

VOLUME XVI - 1883

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

<i>Membership</i>	17,561
<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

The Daughters Of Mary Help Of Christians

1995

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<i>Countries</i>	83
<i>Provinces</i>	83
<i>Houses</i>	1,589

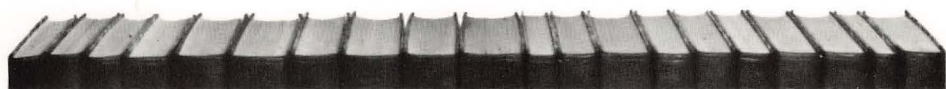
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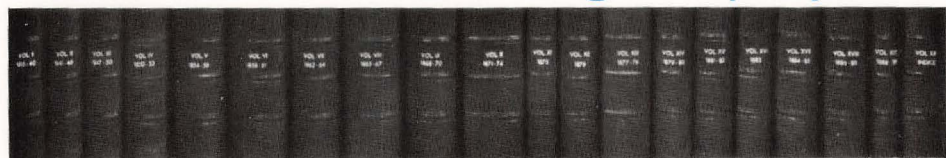
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THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

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.
and
REV. MICHAEL MENDEL, S.D.B.
Editors-in-chief

Volume XVI
1883

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FIRST EDITION

Dedicated

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE
TO
THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

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

(1904-1962)

TO WHOSE
WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
OF
THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO
IS
A LASTING MONUMENT

This Volume Is Dedicated
to
FATHER DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
(1911-1994)
Editor-in-chief
of the English edition
of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco*
for thirty-two years.
To this project he brought
superior dedication, rare skill
and profound love,
earning the esteem and affection
of the whole Salesian Family

Editor's Preface

SAINTE 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 nineteenth 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 "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.²

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*.

²As of 1994 there were about 35,000 Salesian priests, brothers, sisters, and novices.

Fortunately, *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint 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,³ 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 Saint John Bosco*, Father Lemoyne's primary sources were the *Memorie dell' Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales dal 1815 al 1855*⁴ 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 di S. Francesco di Sales*⁵ 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 eyewitness. He recorded what he personally saw and heard from Don Bosco. This enabled him to write a

³All the documents in the archives at Salesian General Headquarters in Rome are being put onto microfiche. The considerable amount published as of 1994 is available in the United States at the Institute of Salesian Studies, Berkeley, Calif. In 1980 a catalogue of all the material in the Salesian Central Archives pertaining to Don Bosco and the beginnings of the Salesian Society was published in conjunction with the initiation of the microfiche project: Archivio Salesiano Centrale, *Fondo Don Bosco: Microschedatura e Descrizione*, ed. A. Torras (Rome: non-commercial edition, 1980).

⁴English edition: *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales from 1815 to 1855: The Autobiography of Saint John Bosco*, trans. Daniel Lyons, SDB, with notes and commentary by Eugenio Ceria, SDB, Lawrence Castelveccchi, SDB, and Michael Mendl, SDB (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1989).

⁵English edition: *St. John Bosco's Early Apostolate*, translator unknown (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934).

true history, even though not according to modern critical methods. He concerned himself principally with presenting chronologically his vast selected material, and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I, which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.⁶ When gifted writers and scholars of the future 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*, we set accuracy and readability as our goals. 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 paths 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

⁶See Francis Desramaut, S.D.B., *Les Memorie I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne: Étude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco* (Lyons, 1962), pp. 411ff.

A Note Concerning Volume XVI

DURING Father Felix Penna's term as provincial (1958-1961), the New Rochelle Province of the Salesian Society undertook the daunting task of translating into English the nineteen volumes of the *Memorie biografiche di San Giovanni Bosco*, which had taken three authors (Fathers Lemoyne, Amadei, and Ceria) forty-one years to publish in Italian. Such an undertaking was unprecedented; until then it had been expected that every Salesian should be fluent enough in Italian to read them in the original.

Father Penna commissioned professionals to translate the entire *Memorie*. His successor, Father August Bosio, in 1962 named Father Diego Borgatello editor-in-chief of the project. Father Borgatello set up an editorial board of nine confreres, who made some of the fundamental determinations that would guide the work.

For thirty-two years Father Borgatello worked diligently, lovingly, and patiently to carry out his mandate. Starting with the so-called "commercial translation," he painstakingly went over each volume line by line and footnote by footnote, rephrasing, fleshing out with first names and scriptural references, adding cross-references and explanatory notes, and often enough retranslating from scratch. Even when the infirmities of age, in general, and cancer, in particular, made work difficult for him, he tried valiantly to continue. This, of course, led to longer and longer periods between the publication of recent volumes; as this is written, it is more than five years since Volume XV appeared in December 1989.*

Before his death on April 23, 1994, Father Borgatello had completed chapters 1-10 of this volume and substantially finished the translation of chapters 11-15, the author's preface, and several of the appendices. Father Michael Mendl was already collaborating with him and, as soon as it was possible, undertook to complete the notes to the unfinished chap-

*Volume XV's title page bears the date 1988 because Father Borgatello had hoped to have the volume ready as a tribute to Don Bosco in the centennial year of the Saint's death and wished the date to stand even when the book was not ready.

ters, copyedit them, and complete the index, which he had already been compiling.

In September 1994 Father Timothy Ploch, provincial, formally appointed Father Mendl editor-in-chief. His work in the general field of Salesian studies and his contacts with others in that field had made Father Mendl aware of the need to publish more of the documentation supplied at the end of the volumes of the *Memorie*; the editorial board concurred. Hence, with this volume we begin to publish considerably more of these documents in translation, both those that pertain specifically to the current volume and those that pertain to earlier volumes but came to light or were compiled too late to be used in their proper place.

The documents to be translated were selected with several criteria in mind:

(1) They should contribute to a better understanding of Saint John Bosco, as for example the three early sermons included in this volume reveal the spirituality and the preaching style of the first years of his priesthood; various letters reveal his manner of dealing with generous benefactors, with friends, or with young people; and testimonials show the impression that he made on others, both young and old.

(2) They should be of general interest to our readership or even of very particular interest: for example, correspondence referring to the proposed foundation in Boston or to the duke of Norfolk.

(3) They should not already be published substantially in the current or an earlier volume, as for example are some of the newspaper articles on Don Bosco's visit to France in this volume or some of his letters to Claire Louvet in Volume XV.

For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to Fathers August Bosio, S.D.B., John J. Malloy, S.D.B., Salvatore Isgro, S.D.B. (deceased), Dominic DeBlase, S.D.B., Richard J. McCormick, S.D.B, provincials emeriti of the Salesians in the eastern United States and sponsors of this project, and to the Very Reverend Timothy C. Ploch, their successor in office.

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to Father Paul Aronica, S.D.B., for his very valuable editorial assistance, to Father Joseph Maffei, S.D.B., for his help with the translation of the documents comprising the appendices, to Gaspar Vibal for the typesetting and design, to Joseph Isola for copyediting, to Robert Johnson-Lally, archivist of the archdiocese of Boston, for information about Monsignor Boulard, to Father Martin D. O'Keefe, S.J., of the Institute of Jesuit Sources for

information on certain Jesuits, and to all others who have helped in one way or another to translate the English edition of Volume XVI from idea to reality.

FATHER MICHAEL MENDL, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
January 9, 1995

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Author's Preface

SINCE Don Bosco's visit to Paris was an event of the highest importance in his life, this sixteenth volume of his *Biographical Memoirs* will restrict itself to 1883, so as to give that visit all the prominence it merits. In the French capital Don Bosco granted innumerable audiences to all kinds of people, visited countless families, religious communities, and churches, preached time and again from the city's pulpits to vast crowds, and was enthusiastically acclaimed by the people in the streets and squares. Who could ever have fancied that as the nineteenth century waned, the people of Paris would be so openly fascinated by saintliness, all the more so by the sight of a poor priest of humble origin and modest appearance, lacking eloquence, unskilled in their language, and Italian by birth? It almost reads like a page from the *Leggenda Aurea* [Golden Legend] of long ago, when, no matter whence he came, a man enjoying the reputation of holiness aroused enthusiastic demonstrations throughout Christendom. Yet our narrative contains nothing that has not been duly documented.

Bear in mind also that our full account is not the whole thing. Unfortunately, much has been irretrievably lost to scholarship, for after the event no one undertook a timely, methodical investigation which would have guaranteed to future generations the full details of the countless happenings involving Don Bosco during his four months on French soil. Belated gleanings have given us just enough information to catch a glimpse and bemoan the loss of many other incidents in the rush of time.¹ The newsy accounts, however, which fifty years ago poured into our archives in the form of letters, newspaper articles, and pamphlets are not insignificant; they suffice to enable us to weave a fairly extensive and reliable narrative.

Many vivid memories of Don Bosco still linger in Paris—a manifest sign that his stay in that famous metropolis kindled more than a momen-

¹Through the *Bulletin Salésien* and other sources, Father [Augustine] Auffray [1881-1955] succeeded in unearthing precious details which have been taken into account. [Author]

tary flicker of popular admiration, though that too would have been, if nothing else, a striking phenomenon. In such a cosmopolitan city, any novelty must certainly be newsworthy if it is to hold the public's attention for even a brief hour. What are we then to say of events which left such a deep and lasting mark on the minds of those who witnessed them? It is a fact that, even today, we keep receiving letters recounting hitherto unknown episodes, and we still keep meeting persons, clerical and lay, noble and middle-class alike, who with vivid clarity and genuine warmth tell us about some long-past incidents which they witnessed. Thus we are moved to cry out, indeed, that "the just man shall be in everlasting remembrance." [Ps. 112:6]

Don Bosco's going to Paris was truly providential in several ways. To many he brought physical healing; to countless others the light of counsel in their doubts, Christian strength in life's hardships, or a spiritual conversion. In addition, funds were poured into his hands, enabling him to expedite the lagging work on the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome, to consolidate his institutions in France and elsewhere, and to pave the way for a Salesian house in Paris. The daily press, in addition to his own extensive private correspondence, so advertised his works that they became known even in the most remote quarters of the civilized world. This publicity substantially facilitated his mission, which was not restricted to a few European nations but was destined to transcend the national boundaries of both the old and the new worlds.

Hardly six weeks after his return to Italy, a widely publicized event refocused upon Don Bosco the attention of France, and consequently of the whole world: the illness of the count of Chambord, which was sudden and brief, took place on Austrian soil but was preeminently a matter affecting France. The international press seized upon it eagerly and thus contributed very considerably to the spread of Don Bosco's fame. The episode is so well documented that we have devoted to it an entire chapter, which will certainly prove of interest to the reader.

In addition to the unit of six lengthy chapters recounting Don Bosco's journey through France, France continues to crop up in the rest of this volume. Still, France did not absorb all of Don Bosco's energies in 1883; other very important undertakings engaged him throughout that year. These included his sons' expedition to the empire of Brazil and his persistent endeavors, finally crowned with success, to win canonical standing for the Salesian missions at the southern extreme of South

America. In addition, this volume will deal with other less important matters, which, as we have done in the past, we shall faithfully recount.

* * *

We shall do all this without deviating in the slightest from the method we have hitherto followed. In evidence that this method was a wise choice on our part, we have the commendation, among many others, of no less a weighty authority and scholar than Cardinal [Ildefonso] Schuster, archbishop of Milan, who, after reading Volume XV, wrote: "This is a unique achievement in its field, for, with no bibliographical pretensions, the author has given us not a photograph but a movie of Don Bosco's life as he really lived it and became holy."² Such, indeed, was our intention from the very start.

Thus, God willing, a genuinely authentic and gigantic portrait of Don Bosco is in due time emerging within the framework of real history. As for "bibliographical pretensions," we could have none, both because we worked with primary archival materials and because the wide range of biographies, all of them generally deriving from the same source, Father [John Baptist] Lemoyne,³ had nothing new to tell us. Biographies written in Don Bosco's own lifetime we have always carefully cited, less as sources than as factual accounts taken from Father [John] Bonetti's *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio*, which he published serially in the Italian and French editions of the *Salesian Bulletin* and which Father Lemoyne later incorporated in his nine volumes of *The Biographical Memoirs*. Likewise, he drew, within the proper context, from Father [John Baptist] Francesia's monographs on Don Bosco's autumn outings and a journey with Don Bosco to Rome,⁴ whose topics antedate 1875, whence I took up the [biographical] task. Archbishop [Charles] Salotti's biography of Don Bosco⁵ was the only one to present new insights and

²Letter to Father Louis Colombo, Salesian provincial, October 3, 1934. [Author]

³Namely, the first nine volumes of *The Biographical Memoirs*, covering 1815 to 1870, and his two-volume life of Don Bosco. [Author]

The nine volumes, of course, have been translated as the first nine volumes of the present series. The two-volume life is *Vita del Venerabile Servo di Dio Giovanni Bosco* (Turin: SEI, 1911-1913, with various reprints and at least one new edition), from which a one-volume English adaptation was made by Father Aloysius Trifari: *A Character Sketch of the Venerable Don Bosco* (New York: Salesian Press, 1927). [Editor]

⁴*Don Bosco e le sue passeggiate autunnali nel Monferrato* (Turin: Salesiana, 1897); *Don Bosco e le sue ultime passeggiate* (Turin: Salesiana, 1897); *Due mesi con Don Bosco a Roma: Memorie* (Turin: Salesiana, 1904). [Editor]

⁵*Il Beato Giovanni Bosco* (Turin: SEI, 1929). [Editor]

details, and these came from the final phase of the Apostolic Processes [of canonization], in which he played a major role and from which Father Lemoyne could not draw because of his death [in 1916]. Father [Fidelis] Giraudi's well known monograph⁶ also presents some incidental and corrective material, none of which touches upon those years which I have been assigned to cover. New data on Don Bosco the writer are being garnered by Father [Albert] Caviglia in his critical edition of Don Bosco's works,⁷ but this too is material that will serve to fill out the already published volumes of *The Biographical Memoirs*. At various times local occasional publications and periodicals have come up with some incidents and sayings of Don Bosco hitherto unknown, and these, of course, we shall put to good use in either the text or the appendices, according to chronology.

* * *

The overall French theme running through this volume suggested that it should end with two very remarkable collections of letters; this seems to be the ideal place for them. One collection consists of fifty-seven letters written by Don Bosco to Miss [Claire] Louvet, the other of seventy-six letters addressed to Count and Countess [Louis Anthony] Colle; all but one are written in French. True, we have already drawn heavily from those two collections in the preceding volume; their perusal, however, has doubtless served to whet the reader's appetite to see them in the original and in their entirety. This is the best way to meet this perfectly reasonable desire.⁸

But herein lies a difficulty. Don Bosco's knowledge of French was more practical than literary; besides, he used to write on the run, as it were, in the hustle and bustle of his daily work, with the result that he frequently slipped into errors of spelling or word choice or syntax. Other literary slips impart to his writing a tone of candor which fully accords with his own holy simplicity. What procedure was I to follow: to edit the letters before publication or to reproduce them as they are? I judged it more conformable to my editorial policies to put aside extraneous con-

⁶*L'Oratorio di Don Bosco*. 2nd ed. (Turin: SEI, 1935). [Author]

⁷Left far from complete at Father Caviglia's death in 1943. He published four volumes of the *Opere e scritti editi e inediti di Don Bosco* (Turin: SEI, 1928-1943), and two more came out posthumously (Turin: SEI, 1965). [Editor]

⁸The English edition includes a selection from each set of letters. There are actually seventy-seven, not seventy-six, letters to the Colles. See pp. 448-489. [Editor]

siderations and to publish the letters according to the autograph originals, all of which are in our possession. Besides, the recent publication of Napoleon Bonaparte's correspondence with Marie-Louise during his first campaign against the allied forces shows similar errors committed by the great emperor himself. Also, just as Don Bosco's faulty French diction did not offend the proverbially delicate ears of his listeners in Paris, so also his faulty writing will not cause educated readers to turn up their noses. The fact is that his correspondents were not in the least troubled by the liberties he took with their language, so clearly and precisely did his thoughts and feelings shine through his words: *the external expression amply revealed his inner character*. The holiness which counterbalanced his oratorical lapses likewise more than made up for his literary defects.

This volume's appendix, like that of the previous ones, includes other French letters of Don Bosco, but they do not contain as many manifest flaws. Their unusual correctness can be traced to the diligence of those who transcribed them in order to send copies to Turin. Since we have no way of comparing them with the originals, we have made a virtue of necessity and, rather than deprive the readers of *The Biographical Memoirs* of these documents because of accidental modifications, we have published them as they are.⁹

And, indeed, it is no small pleasure to be able to enter into such communion with the soul of a person like Don Bosco. Whatever thoughts ran through his mind as he wrote he spontaneously put to paper, so that, with certainty and without mental exertion, we can read into the depth of his being through the clarity of his wording; we peer into his soul and delight in those insights which calm the spirit and lift it above our human frailties.

* * *

A final observation. The chapters which recount Don Bosco's journey through France contain reflections and impressions that are often repeated because they were occasioned by similar circumstances; they come, however, from entirely distinct situations and persons. We decided not to be niggardly in accumulating so many appreciative comments even if they are substantially the same, because such an accord of views, origi-

⁹Selected documents are translated and included in the appendices. Appendix 14 lists all the documents, Italian, French, and Latin, included in the Italian original of this volume. [Editor]

nating from such widely disparate sources, adds up to a more impressive documentation of the sterling qualities of such an extraordinary person.

Coming back to France, we must say that for the French to know Don Bosco was the same as to grasp the extent of his mission. The preceding volumes afford many indications of this, but this volume abounds in them. Such understanding went hand in hand with the growth of his work, nor does it seem to be any different today, judging from recent publications. During the celebrations honoring Don Bosco's canonization [April 1, 1934], a highly credible and widely read French periodical¹⁰ ran a serious study on him, concluding that, of the nine saints canonized in the jubilee year of our redemption [1933-1934], St. John Bosco was rated worthy of special attention because, more than the other eight, he presents us with a model better suited to the conditions and demands of today's apostolate.¹¹ The reasons given in those few pages were the most cogent we could ask for, and they are the ones which did not escape the French people of his day who observed him. This character of modernity, which, as the French say, makes him "up to the minute," adds a more powerful attraction to his *Biographical Memoirs*.

Turin, 1934

¹⁰*L'Ami du Clergé*, May 24, 1934. [Author]

¹¹Pope Pius XI canonized ten saints during 1933-1934: Sts. John Bosco, Conrad of Parzham, Joseph Benedict Cottolengo (whose name the readers of these volumes have encountered many times), Andrew Fournet, Mary Michaeli, Louise de Marillac, Pompilius M. Pirotti, Teresa Margaret Redi, Bernadette Soubirous, and Joan Antida Thouret. [Editor]

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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

January 1883: A Dream, Cooperators and Conferences, Preparations for a Journey through France

THE statistics of the Salesian Congregation for 1880¹ to 1883 trace the normal growth pattern of a religious institute which, having set up its definitive internal structure, now moves into the future confidently and steadily, attracting enough new candidates year after year to more than compensate for inevitable losses occasioned through death and other causes. The 1883 statistics show:

Perpetually Professed	484
Triennially Professed	36
Novices	173
Postulants	190
Priests	184

The triennially professed number less than half those of 1880. However, the reader must remember that during the retreats of the preceding year, Don Bosco had resolutely asserted his intention to reduce triennial professions to the very minimum.² The makeup of the superior chapter shows three significant changes from that of 1882. Father [Anthony] Sala replaced Father [Charles] Ghivarello as economist general, his position of counselor being taken by Father [John] Bonetti; Father [Julius] Barberis was brought into the chapter with the title of master of novices.³

Two new provinces were added to the four in existence since 1880,⁴ the French province having been separated from the Ligurian,

¹See Vol. XIV, p. 298. [Editor]

²*Ibid.*, pp. 275f. [Editor]

³See Appendix 1 for Fathers Barberis, Bonetti, Ghivarello and Sala. [Editor]

⁴See Vol. XIV, pp. 298f. [Editor]

and the South American having been split in two: Argentina and Uruguay-Brazil, as we shall later recount. The Roman province retained its name although it included, besides the houses of Magliano, Rome and Faenza, those of Randazzo [Sicily] and Utrera [Spain], all of them, as in the past, under the direction of Father [Celestine] Durando.⁵

As always, the great majority of novices came from the Oratory, at least two-thirds of its senior students going into the novitiate at San Benigno; however, Don Bosco, good fisher of vocations that he was, let no occasion slip by without casting his line also into our boarding schools. With the students of Father [Herman] Borio in Lanzo, who had joined their teacher in sending him birthday greetings, he tried a little strategem of his own to stimulate the older ones to think about their future. He wrote:

Turin, January 16, 1883

My dear Father Borio:

Your letter and those of several students of yours have brought me much comfort. I know that the sentiments they expressed are pretty much those also of all their classmates; please thank your dear pupils for me. Assure them that I love them all in Jesus Christ and that every morning I remember them in my daily Mass, and I ask them also to pray for me, especially in a fervent Holy Communion.

Now I'd like to propose a little riddle for them to solve, promising a prize to one or more of the winners if they can tell me what the following letters mean: S.S.S.S.S. Whoever finds the key to these five S's will have the firm assurance of happiness in this life and of heaven in the next.

Please extend my most heartfelt personal best wishes to all your students; I urge them to be constantly cheerful, but cheerful in the Lord. As for yourself, please take good care of your health. Give my regards to your father director and bless Father [Anthony] Mellano's sore throat.

Yours in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

No one managed to break the code of the five S's, but Father Borio told us that they stood for *Sano*, *Sapiente*, *Santo Sacerdote Salesiano* [Healthy, Wise, Sainly Salesian Priest].

⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

In a dream which he had in mid-January Don Bosco was given some precious counsels for the good running of the Congregation by Father [Francis] Provera:⁶ a clean sweep of [ill-qualified] confreres, work and vigilance over the boys by superiors,⁷ frequent reception of the sacraments. We relate the account as found in Don Bosco's own handwriting.⁸

On the night of January 17-18, 1883, I dreamt that I was leaving the dining room along with other Salesian priests. As I reached the door, I noticed an unknown priest walking by my side; on closer observation I realized that he was our late confrere, Father Provera. He was somewhat taller than he had been in life. Dressed in new clothing, his face rosy and smiling, he glowed brilliantly as he started to walk out ahead of me.

"Father Provera!" I called to him. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, indeed, I am Father Provera," he answered. Then his face became so handsome and radiant that it was only with great effort that I could return his glance.

"If you are really Father Provera," I said, "don't run away. Wait a while. But please don't disappear into thin air; let me speak to you."

"Yes, of course! Say what you'd like. I will listen."

"Are you saved?"

"Yes, saved through God's mercy."

"What do you enjoy in your present life?"

"All that the heart can imagine, all that the mind can grasp, all that the eye can see, all that the tongue can say." With that he made as if to move on, and his hand, firmly gripped by mine, seemed to slip away.

"No, please!" I begged him. "Don't go away! Speak to me and tell me something about myself."

"Keep on with your work. Many things await you."

"Will it be for a long time?"

"Not very long. But work with all your might as though you were to live forever ... but always be well prepared."

"And what about our confreres?"

"Of your confreres demand and insist on fervor."

"How can we obtain it?"

⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁷Our archives (32-1) contain a long circular letter dated January 29, 1883, entitled: *The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses*. It is written entirely in Father Rua's hand, including the signature: Father John Bosco. It does not appear ever to have been published. (See Appendix 2.) [Author]

⁸Salesian Archives, Autographs of Don Bosco, No. 369. [Author]

"The Master of all masters tells us how. Get yourself a well-honed pruning knife and become a good vine-tender. Lop off the branches that are dead or useless. Then the vine will be vigorous and will bear abundant fruit; what's more important, it will continue to be fruitful for a long time."

"What am I to tell our confreres?"

"To my friends," he said, in a stronger voice, "to my confreres say that a great reward awaits them, but that God grants it only to those who will persevere in waging the Lord's battles."

"What recommendation do you give me concerning our boys?"

"For your boys I recommend work and vigilance."

"What else?"

"Vigilance and work, work and vigilance."

"How are our boys to secure their eternal salvation?"

"Let them feed on the food of the strong and make firm resolutions in confession."

"Tell me: what is the first and foremost thing they must do in this world?"

At that instant his entire person became flooded with a most intense brilliance, and I had to avert my gaze. It was like staring into an electric light, only it was by far more blinding than any light we are used to seeing. He then spoke in a singing voice: "Glory to God the Father, glory to God the Son, glory to God the Holy Spirit: to God who was, who is, and who shall be the judge of the living and the dead."

I wanted to continue our conversation, but, in exquisite tones more resonant than can ever be imagined, he began to chant solemnly: "Praise the Lord, all you nations!" A choir of thousands upon thousands of voices responded from the porticoes and stairway—or rather I should say they joined him with one voice and sang: "For steadfast is his kindness toward us," and closed with the doxology, "Glory to the Father."

Again and again I tried to open my eyes to see who was singing but to no avail, for the light's intense brightness made it impossible for me to see a thing. Finally they all concluded with "Amen."

With the end of the singing everything returned to its ordinary state. Of Father Provera I saw nothing but a shadow, and that too immediately faded away.

I then walked over to the porticoes where the priests, clerics and boys were gathered. I asked them if they had seen Father Provera. All said they had not. I also asked if they had heard any singing, and again the reply was negative.

I was disappointed at their answers and remarked, "Then everything I heard Father Provera say and all the resounding music was but a dream. Anyway, come and listen, and I will tell you about it." I then described the

dream to them as above. Father Rua and Father Cagliero⁹ and others asked me many questions, which I duly answered.

But my stomach pained me so badly that I could hardly breathe and I awoke. I heard the bells strike the quarter hour and then two o'clock in the morning.

Also the Congregation's auxiliary force, the Salesian cooperators, was growing in numbers and strength. During this year all parish deans and diocesan directors were sent a mimeographed form on which to list cooperators' names and offerings which were then to be returned to the Oratory; diocesan directors also received special instructions in a separate circular letter. The parish deans received also seventeen general norms to use while an appropriate manual was being prepared. The *Bollettino Salesiano*, steadily improving, was becoming more and more the official organ of the Association of Salesian Cooperators through its announcements, reports of Salesian conferences being held in small and large centers, obituaries of prominent cooperators, and a list of those who had died in the preceding month. The regular January circular named nearly five hundred cooperators who had passed on to their eternal reward in 1882 alone.¹⁰ Keeping the more active cooperators abreast of the Salesian work was greatly facilitated by Don Bosco's habit of contacting them personally when he was traveling. Hence, in the latter half of January he wrote a hasty note to Father [Dominic] Belmonte,¹¹ director of our house at Sampierdarena, to make sure that the greatest number of cooperators would be there to meet him.

[No date]

My dear Father Belmonte:

God willing, I shall leave Turin at 9:30 A.M. on the 31st of this month and shall arrive in Genoa at about two in the afternoon. I shall stay there until the following Monday afternoon.

If you would, please notify Mr. Migone and his children, Mr. Joseph Cataldi the mayor, Caroline Cataldi, the Dufour family, and Marquis Montezemolo.

⁹See Appendix 1 for both priests. [Editor]

¹⁰We shall no longer report these circulars because, although they always bore Don Bosco's signature, they were compiled by Father Bonetti in accordance with Don Bosco's instructions. We shall refer to them as informative sources. [Author]

¹¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

Also contact a certain fine cooperator of ours—Joseph is his name—who lost his wife two years ago; Mrs. Lucy Cataldi; Isabel Aquarone; the Salesian decurions and the gentleman who last year donated some four to six thousand lire to the house of Sampierdarena. On my behalf please ask Mr. Rusca if he would accept being sponsor of the feast of St. Francis de Sales, which can be celebrated on February 4, if it does not interfere with your plans.

If there is anyone else you think you should contact, please do so. Also, tell them all to scrape some money together to pay our debts.

I shall write a letter to Mrs. Ghiglini which you can either mail or deliver personally.

May God bless us all!

Your friend in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

The number of cooperators was increasing rapidly also among Italians living in regions subject to Austria; this caused a substantial rise in the mailing expenses of the *Bollettino Salesiano*, which Don Bosco sought to avert. He drew up a request to the Imperial Ministry of Trade, to be mailed after his departure, in which he sought mailing privileges for the magazine in Italian-speaking regions of Austria.

The petition was not sent directly to the minister of trade but to the military vicar apostolic with a covering letter recommending the appeal. To date we have not found that letter. The prelate first confidentially contacted the Ministry of Trade to ask if such a request could be honored, and the reply was that no postal privileges could legally be granted to foreign newspapers and periodicals. In communicating this to Don Bosco, the prelate very courteously suggested that he seek the same help from the Austrian ambassador in Italy and through him have some members of the imperial court join the Association of Salesian Cooperators; thus he could send them the *Bollettino* and facilitate the granting of his request. It is evident that this good Austrian prelate was well-disposed to the introduction of an Italian religious periodical into the country.¹²

Many conferences for Salesian cooperators were held in 1883 both before and after the feast of St. Francis de Sales; the March issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano* reported twelve of them but affirmed that many more had taken place. In Turin Don Bosco spoke in the Church

¹²The very tone of the letter, written in Latin, shows signs of benevolent concern. [Author]

of St. John the Evangelist on January 25; of that conference we have found several passages handwritten by him in a notebook.¹³

[Turin] January 25, 1883

Conference Held in the Church of St. John the Evangelist

This is a brief review of the state of projects recommended to the cooperators in 1882 and of those planned for 1883.

Since the cooperators have already been notified of these developments with the New Year's greetings published in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, this conference will be used to answer various questions we have received orally or in writing from our cooperators and their friends.

1. What is a cooperator, and is this an exclusive organization?

The purpose of this association is to bring good Christians together so that they may benefit civil society and foster good moral living, especially among youth in danger.

There are many ways and means of doing this, but we restrict ourselves to helping imperiled youth according to our regulations.

This association has been approved by the Holy Father, who is its head and has enriched it with many indulgences.

2. Does the Association of Salesian Cooperators conflict with the Third Order of St. Francis?

Not only is the Association of Salesian Cooperators not in conflict with the Third Order of St. Francis, but it complements it. Pope Pius IX himself, in addressing this question, stated: "The world is material-minded and so we must show it something visible." In our case, this refers to our cooperators. The primary aim of the tertiaries of St. Francis of Assisi is to sanctify themselves through practices of piety, and the basic principle of the cooperators is the practice of charity. Both of these aims are directed to God's glory and the good of souls. Therefore any tertiary may join the Salesian cooperators, as any cooperator may enter the Third Order of the Franciscans or of the Dominicans, thus benefiting from a twofold source of grace, blessings and indulgences.

3. Can a family, a religious community, an educational institute, a boarding school, or even a parish become a member of this association?

Parents or guardians may enroll personally or as heads of families. For example, one may sign his name on behalf of his family or religious community; in turn, a school director may register himself and represent all his students.

However, each member must live up to the conditions set for cooperators and at some time in the course of the year, in one way or another, carry out at

¹³Salesian Archives, Autographs of Don Bosco, No. 311. [Author]

least some work of mercy as indicated by the rules.

The same norm applies to religious communities, boarding schools and educational institutes, parishes and similar bodies.

4. What about suspicions that cooperators might meddle with politics?

No chance whatever. Their aim is to foster good morals, to do away with theft and purse-snatching, and to lessen the vast number of youths who, roaming the streets and city squares, end up miserably in prison.

Rather, any government, any individual regardless of age or condition, cannot help longing for an association of people who, led only by the spirit of charity, commit themselves to this kind of work.

5. What about the many legacies which allegedly are bequeathed to Don Bosco every day?

Well, I must admit quite honestly that every day some paper or other comes out with news of a fat bequest. However, when I ask for details of name and address of the generous donor, no answer is forthcoming. Some modest legacies have indeed been left to us, but with such conditions and restrictions that in most cases we could not accept them.

Just a few days ago a cooperator notified me that he was leaving us a generous inheritance and even mentioned that a goodly sum of gold coins was awaiting Don Bosco or anyone he might send to pick it up.

Despite the nasty weather and the long journey, I sent two trustworthy persons to claim it. But what happened? They found the will, very neatly and legally drawn up. However, when they searched for that goodly sum, they could not find it. It was only after a long, diligent hunt that the great treasure was located in a strongbox hidden in a cubbyhole; it contained one franc and sixty cents. From this you will know what to think of all the other lavish bequests to Don Bosco.

6. But is Don Bosco not wealthy?

To have an idea of Don Bosco's vast wealth, you must bear in mind that none of our houses has a cent of income and that the taxes levied upon those which own a strip of orchard land amount to more than thirty-three thousand lire.

Undeniable are the costs of construction and repairs, of furnishings, clothing and food for the many youngsters whom Divine Providence keeps sending us every day.

However, I feel that I must clarify some expressions. Although, when looking at myself, I may call myself poor, I am ever so rich when I consider how Divine Providence comes to our aid every day, indeed every moment of the day. My wealth, my dear cooperators, is your charity, that solicitous charity by which, resting on the principle that the right hand is not to know what the left is doing, you keep coming to my aid in such measure and in so many

ways! If I could be free to disclose the many zealous works of charity that so many of you are involved in throughout the year, they would truly be worthy of the faithful Christians of the early centuries.

Without revealing names or places, I shall point out a few facts. Some there are who find ways of economizing by working tirelessly in deeds of charity, such as sewing and patching clothing, knitting stockings, mending shirts and bringing them to us, saying that these are for Jesus' poor ones. Others cut back on their own food and clothing and home furnishings; they postpone renovations or abstain from using horse and carriage, in order, they say, to have a little more money to feed the hungry and give drink to the thirsty. I know persons, well off and well provided for, who take long trips, using the accommodations of the poor, ready to deny themselves due marks of honor and comfort; they do not treat themselves to wholesome entertainments and even cut back on household help, becoming, as it were, their own servants, and all this with the sole aim of increasing their spare funds for works of mercy.¹⁴ Others use their vacation time to make or mend clothes for poor children.

Not so long ago, a lady visiting one of our houses noticed that a considerable number of boys were wearing light summer clothing. Deeply touched on learning that they could not afford being warmly dressed, she immediately took care of that, and before the day was over, at a cost of great sacrifice to herself, she saw to it that proper clothing was provided for these poor little ones of the Lord.

A wealthy gentleman, who likewise shall remain anonymous, came to know that one of our houses was having a hard time providing bread, the baker having refused to make further deliveries because of the backlog of unpaid debts. Not having ready funds at the time, he was not averse to cashing some valuable bonds to pay off the bills and thus allow the prefect of the house to continue feeding his hungry charges.

I will stop here in what would really be an endless recital, but I can do no less than praise God and bless our holy Catholic religion, which instills such faith into the hearts of its children and which imbues its followers with such charity. I thank one and all!

Unità Cattolica published a précis of Don Bosco's talk and, in describing his listeners' reactions, remarked that they became convinced of three things: that Don Bosco was not only the friend and father, but also the eloquent advocate, of youth; that, had he had funds equal to his zeal and dynamism, he would have changed the face of

¹⁴A cooperator of Turin who precisely practiced all these things was Count Prospero Balbo, well remembered by our elderly confreres. [Author]

the earth; that aiding his institutions was performing a work at once Catholic, philanthropic and social.

Father [Maggiorino] Borgatello¹⁵ enjoyed recounting a little episode which took place after the conference. While going from the sacristy to the church office, Don Bosco encountered a group of ladies waiting to greet him in the lobby. Very affably he stopped to speak with them. Father Borgatello, who was standing nearby, was inwardly surprised by the ease with which he conducted himself with women. He was still thinking about this when Don Bosco, bidding the ladies goodbye, turned to him and whispered in his ear, "You see, we need not restrict holiness to externals."

Whether they realized or not that Don Bosco had always been the hammer of the Protestants in Turin and elsewhere, some cooperators, fired by the spirit of their association and dismayed at the achievements wrought in Italy by the transalpine Protestants, sent him a condensed report which showed him at a glance how widely evil propaganda was making headway.¹⁶ They wrote at the top of the folder, "Let Don Bosco take note of what the Protestants have thus far accomplished in Italy. What are we to do in the face of such damage?" While scanning the summary, he must have been particularly pleased that just very recently he himself had succeeded in reprinting one of his former writings. In 1853 he had started the publication of *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings]. The first issue was an apologetic work in six parts against the leaders of the Reformation, entitled *Il Cattolico Istruito* [The Well-Instructed Catholic]. Taking that work up again, he added to it, revised it and published it as a single volume which he renamed *Il Cattolico nel secolo* [The Catholic in the World].¹⁷

"While small in bulk," wrote *La Civiltà Cattolica* of the little volume, "it is solid Catholic doctrine."¹⁸ In fact, it ran through several editions and is still [1935] in demand.

He always considered *Letture Cattoliche* an excellent bulwark against frenzied anti-Catholic propaganda. Hence now that the Church of St. John [the Evangelist]¹⁹ was becoming a new center of religious revival in the city, he wanted the publication to be spread as widely as possi-

¹⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹⁶See Appendix 3. [Author]

¹⁷See Vol. IV, pp. 400ff. [Editor]

¹⁸*Civiltà Cattolica*, Vol. 3, p. 81. [Author]

¹⁹See the Index of Volume XIII under the heading "Church of St. John the Evangelist." [Editor]

ble throughout the area. This was the purpose of his letter of January 8 to Father [John] Marengo, its rector.²⁰

Turin, January 8, 1883

My dear Father Marengo,

I have asked Barale²¹ to work with you in publishing and spreading *Letture Cattoliche*. He has heartily agreed; I am enclosing his letter to me.

Come to the Oratory and talk it over with him. Get Father Bonetti involved in setting up this battle plan.

God bless you, your work and your family. Pray for me.

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Before leaving the Oratory, Don Bosco gave another earnest witness of his zeal for the preservation of the faith. We have already mentioned the irreligious, brazen periodical coming out of Turin which bore the adorable name of the Savior.²² Matters had come to a head, as newsboys bellowed that Holy Name through the streets, huge posters plastered the walls with it, and in many places sacrilegious hands scrawled it with black paint on the pavement of the porticoes, so as almost to force people to trod upon it. Some good-for-nothings, loitering about, would guffaw at religious-minded people who cringed in horror and went out of their way so as not to step on that Holy Name. The king's attorney general was asked to put an end to the scandal, but he hid behind the law of freedom of the press. Some brave young fellows used chemical detergents to scrub that Holy Name off the street stones, even though the pigments had soaked into the pavement. Righteous indignation reached its peak, and yet there was not one word of protest from Church authorities. Although the Catholic newspapers screamed their protests, it seemed that no one knew what was happening in the city. It was time to do something.

Don Bosco then told Father Bonetti to sound the alarm in the *Bollettino Salesiano*, which was read in Italy even by many who did not read *Unità Cattolica*. That zealous soul penned a long, spirited article entitled "Jesus Christ, Our God and King," which closed with an

²⁰See Appendix I. [Editor]

²¹Coadjutor Brother [Peter] Barale was the manager of the Salesian bookstore. [Author]

²²See Vol. XV, pp. 326f. [Editor]

ardent profession of faith and love. Don Bosco was so pleased with the article that he bade the author put it into pamphlet form and spread it gratis throughout Turin. His order was immediately followed, with ecclesiastical approval, after his departure from Turin; the Society for the Mutual Assistance of Catholic Workers distributed well over one hundred thousand copies on just one Sunday in February at the doors of all Turin's churches.

The blasphemous scandal sheet took its usual revenge upon the article published in the February issue of the *Bollettino Salesiano*. On February 11 it printed a scurrilous attack upon Don Bosco, branding him before its readers as a fraud who preyed upon wealthy people and denouncing him to the government as a lawbreaker, an enemy of the country.²³

But Don Bosco still wanted to do more. Wishing the cry "Jesus, Our God and Our King" to be re-echoed throughout all Italy, especially on the occasion of Easter, he conceived the brilliant idea of having the pamphlet serve also as an Easter certificate.²⁴ This called for a new format. The pamphlet had borne the imprimatur of the Genoa chancery, since it had been printed in Sampierdarena. Now, to hasten its reprint [in Turin], it was decided to seek the authorization of the local chancery. This was secured by a little trick²⁵ for the simple reason that requesting it through the normal channels would have been unsuccessful. The enclosure of that Easter certificate in the pamphlet caused an uproar, with the result that it could be sent only outside the Turin archdiocese, regardless of the fact that many local parish priests had requested copies. The demonic periodical took the occasion to hammer out another article entitled "Don Bosco, the Archbishop and Associates." However, it was so coarse that we will not befoul our pages with it. The serpent had had its tail firmly stepped upon.

Though Don Bosco had given orders for this maneuver, he saw only its beginnings since all the rest happened while he was already journeying through France. That trip had a well defined scope: to obtain funds for the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. Tired of delays blocking the work, he had made up his mind to give the project a vig-

²³See Appendix 4. [Author]

²⁴At that time the Easter certificate was a card stating that the bearer had fulfilled his Easter duty. It carried the bearer's name and the signature of his parish priest or of his assistant. [Editor]

²⁵Fr. Lemoyne has left a dramatic account, which we are publishing as Appendix 5. [Author]

orous thrust. But he needed huge sums. "Send us money," he kept hearing from Rome the very day he was leaving and thereafter, "because without money the church will go no higher than its cornice."²⁶ Our good father knew that his strength was being drained out of him, but his love for the Pope, who had given him the assignment, drove him to work with all his might in undertaking such a strenuous journey. All of this he explicitly stated in his letter to the cardinal vicar of Rome dated January 30. "Tomorrow morning," he wrote, "God willing, I shall leave for Genoa and then tour our houses in Liguria. I shall go from one house to the next as far as Marseille, and from there, as long as my health and circumstances will allow, I shall journey to Lyons and then travel on to Paris, begging funds for the Sacred Heart Church and asking people to give to Peter's Pence. But I personally plead with Your Eminence as much and as best I can to remove the obstacles which impede our work. This is my great desire, and I am ready to make even a scarcely reasonable sacrifice, as long as we can continue the works which have unfortunately been suspended." The "scarcely reasonable" sacrifice alluded to the loss of thousands of lire which, as we have recounted in the preceding volume,²⁷ he had to suffer in order to rid himself of the old contract and the intrigues connected with it.

At the beginning of the preceding December he had already sketched a sort of itinerary for his journey to France. "If France is at peace," he wrote to a prominent benefactress,²⁸ "I shall leave on next January 20 for Genoa, Nice, the Maritime Alps, Cannes, Toulon, Marseille, Valence and Lyons, so as to arrive in Paris toward the end of March."

His concern about France's peace was occasioned by the riots which had rocked the city from August 9, the day that the two chambers recessed, to their date of reopening on November 9, during which time the French government had to deal with violence sparked by the socialists and bombings caused by the anarchists. Precisely at the beginning of November Don Bosco's view of the unrest had prompted him to write to Father [Clement] Guiol that many prayers be offered because, even though the storm would be brought under control, it would nevertheless wreak havoc wherever it raged.²⁹ Two weeks later,

²⁶Letter of Father Dalmazzo, Rome, January 31, 1883. [Author]

²⁷See Vol. XV, p. 347. [Editor]

²⁸Letter to Claire Louvet, Turin, December 5, 1882. [Author]

²⁹Minutes of the Ladies' Committee of St. Leo's Oratory, November 8, 1882. [Author]

however, he wrote again to assuage the fears his first letter had aroused; indeed, he firmly promised Our Lady's special protection upon all who took to heart her interests as Help of Christians.³⁰ Still, the sources of unrest did not disappear, given the activities of the parties dividing the citizens: the Napoleonists battling for the return of the empire, the Orleanists and legitimists yearning to raise again the royal standard, the republicans themselves pitting one against the other, while the communists, sworn enemies of all and any government, maneuvered underhandedly. Then in January, while Don Bosco was getting ready for his trip, the court of Lyons indicted the anarchists who were responsible for recent acts of terrorism and pressed charges against Prince Jerome Bonaparte, who was arrested in Paris for an alleged attempt at overthrowing the government. In various ways this kept popular tensions high and led to threatening demonstrations.

The first person to be informed about Don Bosco's forthcoming trip was Father [Joseph] Ronchail, director of the house in Nice.

Turin, January 14, 1883

My dear Father Ronchail,

Among other things to take care of, draw up a list of the cooperators who make up the Nice chapter. This will obviate our sending diplomas to those who are already cooperators, as it always happens; also, it will centralize the association.

On the 30th of this month I shall set out for Nice; I'll confirm the day and time later. Give my warmest greetings to our confreres, pupils and friends, among them our dear Baron Héraud, Reimbeau, and Father Vincenti.

May God bless us all. Prepare all necessary details.

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I have just received your letter. I shall see to it that I spend one day at Menton and Monaco. Make arrangements for me.

Eight days later he mentioned his trip to Count and Countess Colle: "I shall not visit other places in order to spend more time with you, but all at our best convenience."

Before leaving Italy, he thought of Florence, where a new Salesian house was under construction. The most practical thing he could do at

³⁰*Ibid.*, November 23, 1882. [Author]

the time to benefit the new project was to pen a few lines to Countess [Girolama] Uguccioni to urge her direct and indirect assistance.

Turin, January 27, 1883

Our good Mama in Jesus Christ,

Before leaving for France, I want to assure you of my daily prayers for you, our highly esteemed mama. Tomorrow we keep the feast of St. Francis de Sales, and I shall make it my duty to celebrate holy Mass in honor of Mary Most Holy, Help of Christians, according to your intentions.

I know that you are doing all you can for our new house under construction. Please continue. God has helped us and will help us.

May heaven's blessings fall abundantly upon you and your family. I ask you kindly to present my respects to all. I commend myself to their prayers and to yours in particular. With a son's love I remain

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Just two days before his journey, he notified Baron Charles Ricci des Ferres of his departure and asked him to come down for a visit, as he had something to discuss with him.

Turin, January 29, 1883

My dear Baron:

If you could stop in at the Oratory tomorrow (the 30th) I would like to discuss some business with you. Tomorrow, or rather the next day, the 31st, I shall leave for Genoa and from there go on to France.

May God bless you, my ever dear baron. Should He wish to sow thorns on your way, may He at least prepare some comforts for you and assure you of flowers you are to enjoy one day up there in heaven. Amen.

Please pray also for me.

Ever in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

During January he received three letters from Paris. To provide himself with quiet lodgings, he had asked the parish priest of Our Lady of Victories for hospitality in his rectory, but the latter replied that he very regretfully could not grant the request and gave his reasons. To the Count of Richemont he had expressed his intention a year before to visit him in Paris at the beginning of 1883. In January the

count wrote to tell him of his personal delight and of his entire family's heartfelt expectancy. Toward the end of the month the noted scientist, Father [Francis] Moigno [S.J.], of whom we have already made mention,³¹ an enthusiastic cooperator, wrote to Don Bosco; from the letter we deduce that he had recently been at the Oratory in Turin. We feel that our readers should be acquainted with that letter, radiating as it does the warm veneration he cherished for Don Bosco.³²

Don Bosco did not consider it proper to absent himself from Turin for such a long time without Archbishop Gastaldi's permission and blessing. After the well known Settlement,³³ this was on his part a very fine sign of his sincerity, which accorded in every detail with the sentiments with which he had accepted the conditions laid down by the Pope. Hence he went to the archbishop's residence, only to find that he could not obtain an appointment. Returning home, he remarked to his companion who accompanied him, "His Excellency has refused to speak to me now when I have looked for him. Very soon he will look for me and will not find me, because I will not be here." Prophetic words whose fulfillment no one would have thought so near,³⁴ as we shall soon see.

On the morning of the 31st, Don Bosco, as usual, tranquilly heard confessions. Father [Joachim] Berto³⁵ has informed us that he himself went to confession that day and was given the following advice: "Be sure to give the Lord the total sacrifice of yourself and be determined to labor for His glory to your very last breath, patiently bearing adver-

³¹See Vol. XIV, p. 493. [Editor]

³²Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

³³See Vol. XV, Ch. 8. [Editor]

³⁴Father Lemoyne, the source of our information, writes that Father [Louis] Deppert "stated he was ready to testify that he had knowledge of these words of Don Bosco before the death of Archbishop Gastaldi." Father Lemoyne also wrote: "The last words he pronounced were: 'Ah, Don Bosco, ah, Don Bosco!' This is the testimony of Father Corno, who heard him at that very moment, perhaps, when he was dropping to the ground. He said this to Father Deppert, a former schoolmaster, who on several occasions, in the presence of Father Lemoyne, stated that he was ready to swear to it on oath." One thing caused surprise in those days. An association was then being set up in Turin for the spread of good literature at the initiative of the *Comitato regionale dell'Opera dei Congressi*. It would seem reasonable that, in choosing a patron, they would have picked St. Francis de Sales, whom Pius IX had already declared a Doctor of the Church and Patron of the Catholic Press; however, St. Charles Borromeo was selected. The rumor was that the first plan was to place the association under the protection of the bishop of Geneva, but that the archbishop was opposed to it and otherwise would refuse to bless the enterprise. [Author]

³⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

sities and opposition as you do good to others, as though this were the very last confession of your life.” Citing these words from a notebook of Father Berto, Father Lemoyne adds, “This was Don Bosco’s constant theme.” Immediately after celebrating Mass in his room, Don Bosco gave Father Berto, in Our Lady’s name, the following nosegay written in his own hand: “Whoever wishes to work effectively must keep charity in his heart and practice patience in deed.”

Moments later, he left for Genoa, accompanied by Father [Celestine] Durando and Father [Camillus] De Barruel.

Don Bosco was not greatly concerned about his personal needs during these long journeys; he went as he was. His bedroom contained the bare necessities. His many benefactresses vied with each other in giving him socks, handkerchiefs, shirts, undershirts, and other articles of clothing, but he always handed everything over to Father Berto to consign to the wardrobe for anyone who needed it. Father Berto did his best to set aside some of the clothing for him, but he did not want that, and if he realized it was being done, he would insist, “No, no, take it all away. Let it be for everyone’s use. If you hoard these things here, Providence will not send us anything else. Bear this well in mind: the more you give to the community and do not reserve for your own use, the more will come to us.”

This explains why, when the time came for a trip, he had no clothing available, even indispensable things; he rejoiced in this for his love of poverty. One day, just as he was about to leave, his trousers were in such bad shape that, since there was no time to lose, Father Rua hurriedly took off his own and gave them to him. On another occasion Father Lemoyne noticed that he wore under his cassock a waistcoat so threadbare as to be pitiable; he promptly took off his own vest and gave it to him to wear. Both instances took place in his bedroom when they were about to say goodbye.

In undertaking journeys of any length, one thing kept giving him more pain as he got older: leaving his beloved Oratory, which had become a part of his very soul. The extent of his love for the Oratory can be measured from certain statements which dropped from his lips whenever anyone wanted to introduce some changes; such alterations tore at his heart. When plans were being discussed for a new organ to replace the ancient and battered one in the Church of St. Francis [de Sales], he pleaded, “No, have it repaired, but don’t remove it. For years

it has accompanied our boys' singing." One time, as he was gazing from his balcony at the building which diagonally divided the present-day students' playground into two parts, he said to Father Lemoyne, "Do you see that building? Sooner or later it will disappear, it will be demolished, whereas it cost me so much sweat to put it up!"

"Is it possible that anyone would tear down what Don Bosco erected?" remarked Father Lemoyne.

"Yet, that's what will happen. Either for the sake of looks or for a more suitable layout of buildings or for a different division of playgrounds, once I die, those walls will come down."

On one occasion even before his death, while he was away, Father [Angelo] Savio³⁶ cut down the historic mulberry tree in which young [Felix] Reviglio had hidden himself,³⁷ in order to make room for the choir of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, which was built several years after the construction of the church. On his return, noticing that the tree had been cut down, he exclaimed, "Not seeing it again pains me like the death of a brother."

These are all expressions telling us how tenderly and therefore how regretfully he resigned himself to having to leave for a lengthy period a spot so blessed by Our Lady, the scene of so many vicissitudes and of so many graces.

³⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

³⁷See Vol. III, p. 242.

CHAPTER 2

Nice, Marseille, Lyons and Neighboring Towns

IT was just five years before leaving this earth that Don Bosco began his historic four-month tour of France, from January 31 to May 31. After a brief two-week visit to the Salesian houses of the Ligurian Riviera, he traveled at a somewhat relaxed pace through southern France from Nice to Lyons, heading from there for Paris, the main goal of his journey. He remained in the capital from April 18 to May 26, taking short side trips from there to Lille and Amiens and returning through Dijon and Dôle. We shall devote this chapter to the first phase of his long journey, with regrets that we must leave several gaps due to the loss of correspondence.

After spending a few days in Sampierdarena, Don Bosco went on to Varazze, as we learn from a short letter of his to the director of the Salesian house in Marseille.

Varazze, February 5, 1883

My dear Father Bologna,¹

I go along with what you have written. You may tell Mrs. Abatucci that I shall be in Ventimiglia on the afternoon of the 13th. On the 14th I go on to Menton, where I shall stay half a day. I shall gladly see her at either place. However, please reassure her that I am praying for her and all her holy intentions. Enclosed please find a note for Mrs. George Borelli in accordance with what you indicated to me. I rejoice that your community is enjoying good health. Please tell Father Albera¹ to prepare a list of visits for me and some money. I shall bring him a sackful of best wishes from his friends.

God bless us all!

Yours affectionately in Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

From Varazze he went on to the boarding school at Alassio, where he held a brief conference with the cooperators. From the very beginning of his trip he appeared to be so tired that he could not offer the community Mass but said his Mass privately. He had just put on the amice when his altar boy, Hamilcar Bertolucci, with great candor asked him to hear his confession. The director voiced his objection, but Don Bosco replied, "Yes, of course!" He took off the amice immediately, put it aside and sat down. After the confession he told the lad, "Be cheerful! We will meet again!" And meet they did, two years later, at San Benigno. Then and there Don Bosco recalled what he had said to the boy, who had gone there to enter the Salesian novitiate. Many things indeed did that young man have to do and to endure to follow his vocation, but Don Bosco helped him in his family difficulties and through his prayers obtained for him a most challenging victory. For the past seven years Father Bertolucci has led and is still leading a life of prayer and pain, suffering from a virulent form of arthritis. After several visits to San Remo, Don Bosco left Alassio on the 13th for Vallecrosia. We know of no other stopovers on the way.

At Vallecrosia a misguided zeal on the part of ill-informed persons had marred relationships between the director of the house and Bishop [Thomas Reggio] of Ventimiglia. The bishop was led to believe that the Salesians had backed down in the face of Waldensian aggressiveness. Without checking out the facts, he wrote a letter expressing his regret to Don Bosco, who promptly passed it on to Father [Nicholas] Cibrario. The latter lost no time in exonerating himself and his confreres from the groundless accusations of poisonous tongues adept at slandering the Salesians. Anxious to set things right in his own presence, Don Bosco hastened to take Father Durando with him to see the bishop, with whom he stayed until late evening.

A happy and unexpected meeting awaited him on his return. Having tried in vain to hire a coach, he had to be content to walk all the way home. It had rained so heavily during the day that the growing darkness and the mud made walking hazardous. With his failing sight Don Bosco could hardly see where to place his feet, when suddenly who appeared before him but an old friend, the famous dog Grigio, whom he had not seen in thirty years! The friendly animal ran over to him, wagging his tail gleefully, and then he walked forward, keeping about a foot ahead of Don Bosco, just enough to be seen in

the gloom. With slow, deliberate pace the dog led the way for him to follow, avoiding puddles so that he would not get wet. As soon as they reached the house, the dog disappeared.

Father Durando, who was struggling to find his own way through the mud, maintained that he never saw anything, but Don Bosco often narrated this incident. One day, while having dinner with the Olive family, he told them about it.² Mrs. Olive asked, "How could this dog outlive all others?" Don Bosco replied with a smile, "Maybe it was an offspring of Grigio." On another occasion he was asked what its appearance was like. "He was a dog," was the simple answer.

The archives of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians preserve three strange accounts of dogs which recall Don Bosco's Grigio.

On November 2, 1883, two Salesian sisters, returning on foot from Assisi to their school in Cannara, were unexpectedly caught outdoors, far from home, by night and a thick fog. They panicked. Sister Amelia Calaan said to her companion, "If Don Bosco would only send us his Grigio!" "Indeed!" exclaimed Sister Annette Dallara in a trembling voice. Moments later a huge dog leaped out of the hedges, jumped a narrow ditch, and, panting heavily, began to walk between them. He was a tall dog, with grayish fur and long drooping ears, his eyes sparkling in the darkness. As though to cheer them, the friendly dog looked up to each of them like long-known acquaintances and licked their hands. On reaching the school the sisters wanted to feed the dog, but he swiftly spun about and dashed out the gate. They ran after him; however they saw nothing but the bare vast square and adjoining road.

In 1930 the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians were building in Barranquilla, Colombia. Every day news reached them of robberies and violence in the city and its surroundings, and they too feared the marauders because during the whole month of April they had to store outdoors heaps of construction materials and furnishings like tubs, sinks, doors and windows. Of course the thieves knew the place well. On four occasions, before construction actually began, they had broken into the residence, and, though they did no damage, they fright-

²The Italian translation of Doctor D'Espinay's *Don Bosco* omits this episode. Father Rua, who had entrusted the translation to Father [Dominic] Ercolini, ordered him to suppress the anecdote along with other items of which he had no personal knowledge. But he later told the translator that the author was upset over the omission because he had been told it by Don Bosco himself. "That I did not know," was Father Rua's defense. [Author]

ened the sisters. The sisters therefore prayed to Don Bosco to send them his Grigio for protection. One night, behold, into the corridor of their old residence trooped a string of dogs, six of them, never before seen in the neighborhood! They posted themselves in the playfields and in the darkest corners of the old house. Getting over their fear, the sisters approached the dogs and found them to be very friendly. At six o'clock the next morning the dogs filed out just as they had come in, and this they did for an entire month. Later, only three dogs appeared, of which one was poisoned, but another one immediately replaced him. They kept guard until the danger passed.

A third case took place at La Navarre in France sometime between 1898 and 1900. Sister Josephine Crétaz and Sister Verina Valenzano, recording the account twenty years later, could not remember the precise date. As is customary there, toward the end of October, the sisters venture into the nearby villages in search of chestnuts, remaining out three days. On that occasion the two sisters went together. Going from one village to another took some four hours, mainly through sparsely inhabited woods. At a certain point the solitude and silence got to them and they panicked. "We can be ambushed out here," they cried, "and there's no one to defend us or even know we're here!" As they mulled over these somber thoughts, they heard a rustling in the bushes as though someone were kicking up the leaves, but there was nothing to be seen. Suddenly a huge dog appeared, drawing near them and wagging its tail; he circled around them and nudged their shoulders with his head as though to say, "Don't be afraid! I'm here." He then dashed out into the open, picked up a chestnut tree branch in his teeth, tossed it playfully into the air and ran to catch it, keeping always in front of them, as though trying to distract them. "Could this be Don Bosco's Grigio?" they asked each other. They were hoping to bring the dog home with them on their return. However, just as they were approaching the town they met a coach with some ladies they knew and they stopped for a chat with them. Meanwhile the dog disappeared without a single trace.

Much more financial aid was needed if the Salesian house of Vallecrosia was to stand up against the Protestants, who had vast sums at their disposal. In similar situations Don Bosco's usual recourse would be to a lottery. He planned for one with the director, and from Marseille he had the text of a flyer sent to him to have it printed and

mailed to Liguria's foremost citizens for their support in the form of gifts for the lottery. It was understood that non-profit organizations would be granted the needed license to run it; however, the license request was formally denied and the project was scrapped.

Don Bosco was scheduled to leave for Menton during the afternoon of February 14, but his coach was so slow that he missed his train into France, with the result that, taking the next train, he arrived shortly before midnight. He had been invited to be the guest of an English lord, probably an acquaintance from Cannes, but at such a late hour, not knowing where the man lived, he and Father Durando wandered about for some time until they found someone to show them the way. Finally they found the home, and Don Bosco was able to get a little very badly needed rest. The following morning he celebrated Mass in the chapel of a nearby religious house. He also tried to meet Mr. Saint-Genest, the noted writer for *Le Figaro*,³ but with no success, since he had already left Menton some days before.

When he got to Nice, the confreres, who were concerned about his health, were most happy to see him looking quite well. God kept blessing his journey, as generous benefactors responded to his efforts to collect funds to support, enlarge and multiply his good works. One donation alone enabled him to pay off the heaviest debt that burdened the house at Nice. Also the conferences which he held, as before, in the Church of Our Lady and in St. Pierre's Hospice were reasonably successful. *Il Pensiero*, the local Italian newspaper, reported: "Nothing is more natural than Don Bosco's message; the words of a man who is all heart enkindle a similar passion in his hearers."

One day a young lady came to see him and told him the story of a miracle. A year before, her parents had brought her, a deaf-mute since birth, to Don Bosco for his blessing. After blessing her, he had suggested to her parents certain prayers to be said for a determined time. At the end of that time the girl was able to hear and speak perfectly. There she was, a living proof. "And now," she concluded with fluency of speech, "I am greatly indebted to Mary, Help of Christians, and would like to know how I can make it up to Her." It is not hard to surmise Don Bosco's reply.⁴

Father Ronchail and Baron Héraud were both momentarily alarmed by an unpleasant occurrence; fortunately the fear was far greater than

³See Vol. XV, p. 428. [Author]

⁴Father Rua's circular to provincials, March 29, 1883. [Author]

the consequences. During the afternoon of February 24 they accompanied Don Bosco on a visit to Bishop Balain of Nice; from there they went to take a look at a piece of land which someone planned to donate to him, lest the government, as it then seemed plausible, proceed to expropriate the parade ground and build barracks on it. Don Bosco chose to make the trip completely on foot. When they reached a stream known as Paglione, rather than continue to the Garibaldi Bridge, he preferred to take a significant short-cut by crossing the riverbed. While traveling in the opposite direction exactly seven years before, on February 24, he had made that crossing when he had come to buy the Villa Gautier. He wished to keep that anniversary. Like all streams, the riverbed was very wide, while the water was somewhat shallow. However, water there was, and in three places one had to cross the stream on rather lengthy gangplanks. With youthful eagerness Don Bosco, reminding his companions of his former acrobatic skill, walked up to the plank without the help of either the director or the baron, each of whom wanted to hold his hand. All went well with the first and second and most of the third plank, but just as he neared the end his right foot slipped and he fell into the stream. "Oh that poor priest," cried out some Piedmontese laundrywomen in their dialect. Father Ronchail, knowing the condition of Don Bosco's legs, was worried. However, Don Bosco immediately rose to his feet, and they readily pulled him up out of the water, while he kept looking fondly at his overcoat, which he had carried slung over his shoulder and which was floating down the stream for some six hundred feet. Thoroughly soaked and dripping, he was put into a coach and immediately rushed back to the house. Since there was no change of clothes in the house—a homely poverty he gloried in—Father Ronchail had him go to bed. In the long run the accident did him good; he got a few days of tranquil rest, while his friends, hearing that Don Bosco had gone to bed because nowhere in the house could clothing be found for him, vied with each other to provide for his needs.

At first no one in the house knew about the accident. When some inquired they were told that Don Bosco felt a bit tired. The following day, however, at a testimonial dinner with some twenty guests present, he described in detail how he had fallen into the Paglione stream and taken an unexpected bath. His pleasant humor set Baron Héraud's vivid imagination to work: he sent out a postcard picture of Nice, and at the place of Don Bosco's fall drew a monument with an inscription

underneath: "February 24, 1883—Don Bosco is rescued from the waters of the Paglione. A devoted and jubilant friend."⁵

Don Bosco took advantage of a free moment to visit the kitchen being run by the sisters. As he stood looking about, Sister Catherine Cei, while moving a pot, splattered just a little broth on her wimple.⁶ Don Bosco, remarking that even a tiny stain spoiled its looks though the rest was immaculate, added, "So too a soul that has even a single speck at the hour of death will not be admitted to the glory of heaven, but must be purified in purgatory." Father Ronchail, who was accompanying him and briefing him on the house's financial problems, remarked that he often was forced to pester his benefactors and that sometimes they felt annoyed and showed it. Don Bosco's answer came in fluent Piedmontese: "Be smart. The money is for your boys; the embarrassment is for yourself."

At Nice he was visited by a certain Mrs. Mary Angela Laroche, of Vallières, in the diocese of Limoges, who used to winter with her husband at the Côte d'Azur [on the French Riviera] and who had met Don Bosco on other occasions. This time she came with an aching heart. She and her husband were supporting a free school being run by nuns in her village, and one day an official notice came to them from the department of education that the sister superior had sharply censured civil marriage—an unpardonable crime in those days of conflict and outrage against schools run by religious. The city council was informing them that a petition had been filed with the central government's prefecture for an immediate shutdown of the Catholic school. The lady had come to unburden her heart and seek advice. Though Don Bosco was due to leave on the morrow and was busy putting things together, he agreed to see her. After listening to her with great calm, he paused for a moment's reflection and then resolutely replied: "The school will not be closed." He repeated the words several times and then added, "But you must go back there."

"But it's the middle of winter," she interposed. "Our villages are covered with snow, and it would be plain folly to endanger our health in this cold weather. Our journey would end badly."

"Yet you must go back," Don Bosco repeated. His injunction precluded any excuse.

⁵Letter of Father Ronchail to Father Rua, February 24, 1883. [Author]

⁶A white, starched cloth, fastened at the back and worn in front in the upper part of some nuns' habits. [Editor]

Both husband and wife yielded to his firm stand and undertook the journey. They got home at midnight, the noise of their carriage wheels awakening the neighbors. Well-intentioned people rejoiced at their presence in the school's defense; the others were at a loss at what to do. The plaintiffs, taken aback, immediately summoned an emergency meeting and decided to withdraw their suit. They had hoped that, in the absence of the only ones who could parry their thrusts, their maneuver would have met no obstacle, but, as things turned out, they were soundly defeated. "All we needed to do was to obey Don Bosco and get there in time," the lady wrote. "God fulfilled the prophecy of His faithful servant."

This woman so trusting of Don Bosco's word had once before experienced a glaringly clear proof of his holiness. For three years she had harbored a grudge against her mother-in-law for some harm the latter had caused her son, the lady's husband. She no longer visited her mother-in-law or wrote to her, breaking off completely. Her spiritual director, after due consideration, sensing no hatred on her part, thought it best to let things run their course. Meanwhile, however, as time went by the mother-in-law was hoping for a reconciliation and had asked some friends to intervene, but with no success. One day she decided to take up her pen and write to her daughter-in-law, but the latter remained unmoved.

Matters were at this point when the lady went to Nice and, learning of Don Bosco's presence there, asked to see him. Very differently from the way he had received her on other occasions, he was cold and reserved this time and greeted her with, "My daughter, you are in the wrong!" If his reserve had alarmed her, these words upset her, all the more so when Don Bosco from time to time repeated them. She asked him what he meant. His reply was that she should go before the Blessed Sacrament and ask the Lord to enlighten her. Since it was late in the day, she did not see him again until the morrow. The following morning she heard a sermon whose theme was charity and forgiveness of offenses. Immediately she saw the light and felt dismayed at the fact that for three years she had never thoroughly examined her conscience. She sought a confessor and some time later went to see Don Bosco. Before she had a chance to say a word, he exclaimed, "My daughter, now everything is set to right! You have been generously forgiving and have poured out your heart in your letter. God is pleased with you." The fact was that immediately after confession she had

written a warm, loving letter to her mother-in-law.⁷

From Nice Don Bosco journeyed to Cannes. The train made several stops on the way. Father [Camillus De] Barruel tells us: "Wherever people come to know that Don Bosco is passing by, there is such a rush toward him that on one occasion an onlooker, Father Manin, a former missionary and the biographer of [St. John Baptist Vianney], the celebrated and revered parish priest of Ars, remarked, 'We witness the same spectacle as at Ars; I can see myself there again.'"⁸

He stayed several days in Cannes, guest of the marquis of La Croix-Laval. One day his wife, presenting her grandchildren to Don Bosco, said, "I would hope, Father, that several of these little ones of mine will become priests." "Marchioness," he replied, "only one will." His prophetic words were realized in the person of the parish priest of Saint Trivier, of the diocese of Dijon.

On March 2 he breakfasted with an eighty-five-year-old gentleman to whom he had been introduced by a much loved cooperator, Monsignor [Marius] Guigou, chaplain of a well-known rest home. All the household of the venerable old man fervently desired that he would return to the practice of his faith. Don Bosco's presence made a deep impression on his family, nor was it lost upon the elderly man himself, as events of the following July proved. Going back in grievous pain to Gérardmer, his birthplace, rather than indulge in self-pity the sick man resolved to make his peace with God, after which his condition seemed to improve; unable to leave the house, he asked to receive Holy Communion at home. Furthermore, since he had not been confirmed in his youth and since the newly appointed Bishop [Charles] Turinaz of Nancy, his diocese, happened to be passing through, he sent the bishop an earnest appeal for the sacrament. His family was thrilled.⁹

As usual, there were certainly many wealthy persons to meet and several religious communities to visit in those popular resorts, but we have no record of any. Father [Joseph] Ronchail used to narrate one incident which struck him and those who witnessed it. It was just five

⁷Sending in her account of the two incidents on September 14, 1899, Mrs. Laroche wrote: "I so loved Don Bosco that I feel I am acquitting myself of a debt of gratitude to him." And her parish priest added his own testimony to hers, claiming that Mrs. Laroche was "outstanding for her honesty and devotion and was especially worthy of faith." [Author]

⁸Quoted by Father Rua in the above-mentioned circular of March 29, 1883. [Author]

⁹Letter of Miss Ann Nöttinger to Don Bosco, Gérardmer (Vosges), July 28, 1883. [Author]

minutes to the train's departure and Don Bosco was boarding, when two colonels or generals approached him and most respectfully greeted him; then they knelt before him and asked for his blessing, which he gave with the warmest kindness and simplicity.

Leaving Cannes, he stopped over at Fréjus to pay his respects to the bishop. The prelate asked him for some medals of Mary, Help of Christians to send to his godchild, a noble young lady who was then very critically ill in Paris. On receiving the medal, she put it about her neck and began a novena; halfway through it, she was healed. When, later, Don Bosco eventually got to Paris and one day was distributing medals to the people who flocked to him, the bishop's godchild also came up to him and asked for one. Don Bosco, who had never seen her before, looked intently at her and said, "Not for you. You have already received yours from your godfather, the bishop of Fréjus."¹⁰

The bishop had seen to it that Don Bosco could address the people in the cathedral if he so wished. After the talk, one of the residents of the city, a certain Fabre—father of the present [1934] mayor—went to him in the sacristy and asked him to pray for his wife, who was seriously ill and in danger of losing her sight. He blessed a religious object belonging to the sick woman and said, "Please assure her that she shall not die blind." In fact, she lived to an elderly age and always kept her sight. She suffered a great deal with her eyes, and outstanding ophthalmologists of Montpellier suggested an operation, but she would not hear of it, always concluding, "Don Bosco assured me that I shall not die blind."

At that time several ladies became zealous promoters of Salesian works. A spinster among them was so active for a number of years in collecting funds and clothing for Don Bosco's orphans that a local simpleton, whenever he met her, would greet her, "Good morning, Mrs. Don Bosco!"

On the evening of February 6 we find Don Bosco at La Navarre.¹¹ He entered the new house to the joyful shouts of the boys. Construction, which had been in progress for less than a year, had proceeded so rapidly that all that remained for Don Bosco to do was to

¹⁰This fact was certified by Father Ronchail to Father Lemoyne. [Author]

¹¹Our information on Don Bosco's visit to La Navarre comes from a brief chronicle of that house written in Italian. The second volume of Lemoyne's two-volume biography of Don Bosco records a passage from a letter of Father Albera, the provincial, which associates this visit with this year, though it belongs to 1882. Cf. Vol. XV, pp. 418f. [Author]

bless the building. As he set foot within the new home he was greeted with a brief entertainment prepared in his honor, after which he spoke. "When a father returns home after a long absence," he said, "he is greeted by everyone with 'Good morning, Father. Good morning, Dad!' And that says everything. But you have gone even further. Well, I rejoice with you. Your music has certainly improved from last year. I like to think you have progressed as well in goodness and knowledge. Continue to grow in grace and in good health before God and before men, and always make sure you have a good appetite!"

During the afternoon of the 7th, he solemnly blessed the new building and then performed another ceremony. The chapel in use until then had become far too small for the growing number of boys. Foreseeing that situation back in May 1882, he had called the attention of Count [Louis] Colle to this urgent need, and since the count had pledged twenty thousand francs for that purpose, plans were immediately set afoot to build a spacious, beautiful church. By the time of Don Bosco's visit all preparatory work was finished, and so he was asked to bless the cornerstone. Despite the day's inclement weather, the more prominent benefactors of the house came to the double ceremony.

On March 8, amid hurrahs and tears, Don Bosco left La Navarre for Hyères¹² and Toulon, where he was the most anxiously awaited guest of Count and Countess Colle, to whom he narrated the account of his three-hour train ride conversation with their son Louis, who had died two years before.¹³

Throughout his life Don Bosco had several encounters with men and women founders of religious congregations. At Toulon he met a young man, later known as Father Felix Rougier, who is presently [1934] living in Mexico, where he founded the Congregation of the Holy Spirit. In 1878, at eighteen years of age, he was a novice with the Marist Brothers at Lyons, but a stubborn infection in the right wrist, which defied all medication, forced him to return home. Five years passed, and his arm was reduced to skin and bones. His mother,

¹²*Bulletin Salésien*, August 1883. The only record we have of this trip to Hyères is in a letter of one Isabel Guille addressed to Don Bosco in Paris and dated November 15, 1883: "My mother's recovery, which we have often commended to your prayers, is progressing very nicely and is almost complete. We earnestly hope that Our Lady will bring it to perfection. In a very special way, I also commend to your prayers the healing of Miss Felicia Sanguier, whom you met at Hyères." [Author]

¹³See Vol. XV, pp. 66f. [Author]

who deeply revered Don Bosco, brought him to the saint in Toulon and begged him to bless the lad and obtain his cure so that he could become a priest. The boy knelt before Don Bosco, who cupped his head in his hands, prayed for a while and gave him his blessing. The healing was instantaneous: all pain disappeared, the wound closed, and within a short time the entire arm was perfectly normal. In memory of that miracle St. John Bosco is today revered as the congregation's special patron by Father Rougier and his confreres.

On the evening of March 16 Don Bosco was welcomed with great festivity at St. Leo's Oratory in Marseille.¹⁴ It is unfortunate that of all the events that took place on that occasion we know so little, but that little we shall narrate.

We find the general announcement of his visit in the above-cited circular letter of Father Rua to the provincials: "Toward the middle of this month Don Bosco arrived in Marseille, from where we learn that he is totally taken up with outsiders. At all hours of the day carriages can be seen driving up to the house with persons more or less grievously ill who come to receive his blessing, in which they have unlimited trust." All this coming and going, however, did not so engage his attention that he could not give thought to things happening farther away. His mind ran to the Sacred Heart Church in Rome, the principal aim of his journey; he thought, too, of the foreign missions. While he was in Lyons it would have helped him greatly to have a recommendation from the Vatican Secretariat of State that could be considered a positive recognition of the Salesian missions by the Holy See. Regarding both concerns of his, he wrote to his procurator, Father Dalmazzo, from Marseille.

Marseille, March 19, 1883

My dear Father Dalmazzo:

I am doing my very best, but you and Father Savio¹⁵ will have to hustle to get funds.

For your knowledge, I have sent three thousand francs through Father Ronchail from Cannes. This is unrelated to what I mistakenly sent to Monsignor Macchi.

I sent another two thousand francs from Hyères. You will receive more

¹⁴Minutes of the March 15, 1883, meeting. [Author]

¹⁵For both see Appendix 1. [Editor]

this morning. I shall do better after I leave here, because just now there are considerable debts to be faced in these houses. It would be most helpful if Archbishop [Dominic] Jacobini would consider drawing up a letter for us in which he would state that:

1. With the approval of the Holy Father, Pope Pius IX, and by his orders, we began the missions of Uruguay and Patagonia.

2. At this time the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda is considering the division of Patagonia into three vicariates in accordance with the Holy Father's wishes.

3. These missions have been recommended to the benevolent care of the pious Society for the Propagation of the Faith.

Take heart, both of you. Money is not lacking in Rome.

I'll write again as soon as I'm free of this hustle and bustle. Seek and you shall find. God bless us all!

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

March 29 was Salesian Cooperators' Day. After Mass Don Bosco blessed the beautiful statue of Mary, Help of Christians which was donated by a pious family of Marseille for the chapel of St. Leo's Oratory. After the blessing he spent some time with the bystanders, congratulating them for the faith he admired in their city not just among the poor but also among the nobility, and not only among women but also among men. He praised their frequent use of the sacraments and asked them to persevere in that and in their trust of Mary, Help of Christians. The bishop of the diocese [John Louis Robert] presided at the afternoon session, which was so crowded that latecomers could not find standing room even in the proximity of the chapel. Opening with an appropriate exhortation, Don Bosco gave a report on the progress of the Salesian work in France as he had seen it along his itinerary. Of course, he spoke in French. Father [Louis] Mendre, who had been appointed parish priest of St. Trophimus Church, was unable to draft a report as he used to but remarked to Father Albera on Don Bosco's address: "Don Bosco has an eloquence all his own. Yes, he talks differently, but he always pleases." In his address Don Bosco spoke first about Nice.

At Nice I found that our sisters, the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, have a new residence adjoining St. Pierre's Hospice, which has now

enough space to set up more workshops and a chapel. The new facilities have enabled the Salesians to double their enrollment from one to two hundred. That means that one hundred more boys are able to learn a trade along with their academic studies and are taught to know and love God. This is most consoling.

From Nice I went to La Navarre, near Toulon. There, as you know, we have gathered abandoned orphan children of the countryside in an agricultural school which has already done well and promises to do better. Last year all they had there was a ramshackle residence which threatened to collapse any day. Emergency repairs were badly needed. Funds were lacking, but we trusted in God and blessed the first stone of a new, large building which can accommodate more than a hundred and fifty boys. It is now finished, and anyone who, like myself, has seen both the old as it was last year and the new as it is today cannot help but marvel and thank the Lord, Who has in such a visible manner cared for us.

Apart from Marseille, I still have to speak to you about our house in Saint-Cyr. The dangers and seductions facing the young people of the countryside are, I would say, even greater for orphan girls. As a rule, they have to migrate to the cities and there accept whatever work or service they can find. They are devastated on one hand by their own lack of schooling and religion and on the other by scandal, corruption and evil. Who can number the victims? Who can say how many of these unfortunate girls return to the homes they have left? You can see for yourselves that we must combat these dangers of perversion. And so we had to give thought to rural orphan girls, and we did so. Our house at Saint-Cyr was started for this purpose. Some forty girls are being cared for there and given schooling and proper upbringing. They work the soil; at the same time they are receiving intellectual, religious and moral training; they are learning what they need to know as girls and are thus preparing for their future.

But this house, I am sorry to say, is hardly known since it is so far removed from populated centers, and thus it does not enjoy the support of that charity which causes our houses in Nice, La Navarre and Marseille to flourish. We would like to double, yes, triple the number of the girls, but just now we lack funds. However, we do hope soon to put up a new building there too. Having declared war upon hell, we will not let ourselves be outdone in work by the children of darkness.

There is not much for me to add about our St. Leo's Oratory in Marseille; you can see for yourselves what has been done. The chapel having been finished and land purchased for a third building, we are now forced to add a new wing to the house to shield us from the gaze of outsiders. The building will be made ready for occupancy as soon as possible, and this will enable us to raise the enrollment from the three hundred it is today to four hundred and

more. For all of this, you understand, we need money, or else we will go into debt. Do you know what this debt amounts to? One hundred thousand francs. That was the first welcome I received from the superiors of this house when they handed me a bill which included other debts amounting to just under two hundred thousand francs. This is the reality facing us: we have to satisfy our creditors, who are not content with just words. We have to come up with the funds. One suggestion is to pray, but prayer must be accompanied by action. Our creditors are not satisfied with prayers; neither are our students. They eat bread, and lots of it, and no matter what we say or do to break them of this habit, they want no part of it even for one day. They do not demand delicacies, of course, but enough bread and soup to fill them. That's all they want and that's what we must provide.

Someone may ask, "How are we going to wipe out such a huge debt?" In Turin, not very long ago, we built a magnificent church whose final cost ran to a little less than a million francs. Now, do you know how much cash we had on hand when construction was begun? Eight soldi.¹⁶ That week, as we agonized over how we were to pay the workers, I was called to the bedside of a sick woman who, despairing of any more human remedies, decided to place her full trust in God and in the intercession of Our Lady.¹⁷ "Of course," I assured her, "Mary will help you, but you must do your share as well. First and foremost, pray, and pray from your heart, reciting three Our Father's, Hail Mary's and Glory Be's and one Hail, Holy Queen for nine days."

"I shall most willingly do that, and with the greatest devotion."

"But that is not enough," I replied. "You must do something in honor of Our Lady, and you must aid me in the work I have begun. I am really at a loss to provide the workers' wages this Saturday. You should take it upon yourself to do that."

"I promise to do that too, if Our Lady will grant me the grace of rising from my bed on Saturday. How much must I give?"

"This week I need one thousand lire."

"Fine. Come back on Saturday and you will have them."

I returned to her home the following Saturday afternoon and asked the servant who answered my knock how her mistress was faring. "Oh, Father," came the answer, "she is completely cured and doing well! She got up and, not content with walking about her room, went out to church."

"God be praised," I exclaimed. "Did she leave you anything for me?"

At that moment the lady herself came in and recounted her cure. She gave me the sum she had promised and continued to help us in this holy enterprise until it reached completion.

¹⁶See Vol. VII, p. 393. The *soldo* (singular) was a coin worth five cents in the decimal system introduced after the French Revolution. [Editor]

¹⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 279f. [Editor]

This, my friends, was one of the many events which brought about the Church of Mary, Help of Christians in Turin. Of the million francs it cost, a good eight hundred thousand came from graces received through the intercession of the Mother of God. That happened in Turin; I hope it will repeat itself in Marseille for St. Leo's Oratory.

After giving due thanks to some persons, Don Bosco spoke of the recent progress made in various areas and closed, saying, "Give, and it shall be given to you!"¹⁸

Taking the cue from this scriptural quotation, the bishop then encouraged the cooperators to join forces with Don Bosco—the instrument of Divine Providence—and urged all his hearers to do good by example and by giving. He ended his talk with a cute story. "There was once a monastery in Africa," he said, "which owned nothing, and yet the charity of the faithful supported both its monks and a goodly number of the poor. With time the donations decreased to the extent that the monastery fell into serious financial straits. The abbot was worried and, not knowing how they could survive, turned to a colleague of his—the superior of a religious community—and told him of his troubles. The latter, deducing from his words that the monastery, fearing bankruptcy, had begun gradually cutting back on its alms to the poor and then completely dropping them, immediately told him the reason of the loss of donations. In that monastery lived two sisters, he said [with Latin names]. One was called *Date* [Give] and the other *Dabitur* [It shall be given]. When *Date* was banished from the monastery, her sister went also with her, leaving the monks in dire poverty." The audience had a good laugh and drew the moral that helping one's neighbor draws all sorts of blessings from God.

The funds Don Bosco collected in the two weeks which he spent in Marseille gave St. Leo's Oratory some temporary, if insufficient, relief. As he himself realized, the city was in a financial slump, which made the generous donations of normal times impossible. In view of this, he somewhat toned down his appeal to the people in the city and looked elsewhere for needed funds.

¹⁸*L'Écho de Notre Dame de la Garde*, April 8, 1883, reported the event as follows: "This interesting account, narrated with engaging charm and fatherly trust by Don Bosco, deeply impressed the audience grouped about the pulpit. The eager attention of the faithful to this holy priest and the ever growing devotedness of the Catholics are, without doubt, the very best possible proof that the motivation, which has brought about this work and still spurs the faithful to expand it, is from God." [Author]

In the meantime he had received concrete, tempting offers from Lille and Barcelona. From comparing both situations Father Guiol found reasons to encourage the ladies of the Marseille guild. "Divine Providence," he asserted,¹⁹ "has always visibly shown itself in favor of Don Bosco's work and through its continued protection verifies the words of Pius IX, 'Don Bosco is an apostle, and I have the greatest trust in him.' Indeed, one can sense in his houses and among the homeless boys whom he has brought together an aura which emanates from his holiness. The boys of St. Leo's Oratory, by their good, devout conduct, are a veritable sermon, and many times, through the parish's solemn ceremonies at which they serve, they have won back for the oratory the good will of persons who had left it. Their wholesomeness has made those people appreciate the excellence of the work and has been more effective than any advertising or exhortation in bidding them to return."

A little incident which happened in the diocesan seminary gives us an idea of the veneration in which Don Bosco was held in Marseille. A wealthy and very generous benefactor whose son was a seminarian wanted to surprise the lad by a visit from Don Bosco. Don Bosco agreed to go. There they asked to see the rector, who, they were told, was out. They asked for the vice-rector, who came, greeted them politely, and condescendingly asked what he might do for them.

"We would like to see the Olive boy," the father replied.

"I'm sorry, but it's not possible. The seminarians are in school."

"But this is an exceptional request," Don Bosco remarked. "I am a visitor from abroad and a friend of his, and I cannot come back."

"I'm sorry but this is a case where only the rector can make an exception. I can't take the responsibility on myself."

"Please do us this favor," Don Bosco answered. "I am very sure your rector will approve."

"Excuse me, but I don't interpret my superior's mind. There's a rule, and that's enough for me."

The tension between a polite request and an equally polite refusal kept growing until Mr. Olive, losing his patience and somewhat piqued, put an end to the argument by asking, "Do you know whom you are talking to?"

¹⁹Minutes of the April 12, 1883, meeting. [Author]

“Yes, I am talking to a priest—a worthy one, I would say, if for no other reason than that he is in your company. But that is not sufficient reason for me to break the rule.”

“This is Don Bosco!” Mr. Olive fairly shouted.

“This is Don Bosco?” the vice-rector exclaimed, falling to his knees and kissing his hand. Then he rushed to ring the bell, shouting, “Don Bosco! Don Bosco!”

The bell and the vice-rector’s shouts drew teachers and students out into the halls, exclaiming, “Don Bosco! Don Bosco!”

They dashed headlong down the stairs and drew close to him, striving to grab and kiss his hand. It was a moving demonstration of enthusiasm.

In the meantime the rector appeared. He had the seminarians gather in one of the halls and, escorting Don Bosco, asked him to address them. Just what they were all expecting to hear is anybody’s guess, but Don Bosco, with all simplicity, began to ask them questions. “How many of you are deacons?” he inquired.

“Many.”

“And subdeacons?”

“Many.”

“Very well. Listen now to a basic truth. The day is not far off when all of you will be priests. Do not forget what I am about to tell you. A priest never goes to heaven or hell alone; with him go a large number of souls who either have been saved by his ministry and good example or have been lost by his neglect of duty and bad example. Keep this well in mind.” He then went on to corroborate his statement from Church history.

In their hour of supreme anguish the Olive family found a measure of relief in the comforting words of Don Bosco. Two of the Olive sons were with the expeditionary force during the French campaign against the Krumirs in Algeria.²⁰ Their mother wrote to Don Bosco about it, and he replied that neither son would be killed in that war. However, a typhoid epidemic hit the army with heavy casualties, and one of her boys died. Mrs. Olive wrote back to Don Bosco, reminding him of his

²⁰This Algerian campaign was decided upon as a reprisal to the incursions of the Krumirs on March 30 and 31, 1881, in the Constantine region. France sent forty thousand troops there. The campaign ended with the treaty of Cair-Said (May 12, 1881) which made Tunisia a protectorate of France. [Author]

prophetic word. He replied that he had visited the battlefield searching through the bodies of the dead, but had not found her sons among them. He reminded her that he had stated that they would not die in battle. As for the second son, also hit by the epidemic, he assured her that when he would go to Marseille and have dinner with the family, that young man would be the lord of the feast, seated in the place of honor. And so it was, affirms Father Lemoyne, who heard the account directly from the father!²¹

This Olive family is not to be confused with the Olive family of our Salesian missionary Father Louis Olive, who died in China in 1919. He seems to have met Don Bosco in 1882 when he was sixteen. A zealous woman cooperator introduced the Olive family to Don Bosco, who accepted their invitation to dinner. He was immediately drawn to the large family—thirteen children in all, boys and girls. After dinner he had each one come to him for a kindly word. When Louis came up, he looked at the boy intently and then, turning to the mother, said, “This one will be for Don Bosco.” Although he was his mother’s darling, she, a profoundly Christian woman, was later to offer him to the Lord through the hands of his faithful servant, Don Bosco.²²

Mr. Olive’s name became a household word at the Oratory because of an imaginative idea of his. He visited the Oratory in 1883 and, having been given the usual festive welcome tendered to outstanding benefactors, he walked into the playground after dinner and told the boys that on a day acceptable to Don Bosco he would provide half a chicken for each one of them. He left, and on the long awaited day the hunt was on for five hundred chickens. In Turin’s main marketplace at Porta Palazzo, poultry merchants would in the early hours of the morning display on metal racks long lines of poultry, killed and plucked the night before; at dawn hotel suppliers would rush for the first buys. But that morning, to their surprise, there were no chickens in sight, and all they heard from poultry sellers was that Don Bosco had bought them all at a very early hour! In fact, our well-known Brother [Joseph] Rossi, the Oratory’s [purveyor and] cook, who was well acquainted with the buying habits of the hotel suppliers, had

²¹While in Marseille, Father Lemoyne saw the young man when he returned from Africa, not yet fully recovered from his illness. This was some time before Don Bosco attended that dinner. The family reunion took place in 1882 or 1883. [Author]

²² V. Chantier, *Un missionnaire salésien. Le Père Ludovic Olive* (Nice: École professionnelle salésienne Don Bosco, 1931). [Author]

beaten them to their quarry. We can readily imagine all the bantering that went on, as well as the squabbling between suppliers and favored merchants. And that is how it happened that on that day all of Porta Palazzo's chickens were stewing away in the Oratory's kitchen.

We have three other events of an extraordinary nature to recount, though one of them occurred in 1882.²³ The evening before the Salesian cooperators' conference, Don Bosco met again two persons, a mother and son, who had deliberately come to our house in Marseille to thank Mary, Help of Christians from the fullness of their hearts. A year before, on February 11, the woman had brought her son to Don Bosco. He was afflicted with a malignancy affecting the left eye which the doctors had judged incurable, saying that the eye had to be removed. Don Bosco urged both mother and son to put their total confidence in Mary, Help of Christians, and he gave the boy Our Lady's blessing. They had not long to wait for a cure; within just three days the eye was restored to its normal condition, and by the feast of the Ascension the sight was fully restored. They gave thanks to Our Lady and handed Don Bosco a generous offering.

The second event began on the very morning of the conference. From Bern, Switzerland, Don Bosco received a telegram dated April 29, from the Countess of Aure, informing him that her husband was suffering severely from pneumonia complicated by inflammation of the meninx. She was asking that he and his good boys pray that her husband might have at least some relief from his pain. The following morning a second telegram informed him that the man's condition was critical and most insistently begged for prayers. Don Bosco lost no time in having everyone pray for him that day. The next morning a third and final telegram arrived, stating very simply: *il est sauf* [he is doing fine]. The miraculous cure was permanent.

The third event had to do with Don Bosco's visit to Avignon. The Almaric family had a daughter there who had been ill for three months, and she too had then been given up by the doctors. Her parents hastened to Marseille to beg Don Bosco to come to their home and give her his blessing. Since he had already planned to stop over in Avignon, he promised to satisfy their desire. The afflicted parents immediately returned home, their hearts comforted.

²³Father Rua mentions the first two in his second circular letter to the provincials, dated April 5. [Author]

A letter [of Don Bosco] to Miss Claire Louvet would upset the entire chronology of this itinerary if we were to accept its assigned date of March 2 [1883], for that would assume that Don Bosco was already in Marseille by that day. However, the minutes of the ladies' guild [of St. Leo's Oratory] make it absolutely clear that Don Bosco did not get to Marseille before the 16th. Hence we have to suppose that the digit "2" of the letter's date is missing another cipher and should probably read March 22.²⁴ The timetable which he outlined in this letter he later modified during his journey.

Don Bosco, then, left Marseille for Avignon on Monday evening, April 2, with his secretary, Father De Barruel. Luckily they were able to take an express train which got them to the historic city of the popes in just two hours. The news of his coming attracted a large crowd to the railroad station, where it waited for him outside the exit. However, to be rescued from the crush of such a vast gathering, he was whisked away through the adjacent café and put into a coach, which took off at a rapid clip. Realizing what had happened, the crowd ran after the coach. "It was funny but equally touching," writes Father De Barruel, "to see such a unique demonstration of enthusiasm and loving veneration."²⁵

Don Bosco was taken to Mr. Michael Bent of Avignon, who ran a large store of religious articles and church furnishings. Vast as it was, the shop was jammed with people who had to push up against the walls to allow Don Bosco to walk through and impart his blessing to them.²⁶ But over that multitude there reigned a silent and reverent peacefulness which indicated its veneration for Don Bosco, something of which he was totally unaware. Mr. Bent, noting Don Bosco's frailty, kept at his side to shield him from the crowd, and so Don Bosco called him his guardian angel, just as he called Mr. Bent's son,

²⁴We may explain the date being March 2 and not March 22 as follows: At the top of the page Don Bosco wrote in large characters "Oratoire S. Léon, Marseille" with the letters of the last word being squeezed very tightly at the end of the slip of paper. Underneath "Marseille" he wrote the date "2 Mars 83." In his anxiety to fit in all the letters of the address he probably forgot to write the second 2. [Author]

²⁵Father Rua's circular, already cited, and Father De Barruel's letter to Count Colle, Valence, April 5, 1883. [Author]

²⁶A young man, Joseph Françon, wrote to Don Bosco from Tarascon on May 30, when all the newspapers were reporting Don Bosco's visit to Paris: "I am the youth who had been cured by Our Lady of Lourdes, who was dressed in blue. My father and I had the honor of seeing you and receiving your blessing at the store of Michael Bent in Avignon last April. You were also so kind as to assure me of a remembrance in your Mass the next morning." [Author]

his altar boy, *enfant de chœur*, because he served his Mass. However, notwithstanding all these precautions, the crowd kept snipping away at his cassock for souvenirs. Becoming aware of what was quietly going on, he good-humoredly remarked, "They are cutting up my cassock; I hope they will get me a new one!" The owner immediately sent his son William to get Don Bosco a new cassock, which was ready for him before he left the store.

The following morning he celebrated Mass at the convent of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where one of the nuns was Father De Barruel's sister. After Mass he found himself literally swamped by ladies, all of whom were asking for his blessing and a personal word. Later, acceding to the pastor's request, he agreed to speak at four that afternoon in the mother church of St. Agricola, where, in 1371, Pope Gregory XI had initiated the public liturgical cult of St. Joseph.

The church, very spacious indeed, was packed with people, "just about as much as on Easter," as one newspaper put it.²⁷ Another newspaper ran the report of its Avignon correspondent:²⁸ "We marveled not only at the throngs of devotees who crowded about him for a word of advice, a blessing or a souvenir, but also at the lovable simplicity, cheerful humility and self-denial of this holy man who received and blessed everyone, poor, little, sickly, as would have done a Francis de Sales, a Vincent de Paul, or a venerable Curé of Ars." The same periodical wrote of his conference: "Facing such an immense audience, Don Bosco could not help but praise the city of the popes, which remained faithful to the traditions of the past and profoundly Catholic, adding that at that moment he wished he had the eloquence of France's most illustrious orators, the likes of Fénelon, Bossuet and Dupanloup. Then he went on to narrate the history of the Salesian oratories, apologizing with singular delicacy that he had to speak of himself not out of pride, as he said, but merely to state facts as they were. It is hard to describe the people's loving attention to his words, at once so sincere, so apostolic and so wonderfully lucid: his Italian accent and his foreign expressions did not in the least detract from his message."

The next day he said Mass in the same church, and present at it was a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Almaric [Salesian cooperators]. When he

²⁷*Gazette du Midi*, April 5, 1883. [Author]

²⁸*Semaine religieuse* of Nice, April 22, 1883. [Author]

had been to see the daughter the day before, she was doing very poorly. Suffering from tuberculosis, she had been bedridden for three months, and her doctors had given her at most fifteen days to live. Don Bosco comforted her and asked the family to make the usual novena, promising his own prayers and assuring them that she would get well if it were God's will. The parents wanted their daughter herself to ask Don Bosco for a cure, but she, good girl that she was at sixteen, brought herself to ask him merely to be able to attend his Mass the next morning. Don Bosco assured her that she would.

The whole family prepared for the service. That evening they saw Don Bosco again, who reaffirmed his word, adding that the girl would also be able to receive Communion. However, he suggested that they give her some nourishment at about three or four o'clock, a permission he had faculties to grant. Nevertheless, at about seven, when it was time to go to church, the poor girl felt too exhausted to get up. The others went to church and immediately told Don Bosco what had happened. "Yes, yes," he unhesitatingly replied, "she will come." Surprisingly, it was at that very moment that the sick girl told her sister, her tireless nurse, "I think I can make it to Mass." In fact, she arose, dressed hurriedly, walked downstairs and left with her sister in a coach. As they entered the church, a stir of surprise ran through the congregation. The Mass had just begun. Showing no sign of fatigue, she followed the Holy Sacrifice, received Communion, and, returning home, stayed up for a few hours; they even took her out for a little coach ride. The cure never came. Nevertheless she improved to the point that she could be taken into the countryside. While there on May 24, she again attended Mass with her whole family in the parish church some two miles away and had no problem receiving Communion. With her was her father, the notary of Avignon, who had not gone to Communion for many years. He too received the Eucharist. This they recognized as a second grace.

A third grace was soon to come. For liturgical reasons the solemnity of Mary, Help of Christians in 1883 was transferred to June 5. The Almaric family conceived the idea of bringing the sick girl to Turin on that day. Since the doctor whom they consulted resolutely opposed the plan, they wrote to Don Bosco for his opinion. Don Bosco cabled back that they should come without the least fear. She was accompanied by her mother, sister and brother-in-law. "Poor child," lamented

the doctor to one of her cousins, "they'll never bring her back home alive!" Nevertheless, the trip went very smoothly. Don Bosco received them most graciously and invited them to the festal dinner. They attended the services devoutly and took their place at the banquet amid a host of other guests, the girl always in their company. They finally left with their hearts in trustful ease. However, a year later, on May 23, Mary, Help of Christians called Her devoted child to Herself. She received all the sacraments and expired invoking Don Bosco's name. "Though Don Bosco could not work the desired miracle," wrote her elderly sister many years later,²⁹ "he obtained for us some most valuable graces."

In the sacristy of the parish church Don Bosco stopped to look intently at one altar boy and then told him, "You will become a priest." He is now Canon Aurouze.

As the time for his departure drew closer, it became harder to drag Don Bosco from the waves of people which kept surging in and out of the sacristy.

"This is a flood," he was told.

"One more reason why we should get out of here," he replied.

It took a good twenty minutes to get Don Bosco from the sacristy to the rectory, just a few steps away. The people waited for him in the church plaza, but he left by a side door and was whisked off to the station in a carriage. "This is the way that virtue and holiness even today hold sway over the crowd," concluded the Avignon correspondent.

Don Bosco's next stop was Valence. There he was given an enthusiastic welcome by the people and was the guest of Mr. [Albert] Du Boys. On April 6 a vast crowd flooded the Church of St. Apollinaire to assist at his Mass. That evening he gave a brief conference to the Trinitarian Sisters in their convent. Returning home after eight o'clock, he walked across the garden of the Sisters of St. Martha, which they had illuminated for the occasion with Venetian flambeaux. There he was greeted by the sisters and their students on their knees, asking for his blessing. From Valence Don Bosco wrote to Count Colle: "In spite of all my good will to write to you, this is the first opportunity I've had to do so.... I always carry in my heart the sweet remembrance of your graciousness, your attentions and the more than generous donations

²⁹Report of February 12, 1931. [Author]

you have lavished upon me so many times and more particularly during the delightful days I had the honor to spend with you in Toulon. You understand, my dear count, that what I say to you I mean also for the countess, whom we may at this moment truthfully call *the charitable mother* of the Salesians.”

From Valence he went on to Lyons, the third major stop of his itinerary. An inspiring article in *Éclair* had built up the people’s expectations before his arrival.³⁰ The opening and closing statements of the article read: “Within a few days the city of Lyons will have the good fortune to host Don Bosco. Without a doubt this seat of France’s primates and center of so many marvelous undertakings will once more gladly welcome the beloved and saintly priest whom all of Italy has long revered as one of its finest and certainly brightest glories, and whom France—ever an admirer of great accomplishments and of heroes chosen by Providence as instruments of its mercy—is starting to love and bless.... Soon the people of Lyons will hear the voice of that saintly priest, a voice one simply cannot hear without being deeply moved. Don Bosco will speak of his works with that sublime simplicity which lends charm to his words and strikes the innermost chords of the heart when he directs a warm appeal to the well-known outstanding generosity of the faithful of Lyons. Charitable souls: you will gladly hearken to his appeal, and we are sure that you will be happy to contribute your generous donations to the support and growth of the Salesian works, which are par excellence Christian and patriotic works of sacrifice and love. Thus you will tell that good priest, Don Bosco, that he will always find in this beloved land of France sincere and true friends. Thus too you will be well deserving of both God and the fatherland.”

He spent ten days in Lyons, April 6 to April 16. Tokens of extraordinary esteem in which he was held accompanied him throughout his entire stay wherever he went. He could not freely move about; someone had always forcibly to break a passageway for him through the multitude closing in upon him. Nor were some content with just seeing him; not a few kept trying to touch and talk with him. However, he was not allowed to speak in any public church of the city. Cardinal [Louis] Caverot attached too much importance to a letter he had received from Archbishop Gastaldi, who, on learning of Don Bosco’s

³⁰See Appendix 6. [Author]

tour of France and of its purpose, had written to him and made allegations apt to set him against the servant of God. Not so the eminent Cardinal [Joseph] Guibert of Paris, who had received a similar letter, and who, as we shall see, had no such prejudices. He told Don Bosco of the letter and made his indignation known by arranging for him to speak in one of Paris's most prominent churches.³¹

On this occasion also Don Bosco was the house guest of Monsignor [Louis] Guiol, brother of the pastor of St. Joseph's in Marseille and rector of the Catholic University of Lyons. He was besieged by a host of outstanding persons who begged him to obtain for them the favor of having Don Bosco at their homes for dinner, while others put Father De Barruel's patience to the test by pestering him to arrange a personal audience for them.

On a lofty height of Lyons stands the very popular shrine of Our Lady of Fourvière. There Don Bosco addressed the people on Sunday afternoon, April 8. Both church and plaza overflowed with people. Attending him in the presbytery were, among others, Benedictine Father [Joseph] Pothier, renowned scholar of Gregorian chant, and the superior general of the Sulpicians. At the entrance of the church, Don Bosco blessed a beggar woman who was most pitifully crippled. No effect of the blessing was noticed then and there, but we came to know from the Sisters of Charity that when she was home in her pathetic little hovel, she cast off her crutches, was able to walk, and regained the use of her arms.³² At the end of the service Don Bosco was requested to appear at the rector's window and from there to impart his blessing upon the crowd, if it was ever going to scatter.

At Fourvière on the morning of April 15, the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, he paid a visit to the Religious of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle, whose mission it is to afford women the finest facilities for spiritual retreats. He arrived at about eleven. To give the sisters time to gather, the superior took him to the sick room of Mother De Fraix, who was seriously ill. They expected a miracle of him, but he gave her his blessing and encouraged her, saying that his blessing would stay with her till death. As he left the room he told the superior that Mother De Fraix was indeed ready for paradise. He then went down into the main hall, where he spoke a few words exhorting

³¹Summary of the *Positio super virtutibus*, No. III, Paragraphs 235-236. [Author]

³²Letter of Father De Barruel to Count Colle. Moulins, April 17, 1883. [Author]

the sisters to observe their rules faithfully and to form themselves into so many saints for heaven. He closed with his blessing. He also imparted his blessing upon a group of retreatants. One of them was deaf and begged for his prayers that she be granted a healing. He urged her to have trust in the Blessed Virgin Mary and to pray fervently to Her every day until August 15.

He was a guest of the cofoundress of the Religious of Our Lady of the Retreat in the Cenacle, Mother Theresa Couderc, whose cause for beatification has been introduced in Rome. She too was ill, and Don Bosco gave her his blessing.³³ Her sisters were hoping for some extraordinary effect, but the good nun, commenting on that visit, used to say, "After his visit I felt weaker than before. I had not asked the Lord for healing, but only that I might receive all the graces attached to the holy man's blessing." She kept repeating with firm conviction, "Oh, yes, he is a saint!" The superior, writing about that meeting, remarked, "There is nothing more enchanting than to have seen those two holy persons recommend themselves to each other's prayers."

It was announced that Don Bosco would say Mass on Tuesday in the Church of St. Francis de Sales. As usual, the church was packed, so much so that the sacristy doors had to be barricaded lest he be smothered by the crowd.

On April 11 he accepted an affectionate, pressing invitation to dinner at the seminarians' summer residence, where two hundred of them had gathered with their superiors and other prominent guests. How cordial was the reception given him by the rector, staff and seminarians! They all had dinner together in a large hall. Toward the end of the meal, according to their insistent requests, he addressed a few words of advice and encouragement to the students, which they listened to with religious devotion and punctuated with enthusiastic applause.

There was in Lyons a boys' home called Our Lady of the Guilotière, staffed by zealous clergy and laity who, drawing their inspiration from Salesian undertakings, had been working for several months to consolidate a new venture called The Apprentices' Trade School. The promoters of the work naturally felt that a visit from Don Bosco would further bless their enterprise, nor could Don Bosco omit show-

³³While we are correcting these page proofs (May 12, 1935), Rome is proclaiming the decree of the heroism of her virtues. [Author] She was canonized in 1970. [Editor]

ing his fullest agreement for a project so much in harmony with his own mission.

Father Boisard, originator and director of the project, had spent one month at the Oratory in 1882 before undertaking the task. He had desired to become a Salesian but, with Don Bosco's advice, returned home to work on his own. A perfectionist by nature, he could not conceive of a vocational school without the very latest technical equipment. Don Bosco, instead, preferred to begin with whatever he had on hand and later bring his work to fulfillment step by step. "I have toured your workshops," he told Don Bosco in the first days of his stay, "but I think they are somewhat lacking in technical equipment." "You're right," replied Don Bosco. "Note, however, that we have no hired help and that our confreres have not yet been fully trained. You may do better; give it a try in Lyons." Try, indeed, the good priest did, but his workshops languished, while Don Bosco's kept strengthening and progressing steadily. For Don Bosco, perfection was a point of arrival; for Father Boisard, it was a point of departure.

Two things, however, struck him during his stay at the Oratory—the preventive system and the spirit of piety. He returned home enlightened and encouraged, so much so that on the 15th of the following October he opened his first workshop with twelve young artisans. At the public reception tendered to Don Bosco he recounted the story of his new endeavor. "We are just at the beginning," he said in closing, "but the work will grow because its organization and character are those which I saw in full bloom in Turin. In describing this venture of Lyons, I speak as a pupil. What it should be and what it will become with God's grace and the support of the people of Lyons, the expert himself will now tell us."

In "colorful language"³⁴ and, as one witness still living has expressed it, in "halting French" Don Bosco inspired all to concur in developing a work which he felt was in some way placed under his patronage. He unfolded a twofold theme: the first, religious, that children are God's delight; the second, social, that unruly youths will produce an unruly society. Having drawn practical conclusions from these two premises, he asked: "Do you know where we are to find the salvation of society?" He paused for a moment and then continued, "The salvation of society, my dear friends, is in your pockets. The

³⁴*Écho de Fourvière*, April 12, 1883. [Author]

youngsters cared for by the boys' home and by The Apprentices' Trade School stand in need of your support. If you back down now and leave these youngsters to fall victims to anarchist ideals, the benefits you withhold from them today will one day return as they demand them from you, no longer begging with hat in hand, but putting a knife to your throats, and then with your goods they may also take your lives." His closing words were: "The charity of Lyons's people, which extends to Turin's institutions, cannot neglect Lyons's own works. I wish to leave here with the hope that a venture so well begun will continue to expand, that it will lack neither the protection of the good people nor the blessing of God." In a brief interview with a newspaper reporter he explained what he meant by "good people." "These are works," he said, "which not only Catholics must support with a united front but also people who have at heart the morals of the young. Philanthropists must not be less involved than Christians in this matter. It is the only way we can prepare a better future for our society."

It had not been easy to wrest permission for this meeting from the cardinal archbishop. "All they will think of is themselves," he had remarked with a touch of irony, convinced that Don Bosco and his Salesians were only interested in diverting funds to their work. However, he finally yielded to the insistence of others with the promise that Don Bosco would be permitted to speak only of the Lyons project. In all truth, Don Bosco did emphatically stress the needs of this undertaking to his listeners, going so far as to state, "If you will not support this venture, you will have to pay for it later on. Works of this nature are needed to balance society." His appeal brought in eight hundred and fifty francs for the running of the trade school.

When asked a short time ago about the impression made on him by Don Bosco, the present Canon Boisard replied: "There are two: one of goodness and simplicity, the other of unalterable calm. He never gave any hint that he was in a hurry. During my month's stay in Turin, I always saw before me a man of utter calm, one who acted unhurriedly, as though he were unaware of anyone else but the person he was speaking with."

More than anything else, one reason kept him in Lyons so long: his desire once more to plead the cause of his missions before the central committees of Lyons's two well-known organizations, the Society for

the Propagation of the Faith and the Holy Childhood Association. Obtaining a hearing, he demonstrated to the members the urgent need of providing means to foster the growth of the Patagonian missions, stating that without their help he would be in grave straits and would have to look for some kind of expediency so as not to withdraw from that field of mission apostolate. It was his firm intent, he stated, to go forward at all costs. He told them he was considering setting up fund-raising centers in France, but had not as yet done so lest he create antagonism, something he would consider extremely regrettable. Was it not evidently more suitable and effective to have a single center for all the foreign missions which would collect funds for the spread of the faith? The Society for the Propagation of the Faith, he continued, was too venerable and effective a work in Lyons for him to compete with and divert funds from. Still, if the Society did not hasten to his aid, what other recourse did he have but to set up centers in France and Italy and elsewhere to obtain help? It was a matter of honor for himself as superior of a religious congregation and for the Supreme Pontiff, who had entrusted those missions to him. Above all, it was a matter of saving souls who then and there were unable to obtain help elsewhere. He did not intend, however, to precipitate a decision; he wanted to deliberate about it and would bide his time. In the case that he should be forced to take that drastic step, he would not disclose whether or not the Society for the Propagation of the Faith had contributed funds, but he would have to tell the world that he had no other financial support to advance his missions than his own resources, and they were in reality few, insufficient and already strained by his many other works. He therefore asked the Society's committee to think about finding some way they could assign his missions an adequate portion of the funds they collected. The bottom line was, he said, that the Patagonian missions were entitled to the same evangelical charity given to all the other missions. The entire council agreed with Don Bosco's reasoning and decided to give the matter their serious consideration.

Don Bosco was asked to address another group in Lyons. The revered Monsignor Desgrands, president of the Geographical Society, in speaking with Don Bosco, had been so astounded by the self-assurance and grasp of details concerning Patagonia in his lecture that he invited Don Bosco to share this information with the Society's members at its next meeting. Despite the difficulty he experienced in presenting this kind of material in French, he agreed to speak on Saturday, April 14.

His renown as “the venerated healer”³⁵ and an understandable curiosity to hear what he had to say about a region as yet so wrapped in mystery³⁶ attracted quite a number of members and scholars. It turned out to be not a formal address, stated the press, but a *causerie*, an off-the-cuff exposition—original, pleasing, spirited and instructive. His style, at once grave, cultured and delightful, gave the gathering a very charming impromptu flavor. All had before them a map of Patagonia while Don Bosco described in detail the flora and fauna, the geology and mineral deposits, the lakes and rivers and inhabitants, to the utter surprise of his listeners, who kept looking down at their maps and then up again to stare at him in astonishment. When he finished his talk, they asked him where he had researched such interesting facts, but he limited himself to saying that all he had told them was pure truth. The Society, we believe, took time to verify Don Bosco’s statements, because, as we shall see, it was not until 1886 that it committed itself by stating that his talk was not a flight of fancy. As a proof of that commitment they had a gold medal especially struck for him in appreciation for his contribution to the Geographical Society, as we shall narrate in due time.

Sparse and fragmentary is the material we have about his private encounters. While visiting a noble family, he was asked by the lady of the house to bless her maid, a girl of eighteen, whom she had taken in from an orphanage. “She needs it,” the lady explained. “She is an orphan.”

Don Bosco blessed the girl and then said, “I shall pray for your unhappy mother.”

“Her mother?” questioned the lady. “Then you are not an orphan as you claimed?” she asked the girl.

Hard pressed for the truth, the serving girl admitted that her mother was alive, but that her background had been hushed up because her mother had abandoned her family and begun leading a disreputable life.³⁷

Outstanding among the cooperators of Lyons in love for Don Bosco was Count Jouffrey. How and when the friendship which bound him to Don Bosco originated we do not know, but it is certain

³⁵*Écho de Fourvière*, May 5, 1883. [Author]

³⁶*Éclair*, April 21, 1883. [Author]

³⁷D’Espiney, *Don Bosco*, 11th edition. [Author]

that in 1883 Don Bosco was already addressing him as “my friend Gustave.” During his ten-day stay in Lyons Don Bosco had the count’s coach and cabman entirely at his disposal at any time of the day. One morning he was returning after Mass from the tomb of St. Pothinus, bishop and leader of the Martyrs of Lyons. The winding hill road was blocked by crowds swarming about the carriage and forcing it to a crawl. Don Bosco, turning this way and that, would listen, respond and bless, but the carriage moved at a snail’s pace. The coachman, not as patient as his passenger, burst out in an expression that has since become famous: “It’s easier to chauffeur the devil than a saint!”

The horse and carriage that transported Don Bosco were not to come to an undistinguished end. The horse, let out to pasture, died and was buried on an estate of the count, but the carriage is still around, preserved as a relic, and is proudly shown to all who visit the hospitable home.³⁸

Count Jouffrey’s mother was ill. However, she never asked Don Bosco for a cure, but rather offered her sufferings to the Lord for the salvation of souls. It seems that Our Lady granted her prayer and did not free her of her affliction, so that she might carry out her mission of expiation and petition. We infer this from a touching letter sent her by Don Bosco the following day through her son Gustave, who visited Don Bosco in Turin and for several days stayed on as his receptionist.

Father Gourgon, pastor of St. Francis Church, took Don Bosco to visit a woman who was very gravely ill. Her death would have been ever so much more tragic in that she would leave three little children orphans. Walking into her bedroom he said, “This illness is not unto death.” He then blessed her and told her to recite the Hail, Holy Queen every day until August 15. It was precisely within that period that her doctors declared her out of danger. Then, as Don Bosco was leaving, he found the entire household, joined by many relatives, gathered in the main hall to receive his blessing. Two nursemaids were carrying a little baby each; one, named Andrew, nephew of the sick lady, was just five months old. Don Bosco, standing on the doorstep about to leave, turned back and, gesturing toward the child, said, “He shall be a great servant of God and of the Church.” He is today the Sulpician, Mon-signor Andrew Jullien, auditor of the [Sacred Roman] Rota in Rome and consultor to several other Roman congregations.

³⁸*Bulletin Salésien*, August-September 1932. [Author]

One day, going to say Mass in a little church whose name we do not know, he had an encounter which reminded him of an event that had occurred in Cannes several years before. As he entered the sacristy, a lad dressed in a cassock hastened toward him, jubilant and anxious to meet him. "Who are you?" Don Bosco asked.

"I am your little John."

"Which John?"

"Your John—John Courtois. Have you forgotten that when I was ill my parents had me brought to the railroad station in Cannes?"

"Ah, yes, now I do remember."

John was joined by his father and mother, who, weeping with joy, had come to pay their respects to him.

One year, while he had been in Nice, this lad's parents had several times written to ask him to come to Cannes to see their son, who, long confined to bed, had been unable to take a step. However, Don Bosco had then answered that he could not stop over at Cannes. But they did not give up. Finding out the day and time his train would pull into Cannes, they asked four men to go along with them and carry the boy on a cot to the railway station. The station master gave them a hard time and would not let them in. Finally, however, they brought the cot into the station and placed it a few feet from the track. As the train pulled in, they dashed from coach to coach, inquiring, "Is Don Bosco here? Is Don Bosco here?" Don Bosco, unaware and sitting quietly in a corner, on hearing his name called stepped into the aisle and replied, "Yes, here I am. I am Don Bosco."

"Please, dear father, step off the train a moment."

"My ticket is for Marseille, and I cannot leave the train."

"Just for a second! Have you forgotten my son about whom I wrote to you at Nice? Please come and bless him."

They led him to the boy's side. Don Bosco was nonplussed. After a moment's hesitation he stepped up to the cot and asked the boy, "Who are you? What's your name?"

"I'm John. Bless me, my Father," he feebly begged.

Don Bosco made the sign of the cross over him, recited a prayer with him and blessed him. In the meantime the train was ready to pull out of the station.

"Give me a kindly word," the boy asked.

Turning to him, Don Bosco replied, "What are you doing here? Aren't you ashamed to have people bring you here like this? Get up!"

He said these last words as he hurried to reach his coach and the train was blowing its whistle. Before he sat down he saw the boy take eight or ten steps toward him to thank him, and then he saw him no more. Now, in the sacristy, he was looking upon him again.

Since then the boy had been well and apparently still was. Then on December 10, 1885, Don Bosco received a letter asking him, among other things, to pray for a young lad of Cannes named John Courtois. Recalling the episode, Don Bosco narrated it to Father Lemoyne, who preserved it for us.

Other details, especially concerning the spiritual emotions which Don Bosco's presence aroused in people who approached him during his stay in Lyons, we learn from letters written to him in those days, or soon after his departure, which have survived the destruction befalling so many other similar testimonies. From them we glean the following.

The count of Montravail badgers Don Bosco's secretary for a private audience, certain that by hook or by crook he will wrest a blessing from Don Bosco to obtain the cure of his little niece.

A Mrs. Crosier, who hosted Don Bosco at dinner on April 10, is still thrilled four days after the event and is distressed at the thought that she might not be able to see him again before his departure from Lyons. Hence, she presents seven petitions which she would like him to pray for, bringing back to life so many little incidents which happened between him and the people she mentions.

On April 14 Don Bosco celebrates Mass in the chapel of some sisters, where Mr. and Mrs. Paturle have brought a daughter of theirs who is suffering from rickets. They receive Communion at his hands but, much to their disappointment, are unable to meet him personally. The following day they entreat him to ask the Lord for their daughter's health and for an improvement in their business affairs.

Mrs. De Guestu, who has invited him to dinner through Monsignor [Louis] Guiol, fears that her request might be denied; hence, she personally implores him to grant her family that great consolation for which she has been praying for days.

The superior of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Cluny, who had not been able to satisfy her ardent longing to see him in Lyons, writes to him now in Paris to commend herself and her sisters and pupils to his prayers, confiding that they are all a source of concern to her. She mentions the grave illness of one of her sisters whose loss would bring both grief and harm to the community. She asks Don Bosco to

pray for her and for all the sisters that they may faithfully appreciate the gift of their vocation. The entire letter breathes a sense of confidence and trust in Don Bosco.

Persons of all social classes mingle freely in this correspondence. There is a certain Mrs. Goudin who sends him thirty-six francs which she has collected and says she happily recalls having written to him in Lyons and having received a reply. Then there is the count of Montessus, who says he has read D'Espiney's book and is convinced that by sending [Don Bosco], the great educator of modern youth, to France, God has shown French parents that, despite the opposition raging against Catholic schools, He has not forgotten them. A Mrs. Dupont, who witnessed healings obtained by Don Bosco's prayers in Lyons, confidently entrusts herself to his prayers that a young niece of hers may recover the use of her limbs. We must not omit the letter of an elderly serving maid who wrote to him on April 23: "I am only a poor servant woman, now seventy-nine, and still in service. However, I am so impressed by your works and by the good that you do, dear Father, that I ask you kindly to accept one hundred francs of my life savings. In exchange please pray that the Lord will grant me the grace of a holy death. I commend to you also my family; I have ten grandchildren, all orphans."

On the day of his departure Don Bosco wrote to Father Albera:

Lyons, April 16, 1883

Dear Father Albera:

We are leaving for Paris, with a one day stop at Moulins.

You will receive from Mr. Diuros of Avignon five thousand francs, half of which is for you, and the other half goes to St. Isidore or Saint-Cyr.

Our address in Paris: Countess de Combaud, Avenue de Messine 34.

Keep up your prayers. All is going smoothly. Greetings and thanks to our friends and benefactors. God bless you all.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. For my information, let me know if you get this by tomorrow.

He had a very brief stopover at Moulins; however, he again sent some news to Count Colle, promising that his secretary would send a more complete account later.

In those brief hours he found time to pay his respects to Bishop

Dreux Brézé. However, when he got to the residence, his somewhat shabby appearance and his faltering French gave the porter cause to hesitate. It was not yet time for interviews with the bishop, he told Don Bosco; besides, he had strict orders about that, and it was useless to insist on seeing him. Furthermore, the bishop adhered rigidly to French aristocratic etiquette, very much in keeping with his upbringing. Still, Don Bosco's gentle humility in repeating his request induced the porter to try, but the bishop's secretary was even more adamant in refusing to convey the message. Nevertheless, hearing the porter describe the visiting priest, he asked him to show him to the office.

The young secretary was immediately struck by the aura of holiness which issued from his very person. Then, hearing him speaking so humbly in his faulty French, he realized that the visitor was a priest of rare goodness. "Well," he said, "this isn't easy to do, but I shall ask His Excellency if he will see you."

Then, walking somewhat timidly toward the bishop's apartments, he suddenly realized that, under the spell of the meeting, he had forgotten to ask the priest his name and position. No sooner did he hear "Don Bosco" than he fell to his knees and asked for his blessing, praising heaven for a meeting he considered a signal favor.

"His Excellency will be most pleased to see you," he continued. "Please wait a moment while I go to tell him that you are here. There are no interview hours for you, I can assure you."³⁹

In fact, as soon as the bishop heard the name, he exclaimed, "Send him up immediately."

We have no idea of what went on between Don Bosco and the bishop, but the secretary, who even in his old age loved to tell about this meeting outside of audience hours, would add that the bishop had been very profoundly touched and would often speak of Don Bosco with lively satisfaction, esteeming it a great fortune that for a few moments he was in the presence of one whom all considered a saint.

After his brief stay at Moulins, Don Bosco went to Turlon-sur-Allier, a small neighboring village, where he called on the countess of Riberolles and her daughter, the marchioness of Poterat, at their castle. The two wealthy and charitable ladies, admirers and benefactress-

³⁹The secretary was Canon Nény, who died as vicar general of the diocese. He passed on this information to his friend, Father Giraud, presently dean of the cathedral chapter, who in turn sent it to us through Miss De Rancourt of Montluçon (Moulins, October 18, 1933). [Author]

es of Don Bosco, were waiting for him as a consoling angel in their hour of family grief, for the marchioness was suffering from a lifelong illness.⁴⁰ He stayed there until April 18, saying Mass in the castle's private chapel. The altar on which he celebrated the Divine Sacrifice was later donated by the present owner, Mr. D'Alès, brother of the scholarly Jesuit, Father [Ademaro] D'Alès, to the convent of the Carmelite Sisters of Moulins, who set it in their chapel and dedicated it to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus, regarding it as a precious relic of Don Bosco.

⁴⁰She was the sister-in-law of Monsignor De Poterat, former director of the *Oeuvre de Jeunesse* in Orléans, who later succeeded Monsignor De Ségur as president of the *Union des Oeuvres Catholiques*, a sort of federation anticipating present-day Catholic Action. In 1882 the Union had donated twenty thousand francs to the Sacred Heart Church in Rome. [Author]

CHAPTER 3

Death of Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi: A Flashback

IT was Easter Sunday, March 25, 1883. The bells of Turin's churches suddenly changed their joyous Alleluias into a somber death toll. That morning, as people and clergy waited in the cathedral for their archbishop to celebrate a Pontifical Mass, the sad news was announced in a voice broken by grief: Archbishop Gastaldi is dead.

Throughout Holy Week the archbishop had presided at all the sacred ceremonies in the cathedral. On Holy Saturday evening—was it with some unknown foresight?—he visited the shrine of the *Consolata* [Our Lady of Consolation] to bid farewell to Turin's Madonna, saying as he entered his carriage, "Let us go to visit our dear Mother; let us go to place ourselves under Her mantle. It is a comfort to live and die under Mary's mantle." He remained a half hour in prayer and then, feeling faint, went out into the fresh air. It was the symptom of his approaching end.

On Easter morning his secretaries, who were to escort him to the cathedral, noting that he was rather late in coming out of his bedroom, went in through a side door and found him lying on the floor, unable to speak and mortally stricken. Canon [Thomas] Chiuso immediately gave him the Last Sacraments. Shortly afterward the doctor declared him beyond medical help. His ordinary confessor, Father [Felix] Carpignano, superior of the Oratorians, who had meanwhile been summoned, said the prayers for the dying and imparted the papal blessing. Toward ten o'clock the archbishop breathed his last.

Vast crowds filed past the prelate's body lying in state in the chapel of the archbishop's residence, and on the following Wednesday it was brought to its final resting place after a very solemn funeral service.

Lawrence Gastaldi was born in the same year as Don Bosco [1815]; his father was a lawyer. Gifted in mind and memory, he was always a

top student. Pursuing his priestly vocation, he received his doctorate in theology at the age of twenty from the Royal University at Turin; at twenty-three he became a member of the faculty of theology. His chosen pursuits thereafter were fostering Hebrew studies, teaching moral theology, preaching in various dioceses of Piedmont and steeping himself in the philosophy of Antonio Rosmini.¹ In 1841 he published a defense of Rosminian philosophy against a certain self-named Eusebius Cristiano, who combated it with extraordinary fury. In 1845 and 1846 he published the works of two other theologians; they were the last volume of [John Maria] Dettori's moral theology and Alasia's compendium of moral theology,² to which he added notes about references to the civil code of King Charles Albert. Having been appointed canon of the collegiate church of the Most Holy Trinity, he zealously propounded the concepts developed by Rosmini in his *Le Cinque Piaghe della Chiesa* [The Five Wounds of the Church] before it was placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1843.³ In 1850 he joined Rosmini's Institute of Charity. After several months of novitiate at Stresa, during which he applied himself to English, he was sent as a missionary and theology professor to various schools of the institute in England.

In 1862, returning to Turin from Britain, he left the Institute of Charity and became a canon of St. Lawrence Church. He resumed his ministry of preaching, for which he was in great demand. It was during this time that Don Bosco urged him to write four pamphlets of the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] series: a life of the Curé of Ars, a biography of Turin's priest and theologian Father [John Ignatius] Vola, historic notes on the martyrs of the Theban Legion in Turin, and a popular essay on papal power.

Pope Pius IX appointed him bishop of Saluzzo in the consistory of March 27, 1867. During his four years of office he preached unceasingly, visited all the parishes of the diocese, organized works of charity, and took personal charge of the young seminarians' formation. Urged by Don Bosco, he highly distinguished himself during the Vatican

¹Rosmini (1797-1855) was a renowned philosopher and writer. In 1828 he founded the Institute of Charity, and he also served for a time as an advisor to Pope Pius IX. [Editor]

²Dettori (1773-1836) had been removed from his position at the University of Turin because of the controversy sparked by his opinions on "Probabilism." He leaned heavily toward Jansenism and Gallicanism. Alasia, too, who at that time followed the current, belonged to the school of rigorism. [Author]

³Concerning Rosmini's philosophy see the Index of Volume XV under "Rosminian Philosophy." [Editor]

Council, as Lemoyne well describes in Volume IX of these memoirs.⁴

In 1871 he succeeded Archbishop [Alexander] Riccardi in the see of St. Maximus, Turin, which he assumed on November 26. Here his energetic work greatly increased. His top priorities were the discipline and ongoing formation of the clergy and the education and training of the seminarians. He summoned three diocesan synods. He was a tireless proclaimer of God's word. His pastoral letters, solid in content and smooth in style, are still read with profit today. The people admired his burning and disinterested zeal, sincerely mourning his sudden departure.

Being advised of the death, Don Bosco, who was in Paris, ordered a solemn funeral service in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, to which the archbishop's relatives were invited. Very few of them came, not even the young Countess Lorenzina Mazé de la Roche, the archbishop's niece who had always remained Don Bosco's friend. Perhaps they felt that the Salesians viewed the archbishop's death as a triumph for themselves or perhaps they feared that others might see it that way. The plain truth is that the Salesians maintained absolute reserve. Proof of this was given when *La Stella Consolatrice* printed an extended obituary of the archbishop in its April 7 number, having first sent the galley proofs to Father Bonetti for his review and timely modifications if necessary; he did not allow himself even a single word of criticism.

After this biographical sketch, the readers who have followed our narrative but do not know the origin of the ten-year-long controversy between Archbishop Gastaldi and Don Bosco must feel more than ever desirous to know what brought it about. All will be told in detail in the tenth volume of these *Biographical Memoirs*, which has not yet been published.⁵ In the meantime, however, it is most important that we take this occasion to describe at least summarily how and why the controversy arose. Nor will it be without advantage to recall, at least in an overall view, Don Bosco's comportment in the face of this constant opposition.

Two facts are historically certain: Archbishop Gastaldi's nominations to both the see of Saluzzo and that of Turin were proposed and recommended by Don Bosco;⁶ second, the archbishop was very well aware of this.⁷ Don Bosco saw Archbishop Gastaldi's presence in Turin as a god-

⁴See Index of Volume IX under "Gastaldi, Lawrence" and "Vatican Council I." [Editor]

⁵Volume X was published in 1939, whereas this volume was off the press in 1935. [Editor]

⁶See Vol. X, pp. 200, 309. [Editor]

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 203. [Editor]

send. They were very close friends, and Don Bosco shared all his private plans with him. When the time came for him to initiate proceedings for the approval of his rules, he was convinced that the archbishop's favor would greatly aid in bringing his enterprise to a happy conclusion. This, however, was not the opinion of Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda of Fossano, who would have preferred to see Bishop [James] Colli of Alessandria in Turin;⁸ neither was it the view of Pope Pius IX, who made no secret of this to Don Bosco, as we have elsewhere recalled.⁹

Unfortunately Don Bosco's rosy vision soon faded away. In his very first homily the archbishop hammered the point that his nomination had been solely due to the unexpected intervention of Divine Providence, untainted by any human favor.¹⁰ Those who knew him well immediately recognized in those words his intention of disclaiming any recommendation on Don Bosco's part. It is a fact that in private conversations he unequivocally made this point clear, repeating that he owed nothing to Don Bosco and that it was the Holy Spirit who had chosen him to direct the see of Turin. Oversensitive as regards his authority, he most likely succumbed to malicious insinuations. Apart from this, his relations with Don Bosco went smoothly for the first few months.

The first signs of coldness began to appear in April 1872, when Salesian candidates were presented to him for ordination. A tug-of-war ensued which lasted until October 24, when Don Bosco received a letter from the archbishop which began: "You know very well from long experience how attached I am to the Salesian Congregation which you have founded. I have seen it mushroom from a tiny seed and have never neglected to favor it as circumstances warranted because I judged it then, as now, a work inspired by God. You know too the protection I afforded this Congregation as bishop of Saluzzo in order to win for it the assistance and approval of the Holy Apostolic See. Now that Divine Providence has placed me in this archepiscopal see of Turin, I shall very gladly continue helping you to achieve full approval from the Vicar of Jesus Christ." We can imagine with what apprehension Don Bosco read this verbose and pointedly worded introduction. After enunciating the principle that "good must be done the right way" and stating that to attain this end he would even be able "to curb the heart's affections," he came to the point.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 200. [Editor]

⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 371f. [Editor]

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 124f. [Editor]

A rescript from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, dated March 9, 1869, had given Don Bosco the faculty of issuing dimissorial letters to candidates who had come to the Oratory before the age of fourteen. In order to ascertain the date of the candidates' actual admission into Don Bosco's house before their fourteenth year and to verify their preparation for sacred orders, the archbishop required the following information: "All students who are members of your Congregation and wish to receive either tonsure or minor or major orders must present themselves personally to me at least forty days before the date of ordination; they are to bring with them a statement, signed by you or your representative, stating the candidate's full name and that of his father, his place of birth, the diocese where he was born or belongs to under any title, his precise age and the year he entered the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, founded by you. A certificate is also needed stating how many years he devoted to the study of Latin, other academic subjects and theology, the schools he attended, and the day and year he took or renewed his triennial vows. In addition, each candidate is required to undergo an examination in at least two entire treatises of theology, which are to be different for each ordination; likewise, he is to be tested in everything that concern the order he is to receive, such as what pertains to the tonsure and the four minor orders; the subdiaconate and clerical celibacy, the divine office, the ecclesiastical title by which he will be ordained; the theology of the diaconate and, lastly, whatever regards the sacrifice of the holy Mass."

Don Bosco obediently submitted, but on the evening of November 8 the archbishop flatly rejected a list of ordinands presented to him by Father Cagliero and threatened to write to the Holy See about the spirit reigning among the Salesians.

This notice so hurt Don Bosco that he could not sleep the whole night. The following morning he wrote the archbishop a letter of which we quote the essential portion:

... As soon as Your Excellency became archbishop of Turin, you asked me, while I was visiting you in your residence, how our Congregation was faring in its relations with people in authority, particularly the clergy. My response was that we had no difficulties with anyone, adding that only two clergymen, whose names I mentioned, were causing us many problems and much unpleasantness, though they perhaps meant well. You immediately replied, "Be at ease. These people are in minor positions, and their authority will always be

tempered by that of the archbishop. Our first efforts will be to bring to a successful conclusion the approval of the Salesian Congregation.”

This was the state of things up to around April, when I began to detect some umbrage at our request for ordinations; next came your refusal, the examination of our candidates and a letter from you detailing norms to be followed. We promptly complied with everything, although no such a request ever came to us from other dioceses. Finally, yesterday, for some unknown reason, our request for ordinations was rejected with the added threat of writing to Rome to censure the spirit reigning among us. It may be that the person I charged with this request did not observe the proprieties in speaking with you, but in that case he should have been advised and corrected as his faults or merits warranted. It seems to me that this cannot be considered as indicative of the spirit of our Congregation.

Having said this, I beg you to the best of my ability to state in writing or verbally, personally or through others, what you find blameworthy in us, so that we may know how we are to conduct ourselves and within what limits we are to stay. Several times I have brought this to your attention, but you have never come down to specifics. Now I ask you, please give thought to the following: first, writing to Rome will only be giving the enemies of good the opportunity to exploit the dissension between poor Don Bosco and his archbishop; it would be ruinous for our newborn Congregation, which is struggling through many obstacles, one worse than the other. I would then be required to give information and clarifications, whence will follow hard feelings, troubles and, perhaps, even scandal. Nor would it be advantageous to Your Excellency, for I am convinced that your good name is in many ways linked to that of our Congregation. Second, we have always worked within and for the diocese of Turin without ever requesting positions or stipends, while we have always looked upon you and continue to see you as one whom we very much revere. Third, if you will allow me to say what I feel, continuing to act with others in this fashion will bring you to a point when you will be feared by many, but loved by few ...

Don Bosco's long-standing trust in Archbishop Gastaldi had dictated the letter. However, the archbishop's prompt reply only made matters worse. He complained about the absence of a regular novitiate, saying that was the reason why the members of the Congregation, with very few exceptions, lacked the essential virtues of religious life, particularly humility; he also made it clear that he was against the excessive exemptions of religious from the bishop's authority.

Though this reply did nothing to ease Don Bosco's pain, he was glad that at least it clearly spelled out some reasons for the prelate's

new attitude toward him. Don Bosco replied on November 23, primarily addressing the novitiate and relating a conversation he had had with Pope Pius IX on the eve of the Congregation's general approval. The Holy Father had asked him then: "Can a religious congregation exist in times, places and among people who want to suppress it? How can a house of studies or a novitiate exist?"

Don Bosco had replied: "It is not my intent to found a religious order for penitents or reformed souls who need to be trained in good habits of living and piety. I intend to recruit young men as well as adults of proven morals, morals that have been tested for several years, before admitting them into our Congregation."

"How will you achieve that?" the Pope asked.

"As I have done up to now and hope to continue doing. We accept only youths who have been educated and trained in our own houses, boys chosen for the most part by their pastors, who have recognized their virtue radiating through the realities of day-by-day living and have recommended them to our schools. Two-thirds of these boys are returned to their families, while the rest go through four, five and as much as seven years of training in piety and study. Even then only a few of these are admitted into the novitiate, notwithstanding this long period of training. For example, this year one hundred and twenty boys completed their secondary schooling; of these, one hundred and ten donned the cassock, but only twenty of them remained in the Congregation; the others were recommended to their bishops. Those who are admitted to our Congregation must still spend two years in Turin, where they have daily spiritual reading, meditation, a visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament, examination of conscience, and a short talk given to them in the evening by me, rarely by others; all of these practices are performed in common. The aspirants have two special conferences every week, and once a week there is a conference for all the members of the Congregation."

"God bless you, my son," replied the Pope. "Continue the practices you have described to me, and your Congregation will achieve its purpose. If you run into problems, let me know and we will see how we can overcome them."

Don Bosco's explanation was followed by the *Decretum Laudis*. Obviously Pius IX shared Don Bosco's opinion: The novitiate existed in fact if not in name.

In regard to the archbishop's second criticism Don Bosco wrote: "I

would humbly and respectfully request Your Excellency to let me know, not in a generic way but by name, those particular individuals (lacking in humility and religious virtues) and I assure you that they will be severely chided, and only once. This is a deception which must be brought out into the open—a deception unknown to me until this day, a deception unknown to you until last April. Up to that time you saw, heard, read and, I dare say, made important decisions regarding this house. Up to that time, both in writing and in private and public statements, you have always acclaimed this house as a haven of salvation for youth, teaching them true piety and virtue.”

Up to now their relations, if not as cordial as they had once been, continued at least privately and were leading up to a dialogue which, Don Bosco hoped, would bring about a mutual understanding, but some actions of the archbishop turned into contention what could and should have remained an exchange of ideas between them.

In 1873 Don Bosco was about to begin proceedings for the definitive approval of his Congregation. For this he needed the support of many bishops, primarily that of his own ordinary. Archbishop Gastaldi wrote a letter of commendation replete with praises but with particular recommendations regarding the novitiate, admission to orders and canonical exemption. Then he wrote to all the bishops of Piedmont and to other bishops, expressing the hope that, if asked, they might issue an endorsement of their own with four qualifications: that no member of the Congregation be admitted to orders before perpetual profession; that the rules of the novitiate be such as to form good religious, as was done by the Jesuits; that all candidates to orders be required to take diocesan examinations; that the diocesan bishops have the right to visit the Congregation’s churches and chapels. Once Don Bosco saw the drift taken by the letters of commendation and was confidentially informed of the archbishop’s maneuvering with the bishops of Piedmont and Liguria, he made it known that he was leaving matters as they were and would not present his application to Rome. The archbishop, however, realizing that Rome already knew Don Bosco’s plans and foreseeing that this sudden change would require an explanation, sent his letter of commendation to Cardinal [Prospero] Caterini, prefect of the Congregation of the Council, with a cover letter in which he emphasized, besides the above concerns, the need that “philosophical, theological and other studies be far more solid and serious.”

All this happened in April 1873; in that same month other distaste-

ful situations arose, always in connection with the ordinations. On April 20 the archbishop sent Cardinal [Joseph] Bizzarri a list of eight concerns of his, each with a lengthy explanation. It was unfortunate that his zeal was not matched by a better understanding of Don Bosco's Congregation and more accurate information. Don Bosco found out about this letter a year later, while he was in Rome. Thereupon he drafted a memorandum which he sent in its final form on March 30 [1874] to the cardinals of the commission for the approval of the rules. We think we should insert this memorandum at this point.

Let it be stated by way of introduction that up to February 10, 1873, Archbishop Gastaldi, presently archbishop of Turin, consistently professed himself to be an ardent promoter and tireless cooperator of the Salesian Institute. On that date he sent Father John Bosco to Rome with words of warmest encouragement and with a Latin letter of commendation in which he stated that he recognized the hand of God in the formation and preservation of this Institute and, while lauding its founder to the skies, gave flattering praise to this Institute for the good it had done and has continued to do.

Then in his letter of April 20 of the same year, 1873, he flatly contradicted everything he had said in February, namely:

1. He denied that the rules of the Congregation had ever been approved by his predecessors.

Response: Among the documents filed with the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars is a decree of Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni, dated March 31, 1852, which approves the Institute of the [festive] oratories and appoints Father John Bosco as its head, granting him all the faculties necessary and helpful for the proper running of the same.

2. Neither Archbishop [Alexander] Riccardi nor he had ever been asked for any approval.

Response: Though he is not clear whether an institute which has been approved by a diocesan ordinary needs a further approval from his successors, nevertheless the fact is that Father John Bosco did request Archbishop Riccardi to confirm the above approval. He answered, as later did also Archbishop Gastaldi several times, that when an institute has been approved by the Holy See it does not need diocesan approval.

Nevertheless, wishing to help this Institute achieve stability, on his own initiative on December 25, 1872, Archbishop Gastaldi issued a decree confirming all the privileges and faculties granted by his predecessors, adding a few new ones, among which were parochial rights.

3. A two-year novitiate, dedicated entirely to spirituality.

Response: This might have been practicable in former times, but it is no

longer so in our present-day circumstances. It would mean the destruction of the Salesian Institute because the civil government, being apprised of a novitiate, would instantly dissolve it and scatter the novices. Furthermore, this kind of novitiate would not be in accord with the Salesian constitutions, which call for an active life for the members and maintain only those ascetical practices which are necessary to form and preserve a wholesome ecclesiastical spirit. Such a novitiate would not be proper for us, because it would not allow the novices to observe the constitutions according to the spirit of the Congregation.

4. Some of the professed have already left and have caused complaints, etc.

Response: So far, only one member has left, Father Frederick Oreglia. He entered our Congregation as a lay member and left it in order to enter the Society of Jesus and pursue a career of studies. He did so and is presently carrying on a praiseworthy ministry.

5. This Congregation in no small measure upsets the ecclesiastical discipline of the diocese.

Response: This is a gratuitous assertion. To the present date, the archbishop cannot cite one single example to prove it.

6. Only too often some members make their religious profession, receive Holy Orders under the title of common life, and then leave, etc.

Response: This is a groundless assertion. So far nobody has left the Salesian Congregation.

7. A member of his diocese (Saluzzo), left the Salesian Congregation as soon as he was ordained in it.

Response: There is not the least shade of truth in this allegation. The priest to whom he is referring, whom he alludes to also in later letters and whom he would like to cite in proof of his assertion, was never a member of the Salesian Congregation. He was ordained for the diocese by Archbishop Gastaldi without a letter of recommendation and against the advice of Father John Bosco, to whom he had been sent by the ordinary and in whose house he had pursued his studies and lived free of charge.

8. Clerics who had been dismissed from the seminary and had been accepted into the Salesian Congregation were sent to other houses and other dioceses, where they were ordained, and then they re-entered the diocese of Turin.

Response: Not a single case of this kind has taken place. Should it happen in the future, it is always the prerogative of the ordinary to accept them into his diocese or reject them, as he is free to do with any individual who leaves a religious community.

9. It is worth bearing in mind that, should the recommended conditions be enforced, the Salesian Congregation, lacking as it does all material means, would have to shut down its houses and suspend all catechetical activities, since it would no longer have either catechists or teachers. Indeed, it would cease to

be a moral body in the eyes of the state, and its members would immediately be dispersed. That would be the death of the Congregation.

10. Please note also that the present archbishop [of Turin] has never registered the slightest displeasure, nor has he ever made any observation to either the members or the superior of the Salesian Congregation. However, whenever he wished to point out a cleric of learning and outstanding virtue, he always singled out a Salesian student.

11. The allegations made in the letter of April 20, 1873, have been repeated later in different words in three other secret letters sent to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars; they always vaguely allude to happenings which have nothing to do with the members of the Salesian Congregation.

12. As a rectification of that letter and in defense of the truth, I believe it to be most opportune that this memorandum be attached to it.

Fr. John Bosco

We now return to April 1873. The ordination issue had an unexpected epilogue. In May Father [Thomas] Chiuso, writing for the archbishop, notified Don Bosco that no Salesian would be admitted to orders until he testified that two ex-seminarians of the archdiocese were no longer living in a Salesian house and until he promised that he would never again accept them or any other ex-seminarian of Turin without the chancery's written consent. This signaled an escalation of obstacles which gave Don Bosco no end of concern. Where would it all end? How could he ever hope to have his constitutions approved with a problem of this kind blocking him? Lest he send too hasty a response, he withdrew to the Salesian school at Borgo San Martino for three days of spiritual retreat, after which he opened his heart to the archbishop, writing as though he were standing at God's judgment seat.

You have sent me word—he wrote—that you will no longer admit any of our clerics to sacred orders unless I dismiss from our houses cleric B ..., who left us two weeks ago, and cleric R ... In addition you demand a sworn statement from me that I will no longer accept into our Congregation anyone who may have once belonged to the Turin clergy.

Since you cite no reasons, I believe I may offer the following considerations.

If these clerics have been dismissed from the seminary, what is wrong with their retiring to a religious house to think over their situation or to get ready for examinations or to learn a trade by which somehow to earn their daily bread? Just because they have lost their vocation, must these clerics become outcasts and abandon themselves to a pitiful future?

It seems to me that it would be better to help them settle down in a situation where they can function and meet their needs. This has been and still is the policy followed by the bishops with whom we have ties. Perhaps the objection may arise that they should first ask permission, so as to preclude any problems. But the answer to that objection is that requiring them to seek permission is too weighty a burden for them and for our Congregation, or at least for the religious house they apply to. Since this condition has not been appended to your approval, the superior is not authorized to add it. The fact is that we have repeatedly requested this permission but have gotten nowhere. In these situations please consider that if these ex-seminarians are told that, by the archbishop's orders, they may not be admitted to any house of ours and, if there, must be dismissed, you will turn their families and friends against you. This will be all the more likely if any of them happen to be already enrolled in courses or have started learning a trade.

Your directive, which I believe I have no right to follow, would erect a wall between the Salesian Congregation and the clergy of the archdiocese, to whose good it is particularly dedicated and for which it has labored well beyond thirty years. If, however, there should exist some ecclesiastical prescription in this regard with which I am not acquainted, I will promptly and totally submit to it.

As for all the clerics who have applied to you for ordination, I realize that you must reject those whom you find unworthy. However, if they are worthy, might it not be by way of reprisal or for reasons totally unrelated to them that you reject them and thus deprive this Congregation, the Church, and your own diocese of priests, of whom there is such a need?

I would think that this Congregation, which labors for this diocese with not the least self-interest, and which from 1848 to this very day has supplied no less than two-thirds of its clergy, deserves some consideration. This is all the more so because if a seminarian or even a priest were to come to the Oratory, he would only be changing residence and would always continue to be working in and for the diocese of Turin.

As a matter of fact, in the three instances when Your Excellency decided not to admit some of our clerics to holy orders, you did nothing else but cut back on the number of priests working in this diocese.

Having said this, I wish that Your Excellency would be deeply convinced that both you and I are watched by people who in subtle ways are trying to snatch at something to blast, namely that the archbishop has broken ties also with poor Don Bosco. In this regard you know very well that just a few days ago I made not insignificant sacrifices to prevent the publication of certain slanderous articles.

I further wish to let you know that certain papers which were supposed to be locked up in government offices are now circulating around Turin. They

are clear proof that if Canon Gastaldi became bishop of Saluzzo it was at the proposal of Don Bosco. If Bishop Gastaldi became archbishop of Turin, it was also at the proposal of Don Bosco. There are even memos mentioning the obstacles that had to be surmounted in this regard. These papers also state the reasons why I stood by you—among them the great good you had done to our houses and to our Congregation.

It is common knowledge that by keeping our unity we can do each other much good and that the evil-minded would gloat over a split between us.

Now you might ask: What does Don Bosco want? Total submission to and full accord with my ecclesiastical superior. I ask no more than what our Holy Father said and what you yourself often repeated while bishop of Saluzzo. "In these trying times of ours," you said, "a newborn congregation needs all the leniency compatible with the bishops' authority and, should difficulties arise, all possible help in deed and counsel."

My sole desire in writing this letter is to tell you what can serve as a norm for both of us and redound to God's glory. Nevertheless, should an inopportune word have escaped my lips, I humbly ask your forgiveness ...

Unfortunately, however, regaining the archbishop's good graces had become forever impossible, and new approaches had to be found; the friendly style of personal correspondence had to give way to the formalities of officialism. Therefore, two weeks later, he met the twofold requirement which the chancery had set.

[Turin] May 29, 1873

Always glad to be able to second the wishes of His Excellency the Most Reverend Archbishop of Turin, I willingly declare:

1. I shall never receive as a cleric into any house of the Salesian Congregation any former seminarian of this archdiocese, unless he has already been accepted in any house of this Congregation before his fourteenth birthday, in accord with the papal decree of March 1, 1870, or unless he enters in order to learn a trade.

2. To date this has been our policy. Absolutely no exception will be made without the permission or consent of the archdiocesan chancery.

3. Believing that I am faithfully interpreting the directive of His Excellency, I intend that this statement be read in the light of the reservations and limits set by the sacred canons established to safeguard the freedom of religious vocations.

4. Any further clarifications shall be made most readily at the first expressed wish of my ecclesiastical superior, whose counsels I shall always treasure.

Father John Bosco

Not even this declaration sufficed. The statement invoking the sacred canons which protect the freedom of religious vocations irked the archbishop, who rejected the entire statement. This constituted an open declaration of war.

We stop here. We have said enough to clarify the origins of these strifes whose growth our readers have had the opportunity to see in the preceding volumes. A more detailed and more documented account will be found in Volume X, which to date [1935] has not been published. On July 2, 1873, the conversation having touched upon this implacable dissension, Don Bosco stated from the depth of his serenity: "This too will pass. Initially this struggle grieved me because I did not know the reason, but now the Pope has drawn up guidelines for me to follow. I let things ride and say nothing."

We who yearn to fathom our saintly founder's life think it quite proper to search for the causes which brought about such a reversal in the relations between these two great men whom God had set up as luminaries in His Church. On this subject the apostolic process provides a vast amount of material supplied by reliable witnesses who saw what had occurred and who heard the opinions of those who had died before the time of the inquiry. The best thing we can do is to glean every bit of information available, organize it and then present it to our readers in a concise, lucid way, with nothing held back.

Foremost is the witnesses' overall conviction that Don Bosco was not in the least to blame for the deplorable harassment. In support of this, we cite the testimony of one sole person, the young Countess Mazé de la Roche, Archbishop Gastaldi's niece, who was as devoted to Don Bosco as she was to her uncle! Asked by the ecclesiastical court whether there was any reason to suppose or believe that Don Bosco had caused the controversy, she replied: "I am fully convinced that Don Bosco gave no cause for this dissension, for I have always known him to be opposed to any quarrel and keen to avoid it even at the cost of sacrifice. Furthermore, I state that in all his conversations with my mother and myself in this regard he made it quite clear how intensely these trials grieved him."

Therefore, summing up the reasons alleged by the witnesses and reducing them for the sake of clarity to a few essentials, we find that some originated from the archbishop's temperament and frame of mind, while others arose from the spirit reigning in his household and his chancery.

As for his natural temperament, an obituary which appeared immediately after his death and which was inspired by the deepest reverence for his memory¹¹ makes mention of his “rigid stance,” adding that throughout his missionary stay in England “he did not soften his disposition in a land where amiability was a must for leading that flock back to the fold it had once abandoned.” That in all reality he was an impulsive man, impetuous, easily angered and given to caustic language was common knowledge to all who knew him. Such extremes were due to his nervous disposition and to a liver ailment from which he suffered. Impelled by his nature, he would sometimes, as witnesses have testified, exceed proper limits and then, lest he compromise his episcopal dignity, would not back down. This certainly is one of the main factors we must look into as a cause of the actions he took.

Another factor was his mental attitude. He received his intellectual formation from the University of Turin at a time when it was imbued with Jansenism and Gallicanism. This gave rise to his paltry regard for the moral theology of St. Alphonsus Liguori and his exaggerated opinion of his episcopal jurisdiction. The first of these caused him to issue excessive, wrong or upsetting diocesan disciplinary rules and to have recourse to real but incredible measures. The second made him imperious, meddling and intolerant of anyone who, while respecting his dignity, did not show himself amenable to his every wish. Hence it was that, with no authorization from Rome, he wanted to meddle in the internal running of the Salesian Congregation, which had already been approved by the Holy See, and demanded that it submit to his orders. Besides, the very autonomy of the Salesian Congregation was a thorn in his side from the very beginning of his episcopacy in Turin. “I have here a diocese within a diocese,” he wrote to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on August 26, 1877. “Don Bosco diminishes and assails the authority of the archbishop of Turin and is causing a split within the clergy.”

Given these several factors, there was no earthly hope that once the contention set in, it could easily be stopped or minimized. This was the assertion of Bishop [Joseph Francis] Re of Alba,¹² who knew what it was all about. “In explaining the duration of such hard feelings between these two men, both moved by good intentions,” he stated, “I believe it

¹¹*La Stella Consolatrice*, Nos. 13 and 14. [Author]

¹²*Processicolo*, p. 137. [Author]

timely to recall that the archbishop had, along with other fine qualities, a somewhat exaggerated view of his own authority and of his own knowledge. In addition, he had an impetuous character which made him jump at quick decisions, from which he found it difficult to withdraw because of his fear of undermining the prestige of his authority.”

His philosophical leanings also shaped his frame of mind and crystallized in him particular attitudes. He professed himself a convinced Rosminian and acted like one.¹³ In those years Rosminianism was a burning issue, and Catholics debated it with real acrimony. Archbishop Gastaldi’s aversion for Don Bosco and the Salesian Congregation became acute when he saw that not only did their constitutions impose St. Thomas Aquinas upon the Salesians as their master in their priestly studies, but that, furthermore, their courses exclusively employed textbooks conforming to his traditional interpretation.

A question immediately arises. If this was the man’s character and his mental disposition, was Don Bosco the only one to feel their effect? No. Others also had their share, although not to the extent experienced by Don Bosco.

It is a known fact that, because of a difference of opinion in theological matters, the archbishop dismissed [from the seminary faculty] the learned moral theologian Father [John Baptist] Bertagna, later auxiliary bishop to Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda [of Turin]. Further he also removed from the directorship of the Convitto Ecclesiastico Father [Bartholomew] Roetti, later the vicar general of the same cardinal. He also withdrew from nomination to Father Bertagna’s chair the name of Father [Augustine] Richelmy, the future cardinal archbishop of Turin, and he dismissed Father [Joseph Francis] Re, the future bishop of Alba, from teaching in the seminary, as well as Father Castrale, later bishop and vicar general of Cardinal Richelmy. Somewhat less known is the fact that because of a difference with Rosminian teachings he barred from his archdiocese the dauntless journalist Father [Dominic] Tinetti of the diocese of Ivrea, who later became director of *L’Unità Cattolica*, of which he had been its first editor. The archbishop then made problems for Father [James] Margotti, who, to get out of the hassle, ceded ownership of the paper to his brother Stephen and even wrote a letter, resented by the arch-

¹³On October 18, 1879, he wrote an open letter to the Speirani Publishers, who had printed Rosmini’s works, in which he interpreted in favor of Rosminian teaching the papal encyclical *Aeterni Patris*, which had appeared in August. That letter was immediately decried in writing by Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, then secretary of state. [Author]

bishop, to Father [Peter John] Beckx,¹⁴ general of the Jesuits.¹⁵ In matters of canon law, also, he imposed on his priests countless canonical suspensions. For questionable motives he filed so many complaints with the Roman Congregations that Father Rua stated in the apostolic process that he knew that on one occasion, when Cardinal [Louis] Oreglia was visiting his native Piedmont, he was charged by Pius IX to recommend to the archbishop to treat his clergy with greater clemency.¹⁶

The milieu, as we have said, was also one of the causes of all these troubles. Impassioned insinuations, half truths or downright malicious lies made by some who shared his table or held chancery posts kept daily inflaming the archbishop's resentment. During her deposition Countess Mazé de la Roche would at times appropriately quote various entries from her diary. For example, after Don Bosco had once been refused an audience with the archbishop, she wrote: "How they once loved each other! Why has my uncle changed so? Ah, whoever took it upon himself to cause this discord must certainly be stricken with great remorse. Why does he not recant his statements, which have no shade of truth?" To the ecclesiastical judges she remarked, "Having many times been invited to dinner by my uncle, I often heard his secretary either make sarcastic quips about Valdocco, or call them 'those people down there!' " As for the chancery staff, let it suffice to say that its fiscal lawyer was once styled by a cardinal "an instrument worthy of his employer."¹⁷

We will not cover up certain side issues which may tone down our judgments upon these well-known facts. It may be that from his arrival in Turin as archbishop, Gastaldi feared it might be said that, having been appointed to the archdiocese of Turin through Don Bosco's influence, he would let Don Bosco sway him in his administration. Perhaps he may also have feared that Don Bosco would endeavor to draw to his Congregation many young students and plentiful charitable donations, to the detriment of his own diocesan seminary. Finally, some individual rulings which he issued may well have been due to the fact that canonical legislation was not as clearly defined then as now in certain matters.

¹⁴Mispelled "Beckis" in the Italian edition. [Editor]

¹⁵July 28, 1880. [Author]

¹⁶*Summarium super virtutibus*, No. III, Paragraph 695. [Author]

¹⁷Letter of Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina to Don Bosco, December 25, 1881. [Author]

Cardinal Cagliero, who had first-hand knowledge of the events, almost unwittingly summarized in a few words all the principal sources of the conflict in the closing statements of his testimony in the apostolic process. "It seems to me," he stated, "that their differences arose from petty jealousy and from feared or presumed abuses against diocesan authority—something that can easily happen between a newly rising congregation and a bishop who reluctantly sees it placed outside his jurisdiction, especially if he has a hasty and strong temperament, a somewhat precarious health condition and a circle of spirited but narrow-minded counselors whom he allows to sway him."¹⁸

It seems that the Lord, who permitted those ten years of tribulation, also took care to forewarn His servant in good time. For as soon as the rift began opening up, He sent him an enigmatic dream whose full understanding would supply the key to the complex series of events to follow. Don Bosco dreamt that there was a heavy downpour of rain during which some urgency or other made it necessary for him to go into town. As he drew near the archbishop's residence he saw—strange to recount—the archbishop himself, vested in full pontifical regalia, stride out of the house. Hurrying over to him, he cried out, "Your Excellency, look at the storm you are going out in! Can't you see there's not a soul outside? Please listen to me, go back into the house."

"It is not your duty to come and counsel me," was the curt response. "I shall go about my own business and you about yours." And he pushed Don Bosco aside.

However, hardly had he gone a few steps when he slipped and fell into a puddle, soaking and muddying his vestments. Five times Don Bosco went up to him and begged him to have regard for his dignity and return home, but all in vain. Prayers and pleas went unheeded. As the archbishop stubbornly continued making his way, he fell a second, third, fourth and fifth time. When he arose the last time, he was unrecognizable; his entire person had become one with the mud that encrusted him from head to foot. He made one more final effort and fell, not to rise again.

We may well believe that Don Bosco, accustomed as he was by long experience to read the future in the symbolism of dreams, from then on looked with deepest compassion upon the relentless unfolding of

¹⁸*Summarium super virtutibus*, No. III, Paragraph 695. [Author]

irritating circumstances and, while fearing the final tragedy, took heart and would not sway from the line of conduct which he had set for himself and which we shall now describe.

First of all, he was most careful not to fuel gossip by publicizing the rather frequent unpleasant incidents. Unless there were serious reasons, he said not a word. The apostolic process is quite clear about that. Testifying for her mother and for herself, Countess Mazé de la Roche stated: "He let us in on these painful incidents only so that, by knowing all the facts, we might find some way of using our kindly services to soften the unfortunate misunderstandings.... As far as I know, I am convinced that Don Bosco never opened his heart about these matters to other outsiders, and when he spoke of them to us he would say: 'I speak to you because I know with whom I am talking, and I know that you will use the information only to help.' "

Second, he exercised self-control so as to couple his personal hurt with resignation. And in certain instances patience was costly. He once told Countess Mazé de la Roche how he had been refused an audience. She in turn recorded her reaction and his words in her diary thus: "How resigned he was, but how afflicted in spirit! I felt most moved to hear these words issue from his lips: 'Yes, I have all the will to be strong, to take heart in adversity, but when trouble is heaped upon trouble the poor stomach can't stand it anymore and cramps up!' Never in my life did I see Don Bosco's countenance alter, but that time, as he spoke, his face alternately became pale and flushed." The witnesses are unanimous in testifying that never did they detect in his language the slightest indication of resentment because of all these adversities. Father [John Baptist] Anfossi, who had close associates among Turin's clergy and was well aware of what was happening, came to know of Don Bosco's afflictions, and time and again he would go to bring him comfort. However, he soon realized from Don Bosco's constantly pleasant manner that not only did he have no need of comfort, but he knew how to instill into the comforter sentiments of peace and trust in God.

Don Bosco in turn found it useful to confide to Father Anfossi, who kept in close touch with clerical circles, certain particulars, so that, as the occasion arose, he might set the record straight. One time, he told Father Anfossi that he had been summoned to the archbishop's residence for a meeting in which he felt that an open exchange between them had smoothed over all their differences. In fact, the archbishop

called in his household and asked Don Bosco to bless them. However, hardly had he dismissed them than, seemingly having second thoughts, he once again heaped accusations against Don Bosco. The latter, with customary calm, tried to disprove them, but to no avail. The archbishop harshly retorted, "Get out!" and turned his back on him. Don Bosco was deeply hurt as his secretary took him by the arm and led him out of the room. After recounting this to Father Anfossi, Don Bosco exclaimed, "How can anyone seriously and effectively deal with a man who so easily changes his mind?"

Don Bosco was so deeply concerned about these painful happenings because he worried about grave matters affecting his Congregation rather than himself. One day he remarked to Father Anfossi: "If it were not for the Congregation, I would prefer to move to Rome or to any other city in order to avoid these hurts, but I feel that it is God's will that the Congregation sink its roots here."

He no less regretted the fact that troubles of this kind kept him from doing all the good he wanted to do. To a confidant of his he remarked: "The devil foresaw the good that might have been accomplished if Archbishop Gastaldi had continued to befriend us, but the evil spirit has sown weeds in the field. The archbishop keeps tabs on all our doings and gives us no end of trouble, but this too will pass. We shall continue going forward in silence without ever retaliating against him. But I only regret the amount of time which he makes us waste and which we could use for the benefit of souls."

Another point on which the witnesses agree is the affirmation that, notwithstanding the antagonism which a very high-placed Roman prelate¹⁹ characterized as systematic, Don Bosco never neglected to love, respect and, as much as possible, help his archbishop. Countess Mazé de la Roche testified: "Whenever this topic came up, Don Bosco mentioned only the bare facts, so much so that sometimes we were not sure what he was referring to and were forced to ask him. But in everything he spoke so respectfully and charitably of the archbishop that we were edified."

The witnesses were not the only ones to speak thus of Don Bosco; others who could not attend the apostolic proceedings wrote in the

¹⁹Letter of Archbishop [Angelo] Vitelleschi, secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to Don Bosco, January 5, 1875. [Author]

same vein. Precious is the written testimony of Father Felix Giordano, superior of the Oblates of the Virgin Mary at Nice: "I learned about the conflict when, passing through Turin, I spoke familiarly with the archbishop, having many years before been a classmate of his. Well, I can say that never in my life have I been as stunned as when I saw how unalterably unruffled my friend Don Bosco was. In fact, after another conversation with him, I left so edified that before returning to Nice I wrote a very lengthy letter to the archbishop, telling him of the pleasant impressions Don Bosco had left in me."²⁰

Letters of this kind, written to urge Archbishop Gastaldi to leave Don Bosco in peace, were not few. Father [Dominic] Franchetti is in possession of the originals.²¹ One letter, dated August 1873 and written by Bishop [Peter] De Gaudenzi [of Vigevano], bears the following testimony: "I am positive that Don Bosco, whom I know you so revere and esteem, is ready to endure anything rather than be wanting in respect and reverence for his archbishop."

Additional evidence of Don Bosco's walking the path of righteousness is to be found in the supernatural gifts which never ceased to shine forth in him during the time of his greatest afflictions. One reply of his in this regard is very telling.

When finally Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda's appointment to the see of Turin cast an aura of peace upon the Oratory, Father [Paul] Albera,²² desirous to know what Don Bosco thought of Our Lady's frequent intervention in his life, asked him about it. He paused a moment in thought and then replied, "Everyone was against Don Bosco. Our Lady had to help him."

We will end this account with Cardinal [John] Cagliero's words, which concluded one of his extensive testimonies: "In closing I maintain that it was not without divine intent that Don Bosco found, for the refinement of his own holiness, opposition in the one man he had hoped would be his most trustworthy and strongest protector, and this precisely during the most glorious and fruitful period of his apostolate. This cross which the Lord placed upon his shoulders made him lose a great part of his most precious time in nothing else but a humble and

²⁰Letter to Father Rua, March 25, 1888. [Author]

²¹See Vol. XV, pp. xviii f. [Editor]

²²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

dutiful self-defense. Still, it never drew from his heart a word of lament, impatience, anger or justified resentment. He bore his cross strongly, serenely, humbly, without even once losing inner peace, without ever being drawn away from working assiduously for the consolidation and spread of his Congregation with cheerfulness of spirit, with that intimate, unalterable union with God which is the trait of the saints.”²³

²³*Processicolo*, p. 97. [Author]

CHAPTER 4

Paris Welcomes Don Bosco

DON Bosco was no stranger to Paris, nor did he enter the city unexpectedly. His lengthy dealings with Father Roussel¹ to take over the latter's work in Auteuil had made his name well known in circles, both clerical and lay, that were involved in philanthropic enterprises, of which the great city had a large number. So-called "fund-raising rallies" cited this Turinese priest's work for poor and abandoned youth as an incentive and a model, all the more so since his foundations in France kept drawing greater and greater attention from Paris' good-hearted citizens and the Catholic press. In addition, his contact with the Paris community which regularly wintered in Nice and along the Riviera had won him some valuable friends, many of whom, moved to admiration for his virtue and his enterprises, were looking forward to having him in their capital. Through their influence the biography by Dr. [Charles] D'Espiney of Nice had reached and circulated through the aristocracy; a straightforward, spirited account of the most salient points of his life, it made its readers anxious to meet such an extraordinary man face to face. Hence, no sooner was it known that he was actually to be in their midst than Paris' noble families strove with each other to be his host, meanwhile spreading the happy news among their many relatives and acquaintances. No one, however, could have possibly foreseen or even imagined a tiny fraction of what actually occurred; its account will take up a considerable part of this volume.²

¹Founder of an orphanage for young workers in the Auteuil quarter of Paris. See Vol. XIII, p. 565. [Editor]

²The principal sources of our account are as follows: (1) contemporary newspapers; (2) some one hundred letters written to Don Bosco or to his secretary which, fortunately, have survived; (3) a terse diary, with very wide gaps, of the evening audiences held from April 18 to May 21; (4) two booklets printed in Paris: Leon Aubineau, *Don Bosco, sa biographie, ses oeuvres*.

It was about six in the evening of Wednesday, April 18 [1883], when, accompanied by Father [Camillus] De Barruel, Don Bosco stepped from his train at the Lyons station in Paris. A carriage was waiting for him; it drove him through the city's boulevards to the De Combaud residence on Messina Avenue. Countess De Combaud, an elderly, deeply Christian lady, was very thrilled to be his host. We first met her in our narrative when we spoke of the future bishop Anthony Malàn and his extraordinary vocation.³ She had seen Don Bosco at La Navarre, near which she had her villa, during his last visit there and had then arranged with him for his coming trip to Paris. She placed an entire apartment, separated from the rest of the house, at his disposal and assigned adequate personnel to serve him, omitting nothing that might make him feel perfectly at home.

It soon became very clear how appropriate was Don Bosco's choice of a secretary. Father De Barruel, French to the core, came from a noble family of the Dauphiné region, had studied law and had headed a prefecture cabinet during the presidency of Marshal [Maurice de] Mac-Mahon. As a boy in the preparatory seminary founded by Bishop [Félix-Antoine] Dupanloup at Chapelle Saint-Mesmin near Orléans, he had been a classmate of Archbishop Camillus Siciliano Di Rende, then apostolic nuncio to France. Well educated and experienced, Father De Barruel was a real godsend to Don Bosco in that fashionable society.

Paris was enthralled by Don Bosco's visit. That says it all. Outstanding cities are not usually overwhelmed by visitors, renowned though they may be; Paris is perhaps the one city in the world least affected by a novelty of this kind. Today [1934] Rome is its only rival. Personages of great renown in the arts, sciences and politics or society leaders of the highest ranks pass through the city every day, drawing at best a momentary glance to themselves.

As the adage has it, "No one is touched by the usual." Contrariwise, however, no sooner did word get out that Don Bosco was in Paris than an endless, overwhelming surge of humanity centered upon him.

vres et son séjour à Paris [Don Bosco, His Life, His Works and His Stay in Paris] and *Dom Bosco à Paris, sa vie et ses oeuvres* [Don Bosco in Paris, His Life and His Works], authored by a former magistrate, edited by A. Josse, and published by Ressayre, 7th printing. The latter work ran through three printings in less than a week. Both booklets appeared while Don Bosco was still in Paris. Other sources will be cited as they occur: (5) some observations of Father Lemoyne on information he received verbally; (6) more recent testimonies given by survivors who saw and heard Don Bosco in Paris. [Author]

³See Volume XV, pp. 469f. [Editor]

Wherever he went, everyone wanted to see him, to hear him, to get near him, to touch his garments. It was a daily general ovation, in no way prepared or organized, but totally improvised, spontaneous, utterly amazing.

And this occurred even though there was nothing about his exterior person to give him mastery over the crowds. The newspapers pointed out his mediocre height, his hesitant step, his poor eyesight, his slow, weak voice, his foreign accent and yet more foreign phrasing and the extreme simplicity of his whole appearance. However, they also brought out his exquisite kindness, his unalterable gentleness, his heroic patience; they remarked how the halo of the healer which encircled his name in no way affected his modesty, which made him stand out no more than the very least of his Salesians. The unworldly wise, however, understood well the secret of his powerful attraction; it was his holiness which, despite all attempts that had been made to warp inmost popular sentiment, kept exerting, even in a city like Paris, its endless fascination.

The surge of humanity we spoke of began the very next day. After celebrating Mass for the Carmelite Sisters, Don Bosco immediately hastened that day to pay his respects to the archbishop, but he was away administering confirmation. He met with his coadjutor, Bishop [Francis] Richard [de la Vergne], who extended him a very warm welcome. Later that day, however, he went back, and was received in a long and warm audience by Cardinal [Joseph Hippolytus] Guibert. On returning home he found a hundred people already waiting to see him.

This onrush of visitors, an indication of what was to follow every day and evening, alarmed Countess De Combaud, who promptly took appropriate measures to meet it. Not far from the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, on Ville L'Evêque Street, there lived in the De Sênislhac residence a community of women who externally wore no sign of being nuns but who actually formed a religious family. Its members belonged to the aristocracy and each one was addressed as "Miss" rather than "Sister."⁴ They were the Oblates of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, founded in Montluçon [in 1875] by Louise Thérèse de Montaignac de Chau-

⁴The people thought these women were nuns but, seeing no outward indication of this, they asked them, in Don Bosco's hearing, "What order do you belong to?"

"To the order of good Christians."

"What kind of work do you do?"

"Caring for others like you."

"What charitable home is this?"

"This is the home of Miss Sênislhac."

With responses like this they shied away from public curiosity. [Author]

vance, whose cause of beatification has been introduced.⁵ A member of the S nislhac family was the superior. Countess De Combaud approached her. As was obvious to all, Don Bosco, after celebrating Mass wherever he might have been invited, would never be free to return home before midday, and therefore the greatest flood of visitors would crest in the afternoon hours. They agreed to share equally: every afternoon at two Don Bosco would go to the S nislhac home and there give evening audiences. For this purpose he was allotted a spacious, comfortable room on the second floor which was reached by a magnificent stairway. A landing led to a small room which in turn opened into a grand salon lit up by three front windows. From it one entered an antechamber which opened up into the library, where Don Bosco was to give audiences.

It would help to know at this point Don Bosco's daily schedule while in Paris. He rose at five and said his prayers; then he cleared out the remaining mail of the last evening delivery, a mountain of correspondence that grew daily. After this he would go to celebrate Mass in whatever church or chapel he was expected; there too he would afterward receive people and continue seeing those who had been sent to him by Countess De Combaud until it was time for him to lunch at the home of one of the many hosts who daily kept pressuring him with invitations. He tried to be back at the S nislhac residence by two, in time for his afternoon and evening audiences, which lasted no less than six hours, returning to the De Combaud home at about ten o'clock. There he would spend a little time with his hosts, after which, retiring with his secretary to his private quarters, he would look over the correspondence which had been separated for him according to appropriate responses. Finally, after his evening prayer, he would go to bed toward midnight.

The evening of April 20 gave Miss S nislhac's community a fairly good idea of what was awaiting them in days to come. At two o'clock their home was literally besieged, as people of all social circles begged to see Don Bosco. The community, anxious to be the first to receive his blessing, gathered about him in the library as soon as he entered. It had been firmly agreed that his secretary would be the one personally to direct the audiences, but, once he left Don Bosco with the community, Father De Barruel slipped away, having other things to do. What a predicament the poor ladies found themselves in! The first thing they had to do was to shield Don Bosco from an onrush, and so Miss

⁵She was beatified in 1990. [Editor]

Jacquier stationed herself at the doorway between the grand salon and the library, while Miss Bethford took her position at another doorway which led from the library to the landing of the staircase and which was to remain locked. Don Bosco could be reached only from the inside stairwell. Here the stalwart doorkeeper firmly controlled the flow of visitors according to the order of their arrival. Ladies and gentlemen of the nobility packed the salon; among them was the princess of Trapani, who with her daughter and some other ladies was complaining that for two hours she had been waiting her turn, which never seemed to come, and that she could not even force her way through the crowd to reach the self-appointed doorkeeper and plead her cause. At last, by an exchange of notes she managed to contact her, and she was brought in through a side door, hidden from public view, and thus saw Don Bosco. She left thrilled with joy, profusely thanking the ladies who had relieved her anxiety.

Six hours later the salon was still packed, because no sooner did some leave than others took their place. Finally Don Bosco came out to impart a general blessing to all. At that instant a massive surge toward him threatened his safety. The long wait had set nerves on edge. Cries rang out: "Father, my son has typhus ... Father, I have a tumor ... Father, my son is driving me to despair ... Father, I have this and that trouble!" Some others, taking advantage of the excitement, used scissors to snip off pieces of his cassock as relics to cherish. When he finally left, his bodyguards realized that they had been on their feet for eight hours.

But they learned from the experience. The following day, with the rush repeating itself, all those who entered the salon had to sign their name on a sheet of paper with a number; this gave the audience a feeling of orderliness. The plan worked so well that it was followed from then on. The ladies were helped by Countess De Caulaincourt, Countess D'Andigné, and other noted Parisian ladies who, with great self-denial, assumed the burden of keeping some semblance of order in holding back a multitude which overflowed the salon, staircase and courtyard, waiting impatiently hour upon hour but never breaking lines.

While in Paris, Don Bosco was no longer his own master. One evening, having business to discuss with a gentleman, he had to steal out of the house by a rear door since the main entrance on Messina Avenue was blocked. Though he had not told a soul where he was going, once word got out, probably through an indiscretion of the coachman, his carriage was mobbed before it even reached its destination. He

entered the home, only to find himself hemmed in on every side in the lobby; some even knelt then and there to make their confession. Suffocating in the crush, Don Bosco called to Father De Barruel for help. "Tell all these people," he cried, "to get back into the antechamber and come to me one at a time."

"Yes," answered the secretary, but then, losing heart, he ended up sitting on a bench, thoroughly dazed.

"Father De Barruel," Don Bosco kept calling out, "do as I say," but it was useless.

Who knows what would have happened but for the unexpected appearance of the marquis of Franqueville, who took Don Bosco into an adjoining room and told him to wait a moment there. Then he shut the door, returned to him by another entrance, and took him secretly to his own home for dinner, while all continued to wait, convinced that he was still in the house. They got to the marquis' home as the clock struck eight, but there at the main entrance stood a carriage already waiting for him. A family whose son was dying had come to beg Don Bosco for just one visit, even for a single minute.⁶ Don Bosco obliged. He finally sat down to his meal at eleven o'clock, taking only a bit of soup.

On May 3, after a conference at St. Clotilde's, Don Bosco began receiving people in the rear sacristy of the church, standing on a platform, but the line never seemed to end. At a certain point he said to the marquis of Franqueville, "It's impossible to please everyone. How can I hold up? I'm exhausted. I will let everyone come, but they must express only one thought. Let's agree on that." The marquis went out to set down this condition to the people and then watched carefully to make sure it was followed. Thus, each person passing by him made but one request of him: "Pray for me ... My mother is sick and begs for your prayers ... Please bless me ... May I have a medal? ... I have a wayward son ... Please pray to Our Lady that my business affairs may prosper ..." In this way he was able to meet some forty persons per minute, giving each one a medal of Mary, Help of Christians.

This flow of people had already gone on for two hours when Don Bosco asked the marquis, "Look out and see how many more there are." The marquis did so and replied, "There are still five hundred." They brought him a cup of coffee, which he sipped without interrupting the

⁶The dying boy's father was a millionaire. His note read: "Mr. Allardi, 32 Freidland Avenue, has a young son who is dying, given up by all the doctors. He begs Don Bosco to come, if only for a minute." [Author]

audience. About an hour later he again asked the marquis, "How many are still out there?" The marquis looked out and replied, "Probably a thousand."

Don Bosco was totally exhausted. There had to be an end. The parish priest came in to exchange a few brief words with him. Then the marquis took him through a nearby entrance into the rectory and from there he was driven home. When the restless crowd realized that he was no longer in the room, they invaded the rectory, loudly demanding to know where Don Bosco was. A riot was about to ensue when someone shouted that he had gone to the home of Mr. Adolf Baudon, the president general of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, and called out his address. Since not everyone heard the address clearly and those who came from the opposite end of the city had no idea where it was, this was followed by a storm of requests made to passersby, who then themselves curiously lingered about, thus doubling the throng. Then came a wild scattering of the crowd, as everyone rushed to get to Mr. Baudon's home first. In time a rising tide of humanity surged upon it, forcing their way into the portico and then clambering upon the stairs. Mr. Baudon, frightened out of his wits, appeared at the window and asked what was going on.

"We want to see Don Bosco!"

"He is not here."

"He is! They told us he is here in your house."

"Yes, I am expecting him. It will be my pleasure to have breakfast with him, but he isn't here yet."

Just at that moment Don Bosco arrived. With God's help, he managed to get out of that predicament too. He then entered the house and went into the parlor, where he finally enjoyed a moment's rest.

One afternoon he was somewhat late in getting to the S  nislhac home. The entire area between the house and the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, some two hundred and twenty yards away, was so tightly packed with people that no traffic could move. He had to get out of his carriage and force his way through the crowd. Since he was dressed in French clerical garb with rabat and sash, no one recognized him. At one moment, carried along by the crowd, he found himself wedged into a doorway and then shoved into a backyard, from which he had a very hard time getting out and continuing on his way. Finally reaching the entrance of the house, he tried to get in, but could not make his way to the first step.

"Please," he asked politely, "let me through."

"No!" came the answers. "I am number fifteen." "I am number twenty."

"Well," he said after a moment, "if you won't let me pass, let me at least sit on the top step and rest."

"No, no, we are ahead of you, and you are breaking in."

"But, good sirs, you had better know that, if I don't get in, you won't be able to talk to Don Bosco, because I am Don Bosco."

They laughed in his face, and everyone around called him a liar.

There was nothing he could do, and so he had to turn around and effortlessly walk away. Freed of the crowd, he went to visit a family who had long expected him in order to bless a sick person. Without the setback he would not have been able to comfort that poor man.

When Miss S  nislhac, who, with her home jammed with people, had been waiting and waiting for him, found out what had happened, she was very upset, and so she called for police assistance. From then on two city patrolmen would come and station themselves, one inside the house and the other outside, so that the people would not block the tenants who were trying, without luck, to get in or out of their apartments.

The city newspapers took notice of Paris' Italian visitor. *Le Figaro*, *L'Univers*, *La Gazette de France*, *La Clairon*, *La Libert  *, *Le P  lerin*, *La France Illustr  e* of Father Roussel and other periodicals did not just bid him welcome but gave him lengthy coverage, citing him as "a man of God," "the nineteenth-century healer" and "Italy's Vincent de Paul." The provinces reiterated the message. In Paris reporters dogged his footsteps. Later, at the proper place and time, we will give an account of their articles. Just now we shall quote excerpts of two articles describing Paris' general enthusiasm for Don Bosco, omitting the biographical notes culled mainly from D'Espiney's [*Dom Bosco*] to give the readers some idea of the man of the day. Our first quote is from *L'Univers* of May 5 [1883], signed by [L  on] Aubineau, a veteran newsman and keen observer.

Paris is agog at the excitement being stirred up at its very heart by a humble priest of the diocese of Turin, whose appearance is not the kind that would draw the world's attention. He is of humble stock and is modest in bearing. In a dense crowd his voice can hardly be heard. His step is faulty and his vision weak. Why do the crowds rush to him? ... The only concern in the capital these days is to see and get near Don Bosco.

"Where is he?"

"What is he doing?"

Two weeks ago his name was scarcely known, apart from some charitable groups. People had a general notion of the works linked to his name: institutions for abandoned young people whose numbers are growing and spreading out everywhere. A booklet, too, which one can hardly read without smiling, had brought to the attention of devout souls his marvelous works, their development and success. Not much more than this was known. Hence many are to-day bewildered by the unexpected enthusiasm stirred up by a name which not so long ago they had hardly ever heard.

Paris' acclaim is well nigh unanimous, and the irresistible attraction which excites the populace has something of the miraculous about it. It supplies an answer, unwitting if you will, yet direct and determined, against the boasts of atheism raised on all sides, supposedly coming from the people. So many tributes are being paid to this man of God: people want to look upon a man of faith and of prayer. The biggest churches have proven too small to accommodate the faithful who flock to hear Don Bosco's Mass, to pray with Don Bosco, to receive Don Bosco's blessing. They ask nothing else of him.

The multitudes we saw not so long ago crowding about the Curé of Ars went to him to seek forgiveness of sins: people flocked from every part of the world to this confessor in a humble parish, marooned amid the bogs and ponds of Bresse. Nor does Don Bosco refuse to accept and listen to sinners ... but Parisians know that the whirlwind sweeping him along allows him no time to stop and hear confessions, and all the bustle surrounding this gentle and simple priest has but one purpose: to obtain a blessing and a little prayer.

Everyone invokes that blessing upon a dire personal need or burden of sorrow. The good priest listens to all, concerns himself with all, and invokes upon all the protection of Mary Most Holy, the Help of Christians. He does not look out for himself. He gives himself entirely to those who beg for his aid: he is there for them, for their hurts, for their hopes. He consoles, blesses, encourages. He pays no heed to the turmoil enveloping him but gives his undivided attention to the person speaking to him; he listens to all and bids all to take heart.

... I have not seen him in his own homes, in the midst of his priests, who, formed by him, bring the richness of their priesthood to the poor souls of the boys he rescues, but I have seen him in the midst of the crowds who, drawn by his name, fall at his feet, kiss his hand and bow to receive his blessing. The grandeur of such a triumph consists in the modesty of the person being honored. It is clearly obvious that he seeks nothing for himself, but directs all to God and the Blessed Virgin. In himself he is a son of peasants who at fifteen was still guiding the plow, and a son of peasants he remains, pretending to nothing higher. He goes about doing good and sacrifices himself for all indiscriminately, as it were, with no preference. They take hold of him, they lead him about, and he lets them do it.

... The demeanor of the Parisians is surprising. The crowds flocking to the churches are imposing; the throngs about this man fill one with wonder. Everywhere he goes, even in private homes, the masses follow him, precede him, search for him, besiege him, and it is not only the simple people who rush to him. I had a chance to see him once in a sacristy before Mass. After donning the sacred vestments, with hands joined and eyes lowered, he started to walk toward the altar, when many priests approached him one after the other and whispered their requests into his ear. What are we to say of Don Bosco at the altar? I was able to observe him from close by and I have seen his recollection and prayerfulness.

The same day *La Liberté* ran a long article on him, beginning: "Religious circles in Paris these days are talking about nothing but Don Bosco, an Italian version of St. Vincent de Paul." Then follows an account of what the reporter observed at the De Combaud home:

His apartment is besieged; the churches where he goes to say Mass are packed; when it is known that he will preach, a police detail is needed to keep the crowd in order. Wherever people gather, you hear talk of extraordinary things he did, and you hear over and over again, "The father ... the saint." The father and the saint are one and the same person, Don Bosco.

I, too, let me say it, wanted to meet a man whose beneficent life has merited such attestations of reverence. With this in mind I went to Messina Avenue, where Don Bosco enjoys the hospitality of a friendly family in a magnificent private mansion. Numerous carriages lined the street by its entrance. A busy flow of people kept going in and out of the courtyard. Many were pestering the doorkeeper to list their names for an audience. The very huge lobby, crowded with persons who had obtained an audience on that day, had not a single empty seat. We ascended the stairway and were introduced into Don Bosco's reception room. With such a throng waiting to see him, we barely had time to greet him. He is a humble man, one would say almost timid, who speaks French with a slight Italian accent.

Don Bosco passed the newsman on to Father De Barruel, who led him to Father Rua, "a typical Italian," as the journalist described him, who was busy going through the mail. "I have never seen such a pile of letters coming in on one day," the newsman continued. "They formed a huge pile on his desk, and under it was another great pile of opened envelopes. Father Rua was marking up those letters which called for a response and heaping them into a stack in front of him. How many letters! How many letters! And this did not include the registered mail."

It was especially to handle his mail—a delicate task to be sure—that, toward the end of April,⁷ Don Bosco had summoned Father Rua to Paris. Father De Barruel, helped though he was by volunteers, could not keep up with it. On May 3 Father Rua wrote to the director of the Oratory: “You can’t possibly picture the mountain of mail waiting for us to answer; we would need not three, but six or seven secretaries. Luckily we have a fine religious coming in to lend us a hand.” Also the De Combaud children’s governess and a few of the Oblate [Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus] helped lighten the load. Six times a day the porter would come in with a sackful of mail.

The reporter of *La Liberté* plied Father Rua with questions to draw some fresh, interesting tidbits of news with which to regale his readers, but he did not get very far. Father Rua, never stopping his work, kept opening letters, rapidly scanned their contents, jotted annotations, and either set them aside or dropped them into a basket. Meanwhile he told the reporter anecdotes of Don Bosco’s life and details of his undertakings. When the interviewer asked if it were true that Don Bosco healed the sick, Father Rua and Father De Barruel both smiled, and the former answered, “All he can do is to pray to God for them.”⁸

We have a vivid and telling account, not meant for the public eye, from the pen of a person of distinction who was very close to the events, which witnesses to the fact that it was not just the common people or puny minds that waxed enthusiastic. The account comes from Mrs. Claudius Lavergne, wife of the man who spread in France the art of stained glass, herself a renowned writer of children’s books. On May 5 she wrote to a sister-in-law:⁹ “What a magnificent century is ours when we consider the fruitfulness of the Church! Here is Don Bosco in Paris, and you cannot possibly imagine the rush of Parisians to this simple priest. He is neither eloquent nor imposing in any way, but his is a simplicity and a humility worthy of St. Vincent de Paul. He is supported when walking because he is exhausted. Today he must go to Lille. On

⁷In Don Bosco’s beatification process Father Rua stated that he arrived in Paris three days after Don Bosco’s conference in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene. Don Bosco spoke there on April 29. [Author]

⁸D’Espiney’s booklet, *Dom Bosco*, gives the following picture of Father Rua on page 61: “Of medium height, pale, gaunt, eyes aglow, Father Rua is the typical Italian, distinguished and suave. His voice is pleasant, his smile shrewd but softened by great kindness. He allowed us to spend long hours with him, and we left charmed by that conversation, in which his trans-Alpine humor blended with a profound grasp of the human heart. He is a dynamic man.” [Author]

⁹The letter was published in the September 1921 issue of the *Bulletin Salésien*. [Author]

his return he is due at the Ladies of Zion, where I hope to have him bless my children, both the little ones and the grown-ups. If we were to trust public rumors, his miracles would be numberless, but you know well the Church's strictness in this regard, and we are not to believe all that we hear. Nevertheless, even when we subtract nine-tenths of it, we still have abundant reason to justify the enthusiastic welcomes they give him. As for me, I have the greatest faith in his prayers, and I shall ask him for everything that is dearest to me in this world.... This is the event of the week and, since the visit of Pope Pius VII, Paris has never seen such masses throng about a priest."

For the reader to have a fuller idea of the welcome Don Bosco was given by Paris, we must add some of the more meaningful particulars.

Not a day passed without his receiving an invitation to dinner from distinguished personages. Imitating his Divine Master also in this, he accepted. When he was at table, all eyes were riveted upon him. Indeed, some people not only sat him in a very conspicuous position in order to enjoy seeing him, but even went so far as to use mirrors and glass partitions to gaze at him without being noticed. Ordinarily he ate little, and this made people exclaim, "Such a spirit of mortification!" One day he was served choice ice cream. "You'll see—he won't take any," some of those at table with him whispered to one another, "or he'll just take a tiny sliver to mortify himself." But Don Bosco, having overheard them, took a generous portion. "You see," they remarked, "he does that so we'll think he is a glutton." He himself told us this incident and very wisely drew a moral from it, saying, "See how this world reacts. If one has its esteem, all he does is well taken, but if one is thought wicked, the opposite happens." On this occasion there were even some who would devoutly drain the last drops of wine from his glass and keep the glass as a relic.

Many brought him religious articles to be blessed and even pens as well. Some came with new pens for him to use so that they could then keep them as relics.

His personal belongings were snatched and sold even at a great price. One day a gentleman went to him with the request that he simply sign fifty holy cards, and he did so. Two days later the same gentleman returned with two thousand francs which he had gotten by selling the autographs. Sometimes very poor persons would come and ask him to sign similar holy pictures, which they would then sell for forty or fifty francs apiece. He did this as his way of giving alms to the poor. One

lady who had obtained an autograph of Don Bosco wrote to tell Father De Barruel that it was her joy, so precious to her indeed that she was now begging the secretary to get her another with a few added words from Don Bosco, which she would then send to her brother, who was anxious to possess such a treasure.¹⁰

This eagerness to obtain his autograph was further fed by the news that a sick man in Chambéry had placed on his chest a holy picture of Mary, Help of Christians with Don Bosco's signature underneath it and had instantly been cured.

What shall we say of the medals? He gave them out with great abandon. The very first morning after his arrival in Paris, he saw the need of getting himself a good supply, and so he wrote to the Oratory's provider:

[Paris] April 19, 1883

Dear Joseph Rossi:

Rush me:

1. The address where I can get medals and pictures of Mary, Help of Christians.

2. If I can't get them here in Paris, send them to me from Turin at 34 Messina Avenue.

Have a good day.

Your friend,
Father John Bosco

P.S. Regards to Garibaldi and Marcellus Rossi.¹¹

On the same day, with his usual courtesy he wrote to Father Berto:

My dear Father Berto:

Write to me about yourself; tell me what's going on and about each and every zucchini and bean plant.

Please send me my summer coat.

God bless you. Regards to [Brother Bartholomew] Mondone and Father Taulaigo. Pray much.

Your dearest friend,
Father John Bosco

¹⁰Letter of Mrs. Isabel Guille to Father De Barruel, Paris, May 22, 1883. [Author]

¹¹Two coadjutor brothers, the former in charge of the bookstore, the latter the Oratory's porter. [Author]

So many were the medals he gave out that Baroness Reille, who had taken it upon herself to provide them and was very happy to have kept her promise, used to say, "I would never have thought I would spend such a considerable sum."

We cannot forget about his clothing. Not a few times he returned home with his cassock in shreds. On one occasion the whole back of it was slit from top to bottom and filched so fast that he was quickly helped to slip on his topcoat. That coat too has its own story that we'd like to tell.

One day Don Bosco was invited to the home of the marchioness of Pollerat, whose daughter had lain ill for ten years. On entering, Don Bosco bade her to put her trust in Mary, Help of Christians and get out of bed, for she had been healed. The young lady did so and felt perfectly well. Later the mother sent him a donation of ten thousand francs and then asked Father De Barruel to get her anything belonging to Don Bosco, offering to pay whatever he asked. Father De Barruel suggested Don Bosco's topcoat with a price tag of two hundred francs. The marchioness willingly sent him the money and requested that he send her the coat. Father De Barruel answered her a few days later, saying that he no longer had the two hundred francs and that it was unfair to deprive Don Bosco of his coat without replacing it with another. The young lady sent him two hundred francs more, but she was told the coat had already been snatched away by someone else who had paid handsomely for it. Unruffled by the message, the marchioness immediately sent him an additional two hundred francs with the request that she might at least have the new coat that had been purchased for him. In short, the matter stretched out so long that at final count, to acquire the coveted garment, the marchioness had to disburse on five occasions the total sum of a thousand francs.

But what had happened to the first topcoat? Countess De Combaud had persistently begged Don Bosco to give it to her.

"But I can't do without it," he had told her each time.

"Get another one to replace it."

"But how?"

"What does it cost?"

"Eighty francs."

"Here's a hundred." Then and there she handed the money to him.

The following day the lady serenely went to claim her purchase. "But," Don Bosco told her, "I've already spent the hundred francs." He

disbursed money here and there as he received it and as the houses in France, the [Sacred Heart] church in Rome, and the Oratory needed it. The countess gave him another hundred francs and several days later came to retrieve the famous coat. “What can I tell you?” Don Bosco said. “Someone asked me for money, and so ...” Without complaining the countess came back later with another hundred francs. Don Bosco smiled. It was the same story all over again! All in all, the scenario was replayed ten times, each time to the tune of a hundred francs. When the money rose to a thousand francs Don Bosco asked his secretary, “Do you think it’s enough?”

“I think so,” he answered.

“Look,” he told the good lady when she came back. “I can’t do without the coat, and I have no time to go out and buy another. Please take care of this for me.” She got him a new coat and then Don Bosco, taking it, gave her the old one.

It was common knowledge that Don Bosco was in Paris to collect funds, and so no one took offense at his amusing tactics. Upon his arrival he had drawn up the following list and had it translated, reproduced and distributed:

Construction Work Still To Be Done in the Sacred Heart Church and Hospice in Rome	
Basilica-style ceiling and vault.....	Fr. 50,000
Entire flooring.....	40,000
Sheeting.....	25,000
Façade.....	40,000
Cut stone for the hospice	25,000

The noble families of Paris were very candid in their dealings with Don Bosco, asking him questions which would sound quite indiscreet if the endearing esteem in which they held him were not widely known. He in turn took the occasion to give them delightful responses which later on made the rounds of his admirers. Thus on one occasion someone asked him where he got the fabulous sums that he needed to maintain and develop his works. “I have a great fund-raiser,” he answered, “who provides feed for my little caged birds. My great fund-raiser is Mary, Help of Christians.” Others asked him why he suggested almsgiving as a condition for obtaining graces, and he replied, “To thank God for such singular and unhopd-for graces, it is only proper that one

add to prayers, which are thanks in words, alms, which are thanks in deeds. It would be totally unbecoming, indeed, for a wealthy person who has been miraculously healed of an incurable illness to give God, in the person of His poor, a simple banknote of one thousand francs, a recompense far less than any prominent doctor would demand.”

One gentleman put him on the spot by asking him just why he had come to Paris. His candid reply was, “Do you not know what hunger forces the wolf to do? It drives him out of his lair to forage for food wherever he can to ease his hunger. That’s why I have come to Paris. I am overwhelmed with debts to keep caring for my orphans, and being unwilling to let either myself or my children die of starvation, I have come from Italy to France and thus to Paris, where I know I will find many charitable and generous persons like yourself whom I can ask for alms.” The inquisitive gentleman understood and, on leaving, asked him to accept a generous donation.

To questioners he spoke with a modesty and simplicity that were fascinating. Baron Reille, feeling most highly honored to have Don Bosco at his table, invited a coterie of several prominent people to join him, among them the apostolic nuncio, Archbishop [Camillus] Di Rende. Conversation was varied and ranged widely as Don Bosco’s table companions savored his endless pleasantness, when a certain man of the fashionable Parisian society remarked to him, “You enjoy an extraordinary influence over bad-natured people, and the stories of the converted thief¹² and of the hike in the countryside by juvenile delinquents who chose not to escape¹³ have in them something of the prodigious.”

“Oh,” Don Bosco cleverly replied, “I’m not always that lucky! The first homeless lads I took in from the streets of Turin slept just one night in my home and, come morning, ran away with my sheets and blankets. For several years I could take no one in unless I had people with me, so many were the threats against my life.”¹⁴

“And that wasn’t enough to dampen your ardor for your work?”

“Oh, no. I considered those people just poor fellows brought up unwholesomely from their childhood. Society has such little concern for the underprivileged!”

¹²See Vol. III, pp. 389f. [Editor]

¹³See Vol. V, pp. 140-145. [Editor]

¹⁴See Vol. III, pp. 211ff; Vol. IV, pp. 54f, 118, 486-502; Vol. XIV, pp. 405ff. *See also Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, the autobiography by St. John Bosco, pp. 412-426. [Editor]

The bystanders noted that charity always had the last word with him.

Certain pleasantries of his, like the incident of the topcoat, delighted Parisians and opened their pocketbooks, but there were also incidents of another kind.

One time, at the end of a banquet, a little girl, the host's daughter, entered the room to greet the visitors with a kiss and to ask them if they had enjoyed their meal. People were curious to see how Don Bosco would react. When the child reached him, he took a medal of Mary, Help of Christians from his pocket and told her, "Kiss the medal and then put it about your neck and love Our Lady." His gesture evoked an overall feeling of deep admiration.¹⁵

Biographical sketches published in the Paris newspapers always brought up his erstwhile skill in sleight-of-hand tricks. Once, while visiting a wealthy gentleman, he was asked to give an example of his expertise.

"Very gladly," he replied graciously, "and I'll do so right now if you don't mind."

"Yes, yes, by all means. Go ahead."

"Can you tell me what time it is?"

His host put his hand into his pocket, only to find it empty. "Here is your watch," said Don Bosco with a smile, but he did not hand it over to him. After a while, as Don Bosco was about to leave, the gentleman reminded him of the watch.

"Oh, no!" Don Bosco replied. "I will not return your watch until you pay me its value to care for my children."

"It's an expensive watch, you know."

"Well, think it over."

The man took five hundred francs from his pocket and got his watch back. The bystanders broke into laughter, as did the gentleman himself as he escorted Don Bosco as far as the street with the greatest cordiality. He most probably had not realized that he had left his watch nearby within Don Bosco's reach.

Under the date of April 25, the chronicler of the Oblate Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus wrote: "Don Bosco receives a great deal of money. Miss Jacquier brings him handfuls of gold coins. When he arrives I hand him an enormous bundle of letters, some of which contain even

¹⁵Father Ronchail was told of this at Cannes by eyewitnesses. [Author]

banknotes of one thousand francs. Often I give him only those particular letters which I have been told to hand over to him, and the rest I give to Father De Barruel, who, sitting in the living room, runs through the correspondence, puts together the banknotes, and replies to questions and requests and so on.” Even a woman artist wanted to help Don Bosco by means of her art: she painted his portrait and sold copies for the benefit of Salesian work.

The French newspapers reported this candid fund-raising campaign with respect. Their fund-raising estimate may certainly have been exaggerated, but it is no less true that the Parisians gave willingly and lavishly. This too was a shining witness to the holiness of this man of God. Father Rua recalled a unique happening. One night he told Don Bosco, “This has been a bad day. Nothing has come in.”

“Don’t talk that way,” Don Bosco reminded him.

The fact was that all his pockets were bulging with money, and he had more besides. Not knowing where to store it, when he was alone, he slipped off one of his suspenders and used it to tie a pantleg as a kind of sack to drop into it all the money he received. In Father Rua’s presence he let the money fall out and found it to amount to several thousand francs.

A special sign of esteem came to him from the steering committee of the XII Congress of French Catholics, which was held on May 9 in Hertz Hall and was well attended. Under the honorary presidency of Bishop [Francis] Richard de la Vergne and the active chairmanship of Mr. Chesnelong, the most illustrious representatives of Catholic France sought means and ways to stem the tide of rising secularism promoted by the Masonic government. Don Bosco was formally invited to preside at one of the sessions. It was a great honor indeed, but one he had to decline because, having to leave Paris for the north on May 5, he could not be back before the middle of the month.¹⁶

Innumerable were those who begged Don Bosco for his prayers during his stay in Paris. To satisfy the wishes of so many in some way, he decided that he would hold a novena to Mary, Help of Christians from May 15 to May 24 to pray for their intentions, inviting all who wished to join him to say three times the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and likewise, three times, the Hail Holy Queen to Mary, Help of Christians, along with the invocations “Most Sacred

¹⁶*Unità Cattolica*, May 15, 1883. [Author]

Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us,” and “Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.” A committee of noble ladies who had been organized to assist Salesian works even sent an announcement to the newspapers.¹⁷

Among the extant letters of condolence sent to Turin on the occasion of Don Bosco's death, we have found some which confirm, after a lapse of five years, the reverence and love he had won in Paris in 1883. Madame Lachèze wrote to Father Rua from Angers on February 4, 1888: “We bitterly mourn the loss of our father, Don Bosco. We were blessed to be able to meet him in Paris at the home of the marquis of Franqueville, and we consider that day an outstanding one in our lives. It was my intent to send him a hundred francs for his works with the request that he obtain for me the healing of my daughter, who has been ill for some time. Now our lamented father is in heaven—I have no doubt of that—and he will pray for her. While sending you this little donation, dear Father, I also beg for many prayers. We have had a Mass said for our good father, as you recommended in your circular letter, which we received last evening. He has no need of it, but, since this was his wish, it is always a pleasure to do what he asked of us.”

Mrs. A. Méricant wrote to Father Rua from Trouville-sur-Mer on February 6, 1888: “I grieve to learn of the death of your holy founder. One is tempted to pray to him rather than for him. Without doubt he protects his large family from above, but it wrings the heart to know that he is no longer among his boys. I thank God, who willed that I should be, even in a very small way, one of his cooperators. I was blessed to see Don Bosco twice—the first time in Turin, where, being on a pilgrimage to Rome, I admired his vast work, and the second time in Paris. I wanted to speak to him there, but it was impossible, so huge was the crowd about him. I have a request to make of you, dear Father: one of my sisters is going blind, and we are asking for her healing through Don Bosco's intercession. Would you please be kind enough to send me something that was his, such as a piece of clothing or of a garment that he wore?”

Louise Roy, a schoolmistress who had been completely won over by Don Bosco in Paris, wrote very touchingly from Vienna: “While I was in the confessional last Saturday, Father Freund told me of the death of the most venerated Don Bosco, which my friends had not dared to tell me. You know that I owe to Don Bosco my conversion and the peace in

¹⁷*Le Monde*, May 12, and *L'Univers*, May 13, 1883. [Author]

which my conscience now finds joy. Hence, his loss is most painful for me. I have no words to describe my *profound sorrow*. All through January I lived with the hope that he would recover, and my students and I prayed for him. I delayed writing to him day after day, waiting for the first of February and keeping him always in my thoughts. And now God has taken him from us! I feel I have lost more than a father and friend, for it was only his prayers that won for me the grace of overcoming all my uncertainties and gave me the courage to become what I now am. Last Sunday, Father, while I read your notice, I resolved in my heart to do all I possibly can for your work, which is his. I do not have to tell you that I am praying for him with all the fervor I can muster, and my pupils are doing the same.... His death leaves me an orphan, but with you I say, 'May God's will be done.' "

From Paris Miss A. Touzet, sharing the common grief, wrote on February 9: "I knew Don Bosco closely. Twice, once in Turin and then in Paris, I was able to get near the St. Vincent de Paul of our times, receiving from him counsel and inspiration. Notwithstanding the certainty of his happiness and glory in heaven, his death leaves us plunged in grief. 'Heaven is populated with saints,' we were saying to each other in sharing the bitter news, 'but we have so much need of them here on earth! Why has God taken him so soon from us?' But we are not to demand answers from heaven, and we say with you, dear Father: God, who is infinitely good, does only what is in accord with His justice and His goodness. Favoring the wishes of our lamented father, we pray for him, but cannot resist the feelings which prompt us to pray to him for ourselves."

How deeply rooted in souls was the conviction that Don Bosco was a great saint!

We will end these quotes with the tender words of Mrs. Lepage, née Delys-Rennes: "I consider it a grace and joy in my life to have met Don Bosco in Paris. The thought that he chose to pray for me and mine and that he will continue his protection over us brings me the most consoling comfort. I will always treasure his memory and continue to help his works, which now are entrusted to you."

Even before we get into the many things that have yet to be said, we have recounted enough to convince us that the judgment expressed at that time by that great friend of Don Bosco, Father [Clement] Guiol of Marseille, is not an exaggeration. While the sects feverishly struggled to strip France of its Christianity, that good friend of Don Bosco saw in the visit of this poor priest, whose outward appearance gave him no as-

cendancy, a foreigner who spoke haltingly the language of the country, “a God-given seed of salvation and of hope.”¹⁸ [Leon] Aubineau’s article, which we quoted above,¹⁹ also ends with a happy prediction of the effects of Don Bosco’s visit. “Only after he leaves us,” Aubineau wrote, “will we fully know the benefits of his visit. He leaves many hopes behind him. He has called upon many sick people; the novenas he suggested are not yet over. He has eased many spiritual ills, for souls are the principal object of his charity, so many of them needing to be enlightened, so many being troubled and lost. May they all have received a powerful reawakening, and may Mary, Help of Christians bring Her servant’s work to completion.”

¹⁸Minutes of the Marseille Women’s Committee, May 10, 1883. [Author]

¹⁹See pp. 78f, footnote 2. [Editor]

CHAPTER 5

Don Bosco in Paris: Audiences

“REGAL” was the term used to characterize Don Bosco’s audiences in Paris, but it was a grandeur unknown to earthly sovereigns because these audiences reached out to all, poor and rich alike, and this not merely on some special occasion but every day up to the very eve of his departure!¹ So far we have provided but an overview of them to serve as an indication of the welcome tendered Don Bosco in the French capital; now we shall see in detail how they were conducted and shall cite special cases which have come to our attention.

A brief diary kept by Miss Bethford introduces us to the evening audiences in the S nislhac home. To keep them running smoothly, the two ladies, who, as we have already indicated, were standing watch at the main entrance, had to take a very determined stand, which at times became quite awkward when, as it often happened, they had to confront members of the aristocracy, highly placed persons, or priests. On April 21 two priests came resolved to crash the gate by entering through the door on the landing rather than by taking a number and waiting like the rest. One, Father [Dominic] Sire, [former director] of St. Sulpice, went about it diplomatically. He took with him a lady who volunteered to relieve the sister as doorkeeper; the latter, however, rather than swallow the bait, merely thanked her for her kind offer. The second priest showed up with a brazen-faced virago who had fashioned a new rifle which she wanted Don Bosco to bless; she tried to force her way in as the priest’s companion, but both had to take a number and await their turn.

¹*Le Monde*. May 13, 1883. [Author]

Every rule, of course, has its exceptions, and the two doorladies wisely adjusted to the occasions as they came up. The diary entry for April 21 reads: "As the audiences begin, Miss Jacquier, reading from a list compiled at the main entrance, calls out the numbers and corresponding names. I, instead, stand by a side door and admit people who have a slip signed by Don Bosco or a note from Father De Barruel saying they are to be let in immediately. I also admit visitors who are ill or have been recommended by our friends. This is not always easy because no sooner do those in the main salon get wind of these little maneuvers of ours than we have a veritable riot on our hands, with people crying foul. Occasionally, we open our doors a tiny crack to signal to each other, and this makes good Don Bosco smile as with unflagging patience he keeps receiving so many demanding men and women."

That night the audiences closed at nine. Members of some sixty families had had their personal chat with Don Bosco. Remaining alone with a few people who were to escort "the saint" home, the two doorladies knelt by Don Bosco's desk, one on each side, and asked his blessing. He obliged and, in bidding them good evening, he told them they were his two guardian angels.

By six the next morning, a Sunday, people were already flocking in to see Don Bosco. It was not the right time, but the sisters, who would gladly have desired to enjoy some time alone with him themselves, realized that they would never have a chance in their own house. Countess De Combaud gave them the opportunity by opening her home to them any morning as often as they wished to come. One day Miss S  nislhac, realizing that the situation was becoming more and more acute, asked Don Bosco to call in some men to keep order with a firm hand, but the answer was that only women would have the needed patience. Every evening, before leaving, he called God's blessings upon the sisters, adding some kindly words which were eagerly received and made the good guardians of order forget their heavy weariness. Once, for instance, he told them, "I shall pray that Job may give you patience. Very soon you will have had enough of Don Bosco in your home!"

On the evening of the twenty-third, the S  nislhac residence became a workplace to benefit poor churches. It was an evening when prominent ladies would come together to sew sacred vestments. They were able as a group to meet Don Bosco, who, however, spoke but very few words to them and then gave them his blessing. The clamor of the

crowds outside dispelled any desire he had to spend more time with them.

That evening a high-society woman, well known in Parisian circles, also came, but she refused to have her name announced. She said that she had obtained from Don Bosco the cure of a very dear friend of hers and now wanted to thank him. With expressions of gratitude she also handed him a rather substantial donation along with her marriage band, a very expensive piece of jewelry sporting a pearl of purest quality, the size of a little hazelnut, and encircled by eight diamonds. Don Bosco's first thought was to raffle it. He mentioned his idea to Countess De Combaud, who took it upon herself to conduct the raffle; in turn, every evening Miss S  nislhac, the foundress of the religious family, would make the rounds of her aristocratic visitors to sell them tickets.

On the afternoon of the twenty-sixth, two deluxe carriages stood in the courtyard awaiting Don Bosco. One belonged to Mr. Saint-Phalle, at whose home Don Bosco was to have dinner, the other to an invalid who lived near the Gare du Nord. That evening Don Bosco cut his audiences short at eight o'clock. The young Saint-Phalle could hardly wait to introduce Don Bosco to his family, who had gathered six hours earlier to greet him, but, without the slightest hint of worry, he very calmly told the young man that he would come shortly as soon as he had seen the sick man.

Just moments before Don Bosco could reach the hallway, a little deaf-mute girl was there waiting for him. She had come from the Paris countryside in the company of two lady relatives. The poor women were fretful because their train was leaving soon. "We are not rich," they lamented, "and we cannot afford two train trips and miss two days' work." The doorladies, softening, allowed them to come in and, soon after, happily saw them leave, beaming with joy because Don Bosco had told them, "The child will speak when her two brothers will enter the Dominican order."

Now let us give some examples of what the audiences were like. Just after two in the afternoon of April 27, Marchioness Bouill   came bearing a note in which the parish priest of St. Mary Magdalene asked the ladies for a favor: would they prevail upon Don Bosco to visit a sick boy who was the son and nephew, respectively, of the two Bouill   brothers who had fallen at Patay in 1870 while serving in the Zouaves and defending the banner of the Sacred Heart. At Patay, during the blood-drenched days of December 2 to 4, the former Zouaves of the

Holy See, commanded by General De Charette, had honored that banner by heroic deeds of valor. The note was stained with the afflicted lady's tears. The youngster was burning with typhoid fever which the physicians had despaired of treating. Miss Bethford promised to do her best with Don Bosco, but then, recalling the incidents of Mr. Saint-Phalle and of the sick man, she suggested that the marchioness send a member of the family with a carriage around five o'clock that evening to take "the holy man" to the youngster.

The audience had just begun when Miss Bethford, at her post, heard excited voices at the foot of the stairway; moments later, the crowd yielded to the forceful shoving and pushing of a noble lady. She was distraught and her moaning was so heart-rending that all those crammed into the grand salon were moved to pity. She was Duchess Salviati, whose sixteen-year-old daughter was at the point of death. She asked to see Father De Barruel to obtain at any cost a visit from Don Bosco. Not without some hesitation Miss Bethford sent for the priest, who was greeted by an outburst of tears. He promised that the visit would be granted.

When Duchess Salviati departed, Miss Bethford attended to the Bouillé case. She brought Father De Barruel the note. She did so without the qualms she would normally have had because she knew any request of the parish priest of St. Mary Magdalene would be immediately honored. However, Father De Barruel, hearing the case, promptly answered with such a blunt refusal that the lady didn't dare breathe another word. Nevertheless she trusted that the suggestion she had made to Marchioness Bouillé would prove effective.

In fact, at five-thirty that evening a carriage pulled up in the courtyard, and out stepped the paternal grandfather of the youngster and a Jesuit priest, Father [Gustave] Argand, who begged Miss Bethford for her good offices. But how was she to interrupt the audiences? Don Bosco, who had arrived late, had been receiving for only about an hour, and there were still more than a hundred people who had been waiting since noon to see him. Be that as it may, she called to Father De Barruel, who stood as immovable as a statue on the landing, facing the boy's grandfather who was desperately tearing his hair and crying aloud, "I have promised the lad's mother I would bring Don Bosco to her, and without Don Bosco I cannot go home." Miss Sénishac, touched to the heart, made way for the grandfather and explained the situation to the people, speaking so persuasively that gradually all were

moved to compassion. On hearing the name which recalled the heroes of Patay, no one dared claim precedence, but all respectfully bowed to the elderly gentleman as he stepped into the salon. He and his Jesuit companion fell to their knees before Don Bosco, who first consoled them and then promised that the boy, though he had already received the Last Rites, would not die. However, so forceful were their pleas that he went to the Bouillé home on Bienfaisance Street, where he found the lad in the throes of death, surrounded by his family. Don Bosco knelt in prayer and then said, "The lad will be better within the hour, and convalescence will immediately begin." And so it happened.

What took place at about four o'clock on the afternoon of April 28 was a blend of tragedy and comedy. While Miss Bethford was struggling at her post to hold her own, lest she be swept into the library by a flood of people, in strode a "grande dame" dressed in black, with a determined manly gait, asking to speak with Father De Barruel. The latter was upstairs, busy with correspondence, and had given orders not to be disturbed. The doorlady explained that he was not in. "But I know he's in," brazenly replied the unknown visitor. "He's upstairs, and I'm going up to see him." The impudent tone of voice in which the last words were emphasized rallied the portress's courage, and she snapped back, "You will not go upstairs; you will respect the house you are in and the directives you are given." The burly virago's only response was to dash toward the staircase leading to the second floor, while Miss Bethford seized her by the arm striving to hold her back. Hearing the uproar, Miss S  nislhac ran up and let the intruder know that she was forbidding her to enter her private rooms.

"You are Miss S  nislhac?" asked the high-handed visitor.

"Yes, Madam, I am."

At this, the disdainful virago calmed down and confidentially let her know that she wanted to invite Father De Barruel, Don Bosco, and Father Forbes to dinner at her home. Her name was Madame D'Arx.

Every evening the visitors were given a flyer advertising the conference Don Bosco was to give at St. Mary Magdalene's on the twenty-ninth. That day there were no audiences. Miss S  nislhac's only mail was a four-page letter from Mr. Sakakini, consul general of the shah of Persia [Iran], who was asking Don Bosco to visit his wife, an invalid for more than two years.

Rest was finally to come for the Oblate Sisters after April 30, when they would start their spiritual retreat. The diary records: "Despite the

good fortune we have to be of service to Don Bosco, we are thoroughly worn out. Our throats are raw from repeating the same thing over and over again to people who refuse to listen to reason because they are upset at having to wait."

That day Don Bosco arrived late. The sidewalks were so jammed that it took him an hour and a half to go from the rectory of St. Mary Magdalene to the S  nislhac home, from No. 2 to No. 27 [of Ville l'  v  que]. He was drained of all energy and asked for a drink. Miss Jacquier immediately got him a warm mixture of water and Malaga wine.

While he was walking across the courtyard a sick young boy was brought to him in a carriage. He looked at the child and said, "If Don Bosco were alone, he would make the child walk, but there are too many people around. He will walk on the feast of the Assumption. If he doesn't, let him write me a note saying, 'Don Bosco, you don't know how to pray.' "

Two priests were the first to be received, Father Chauveau and Father Lebeurrier, who, the diary notes, knelt "before the saint" with moving humility. The last remark is of the diarist.

In the course of the audiences some of the usual dramatic scenes occurred. Miss Bethford, while going on an errand for Miss Jacquier, heard a rustling sound in the library; so did Father De Barruel, who was momentarily substituting for Miss Bethford. Both, fearing that someone had entered the antechamber by a side door normally kept locked, simultaneously entered the library from opposite ends. They were right; a group of ladies had forced the door to get in. Heedless of their pleas, they ordered the women to leave immediately. One of them, however, threw herself to her knees before them and with folded hands begged so insistently to stay that she got her way. Father De Barruel, before leaving, then ordered that the number system be followed, except—and he raised his voice for all to hear—for Mrs. De Martimpr  , who was to be admitted immediately.

But then what happened? No sooner did he leave than an ordinary elderly woman loudly announced: "Mrs. De Martimpr  !" and, while doing so, shoved forward a young woman, barefoot and in tatters, holding in her arms an emaciated and dying baby. The haggard face of the mother, framed in a muslin kerchief and beaming with eager expectancy, so moved all those present to pity that, yielding to that human picture of misery, they backed into each other to make room for

her to pass. Miss Bethford immediately opened the door for her, but no sooner had she closed it than up stepped the real Mrs. De Martimpré. Miss Bethford was upset by the elderly woman's trick, but the latter excused herself by saying that she thought she was doing a work of mercy because the unfortunate woman had come barefoot all the way from the Bastille² to have her son blessed by "the saint." Just then the poor young mother came out, wild with joy because Don Bosco had told her that her son would live.

That was a rough evening indeed! The stalwart doorkeepers felt totally overwhelmed. From courtyard to library there was not a spare square foot. And still, while calling everyone to order, they had to be very polite since they were dealing with an elite group of people. However, elite or not, there was simply no room to accommodate everyone in the antechamber and the salon, and so many a prominent personage had to take his place on the landing of the staircase. One could therefore see, seated on the steps out of sheer exhaustion, some of France's foremost ladies of the Rohan, Rozenbau and Frencinet families. Toward evening Madame Curzon planted herself on a chair by the door on the landing and stayed there determined to wait until Don Bosco would come out of the audience room. In due time the door opened, and an onrush of people, without heed or concern, lunged toward it. Miss Bethford opened her arms to shield Don Bosco and Madame Curzon, but she was swept aside. She cried out desperately for Father De Barruel, who dashed in and held the line. One woman, rather than pull back, let herself be pushed to the floor. Poor Don Bosco was hemmed in, but in that bedlam, Madame Curzon, while helping the poor woman to her feet, considered herself lucky that she had received a hearty blessing and a good word from Don Bosco. When he stepped into the courtyard, a marchioness who was waiting for him with a carriage opened the door for him herself and bade him enter, saying that the carriage would take him wherever he wished. He thanked her, adding, "May you have a hundred carriages to take you to paradise!"

The sisters' [spiritual] retreat and Don Bosco's departure for northern France put an end to the daily hassle. On May 21 he went to the Sénisilhac home for the last time. It was a fairly quiet evening. On en-

²The fortress-prison in Paris which fell into the hands of the revolutionaries on July 14, 1789. In 1880 that day, also known as Bastille Day, was chosen as the French national holiday. [Editor]

tering he asked Miss Bethford if she had said an Our Father in honor of Job to obtain the gift of patience. She smiled and presented to him for his blessing two packages, each containing a gross of medals, one for herself, the other for her "companion in arms." "I have run out of medals," Don Bosco told her. "May I have some of these?"

"Oh yes, Father, take as many as you wish," she replied, placing the packages on the table so he could give them out during the audiences.

"You will see there will be some left," he assured her.

But that prediction did not come true, because all that remained of the two hundred and eighty-eight medals were two empty boxes. However, the two sisters were not left empty handed, for there was still one packet of medals which Miss S  nislhac had formerly asked Don Bosco to bless for the community. This prompted the following excellent reflection from Miss Bethford: "Thus the holy man had spoken the truth. At the same time he had taught both of us the lesson that we are to be satisfied with what we have in common and that private reserves are of no worth."

So far we have been drawing almost exclusively from the S  nislhac chronicle. We shall now recount some extraordinary audiences which took place in the De Combaud home or elsewhere. Don Bosco was in demand wherever he went, and so one of the tricks which Miss Bethford devised to thin out the crowds in the S  nislhac home was to let people know where Don Bosco was next expected to celebrate Mass. Some visitors used to lie in wait in the De Combaud home in areas near his bedroom so as to get to him when he appeared in the early hours of the morning. Of course this meant they had bribed the servants, who in turn favored the visitors, certainly to their own benefit. In fact, once Don Bosco had left Paris, an elderly man servant who had been assigned to his antechamber went to the countess and, as his daughter has recently told us, said to her, "My lady, I am sorry, but I would like permission to leave your service."

"Leave? Has someone slighted you? Do you want a raise in salary?"

"No, no, Countess. Everyone here treats me kindly, and I have no complaints. I only want to tell you that now I have made enough money and no longer need to work for a living."

Evidently, thanks to Don Bosco's callers, he had managed to bolster his savings substantially.³

³*Bulletin Sal  sien*, March 1930. [Author]

Could the walls of Don Bosco's audience rooms speak, how many things they could tell us which have been forever sunk into oblivion! Likewise, faint is the remembrance even of events which took place there before witnesses or which were attested to by persons who participated in them, for they are now deceased. We shall therefore touch upon a few events which we were able to retrace.

There was much talk of miracles being performed by Don Bosco. Regardless of any judgment we might pass on them, the fact is that certain audiences included or were followed by some amazing results. Such was the case of Father [Andrew] Mocquereau, a Benedictine, who died in 1928. That case is abundantly documented.

Father [Charles] Couturier, immediate successor of Father [Prosper] Guéranger as abbot of Solesmes, who through others had petitioned Don Bosco, while in Marseille, for a visit to his abbey, wrote to him in Paris on April 20, and directly, in his own name and that of his community, renewed his plea. One of the monks felt such an urgent need to speak to him that he asked the abbot to let him go to Paris if it should happen that Don Bosco could not confirm his visit.⁴ Since Don Bosco could not, the monk went to him. This was Father Mocquereau, pupil and successor to Father [Joseph] Pothier in the restoration of Gregorian Chant. In the very prime of his adult years he had contracted a persistent laryngitis which practically left him voiceless, threatening to wreck the splendid hopes which had been placed in him for the overall direction of sacred music in the abbey and for the continuity of the reform. He cherished the secret hope that Don Bosco's blessing would free him from his disability. In addition to this personal request of his he had another delicate mission to carry out. A devout young lady had asked him to commend her to Don Bosco's prayers that she might obtain for herself and for a friend of hers the Lord's grace to overcome the obstacles which were then blocking them from entering the Benedictine monastic life within a certain period of time. On reaching Paris, the monk went to the De Combaud home at about two in the afternoon and asked the porter if he might speak to the countess.

"Does it regard Don Bosco?" the porter's wife curtly inquired.

"No, I'd like to see the countess. My business is with her."

"Then you may go up. We will tell her you are here."

⁴See Appendix 7. [Author]

The butler, suspecting it was Don Bosco he wanted, raised some objections, but the monk persisted and was finally admitted. The countess and her daughter greeted him graciously. On hearing his request, they replied that he might find Don Bosco at the S  nislhac home, but who could ever be certain of his whereabouts? "Don Bosco just can't be reached," the countess continued. "He leaves at seven in the morning and returns dead tired at eleven at night.... But don't worry. Since you have a truly important message for him, I will make arrangements. Come tomorrow morning at seven. I will provide a two-seater coach for him. You can ride with him and for a half hour you can talk with him at your ease. It's the only way to catch him. Also, since it is morning, you will have the added advantage that he will be rested, whereas at night he returns thoroughly exhausted and unable either to speak or to listen. So come tomorrow."

Father Mocquereau was more than punctual; he was at the house by six-fifteen. The porter invited him into his tiny quarters, where he waited in anxious expectation, his gaze fixed on the doorsteps, because he did not dare call upon the Countess De Combaud at that early hour. After ten minutes, during which he never stopped praying to the holy angels, the children's governess came out to invite him into the countess' apartments. As they were going, his first thought was to ask her if, as promised to him, Don Bosco had been advised the evening before that he was to ride in his carriage. "He came in at midnight," she answered, "and it was not possible to tell him." The reply upset him, as he feared that the favor might have been accorded to someone else by Don Bosco or by his secretary.

At seven more problems arose. A marchioness' lady-in-waiting arrived to say that her mistress was sending her carriage for Don Bosco so that she might keep it as a remembrance of the man of God. Fifteen minutes later a countess arrived, and she too negotiated for the use of her coach, that it might be sanctified by the presence of the new St. Vincent de Paul. In distress the Benedictine priest prayed ever more fervently to his guardian angel.

His prayers were soon answered. The governess, who had left while the discussion about the carriages was going on, now showed up triumphantly and told him, "Father, it has been agreed that you will ride with Don Bosco and his secretary in the countess' coach. He has given his word."

At about seven-forty-five the Countess de Combaud entered the hall

to say that Don Bosco was about to leave his room. In fact, minutes later, as soon as he made his appearance, the Benedictine monk was presented to him. He fell instantly to his knees and asked for a blessing, which Don Bosco imparted with the usual words. The priest then thanked him for the favor of being allowed to ride with him in his carriage.

"Yes, yes," was the reply. "Let's go."

Father Mocquereau thus described his first impression to his sister: "Don Bosco is in very poor health; the portrait of him that you have seen is very far from the reality. He shows his seventy years and walks with great difficulty. At first I was somewhat surprised to see a saint looking so drab. He was unshaven, his hair long, uncombed and straggling wildly in all directions; his clothing too was shabby, his coat collar greenish with use, and so on. That is his exterior. That first moment therefore was for me a purely natural reaction."

As they were about to come downstairs, his secretary ran up to tell him that people were crowding the staircase, but that he should not stop since they were already late. However, hardly had they started to come down when a woman stood before him, and he stopped to listen to her with genuine interest. Further down the steps he found some twenty people, among them a young woman who begged him, "Father, heal me. I am forced to spend eighteen hours a day in bed."

"Kneel down," he told her.

She knelt on the step as Don Bosco, standing beside her, said an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be and then blessed her. "At that moment," observed Father Mocquereau, "I saw and felt the presence of a saint."

A step lower, a mother presented her two sons, about fourteen and sixteen years old, whom he blessed, laying his hands firmly upon their heads. A little further down a woman addressed the monk, "I see you are with him. Please, ask him to ride in my carriage. I am Mrs. So-and-So." He naturally replied that he could do nothing. In short, just to get down the stairs it took Don Bosco twenty minutes, being stopped on every step by beseeching men and women.

At this point the young Benedictine priest, his mind always intent upon the talk he was soon to have, rushed over to the coachman who was to drive them and whispered into his ear, "You know that we are going to the Sisters of the Cenacle on Rue La Chaise. Drive very slowly; the longer it takes to get there the bigger will be your tip." He then dashed back to Don Bosco, who was still on the last step, and, shield-

ing him with his own body, led him to the coach and helped him up. He really would have preferred to be alone with Don Bosco, but he resignedly accepted the indispensable presence of Father De Barruel, the secretary, who, sensing his discomfort, hastened to assure him politely not to be uneasy because he was sworn to the strictest secrecy.

As soon as the horse began a slow walk, Father Mocquereau opened the conversation by presenting the first purpose of his visit. Don Bosco listened, eyes closed, every now and then muttering, "Fine, fine!" At the end he said, "In the sacristy of the Cenacle I will bless you and give you a medal. You will then say every day three Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glories with the invocation, 'Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.' "

"And next Sunday," the priest continued, "should I try to sing Mass?"

Don Bosco looked at him intently and smiled. "Yes," he said, "try, try!"

Father Mocquereau immediately passed on to his second request, handing him the young lady's letter, but, since Don Bosco had trouble reading it, he asked if he might read it to him, doing so with warmth, emphasizing and commenting as he read about the young lady's set time and the insurmountable obstacles. When the reading was over, the secretary interrupted his recitation of the breviary and turned his ear to Don Bosco, gazing at him. With the fullest calm, Don Bosco smiled but said nothing. At this point the monk insisted on an answer. Very tranquilly Don Bosco told him, "Wait, wait. I must pray and pray to the Lord." After a moment he added, "Tell that person, 'To the one who gives, it shall be given.' She must first do many works of mercy." After a brief silence, he went on, "She does not have to give to Don Bosco. There are so many other works of mercy, a whole sea of them: orphans, missions, and so forth. She must give, and she shall receive. She is also to say the prayers I asked you to recite. I shall give you a medal to bring to her." Apropos of this, Father Mocquereau was bringing to Don Bosco a donation of fifty thousand francs from the young lady.

Thus a trip that would have taken ten or fifteen minutes actually took twenty-five to thirty. Rue La Chaise was jammed with vehicles, cabs and hansom coaches. A massive crowd packed the Cenacle's courtyard. As soon as Don Bosco alighted, there was a general rush toward him: some wanted him to touch medals and rosaries, while others shouted out their pleas for their needs or their sick ones. "Our poor Don Bosco," the monk later wrote to his sister, "tranquilly steps

through the midst of that crowd, imparting blessings right and left, touching the sick who stand in his path. His secretary and I, walking by his side, shield him from the crush. We shuffle at a snail's pace and with great difficulty. They bring him a little girl who is mute; he touches her and moves on. Some regret that he was not able to touch them. To sum up, I have never before seen in a crowd of people such extraordinary faith and in a man such consummate calm. The Lord has granted me the additional outstanding grace of witnessing such a spectacle."

When they finally got to the sacristy Don Bosco had the young monk kneel before a little statue of Our Blessed Lady and, standing by his side, recited with him the Our Father and Hail Mary, with other prayers. Then he gave him a bountiful blessing "for health of body and holiness of soul," laid his right hand upon his throat for a few moments, and then he vested for his Mass. Father Mocquereau assisted at it and afterward left with a deep sense of peace and contentment in his heart.

His ailment did not completely leave him, nor did he ever again have a strong voice, but he always had enough to carry out the mission assigned him by Divine Providence. In fact, not only did he stay on as choirmaster at Solesmes to the very end of his long career, but he generously gave of himself at conventions and congresses, strenuously waging a crusade for authentic liturgical music. Both young ladies also were granted their requests; they took the veil and professed the rule of St. Benedict.⁵

Generally the more striking events took place far from public view or were deferred to some later date. Sometimes, however, notoriety was not lacking. One day they brought him a man monstrously swollen with dropsy and apparently near death. Don Bosco received him in audience and blessed him. The cure was instantaneous: the swelling went down immediately, and his skin became as wrinkled as an empty wine-skin. The people who had seen him being carried in by others and now saw him walking out on his own could not believe it was the same person. "But I am that person!" he kept repeating, no less astounded than his interrogators who kept gaping at him.

This cure recalls another which we place here only because the malady was the same. Ferdinand Bagouin, a worker and former papal Zouave, who was living in Sèvres, had been suffering from dropsy for

⁵*Bulletin Salésien*, March 1930. We have mostly drawn this information from three letters of Father Mocquereau which were passed on, after his death, to the editor of the French bulletin, two of them by his sister in 1930 and one in 1934 by a monk of Solesmes. The first two were published in the *Bulletin Salésien* on May 1930; the last was unpublished. [Author]

a long time. Having heard of Don Bosco some time before in Rome, he had written to him in Turin, but had received no answer. He wrote him again in Paris. Don Bosco had somebody reply to him to pray to Mary, Help of Christians and to inform him that on April 30 he would be present at the opening of Mary's month in his parish. Although three doctors had already given him up, at two in the afternoon of April 30 the swelling unexpectedly vanished in both abdomen and limbs, so that by seven o'clock that evening the good man was attending the services in his church with his mother. He then felt he had to have another audience with Don Bosco to thank him. The priest who forwarded the latter's request to the secretary had just returned from Don Bosco himself, but due to the time squeeze had not been able to tell him everything he had planned. Mindful of this, the priest jotted down for himself this note: "On that day, during my audience with Don Bosco, I scrupulously adhered to the public recommendation that we express ourselves with few words, and so during my audience I deliberately omitted too many things. Please be kind enough to give the good Father the enclosed note which is sealed because it contains very confidential material."⁶ We know nothing more except that in a letter dated December 23, 1887, the same Bagouin, in commending to Don Bosco's prayers the economic hardships of his family, wrote: "May the most holy Virgin, Help of Christians, save the one whom She has cured through your prayers."

Writing for an audience was a common way used by those who had neither the time nor the stamina for the grueling long waits. Several letters of this nature are in our possession. The count of Villermont, for example, very happy to have become a [Salesian] cooperator and personally met Don Bosco, wrote on April 23 that he would like another audience to learn at first hand how he might cooperate. On April 26 Mr. [George] Bastard, director of the weekly *Gazette Illustrée* and author of *Cinquante jours en Italie* [Fifty Days in Italy],⁷ in which he had written about Don Bosco,⁸ earnestly seeks an audience to pay his deepest personal respects. Father [Francis] Moigno, a Salesian cooperator, writes with filial love on April 26 to request a few moments of his time, just enough for a blessing. Mrs. Dufrasne writes on May 20 to say she would like to bring her husband, who is suffering from reli-

⁶Letter of Father E. De Leudeville to Father De Barruel, May 11, 1883. [Author]

⁷See Vol. XIII, p. 573. [Editor]

⁸Cf. *Memorie Biografiche del Beato Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XIII, pp. 1002f. Appendix in French, document no. 62, omitted in this edition. [Editor]

gious fixations, for a blessing and for mental healing from Our Lord. On May 21, a daughter yearns to bring her paralyzed mother to receive his blessing. On May 22, Baroness Racat de Roman seeks counsel as well as a blessing. Mrs. Franconie humbly begs him on the same day for an audience to receive his blessing. Mrs. D'Ervan writes from Tours on May 22 that she is at her wits' end because her son, a railroad engineer and inspector, will lack the time to see Don Bosco, though he has such need of a blessing to bring him back to God and recall him to the practice of the faith he has abandoned. Mrs. Loison from Levantie expresses her distress on May 22 at having received her audience ticket too late. On the same day Mrs. Pepin-Lehalleur, who received an appointment from Don Bosco to meet him at the Josse bookstore at five-thirty that evening, writes to say she received a note from Mrs. Josse at the very last moment telling her not to come because they had to close shop to avert disorders, and she is devastated. The next day Father Baiville, who repeatedly and unsuccessfully went to the same bookstore in the hope of meeting Don Bosco, once more requests an audience because he feels he needs his word and blessing. Mrs. Hiendonne on May 24 writes that, though she had a ticket for an audience, she had to spend four fruitless hours of waiting in the antechamber. Then, after two more useless tries, she lost all hope, and she humbly begs him to pray to the Almighty to bend the will of a selfish father. The same lot befell Baroness Des Graviers, who, having returned just a few days before from a fruitless trip to Ville l'Evêque Street, as she had been directed by Don Bosco, promises a donation of a thousand francs if he will restore peace to a troubled soul who has given up her religious practices. The duchess of Aremborg writes on May 23 to say she is ready to delay her departure from Paris by several days so as to obtain a very brief audience the following day at any hour and place of his choice, and in the meantime she offers him the hospitality of her Aremborg residence when, as she hopes, he will go to Belgium.

We will end this survey by quoting two highly regarded ladies. One, Madame Bouquet, wrote to Don Bosco's secretary on May 22: "Yesterday I felt a deep need to see Don Bosco and recommend to his prayers a sick man about whom I wanted briefly to speak to him. A young niece of mine who was with me also wished to ask his opinion on an important matter. We waited all day at the Sénisilhac residence, and just as we were about to kneel before Don Bosco he had to leave and all I could do was to hand him an envelope containing a small do-

nation and to ask him to pray for that sick man who is so much on my mind. We were hoping to see Don Bosco today at the Josse bookstore, but he did not show up, and so by six o'clock we had to go home without seeing him. Don Bosco, however, had the graciousness to remember me and speak about a visit he had paid me in Cannes two years ago. My children, who were fortunate enough to see him recently, mentioned this to you at the home of Madame De Madre. But I do not know how to reach him and warmly beg you to let me know how to go about it before he leaves." The second lady was the wife of the well-known financier Phillipart. Asking for Don Bosco's prayers that a dear friend of hers be acquitted of a serious charge, she was now writing to inform Don Bosco that the favor had been granted and to beg him to continue his prayers that together with temporal graces she and her family might receive also spiritual graces; meanwhile she was sending an offering to be handed personally to Don Bosco and was requesting another audience.

Even bishops wrote to Don Bosco seeking a private audience for some persons who needed to speak with him. Bishop Hector Chaulet d'Outremont of Le Mans, for example, very warmly recommended one of his flock.

All this documentation tells us that people were flocking not just to a healer but also, and perhaps even more, to a saint as such, a man of God richly enlightened by heaven to guide souls to salvation. To this intent, without waiting to be asked, on his own he gave sage advice, and, more often than not, a hint about confession. One time in May a woman, elbowing her way through the crowd with a forcefulness arising from her distressed motherly heart, reached Don Bosco and, at the peak of her desolation, told him how her son, an employee in the government's accounting office, had been arrested with others under suspicion and thrown into prison. His case was scheduled for trial in June, and she was earnestly begging for an acquittal.

"But, lady, what can I do?" Don Bosco asked her.

"If you will, you can set him free."

"But I certainly am not the Almighty!"

"Yes, yes, but you can do it. I beg you, I entreat you ..."

"If I were in Italy I would have influential friends to recommend his case to, but here I don't know anyone."

"Please have pity on a poor mother!"

"Very well, turn to the Lord and every day until the trial recite these particular prayers."

"Yes, yes, I'll do that."

"And I shall pray for you."

"Yes, please obtain the grace of my son's acquittal and freedom."

"But a prayer is not enough. You must do more."

"Tell me, tell me."

"A good confession and a good Holy Communion."

"It's been thirty years since I have gone to confession, but I promise I will do that and anything else you will advise."

"One more thing: in the future practice your faith."

"I will, I promise."

"In that case, be at peace and trust in the Lord."

So saying, Don Bosco took some medals and gave her one, saying, "This is for you." Then, giving her another, he told her, "This is for your son." He added a third medal without any comment.

His silence hit her. She had the uncanny feeling that nothing was hidden from Don Bosco. She felt that he knew how many people comprised her household and for this reason had given her three medals. At home with her were only her son and her husband, who also was no longer receiving the sacraments. With this thought in mind she returned home, her heart swelling with hope.

On reaching home she immediately called her husband, told him about her visit, talked to him about the prayers and confession, and then gave him the medal, saying, "This is for you. He did not tell me that, but it is for you. Don Bosco is a saint. He knew that you need this." She spoke so convincingly that her husband finally exclaimed, "Very well, I shall also do my duty and go to confession and Communion." He did so indeed.

His wife was beside herself with joy for having had that talk with Don Bosco, whose holiness she proclaimed to all her friends and neighbors. And God blessed her. On the last day, as she completed her prayers, her son was brought to trial and, while others were found guilty, he was acquitted and set at liberty. All three of them then, not content with thanking God in Paris, went to Turin on June 20, as if in fulfillment of a vow, but certainly to give thanks in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

A very refined-looking gentleman came for advice, but Don Bosco cut him short, telling him outright, "Go, do your Easter duty." Somewhat disconcerted by the interruption, the distinguished visitor, who was just past middle age, kept trying to express himself, but Don

Bosco gently and encouragingly repeated, "Go and do your Easter duty." He again attempted to finish what he was saying, but Don Bosco again, this time in tones both commanding and tender, repeated, "Go and do your Easter duty." Somewhat piqued, his visitor put on an air of cold reserve, determined to finish his statement, but Don Bosco did not let up on his refrain, accompanying it with such a glance and smile that eventually the magic words touched the man's heart. All at once he melted into tears and admitted that he detected in Don Bosco's command God's intervention in again starting afresh a long sequence of graces which he had for many, many years. With no hesitation, the next day he and his whole family received the sacraments.

Who will ever know how many confessions Don Bosco heard during those countless audiences? One man, who had escorted his sister to Paris, went with her to see Don Bosco and, for some unknown reason, made his confession in her presence. When he finished, she also knelt at Don Bosco's feet for her confession, telling her sins aloud. Unsuccessfully Don Bosco tried to stop her, reminding her that the Church forbade women to confess in that place and that he could not give her absolution anyway. But speaking all the louder, she replied, "God has given you power to forgive sins in any place on earth." Don Bosco insisted, but he could not persuade her. Finally members of the household entered and convinced her to desist.

Men of God consulted Don Bosco with the certainty that he was gifted with heavenly enlightenment. Father [Leon Gustave] Dehon was one. From 1877 this very devout priest of the Soissons diocese had felt that he was being called to found a congregation of priests who would make reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in a threefold apostolate: within the clergy, among the laity, and in the foreign missions. He had already worked out his plans when he heard that Don Bosco was in Paris. For a clearer discernment of God's will, he went to him, explained his project, and asked for his opinion. Don Bosco answered him definitively and reassuringly, "Yours is certainly God's work." Later he reaffirmed this judgment to Father De Barruel, who related it to Father Dehon when he had occasion to do so, making him doubly happy. Father Dehon is the founder of the flourishing congregation of the Priests of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of St. Quentin.⁹

⁹Oliver L. Kapsner, O.S.B., *Catholic Religious Orders* (Collegeville, MN: St. John's Abbey Press, 1957), p. 343, no. 1034. [Editor]

Father Ephraim, prior of the Trappist monastery of Tamié in Savoy, also went to him for discernment. Taking up a proposal of Bishop Laplace, vicar apostolic of Peking, he nurtured the desire of founding a Cistercian monastery in China and naming it Our Lady of Consolation. Before decisively putting his design into action, however, he wished to consult Don Bosco, who listened to his plans, blessed the project, and praised the idea of naming that far distant monastery after Our Lady of Consolation. That same year, Father Ephraim sailed to China and, high up in the mountainous region near the railroad that goes from Peking to the northwest, he built his monastery. The foundation went through many a trial, especially during the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, but it flourished so strongly that from it arose a second Trappist monastery entitled Our Lady of Liesse, near the railroad line connecting Peking and Han-Ku. Today [1934] both monasteries count eighteen European priests, twelve native priests, and eighty-eight native lay brothers. It was also from the monastery of Our Lady of Consolation that Father Bernard went to found the Trappist hermitage of Our Lady of the Lighthouse in Japan.¹⁰

Who knows how many souls regained the gift of faith through Don Bosco's prayers? One gentleman began his audience by stating bluntly, "Father, I don't believe in your miracles."

"I have never claimed or even suggested that I work miracles," replied Don Bosco.

"But everybody says you do."

"Well, then, everybody is wrong. I can do only one thing: I can pray to the Lord that in His mercy He may deign to bless the persons who commend themselves to our prayers. Often the Lord, seeing their faith, their resolve to live good lives and do good deeds, graciously hears us and consoles the distressed."

"In that case I have no problem believing, but I must tell you that I have not been to confession for the past forty years because I no longer believe in it."

"That's too bad, very bad! I don't have time to discuss it with you now because there are at least eight hundred people outside waiting for an audience, and so I'll just limit myself to a few remarks like a good friend. Just suppose that you are at the end of your days, with no cure in sight, and the doctors and your family and you yourself realize you

¹⁰*La Croix*, October 25, 1934. [Author]

have at most but one hour of life left. At that moment Don Bosco just happens to show up and tells you, ‘Sir, you are about to face God, but you still have time to return to His grace by confession. All sensible people, many learned persons, and even many an unbeliever, on reaching this point, have made peace with God. Very few have refused to do so, and they are for the most part hardened souls. If you do not straighten out the affairs of your soul, you will be eternally unhappy. If you do straighten them out, God is so good that He will again give you His kiss of peace.’ And I might also add, ‘What I am saying is true; it is a matter of faith. But even if there were just a doubt, common sense and prudence would tell you that, when it’s a matter of eternal damnation, one must take the safer path to avoid it. That’s how we act in this life’s affairs, even if they are temporary and short-lived. Even supposing that there is nothing in the beyond and that God will not demand of you an account of your life, it still costs you little to confess your sins, to be sorry, to seek God’s forgiveness. On the other hand, wouldn’t it be wonderful not to have to worry about being accountable to God if it should really happen that you must stand at the divine tribunal, as all good Catholics believe?’ Now tell me, sir, were you to find yourself in those straits and Don Bosco were to speak to you in that way, what would you do? If you prefer not to answer immediately, I’ll give you time to think it over and give me your response later.”

“No,” replied the unbeliever, pensive and visibly moved. “I won’t keep you waiting for my decision. You are honest with me, and I want to be honest with you. I would choose the safer way and confess.”

“Fine, but why don’t you do it now, while you are healthy and strong, and have time?”

“Well, you know, it’s not so easy.”

“That’s not true. But even if it were, a man of good sense and good heart like you should be able to overcome it and fix his gaze on eternity.”

“You’re right. If you would have the kindness to hear me, I am ready to make my confession right now.”

“I am sorry I cannot because there’s a huge crowd waiting outside. But I will direct you to a friend of mine, a good priest who will treat you most lovingly.”

He then jotted a note to the parish priest of St. Mary Magdalene Church and gave it to the man. Three days later that gentleman attended Don Bosco’s Mass and received Holy Communion. Securing a sec-

ond audience, he could not thank him enough for leading him back to God. "I had come to discuss matters with you," he admitted, "but in a saintly way and without arguing you caught me in your net. I will never forget our conversation."

On two separate late evenings Don Bosco received two other visits, one more striking than the other, both shrouded in an aura of the unbelievable and the mysterious.

One evening a very distinguished-looking gentleman came and asked, "Are you Don Bosco?"

"Yes. What can I do for you?"

"I greatly desire to make your acquaintance."

"And I'll be very pleased to do the same. What is your name?"

"Have you ever heard of Paul Bert?"

"Yes, of course. His name has come up often these days."

One of Paul Bert's books, entitled *Manuel civique*, had been forced upon elementary schools and was causing quite an uproar. Catholics fought it tooth and nail. It was placed on the *Index of Forbidden Books* and twenty-seven French bishops issued pastoral letters forbidding its reading; some even went so far as to deny the sacraments to teachers and pupils who used it.¹¹ The book taught that God is an unintelligible being, religion is a prejudice of the ages and a superstition exploited by priests, atheism is a human right, faith in the supernatural is incompatible with freedom and the progress of the human spirit, and similar things. The author, former Minister of Public Education in 1881 and 1882, was one of the leading exponents of Leon Gambetta's anticlericalism.¹² Consequently, the masonic government supported the author and haled bishops and parish priests to court for civil disobedience. Four hundred parish priests were found guilty on simple denunciation without benefit of trial, hearing, instruction, prosecution or defense. Children whose Catholic parents had taken the book from them were suspended indefinitely from classes, and a week later their parents, with no prior warning, were summoned to appear before the school board and, being held accountable for their children's absence from school, were fined twenty-five francs and threatened with jail.

Upon hearing that Don Bosco was informed of these facts, the gentleman stated, "I am Paul Bert."

¹¹Cf. G. Soderini, *Leone XIII*, Vol. 2, p. 243. [Author]

¹²Leon Gambetta had been premier of France in 1881. He died in 1882. [Editor]

"You?" asked Don Bosco. "And how can poor Don Bosco be of service to you?"

"What have you to say about my book?"

Don Bosco gazed at him for a moment and then seriously replied, "All I can tell you is that it has been proscribed."

"I have come because I want you tell me what you find wrong in my book."

"But I have never read it."

"Very well. Here is a copy. Read it and write your corrections in the margins, and I assure you I will take account of them in a reprint."

"Are you serious or joking?"

"I am serious. I can have this book reprinted within forty-eight hours."

"Leave it with me, and I'll see what I can do."

"I ask only one thing of you. No one is to know of my visit. Such information would raise a furor in the press and in the Chamber of Deputies."

"Be at ease. Everything will be done discreetly."

Paul Bert shook Don Bosco's hand and left. Don Bosco sent the book to the parish priest of St. Mary Magdalene because, being involved in audiences from morning to night, he could not read it himself. The pastor, recognizing the importance of the book, immediately set about the thankless task, so that in a few days it was filled with deletions and corrections. The author, returning not much later for another talk with Don Bosco, took his book back and kept his word, at least to a point. When, at the beginning of June, the duke of Broglie raised the question of the atheistic manual before the Senate, the Minister of Public Education, Mr. [Jules] Ferry, reported that Paul Bert "had become his own censor," and had introduced such corrections in the new edition that no one could find in it anything in violation of governmental directives for public education. In all truth the corrections were noteworthy. However the chapters extolling the French Revolution still remained, as well as its victories, its accomplishments and its charges against the king, the aristocracy, the *ancien régime* and especially the clergy. God's name was no longer blasphemed, but many, many slanders remained against His ministers and sacred matters. On the other hand, by his corrections the notorious author had actually vindicated the Church authorities' censures.¹³

¹³Cf. *Unità Cattolica*, June 8, 1883.

Anyone who is even slightly acquainted with Paul Bert's thoughts on secularism in education will be flabbergasted to learn about this incident. The secrecy he requested was respected until probably about the end of 1886, when he died without the sacraments—not because he refused them, but rather, it is said, because of the interference of those who attended him. At that time, to minimize the scandal, it seemed proper to reveal what took place between him and Don Bosco. However, just looking at the bare facts, we should bear in mind that Paul Bert, besides being a politician and a party man, was also a prominent scientist. Professor of physiology at the Sorbonne University and later at the Natural History Museum, he had, in teaching and writing, made major contributions to the progress of science. In addition, he was passionately, though on a purely rational level, involved in problems of education. Hence we would not be averse to believe that at first it was his scientific curiosity that led him to seek out Don Bosco for an exchange of ideas. The manual was but a pretext to study the man at leisure, but the aftermath of their meeting reveals once more the supernatural efficacy of Don Bosco's word.

More difficult to break through is the shadow of mystery enveloping the second audience, namely, that with Victor Hugo. Once it came to be known, it made the headlines in the press and even appeared in polemical works. Certain circumstances surrounding the first report made the whole thing appear quite implausible. In addition, some assertions of Mrs. Joan Richard Lesclide, widow of Victor Hugo's former personal secretary, if they are true, would wipe out any chance of that report's credibility. Lately, however, first-hand evidence has come to light which definitively removes all grounds for doubt that the meeting did take place; at the same time it has provided us with some hitherto unpublished details which lend certainty to the fact. Attorney Boullay, at that time a member of the board of directors of the Auteuil Orphanage,¹⁴ personally witnessed what we shall recount and he vouches for its truth.

There is no doubt that a meeting did take place between Don Bosco and Victor Hugo at Auteuil in Father Roussel's orphanage on May 20, 1883. As we shall see, Don Bosco went to the orphanage on two occasions.¹⁵ When Father Roussel learned that he was due for a second vis-

¹⁴See Vol. XIII, pp. 565ff. [Editor]

¹⁵See pp. 129, 156f. [Editor]

it, he asked his friend, Mr. Boullay, to come with his little daughters to receive Don Bosco's blessing. He arrived at about four-thirty in the afternoon and found the courtyard filled with people. As he was going to Father Roussel's office, he saw him coming out with an elderly man, rather short in stature, with a thick white beard, who made his way out through a lonely side street. He immediately guessed his identity, but it seemed so unbelievable to him that he felt he had to ask Father Roussel.

"Was that Victor Hugo who was just with you?"

"Yes, but hush, say nothing to anyone about it. He wanted to speak with Don Bosco and came to see him secretly in my house. He was drawn by the philanthropy of this apostle of youth."

Some moments later, Attorney Boullay was introduced to Don Bosco, who blessed him and his little girls. Then, after the usual amenities to break the ice, he found courage to remark, "Father, you have just spoken with a very important person."

"Who told you?"

"Father Roussel."

"In that case I will say, yes, I have been speaking with Victor Hugo. He tells me he believes in spiritualism, but I believe that if he keeps on holding back, it is only because of human respect. His entourage, as he himself told me, is dead set against any concept of religion.... Well, now he is old.... We must take advantage of God's grace. I said this to him too...."

An incident helps us understand Victor Hugo's reason for visiting Don Bosco. Only recently he had been shaken to the very depths of his soul. On May 11, after a prolonged, agonizing illness, his life's companion, Julia Drouent, died. The moral depression caused by the loss must have engendered in him the need to speak to the priest whose wondrous deeds were being acclaimed by all Paris. Then, too, his own curiosity to meet such a mysterious personage must have influenced his decision. Indeed, everyone knows how ardently his poetic soul was aroused by whatever had the earmarks of the arcane, and how inquisitively he dabbled in the occult.

Don Bosco kept that visit to himself until Victor Hugo's death [May 22, 1885], but the pagan irreligiousness of the funeral rites, which were staged as an apotheosis of the deceased, moved Don Bosco to reveal the sentiments which Victor Hugo had manifested to him. Between May

and June 1885 he told Father [Charles] Viglietti¹⁶ and Father Lemoyne¹⁷ about their conversation. Father Viglietti wrote as Don Bosco dictated;¹⁸ then Father Lemoyne touched it up slightly, substituting the Italian polite form *lei* for the French *vous* of the first draft and interjecting some insignificant little phrases. But what counts most is that Don Bosco reread the narrative. We have proof of that in three minor corrections which are most certainly in his own hand; his also, it appears, is the mark he made to draw attention to a marginal notation recognizably in Father Lemoyne's handwriting. Perhaps Don Bosco, after making his customary little cross on the original, handed Father Lemoyne the pen as he dictated the note. The ink makes that quite clear because Father Viglietti wrote in black ink and Don Bosco marked it in blue, and the ten half lines scribbled in the broad margin are also in blue. As for the exactness of the dialogue, there might be room for some uncertainty, given the two years' lapse since the actual meeting, but it is known that Don Bosco's memory served him well to the very point of death. Following is the account in full:¹⁹

Two years ago, while staying in Paris, I received a visit from a celebrity who was a total stranger to me. He had been waiting three hours to see me, and at eleven in the evening I received him in my room. His first words were: "Don't be alarmed, sir, but I am an unbeliever and hence put no faith in any of the miracles people say you work."

I answered, "I neither know nor ask to know whom I'm speaking with. I assure you, I neither wish to nor can make you believe what you don't want to believe. Nor do I intend to talk to you about religion, which you don't wish to hear about in any shape or form. But please tell me one thing: have you lived all your life with these sentiments in your heart?"

"In my early years my beliefs were the same as my family's and friends', but once I was mature enough to mull over my tenets, I put religion aside and started to live as a philosopher."

"What does 'live as a philosopher' mean to you?"

"It means living a happy life with no thought of the supernatural or of a fu-

¹⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

¹⁷*Ibid.* [Editor]

¹⁸Father Viglietti's diary, which we have quoted elsewhere and of which we shall say more in the next volume of the *Biographical Memoirs*, records on May 28, 1885: "Don Bosco has asked to see what I have written concerning Victor Hugo, because he wants to dictate the dialogue he had with him in Paris." [Author]

¹⁹Don Bosco's corrections are in black ink, whereas some additions by Father Lemoyne are within parentheses. [Author]

ture life, which priests exploit to frighten simple folk and the poorly educated.”

“And just what is your view of the future life?”

“Don’t waste your breath speaking to me about it. I’ll talk about the future life when I find myself there.”

“I take it you’re just quipping, but, since you introduced this topic, please be kind enough to hear me out. Sometime in the future might you not get sick?”

“Oh yes, of course, all the more so at my age when I experience so many aches and pains.”

“Could it not happen that these ailments of yours might bring you to the point of death?”

“They could, since I cannot exempt myself from the common lot of mortals.”

“And then, when you’ll find yourself in grave danger of death, and will come to the point of passing from time into eternity ...”

“Then I shall screw up my courage to be a philosopher and banish all thought of the supernatural.”

“And what prevents you (*impedisce*)²⁰ at least at that moment from giving some thought to your immortality, to your soul and to religion?”

“Nothing. But it would be a sign of weakness which I don’t care to show lest I become the laughingstock of my friends.”²¹

“But at that moment you will be at the end of your life. At such a time it is smart to look after yourself and your peace of conscience.”

“I understand what you mean, but I don’t feel I can lower myself that much.”

“Yet, at that moment what else is there for you to hope for? Your present life is about to end, and you still refuse to hear a word about eternal life. So what will your future be?”

He bowed his head and said nothing, lost in thought. At this juncture I continued, “You must give some thought to this awesome future. If, while you still have a moment of life, you will take advantage of it and have recourse to religion and to the Lord’s mercy, you will be saved, and saved forever. Otherwise, you will die, and die as an unbeliever, a reprobate, and all will be forever lost for you. To put it more bluntly, I tell you that you will have no other choice than non-existence [for such is your opinion] or²² an eternal punishment [according to my personal and universal belief].”

“Your words are neither philosophy nor theology, but the words of a friend, and I don’t want to reject them. My friends and I often discuss philosophy but we never address the great issue of what awaits us: either eternal suffering or non-existence. I want to have this matter thrashed out thoroughly, and then, if you will allow me, I shall come to see you again.”

²⁰Here Don Bosco had corrected Father Viglietti’s misspelling *impedise*. [Author]

²¹Father Viglietti had written *in faccia in faccia a tutti i miei amici*. Don Bosco turned it into *in faccia degli amici*. [Author]

²²Father Viglietti had written *of* instead of *or*. [Author]

After a few more words together, he shook my hand and, on leaving, gave me a calling card on which I spotted two words: VICTOR HUGHES.²³

He came back the next night at the same hour; he took my hand, and holding it [tightly], said to me, "I am not the type of person [you probably thought I was; it was just a trick of mine]. I made a real effort to play [the part of] an unbeliever. I am Victor Ugo (sic) and I beg you to be my good friend. I believe in the supernatural, I believe in God, and I hope to die assisted by a Catholic priest who will commend my soul to my Creator."²⁴

This second visit is precisely the one about which Attorney Boullay spoke to us. Just what day the first visit took place we may never know, but we have an account of it from Don Bosco which confirms its authenticity. He was at Alassio at that time, and he was walking from the refectory to his room after supper in the company of several Salesian priests, among them Father Bartholomew Fascie,²⁵ present Prefect General of Studies of the Congregation [1934], who was then a lay teacher in that school. One night, while in Paris, Don Bosco was visiting a family and returned home after eleven o'clock, thoroughly exhausted. Alas, however, there were people waiting for him. Going up to his room, he did his best to convince those gentlemen that he was dead on his feet, but they would not listen. He exchanged a few passing words with each one; then, believing he was finally free, he opened the door of his room, when suddenly, from a dark remote corner, stepped forth a specter. It was an elderly man who closely followed him into the room and sat by his side on the sofa. They talked, exchanged views, and argued until finally, dead tired, Don Bosco began to nod. His importunate visitor now and then tugged at his sleeve and kept saying, "Listen! Listen!" But Don Bosco, bowing his head, rested it upon the man's shoulder, with not the least sign of paying him heed. The visitor did not dare wake him, but sat stiffly erect until he himself fell asleep. Eventually for some reason or other, he abruptly shifted his

²³Before the word VICTOR appears the symbol #. All that follows in blue ink is the marginal addition we already mentioned. The words in square brackets are in black ink and were written later by Father Lemoyne. [Author]

²⁴In the document the dialogue is followed by a later comment of Father Viglietti. According to him, Victor Hugo was "immediately afterwards" to have given a speech in the Senate about the necessity of religious instruction. However, this is an anachronism for which the *Bollettino Salesiano* of June 1883 is responsible. In truth, that speech had been delivered in 1850. [Author]

²⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

position, lost his balance, and fell upon the arm of the sofa. Don Bosco, losing his support, fell on top of him. "*Pardon, monsieur ... pardon, monsieur,*" they kept saying to each another, rubbing their eyes. That occurrence convinced the good gentleman that for Don Bosco too the night was made for sleep. "Who was he?" one of Don Bosco's listeners asked. Turning to his questioner, he replied with an air of indifference, "A certain Victor Ugo (sic)."

That the De Combaud household was unaware of the poet's presence should surprise no one since Don Bosco's suite of rooms was totally isolated from the rest of the mansion. The lateness of the hour and the connivance of his servant account for the fact that the renowned writer could enter unobserved as he certainly wished. As for the calling card, the aforementioned Joan Richard Lesclide affirms that Victor Hugo never used one; however, assuming she was right, he might well have used a card with his name handwritten on it.

[Charles] D'Espiney was the first to publicize this visit, reporting it in part in the tenth edition of his *Dom Bosco*. Father Ragey took some excerpts from that account and wedged them into several verses written by the poet, which he felt were in harmony with them.²⁶ Much later the *Études* of Paris took up the story, obtaining the authentic account from the Oratory and translating it with a commentary²⁷ which resolved possible objections, including the handwriting of *Hughes* on the calling card. "How are we to explain that bizarre orthography?" the writer asks. "Why did Don Bosco correct three insignificant errors and let that one go by?" He answers: "We believe that the fault is his. The reason is that, having always pronounced the poet's name, *Victor Ugo* the Italian way, and wishing to dictate it in the French form, as it was written on the calling card, he emphasizes, as in Italian, the first syllable and writes the hard *g* as the Italian *gh*, rendering the name *Hughes*." It could also be that Don Bosco thought that *Hughes* was a translation of the Italian *Ugo* and dictated it thus.

Another problem concerns the late hour assigned to the second visit, an entirely unlikely time, especially in light of the secretiveness in which Victor Hugo wanted to enshroud his goings and comings and which counseled him not to go twice to the same place. Did Don

²⁶*La Controverse et le Contemporain*, 1889, Vol. XV, pp. 196-215. [Author]

²⁷A. Dechene, "La dernière heure de Victor Hugo," in *Études*, June 5-20, 1920, pp. 569-75. [Author]

Bosco's memory slip? Was it his secretary's misunderstanding, which Don Bosco overlooked because he limited himself to reading only the dialogue? Since we cannot cast doubt upon the word of Attorney Boullay, an error was certainly made, impute it to whom we may.

We could not assert that the interview was unproductive. It is a well-founded opinion that, from that time on, Victor Hugo repeatedly made theistic declarations, but we also know that those around him did all they could to hush any such avowals. This was most manifest whenever he rose from the dinner table. No sooner would he open his mouth to express such beliefs than his son-in-law, [Edward Stephen Anthony] Lockroy—a Jew whose real name was Simon and who, later, became Minister of the Navy—would silence him with, “Come, come, now. The old man is raving again!”

Many are convinced that, in the poet's last illness, Cardinal [Joseph Hippolytus] Guibert, rather than just send his secretary to test the ground, could have achieved a great deal more by going there in person, but it seems that he was then in poor health. When his secretary went, he was politely escorted to the door. This is not the way the poet would have acted; rather, lured by honors as he was, he would perhaps have allowed himself bit by bit to be taken in tow far beyond his basic theism. But these are secrets of grace which it is not given us to fathom. As for the poet's talk with Don Bosco, we are in agreement with a French periodical in which, while we were reviewing the page proofs of this chapter, we spotted these words, “No one shifted ground: the lay moralist did not preach, the priest retained his dignity, and the saint did not fall to his knees before the philosopher.”²⁸

How many troubled souls, how many matters of conscience, must have been submitted to Don Bosco's examination and judgment during his stay in Paris! How many civil marriages he must have brought to the Church for validation, how many entanglements of every kind did he resolve among the higher and well-educated classes of society! “For the good of souls,” he had on rare occasions asserted, “I had to get involved in very many things, a hundred of which were so important that for any one of them it would have been worth my while to undertake a trip to Paris.”

²⁸*Révue des Deux Mondes*, May 15, 1935, p. 348. [Author]

CHAPTER 6

Paris: Visits

While Don Bosco's afternoons were taken up with audiences, his morning hours were reserved to visiting, though not exclusively, since varying circumstances warranted exceptions. This chapter will follow him, step by step, and, as it were, with calendar in hand, as he made his rounds of churches, religious communities, and private families. We shall add those brief news items which might elsewhere break up our chronology and those whose precise dates we have not yet been able to ascertain.

Don Bosco celebrated his first Mass in Paris at the Carmelite Sisters' convent, the third to be established in Paris, on Messina Avenue, not far from [the De Combaud home] where he was staying. Miss Bethford's diary tells us that the Oblate Sisters on Ville d'Evêque Street attended the Mass. After greeting and blessing them, Don Bosco expressed his wish of keeping united with them in prayer. In turn, shortly before he left Paris, they presented him with a formal certificate making the Salesians an affiliate of the Carmelite Order.

On the morning of April 21 he said Mass in the convent of the Dominican Sisters of the Cross on Charonne Street. Some people asked to see him after Mass, and he obliged. Time flew by without causing him concern, but as noon was approaching Father De Barruel took his stand in the doorway and blocked anyone from entering the room. Turning a deaf ear to the general outcry of protest, he approached Don Bosco and told him, "We must go. It's past eleven. We still have another visit to make, and at twelve we are expected at Auteuil."

"Don Bosco," reports *Le Monde* of May 13, "replied, 'Good!' with a friendly, gentle smile and in his winning, charming accent. Then, rising from his armchair, he motioned to some sadly disappointed ladies

with a long, loving gesture of invitation, saying, 'Come, ladies, come.' And the audience continued, to stop only after he had given each one his particular blessing and a word of comfort.

"At what time did he get to Auteuil? God alone knows, but if the hour was missed, it was absorbed into the eternity of heaven. This kindly priest never sends anyone away, never rejects, never makes demands on those who come to him for solace in their pain. His soul, entirely belonging to God, he gives to anyone who turns to him."

Although negotiations dealing with the orphanage at Auteuil had failed,¹ Father Roussel's affection for Don Bosco did not wane. They had first been introduced to each other in Rome by Pius IX in 1876. As the Pope had walked past Father Roussel, he had remarked, "This is Don Bosco of France, whom I saw yesterday." Seven years later, in recalling the scene,² Father Roussel spoke of the warm comfort he had experienced on seeing "the holy priest" to whom the Holy Father himself had introduced him. It was natural then that, on hearing of Don Bosco's arrival in Paris, he anxiously sought to meet him. Don Bosco thoughtfully gave him advance notice by sending him word that he would be arriving early on the morning of Saturday, April 21. He got there about noon, had luncheon with him, and then was given a tour of the facility. In his already mentioned periodical Father Roussel wrote, "With such a lively, friendly, and gracious conversationalist we managed to discuss our mutual affairs at some length." Once word got around the neighborhood that Don Bosco was in Auteuil, many of Father Roussel's friends flocked in large numbers to see him, showing him many signs of their appreciation. Father Roussel himself openly admitted that, were it not for lack of time, they would have given him a more formal welcome. Don Bosco, however, before saying good-bye, made it clear to him that he certainly intended to return before leaving Paris.

The Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, whose convent was on the Invalides Boulevard, were pleased to have him celebrate Mass for them in the spacious chapel of their boarding school on April 22. So many were the children who wanted to share the privilege of attending his Mass with their teachers that Holy Communion took one entire hour. After having visited with both nuns and students and having listened to persons who wished to speak with him, Don Bosco made other calls in

¹See Vol. XIII, pp. 565-572. [Author]

²*France Illustré*, April 28, 1883. [Author]

order to please as many persons as he could who had begged for the favor of seeing him.

He had promised the Assumptionist Fathers of François I Street that he would spend a couple of hours with them. The order had been founded at Nîmes in 1847 by Father [Emanuel] d'Alzon to conduct schools, organize national pilgrimages, and run missions in the Middle East from the Balkans to the Dead Sea. They also vigorously conducted a widespread campaign of Catholic literature. The Assumptionist Father [Vincent de Paul] Bailly was then editor of *Pèlerin*, a widely circulated small periodical which heralded Don Bosco's work in France. In fact, as far back as 1877, its first year of publication, it had given enthusiastic coverage to Don Bosco's undertakings, even running his picture.

Articles about him appeared every time when French pilgrims, returning from an excursion to Rome, would stop for a visit to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, the Oratory and Don Bosco. The spiritual leader of these pilgrimages was usually Father [Francis] Picard, second superior general of the order. The Assumptionist Fathers and Don Bosco both enjoyed spending some time together while he was in Paris. "On his arrival in Paris," wrote *Pèlerin* on May 12, "one of the first visits this man of God made was to the humble *Pèlerin*, for he loves the poor. Also, as did the Lord with His disciples, he dined with *Pèlerin's* [editor] at Eastertide and laid hands on several sick persons whose health has since steadily improved." Then, alluding to the overall impact which Don Bosco was making upon Paris, the article continued: "It is certainly a striking phenomenon to witness the sentiment which has shaken Parisians out of their indifference at the visit to their city of a priest, a saintly man, so soon after the expulsion of religious, and which has driven them to force their wealth upon him almost, as it were, in atonement. We believe that, elderly though he may be and unsteady on his feet, having always to be supported by a friendly arm, he has brought to France nothing less than the solution to her working-class problem, even though he is almost blind and reads no newspapers."

One of the sick persons *Pèlerin* alluded to was Father Picard himself, for whose recovery Don Bosco had promised to pray. He was, in fact, healed and lived twenty years more.

The dinner talk centered mostly on Salesian affairs, reported in interview style by *Pèlerin* on May 12. Most of the conversation focused

on the origins and growth of Don Bosco's congregation, but toward the end of dinner it turned upon his educational system. Someone questioned whether the young artisans could be on their own without wavering once they left their shelter and were put into a factory or barracks environment. Don Bosco replied, "Almost all our former students keep coming back to our schools for confession. On Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings many in Turin come to us for this reason. Then, too, it is well known in the Italian army that the boys who have attended our trade schools practice their faith while in the military. They are even dubbed 'the Don Bosco boys.' You'll find them in all ranks of the Italian armed forces."

"But what makes up the formation of these lads?"

"Two things: kindness under all conditions and an open chapel with full facilities for confession and Communion."

"Do many go to Communion?"

"Very many. We have daily Mass for artisans and students; before and during Mass they are free to go to confession. Very many do so. It is frequent Communion that accomplishes everything."

"Aren't there also punishments?"

"We have no structured punishment, though occasionally we expel some boy. For punishment we substitute friendly and informal supervision and recreation. Infractions of discipline mostly take place because of lack of supervision. Vigilance cuts wrongdoing sufficiently to eliminate punishments. Each workshop has its own instructor. In addition, a cleric looks after the boys' conduct and their good spirit and piety. He also singles out those artisans who qualify for academic studies. Each new boy is given an older student as a buddy to get him started, and to protect and advise him. As for recreation we maintain that boys must be happy and kept busy with games. To achieve this we spare no effort. First comes music, then sports. When the boys tire of playing, they often go to pray in the chapel, which is always kept open."

The article closed with the following comment: "We have seen this system in action. The Oratory in Turin is a large boarding school where students are not forced to line up;³ rather, they move in groups pretty much like a family, each group clustered about a teacher; there is no shouting, pushing, or squabbling. We admired the serenity of the

³This is very true. In those days the boys went from the playground [to their classrooms or workshops] in groups without being held to silence. It was not until 1884 that orderly lines were introduced. When Don Bosco noticed this, he was displeased, but ever since this custom has been continued. [Author]

lads' faces and could not help exclaiming, 'God's hand is here!' "

Also *Le Monde* of May 17 covered this visit and mentioned one sensitive but instructive point brought up in this pleasant conversation. An Assumptionist asked Don Bosco what harmful influence he could pinpoint for the regrettable decline in faith which marked most of the young men who had received a well-rounded education from the tireless efforts of the zealous fathers and brothers, for it was well known that once their alumni became adults, they generally neglected their religious duties. But Don Bosco's reply was, "This serious problem rises from the fact that in France boys are not sufficiently close to their priests and hence rarely go to confession. In their formative years youngsters need the helpful touch of priestly gentleness. If they experience this influence from their earliest years, they will later recall the peace of mind that was theirs from sacramental forgiveness, and on falling through human frailty, they will always turn for help to the friends of their boyhood. That is why in Italy the children of the masses show an overall better perseverance rate than their counterparts in France."

Don Bosco's visit to the Assumptionists came at a particularly fortunate time. They were just then planning an enterprising Catholic daily newspaper meant for the widest possible French readership. A few did look askance upon this bold project, and so its initiator, Father [Vincent de Paul] Bailly, and the superior general, Father [Francis] Picard, were wavering. Don Bosco, himself always ready to take a risk in similar undertakings, encouraged them to get on with their project. He asked if they had funds and the personnel, and on learning they did, told them, "Go ahead, then! Go ahead!" His encouragement proved so effective that the first issue of the renowned *La Croix* appeared on June 16. It is a newspaper which so far (1934) has enjoyed half a century of sturdy vitality and reaped an abundant harvest of good.⁴

While we are on the topic of the press, we will add that Don Bosco also devoted some time while in Paris to the family of the prince of Catholic newspapermen who, in the columns of *L'Univers*, had initiated and waged many a strenuous battle in defense of the Church. He was Louis Veuillot, who had died on April 7 of that year. Don Bosco com-

⁴On December 1, 1934 *La Croix* made this comment: "The daily *La Croix* had not yet seen the light of day but was on the verge of birth, if not exactly hesitant at least somewhat apprehensive. Would it meet with the fate befalling so many other publications? Would Catholics support it? Would its first issues win the sympathy of the public? Troublesome fears, these. With a single word, a single gesture, Don Bosco brushed them aside. It was time to act and take this leap into the dark." [Author]

forted his grieving relatives with words of Christian consolation. His visit brought a healing balm especially to Louis' sister Eliza, who had shared his life of faith and enterprising charity. As a child, Francis, Louis' nephew, had been blessed by Don Bosco, and to this very day [1934] still feels the touch of that hand, "charged with divine grace," on his forehead. Now, some fifty years later, he was joyfully announcing that Don Bosco would soon be returning to Paris, crowned with the aureola of sainthood, to claim a church dedicated to his name.⁵

On the morning of April 23, the family of Countess De Rites had the pleasure of attending Don Bosco's Mass in the chapel of their home in the suburb of St. Germain. The chalice was the one used by Pius IX on December 8, 1855, the first anniversary of the proclamation of the Immaculate Conception. Awaiting Don Bosco at the altar was Father [Dominic] Sire of St. Sulpice, whose name is linked to a notable souvenir of that historic event. He was the one who arranged to have the bull *Ineffabilis* translated into four hundred languages and dialects and bound into one hundred and ten volumes, which were handsomely cased and presented to Pius IX on February 11, 1877. Don Bosco had admired this magnificent collection in the Immaculate Conception Hall of the Vatican, and he was delighted to meet the man who had thought up the idea.⁶

Present in the De Rites' chapel were about fifty members of the Parisian aristocracy. The offertory collection taken up by a former Zouave, the son of Madame Poulpiquet, brought in a generous donation for Don Bosco. Most of the congregation received Holy Communion from him. After the Mass he agreed to grant private audiences.

Father Sire is probably to be credited with making it possible for Don Bosco to make one of his most important visits, both in itself and in its effects—the visit to the renowned seminary of St. Sulpice. Few are the seminaries with as splendid a history as St. Sulpice. Staffed by a congregation of priests founded in Paris by the Venerable [John James] Olier in 1642, St. Sulpice soon became, as it is today [1934], a flourishing formation center of brilliant, learned prelates and of priests distinguished for piety and zeal in the Church's service. The seminary rector, Father Bieil, a stickler for protocol, had felt he had to request

⁵*La Vie Sociale*, Paris weekly, May 21, 1933. *L'Osservatore Cattolico* of Milan, May 7-8, 1883, published an interesting comparison of Louis Veuillot and Don Bosco. [Author]

⁶Father Sire was also one of those helping Don Bosco's secretaries with his correspondence. [Author]

instructions on the welcome and degree of honor he should give to Don Bosco. "He is neither bishop nor prelate," he queried, "and so what am I to do?"

Cardinal [Joseph Hyppolitus] Guibert's reply was, "Receive him with all possible honors. We will never be able to outdo his merits."

Don Bosco visited the seminary on the evening of April 23, but his very late arrival upset the regularly scheduled spiritual reading, supper, and night prayers—something absolutely unheard of in that sacred citadel of tradition.⁷ Stepping forward with an air of calm simplicity, he mounted a dais and gave the future priests a brief talk on the theme of Jesus' praise of St. John the Baptist in the Gospel verse: "He was the lamp set aflame and burning bright." [John 5:35] He explained how a priest's life is to be one of intense interior fervor, that he may shed light upon himself and others, and he repeated his choice adage that a priest never goes alone either to heaven or to hell.⁸ [Years later] Father Clement, director of [Bishop Francis] Fénelon School, commented thus on this talk of Don Bosco,⁹ "What I recall best is the flaming ardor of his speech, especially when he stressed the need of trust in God. As he spoke, his eyes flashed beneath his furrowed brow and his voice, though throaty and tired, waxed stronger.¹⁰ As soon as he stepped onto the floor, my companions crowded about him, almost on top of him in their eagerness to touch him and kiss his hand. I can still see one of them, scissors in hand, snipping away at the hem of his sash, I believe, while another was clutching a piece of red cloth probably torn from the lining of his hat. In the midst of this crush Don Bosco had a smile for everyone, which I can still see shining brightly as he turned left and right with extraordinary goodness and boundless tenderness."

⁷Nor did this pass unremarked. One faculty member, who could not bear such disruption, kept muttering, "Communities do not wait, communities do not wait." However, the rector told him and others, "Don Bosco is a saint. His case well merits an exception." To while away the time, Mr. Thiroux, a jolly fellow, a former attorney turned seminarian, improvised the following quatrain which made the rounds of the hall to everybody's amusement:

Don Bosco, they say, has worked great miracles;
Has raised the dead, has spoken like an oracle.
But his greatest miracle he performed today
When your rule, O St. Sulpice, yielded to him. [Author]

⁸*Bulletin Salésien*, June 1931. [Author]

⁹Letter to Father [Augustine] Auffray, Paris, April 14, 1931.

¹⁰At one moment, unable to remember the word *gamin*, urchin or little rascal, he said, "I have to feed a great many little.... What do you call them? Moneux, moneaux?" [*Monello* in Italian.] But the seminarians, thinking he meant sparrow, "moineaux," prompted him, and he accepted their correction. This detail, too, is mentioned in the letter to Father Auffray. [Author]

The impression he made on these seminarians never faded from their memory. It greatly helped strengthen the warm feeling which the French clergy still cherishes for Don Bosco. Among the clerics were such stalwarts as Cardinal [Francis] Bourne, archbishop of Westminster, Archbishop [John Baptist] De Guébriant of Marciapolis and superior of the Missionaries of Rue du Bac, Bishop Gibergues, who died as bishop of Valence, Auxiliary Bishop [Ernest] Neveux of Reims, Bishop [Louis] Termier of Tarentaise, Fathers Vigouroux and Mourret, leading lights of sacred learning, and other prominent priests. Recalling that memorable evening, Cardinal Bourne wrote:

It is one of my most cherished memories, one of my greatest privileges, to have known personally Blessed Don Bosco. I was a student at St. Sulpice in Paris when he visited that city in 1883. I had already heard of the marvelous works he had done and of some of the wondrous occurrences in his life. And I remember well the keen, expectant interest with which the seminarians awaited the coming of one who was already regarded as a saint. He was broken in health, feeble in his movements, speaking in halting and imperfect French. But he made an immense impression upon us all. On that occasion I had no opportunity of speaking to him. In 1885, the year after my ordination to the priesthood, being strongly interested in and attracted to the work of the Salesian Congregation, I paid a short visit to the Oratory in Turin, and there had the great joy of speaking to Don Bosco, and of sitting at his right hand during the meal to which he had invited me. In 1887, at his direct request, I gave what assistance I could to the first members of his congregation whom he sent to Battersea [London] in November of that year. Henceforth I have always remained in intimate and affectionate association with his sons, both in this country and in the many places where I have visited them abroad. He passed to his reward early in 1888, and from that day I have constantly revered and invoked him as a saint.¹¹

The enthusiasm of the seminarians of St. Sulpice spilled over into the junior seminary of St. Nicholas of Chardonnet on Pontoise Street. Three weeks after Don Bosco's visit to St. Sulpice, Father De Barruel, his secretary, received this letter on behalf of the superiors and seminarians: "The very profound impression made upon us when we saw

¹¹From the Preface to the English version of Father Auffray's *Life of Blessed Don Bosco*, London, Burns and Oates, 1930. See also Appendix 8. The rector of St. Sulpice was very disappointed because, despite his best efforts, he was not able to thank Don Bosco again for his second visit. He therefore decided to write him a week later. "Your presence," he wrote, "did us a lot of good." He also enclosed three hundred and twenty francs for his charities. [Author]

and heard Don Bosco at St. Sulpice, far from fading from our minds, will long remain engraved among the loveliest and most heartening memories of our life. Now we are very eager to share our impression with the boys whom God has entrusted to us and in whom He has already sown the seed of a priestly vocation. We feel that Don Bosco's visit and words strengthen and bring to maturity this vocation. Is not a holy man's blessing a special grace from God and a token of His unshaken protection?" Then they asked Father De Barruel to use his gracious influence. A good word was also put in by a zealous cooperator named Mrs. Mollie when she saw Don Bosco on May 16.¹² Willing to make any sacrifice for the young, Don Bosco went gladly, possibly on May 22, after leaving the convent of the Sisters of Sion.

Also the Visitation Nuns of the second Paris foundation on Vaugirard Street were among the first religious communities to assure themselves of Don Bosco's celebration of Mass in their chapel. He did so on the morning of April 24. By seven o'clock the chapel was swarming with distinguished persons who, despite the crowding and fatigue of a long wait, kept a most edifying composure. Don Bosco did not arrive until nine o'clock. As usual, unexpected stops made it impossible for him to keep any schedule. As he entered, leaning on Father De Barruel's arm, and made his way through the assembly of aristocrats, they pushed and shoved to give him room. All eyes focused on his every movement with a sense of reverence and prayer. In the solemn stillness of the chapel, as Don Bosco ascended the altar, one could almost feel the heart-throbs beating in unison with his during the Divine Sacrifice. After the Gospel he faced that wealthy congregation and in simple words made them understand that true riches could be found only in the fear of God. For their edification he narrated a touching incident. The young heir of a wealthy family had gone to Rome with his father to be introduced to Pope Pius IX. In the presence of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, the devout father requested a special blessing for his son Louis, that God might keep him in his parents' love. Looking reflectively at the boy for a moment with a fond, fatherly gaze and lifting his eyes to heaven, he told him, "Always be a good Christian, Louis." The

¹²*L'Univers* of May 4-5 [1883] carried this announcement: "Mrs. Mollie, 44 Saint Placide Street, Paris, has a supply of religious articles about Don Bosco and his works, medals, pictures and novena prayers for Mary, Help of Christians, besides the *Bulletin Salésien* and order forms for Don Bosco's spiritual writing." Copies of the *Bulletin Salésien* were also available at the Sênishlac residence. [Author]

Holy Father then put a hand on the lad's shoulder and added with grave, carefully enunciated diction, "Be rich, Louis ..."

"Most Holy Father, we are not asking for material wealth," the father interrupted. "God has provided us with that."

Unheedingly the Pope repeated and completed what he wanted to say: "Be rich with true wealth, Louis, and always treasure the fear of God." Don Bosco's listeners certainly could not guess who this father-son couple might be, but we can readily identify Count [Louis] Colle and his beloved son Louis, Jr.

With some difficulty the people managed to approach the altar for Communion. After Mass there was a surge to the small sacristy, which soon became jammed. The few who managed to squeeze in knelt at the holy man's feet to implore his blessing. The others wanted to have their chance too, but Father De Barruel asked that they respect Don Bosco's wish to make his thanksgiving prayer. They acceded, but those who had been able to worm their way into the sacristy knelt silently and reverently in a circle about him as he prayed. "Watching Don Bosco in prayer," wrote one newspaper reporting on his Mass at the Visitation Convent,¹³ "is to feel heaven's dew refreshing the heart."

After his thanksgiving the ladies and gentlemen filed past him, grateful for a blessing, a glance, a word from him. Before leaving, since Cardinal Guibert had given him permission to enter the cloister, he surprised the community with a visit. However, he had to use a private entrance, since it would have taken him more than an hour to get through the chapel. He urged the assembled nuns to be loyal to their rule, and then the former mother superior, Sister Mary Kotzka Le Pan de Ligny, well over seventy and very ill, was introduced to him. The nuns were very fond of her and begged Don Bosco to prolong her earthly days. He had to smile at such an ingenuous request, reflected for a moment, and answered, "Certainly it is not your wish, Mother, to stay much longer here on earth. However, you will have to tarry awhile down here. You will depart when your daughters will give you permission to leave."

"Oh, our mother will see all her daughters pass into eternity before her," the nuns answered, "because we shall never give her leave to die."

However, that leave they were forced to give nine years later, when her pains increased to such an extent that for her to live meant to suffer.

¹³*Le Monde*, May 17, 1883. [Author]

Her daughters, unable to bear seeing her in agony any longer, begged the Lord to call her to Himself, and the Lord answered their prayer.¹⁴

Don Bosco then dropped into the girls' boarding school annexed to the convent. On seeing those devout-looking young ladies, we are told by a Visitation Sister, he immediately brightened. He urged them to carry out their Christian duties, beginning his short talk with the words, "My daughters, remember that there is only one God, only one paradise, only one earthly life, only one soul." His secretary hurried his departure because a crowd of people outside, both well and ill, were creating a disturbance and giving the impression that they might crash through the convent gates.

The remembrance of this visit is still vivid at that school, because soon afterward an alumna, who later entered the Visitation novitiate in Turin, Cecilia Roussel, bought a statue of Mary, Help of Christians, had Don Bosco bless it, and then sent it to the convent. Today both sisters and pupils still meet in prayer before it.

One gentleman, who truly merited a visit from Don Bosco and welcomed him the following day, was the viscount of Damas. With Christian courage and holy perseverance he had dedicated his life to the noble mission of reviving France's Christian faith through sacred pilgrimages. On the morning of April 25, at about eight-thirty, he sent his carriage to the convent on Messina Avenue to bring Don Bosco to his residence. Very reverently he stood in the courtyard at the foot of the steps leading to the main door, awaiting his venerated guest. Leaning on the viscount's arm, Don Bosco slowly made his way up the steps to the landing before the main hall, where the entire family was waiting to welcome him. After the usual cordial introductions, he was escorted to the private chapel. The entire household and a few close friends of the family knelt behind him as he prepared to celebrate Mass. *Le Monde* recorded in its issue of June 19: "It's impossible to portray the profound peace, the spiritual concentration of this great, noble family, as the venerable priest, robed in sacred vestments, approached the altar and his blessed voice brought to the hearing of all the prayers which the Church has endlessly offered to God." The Holy Sacrifice was characterized by a most reverential silence, and nearly all received Holy Communion from his hands.

¹⁴This incident is also found in an anonymous booklet entitled: *Summary of the Life and Virtues of the Venerable Mother Kotzka Le Pan de Ligny, Superior of the Second Visitation Convent in Paris*. Published by the Convent. [Author]

After his thanksgiving he was escorted to the hall, where a group of children gave him a gracious welcome. His gentleness immediately won them over. After a few appropriate words he blessed them and then turned his attention to the adults. *Le Monde* continued: "One must have already witnessed other gatherings about Don Bosco to have an idea of the calm, the reverence, and the dignity which prevails. The lovable priest's measured and rich-sounding words, which take on an added charm with his Italian accent, the modesty and wisdom of the thoughts he expresses—everything emits a fragrance of supernatural grandeur which captivates all who hear him." The adults knelt for his blessing and then asked him to join in the family dinner. Afterward, his host, placing himself at Don Bosco's disposal, helped him back to his carriage and remained sitting by him all the time during which Don Bosco called upon people who were ill or in need of his spiritual comfort.

One saintly infirm woman who received his blessing that day was Mother Mary of Jesus, who founded the Little Sisters of the Assumption to nurse the needy sick in their own homes. Women friends of the sisters left no stone unturned to procure this priceless visit to their community. Founded in 1842 in Saint-Servan-sur-Mer, Brittany, the congregation moved to Paris seven years later, and in 1870 its mother-house was set up in Grenelle, a Paris suburb. It was to Grenelle that Don Bosco went, happy to bless a community which devoted itself entirely to the poor. He listened with kind interest to the detailed account of the sisters' work and promised his prayers for the congregation's growth. Ill as she was, the mother general insisted that she wanted to be present at his talk. Father [Stephen] Pernet, the Assumptionist who had given the new congregation its definitive form and was still directing its spirit, also attended and told Don Bosco, "Good Father, pray very particularly for our dear mother general, that the Lord may restore her health and we may have the joy of keeping her with us for the welfare of our whole religious family."

"I will pray for all your intentions," Don Bosco replied with a smile, "and for the good mother I shall ask that she live as long as Methuselah, nine hundred and sixty-nine years...."

"Oh, Father," exclaimed the mother general in alarm.

"Well, let us take away the 'nine hundred,' " Don Bosco added half jestingly, "and then subtract a few more years, and we will have only fifty-nine."

"But Father!" exclaimed the nun in dismay.

"Settle for it, settle for it."

"I will," she answered.

"For myself, I ask you for one thing only, that you pray for Don Bosco to save his soul."

"And to live as long as I shall," she added.

"Oh, if I were to live as long as Methuselah I'd turn the whole world topsy-turvy.... But you, Mother, were you to live as long as that patriarch, how great you would see your family become! Then too in paradise all your daughters, together with the many souls they will have saved, will form a magnificent crown about you. And then, seeing you again in the midst of your family in heaven, I shall ask the Lord to put me and my family at some little distance from you in some heavenly corner, because all my noisy little rascals would only disturb your peace and quiet...."

Preparing to leave, Don Bosco blessed the community, adding, "My good sisters, I shall ask for all of you piety, fervor, and perseverance in the exact observance of your rule." On leaving he did not say farewell, but gave them reason to hope that, on his way back from Lille, his next stop, he would revisit Grenelle and also gladly celebrate Mass for them.

Most of the sisters thought the above brief dialogue was in jest, but not the mother general and several others. Not long afterward, Baroness Reille, in an audience with Don Bosco, asked him if the foundress had any chance of recovery. Taking great pains not to shatter her hopes, he answered, "Yes, but many prayers are needed.... From the 1st of May to the end of June let three Hail Holy Queens, three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys be said every day."

Don Bosco did indeed return to Grenelle on May 20¹⁵ and offered Mass there. He was met by Father Pernet, who accompanied him by coach from the residence of Mrs. Saint-Seine to Saint-Germain Boulevard and thus managed to be alone with him during their half-hour drive. However, noting Don Bosco's utter fatigue, he did not dare engage him in conversation. Still, taking heart, he spoke to him of the nature of the congregation of the Little Sisters of the Assumption, their mission and purpose. Don Bosco listened intently. Finally Father Pernet asked him, "Tell me, Father, what do you think of our congregation? Is it from God?" Don Bosco reflected a moment and then unhesi-

¹⁵In Volume II, p. 555, of his two-volume biography of Don Bosco, Father John Baptist Lemoyne assigns "May 15" as the date, but this is an oversight. Don Bosco returned from Lille on the 16th. On the 19th Sister Emanuela Marie wrote to all her communities: "We expect Don Bosco tomorrow; he will say Mass in our chapel." The details related above are taken from *Mère Marie de Jésus*, Paris, Maison de la Bonne Presse, 1909, pp. 309-316. [Author]

tatingly answered, "Yes, this work is from God. It will accomplish much good in the Church. Go forward." So heartened was Father Pernet that he did not ask any further questions. Although his first intent had been to consult him about several personal concerns, he refrained for fear of overtiring him.

Mass, scheduled for eight o'clock, began at nine. The reverend mother, now bedridden, had herself carried into the chapel to attend Don Bosco's Mass, lying on a stretcher behind the altar, the only place not invaded by the crowd which had overrun the convent by six-thirty. Many sick persons attended, and many received Communion. Unable to extend her eucharistic fast, the reverend mother received Communion from Don Bosco before the Holy Sacrifice. After Mass, Father Pernet asked him to give her a special blessing. Don Bosco joined her in a Hail Mary, a Hail Holy Queen and the closing prayer. He ended by saying to her, "I wish you health and holiness. Yours is the way of the cross and suffering.... Let God's will be yours!"

As regards the audiences, which ran well past midday, the nuns had to yield to their visitors. Among them were two peasant women from the Vendée, who had traveled well over a hundred and fifty miles to see and talk with Don Bosco. On reaching Paris the previous evening, they had gone directly to Father De Barruel, who sent them to Grenelle. Still fasting, they waited there from six in the morning to three in the afternoon, but they emerged from their audience radiant with happiness.

Don Bosco had dinner at midday with Father Rua and the latter's secretaries; in the company were also Father [Francis] Picard [second superior general of the Assumptionists] and Father Le Rebours, parish priest at St. Mary Magdalene Church. There was also one of the cardinal's vicars general, and others. Don Bosco must have been thoroughly exhausted because at one point he quietly fell asleep. Father Picard motioned the others to be silent and not awaken him. After he awoke and finished his meal, Don Bosco went to visit the reverend mother. Father Pernet knelt before him and begged him to obtain her recovery. Don Bosco stayed by her bedside some ten minutes and then said, "You are too useful to your congregation to go to paradise now." Turning to Father Pernet, he continued, "Pray and have others pray until July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. I also will pray and have my Salesians and boys do likewise." He was then escorted to the infirmary to bless the sick nuns. As he took his leave of the convent, he was asked to give the community a final blessing. Sister Emanuela

Marie wrote: "He had a very special look on his face, which seemed to glow with a supernatural light. He told us of the joyful comfort he had received that day and then said a few words about frequent Communion, in which we find light, strength and holiness. He then gave us his blessing. As at his coming in the morning, so at his departure, the problem was to shield him from the crowd which sought to approach him and touch his clothing. Father Picard stayed behind and, noting how impressed the sisters were, told them many incidents about Don Bosco, among them something that had happened that morning. When Don Bosco got to the convent, he did not seem to see at all, but suddenly, eyeing a distinguished looking young man, a total stranger, he beckoned him to approach.

"What are you doing in Paris?" he asked.

"I am attending the law school at the Catholic University," the young man answered.

"Let me see the book you are holding."

It was a missal. Pressing his hand warmly, Don Bosco told him, "Soon you will be one of us." Spotting him again in the apse after Mass, he bade him join him and once more said, "I'll be expecting you soon in Turin." It became known later that he was the son of a member of the Women-Servants of the Poor, an association of ladies who devoted several hours each day to helping the Little Sisters of the Assumption nurse the sick poor in their own homes. His mother had sought and obtained permission to take him with her to Don Bosco's Mass, but never could she have dreamed what would happen. Being a devout woman, however, she raised not the least opposition.

Two other incidents were positively confirmed by the one who was primarily concerned in them. An eighteen-year-old young lady wanted to become a nun, but could not make up her mind which order to join. Trusting that Don Bosco could advise her, she was so insistent with Father [Vincent de Paul] Bailly, her confessor, that he obtained an audience for her on April 25, and she told Don Bosco about her uncertainty. Father Bailly had suggested the Little Sisters of the Assumption to her, but she did not agree, or rather, as she put it, they seemed of little or no import to her. Another choice was the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, but she felt a certain distaste for them, since she had been told that they followed a quasi-military regime, with no family warmth, and that their superiors were hard to approach. After listening to her views, Don Bosco paused for a moment's reflection and

then, without the slightest hesitation, told her, "Join the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul." Some years later the young woman followed his advice and took the name Sister Elizabeth. At this writing [1934] she has been a Daughter of Charity for the past forty-five years.

Heartened by his warm reception, on May 20 she decided to do something for a girl friend of her own age who was a deaf-mute from birth. Could not Don Bosco cure her? She and several other girl friends—among them the deaf-mute—returned to the convent of the Little Sisters of the Assumption on Don Bosco's second visit. Their whole group managed to approach Don Bosco and introduce their friend to him, begging him to obtain hearing and speech for her. He listened kindly to them, reflected a moment, and then suggested the usual novena prayers to Mary, Help of Christians. As the novena was reaching its end, the deaf-mute one day suddenly began to repeat the sounds uttered around her—she could hear! Soon after, with her friends' help, she also began to speak.

When asked what kind of impression Don Bosco made upon her, Sister Elizabeth answered: "One of fatherly goodness. He placed himself at everyone's disposal, always ready to help even though his health was poor and he could barely stand. When asked a question, he would always pause a moment before replying, as though waiting to receive from above the counsel people sought from his own lips."

As noted before, Don Bosco did not want to cause distress to the Little Sisters of the Assumption. However, when a gentleman who was a close friend of the sisters and had been at the convent in Grenelle that day, taking advantage of being alone with him, asked that he pray for the mother's recovery, Don Bosco closed his eyes, shook his head, and honestly replied, "No. This work is of God, and it will stand of itself without her." Mother Mary of Jesus went to heaven on September 18. Born November 7, 1834, she was but a month and a half short of her fifty-ninth birthday.

We now resume our chronological account. On Thursday, April 26, Don Bosco celebrated Mass at the orphanage of the Presentation, founded by Canon Pelgé on Nicholas Street in Passy, a suburb of Paris. The canon personally assisted him at the altar. In the little white and gold chapel a group of three- and four-year-old girls occupied the area nearest the altar, while the older girls behind them raised their angelic voices in song. There were many Communions. Don Bosco gave audience to many and then, on leaving, found the courtyard jammed with

crowds who had gathered to wait for him and ask his blessing for the sick they had brought along.

On the morning of the 27th he said Mass at the retreat house of the Sisters of the Cenacle on La Chaise Street. At seven o'clock the chapel began to fill with people of social rank, who signed the visitor's book on entering. The De Cessac family, for whose intentions the Mass was being offered, took their places in the sanctuary. Once the chapel was full, the rest of the people, unable to be accommodated inside, had to remain in the vast parlor. In all, the congregation numbered some four hundred ladies and gentlemen, among them many sick persons afflicted with a variety of ailments. Don Bosco arrived at eight-thirty and moments later went to the altar. After reading the Gospel, he spoke about his works. Amid utmost devotion and reverence, despite the crush of the crowd, he gave Holy Communion to many persons. The retreat master, realizing he could not preach to such a throng, had thought it best to absent himself. After Mass the Gospel scene of the multitudes crowding in supplication about the Redeemer was reenacted as some tried to touch his garments, others begged his blessing or implored a favor. Many managed to get near him, but so many more could not. Don Bosco seemed to favor the sick and the young, for whom he had a special blessing. Toward midday the priests, who had never left his side, managed to free him from the crowd and brought him to see the nuns, who had assembled to meet him. There he sat a few minutes for some badly needed rest. He said a few kind words, blessed them, and, before leaving, gave each a medal of Mary, Help of Christians. At the threshold he again invoked the blessing of Mary upon the community. The house chronicle notes: "He left toward one o'clock. We were most edified by his humility, his calm and serenity in the midst of the crowd, which always gathers around him and dogs his footsteps. One gets the feeling that he lives in a higher realm, and that we here below are just basking in the radiance of his charity."

That same day he also called on the Ladies of Calvary on De Lourmel Street, where they ran a home for victims of lupus, a disease which hopelessly ulcerates and horribly disfigures the face. These ladies, all widows, formed an open lay association without vows or religious habit, and lived with their own families. They came to the clinic from all quarters of Paris to offer their charitable services to the sick. This visit of Don Bosco was meant to show his appreciation for the virtue of these generous nurses.

On April 28 he celebrated Mass and held a conference at Our Lady of Victories Church, but more of that in the next chapter.

The one church in Paris which more strongly than all the others attracted Don Bosco was the Church of St. Thomas of Villanova. It was here that St. Francis de Sales, as a young student, in fervent prayer before a statue of Our Lady, which is still venerated there, felt himself freed miraculously from the nightmare of a temptation which had driven him to despair of his eternal salvation.¹⁶ We have proof that Don Bosco was drawn there by the thought of our holy patron from the few lines he added to his signature in the Mass register: "Father John Bosco, superior of the Pious Salesian Society, commends all his works to St. Francis de Sales, its patron."

He said Mass there on Sunday, April 29. Long before eight o'clock that morning every seat in the church was taken. He spoke briefly to the people about the value of charity and the scope of his works. As he was leaving, two small boys, who had squeezed into the church by worming their way, crawling on all fours through the people's legs, stood for a minute gazing at him and smiling. At his invitation they each took a hand of his and kept looking at him, chuckling at some word he said as he slowly walked along, fully at ease with the boys' grasp, leaving his hands in theirs. Meanwhile he was listening to the people around him, replying to their questions, while the two little fellows did not budge from his side until their parents came to claim them. The newspapers played up this charming human interest story.

St. Thomas of Villanova Church was a short distance from a convent of sisters who also took their name from this Spanish saint. Don Bosco dropped in for a visit before leaving. The community still recalls two instances of Don Bosco's reading of consciences. Upon being introduced to the novice mistress, he said to her, "Don't ask to be replaced in your office." She had in fact been pondering the question, but had not breathed a word to a living soul. Then, when all the community had gathered around him, he suddenly exclaimed, "But one sister is missing." In fact, one nun was outside, looking after the visitors. She was the one for whom Don Bosco had a message. As soon as he saw

¹⁶Popularly known as the *Vierge Noire* [the Black Virgin] because of its dark hue, the statue's correct title is *Notre Dame de la Bonne Délivrance* [Our Lady of Prompt Succor]. Before this statue, young Francis de Sales had first made a vow of chastity. At the time, however, the statue was venerated in the Church of St. Stephen de Grès on St. James Street in the student quarter. Rescued by some devotees from the ravages of the French Revolution, in 1806 it was entrusted to the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova on Sèvres Street. [Author]

her, he said, "You are undergoing great inner anguish, but do not take it amiss. It is a test willed by God." Hers was a very cheerful and light-hearted disposition, so that no one could have ever guessed the thorns of grief piercing her heart.

When his carriage reached the square, it ran into such a jam of hired hacks and family coaches that it could not get across. A coach took him to the parish church on St. Sulpice Square. It was a church with a history all its own. Dedicated to Our Lady's Assumption, it was commonly called the German church because many housemaids used to attend Sunday Mass there. It all began in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when many young women came from the German-speaking canton of Switzerland to work in that aristocratic quarter of Paris. In that church, too, Pope Pius VII prayed when he went to Paris to crown Napoleon emperor in 1804. And there, too, at the beginning of the same century, after the French Revolution, Bishop [Dennis] Frayssinous first inaugurated a series of conferences defending the basics of the Catholic faith. His lectures generated the idea of expanding the field of religious instruction during Lent by transferring it to Paris' most outstanding pulpit in Notre Dame Cathedral. This elite preaching continues today [1934]. Later on, this historic Church of the Assumption became the seat of another ministry which was flourishing at the time of Don Bosco's visit: adult religious education for young ladies of Parisian society. The lectures were also attended by the senior students of the local seminary.

Don Bosco's visit was scheduled for ten-thirty, but he arrived an hour late. To fill in time, Father Sire, the school's director, read aloud some interesting episodes from D'Espiney's biography, such as that of Grigio the gray dog, the incident about the insane asylum, the beginning and development of Don Bosco's works, and some of the healings credited to him. The readings excited the audience almost to a pitch of frenzy to meet Don Bosco in person.

Along with the young ladies attending the apologetics course were several outsiders who planted themselves in every nook and corner and even overflowed the pulpit steps. The rumble of carriage wheels pulling up to the church door sent an electric shock through the assembly. The hymn they had just started came to an abrupt end. "Saints can be heard from afar," muses a friendly diarist from whom we are drawing this and other information.¹⁷ "Though Don Bosco had not yet ap-

¹⁷A Redemptorist nun from the Landser convent in Alsace, a faithful follower of the lectures, who graciously sent us a copy of this excerpt from her diary (April 29 to May 1). [Author]

peared, one could feel the presence of an extraordinary person.”

The director introduced the class to him, saying how happy they were to welcome him to their church, so often honored by such illustrious persons as Pope Pius VII. Don Bosco made a brief reply, speaking slowly, obviously translating his thoughts into a language not his own, but, states the diary, with a typical Italian accent.¹⁸ That morning his voice carried fairly well. “I am but a simple priest,” he told them. “I am glad to be here at St. Sulpice, where fidelity to the full heritage of Christian faith and piety always reigns, and to know that Pius VII, of such august memory, once also stood here. I recall this gladly because Pius VII was most Salesian at heart. May you always cling to the faith that so animates you and persevere in your fidelity to the Catholic Church. This is my wish not only for you, but for your families and friends as well, that you may become one heart and one soul, as the Lord told us. I especially have at heart that you always hold on to the greatest of all treasures, the one and only to be sought and secured at all costs—the fear of God. Through it we shall enjoy His friendship here on earth and keep enjoying it in eternity. Now, if you have medals, rosaries, crucifixes, or other religious articles, please hold them in your hand. By the Holy Father’s special authorization, I will endow them with an indulgence of three hundred days as I bless them.” He had styled Pius VII “most Salesian” because he was the Pope who had introduced devotion to Mary, Help of Christians, to the Church. He then gave a special blessing to the little ones presented to him by their mothers.

Still under a reverential spell, the crowd did not break up until he left. The diary also describes his physical appearance: “Don Bosco’s hair is still black. He is of medium height. His back is somewhat bent, his face long and lean. He walks very slowly, weakened by the burden of his labors; his sight is also very poor. How good it feels to be in a saint’s presence! After that visit of Don Bosco I felt I had become transformed.”

That noon he was invited to the home of Countess Grocheslska on Prony Street. How anxiously that good lady had awaited that blessing! Back on April 24 she had written to Father De Barruel, “It shall be a red-letter day when we host as eminent a guest as Don Bosco under our roof. We pray that nothing may occur to rob us of this honor. We

¹⁸The noted church historian Father Mourret, who was present, in a letter to Father Augustine Auffray (Paris, May 4, 1931) says that Don Bosco pronounced French somewhat haltingly with a pleasant Italian accent. [Author]

have already ordered the choicest, tenderest cuts of meat there are.”

To this princess we owe the account of an episode which she narrated in Poland and which was recorded for us by trustworthy persons. A French young lady of most eminent nobility was living in deep spiritual distress because, though she felt herself called to religious life, she could not clearly discern it to be God’s will. She decided to seek Don Bosco’s advice. She had been waiting several hours for an interview, when Don Bosco suddenly stepped into the room from his chamber, and before she could even open her mouth, he turned to her, gazed into her eyes, and said, “No, no, you shall not become a nun. You shall marry a Polish nobleman and have many children.” In fact she did marry and had twelve children.

In our next chapter we shall recount Don Bosco’s Mass and evening conference of April 30 in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene. Just now we will consider his May 1 visit to the nuns who were known as Benedictine Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament from the name of their church on Monsieur Street.¹⁹

As soon as word reached the nuns that Don Bosco was in Paris, they became filled with a burning desire to see him, and their longing grew as they kept hearing about him. But how could they get him to visit their convent? They knew no one in Paris to speak for them, but they did know Dr. D’Espiney, who lived in Nice, and so they appealed to him. Twice the doctor wrote to Countess De Combaud, who in turn repeatedly wrote to Don Bosco and also asked a Benedictine father to talk to him. Dr. D’Espiney’s goddaughter, living in Paris, also did her very best to obtain a positive answer. But they got nowhere, because Father De Barruel, determined to spare Don Bosco strain and fatigue, had steeled himself against their request. However on May 1, feeling slightly indisposed, he temporarily had to leave his post in the waiting room, and was substituted for by a volunteer religious of the house of Nazareth who was known to be more obliging. Hearing this, Dr. D’Espiney’s goddaughter seized the opportunity, and luckily so, because the volunteer agreed to bring Don Bosco to the Benedictine convent. He stuck to his promise very faithfully, so that Don Bosco, on meeting the young lady as he was entering the Vincentians’ monastery for his conference, told her, “As soon as I leave this evening I shall first visit a sick woman and then I shall go to see the Benedictine nuns.”

¹⁹From an account compiled by the superior on October 3, 1890. [Author]

Once word got around, the convent came under immediate siege, so that it was only by sheer effort that the nuns could keep their cloister from being overrun. They waited for Don Bosco from four to seven and then, giving up hope, went to their supper, already an hour late. However, just fifteen minutes later, someone came dashing in to announce the long expected arrival. Don Bosco had been detained so long that he had given up all thought of the visit, the more so because Father De Barruel, back on duty, was ready to escort him to dinner at the De Fougerais home on Villars Boulevard. Father De Barruel had ordered the coachman to drive there, but his substitute, who also was accompanying Don Bosco, mindful of his promise, quietly muttered to the driver, "To Monsieur Street, No. 20." The driver obeyed. Thinking he was being taken to Villars Boulevard, Don Bosco was somewhat surprised to see only nuns as the coach drove into the yard.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"At the convent of the Benedictine sisters."

"The Benedictine sisters?" Then, as though nothing was amiss, he added, "I was told about them, and here I am!"

Rather crossly, Father De Barruel told the superior, "He is due at the De Fougerais home at seven. Take us quickly to the community. He will bless them from the doorway and leave at once." At the threshold of the room he urged Don Bosco to bless the nuns from there and leave. However, seeing the entire community waiting for him, Don Bosco smiled at Father De Barruel and answered, "Very well." Then, without further ado, he sat in the armchair they had set for him. As one of the sisters took his hat, he playfully remarked, "Please don't switch it with another."

Then, addressing the nuns, he began telling them that he felt he was with the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, since they wore similar habits. He spoke of devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for some fifteen minutes and then, very impressively and with a meaningful gesture of his hand and index finger, he concluded, "*Your* congregation, *your* community, *this* community of yours will grow and be a delight to the Lord and the angels. This, *this* community *right here!*" As he spoke he pointed to the floor with his index finger, stressing the phrase "*this* community." To grasp his meaning we must know that, a short time before, he had been asked about the future of a branch of the Benedictine Order which had moved to Lourdes. By repeatedly stressing "right here," he let it be known that

he had no answer to give them regarding the other community. The present-day [1934] superior is firmly convinced that this prophecy or promise of his was fulfilled. Today the Paris convent houses well over one hundred nuns and for the past thirty years has been a haven of faith for many lost souls in the heart of the city, and a refuge of piety for so many others who wish to live a life of prayer in the midst of high society. No such good fortune befell the Lourdes religious community.

At the mother superior's request he graciously blessed the sisters who were ill. They thought they saw his face transfigured as he pronounced the blessing upon them and upon the medals they held in readiness. One young sister, who was troubled with painfully swollen and ulcerated legs, prayed trustfully in her heart for healing through Don Bosco's merits, and her trust was not in vain, for, when the bandages were removed, the sores had all disappeared, never to return again, despite the doctor's claim that she would be troubled every winter.

As he was about to leave, a woman dashed into the cloister and flung herself at his feet, babbling endlessly. Don Bosco finally told her, "Take this medal, and you will recover." These were the only words the mother superior overheard, for, seizing the opportunity, she was busily snipping a little piece of his cassock. Then nonchalantly she asked him for a medal, and he gave her three.

He was next introduced to the girls of the sisters' small boarding school, in particular to Gabrielle Noirol, a niece of Dr. D'Espiney. Don Bosco blessed them all, telling them he hoped they would all become so many St. Teresas, but he kept gazing at Gabrielle with a puzzling anxiety. Several women who noticed this had a feeling that the young girl would not live very long. In fact, she died soon afterward.

Another episode had something of the miraculous about it. A young woman was hoping to become a nun, but a lung ailment caused her to fear she would never be granted the favor. The wondrous stories she was hearing about Don Bosco encouraged her to strive to obtain his blessing. One day, while attending his Mass, probably in the Church of St. Sulpice, as she was at the point of losing all hope of receiving Holy Communion from him because of the huge crowd, she suddenly saw him reach out to her beyond three rows of people, with the Sacred Host in his hand. She took this as a sign that the Lord would grant her enough health to become a religious. She did in fact join the Benedictines as an oblate sister since she was not judged strong enough to endure the full austerity of the rule. She was a great help to her com-

munity by accompanying the nuns' Gregorian Chant, and for seven years, until 1890, when she died, she edified her sisters by her fervor and exemplary obedience.²⁰

On leaving the cloister Don Bosco found a pitiful crowd of needy persons waiting for him in the courtyard, seeking his help and begging him to grant health to them or to others. All he could do for them as he walked through their midst was to repeat, "Have faith.... Pray to Mary, Help of Christians." It was almost a reenactment of Peter surrounded by the multitudes as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. One of our source materials concludes with these words: "We cannot close our account of this renowned miracle-worker's stay among us without stating that several persons sought and obtained various spiritual favors from him, such as enlightenment, resolution of doubts and freedom from temptations. Several pious and trustworthy priests witnessed and verified their authenticity."

The morning of May 2 he spent with the Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Conflans. From the very first days of his stay in Paris he had personally made it known that he would gladly offer Mass in one of their three convents in the city. Father De Barruel chose the one located on the Boulevard des Invalides, adjoining their motherhouse, on condition that only the sisters, pupils and a few women devotees of the Sacred Heart would be present and that his visit would not be publicized. Despite all these precautions, however, a veritable flood of people inundated the boulevard along with a considerable number of coaches, so that the chapel was packed. It took Don Bosco forty minutes to give Communion. When asked later if he was too exhausted, he answered, "This house is filled with God; this thought gave me strength." The inspiration had come to him when, fearing there might not be enough hosts for all, he opened the tabernacle and found another full ciborium. After Mass the sisters of all three convents, the novices and the boarding pupils were anxiously waiting to have him speak to them. He went to the nuns first. "Father," the archbishop's secretary, who was escorting him, said, "this is the sisters' residence."

"Well then, there is no need to speak of conversion, but of sanctifi-

²⁰This Benedictine community has traditionally borne a special affection for Don Bosco's sons. If they ever had any business in that part of town, which was quite distant from their own house at Ménilmontant, it was understood that they would be welcome at Monsieur Street. It was there that Huysmans met the altar boys from Ménilmontant, who inspired him to write his well-known sketch of Don Bosco. Present relations between the two communities are still most cordial. [Author]

cation,” he replied. “*C’est ici que l’on achète....* Is that how you say it? he asked the secretary.

“It’s better to say *on acquiert*.”

“Here one acquires true fervor,” he told the sisters. “I mean love of God not merely to keep for oneself, but also to bear it elsewhere and share it with others. Its source is the Most Blessed Sacrament. Spread this devotion which contains all others—the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Be ever mindful of God’s love in the Holy Eucharist.”

After telling them of the encounter of Louis Colle with Pius IX, he said, “You may well be wondering who is speaking to you. I am an ordinary Italian priest who has a family much larger than yours. I need your prayers, because my poor young orphans have three needs of their own: a home, education, and food. Pray also for our missionaries working among the natives at Patagonia. Theirs is an immense territory shrouded in darkness, the darkness of idolatry, and to bring these people back to the truth is one of God’s greatest miracles. To accomplish this will take much prayer, much work and much time. Time is God’s concern, work is the missionaries’, and prayer depends upon all of you. Pray therefore that God may touch their hearts and swell the number of Christians and devotees of Mary. For my part I shall pray and ask others to pray that you may grow in holiness and that we may meet once more in heaven.”

“Father, the sisters have convents of the Sacred Heart also in America, in Chile and elsewhere,” the secretary remarked.

“Fine, excellent! I am so happy to hear that. How about Brazil? They are badly needed there too. A territory twelve times the size of France, Brazil has very few priests. Oh yes, there is a really extreme need.”

Then, after a few moments of silent prayer, he asked all to say the Hail Mary and blessed them and their loved ones. On leaving the room, he met a small retarded girl placed there to receive his blessing. He paused to give her his utmost attention and concern. “Say an Our Father and a Hail Mary every day up to the feast of All Saints,” he told her, “and be obedient.” He then blessed her very slowly and lovingly.

The novices, grouped together in the hall at the doorway, had been able to hear his talk to the sisters. Two novices were introduced to him, one asking prayers for her mother, the other for her father, who, alienated from God, was furious that his daughter should want to become a nun. Don Bosco looked at them tenderly and promised his prayers. He then assured the second novice that her father would mend his ways and

would die a Christian death, as he actually did a few years later. With a fatherly smile he told the first novice that her mother was a good, devout person dedicated to God despite her temporal resentment, and that soon she would come to visit her daughter and would become the sisters' friend until her death. These predictions were likewise fulfilled.

Lastly he met with the school girls assembled in a nearby room. "Don Bosco's whole person emanates holiness," the convent chronicle tells us. "Despite his strong Italian accent and faltering voice weakened by age, we did not miss a single syllable of his talk." He opened by expressing his joy at seeing their large number. "I am always delighted to see the Sacred Heart convent schools everywhere filled to capacity," he said. "Blessed be God for this! It is always very gratifying to see how God chooses so many tender seedlings and one day uses them to do much good in this world." Although he enjoyed talking to them, he said he did not intend to give them a lecture or a sermon, for they got enough of both from their teachers and the monastery priests. But he did want to address them a few words as a souvenir of his visit. He quoted St. Philip Neri, Rome's renowned apostle and friend of youth, as he called him, who used to tell his boys, "Give me a lad who will trust me with just two inches of his head, and I will make a great saint of him." In comment, he said, "I will tell you the same thing, my daughters. Be obedient and I will make great saints of you, because the two inches of head mean obedience. Once you let go of your own will, great things can be done with you. So, I am not telling you to preach a lot or pray a lot or fast, but only to obey your mother superior. I am sure that many of you here have already become more spiritual-minded because of your obedience, and I pray the Lord to give your teachers the joy of seeing many more of you seek holiness in the same way." Before leaving, he gave each girl a medal of Mary, Help of Christians.

He left Conflans at eleven-thirty, besieged to the end by persons who had something to say or ask. When he finally got into his coach, he told the sisters in charge, "How grateful I am for your great patience and kindness."

The chronicle of the sisters' motherhouse describes the impression he left.²¹ "What touched us most is Don Bosco's simplicity. He does not seem aware of the excitement he generates, because he is always serene and does everything unhurriedly, as though he had nothing else

²¹We have also drawn from the novitiate and the boarding school chronicles. [Author]

to do. His appearance is very ordinary; there is nothing about him to spark enthusiasm, if we except his holiness.... Humility flows from his entire person."

On May 4 he said Mass at the hospice of the Good Shepherd on Denfert-Rochereau Street. This was a very much needed home for wayward girls who were looked after by the Ladies of the Good Shepherd. It was run by the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova. Countess De Combaud earnestly besought him to go because, as a good friend of the hospice, she begged him to obtain healing for the superior, Mother Courtel, who had a serious heart condition. Don Bosco, who would gladly have foregone the visit, kept replying to her insistent plea, "Please don't force me to go. Besides, I would not be the bearer of good news." At long last he agreed to go, but only on condition that, since he was to celebrate Mass in a public church, there would be a congregation present to contribute to a collection. The Ladies of the Good Shepherd were invited and took their places directly in front of the altar rail. It was the first Friday of the month, and everyone received Holy Communion. Father Rua was assisting Don Bosco at the altar.

In response to her spiritual daughters' affection for her, the mother superior asked to be carried into the dining room, which was separated from the church by only a partition wall, so she could follow the Mass through the open door. After his thanksgiving, Don Bosco was escorted through the church to the threshold of the dining hall. There he stood and, seeing all the sisters gathered about their superior, said, "*Requiescat in pace*," to which the ailing nun replied with edifying resignation, "*Fiat voluntas tua*." Understanding that much Latin, all burst into sobs.

After a light luncheon, Don Bosco went to visit the boarding girls, who were also in tears since word had reached them of what he had told the sisters. He sat in an armchair on a dais and said, "My daughters, there is nothing to cry about. When the crown in heaven is ready, we must not detain the saints on earth." He then continued, "The Lord loves this house. He is received with devotion in Holy Communion. Your spirit is good. What matters now is that things continue that way." After giving them his blessing, he went into the courtyard. There the ladies' auxiliaries filed past him one by one, receiving from him a medal of Mary, Help of Christians, and giving to Father Rua little bundles of notes.

The sister who just recently told us about this also mentioned an overlooked, yet singular favor which she believed she received that day. She was then fourteen and a boarding student. Her mother wanted to take her out of school, but the girl could not bring herself to leave, and, thinking that Don Bosco's visit might give her an answer, she asked her mother to hold out for one more week. Meanwhile she prayed that God would give her some sign to reveal His will. Don Bosco came, and as he placed the Sacred Host upon her tongue, she noticed that he smiled at her. "It must be the gracious smile he gives everyone," she told herself. Later, in the dining hall, as Don Bosco walked to the dais between two lines of students, he stopped for an instant in front of her and again gave her, and her alone, a meaningful smile. Her schoolmates, a trifle envious, asked her why he had given only her that special smile. She replied that she did not know. However, in that smile she saw the answer she had requested, that she would not leave the convent school. She stayed on and entered the order and is a nun today [1934].

Minutes later, Don Bosco had a strange experience. When he went to his carriage he noticed that it was not the one he had come in. Standing by it were several gentlemen who, very courteously but firmly, bade him enter and then drove him to one of their homes. Here, heaping every possible courtesy upon him, they tried to wring from him some predictions about close-at-hand public events. However, he adamantly kept telling them that he had come to Paris to open a charitable institution, not to dabble in politics. Though they posed as monarchists, probably this was a scam set up by the police who were probing for ulterior motives.

Two extant letters remind us of that visit to the Sisters of St. Thomas of Villanova. The first was written by a woman the day after the visit. She wanted him to come to her house to bless an ailing member of her family. She had already begged him with a note handed to him after his Mass at the retreat center. The second letter is more relevant. A sister wrote to inform him of the death of Mother Courtel and to tell him that a prediction of his in her own regard had come true. Don Bosco had urged her to endure thorns cheerfully. "Which thorns?" she had asked herself at the time, for she was then enjoying utmost peace of mind. However, for the past eight months she had been chafing beneath the weight of a cross which utterly convinced her that Don Bosco's words had come to her by enlightenment from on high.

On May 5 Don Bosco left for Lille, returning to Paris on the 16th. We shall expand on this in Chapter 8. In no way did his two weeks' absence diminish Paris' enthusiasm for him.

His promise to revisit Auteuil was prompted by his own sense of exquisite courtesy. At his first visit on short notice, he had realized that Father Roussel was somehow uncomfortable with having been unable to give him a rousing welcome. He wished now to lift his spirits by personally offering to revisit the orphanage. He returned on May 20, a fine Sunday afternoon. Many friends of the house had come to honor him, some to speak to him. When the audiences were over, he went to the chapel, where the students had assembled, to speak to them briefly. *La France Illustrée* of May 26 reported: "In a rather heavy Italian accent, which in no way marred the charm of his speech, he spoke of reverence for God, ending with the story of Count Colle and his son Louis.²² The youngsters listened with rapt attention. Father Roussel then asked 'the good father' to recite five Our Fathers and Hail Marys with them, which he did with 'evangelical fervor and simplicity,' that they might obtain the precious treasure of divine grace and that God might grant their benefactors and teachers the special help they needed to continue effectively their mission of charity. Outside the chapel, everyone crowded about him, asking for his blessing."

Father Roussel's generosity was obvious as he very gladly handed Don Bosco a thick bundle of letters and a considerable amount of donations which he had received to pass on to him. The boys too—not without a delicate prompting by Father Roussel—got together a tidy sum, as they said, for his coach fare. But his hearty generosity showed itself even more strongly when some of his friends, worrying because so many donations were being diverted from needy French children, asked him whether he also felt the same. "Not in the least," he replied in his public newsletter. "God, who feeds the birds in the sky, will not stop reaching out to our own home, and we would truly be ungrateful if we were to doubt His protection and help." It also happened that an anonymous grandmother, obviously a good and generous lady, though overly sensitive about those donations to Don Bosco, gave vent to her feelings in a letter to Father Roussel, enclosing a hundred franc note for his work. Not knowing her identity, Father Roussel answered her complaint in *La France Illustrée*. "Our heart is at peace," he wrote, "and

²²See pp. 136f. [Editor]

we are convinced that Don Bosco's visit has brought our house an additional blessing." Then, after quoting her anonymous letter, he closed his remarks with a saying of St. Vincent de Paul that the needy should begin helping themselves by giving to others.

Two other letters tell us of his visit to the Matilda Nursing Home on Roul Street in Neuilly.²³ The first, written by a certain Madame Giraldon, tells Don Bosco, "Yesterday, at the nursing home, I was honored to see the special attention you briefly gave my son. You blessed him for me, and you actually stopped and placed your hands upon his head. Oh, may your blessing follow him through life and shield him from all harm." The second letter, written by one of the patients, Mary Eugenia Lair, is even more touching. "I know that your time is entirely dedicated to God and to souls, and so I will be discreet and tell you the purpose of this letter in a few words. For thirty years I have lived in this home for incurable young women, which you so kindly visited last Monday to offer Holy Mass for us and speak to us. To all of us, weak and sickly, your visit brought much joy. We have already thanked God and our beloved heavenly Mother of Sorrows, and we now thank you, dear Father."

Three other noteworthy events—a partial cure, a conscience-reading and a kindly refusal—have come to our attention from accounts sent us by five good women who were former residents at that home and had recovered.

After his Mass in the overcrowded chapel, Don Bosco walked through to a ward of the more seriously ill patients who, totally unable to move, were lined up on lounge chairs. One, Bertha Marnot by name, whose condition was very serious, was suffering from stomach ulcers which caused repeated vomitings and, with other factors, did not allow the poor woman to receive Communion. As Don Bosco passed by, he spoke a few comforting words and promised to pray especially for her. From that moment on the vomitings ceased, never to return. True, she remained bedridden, paralyzed from the waist down, but she could at least enjoy some rest and receive Holy Communion quite often.

When Don Bosco passed through the main ward, one of the patients was missing. She had left deliberately and with good reason. Orphaned

²³The home was founded in 1853 by Father Moret, a saintly priest of the Paris diocese. A shelter for poor women afflicted with incurable diseases, the home was named after Princess Matilda Napoleon, who had saved it from bankruptcy. Charitable married women and spinsters were now supporting it. [Author]

of both parents, she had no name, and so the mother superior had called her Joan Rayon. With one leg amputated, she got around on crutches, but that did not deter her from leading an immoral life by frequenting bad company on her days of leave. It so happened that Don Bosco, while walking down the stairs leading from the inner courtyard to the street below, came face to face with her. He stopped abruptly and, looking intently at her, said point-blank, "You are really sick, very sick, very sick!" It seems that this unfortunate young woman turned a deaf ear to the call of grace then knocking at the door of her heart. After leaving the home, she died a pitiful death in a hospital.

A fourteen-year-old girl, Louissette Philippe, a paraplegic, made a heroic effort to stand as Don Bosco passed by, crying, "If only you would cure me!"

"No, my child, no. It is best for you to be here. The Lord wants you to stay here, where you are well cared for."

A Sister of the Most Holy Redeemer who frequently used to go to the nursing home, and who told us of this incident, was asked why Don Bosco refused to heal that girl. "We all thought he did not wish to perform a healing," she replied, "because that girl was very attractive and thus might run great risks living in the world. That's what we said to each other."

On the occasion of Don Bosco's visit several young girls who were ill had been prepared for their First Holy Communion. After the Mass, each received from the volunteer ladies a picture of Don Bosco which shows him kneeling at the feet of Mary, Help of Christians. Among them were the five ladies who later passed on this information to us.

That same evening he made a visit which aroused a whole neighborhood. In Sèvres Street there was a small bookstore owned by a certain [Adolph] Josse, a long-standing acquaintance of Don Bosco, whom he had met in Cannes. The June 5 issue of *L'Univers* reports several graces, in particular a recovery from illness, which had kindled in both Mr. Josse and his wife a flame of lasting gratitude to Don Bosco. Mrs. Josse had sponsored a collection at St. Sulpice, which we shall speak of later.

Don Bosco, unable at the time to thank heartily the generous workers who had gathered funds for him, now called on Mrs. Josse to express his gratitude to her and to the kind-hearted helpers. The visit, scheduled for two o'clock, was to be a family affair. However, by mid-day, as word of the visit spread, the bookstore was besieged, so that

only by sheer force could the shop door be bolted. The street became so jammed that no one could move about. The people overflowed into the yard, into every open area, the staircases and every accessible niche and corner. The clock struck three and then four and five, but still there was no sign of Don Bosco. Yet the crowd would not disperse. Workers on their way home also joined them, further swelling the mass of people.

It was after six when Don Bosco's coach rumbled into view, trying to inch its way through the impasse. As it entered the yard Don Bosco was asked to say a few words to the mass of people and give them his blessing, if he wished them to scatter quietly. From the coach step he briefly addressed the five or six hundred people who had crammed into the yard. They listened in rapt silence and with sentiments of devotion, the men standing with heads uncovered. When he raised his hand in blessing, both men and women knelt and repeatedly signed themselves. *L'Univers* commented: "We all know how deep an impression is made by such a demonstration of devotion on the part of an entire populace in the presence of frail, modest representatives of God's power and mercy. Those who witnessed Don Bosco's blessing to the crowd massed in the courtyard of Sèvres Street, No. 31, will never forget the scene. That entire throng—some in working clothes, others in costly apparel, men, children, and society ladies—all formed a huge crowd of Christians expressing their faith in God and their awe and veneration for holiness."

As Don Bosco was entering the house, a family friend, Mrs. Bonté, quickly pushed her way to the front and asked him to bless the two children who were with her and the others who were away in boarding schools. Don Bosco assured her that he was blessing all of them, along with their father. Then, placing his hand on the head of the younger boy, he said, "This one is for the Lord." Eager to see some of her sons priests, the woman understood Don Bosco to mean just that, and so answered, "Even all of them, Father, if it is God's will." But Don Bosco, looking at her with such tenderness that fifty years later she could still visualize his gaze, replied, "No, one is enough." A few months later the little boy, so full of fun and life, was involved in an accident and died after lingering but a week. Then she understood Don Bosco's puzzling remark and his look of compassion.

The general blessing Don Bosco had given the crowd before entering the house did not really disperse it, for the people merely clustered

outside and waited for him. In the house, since he had no time to speak to everyone, he listened with utter calm to everything they vied with each other to say to him. Finally, he gave a single response to all, assuring them that he took all their intentions with him, and urging them to join him in their hearts as he prayed to Mary, Help of Christians. He blessed them and then, returning to his coach, found that the crowd had in no way diminished. No sooner did they catch sight of him than they lunged forward, some snatching at his hands to kiss them, others holding out religious articles for his blessing. The only way he could free himself from the crowd and drive away was for a tall, brawny and staunch gentleman to clear a path before him, as two other volunteers protected him on either side and a fourth bodyguard took up the rear. He entered the coach, but the vehicle could hardly move without incurring the danger of running over someone in the crowd. For safety, some workmen walked alongside it, gently pushing it forward.

They moved a few steps and then a hundred voices took up the cry, "Don Bosco, your holy blessing!" Don Bosco requested that the coach be stopped and, moved to tears himself, stood up, saying, "Yes, yes, I bless you, and I bless France!" His words were hailed by an outburst of applause and the waving of hands and handkerchiefs, with caps and hats sailing through the air, and thus the crowd broke up.

We have fairly ample details of four visits Don Bosco made on May 22. The first was to a convent quaintly known as "The Birds' Convent," located at the corner of Sèvres St. and Boulevard des Invalides. Both the convent and the girls' boarding school were run by the Canonesses Regular of Notre Dame, a congregation founded by St. Peter Fourier [in 1597]. Word of his visit had reached the convent the night before, causing great excitement among both nuns and pupils, all eager to see a saint. We can readily understand how such an event could not be kept secret, and so, when the enormous crowd milling about the gate tried to force its way deeper into the courtyard behind his coach, it was almost impossible to bar the gate. Declining graciously a suggestion that he rest in the parlor, Don Bosco went straight to the sacristy, escorted by the mother superior, whom he asked for the intentions she wished him to present to God during the Mass.

The section of the church open to the public was jammed, and a long line of private carriages cluttered a long stretch of the street. The Jesuit provincial, Father [Gideon] Labrosse, was also present. Many received Holy Communion. After Mass, Don Bosco moved closer to the boarding

students and, in a fatherly way, urged them to live in a holy fear of God by avoiding whatever might displease Him. Especially, he said, they were to love Him. "Love God when you pray," he told them, "when you find yourselves in difficult situations and when you receive the sacraments." After sipping a cup of coffee, he next spoke to a hundred or so assembled day pupils. "There are only two routes that you should know," he told the girls, "the way to school and the way back home."

So many important persons kept tagging after him wherever he went that the mother superior, who had wanted to discuss some confidential matters with him, could not find a favorable moment. One girl, who was limping, got up enough courage to ask Don Bosco to straighten her foot deformed since infancy, but he only urged her to love God above all things. He blessed the entire house except the infirmary, because it was too late for him to go upstairs. On his way out he told the superior, "I bless your patients." The good sister mentioned an intention very dear to her heart. As he was stepping into his carriage, he assured her of his prayers for all her intentions, but he did so in such a touching and heartwarming way that he left her radiant with joy.

The house chronicle records: "His exceptional kindness and simplicity, truly indicative of his holiness, impressed us very profoundly. He seemed unconcerned about the most enthusiastic signs of veneration shown him." A former pupil still recalls that all the boarders assembled in the reception room and, after assisting at Mass, listened to a brief exhortation. Then, full of admiration for his holiness, all strove to get near him to ask him to bless their religious articles.²⁴ Another alumna still cannot forget the heavenly expression with which he said the words "the good God." "As for the rest," she adds, "his whole person was a sermon in its transparent simplicity and humility. I was then very young, and yet that impression of holiness has not worn off."²⁵

From the Canonesses Regular of Notre Dame he went to the Stanislaus Institute, a boarding school run by the Marianists. The whole staff welcomed him. It was a quasi-military academy, and he was greeted by the presentation of arms from one section of students, who stood about him as an honor guard. Yet it was a school of sound religious education. In its chapel, Father [John Baptist Henry] Lacordaire had initiated his famous series of Lenten sermons that shortly afterward earned him the pulpit of Notre Dame Cathedral, a pulpit which enhanced the

²⁴Letter to Father Auffray, Turin, July 29, 1932. [Author]

²⁵Letter to Father Auffray, Paris, January 29, 1934. [Author]

level of Lenten instructions during which first-rate preachers have continued to develop [1934] some of the most complex and lofty themes of Catholic doctrine in masterly fashion. Don Bosco gave the young men a talk suited to their cultural level, neatly blending religion with patriotism. After blessing them, he expressed his admiration for their behavior and for the order and discipline and renown of their splendid school. When he finished speaking, two cadets offered him a purse to which all the students had contributed to aid his works.²⁶

His next stop was at a boarding school run by the Congregation of Notre Dame de Sion, founded by the noted Jewish convert, Alphonse Ratisbonne. However, we have no details of that visit.

His fourth visit that day we may well style an historical moment. In 1883 the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, for whose spread he had worked hard both in Turin and in other Italian cities, was celebrating its golden jubilee. Regardless of whether the central committee's members, headquartered in Paris, knew of Don Bosco's zealous activity, they made it known that they would welcome a visit from him. Having been so informed, Don Bosco called on the committee at a regular meeting on the evening of May 22. He was received with due honor and, at the chairman's invitation, gave them a brief talk. As a veteran member of the Society, he stressed the benefits accruing to all charitable institutions from the cooperation between the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the parish clergy. He then went on to speak of his own work, which had begun from nothing and progressed so well. The reason he came to Paris, he said, was to open the way for setting up a hospice there for homeless boys. Lastly, he spoke about his system of education, which aims at winning the hearts of the young and, through their love for their educators, to ensure their good behavior and performance of duty. The committee warmly thanked him and asked him to accept their offering of one thousand francs. Don Bosco thanked them in turn and then, using the personal faculty granted him by the Holy Father, gave them a papal blessing, which he extended to fellow members, to their families, and to their projects. The meeting was adjourned in his honor,

²⁶The school record reads: "Friday, May 25. We were honored by a visit from Don Bosco, founder of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. This dedicated friend of youth urged the cadets to put lively faith and unlimited trust in the Blessed Virgin. Upon leaving, the holy impression he had made remained with the cadets, who presented him with a contribution to his works." [Author]

and he was conducted to the office of the Society's president to receive those members who wished to speak to him privately.²⁷

As the time for his departure [from Paris] drew near, Don Bosco realized that he still had to fulfill an obligation which he had taken upon himself a month before. Our readers will recall that he had then been given a costly ring which he intended to raffle off.²⁸ The drawing took place on the evening of May 23 at the residence of Monsieur Faucher, Countess De Combaud's brother. The elite of the aristocracy and of Paris' high society ladies were present. The Faucher family and Countess De Combaud hosted the party. Don Bosco made his appearance—modest and calm as always—and was greeted by the distinguished gathering with noblesse oblige. He was invited to draw the winning ticket himself. Luck favored a wealthy Spanish lady who had purchased two hundred tickets, and she graciously gave the ring back to Don Bosco. Before taking leave of the illustrious guests, he told them that although he would soon be returning to Turin, where the needs of his works were urgently calling for his presence, he would leave his heart in France's grand capital, where he had witnessed so many signs of faith, Christian piety and willing sacrifice. After a gracious word of thanks and his blessing, he slowly began to move to the door, hemmed in by the guests who milled about him and conversed with him with the greatest ease. This meeting offered him a most timely occasion of taking a gentlemanly leave from that French nobility which had lavished admiration and contributions upon him.

One invitation Don Bosco could not decline came to him from Versailles through Count De Masin, offspring of the Piedmontese Masino family. The Eudist Fathers invited him to their boarding school on May 24, the feast of Corpus Christi, to give First Holy Communion. Unfortunately he missed his train and could not arrive in time for that Mass; instead, as is the French custom, he said the "Thanksgiving" Mass.²⁹ The city's leading citizens assembled, eager to meet him. Head and shoulders over them stood the revered figure of the renowned Christian apologist, August Nicolas, who edified all by kneeling before Don Bosco. The mere mention of Don Bosco's coming had, of course, sufficed to bring a deluge of letters from Versailles to Paris from people who begged him to come and bless their infirm. Count De Nicolay, for instance, after recounting the ills afflicting his loved ones, begged

²⁷*Bulletin Salésien*, May 1933. [Author]

²⁸See p. 101 [Editor]

²⁹Letter of Mrs. Levasseur to Don Bosco, Lisieux, June 8, 1883. [Author]

for his kind intervention. In speaking of himself, however, he wrote in saintly fashion: "I commend myself to your special prayers; mine is a dire need for God to grant me His grace and enlightenment that I may lead the little flock He has entrusted to me along the way of salvation, and that He help me progress in self-detachment and in love for Him and for my neighbor." Countess De La Rédoière expressed the wish that on his return to Paris he might stop halfway at St. Cloud to bless her sick daughter, but Don Bosco's reply was that he regretted he could not satisfy her desire. The widow Levasseur, who had come purposely from Lisieux to attend his Mass, gave him an offering of a thousand francs and begged him for the healing of an eye ailment; his response gave her hope.

Through friends, the De Masin family managed to get Don Bosco to accept a luncheon invitation at their home. Bishop [Peter Anthony Paul] Goux was also present. During the meal, freely and with utter simplicity, Don Bosco fielded all their questions. He was asked, for instance, how much truth was in the story of his famous dog Grigio. With easy composure he told them the facts, attributing all to the goodness of Mary, Help of Christians. Asked to bless a little girl who had been paralyzed for some years by a spinal ailment, he did so, recommending a novena to Mary, Help of Christians. Some time later the child was able to walk; however, the following year she died of the croup. In no way did her death lessen the reverence her family had for the "saint," as they called him. "His blessing," they claimed, "served to open the gates of paradise for her."

Leaving the table, Don Bosco went into a salon to receive the visitors who were crowding the front entrance. An endless line of people, sick and well, some from Versailles, others from elsewhere, filed past him.

A family who was friendly with both Don Bosco and the Augustinian Hospital Sisters of Versailles arranged for him to visit their convent of St. Martin. He was given a most hearty welcome not only by the sisters and their lady boarders and patients, but also by a vast assembly of townsfolk who jammed the entire cloister area from its main entrance to the church door; among them were also the sick who eagerly sought his blessing. Wending his way along a path opened for him with strenuous effort, he entered the church, stepped up to the altar and, standing on the altar platform, spoke. "Even though time is lacking," he said, "I would like to say a few words. I am happy that I can speak to good Christians today, the feast of Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist and also

the feast of Mary, Help of Christians and Queen of Heaven: Mary, the help of parents, of children and of friends; Mary, the help of the indicted, of the afflicted, of heretics, schismatics and poor sinners—in a word, the help of all, because this good Mother wants all to be saved. But if we are to be dear to Her, we must honor Her Son, and I shall tell you some ways to do that. To be beloved of Her, one must frequent the sacraments, receive Holy Communion as often as possible and, when not possible, make spiritual Communions. One must attend Mass, visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, assist at Benediction, and perform deeds of mercy in honor of Our Lord Jesus Christ, because the Lord is pleased by the practice of charity.

“I shall not forget to pray for you, and you, on your part, please pray for this poor priest, for my missionaries, my orphans, and all my undertakings. I shall ask God to bless this house so generous in works of mercy. I shall pray for the sisters and residents that they may all be good Christians. I shall pray to Mary, Help of Christians, for all of you, because this good Mother of ours is always pleased to intercede for us. I hope that She will obtain for us the grace of meeting Her in heaven. Through the Holy Father’s special favor I am allowed to grant a very generous blessing to all present. It is a blessing not just for you, but also for your relatives, for your friends, and for your sick, because there are many who suffer. It extends also to all the religious articles on your persons.”

Then, crossing his arms upon his chest and lowering his gaze, Don Bosco pronounced a long blessing which closed with a broad sign of the cross.

A thrill of overwhelming emotion ran through the entire audience, moved not only by the charming simplicity of his words, but also by the aura of holiness which emanated from his very person. When he tried to leave, he had to push his way through the crowd. While some asked for special prayers, others begged his blessing or pressed alms into his hands, and all tried to kiss his hand or his clothing. It was a scene of spirited enthusiasm which one eyewitness termed indescribable. At long last he managed to get into his coach, leaving the people with the impression that they had met and listened to a saint.³⁰

³⁰J. Riché, *Les Augustines Hospitalières de Versailles*. Versailles, Cloteaux Press, 1932, pp. 118ff. [Author]

We know that one of the women patients immediately began to feel better, so much so that she was able to rise from bed, eat her food and sleep—something she had not been able to do for eight months.

Missing his train brought about a more serious inconvenience than before, but a visit from Don Bosco was worth any annoyance. Not far from Versailles is the distinguished military academy of Saint-Cyr, a training center for officers of the armed forces. The students, for the most part sons of aristocratic families, had heard so much about Don Bosco from their relatives that they wanted to see him at any cost. Through the intervention of an influential person, they asked if he would deign to pay them a visit, but he excused himself, saying it was impossible. However, when a delegation of the students came to him and most cordially insisted with him, he agreed. He set the appointment for May 24 at nine in the morning. He would have just made it, had he not again missed his train. And so, that morning a thousand young men were impatiently awaiting his arrival, but the time flew by and Don Bosco did not appear. It was twelve noon and still no Don Bosco. “He promised,” they kept telling each other, “and he will come,” and they did not tire of waiting. At long last, at two o’clock, he arrived. His audiences and visits, as well as the train schedule, had made an earlier arrival impossible. Welcomed with thunderous applause, he strode into the midst of the cadet ranks with a broad smile; then, being asked, he addressed them a few words with the same ease as he would speak to his Oratory boys. As he graciously was bidding them good-bye and was beginning to leave, they all called out with one voice for his blessing.³¹

That year, 1883, since May 24 fell within the octave of Pentecost, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians had to be postponed. The *Semaine religieuse* of Nice, in its issue of May 24, published a poem on Don Bosco and his works which opened with this sketch of Don Bosco: “Goodness, simplicity, unalterable gentleness, you flash from his brow like a ray from heaven and, wondrously reflecting his holiness, you light the way before him. He comes to us from God. His are not features to dazzle the eye, but he draws us all to himself by his

³¹Education at the academy was then influenced by religion. For this reason the school’s elderly revered chaplain, Monsignor Lanusse, won the army’s esteem. By 1896 he had educated with utmost zeal twenty-five generations of military officers (*Corriere d’Italia*, October 13-14, 1896). Most of the students came from the Jesuit prep school of St. Geneviève, which we shall speak of soon. The S  nislhac house chronicle concludes with this last line: “Thursday, May 24. This evening at eight o’clock we all went to visit Don Bosco.” [Author]

shining candor and those angel-like virtues which bear us up to heaven. In his presence we breathe an air of calm and peace because he has a heart of such goodness that it enthralls while it comforts, and the relieved soul accepts with lively eagerness his gentle teachings. Simple is his speech, for he well knows that the word touches the heart only when it is blessed by God. His brow shines with the heavenly aura of humility, embellished by love.”

Also on May 24 he received a letter from a Parisian lady whose many merits deserve to be better known. He was asked to pay a visit to Montmartre. Regardless of the writer’s reasons for the invitation, the promoters of the idea saw the visit as, essentially, publicity. For our non-French readers a little historical background is in order.

The hill overlooking Paris from the north, sacred in ancient times to Mars and Mercury, changed both name and patrons when France’s protomartyrs, headed by St. Denis, the first bishop of Paris, sanctified it with their blood, so that *Mons Martis* or *Mons Mercurii* became *Mons Martyrum*. In the course of centuries that spot became the showplace of so many and such important religious and national events that it came to be considered the heart of France and to be hailed by the Parisians as the cradle of their faith. After the disasters of 1870,³² Catholics felt that they had to appease the divine wrath in a grand act of expiation and penance by solemnly consecrating the entire nation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The idea spread rapidly, and took concrete form in a plan to erect a sumptuous temple to the Sacred Heart. And what finer spot than Montmartre, which throbbed with the most sacred memories of historic France? The idea thus concretized won over also the National Assembly, which formally passed the law of July 23, 1873, sanctioning the erection of a shrine to the Sacred Heart of Jesus as a work of public merit.³³

Preparatory plans were promptly drawn up to suit the grandeur of the undertaking, but it was not until June 16, 1875, that the first stone was laid. The foundations alone took five years. The basilica was roofed in on August 3, 1914, and consecrated on October 19, 1919.

However the enemy of good was not asleep. While the huge walls

³²Sedan, a manufacturing city in northeast France, was the scene of the famous battle of the Franco-Prussian War which resulted in French defeat and the surrender of Napoleon III with 100,000 men on September 2, 1870. [Editor]

³³On June 29, 1873, sixty deputies had consecrated France to the Sacred Heart of Jesus at Paray-le Monial. [Author]

were being erected and the piety of the French was being focused on that powerful center of Christian life and then spread out to every quarter of the nation, the anticlericals, who had gained power after the debacle of [Patrick Maurice de] MacMahon,³⁴ started to become alarmed because they saw the monument as a bold challenge issued by the monarchists. The struggle continued to rage, now hushed, now shrill, until the outbreak of World War I, when national security silenced all senseless enmities. Since 1883 was the year when the radical parties were striving to double their forces to steer legislation toward national secularization, Montmartre gave them second thoughts.

With this in mind, we can better appreciate the documentary value of the letter, which read:

“From the very first day of your stay in Paris my husband and I, having heard of you and your works and your love for youth, have had but one desire—to meet you and to receive your holy blessing. Moved by the conviction that yours is a holy life and the aim of your mission is noble, I have willingly contributed to every collection that was made for you in the churches, and not only have I assisted at all your Masses, but have also been able to receive Holy Communion from your hands on three occasions. The last time I saw you was in the house of the countess of Gontant-Biron, and I got to speak to you in the salon and to request membership for my husband and me in the Salesian co-operators. However, after my last Holy Communion, I have been so obsessed with an idea that I cannot keep from telling you of it. Strange as it may seem to you, I am convinced, Father, that you, being filled with the spirit of God and reading into the conscience, will forgive my writing to you. As you well know, we are never to reject an inspiration based on principles of faith and divine love. Everybody has asked you—I know they have—to go to the Sacred Heart Basilica at Montmartre, but you have always refused because you said (and last Saturday Father De Barruel told me) you did not want to give an impression of a rally, which would more likely harm than help the erection of a monument that the present government has manifestly opposed. I would not know how much a soul like yours would be influenced by politics or human respect, but, dear Father, I am sure of one thing: that it is your duty to go to Montmartre tomorrow, not to draw people—for crowds already overwhelm you—but to go as a simple priest, secretly. You must go

³⁴Marshal of France and second president of the Third Republic. [Editor]

there to render thanks to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, who has granted you so many favors, and to bring your offering, be it no more than a stone for the church, in recognition of all that Paris has so enthusiastically lavished upon you. In the name of all the Catholic committees and of all fervent souls whom I am privileged to speak for, we come to beg you to go up to Montmartre and beseech and thank the Sacred Heart of Jesus, praying also for all of us. The sacred blessing which you will impart to France from the roof of the crypt of St. Denis, martyr, will, we are sure, benefit the city and restore to France those sentiments of faith, honor and love which it seemingly has now cast into oblivion."

Had Don Bosco ever intended to make that visit, prudence would probably have advised otherwise once he read that letter. Luckily, his departure was at hand, and time was no longer his own to allot. He had a good excuse.

Requests for many other visits came from the Paris area and elsewhere; we shall look at a few. The French capital was the permanent residence of Naples' ex-king Francis II; in fact he lived not far from Ville l'Évêque. He knew and esteemed Don Bosco,³⁵ and it was to be expected that Don Bosco would visit him. However, when he did not, the ex-king complained to Madame Champeau. She it was who took it upon herself to let Don Bosco know of the ex-king's desire and disappointment, and she probably did what she could, but we have no knowledge of the outcome. The fact is that the visit never took place.

Bishop Francis Grolleau of Évreux, letting Don Bosco know through Count [Eugene] De Maistre of his diocese that he urgently wanted to see him, begged that he come for a visit not only in the name of his love for Jesus Christ, but also for the faith and reverence which he professed for the shepherds of the Church. The count of Waziers, expressing his homage to Don Bosco, wrote to tell him how happy he would make his family by a visit and listed several reasons to induce him to come. Mr. Maujouan du Gasset wished to have him at Nantes, "one of the most Catholic cities of Brittany and of France," where lived many friends of his works. The rector of St. James in Douai put his entire church and rectory at his disposal. A Russian lady wrote an interesting letter from San Remo, where she had met Don Bosco, to invite him to come to Pau. The Daughters of the Holy Cross wrote three times [from

³⁵Cf. Volume VIII, pp. 283ff. Our information is taken from the diary of Miss Bethford. [Author]

Paris] begging him to come and comfort their sick superior and to counsel them in spiritual needs. The countess of Medu asked Father De Barruel for a visit by Don Bosco to the school of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart on Picpus Street. All these and other requests could not be met for lack of time.

Also other requests for visits came to him from religious communities and families; just which, if any, he accepted we do not know. Like the preceding requests, their value lies in the sentiments they express that always help us to appreciate the esteem in which Don Bosco was everywhere held. For example, the Sisters of Mary, the Rescuer, on Calais Street, wrote on April 23 that they would love to have Don Bosco come and offer Mass for them, after which a collection would be taken up for his works. The mother superior of the Servites of Mary on Douguay-Touin Street begged him on April 24 to come and bless her community. On the same day, the superioress of the Abbaye aux Bois [the Abbey by the Woods] on Sèvres Street, in an effort to get him to say a Mass at her girls' boarding school, wrote to tell him of their devotion to the Madonna of Help, whom they identified with Mary, Help of Christians. The nuns of St. Clotilde Convent on Neuilly Street reminded him that on May 5 he was expected there for his last meal before leaving for Turin, adding that they were preparing themselves spiritually for such a grace. Finally the duchess of Reggio entreated him to visit and bless a few infirm.

Many others, not expecting that much, were content with the assurance that he would pray for the intentions they had confided to him. "You can heal my son," one mother wrote. "Mary, Help of Christians, will not refuse you anything." Another woman, having Don Bosco's promise of prayers for her intentions, questioned if she had the right to use his intercession to seek favors of God, adding, "I would not like to take advantage of your prayers without your permission, but through your prayer I hope to be heard." One lady, heartened at the thought that her sister, Paula Dewarin Lorthiois, had received through Don Bosco's intercession a favor she had unrelentingly sought for four years, asked him to obtain the same for her—the grace of being able to have children. Bishop Richard de la Vergne, coadjutor and future successor of the archbishop of Paris, warmly begged him to say a Mass for the infirm father of a family in Nantes, and then, later, the Mass having been offered, he sent a stipend of a hundred francs; in both letters he earnestly commended himself to Don Bosco's prayers. A gentleman from Chizeray, ac-

knowledging that Don Bosco was being flooded with requests for prayers, added a request of his own for himself and his family, affirming the trust they had in "the holy priest's intercession with God."

How much confidence people placed in the power of Don Bosco's prayers! A young lady, after repeated failures, managed to get near to him as he was leaving St. Sulpice Church, and, resting her hand on his arm, she recommended to him the career of her brother, a cadet at the military academy of Saint-Cyr, who was due for a very important examination. She had pleaded for Don Bosco's prayers, but, later, mother and daughter kept asking each other, "Did he hear our request? If so, all is well, but supposing he did not?" For her greater security, the mother wrote to him at Turin, anxious and very trusting.

A fierce pre-election struggle was raging in France in the first half of May, and the radical parties were gaining strength. In Paris' sixteenth ward a certain Mr. Calla was being opposed by a ruthless anticlerical candidate. The votes were to be counted a second time on May 20. Writing to Don Bosco in deeply Christian terms, Mrs. Calla recommended the successful issue of the election to Don Bosco. Her husband won the victory, and Don Bosco read of the event in the papers soon after his arrival in Turin. In covering the news, *Unità Cattolica* reported also the opinion of good people who thought that Don Bosco should be given a vote of thanks for the results, since victory would have been impossible without the intervention of Mary, Help of Christians, in response to his prayers.

We will devote the last section of this chapter to more of Don Bosco's visits of which we have no details, and to others of which we have some particulars, though we cannot ascertain their dates.

Of his visit to the church of St. Ignatius on Madrid Street and to the parish of St. Margaret, where an image of Mary, Help of Christians, was venerated, all we can say is that he went there. On May 18 he visited the Gautier family on University Street; we know only that his hostess handed him a note as he entered the house, reading: "From the depths of our hearts we thank you for coming to our home, and we ask you, as a special token of this visit, to obtain for us the grace of knowing God's will in regard to our dear son's marriage and of abiding by it." On Jacob Street there was a teachers' college founded by a Miss Désir; its scope was the training of Christian teachers for daughters of noble families. Begged by the faculty to visit the college and impart his blessing, he went soon after May 20. On the morning of May 25 he cel-

ebred Mass in St. Thomas Aquinas Church, as we learn from a mother whose letter radiates the exquisite consolation she experienced from his "boundless kindness" in being received by him in the sacristy after Mass that Friday. "I have a very sick daughter," she wrote, "and I have such trust in your prayers that I have gone to all possible lengths to get to you, but in vain. I beg you on bended knee to give me that assurance for the morning after tomorrow, and I shall be indebted to you forever."

We do not have the exact date of his visit to the large and renowned St. Geneviève Junior College on Lhomond Street. It was run and staffed by Jesuit teachers to prepare young men especially for military careers. After their expulsion from France, the Jesuits had entrusted their school to diocesan priests, one of whom was the chaplain, Monsignor Odelin. Prime Minister Jules Ferry, however, had authorized two other well-known Jesuit teachers, Fathers [Eugene] Cosson and Joubert, to remain, lest the school lose most of its student body.

Monsignor Odelin, the chaplain, was present at the reception and believes it took place in May.³⁶ Don Bosco found the students assembled in the main hall. Since he was speaking to young men of affluent families, he told them of the satisfaction derived from involving oneself in caring for the destitute, and he urged them to be always faithful to the responsibilities laid upon them by their social standing, while remaining loyal to the faith of their parents and teachers. As he was about to take his leave, the son of a general of the empire, whose speech defect threatened his career, threw himself at his feet as to a saint and, in tones which the chaplain calls unforgettable, exclaimed, "Father, I have trust in you. I beg you, heal me!" "My son," replied Don Bosco, "have trust in God. Pray to Him, and He will heal you." It was a scene truly similar to those taken from the pages of the Gospel, though we are left disappointed because we do not know the end result.

Monsignor Odelin then took him to visit the Catholic Institute. During their ten minute carriage ride, Don Bosco spoke glowingly of the value of higher education, especially for priests, offering the following reflection: "There is nothing worse for a priest than to have to work with a conscience in disarray." Many seminarians and lay people familiarly surrounded the "saint of Turin." Too bad that Monsignor Odelin immediately returned to Lhomond Street, leaving Don Bosco with his secretary.

³⁶Cf. *Semaine Religieuse* of Paris, February 8, 1930, and *Bulletin Salésien*, May 1930. [Author]

There is another undated visit which was followed by a surprising phenomenon. On Sèvres Street, not far from the former Joffre bookstore, is the Church of the Gesù, where Don Bosco celebrated Mass. As he was leaving, he was faced by a sick woman in a wheelchair. She was being wheeled by no less a personage than the famed historian of the Bastille, Funk-Brentano of the French Academy. He himself gave an account of this incident.³⁷

For many years Mrs. Gérard had spent her days confined to an easy chair. The historian's mother, who had seen her in this condition for a long time, still felt deep sympathy for her. Pious and devout as she was, upon hearing of the miracles attributed to Don Bosco, she thought of that poor woman. But how was she to get to him? One day some neighbors told her that Don Bosco was due to say Mass the following morning in the nearby Gesù Church. This was her opportunity. Without delay she asked her son to rent a wheelchair for the sick woman and take her to Don Bosco.

Her student son, who was then attending courses in paleography, putting aside his medieval manuscripts, shouldered his deed of charity. Very carefully, with the help of friends, he got the patient down to the ground floor. Just what she was suffering from he does not know even today [1934]. He sat her in the wheelchair and very slowly began to wheel her, much as nannies wheel their infant charges in strollers. At the church entrance they waited for the Mass to finish. Finally Don Bosco stepped out and stood before Mrs. Gérard, who very briefly told him the history of her illness, expressing all her hope. Don Bosco recited a prayer with her and then gave her his blessing. Instantly the woman straightened up, leaped to her feet, and began to walk. Her first steps were somewhat unsteady, but then, beside herself with joy, she almost ran all the way home.

Don Bosco had already left, and Funk-Brentano stood there in a trance beside the empty wheelchair, until he too decided to make his way back whence he had come and return the wheelchair to his mother. The cure was instant and lasting. For a long time he saw the healed woman go every morning to the Gayne-Petit, a large department store where she had found employment.

A letter from Countess Riant bears only the day of the week. For years her husband had lived his life from bed to couch. Don Bosco

³⁷*Bulletin Salésien*, October 1930. [Author]

went to see him and gave him his blessing, after which the count was able to rise and walk; he was not fully healed, but to the end of his days he managed to keep active in deeds of mercy and in study. He had promised a thousand francs a month for one year if he received relief. The healing was so unmistakable that he felt bound to his word. In sending Don Bosco the second portion of his donation, the countess asked him to pray for her son who had fallen ill. Don Bosco had a reply sent to her to thank her and to instill in her new hope in the powerful intercession of Mary, Help of Christians.

From newspapers and letters we may safely conclude that in Don Bosco's visits to private homes his blessing effected many other wonders of which we cannot determine either the number or the kind. Humility and prudence called for some reserve. However, despite the lack of exact times and places, we cannot deny the reality of some of them. For instance, a letter written from Quimper to Father Michael Rua on October 8, 1894, makes mention of a woman in Paris who, on receiving Don Bosco's blessing, was healed both of a physical ailment and of a moral affliction. Later on, Don Bosco gave her hope of a conversion which at that time was barred by very trying difficulties, and his prediction indeed came true eleven years later.

The countess of Eu [in northern France], daughter of Don Pedro II, emperor of Brazil, had a son, heir presumptive to the throne, who was ill. Asking a friend to invite Don Bosco to her home, she was granted her prayer and the sick boy immediately started to get better—not enough, however, for a complete cure. In fact, the family chaplain, writing later on to Father Rua in August to request prayers in the mother's name, described the boy's case in anything but comforting terms. A letter of Don Bosco to the countess assured her of his prayers and those of his Salesians.³⁸ Later on, he wrote to the cured prince and learned from the chaplain-tutor that the mother, having returned to Rio de Janeiro, had spoken in his favor to the emperor. Both she and her spouse considered it a honor to be enrolled among the very first Salesian cooperators in Brazil.

More astonishing is the following fact. One evening Don Bosco was called to bless a sick youngster, some twelve or thirteen years old. He replied that he would go and bless him, but with one condition. "What is it," the family asked.

³⁸See Appendix 9. [Author]

"That he come to serve my Mass tomorrow."

"Impossible!" came the answer in a chorus. "He has been sick so long, and the illness is so serious!"

"If you wish me to come, you must give me your word."

"If you say so, we will give you our word."

Various important persons were at the sick child's home, among them a lady from Bogotá, Colombia, named Mrs. Ortega, whose father was a doctor. Approaching the sick boy Don Bosco told him, "I was called to give you a blessing, but I would not come unless you agree to come tomorrow and serve my Mass in such and such a church. If you promise to do so, I will give you my blessing."

"How can I go since I've been this way for so long?"

"Trust that Our Lady can certainly give you strength to come."

"Very well, I promise."

"Fine! Now let's say a brief prayer and I will bless you."

Don Bosco did so, and the following morning, on reaching the church, he found the lad waiting for him, perfectly restored to health. This is one of the episodes which set Paris aglow; indeed, when the Colombian lady reported it to her family in Bogotá, it gave rise to a keen desire which was soon to express itself in a request to have Don Bosco's sons there. Father Rua, who gave this testimony, added, "I first heard of it in Paris, where I was then staying, constantly busy in handling Don Bosco's mail with the help of four other secretaries, who dispatched matters with wonderful skill."³⁹

One final episode was told us by Father Joseph Bologna. Mr. De Bien of Courtrai, Belgium, always deplored the fact that his little son had been afflicted from birth with acne on his entire body, a pitiful sight! Learning of Don Bosco's wonders in Paris, the father wrote recommending his son to him, and Don Bosco replied that he should make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians, and trust in Her. On the ninth day, as the whole family was seated at dinner, the child experienced a violent dysentery, "an abundant flow," as the man put it. But, when it was over, the child was perfectly healthy.

One visit, which took place on May 18, we have reserved to the end of this chapter. Princess Margaret d'Orléans, sister of Count Louis Philip Albert of Paris and second wife of Prince Ladislaus Czartoryski,

³⁹Cf. *Summarium super virtutibus*, No. 17, paragraph 30. [Author]

invited Don Bosco to offer Mass at the Hôtel Lambert.⁴⁰ When she quickly informed her brother, the count, who was away at the time, suggested that she ask Don Bosco to delay his visit long enough for him to have time to be present. On Prince Ladislaus' return, Don Bosco went to the Hôtel Lambert. Seven princes were awaiting him, all of whom, including the count of Paris, received Holy Communion. After Mass, they received his blessing and listened reverently to his words. Prince Ladislaus Czartoryski and his son August had served his Mass. The latter, who became a Salesian three years later, told Father Lemoyne that the family of Orléans had tendered Don Bosco a reception such as they had probably never given anyone else, including princes, all the more so because the Orléans family stuck so tenaciously to its regal customs. Don Bosco alluded to such a manifest sign of faith and piety when he told his escort, on leaving Paris, "If France had at its head men of this caliber, religion would hold the place of honor."

From that day on, Prince August Czartoryski's religious vocation began to bloom; his meeting with Don Bosco at the Hôtel Lambert, his family's usual Paris residence, decided him. The prince's father had desired to host Don Bosco in his home also for patriotic reasons: his aim was to draw the attention of the great apostle of Turin to his unhappy Poland in the hope that he might send his sons there and to Polish colonies scattered throughout the world. It is well known that the Poles, to free themselves from the yoke of the oppressors who had dismembered their country, emigrated to hospitable nations, giving rise to a dispersion not dissimilar to that of the Jews. His son August, driven by a mysterious power, kept hounding his father to have Don Bosco come before that date of his departure from Paris would draw too near. In his heart of hearts the young nobleman had for several years heard an indistinct voice calling him to a life of greater union with God, and now, somewhat confusedly, he felt the time was approaching when he would find someone to guide him in that difficult choice.

He was struck by the first words of Don Bosco, who, watching him approach, greeted him with the words, "For a long time I have been

⁴⁰That the visit took place at the Hôtel Lambert was certified in 1931 by Princess Blanche d'Orléans, Margaret's sister, as we see in letters of March of that year preserved in our archives. It was also verified by Marchioness Du Dresnay, who had luckily come upon a medal given by Don Bosco at the Hôtel Lambert along with this note giving us the date: "Blessed by Don Bosco, May 18, 1883." (Letter to Father Auffray, April 15, 1934.) On March 25, the same lady had written another interesting letter about her father's meeting with Don Bosco in the house of Prince Czartoryski. [Author]

anxious to make your acquaintance.” After the Mass, August could not detach himself from him. He kept looking into his countenance, observing all he did, eagerly drinking in his words. Nothing was said then about a vocation, but the prince was so won over by Don Bosco’s manner that he began writing to him, often enclosing donations. The very first note written by Don Bosco to the future Father August Czartoryski is precisely one of thanks, dated October 4, 1883. It was written in French and reads, “With deepest gratitude I have received the sum of one thousand lire which Your Highness sent for our orphans. The boys and I will pray and receive Holy Communion for your intentions, imploring upon you graces and blessings.” We shall meet the prince again in the course of our narrative before his entrance into the Salesian Congregation as an aspirant.⁴¹

The events we have already narrated, and those we are still to tell, sound like tales of the Middle Ages. However, they took place at the very heart of Paris, that vast marketplace of modern secularism. It is a clear sign that even then evil could not choke out goodness. Don Bosco’s judgment of Paris was not that of some writers and non-writers who point to it, with a certain malicious delight abhorrent to good people, as a city of perdition. In 1884 the Sulpician Father Mourret, meeting Don Bosco in Rome, heard him exclaim, “Ah Paris! Paris! What profound remembrances you have left in me! Such good people! Such hearts!”⁴² We may say that Paris is a city of opposites. Good is there, no less than evil; only, as is its nature, good makes less noise and, hence, it is less noticeable. Don Bosco’s visit was the occasion which brought into extraordinary brilliance the better side of the great metropolis.

⁴¹Cf. Can. Dott. Giovanni Lardone, *Il Servo di Dio Principe Augusto Czartoryski* (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1930). [Author]

⁴²*Bulletin Salésien*, June 1931. [Author]

CHAPTER 7

Paris: Fund-Raising Conferences

We will use the term “conferences” to translate the French *sermons de charité*, i.e., informal talks appealing to the charity of the listeners by acquainting them with the nature, status and needs of a particular charitable undertaking. Don Bosco delivered a number of such talks to vast congregations in several churches of Paris, speaking a simple and plain but frank and touching language which aroused sympathy and appealed to the feelings. Concerning Don Bosco’s conferences in Paris, Father Felix Giordano, Oblate of the Virgin Mary, passed on to the Salesians of Nice a few observations made by a French gentleman. We shall use those comments as a guideline for our narrative.¹ “We Parisians,” he remarked, “turn a deaf ear to renowned preachers; it takes Don Bosco to come and shake us out of our lethargy. He arrives, word of his coming spreads abroad, and, behold, the cream of society flocks to him, and everyone wants to see and hear him. Standing in the pulpit, he possesses none of the personal talents that immediately enthrall the crowds. His entire oratorical array consists of poor apparel, a gentle face, a humble demeanor, an unpolished speech. Yet no one dares hiss him; rather, all listen in respectful silence. He talks about his oratories, schools and missions with a sprinkling of folksy sayings and tales which are listened to with pleasure. He speaks always slowly and calmly, so that all are able to follow him. Nor is anyone offended by his foreign accent and fractured syntax. His talk touches the heart, and the heart hears him, not the ear. Indeed, tears of emotion flow and, back at home, no one speaks of anything else. All Don Bosco has to do is open his mouth to be the most revered and obeyed of men.” On reading this

¹Letter to Father Rua, March 25, 1888. [Author]

gentleman's comments, the Oblate Father points out that these are real episodes to be found only in the lives of the saints, because once they are filled with God, saints no longer speak as humans, but God speaks through them.

Don Bosco's first conference was held at Our Lady of Victories Church. In Paris this church is the counterpart of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin; a modern chronicler of the church in Paris claims that as many as six thousand people visit it every day. Ex-voto offerings literally cover the walls from floor to ceiling, overflowing into the sacristy.² It is the headquarters of the Archconfraternity of Mary, Refuge of Sinners.

It was precisely to celebrate the society's weekly Mass for the conversion of sinners that Don Bosco went there on Saturday morning, April 28. He was assisted at the altar by the pastor and by Father [Dominic] Sire. As those present remarked, never had such a crowd been seen at that particular Mass. Though it was scheduled for nine o'clock, the church was jammed by seven. The sight of such a vast crowd drew from the lips of the faithful who regularly attended Saturday Mass gasps of wonder as well as sighs of disappointment because they could find no room. An elderly woman was overheard to tell someone who had expressed surprise, "This is a Mass for the conversion of sinners and today it is celebrated by a saint."

Don Bosco spoke after the Gospel. We do not have the text of his talk; the newspapers reported only that he had words of praise for charitable giving and spoke of the scope of his work. While he was giving Holy Communion an event took place which we have already narrated elsewhere:³ the sudden apparition of Louis Colle. The vision overwhelmed him: altar rail, people, priests—everything disappeared from his gaze. He remained standing still, thumb and forefinger raised in the act of taking a host from the ciborium, his hand, however, motionless. The bystanders saw nothing, nor were they aware of the interior dialogue then taking place which we have already recounted. Hence the priests of the parish, thinking he was utterly fatigued, distributed Communion themselves, while others went to him and helped him back to the altar. When he returned to his senses he found himself facing the missal.

A misunderstanding after Mass led to a rather noisy scene. Fearing

²G. Breffy, *Notre-Dame des Victoires*, Paris, 1925. [Author]

³See Volume XV, p. 67. [Author]

that the crowd might crush Don Bosco, the pastor tried to seclude him in the sacristy. One woman, however, thinking that he was doing so because he was jealous of the saint's popularity, strode up to Don Bosco in soldier-like fashion, took him by the arm and pulled him back toward the crowd, thus venting her own disapproval as if a certain lack of regard had been shown him. Embarrassed, the pastor virtuously refrained from saying anything, also out of respect for the woman who had so humiliated him. She was the countess of Cessac, a very noble lady, formerly of the court of the Empress Eugénie. In the days of the empire her husband had held the highest offices. Such was her esteem for Don Bosco that she confided every secret to him, and it seems that she received many letters of spiritual direction from him—or so it has been rumored, though to date we have not a single trace of one. To assist at Don Bosco's Mass in Paris cost her a double sacrifice: rising earlier than usual and, sometimes, having to wait for hours upon hours. Her private carriage was always at his disposal. A woman of eminent refinement and forceful spirit, she kept a regal bearing when dealing with prominent persons, but for Don Bosco she waived all protocol. Also Don Bosco's Salesians, when in Ménilmontant, could go to her home at any time. She was always generous in her donations and assistance.

The crowd not only jammed the church but also flooded the square before the main entrance, known as the Petits Pères Square, the ancient name given to the Augustinians who had erected the church in 1629. When Don Bosco left the church, the square was still jammed.⁴

The crowds who had been unable to fit into the Church of Our Lady of Victories made sure they secured a place the following day at the Church of the Magdalene. By far more spacious, this is Paris' wealthiest church; preachers of the highest rank usually mount its pulpit. Don Bosco would probably have preferred not to speak from such a lofty stand, had not the cardinal himself persuaded him to do so. At the end of the audience which he had granted Don Bosco at his arrival, the cardinal, while escorting him out, spontaneously told him to speak at the Church of the Magdalene and then to take up a collection for his works. At first Don Bosco tried to excuse himself from facing such an elite congregation, alleging his ineptitude in the French language, but the cardinal replied, "No, no, speak, speak! Paris will put more trust in you than in anyone else." And indeed it was this very sensitive thoughtful-

⁴One of the curates, unable to find time to talk with Don Bosco, later wrote him a letter overflowing with expressions of reverence. [Author]

ness of the cardinal which so touched him that, responding with the same delicate tact, he always refrained from publicly seeking funds in Paris for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. Three main projects absorbed all of Cardinal [Joseph Hippolytus] Guibert's financial concerns at that time: the temple of the Sacred Heart in Montmartre, organizing an independent Catholic school system, and the Catholic Institute. Hence, allowing a collection in one of the capital's wealthiest churches must be regarded as a sign of outstanding graciousness, so eminent and, perhaps, unprecedented.

On April 28 the city newspapers announced the conference, with considerable space being given to Don Bosco's life and work.⁵ The conference was due to start at three in the afternoon, but by one o'clock the church was already packed with an expectant crowd made up of more than ordinary commoners. The fate befalling those who had come at the last hour the day before—having been inexorably kept out of the church—had taught them to be there ahead of time and grab a seat as long as there was one. In anticipation of a huge crowd, the church had been cleared of all unnecessary bulky furniture. Men took their places in the apse and also sat on the altar steps. Those who escorted Don Bosco through the crowd had a hard time, among them a tall, strongly sinewed gentleman who offered his services from the very beginning. As soon as Don Bosco alighted from his carriage this gentleman took his arm to support him and shield him from the surging crowd. Thinking he was French, Don Bosco thanked him, but the man asked him in clear Piedmontese how he felt. Don Bosco looked at him in pleasant surprise, but without recognizing him.

"Don't you know me?" the man asked. "Yet we see each other every now and then."

"Just now," Don Bosco answered, "my mind is tired ... I really can't remember ..."

"I am from Turin ... Buscaglione!"

"Oh, now I know!"

Mr. Buscaglione was a professor at the University of Rome, director of the Stefani News Agency, consul to Spain and Grand Master of Turin's Masonic Lodge. He thought highly of Don Bosco and in his teaching strove to respect his students' conscience. He fell ill while in

⁵At the proper time and place we shall give samples of the articles which were published during those weeks of Don Bosco's stay in Paris. [Author]⁶

⁶These articles are omitted since they are all in French, even in the Italian edition. [Editor]

Naples and was cared for by nuns; just a few hours before his death he sent for a priest. His friendly relationship with Don Bosco served him in good stead.

And so, preceded and flanked by a cortege of stalwart escorts, he made his way to the pulpit with difficulty while as many as could do so grabbed his hands to kiss them. Finally there he stood, greeting the people with a slight bow of the head. He then sat down and surveyed the vast crowd who returned his gaze. Any other Italian speaker so drained of all strength and so poorly equipped to speak the language would have lost heart at the sight of such a large, elite audience and, at best putting together some few phrases to beg for their charity, would have tried desperately to get out of such an embarrassment. On the contrary, Don Bosco did not lose an ounce of his usual calm, and, with the humility of one whose love of neighbor takes no heed of whatever figure he may be cutting before his peers, he gave a fairly long talk. Although his weak voice certainly did not travel very far, there was not the least sign of protest or complaint, as might be expected in similar situations. He spoke very slowly, pronouncing his words so distinctly that his talk could easily be transcribed. In fact, one reporter from the no-nonsense newspaper *Gazette de France* and one of his colleagues easily jotted down every word he said. Here we translate that report, including within square brackets some sentences left out by the *Semaine Catholique* of Paris, which also published the entire talk.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very much moved by the sight of such a large audience and I don't know how to deal with such attentiveness. It is an inexpressible consolation for me to address so notable an assembly of good Catholics. We shall talk about the young.

As one of your most illustrious prelates, Bishop Dupanloup, has said, society will be wholesome if you give your young people a good upbringing. If you let them slip into evil influences, society will degenerate. "When people speak to me about the young," a holy priest once said, "I do not want to hear about projects, but I want to see the results which have been obtained. Well then, I shall very simply tell you what Divine Providence has allowed us to do for youth. Your hearts will be touched.

Your interest is in our poor abandoned orphans. Not only do we want to support, nurture, and teach those we already have in our care, but we also want to save many others. Before explaining our undertakings, I shall tell you how I intend to repay the debt of gratitude I feel toward you.

Through the special favor of the Holy Father I am allowed to grant each of you who are standing at God's right hand, as a favor to you and your family, a blessing which carries with it a plenary indulgence. Tomorrow I will offer Mass for the intentions of all who come to the aid of our works, especially those good-hearted ladies who collect donations for us, and also for the intentions of your parish priest and the parish clergy. I shall beg the Lord to shower upon all of you His most special blessings. May God comfort you, heap His graces upon you, and help me express myself worthily before you.

The first thing we look for in anyone who comes up with grand projects is that he tell us the intent, the scope of his work. We then look for the results he has obtained. I shall take up both matters in explaining the overall scope of our work.

When I speak of youth, I do not refer to those young people who are being reared with great care in well-to-do families, boarding schools or institutions. I speak solely of abandoned youngsters, the homeless who roam the streets, the squares and alleyways. I speak only of these young derelicts who sooner or later become the scourge of society and end up packing the prisons.

I saw the need for my work in Turin when I used to visit the prisons in the exercise of my priestly ministry. Among the prisoners I found a host of youngsters, children of very good parents. It is evident that had these youngsters received a good upbringing, they would never have turned to evil ways. And also I realized that, once they left prison and returned to their foolish life, they could not help but end up badly, whereas if we were to concern ourselves about them and bring them together on Sundays, there might be some way of rescuing them from vice.

To obtain good results without having the necessary means one must plunge into the work with the fullest trust in the Lord! That is how we began our work of the festive oratory. Along with our boys just out of jail, we immediately took in lads from the streets. We managed to provide a home large enough to accommodate many youngsters, and in due time we were able to wall off the playground.

Then, with the help of some of the city's wealthy young men, we were able to care for these poor orphans, teaching them music, involving them in sports and gymnastics and literary entertainments; later we managed to provide them with many wholesome amusements after breakfast and snacktime. The first fruits of this work brought me to the conviction that our work came from God.

Once we could afford a chapel, several priests used to come to hear our boys' confessions, so that while some of the lads were placed under the supervision of our helpers, the others went to confession and received advice. At the proper time a bell would put an end to their games, and all would join together for Mass. Thus we managed to keep them completely busy from early morning to midday. At that time everyone was on his own, but at two o'clock all came together again, and their time was divided between catechism class, Vespers, Benediction, and recreation.

The well-to-do young men who volunteered to work with us spent a great part of their time hunting for jobs for our orphan boys. By personally visiting shops, factories and businesses they managed to place a good number of boys. Soon their womenfolk came to help us by procuring clothing for our poor boys.

[Our work thus took on a double benefit: we shielded from evil those vagrant lads whom we had taken in, and we rehabilitated and put back on their feet those who, after having fallen, gained their freedom from prison.] Among the homeless youths of Turin there was a fairly large number of older and illiterate boys. To put it simply, when they came into contact with the boys whom we had already trained, they felt ashamed of their ignorance. God inspired us to set up special classes for them, and in the evening we often had the consolation of grouping some one hundred and fifty to two hundred young men who, as time went on, would come on their own to make their confession and receive Holy Communion. [Ours was, therefore, the good lot of saving them in the nick of time from the brink of perdition.] Soon after, we had to set up day classes.

In my walks through the city streets, whenever I would meet a needy youngster I would ask him, "Do you want to work?"

"Yes," would be the prompt answer. "But I don't know where to apply."

"I'll show you."

"They won't talk to me, because I'm in rags."

"Come with me. I'll get you clothing."

They would all willingly come. This, in brief, is the history of our oratories, hospices or orphanages.

We next figured that there was need to provide honest farmhands in Italy, France, and more especially in Spain and South America, where we set up agricultural boarding schools for orphan boys.

The good success of our efforts for boys led us on to set up parallel works for girls, our plans being realized when the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians was founded.

It would take too long to recount the history of our work; so I shall limit myself to answering those questions which you are now probably raising in your minds. Are the results encouraging? Yes, they are, I answer. Everywhere our houses have multiplied: in Italy, France, Spain, and most especially in South America. Considering only France, let me say that we have a hospice in Nice for two hundred and thirty youngsters. At La Navarre, in the district of La Crau, the one hundred and twenty lads who live there are all working on the farm. At Saint-Cyr, between Toulon and Marseille, we run a large orphanage for poor and abandoned girls. Apart from church and school, where they are all together, these young girls are occupied in various tasks appropriate to their condition. During the day they work in the orchard, and at night they do sewing. Our hospice for boys in Marseille enrolls three hundred boarders,

while more than a hundred and fifty day students are on the waiting list to be admitted. [Even though we have put up huge buildings, we are still overcrowded. In this regard we still have very pressing outstanding debts. People will come to our aid because we have toiled solely for God's glory, for the good of society, and for the salvation of souls.]

As our schools kept growing we soon came to realize on the one hand that many of our orphan youngsters had a special aptitude for academic studies, and on the other that we needed to increase substantially the number of our catechists, teachers, and assistants. [Thanks be to God, we have been able to initiate a new work which has met our needs as well as the personal needs of the students and the good interest of society, and so we have begun to teach secondary school courses too.] In a word, we have trained a good number of teachers and assistants for the primary grades.

God has blessed our persevering efforts, and today we have contributed to the Church and to our own works a very large number of priests who with admirable zeal staff our houses. As for those boys who have not received a vocation to the priesthood, we have continued their education to suit their aptitude.

Our work continues today; moreover, for quite some time in Italy, South America and France, our former young orphans have occupied some of the most distinguished posts in universities and academies. Through us they have found regular teaching positions in literature, science, law, and medicine. Into whatever profession they go, the young men we have trained are a credit to the education they received.

At present the number of houses we have founded and directed has reached the remarkable number of one hundred and sixty-four. More than one hundred and fifty thousand boys have been under our care, and every year the turnover of boys in our houses amounts to between thirty-four and forty thousand. With each passing year we have the comfort of having cooperated in the salvation of these souls, whom we have set on the path of service to God, religion, the nation, the family, and society.

[Thanks to the lads whom we have befriended and who have become our evangelists, our works have increased daily in France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, and even the uncivilized lands of Patagonia.]

While day by day we keep expanding, we also run into graver problems of procuring funds. Up to now we have managed to take care of all these youngsters. How did we ever manage? This is the great mystery which I must reveal to you. In my poverty and lack of means, how was I ever able to start and finance these works? It is the secret of God's bountiful mercy. [He has graciously blessed our work, since the good of society and of the Church rests in the wholesome upbringing of the young.]

The Blessed Virgin has been for us a real Help of Christians because the success of our endeavors stems from her assistance. It is she who has supplied

the means to build houses and churches. [We have gone forward only with her protection; she blesses those who take care of the young.]

With all my heart I thank each of you who have so attentively and kindly listened to me. I thank Mary, Help of Christians for all the help she has given us. In reward for your charity toward our orphans, she will protect your interests and families, and she will be your children's guide and support. [I pray that she will always be our mother and that at the hour of our death she will show herself to be our protector.] May she be our strength here below, as we look forward to praising and blessing her in heaven.

Semaine Catholique, reporting Don Bosco's talk, added this comment: "Such an unadorned address charmed the privileged few who were able to hear him, but the aura of holiness which issued from this kindly priest's person was enough to instill the entire audience with a sense of profound reverence." [Leon] Aubineau's booklet reads: "It would be hard to come upon another talk at once so simple and so effective. Don Bosco has revealed both himself, his life and his work. He pleads for his boys and enumerates the reasons which should move every Christian to come to his aid. In saving souls he promotes the good of society and metes out both temporal and eternal promises to all who wish to help him. True, he takes with him everywhere the Pope's blessing, but there is no denying that he bears also the blessing of God. To the art of begging, Don Bosco has joined the art of thanking. Nor does he limit himself to the pulpit to thank those who have lent him their aid, but he has assured those women who solicit funds for his work that the Virgin Help of Christians is the titular provider of all Salesian hospices, and that by begging for poor and abandoned youth as they do, they are the co-helpers of the Mother of God. Don Bosco is identified by his work: everything he says and does focuses on his young orphans. He has no other message to unfold; everything centers personally on his boys: to clothe them, feed them, save them. For his boys' well-being, miracles flow from Don Bosco's hands. Nor is one to be surprised at the conditions he lays down when people ask him to obtain various favors from God. Everything hinges on the salvation of the young and on co-operating with Jesus Christ for the salvation of those souls whom He has ransomed by His Blood. To render the Blood of Christ fruitful is the purpose of the cooperation that Don Bosco requests of all who need those kindly powers which issue forth from the garment of the Lord."

Also Paris' prestigious periodical *Clairon*, running an article by

Meurville entitled “A Miracle Worker in 1883,” made the following comments: “Don Bosco spoke yesterday at the Church of the Magdalene; it was jammed, as though people were flocking to hear the most renowned orator. By two o’clock the doors had to be closed to new arrivals because the audience had already overflowed onto the steps of the altar, all standing in silent awe. And yet, Don Bosco is not an orator. He speaks French with difficulty, and his voice has neither the resonance which moves the masses, nor the silvery tone which tickles the ear, nor the cadence which charms the heart. His gestures are restrained and unforced, his countenance without glamor or power. All his exterior exudes gentleness, simplicity and Christian humility. With only this scanty oratorical gear he faced the Parisian public, as skeptical as it is and so sensitive to the charm of the word. For Parisians all the brilliant gifts of genius add up to eloquence, and a good speaker is to their eyes all that they could wish him to be: statesman, general, financier, and sometimes all these at the one time [...]. He could hardly be heard and barely was understood, but his concepts overmastered the audience, and the grand sweep of his work shone brilliantly through the church, forming, as it were, a halo about the head of one who, with nothing, had accomplished so much.”⁷

His passage from the pulpit to the sacristy after the conference was a veritable manifestation of faith: people bowed down to receive his blessing, mothers presented their children to be blessed, many asked him to bless religious articles and sought to touch his cassock. More prominent persons—and they were not few—were waiting for him in the sacristy, hoping to win a moment or two of private talk. “With the calm and simplicity of the saints, who attribute to God the signs of respect and trust which are shown to them,” wrote *Semaine Catholique*, “the good father held audience in a small room.” The paper’s writer managed to get in to read back to him some passages of his talk which he had jotted down in shorthand but had not fully understood. “His affability,” he continued in his article, “was so entrancing that, mindful that many were still outside waiting, we had to force ourselves to break away from the fascination which that man’s conversation exercised over us, so renowned as he was for his works and yet so loving, so affable, so compassionate toward the stranger who had given him a glimpse of the inner pain which could find no comfort on this earth.”

⁷*Clairon*, April 30, 1883. [Author]

Nine-tenths of the audience had left the church with the ardent hope that they might at least be able to read the passages which they had not been able to grasp. This wish was amply met by the newspapers, most especially by the *Gazette de France*.

The fund solicitors, whom Don Bosco had commended, belonged to the elite of the Parisian nobility.⁸ Standing at the church entrances they collected fifteen thousand francs.

At the Church of the Magdalene, Don Bosco had an already illustrious listener who was to become ever more illustrious in our days [1934], the future Cardinal Peter Gasparri, then a highly acclaimed professor of canon law at the Catholic Institute of Paris. He was there for a mission which seemed most appropriate since he was an Italian. He had been asked by the Institute's rector, Monsignor D'Hulst, to meet Don Bosco in the sacristy after his conference and escort him to Assas Street for a dinner which a group of professors were giving in his honor. Fifty years later, the cardinal, abrim with honors, still took delight in recalling the facts and describing the complexity of his task. The multitude, he said, surrounded Don Bosco on every side. Some sought his blessing or a remembrance in his prayers, some asked for a medal, others pressed offerings into his hand. The throng surpassed all imagination. Poor Don Bosco, tossed about in every sense of the word, suffered all those pious indiscretions with unalterable grace.

The future cardinal had to bide his time before getting to his task, but he managed to free Don Bosco from the noble men and women who hemmed him in and to get him into a very ordinary public carriage. They did not go directly to the Catholic Institute because Don Bosco had first to visit a sick boy. At table he entertained his fellow diners with his relaxing conversation. "With his rather peculiar French," remarked the cardinal in a conversation at which the writer was present, "he made himself understood extremely well." Shortly afterward, he was given a reception in the lecture hall in the presence of all the teachers and most of the students. When asked to speak, he did so with great simplicity, narrating the beginning of his work and the obstacles he had met and overcome. All were hanging on his words. If a word did not come to mind, he would lean to one side and ask the nearest listeners, "How do you say this in French?" On being told, he would repeat the word. "It

⁸The names were added to the announcement of the conference. [Author]

was a treat,” concluded Father Gasparri; “his success was superb!”⁹

That evening he brought much comfort to a noble family. Mrs. Du Plessis had a twenty-six-month-old granddaughter who had whooping cough with dangerous complications which gave her doctors reason to fear the worst. Through Mrs. De Combaud, the grandmother had managed to win the promise of a visit from Don Bosco. She personally went to pick him up with his secretary in her carriage. At home Don Bosco found the child’s parents in tears. Only recently they had lost a son. Taken to the child’s bedroom, Don Bosco said a brief prayer; then he asked the parents and bystanders to pray. During the prayer he stopped abruptly and, turning to Mr. Du Plessis, said, “It is not enough that the others pray, the father must pray also.” At the end he placed a medal of Mary, Help of Christians about the child’s neck, saying, “She is not as sick as they think.” No sooner had he left than the child was declared out of danger and is presently Countess Charlotte Du Reau of La Gaignonnière, who inherited a deep devotion to Don Bosco from her family.¹⁰

On April 30, true to his promise, he celebrated Mass at the Church of the Magdalene for the women who had solicited funds and for all the benefactors of his works. Out of consideration for the class of women who were to attend, he set the time for nine-thirty and then imparted a blessing with the plenary indulgence. He spoke a few words about charity from the altar, but only those closest were fortunate enough to hear him. We will not repeat his talk, which was as usual, but we will rather narrate an event which happened shortly before Don Bosco got to the church.¹¹

That morning Don Bosco was picked up by Father De Bonnefoy, assistant pastor at St. Roch Church and, later, bishop of La Rochelle, who was preaching a triduum at the Church of the Magdalene. He was to es-

⁹Cardinal Gasparri recounted another meeting of his with Don Bosco. One year, returning to Italy for a holiday, he arrived in Turin with only sixteen lire in his pocket. In his rush to leave, he had dropped his wallet in his room; since he had a pre-purchased ticket, he did not realize he had no money until he got to the border. Taking advantage of a stop at Turin, he rushed to the Oratory and asked Don Bosco for a loan of a hundred lire, which of course he immediately got. Cf. *Bulletin Salésien*, August-September 1932. [Author]

¹⁰The countess still has the medal, on which is inscribed the date: April 29, 1883. From this we can deduce that a special medal was struck to commemorate the date of the conference. The child’s mother, Mrs. Du Plessis, thus describes Don Bosco’s entrance into their home: “Our emotion was deep as we approached the saintly man coming up the stairs; he seemed so wrapped in prayer that he paid scant attention to our thanks.” [Author]

¹¹We have two handwritten accounts of this incident: one by the Salesian Father [John Baptist] Fèvre, who heard the account from the bishop of La Rochelle and wrote of it to Father Lemoyne on December 1, 1898; the other by Baroness Cholet, mother of the healed woman, in a letter she wrote on November 29, 1930. [Author]

cort Don Bosco to the home of a sick girl in the last stages of tuberculosis. In a prior crisis she had received the Last Sacraments, and the end seemed pretty near. The good priest had given the sick girl and her mother hope that Don Bosco's blessing might restore her health. Standing at her bedside, Don Bosco asked her, "Do you have faith?"

"Yes," replied the mother for her dying daughter. "We have the utmost faith."

"If you have faith you will recover, because faith can move mountains. Say each day an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be in honor of the merciful Heart of Jesus, and one Hail, Holy Queen, that Mary, Help of Christians may take you under her protection. Continue this until the feast of the Assumption."

"Father," immediately replied the mother, disappointed in her hopes by having to wait so long, "could you not take my daughter by the hand and heal her immediately?"

"Let me talk," answered Don Bosco somewhat severely and shaking his head. "I will pray for you and have my boys pray as well, and today, while saying Mass at the Church of the Magdalene, I shall remember you in a particular way. Goodbye, my daughter."

With these words he walked out of the bedroom and, on his way out, he remarked to the mother at his side, "Don't forget my large family." But the lady had anticipated him, having secretly given Father De Bonnefoy an envelope containing a check with a written plea for the healing. However, her action had eluded "the pious Italian priest." On the last step of the stairway, Don Bosco gently asked the woman to go back up, bidding her farewell with a sweet greeting, "God's peace be upon you and upon your home."

The illness ran its course, and the sixteen-year-old girl kept struggling between life and death. Her body was literally reduced to a mere skeleton. She fluctuated between highs and lows until August 15. On the morning of the feast of the Assumption, as mother and son were getting ready to go to Mass, a cry rang through the house. The sick girl, moments before in a coma, was screaming with a strong and joyful voice, "Mama, mama, I am cured!" The mother ran in to see her, rosy and joyful, dressing herself alone, swinging her arms and singing. She could hardly believe her eyes, but there was more. Not taking the least nourishment, without support of any kind, without the smallest help, the girl walked to church and went to confession and Communion to the utter stupor of those who knew her condition. So real, complete and last-

ing was her cure that in 1898 Madame Margaret—that's all we know of her name—was the mother of three healthy, hardy children.

Another committee of noble ladies sent out admission tickets to a conference of Don Bosco at nine o'clock on May 1 in the Church of St. Sulpice, but by the time he got there it was already past ten. The tightly cramped crowd which had been so patient till then had to stretch their patience still further when they saw ascend the pulpit, not Don Bosco, but the parish priest, who told them that because of utter fatigue Don Bosco could not hold the conference and for the same reason could not administer Holy Communion to all. However, after the Gospel, Don Bosco turned to the people and gave them a brief exhortation. His voice reached hardly a tiny fraction of the crowd; on their part, however, writes [Leon] Aubineau,¹² "they kept gazing at the man of God, whose very appearance had an eloquence at once simple, unassuming, humble, self-entrusting to God and forgetful of self. All radiated from him, forming an aureola about his modest person." The *Gazette de France*, in its special edition which we have already cited, published his very brief talk as follows:¹³

It is with utter consolation that I look upon this multitude of good parishioners, so well trained in the practice of their faith in this parish. Religion is our one and only comfort amid the miseries and afflictions of this life; furthermore, it is the only guarantee of our happiness after death. Continue to be loyal to it and so receive Communion often. Keep up your tradition of contributing generously to all good works. The most important is the Christian education of youth. Begin with your own families: bring up your children well. Give good advice to all those whom you can reach. Should you come upon an orphan child, take very special care of him, teach him to serve God, help him overcome temptations to evil. I am sorry I cannot speak to you about the work for which I have come to seek your financial help. It consists in gathering orphaned and abandoned boys to turn them into good citizens and good Christians. With God's grace and thanks to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary we have succeeded in gathering and caring for hundreds of thousands of these poor and abandoned lads. Your contributions will enable us to draw God's blessings upon you. When you go to heaven, He will point out to you the souls whom you too

¹²Aubineau wrongly assigns the date of the Mass at St. Sulpice on May 2 instead of May 1. [Author]

¹³We have a lively account of this visit also (document 61 of the Italian edition), given to us by the woman-diarist mentioned in the last chapter; she was then a young parishioner of St. Sulpice. [Author]

helped to enter there. Then you will experience the truth of these words: "Whoever saves a soul has assured his own salvation."

His mention of the efficacious work of the parish was no mere lip service, because he well knew St. Sulpice's reputation of piety and faith, which won for it the title of "Queen of the Parishes."

Six priests immediately went through the church to take up the collection. With the help of some other priests, Communion took but a half hour. It was painful to watch him come down from the altar and wend his way to the sacristy, surrounded by several people who vied with each other to support him. One venerable elderly man knelt before him and, taking his hand, placed it upon the heads of his two children as a pledge of heavenly blessing.

At twelve noon the entrances to the sacristy were still jammed, while many were waiting outside so as to present their sick to him. His carriage, when it finally managed to get moving to take him to Mrs. Vendryès, was so blocked by the crowd that it could only maneuver at a snail's pace; here and there people knelt to receive his blessing. A Catholic periodical¹⁴ thus informed its readers far and near: "This extraordinary man, whose name is on everyone's lips and of whom the newspapers recount wonders which read like legends, is of no more than average height, venerable of countenance, but unpretentious, somewhat shaky in step, weak in body. We would characterize him as one totally drained of all energy, were it not that we are enthralled to see the stamina and clarity of that mind, of those eyes, profound and glistening, in which one may see serenity, strength, faith. He is no orator; his voice is thin and few can hear him, but his person reflects the holiness and spirit of charity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. His motto is: "All of God, all from God, all for God." All the vigor of his soul and all the strength of his being he has dedicated to the service of God and of his neighbor."

Sèvres Street, one of Paris' most sophisticated thoroughfares, is lined with churches, religious houses, schools, and Catholic institutions. Situated on that street, near the Vincentians, was St. Lazarus Bureau of Orphanages, set up to foster and develop institutions which would shelter poor youngsters from the countryside and turn them into good Christians, skilled farmers and gardeners. The Bureau did not actually take in

¹⁴*Rosier de Marie*, Paris, May 12, 1883. [Author]

any lads, but assigned them to appropriate orphanages and distributed annual subsidies to qualifying agricultural boys' homes, especially those recently founded or situated in the country. The fund was supported by legacies, donations, drives, and an annual collection. The marquis of Gonvello, a generous promoter and benefactor of the St. Lazarus Bureau of Orphanages, made sure that his co-workers, dedicated to the care of children, would have the opportunity of hearing the priest who was expending every ounce of his strength to rescue abandoned youth, and so he organized a formal convention for Don Bosco to address.

St. Lazarus Bureau afforded the guests the advantage of a homelike atmosphere, far from the throngs that had a way of growing up around Don Bosco in public gatherings. This way they could see and hear him without disturbance. The convention opened at two-thirty on the afternoon of May 1. Don Bosco was seated, facing the audience; at his right were the Ladies' Committee headed by the duchess of Reggio, and at his left the founding members, among them Monsignor Du Fougerais, president of the organization and director of the Holy Childhood Association. The guests eagerly drank in Don Bosco's every word. Those high society ladies could be seen clasping slips of paper on which they had written in pen or pencil their requests for healing, comfort, spiritual graces and a thousand other things. He addressed them as follows:

Monsignor, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The best thing about this meeting is its link to the eminent work of which it is my pleasure to speak today. I don't see how I can resolve this paradox: our work is one of poverty and misery, but here I seem to be surrounded by wealth and affluence. Nevertheless, to succeed in such a noble and vast undertaking two factors are needed: on the one hand, wealth that gives generously; on the other, poverty which gratefully accepts it.

Well, this is what I find today in great profusion wherever I go in this metropolis of Paris. I see it this very moment, particularly in you, Monsignor, who have so many times demonstrated it in this your diocesan city. But you have gone further: you have every so often kindly honored the city of Turin with your presence. This, I may say, is a favor of which we shall always retain the deepest and dearest remembrance.

Now, what more can this poor priest say who can hardly express himself and make himself understood in your language? The most he can do is give you his blessing. May the all-powerful Lord grant you the courage you need to face life's battle and the strength to profess and always defend truth on every side. May He grant it to you especially now, when we have such need of

Catholics, good Catholics! This is the time when a good Catholic must defend his faith not with the armaments of war, nor with violence or such; what he must do is to strive by example and the practice of all virtue to win over all hearts to the faith which it is our good fortune to belong to.

With this in mind I offer my thanks to Monsignor, who with such loving kindness has taken to heart our great work, most especially our agricultural undertakings. I speak of Saint-Cyr, near Toulon, and of Marseille, where we have a large school for artisans and poor students. I speak of La Navarre, where we care exclusively for farm boys, and finally of Nice, where we take in lads from the city squares and streets. All of them are at risk, and unless they find a helping hand to save them, they are doomed to become in short shrift the scourge of society. They are the ones who will pack our prisons and will in no time become not only disgruntled but, alas, I say it again, the scourge of society in general and of their families in particular.

These are the works befriended by your organization and graciously directed by Monsignor.

Well then, Monsignor, may God in His divine clemency bless you, give you many happy days, and grant that you may consecrate them to furthering Catholic undertakings, works of peace and concord. May He allow you to see what you most ardently desire, that is, the daily multiplication of all those works for youth which are the honor of France and its people! May God bless this beautiful and noble France! May He save it, give it national peace and tranquility, and may He grant us to see you on that last day borne aloft on the wings of angels from earth to heaven. Thanks to the Lord's divine protection, may all these works of charity now undertaken by you become a seed of good, a seed which will ever bear more fruit and which will constitute on earth the glory of France and of all good Catholics.

When Don Bosco finished, Monsignor Du Fougerais, the president, with words gushing from his heart, described the aim of the ministry of farm orphanages; he praised the generosity of the directors, and emphasized the graciousness of the struggle which the Church had to sustain against irreligion to defend the souls of the young. Finally he asked Don Bosco to bless the assembly. He promptly agreed, but first he said, "Before giving you my blessing, may I address a few more words to you? At this time I am even better acquainted, so to say, with the grandeur of the work which you promote and safeguard and from which I have more than once benefited. Today I find I am in a position to advocate more earnestly the future of this redemptive work of yours, a work which is now, and shall all the more so prove in the future, a blessing to society. The Holy Father is well acquainted with your work. The last time I had

the distinguished honor of seeing him, he asked me to give you, or rather to transmit to you, his special blessing, and to assure you that he will remember you always to God in his Holy Mass. Therefore, in accordance with the wish of the Holy Father, I give you now his sacred blessing." The entire assembly was deeply moved. As he spoke, the faces of many could be seen wet with tears. The monthly newsletter¹⁵ of the Bureau of Orphanages commented, "Don Bosco speaks our French language somewhat haltingly, but his speech has such an earnestness of love and faith that it touches the heart." Also *Figaro* of May 2, in reporting the event, took the occasion to speak of Don Bosco's stay in Paris, and did so very favorably, characterizing his simplicity and modesty as "without affectation, pomp or ceremony."

In that motherhouse of the Vincentians there lay near death a sixty-three-year-old priest named Father Duhlleux. His brother, trusting in Don Bosco's supernatural power, brought him to the infirmary.

"I would like to live to see our congregation flourish," the sick man whispered in a faint voice.

"You will be able to see it from elsewhere," Don Bosco answered, seasoning his reply, however, with words of comfort and with his blessing.

The sick priest died the following day.¹⁶

Living with the Vincentians was a prelate very well known throughout France, Bishop [Charles] Freppel of Angers, deputy of the department of Finistère [an electoral district]. Whenever he went to Paris for the opening of parliament, he would take lodgings with the sons of St. Vincent de Paul. He was very anxious to meet Don Bosco. Knowing this, Don Bosco paid him a visit and remained in private conversation with him for some half hour.¹⁷ The bishop must have been excellently impressed because a year later, as we shall see, he delivered a splendid eulogy on Don Bosco in the House of Deputies.

In another church, singularly dear to French Catholics and Paris nobility, Don Bosco also delivered his much awaited message. It was the Church of St. Clotilde, whose virtuous life induced her husband Clovis, king of the Franks, to become a Christian. He spoke on the morning of May 3, feast of the Ascension, after having celebrated Mass. Little that he said was new, being in substance a repetition of his talk in the

¹⁵*L'Orphelin*, June 6, 1883. [Author]

¹⁶*Annales de la Congrégation de la Mission*, 1929, Vol. 94, p. 761. [Author]

¹⁷The aged servant who had escorted Don Bosco to the bishop told this to Father [Augustine] Auffray in March 1935. [Author]

Church of the Magdalene. So squashed was the crowd who came to hear him that one could scarcely breathe. Many received Communion. The collection was a generous one. We have already described what followed;¹⁸ elsewhere, also, we have narrated an apparition of Louis Colle.¹⁹

After a side trip and stay in Lille from May 5 to May 16, he lost no time in holding a conference the day after his return to Paris in the huge Church of St. Augustine, addressing a tightly packed and devout audience. As before, he spoke about his work almost until the end of his talk, but in closing he revealed his plans for Paris, as follows:

I hope that the good ladies and gentlemen of this great and very charitable city will come to our aid in setting up a similar work here in Paris. It is a topic that keeps coming up everywhere and it can be done. We can set up in Paris a house like those in Marseille, Nice and Turin. I believe we can open a work here that will meet all needs. Right now I am not asking for substantial pledges; I am only seeking your help in acquiring a piece of land and putting up a building to house poor boys. It is a giant work—or, rather, a small one—because I wish it to be a simple undertaking without any fanfare. All homeless waifs become at some time or other a burden to civil authorities, and from juvenile delinquents they soon turn into big ones.

It is my hope that Paris, which has so often come to the aid of our works, regardless of the fact that they are so far away, will at this time help us to found a home in which to gather the boys who night and day badger good people.

The Lord will copiously reward all that you will do, and society will be beholden to you. More, the young whom we will save with your help will bless you. Presenting us to the Lord on the day of our judgment, these souls will say, “These are our benefactors, who gave of their time and money to save our souls; if we have been saved, we owe it to them. Now, O great God, show them the mercy You promised in the Gospel. Because they helped us to be saved, let them also be saved.”

While the newspapers reported this conference,²⁰ *Figaro* of May 18 published a long, thoughtful article sent on May 14 by Saint-Genest,²¹ whom we have already met and who was traveling through Turin at the time. It concluded: “The real way of honoring Don Bosco in France is not to acclaim him in the streets, nor to snip away at his clothing, but to

¹⁸See pp. 83-84. [Author]

¹⁹See Vol. XV, pp. 67-68. [Author]

²⁰Also *Unità Cattolica* reported this conference in its issues of May 20 and May 22. [Author]

²¹A well-known French journalist and correspondent for *Figaro*. See Vol. XV, p. 428. [Editor]

do what he does.”²² The *Petit Moniteur*, however, had already commented: “Don Bosco has opened new horizons before us and has won over to his work the very flower of Paris. Thanks to him, the apostolate of charity includes noble and praiseworthy sponsors.”

Unexpectedly striking was Don Bosco’s conference of May 21 in the Church of St. Peter, usually very much frequented by the aristocratic families of Paris, and on that occasion very tightly packed. Don Bosco arrived at six in the evening, so exhausted that he could hardly stand. How was he to give an address in that condition? A substitute appeared.

Cardinal [Charles] Lavigerie, archbishop of the newly revived see of Carthage and founder of the White Fathers, had been in Paris but a few days, having just returned from Africa. He had known Don Bosco for a long time. Learning that he was in Paris, he sought for him in several places until he learned of his whereabouts. He went to the church and, in all the solemn dignity of the purple, he strode though its main door unexpectedly just as the opening prayer was being said before the address. It was an apparition! The cardinal lost no time in ascending the pulpit. Renowned throughout all France, most popular in Paris, he came to lend Don Bosco the support of his popularity. His talk was a model of right timing and insight.

Ever since I first heard of the presence in Paris of Italy’s Vincent de Paul, my brethren, I have had but one wish: to meet with him in one of our churches and to recommend his work to the charity of our Catholic people. I have seen his work begin in Turin, then develop, spread to France, and grow into a bond of mutual generosity and peace between the Catholics of both nations.

You, my dear friends, will draw them ever closer when you come to the aid of this humble and holy priest. On his return to his country, he must be able to say that France is always loyal to its lofty mission, the shield of all who suffer, free of racial discrimination.

I live in a land where our Vincent de Paul once lived for two years in a state of slavery. Now Tunisia needs another Vincent de Paul. He must be taken there not by force, but by love. And this Vincent de Paul is you, my dear Father, because you, with your religious family, half Italian and half French, will better than anyone else accomplish the work that must be done.

²²Don Bosco wrote him a thank you note, but Saint-Genest’s mother answered in his absence. Whenever her son would write in defense of private education, this devout woman would place a medal of Mary, Help of Christians which Don Bosco had given her upon his paper, so that he might be inspired in his articles. [Author]

Moreover, that is the place for you. Up to now, Italians, for the most part, have populated the vast expanse of desert in Tunisia, which is now under the generous protection of France. As their shepherd, I wish these families well, and I would like to show this love by improving all their miserable conditions. Now, only too often, Italian immigrants give up too soon, as we see in the colonies. We should be able to gather together the orphans and all children deprived of the upbringing they need.

Father of Italy's orphans, come. I appeal to your heart, which has already responded to the cry of Europe and America. See, Africa offers you her abandoned children, opening her arms to you. Your charity is so boundless that it can gather them in. These youngsters are for the most part Italian. Send them your sons, who shall speak lovingly to them of their land and ours. We shall love them together, teaching them to bless the name of God and of France.

My friends, give generously to this holy priest. You will at the same time be giving to the African missions because Don Bosco will go there to help them.

We have no way of knowing whether his listeners, with all their admiration for the renowned prelate, were really happy to hear him in Don Bosco's stead; eyewitnesses affirm that no one ever took their gaze completely off Don Bosco, who thoughtfully and modestly sat facing the pulpit, not wincing even slightly when he heard the words of praise being addressed to his person. Then he rose, walked a few steps to the altar rail, bowed to the cardinal, and, raising his hand for silence, spoke:

I find that I am truly embarrassed and somewhat flustered. I should offer a proper response to His Eminence the cardinal, but for this I would need his eloquence, and I am not able to speak. Nevertheless, I must address His Eminence and thank him for all the praise he has heaped upon me and my works. First of all I must admit that some of the things he said about me are not true. He has seen them through the goodness of his heart, and, as you well know, when tiny things are observed in a microscope, they suddenly assume grand proportions and appear huge.

Nonetheless, I thank His Eminence for his courtesy. Cardinal Lavigerie has always been to the Salesian family a father, a benefactor and a friend. Hence, our thankfulness knows no limits, and if we can do anything for his grand undertakings, we shall do it.

Your Eminence, I am in your hands to accomplish in Africa everything that Divine Providence shall ask of me. Yes, Your Eminence, yes, be assured that, if we can do anything in Africa, the entire Salesian family is with me at your beck and call. I shall send my sons, both Italian and French, to Africa.

My friends, you know that we live on charity, and it is charity which sup-

ports our works; at this particular moment, it is the charity of France, the charity of Paris. I have seen that France is ever the great Catholic nation, always ready and generous to assist works of beneficence. Hence, I am very grateful for the aid that you have already given our charitable hospices and will continue to give.

Cardinal Lavigerie's biographer, V. Baunard, writes:²³ "His words were few and very plain, delivered in a faint voice and in faulty rhetoric. Very few could manage to hear him. However, all, or almost all, had tears in their eyes. Rarely indeed do we come across such a contrast as was presented that day by these two men and these two sermons."

After the service the bulk of the congregation dispersed, but the noble women pushed their way to the sacristy, anxious to get a close look at Don Bosco and to receive his personal blessing. However Don Bosco met their requests with gestures of denial. Finally he replied in all humility, "I cannot bless you here before His Eminence. It would be out of order and disrespectful." Realizing Don Bosco's predicament, the cardinal primate of Africa graciously withdrew.

A differently dramatic conclusion ended also another conference, held beyond doubt between May 22 and 25; however, we have no record of which church, or rather chapel, this event took place in. Don Bosco was speaking about Mary, Help of Christians, reiterating what he had so many times stated over and over again: that he was not the worker of all the wonders attributed to him, that credit should rather be given to Mary, Help of Christians. As she had initiated, so also she continued to further his youth work; it was Our Lady who obtained graces and obtained them in endless number. While he was speaking, a gentleman arose and asked for the floor. He then told the pitiful story of a man whose wife had been seriously ill with dropsy for several years and whose son had received the Last Rites and was lying at death's door. He described the anguish of that poor father and of his confidence in Don Bosco's blessing, and then he went on to speak of the father's joy on seeing his wife and son both healed, as he walked to church with them to attend Mass. "Yes," he protested, "such an outstanding grace must be attributed to Our Lady, but the prayers are those of Don Bosco." Don Bosco listened, deeply moved, as was also the whole congregation. However, the emotion reached its climax when the man burst into tears, held back till then with great ef-

²³V. Baunard, *Le Cardinal Lavigerie*, Paris, 1896, Vol. 2, p. 239. [Author]

fort, and exclaimed, "Do you know who this husband is, this fortunate husband? It is I, Portalis." Anthony Lefèvre-Portalis was former deputy of the National Parliament. Don Bosco offered no comment; breaking off his talk midway, he remained silent. In all truth, there was nothing more to say; that gentleman had said it all.²⁴

By now we have recounted all there is to be said about Don Bosco's stay in Paris. Hailed in triumph wherever he went, he spent his days receiving a countless number of people, making innumerable visits, and holding several public conferences. It seems almost unbelievable that he had time for all this, but what is all the more surprising is that he had the strength to hold up under it. Indeed, that such an unrelenting and prolonged mental tension did not even for an instant lessen his habitual tranquility of soul, notwithstanding his scant physical endurance, is a proof of his heroic self-control, which had about it something of the supernatural. This too is to be included among his miracles in Paris.

He left Paris at about nine on the morning of Saturday, May 26, and not May 25, as it has been asserted elsewhere.²⁵ To obviate any possible delay, he did not make known the time of his departure, and as soon as he reached the train station, he asked his secretary to purchase the tickets while he quickly walked through the hall to his train. A few travelers who were waiting for the next train spotted him, however, and word soon spread, so that a small crowd of people gathered in front of his coach compartment, immediately drawing general attention. It could be that Don Bosco's name was not totally unknown to all, or, again, that the sight of a priest so composed in the midst of such a retinue drew the curiosity of the railway employees. People who asked about him were all given a single simple response: "Don Bosco, the miracle worker!" As the train began to pull out, the farewells were cordial, and Don Bosco, with his usual grace and kindness, stood at the window to thank his well-wishers and their fellow citizens. Don Bosco was leaving Paris a bountiful heritage of love, but in return he carried with him the fondest and most lasting of memories.

For some time he remained in recollected silence. Also Father Rua and Father De Barruel were silent, lost in a flood of emotions which gave them much food for thought. How many things they had heard and seen! How many honors had been showered upon their good father

²⁴The former deputy, in a letter dated May 22, informed Don Bosco that his wife, after three years of being bedridden, had been able to go to church two days previously. [Author]

²⁵Cf. Lemoyne's two-volume life, Vol. 2, p. 567. [Author]

by all classes of people, how many wonders he had wrought through Mary, Help of Christians! Finally Don Bosco's words shook them from their reverie: "How remarkable! Father Rua, do you remember the road that leads from Buttigliera to Murialdo? There, to the right, there is a little hill, and on that hill a cottage, and from that cottage to the road there extends a meadow. That poor little home was mine and my mother's. In that meadow, as a child, I used to pasture two cows. If all those noblemen only knew that they were tendering such honors to a poor peasant of Becchi! Pranks of Providence!"

They then went on to speak of two pamphlets, one written by [Leon] Aubineau, the other by an anonymous author, which were being sold to benefit his works and which were very much in demand, as were also his photographs. Don Bosco listened without saying a word or making any gesture which might reveal his thoughts, and then, with childlike simplicity, exclaimed, "With how little wisdom is the world governed! Could the world only see who I really am! But how great are the goodness and providence of the Lord! It is God who has accomplished all this in His infinite mercy!"

Regardless of what his humility prompted him to say, he had truly achieved a glorious triumph in Paris. A year later the echo could still be heard in the French Parliament. In a very somber speech on the labor question, delivered to the Cabinet on February 2, 1884, [Bishop Charles Emil] Freppel of Angers, who, as we have seen, personally witnessed these things, came out with these words: "The one and only Vincent de Paul contributed more to the solution of the labor problem than did all the writers of the era of Louis XIV. And in our day, in Italy, a priest, Don Bosco, whom you saw in Paris, is working out solutions to this problem better than all the speakers of the Italian Parliament have done."²⁶

Efforts have been made to calculate the total amount of funds which Don Bosco collected in Paris, but we believe this to be an exercise in futility. It is quite probable, if not actually true, that Don Bosco himself did not have even an approximate idea of how much money passed through his hands. Almost every evening Countess De Combaud's brother, a banker, used to mail widely the fruits of Paris' generosity which Don Bosco handed over to him without keeping a record. Men of Divine Providence, who do not hoard treasures for earth but for heaven, employ

²⁶From the extensive report of the Cabinet meeting in *Nouvelliste du Nord et du Pas-de-Calais*, Lille, February 7, 1884. [Author]

the means which the beneficence of others sends them without wasting time to keep records. The world trusts them blindly and has no misgivings about contributing to their cause, never even dreaming to ask them for an account, as is right and proper in everyday administration.

Full-fledged ministers of charity, they operate under the control of the all-seeing God, and just as, in giving, the left hand must not know what the right hand is doing, as long as God knows it, so these extraordinary dispensers of charity keep on distributing into various channels what they receive, leaving it to God to measure the sum total of it all.

In the history of the Salesian Congregation Don Bosco's visit to Paris stands at a point of very high relief. In the intellectual metropolis of Europe we may say that Don Bosco and his work made their debut in the world, a world which was to become the field of their activity, and that debut turned out to be both impressive and sympathetically received. From that point on there thrived about Don Bosco, founder of the Salesians, a flowering of international literature which brought him to the attention of people of learning, authority, and wealth, thus opening for his sons highways to charity in every quarter of the globe.

CHAPTER 8

Northward and Eastward from Paris

INCREASING atheism within the government and the spread of socialism throughout France gave the most enlightened churchmen and Catholic lay leaders reason to feel the urgency of stemming the tide, primarily by either creating or expanding youth projects for the common people, especially those aimed at giving professional training to poor and abandoned boys. These were the easy targets of subversive forces which, in the schools and factories, instilled in them aversion for or, worse yet, hatred of the Church and civil society. Don Bosco's system, therefore, could not have come at a more appropriate time. From several towns he received pressing appeals to visit places where plans were afoot to open or expand institutions quite like his own. Some wished to entrust their works to him, others to learn from his expertise and advice. Unfortunately, however, his physical condition would not let him rashly risk the strain of further traveling; furthermore his presence was urgently needed in Italy. Nevertheless, he made his way north as far as Lille, and spent some time at Amiens on his return; afterward, he headed toward Turin, on the way visiting Dijon and stopping off at Dôle. However, it was only at Lille that he initiated plans for a foundation at an early date; the stops in the remaining cities of his route served to afford his tired body some measure of relief and allowed him to meet and become acquainted with many worthy cooperators.

He arrived in Lille at noon on May 5 and was the guest of Baron Alfred de Montigny. He had been introduced to this good nobleman by a common friend, Attorney Ernest Michel of Nice, who zealously campaigned for a Salesian house in that vast industrial center, then under

the threat of Marxism.¹ As will be seen, that foundation was realized in 1884 when the Salesians took over the direction of the existing St. Gabriel's Orphanage.

The news of his coming, heralded some days before by the Paris newspapers, roused the city to high expectations, so much so that, when his arrival was imminent, a large crowd gathered to welcome him. The enthusiasm grew all the more when word got out that he had been at the bedside of a sick woman that very morning, and his blessing had brought her significant relief.

St. Gabriel's Orphanage welcomed Don Bosco with a formal reception in his honor. This charitable institution had never before seen its halls so bursting with people; a couple of hours before time, crowds came rushing to get places. "This illustrious priest," described *Vraie France*, "wends his way through the crowd which hems him in on every side, and seats himself on a slightly raised armchair while all eyes are fixed upon him with eager and hallowed curiosity. No one would ever be able to detect in his countenance or bearing the slightest sign of affected modesty or personal gratification. He seems unconcerned in what goes on about him, lost in loftier thoughts. Seated appropriately there, on the boundary separating fortune's favorites from her rejected ones, he centers his concern on his work and not on himself."

The youngsters sang four stanzas of an anthem set in hexameters. The first two compared Don Bosco's tour of France to that of Jesus to the cities of Judea, thronged by mothers who presented their children to Him for His blessing. The third expressed France's envy of Italy in being the possessor of Don Bosco, while it thanked God that throughout the world Don Bosco's work showed the splendor of divine power and providence. In the last stanza Lille rejoiced to host him within her walls: Lille, bulwark of France, Lille, happy to re-echo the universal cry of *Viva Don Bosco!* An address which followed paraphrased the hymn and introduced two new ideas: that in a burst of emotion and reverence France had bowed to the halo of priest and apostle which shone from his forehead and that the people present considered it a signal grace to have been, even for a moment, the subject of his thoughts. This was followed by an account of the orphanage's history and its present status, drawn up by the president and his staff. Don Bosco concluded the as-

¹The same attorney had also been largely responsible for persuading Don Bosco to make a trip to Paris. Cf. *The 25th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Work in France*, Nice, 1902, p. 112. [Author]

sembly. Unworthy and imperfect an instrument that he was, he said, he placed himself at the disposal of those who sought his aid. He congratulated the founders, benefactors and administrators of the orphanage, especially those who staffed the home, the worthy Daughters of St. Vincent de Paul, the great hero and perfect model of Christian charity. "I marvel," he said, "at the wonders that you have accomplished. I come not to destroy your work, but solely to better it, if I can, with your cooperation." He closed by calling the Lord's blessing upon those present and their families.

In this instance, also, *Vraie France* reiterated in its own words the observation made by other journalists. "As for his bearing," it remarked, "this apostle's words have none of the qualities which normally make a strong impression on an audience and predispose it to fall under his spell. A feeble voice, a faulty pronunciation, a clumsy syntax, are all coupled to a total disregard to cover up these deficiencies or to make up with gestures for the glaring insufficiency of his words. And yet, this frail elderly priest draws crowds wherever he goes; this preacher, this poor speaker who can hardly make himself heard, stimulates and challenges to heights of sacrifice. Even if there were naught else of the wondrous in Don Bosco's life, would not this miracle, repeated every day, suffice?"

The following day he went to speak in the Church of St. Maurice, as the journal *Pas-de-Calais-Arras* amply reported to its readers in the issues of May 7 and 8. Two kinds of people, commented the paper, had become acquainted with Don Bosco before his name became a household word in all of France: pilgrims who traveled to Rome and enthusiastically observed his work in Italy, and persons who, searching to improve their health in Nice, also had the spiritual consolation of breathing the sweet aroma of Salesian work in that city. All of these people, later turning into apostles of the apostle, would come back, changing their wearisome travels into devout ovations which brought about aid for many people.

After this preamble the correspondent thus pictured Don Bosco: "An elderly priest strains to mount the pulpit, with the help of others. He modestly greets his audience and, standing—since kneeling is by far too painful—he recollects himself for a few moments with eyes closed; his lean features, which recall the Curé of Ars, are transfigured while he prays. He begins to speak in a voice neither loud nor soft. His is a foreign accent, but he expresses himself in an easily understandable way. He speaks with simplicity, with no attempt at eloquence, without even

becoming spirited, except when he speaks of God, of religion, and of the salvation of souls. That priest, that orator, is Don Bosco.”

His talk focused on the beginnings of the oratories and hospices, his founding of two religious families, his mission to South America, the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators, and a final request for alms. “Don Bosco,” remarks the journalist, “has a way of his own of rousing people to charity: he goes directly to the point, with no frills, no beating about the bush. Gold and silver coins fill the baskets which zealous ladies later pass around. It is the voice of the public,” the article concludes, “which makes of this priest an extraordinary man. Yesterday, at Lille, crowds surged toward him, blocking his way. They wanted to kiss his hand and receive his blessing; instinctively the people, less prudent than the Church but rarely at odds with it, marveled at his accomplishments coupled with his profound humility [...]. Our country, after having the honor of venerating and blessing him, will soon face the duty of supporting those very works which his inspiration will bring into being and to pass on to posterity the memory of a man who loves France because France loves and practices the holy virtue of charity.”

Each morning after Mass he gave audiences at St. Gabriel’s Orphanage, and from there he would be taken and escorted on visits to the sick or to breakfast or dinner with important families, who vied with each other to be his host. So many were these invitations, which were first cleared through the orphanage’s office, that a schedule had to be drawn up. When he was shown the list indicating where he was to show up for dinner every day, he studied it carefully and then remarked to Father Rua, “Well now, look at this schedule! I expected it to read: today you visit these churches, then you make a pilgrimage to such and such a shrine; the day after tomorrow you fast and go on retreat, then you give a spiritual conference! Instead, look at this: dinner, dinner, dinner! The Lord be blessed!” He spoke these words with not the slightest harshness—that was not his way—but with an air of simple resignation which brought smiles to his hearers.

These dinners, far from being relaxing, were in no slight way fatiguing. Nevertheless he always knew how to bring in a tone of joy, nothing being more distasteful to him than to be a burden to his table companions. On one occasion Baron [Alfred de] Montigny had poured him a glass of Frontignan wine. “This is a good wine,” Don Bosco exclaimed on draining the glass. “A good wine! Another drop, please!” And he reached out his glass. At first his words disconcerted some fellow guests,

but they were not slow to see that in praising the wine he was really praising his host or, as they also suspected, it was his facetious way of masking his virtue. From that day on, the baron changed the name of his Frontignan wine to Don Bosco's wine.

On May 10 he was tendered a formal banquet by the Board of Catholic Education, founded and sponsored by Mr. Jonglez De Ligne. Eight days before, this zealous Catholic gentleman had written to Don Bosco's secretary: "I hope that this saintly priest will do us the honor of accepting. It will be the very best boost he can give the work of our Catholic schools, which now enroll eleven hundred children, all of whom we have rescued from the atheistic schools." Toward the end of the meal a cake was brought to the table, heaped with confetti and topped by a statue of Mary, Help of Christians. When the statue was lifted, there appeared a likeness of the church dedicated to her at the Oratory in Turin. An utterly unfeigned joy filled the guests. One of them, talking about the welcomes given Don Bosco in Paris, remarked that he had good reason to vaunt his many triumphs, but Don Bosco remained silent. Someone asked him, "Come, now, what are your thoughts?" Goodheartedly and with a touch of humor he replied, "I was just wondering whether or not it would become me to be proud." The unexpected retort was greeted with hearty laughter.

The Catholic school system had an anthem of its own which was sung on the occasion of public fund-raisings or other gatherings. A choral group of youngsters sang it on that occasion. It was a battle hymn. The martial refrain strongly expressed the fervor of the new crusaders who had entered the field in defense of God's rights against those who would secularize the schools. Mr. Paul Tailliez offered a toast in the name of his colleagues with a wish that "the holy priest" would pass on to the members of the association a spark of the fervor which totally inflamed him for the glory of Jesus, the salvation of souls, and especially the Christian rebirth of the neediest youngsters. Another gentleman, who had visited the Oratory four years before, spoke in the name of the whole association, asking the "St. Vincent de Paul of Italy" to tell them the secret that made his work so effective. Noteworthy for more than one reason was this passage: "Our friends in Paris write us that you have come like the dove from the ark to proclaim to our hapless country the end of the revolutionary deluge. In fact, we have noted that your arrival in Lille coincided with the feast of the Pope of Lepanto's victory, St. Pius V, the glorious devotee of her whom you especially honor under the title of Help of

Christians. To the olive branch you add the lily of the Immaculate Virgin. A tribute to you, Very Reverend Father, on this soil of France, where the lily has flourished gloriously for eight centuries! Allow us to hope that your visit may be a pledge of its flowering, because our fatherland wishes never to cease styling itself 'Mary's Realm.' "

It was only natural that, in the face of official atheism, the citizens of the Third Republic who regretted the gradual breaking down of the ties that had once linked religion and fatherland together should nostalgically turn their thoughts to the former monarchy. However, Don Bosco, under every circumstance, was very careful not to utter a word which might even remotely ring of politics. In conclusion he was given a medal of the association bearing the cross on its face and on the reverse the lily of the city's coat-of-arms.

It was with "heartfelt gratitude" that Mrs. Niel wrote to Don Bosco to thank him for the honor and comfort he brought her and her family by accepting to join them at noon, May 11, at their home in Roublaix, a city situated about seven miles from Lille. Her husband also, having attended the conference at St. Maurice, prized this visit as "a singular favor."

A certain gentleman prepared a lavish banquet for Don Bosco, but our sources say nothing about his family name. Don Bosco's eye kept wandering over the gorgeous table setting and the exquisite foods. Whatever ran through his mind he expressed toward the end of the banquet, when, finding an appropriate moment, he said to his host, "Sir, I have a question I can't help asking you. Ever since we sat down to eat I have wanted to get it off my chest and could not do so."

"Oh, tell me please," replied the host.

"But it might be indiscreet of me to ask."

"Please speak freely,"

"I would like to know how much this dinner cost you."

"If that's all, I can tell you in a moment."

He summoned the chef and asked him. The latter went to look up his expense ledger and returned to say that the dinner's supplies had cost twelve thousand five hundred francs.

"Now that you know, are you satisfied?"

"Yes and no. Twelve thousand five hundred francs to honor poor Don Bosco is really a lavish expenditure. Should my boys find out that Don Bosco lets people spend so much on a meal for him, they would be astounded. Would it not have been better, they would say, if that money had been given to him to buy bread for us?"

"Well, I will take care of that too!" exclaimed the host, who, wealthy as he was, loved to show both his magnificence and generosity. In fact, just before the guests left the table, a lad very gracefully approached Don Bosco and, after a word of compliment, presented him a sealed envelope on a fancy tray. On opening it, Don Bosco found that it contained twelve thousand five hundred francs in bank notes.

In addition to the extraordinary events we have already narrated, we have accounts of several others. First there is that of Mrs. Philippal De Roubaix. Her legs had become so rigid that every step brought her acute pain. Taken to the church where Don Bosco was and brought to him, she received his blessing and a medal. Immediately afterward, she felt cured and never again suffered those pains.

Mr. James Thery had a rachitic child who could not walk and was hardly able even to move. His parents took him to Don Bosco, who lightly passed his hands over the child's arms and legs. At the touch the boy felt strengthened and, freed from his illness, grew up strong and healthy.

More astounding was another stunning recovery. An orphan girl of Aire-sur-Lys was so badly infected with scrofula that she was not allowed to make her First Communion. In addition, one leg was so twisted that she could stand only with great effort. Miss Claire Louvet, who had come to Lille to see Don Bosco, gave him a letter from Father Engrand² recommending the child to his prayers. It was a Saturday evening. Don Bosco slipped the letter into his pocket to read it when he found time. It happened that in the early hours between Monday night and Tuesday morning the sick girl was subjected to violent spasms, after which she quietly fell asleep and, awakening toward morning, cried out to her aunt, "Auntie, I am cured!" In fact, the ulcers were closed, her legs were supple, so much so that she personally went to Father Engrand to tell him the happy news. In 1891, when the account of her miraculous healing reached the Oratory, she was a normally developed woman enjoying excellent health.

Directly across from St. Gabriel's Orphanage lived Mr. Cordonnier, a wealthy wine merchant. For some time he had been contemplating marriage but had not yet made his intention known to anyone. Like so many others, he wanted to visit Don Bosco in order to pay his respects, offer his services, and, should the opportunity arise, also seek his counsel for

²See Vol. XV, pp. 491f, 496, 503, 506f. [Author]

the future. On approaching Don Bosco, he barely had time to open his mouth when Don Bosco, on seeing him, said, "Yes, by all means, marry the woman of your choice."

Sister Mary Clotilde, of the Bernardines of Esquermes, a suburb of Lille, lay on her bed of pain after having twice, at an interval of eight months, received the Last Sacraments. Don Bosco went to her bedside. The superior, while escorting him to the infirmary, had simply told him, "Don Bosco, here is a sister who was anointed last December and cannot yet manage either to get up or to stand on her feet. Couldn't you make her better? It would be an excellent remembrance of your visit to our convent." Don Bosco looked at the sick woman, then bowed his head for a few moments as though in prayer, and, looking up, stated clearly: "She will live ... and for a long time, too. Thus she will be useful to the community..." Then, with a smile, he added, "Even to a hundred years, if need be." This last remark made people think that he was speaking facetiously. However, it appears that he had no intention of being facetious. He gave no assurance of a cure, but only of a long life. The fact is that the sister was not cured, but at the time of this writing [1934] she was still alive, at the ripe age of eighty-two, and was still offering her pains every day to the Lord for the good of her community, for whom her life was thus, as Don Bosco stated, truly useful. In addition, for some time back she had also experienced periods of improvement which allowed her to do some work.

The community is now located at Ollignies, Belgium, having been forced to move there thirty years ago by the laws of suppression. Just at that time the foundation of a daughter house in the same locality was being discussed. The sister in charge of opening the new house was at Lille during Don Bosco's visit, and she recommended her assignment to him. "Under what title will you honor Our Blessed Lady in your new convent?"

The superior thought for a moment and answered, "The title of Don Bosco's Madonna, because ..."

"Rather, call her the Help of Christians," he interrupted. "She loves to help us."

The proposal pleased the superior, and, from that time on, Our Lady has been honored in the convent of Ollignies under that title.

During his visit to the Women's Home of the Five Wounds, the superior exclaimed, "Oh, Don Bosco, you who work miracles, obtain that all those who die in this home will be saved!"

"Oh, Mother!" was his only reply.

She retorted, "We have in our home now a woman in her eighties who is in her last moments. Come and bless her and send her soul to heaven!"

Don Bosco asked to be taken to her. He approached her, gazed at her a moment, then recollected himself in prayer and gave her a blessing. Then, turning to the superior, he remarked, "See, Mother, your prayer has been already heard." Indeed, no sooner had the elderly woman been blessed that she most peacefully rendered her soul to God.

We cannot omit a little incident taking place at the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. A girl student of theirs—Germaine D.—one of twenty-two children in her family, was brought to him. Being short of stature, she was afraid that this would prevent her from becoming a nun, and so, as she walked by Don Bosco, she plucked up her courage and asked him, "Father, would you pray that I might grow?"

"My child, you will grow ... but elsewhere."

Some time later, the girl flew to that dwelling where all will grow to perfect height.

Among the former pupils was a young lady who felt that she was being called to join her teachers. She was due to enter the novitiate on June 8, on reaching the canonical age of twenty-one, but, attracted by the joys of her family, planned to wait a while. Don Bosco gave the girls a little talk, and then, as he walked among them to receive the donations they offered him, he thanked each one with an impressive "God reward you!" When he reached that girl, he stopped and, giving her a penetrating glance, asked her, "And so, when will you go?" That was all she needed. It was God's voice. On June 8 she entered the novitiate at Conflans.

Delightful is the incident concerning the family of Baron Alfred de Montigny, which the nuns still recall. Having married late in life, they had two daughters whom they sent to the school of the Sisters of the Sacred Heart some time around 1875. However, the girls' delicate health was a constant source of worry to the parents. In fact, the older girl, Mary Theresa, died at fifteen, and her sister Amelia followed her eighteen months later, both victims of tuberculosis. The Montigny home was turned into a house of grief and sadness. Friends of theirs in Nice arranged to have them meet Don Bosco, who poured soothing oil into their wounds, urging them to lavish their care upon poor and abandoned children. Then, at Lille, just before leaving, after having enjoyed the

hospitality of their home, he whispered an unexpected word to them: "You must prepare a cradle."

The word gradually got around, reaching also the ears of Archbishop Alfred Duquesnay of Cambrai, in whose diocese Lille was situated, not being yet a diocese of its own. "If the child is born," he stated, "I want to be the godfather." Less than a year later, the couple were cuddling a baby boy, the desired heir of their name and fortune. The archbishop kept his word. The pastor of St. Maurice, who was to baptize the child, in the presence of such a distinguished godfather, asked him how he was to conduct the rite before his own archbishop. "Act as if I were any member of the diocese," was the archbishop's genial reply. In addition to the father's name, the child was also given that of the archbishop. The person who sent us this account saw the mother in 1897; a widow, she found her sole earthly comfort in her son, the miracle baby, as he was known.³

A final amazing event is described by the one who was granted the favor, a young Jesuit subdeacon named Joseph Crimont. He twice served Don Bosco's Mass. The first time was on May 6, in the chapel of the Sisters of the Retreat of the Sacred Heart of Jesus before such a huge congregation that it took them a good fifteen minutes to pass from the sacristy to the altar because at every step a new group of people encircled Don Bosco. "What a Mass that was," exclaimed Crimont. "It was the Mass of a saint; his face was ablaze with supernatural light." Once again the young Jesuit attended Don Bosco during the Holy Sacrifice; it was in the Church of the Adoration, so called because of the unceasing exposition of the Most Blessed Sacrament—the same crowd, the same enthusiasm, the same devotion of the prior day, and, for the young religious, the same impact of holiness. He was ready to follow Don Bosco wherever he could, as long as he might be able to speak with him and ask a favor. The right moment came as Don Bosco re-entered the sacristy. Responding to his request, Don Bosco asked him what he wished. "My health is poor," he replied. "I would like to have just the strength I need to be allowed to go to the missions. My dream is to become a missionary."

"My son," Don Bosco told him tenderly, "you will be granted this favor. Every day, in my thanksgiving after Mass, I will pray for your intention."

Indeed, this son of St. Ignatius, who had spent so much time in a quest for health, regained it so quickly and so well that a short time later he was sent as a scholastic to the Jesuit College of St. Servais at Liège and the year after to St. Helier, the famous Jesuit scholasticate in Cham-

³Letter of Maurice Berthe, Cistercian, to Father [Augustine] Auffray, November 1934. [Author]

pagne, to continue his studies and prepare himself for the priesthood. There was much talk in those days of the Jesuit missions in the Rocky Mountains, and the young seminarian felt as if an interior voice was pointing out to him the field of his apostolate in the area of the frozen Arctic. After his ordination he was assigned by obedience to the missions in India, but in 1894 his superiors transferred him to Alaska, where he was named Vicar Apostolic by the Holy See in 1916.⁴

We will glean a few more tidbits of information from some letters. On May 9 Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the Convent of the Sacred Heart; the sisters had tucked a sheet of paper containing their intentions under the altar cloth. On May 12 he said Mass for the Carmelite Sisters and, to please them, agreed to write a few words and add his autograph to some holy cards they brought him. On May 13 he offered Mass in the Church of St. Stephen. It appears that he also visited the monastery of the Good Shepherd, the Franciscan Sisters' convent, and the Sisters of Our Lady of Prompt Help.

A young lady named Josephine Pierson, who consulted him concerning her vocation, received the reply: "The good God is calling you." However, in answer to another letter of hers, he had his secretary tell her that she was to adhere to what he had already told her but under the guidance of her confessor. A certain Miss Delarue thanked him for his prayers, which resulted in the healing of a family discord that seemed to be beyond hope. The archbishop of Cambrai expressed his gratitude for Don Bosco's visit to his diocese and for having accepted St. Gabriel's Orphanage. In addition, he asked him to visit a very sick woman in Lille, insisting, "Go, dear Father, and give her your blessing as the Lord blessed St. Peter's mother-in-law, and may your blessing have the same effect." From a letter written by a lady after his death to Father Rua we catch a glimpse of what a blessing his visits were to the sick. She had such remembrances of his counsels and encouragement! What patience and resignation he had instilled in her to endure an illness lasting thirteen years! What loyal and generous attachment to his works she had maintained though the grace requested had not been granted!

Returning to Paris on May 16 he made a stopover at Amiens, where there was a fine group of Salesian cooperators. He was probably hosted by the viscount of Forceville, who had invited him⁵ and who later thanked him for his kindly visit. He offered Mass at ten o'clock in the

⁴See Appendix 10. [Editor]

⁵Having read the incorrect notice that Don Bosco was due at Lille on April 30, he wrote to him there on that date, declaring that he would be most honored to have him as his guest. [Author]

cathedral. Despite the vastness of the church, the central nave was packed with people. After the Gospel Don Bosco spoke from the pulpit, which was attached to a massive pillar whose base was adorned with a giant statue of St. Vincent de Paul, showing him with one hand raised to heaven and the other pointing to a child at his feet. However, that morning his listeners felt that France's saint of charity was extending both arms to embrace Italy's herald of charity.

In the afternoon he visited a nursing home. All, both sick and well alike, gave him no rest; he was hemmed in by a host of mothers accompanying their children and bearing the little ones in their arms, all asking for his blessing. Hands and feet struggled to reach and touch him! A veritable human river bore him along on his way to the train station, and, having boarded, he had to stand at the window to bless the crowds who knelt to receive that grace. A free-lance writer who occupied the adjacent compartment, struck by the uniqueness of the scene, handed him an offering and asked to be enrolled as a Salesian cooperator. A correspondent of a weekly journal, alluding to the well-known miraculous healings, wrote that the most prominent miracles were two: first, the huge crowds that gathered in their anxiety to see and hear a poor old man; the other, the multiplication of conversions.⁶

How much trust was placed in his prayers even here! A certain Mrs. De Franqueville, who asked for her daughter's healing, was content if Don Bosco's secretary would merely write to her: "Don Bosco has prayed" or "Don Bosco will pray"; two words that would "console her and make her feel at peace." Another lady who could not be at Amiens when Don Bosco passed through asked for a tiny prayer for herself in her internal distress, for her sick grandfather, for another member of her family who needed a conversion, for her five sons, for her husband, and for a Carmelite sister. Don Bosco had a reply sent that he would gladly pray for her and hers and was sending her his blessing.

At Amiens a nineteen-year-old girl was boarding with a family that was cold in the practice of its faith and was rather reluctant to give. One day word reached them that Don Bosco, having come to the city, was visiting several affluent homes to seek alms in aid of Salesian works and would most certainly come to them. The matron told the girl that she could not afford a contribution and that, to avoid having to say so, she would not be at home, leaving the girl to make excuses. Don Bosco

⁶*Le Semaine Religieuse* of Nice, Sunday, May 21, 1883. [Author]

did actually make an appearance with his secretary. The young lady received him with all possible courtesy and made him understand as best she could that he had nothing to hope for in that house. Don Bosco looked at her and said, "My daughter, you have the gift of prudence; guard it carefully and God will watch over you. You will have a long wait yet, but you will enter a congregation that was born when you were born. I shall see you again." Actually, he saw her again a few days later in another family and, pointing her out to someone nearby, he said, "I know her.... God is watching over that girl." She had thirteen more years to wait before she could follow her calling, because it was in 1896 that she joined the Little Sisters of the Assumption and it was not until 1900 that, reading the recently issued life of Father [Stephen] Pernet, she learned that the congregation arose in May 1864, in the month and year of her birth.⁷

As we have already stated, Don Bosco stayed ten more days in Paris and then left for Dijon, where he remained three days, staying at the luxurious home of the marchioness of Saint-Seine on Verrerie Street. The following day, a Sunday, he went to say Mass at the convent of the Carmelite Sisters, who had been asking to have him, through their chaplain, since April 13. Father Rua accompanied him. He was first escorted to the infirmary to meet Mother Superior, who was very ill. There the entire community came to him. "After a lapse of fifty years," wrote one of the nuns to us, "I can still see Don Bosco, calm and recollected, looking more like one who lives in another world rather than this."⁸ One sister asked him in Italian whether Mother would recover. "You will receive in the measure that you believe," he answered. She later admitted that at that time she had little faith in a healing. He then entered the chapel, which was jammed with people. At his entrance and during the celebration of Mass, one could have heard a fly buzz, so engrossed were the worshipers with the thought that they were assisting at a saint's Mass. After reading the Gospel, he turned about and said, among other things, "Let us pray fervently for the prioress of this Carmel convent, that God may spare her for some time for the sake of her community, which still needs her badly." Mother Mary of the Trinity did not recov-

⁷Cf. *Mère Marie de Jésus*, p. 311, where the nun recounts that the second meeting also took place at Amiens. If this is true, Don Bosco must have returned, but not fifteen days later, as she affirms. [Author]

⁸She comments as follows on Father Rua, "Father Rua, in some way or other, gave us also the impression of a saint, another Aloysius Gonzaga." [Author]

er; nevertheless, she lived until November 4, 1889.⁹

In the afternoon he visited St. Ignatius School, where First Communion was then being celebrated. On Monday he held a conference at the Church of Our Lady of Good Hope. So vast was the crowd that the Magnificat was sung three times as he made his way from the sacristy to the foot of the pulpit. On Tuesday morning he celebrated Mass at St. Michael's Church and that evening visited an orphanage conducted by Father Chanton on St. Filibert Street.

At Dijon his presence aroused the same enthusiasm and sparked the same demonstrations that had greeted him at Paris and Lille. "This man, so unassuming in aspect," wrote a correspondent of Dijon in the May 29 issue of *Le Monde*, "so wearied by fatigue and travel, who seems to be drained of all strength, answers every question, gives many conferences, distributes blessings and prayers wherever he goes, takes an interest in all the problems of those who ask for his support with God, and at the same time he commends to their Christian charity the colossal undertakings which he directs. People flock after him, beside themselves to see him and to touch his garments, because they feel the attraction of holiness emanating from his person; they detect the supernatural touch in the fruitfulness of his works and in the extraordinary graces obtained by him."

The still uncertain and delayed announcement of his departure brought him invitations from persons of distinction.¹⁰ A lovely letter from the Marquis of Saint-Seine, dated April 10, begs him to visit Dijon, offering him hospitality in the very warmest of terms. On April 28 a viscountess of the same name, taking his coming for granted, requests, for her family's sake, the honor of serving him dinner in her own residence, at any hour of his choice. Countess Max de Vesvrosse, on May 1, tries to reserve a brief audience with him. On May 8, a cathedral vicar, in terms of edifying humility, begs him to come and bless his youth ministry. A subdeacon writes from Poiseul on May 22 with great warmth and lively trust, saying he will go to him in Dijon and bring the son of a praiseworthy cooperator to receive his blessing, adding that he himself needs his intercession for health to enable him to follow his vocation.

More letters reached him while in Dijon. The chaplain of the Ursulines at Monthard had met Don Bosco while the latter was leaving the

⁹A collection brought in five hundred and nine francs. [Author]

¹⁰While at Lille he had received a cordial invitation from the Salesian cooperator Le Bon of Besançon. [Author]

bishop's residence and had knelt at his feet, asking for his blessing. Don Bosco had humorously replied: "May you be blessed by Him in whose honor you shall be burnt," explaining that he would die a martyr not for the faith but for charity. So delighted was the chaplain with this explanation that he later wrote to Don Bosco asking for his prayers. Other people wrote seeking healing for the sick and conversion for sinners; someone thanked him for his visit and sent an offering; another recommended particular intentions to him.

Letters dated after his visit to France and even after his death recall his stay at Dijon. Singular among them is one from an office worker. He had promised Don Bosco one tenth of a future raise in salary. Having received a raise of one hundred francs per month for the new year, he sent his first donation in January 1884, always recalling and giving thanks for their meeting. However, the remembrances most poignant and most moving keep recurring in letters of condolence written to Father Rua in February 1888. "For me," writes the marchioness of Saint-Seine, "it is a most sweet memory and something I consider an authentic heavenly favor to have hosted under our own roof that true St. Vincent de Paul." A Mrs. [Joan] Le Mire alludes to the cure of her daughter-in-law, obtained from "the dear saint"; however, we have no record of this fact.

A recent letter informs us in detail of an episode, unknown up to now, which took place in Dijon. One evening Don Bosco had dinner with a nobleman of Charentenay, an excellent Christian who had invited to a soirée he was tendering Don Bosco several gentlemen and ladies, friends of his daughters. Wishing to retire at nine-thirty or so, Don Bosco walked through the group, leaning on the nobleman's arm, while all stood up to make way for him. He was shuffling along slowly and with strenuous effort. One young lady, Henrietta De Broin, somewhat shy, was hiding behind her friends, who were standing in a semicircle by the door. Don Bosco walked without saying a word and stopping for no one. However, on reaching the doorway, he suddenly stopped and, glancing over his shoulder at the group, he fixed his gaze on that girl and said to her, "My daughter, you are thinking about your vocation. Very well, pray." He then left, went down the staircase, and entered his carriage.

Miss De Broin had not breathed a word to a living soul about the anxieties she was experiencing concerning her future, and so, in her confusion, she then instantly disappeared without anyone knowing where or how she had vanished. The following morning, still agitated, she opened her heart to a confidante of hers. Her father, learning of her anxiety, did

not want her to see Don Bosco again, and so, without giving her a reason, he took her to the country. Distressed at having to be so isolated, Miss De Broin wrote Don Bosco a letter before leaving, entrusting it for mailing to a lady friend of hers. On reading it, Don Bosco intimated that he remembered her, and, when asked if there was to be a response, replied, "No. Let her pray." Some time later the young lady entered the Sisters of the Cenacle at Versailles.

The sister of this nun also benefited from Don Bosco's blessing. Happening to be a dinner guest with him at the home of a family friend, she recalled his eminent simplicity and gracious ways, and most especially that penetrating glance of his which seemed to pierce the secrets of the heart. Being young and rather worldly, she had no desire to get close to him; nevertheless, she had to go along with her father, who brought her to Don Bosco for his blessing. She made sure, nonetheless, not to raise her eyes and thus draw his attention to her, for this would only embarrass her. Yet she too, some years later, followed her sister to the Cenacle and considered this vocation of hers to be a singular grace for which, she writes, she had to daily express her gratitude to Don Bosco.

Don Bosco left Dijon at five on the evening of May 29; he was expected by the De Maistre family at Dôle. Count [Eugene] De Maistre, his friend of many years and a distinguished benefactor of the Oratory, along with his family, gave him a princely reception. However, Don Bosco stayed only overnight, for the next morning, May 30, after celebrating Mass, he continued his journey to Turin. He was carrying with him some four or five bulky packets of unsealed letters, which drew the suspicions of the customs officials at Modane; however, they courteously accepted his explanation and let the packages through. It took a full month of work and help from several secretaries to clear up that correspondence, since Don Bosco habitually would not let a letter go by unanswered, even if it was of no particular value or came from a youngster.¹¹ Indeed, he never omitted acknowledging even a simple calling card.

In the course of this lengthy narrative we have made no mention of reports published in the Italian press of Don Bosco's tour of France because we have found nothing new in them; they were but *précis* of articles reaching them from the French press.¹²

¹¹The author recalls hearing in 1885 a renowned speaker declare in wonderment that Don Bosco used to answer also youngsters' letters. [Author]

¹²In the midst of this harmonious accolade there had to be a strident voice. It was that of *Fra Paul Sarpi*, a Protestant Waldensian newspaper in Venice. An article (June 22, number 24) began:

We find very strange just one Paris letter to Milan's anticlerical paper *Secolo* announcing the departure of "the miracle worker," as it called him.¹⁴ The article was headed by a picture of Don Bosco. Among other things, it stated that Don Bosco, like Caesar, could well have written, "I came, I saw, I conquered!" It added: "What strength of will power this priest possesses! He was a shepherd at the age of fifteen. Ordained at twenty-six and charged with visiting the jails of Turin, he conceived the idea of gathering together abandoned and youthful offenders. Without a penny to his name, ridiculed, harassed, he triumphed over everyone and everything. Just consider this: At this very moment he directs one hundred and sixty centers scattered throughout Italy, France, Spain, and South America for more than one hundred and fifty thousand poor lads. What a socialist priest!" *Unità Cattolica* of Turin agreed on one point with the Milanese paper, with whom it daily had a running feud, stating that in all truth Don Bosco could be called a socialist, because he was in fact the savior of society. Even these journalistic twists have a value of their own. However, the best expression of them all came from a Portuguese journal which proved that Don Bosco's trip to Paris was "a matter of faith."¹⁵

"The clerical journals have sung Don Bosco's wonders in Paris. He made his appearances, held conferences, preached sermons, and won over proselytes to the Vatican. But alas, the propaganda issuing from this priest seems to be highly suspect. The work he founded is nothing more or less than a very shady money-making scam." To prove his assertion the editor was shamefaced enough to make his own, with slight changes, an article written by Giustina¹³ a year before, as though the whole affair had just taken place, without checking to learn if it was fact or slander. Don Bosco could not have been treated more basely; the author was a defrocked priest. [Author]

¹³Attorney Giustina, a former Salesian pupil, was at this time a rabid anticlerical and the editor of *Cronaca dei Tribunali*. Once, however, he took Don Bosco's defense. See Vol. XIV, p. 69. [Editor]

¹⁴June 22, 1883 issue. Don Bosco had been back in Turin some twenty and more days before, but the paper certainly ignored his presence and published the article late. [Author]

¹⁵*A Cruz do Operaio*, Lisboa, 1 de Junho 1883. [Author]

CHAPTER 9

Don Bosco's Seven Months at the Oratory: Celebrations and Events

ALL at the Oratory enthusiastically drank in the reports of Don Bosco's triumphs in Paris communicated to them after night prayers, but those concerning his health made them somewhat worried. Hence many prayers were offered for his safe return. With their closest superiors' approval the boys committed themselves during the novena to Mary, Help of Christians, to a chain of communions, each one pledging himself in his group to whatever number he chose.

Anxiously awaited, Don Bosco arrived at about nine on the morning of May 31. On hand with the boys were also several distinguished guests from the city who came to welcome him, among them Marquis D'Avila, a worthy Spanish cooperator who was staying a few days at the Oratory. Only those who remember the life of those days can understand the happiness, the festivity, the joyfulness which flooded the entire house on occasions like this. Greeted by cheers, applause and music, Don Bosco crossed the courtyard, slowly directing his steps toward the portico over whose central arch was emblazoned the inscription: *Dear Father, France honors you, Turin loves you*. Mounting a platform, Don Bosco stared down at the hat in his hand and with a broad grin began, "You may think that this French hat has changed Don Bosco from what he used to be. Oh, don't be afraid, my friends. I am always the same, always your most loving friend, as long as God gives me an ounce of breath. While in France, I remembered you every day; I prayed for you daily. Your letters and other news about you brought me great pleasure, and I also experienced the power of your prayers. Now, after four months' absence I am glad to be back among you once more, for you are my joy and my crown. It is my wish that next Tuesday, June 5, we hold a magnificent feast in honor of Mary, Help of Christians,

who, as a good Mother, has assisted us all during my travels and has obtained from God many favors for us and for you too. I have many things to tell you, but this is enough for now, because I wish to go and celebrate Holy Mass at the altar of Mary, Help of Christians....”

All were touched by these words uttered with such fatherly affection, and not a few wept tears of tenderness. The entire crowd of boys spontaneously followed him into the church. After a most uncomfortable night, physically weakened, in spite of the late hour, Don Bosco had kept his fast so as to be able to celebrate Mass. At the end, all sang the *Te Deum*.¹

The above-mentioned banner was a simple variation of another in 1867, which proclaimed, *Rome honors you, Turin loves you*. The reaction was identical: as the words had then offended the Romans, so now they offended the French. And yet neither inscription was totally true because, wherever he went, Don Bosco stirred up loving competition all around him, and this love he preferred to all the honors. The blame falls upon the decorator, who thought he would create a great surprise by deciding on his own to modify the banner of 1867; had he mentioned this to the superiors, he would never have received their permission.

1. FEAST OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS

That very evening Don Bosco held a conference for the cooperators in the Church of St. Francis [de Sales], in accord with the announcement and invitations he had issued from Paris on May 25. Priests and laymen jammed the church. He spoke for about an hour. His theme was that, in view of the present situation, the moral education of the young had become one of the most urgent tasks to which it was time to put one's hand. He had words of praise for the relevant efforts of Catholics in various countries and he singled out the achievements of the Salesians in this field. Then he began to talk about his trip to France, showing how both clergy and laity there appreciated the Association of Salesian Cooperators. In closing he touched upon ways of cooperating. These were not new to Turin's cooperators, but those who went to hear Don Bosco were there to hear him, regardless of what he had to say.

The second conference, that for the lady cooperators, was also given

¹*Unità Cattolica*, June 3, 1883. [Author]

by him in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, on the eve of the feast. He showed that Mary loves the young and hence loves and blesses all who take care of youth. She loves the young for the following reasons: because She is a mother, and mothers have greater tenderness for the younger children; the young are innocent; they are the ones more easily seduced and therefore are a more realistic image of Her Son Jesus, who spent His infancy, childhood and adolescence under Her gaze. He then went on to say that Mary loves and favors those who attend to the bodily and spiritual welfare of the young, and obtains special favors for them from God. "Look at this church," he exclaimed. "Just a few years ago it was a field of corn, beans and potatoes. We needed a church in which to gather the nearby young as well as the many further away. Well then, since the church was meant to benefit the young and teach them the holy fear of God, Mary came to our aid in marvelous fashion and caused it to rise, I might say, through the power of miracles worked in favor of those who personally contributed." After recounting some astonishing facts which took place while the church was being built, he continued, "Neither did Mary's wonders cease with the completion of the building. Indeed, they keep happening more often than before. They bring tears of tenderness to the eyes. More recently, in France, wherever I went, I was told of unexpected healings, of lawsuits and discords coming to an end, of longed-for conversions, and many other graces granted through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, to people who made themselves benefactors of poor youth."

The feast, postponed for liturgical reasons and diligently prepared, turned out to be an imposing and touching demonstration of filial love for Mary, Help of Christians. How many prayers! How many Communions! How many Masses! Singing and ritual worship were the form and substance of this solemnity. Bishop Sigismund Brandolini, titular bishop of Oropa and auxiliary bishop of Cèneda, presided. The many tourists, among whom was a select group of French noblemen, left highly edified and full of admiration. The sponsors of the feast were French: Madame Ferrand of Paris, a benefactress of Don Bosco, and Albert Du Boys, a former city judge of Lyons and a Catholic writer, who during his stay completed the sketch of a book on Don Bosco and his works.² At the dinner Don Bosco honored a few guests by offering a toast in French: greetings and thanks to Bishop Brandolini, words of

²Albert Du Boys, *Dom Bosco et la pieuse Société des Salésiens*, Paris, Gervais, 1884. [Author]

praise for Catholic France, best wishes to the sponsors of the feast, and a hearty round of applause for Father [James] Margotti, the dauntless director of *Unità Cattolica*, who was present.³

One topic of general conversation was his trip to France and the various demonstrations which accompanied it. He let them talk; however, his humility found a pleasant way of manifesting itself. To one of his guests, a dear friend, he smiled and said under his breath, "Many times I found myself as lost as a baby chick in tow."

Bishop Brandolini stayed four days at the Oratory. On his last evening he closed his "Good Night" to the artisans with these words: "I leave you with a saddened heart, profoundly impressed by what I have seen. I shall go back to Veneto and everywhere tell of Don Bosco, of his marvelous Oratory, of the majestic ceremonies at which I have assisted, of his pious boys, and I shall say, 'It is not true to say that faith is extinguished, that prayerfulness is dead, that splendor of religious functions no longer exists, that Catholic feeling is annihilated.' No, I shall say, 'Go to Turin, and Don Bosco's Oratory will show you that sacred rites are stupendous, that singing carries you to heaven, that eight hundred boys practice their faith and piety in a truly edifying manner.... Ah, how willingly would I stay with you and share your life!'"

These closing words were not mere wishful thinking, as commonly such expressions are. This bishop, of noble lineage, never let go of this fond remembrance of Don Bosco and the Oratory and Salesian life, for in August, after mature reflection, he asked to retire to the peaceful aura of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. He was sixty years old. On his arrival he would readily put aside the insignia of his episcopal dignity so as not to distinguish himself in any way from the rest of the community and to live as a subject of Don Bosco like everyone else. He thought he might well busy himself with confessions and catechetical instruction. On receiving word of Don Bosco's approval, he planned to submit his petitions to the Pope, along with a doctor's recommendation and a letter of commendation from the cardinal of Canossa, bishop of Verona; a second letter he hoped to receive from the patriarch of Venice, and he asked Don Bosco for a third. He wished Father [James]

³Du Boys commented on this toast: "We heard him propose a toast in French at a large banquet given the day after the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, in his Turin Oratory. He spoke in a very plain manner; he was happily inspired. He was very apropos, gracious and witty." Several French people were present at the feast by writing letters to Don Bosco, among them Father Enggrand of Aire, who related a signal favor, and Mrs. Quisard, who sent a generous offering for the Church of the Sacred Heart. [Author]

Margotti to write in his favor to influential prelates in Rome. The reason for this decision was that he found the responsibility of the episcopal office too heavy to bear.

Don Bosco replied:

[No date]

Your Excellency,

The unselfish reason which would move Your Excellency to retire from the episcopal see of C eneda and come to exercise your sacred ministry with the poor Salesians would certainly highly enhance the honor in which Your Excellency is already held for many reasons and merits. I would not dare hope for so much, but, should the Holy Father accede to your request and should you be able to adapt to our humble way of life, the Salesian Congregation would applaud your coming among us, especially at this time when all the members of our newly born Salesian family can very well say they are overladen with work.

In the meantime, I shall pray and have our orphans pray that God may guide us and make known to us how we may better promote His greater glory and the good of souls.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

Once he knew Don Bosco's favorable frame of mind, Bishop Brandolini sent the Pope his request through the patriarch, whom he begged to be his advocate with the Holy Father; the cardinal promptly gave his word, though he relied also on "the powerful influence" Don Bosco had in Rome.⁴ However, the bishop's hopes were dashed. He was coadjutor bishop with the right of succession, a position that alerted the prudence of the Pope to keep him at his post. In fact, he did succeed Bishop Cavriani in March, 1885.

2. CONFERENCES OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL, SOCIETY OF WORKERS IN NICE, AND FEAST OF THE HOLY CHILDHOOD

Since Turin was one of Italy's cities where the conferences of St. Vincent de Paul had more strongly taken root, it was chosen in 1883 for the observance of the society's golden anniversary. Don Bosco, who was responsible to a large extent for the growth of that organization,

⁴Letter to Don Bosco, C eneda, September, 25, 1883. [Author]

was not to be forgotten by its members at least at the closing of the festivities since his lengthy absence had made it impossible for him to attend other celebrations. The anniversary closing was marked by religious services on June 10 [1883] in the Church of the Holy Martyrs, the conferences' birthplace, and with a formal banquet. For the latter the society's members, headed by Bishop [Dominic] Pampirio of Alba, assembled at the Oratory and were given a princelike reception by Don Bosco. "There," wrote a city paper,⁵ "they sat at table like brothers, honored by the dear presence of the Oratory's venerable superior. It was truly a Christian agape seasoned by holy merriment, cheered by sincere cordiality and crowned by the words of the bishop, of Don Bosco and of various other distinguished members. How eloquently love spoke in that very place which is itself its living and lasting memorial." The guests departed not merely satisfied but full of admiration and emotion for the generous reception they had been tendered.

The following Sunday a deputation from the Catholic Workers' Union of Nizza Monferrato came to present Don Bosco with a certificate making him an honorary member of the society. Don Bosco graciously accepted the honor, stating he was pleased to share in the good being done by an association which he favored in many ways and which had its headquarters in a city so dear to him.

That evening, to gratify the pastor of Nichelino, a small town not far from Turin, and to please the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, who were running the local kindergarten, Don Bosco went there to preach on the feast of the Holy Childhood. He portrayed in lively colors the pitiable state of so many poor children in pagan countries, and described the efforts of the missionaries to save and baptize them. He recounted what the Salesians and the sisters were doing for the little ones of Patagonia, and closed by exhorting all the parents to enroll their children in the Association of the Holy Childhood.

3. DON BOSCO'S NAME DAY AND BIRTHDAY

No longer simply an Oratory celebration, Don Bosco's name day had taken on the character of public homage to this man of charity. A

⁵*Corriere di Torino*, June 12, 1883. [Author]

Turin weekly wrote,⁶ “As soon as we entered the house, we were astonished to see such a crowd of people. Writers, poets, comedians, commoners, artists, women, wealthy persons, day laborers, old and young, students and blacksmiths, priests and coopers, journalists and printers, noblemen and beggars—it was a sea of faces, so closely packed like sardines in a can that one could not move a finger. And what had they come to see? Don Bosco. All Turin turned out to see this man who was preeminently a son of the people, so much so that a dyed-in-the-wool democrat not long ago remarked, ‘In Turin there are only two men who are really popular: Gianduia⁷ and Don Bosco.’ ” To avoid repetitions we shall recount only what we need to preserve the precious words of Don Bosco.

He spoke several times, but we have the overall drift of his words from only two talks. The first he gave to the representatives of the Oratory’s alumni who had come, as was their custom, on the morning of June 24 to offer him their best wishes and gifts. They presented him with the gilded wooden crown to be placed over the main altar. It had been purchased by the goodwill offerings of the Oratory’s first boys, then widely scattered. In the name of all the alumni Father Onorato Colletti, pastor of Faule, read an affectionate speech and then recited a poem of his own. Don Bosco expressed the happiness he felt at seeing the representatives of his dearly beloved numerous children, and, after thanking them for their beautiful gift, he continued:

It’s true that our speaker and poet, in speaking of Don Bosco, came out with some pious exaggerations and indulged in the rhetorical device known as hyperbole, but this is a freedom easily forgivable in sons who, in their sentiments, stand more by what the heart dictates than by what the mind prompts. However, always remember that Don Bosco was and is but a poor instrument in the hands of God, an artist most wise and all-powerful; to Him, therefore, be all the praise, honor and glory.

As for the rest, our Father Colletti was right in saying that to date the Oratory has realized great achievements, and I add that, with God’s help and the protection of Mary, Help of Christians, it will attain still greater ones. Apart from heaven’s help, what aided and will continue to facilitate our good work is the very nature of the work itself. The goal we aim for is well thought of by people, including those who in matters of religion do not see eye to eye with

⁶*La Stella Consolatrice*, June 30, 1883. [Author]

⁷A comic figure of the Piedmontese theater. [Author]

us. If there is anyone who is against us, it's because either he does not understand us or he does not know what we are doing. The goal of our work is the secular instruction and moral education of youngsters, either abandoned or at risk, to safeguard them from idleness, from wrongdoing, from disgrace and perhaps even prison. Now what person in his right senses, what civil authority, would want to hinder us?

Recently, as you know, I was in Paris and I gave talks in several churches to spread our good cause, and, let's be honest, to solicit funds to provide bread and soup for our boys, who never lose their appetite. Well then, among my listeners there were some who came only to discover Don Bosco's political ideals. Indeed, some even thought I had gone to Paris to stir up a revolution or to recruit members for some party. In view of this, some good people really feared that some ugly incident might befall me. However, as soon as I started speaking, all illusions began to slip away, all fears disappeared, and Don Bosco was left free to travel from end to end of France.

By all means, no, our work has no political goals. We respect duly constituted authority, we are law-abiding, we pay our taxes and we go forward, asking only that we be left free to work for the good of youth and save souls. If necessary, we get also into politics, but in a totally harmless manner—on the contrary, in a way advantageous to every government. Politics is defined as the science and art of governing a state well. Now, the work of the Oratory in Italy, France, Spain, and South America, and in every country where it is already established, strives especially to help the most destitute young people. It aims at reducing the number of the unruly and vagrant, the wrongdoers and petty thieves, and thus to empty out the jails—in a word, to turn out good citizens who, far from making trouble for public authorities, will rather be their support in maintaining order, tranquillity, and peace in society. This is our politics; this has thus far been our only concern, and it will continue to be our only concern in the future. It has been precisely this system that has allowed Don Bosco to benefit first you and then so many others of every age and nation. Besides, what good would it do us to get involved in politics? What would we be able to gain from all our efforts? Nothing else than, perhaps, to make it impossible for us to carry out our charitable works. Political matters today can be likened to a steam engine speeding down the tracks and dragging a line of cars perhaps to a cliff and utter ruin. Would you want to step onto the tracks and try to stop it? You would be squashed. Would you want to scream at it to stop? It cannot hear you, and you would only be tearing your throat apart. What are you to do then? Get out of its way, let it go by until it either stops by itself or it is stopped by God Himself with His almighty hand.

Of course there must be in the world people who are involved in politics, to offer counsel, to warn of dangers, or for other reasons, but this commitment is not for us ordinary people. To us religion and prudence counsel: "Live as good

Christians, busy yourself with the moral training of your children, instruct the pupils of your schools or your parishes well in their catechism—that is everything.” This, I repeat, is the system of Don Bosco, who is hardly a politician, who does not even read the papers. Let this be your system too, my dear sons....

The invitation to Don Bosco’s name day on June 24 was followed by two others to the lay alumni and to the clergy alumni, respectively, for Sunday, July 15, and for Thursday, July 19. Don Bosco could not be present at the first since, as we shall see, he was at the home of Count [Henry of] Chambord at Frohsdorf, but he asked Father Cagliero to take his place. However, he got back in time to attend the second. At the brotherly agape how happy he appeared to see himself surrounded by so many priests who considered themselves always his children. For this very reason, at the table these words of a psalm stood out: “Your children like olive plants around your table.” [Ps. 128:4] He made no attempt to mask his joy as he whispered into the ear of Father Reviglio, “These priests are the apple of my eye.” After the dessert, he spoke the second of the talks known to us. After a timely introduction and a word on how God’s help and that of Mary, Help of Christians, never failed at the Oratory and at the other Salesian houses, he repeated an observation which we have heard him make elsewhere.

For some time people and publications have been saying that Don Bosco works miracles. This is a mistake. Don Bosco has never feigned or claimed to work miracles, and no one of his sons should go along with spreading this untruth. Let’s state the matter clearly as it stands: Don Bosco prays and has his boys pray for the persons who commend themselves to obtain this or that favor, and God, in His infinite goodness, most of the time grants the graces implored, be they sometimes extraordinary and miraculous. But so little does Don Bosco get into the picture that sometimes the favors are granted without his even knowing it.

Mary, Help of Christians, is the wonder-worker who grants graces and miracles by the exalted power She has received from Her divine Son. She knows that Don Bosco is in need of money to provide food for so many poor lads who weigh heavily upon his back. She knows he is poor and that, without financial help, he cannot continue the works he has undertaken for the good of religion and society. And so, what does Mary do? Like a good mother She searches around, goes to the sick, and says to them, “Do you wish to be healed? Then give alms for these poor boys, help in works of mercy, and I shall do an act of charity to you by healing you.” She sees a family being torn apart by an unruly son and says to the mother and father, “Do you want this

troublemaker to leave his evil ways? On your part, do what you can to help free from evil so many other poor abandoned youngsters, and I shall call your son back to wiser thinking." In a word, not to be long-winded, Mary, Help of Christians, comforts those who help the Oratory in a thousand ways, and all we have to do is not make ourselves unworthy of Her protection.

And if Mary, Help of Christians, helps the boys of the Oratory, She helps you too who were once Her children and happily still are. Live the life of a good priest, as this old friend of yours has taught you and inculcated in you. Seek the salvation of the souls who are sadly on the way to perdition; take special care of the young in your parishes, for they are the hope of society. Keep united with the Head of the Church, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Let us always wish each other well and pray for each other. Above all, pray for poor Don Bosco, who steadily draws closer to death, that by God's mercy we may all save ourselves and countless others with us.

It was very true that the Blessed Virgin, and not Don Bosco, worked miracles, but it was no less true that the Blessed Virgin looked ever so kindly upon Don Bosco's prayers as on no one else's that we know of. A French newspaper⁸ closed an article entitled "Queen of Heaven" in praise of Mary Most Holy with these words: "Of all the countless graces obtained throughout the world through the intercession of Our Lady, the most outstanding ones in this present era are probably those granted by God to one of His most favorite apostles, Don Bosco."

From 1875 on, Don Bosco's birthday came to be more solemnly celebrated on the feast of the Assumption, erroneously believed by all to be the anniversary of his birth. In 1883, for the first time, invitations were sent out by Father Rua with a circular, in which, however, he first announced the Forty Hours Devotion and the feast of St. Aloysius. A letter written by [Caesar Trabucco], count of Castagnetto,⁹ on this occasion repeats the high esteem and affection Don Bosco commanded among Turin's elite. Although he was out of the city, the nobleman attested to Father Rua that he also had taken part in "the joyful birthday of my venerated and dear friend." He then added, "If in sixty-eight years he has known how to set great store by the precious gems which will adorn his heavenly crown, the fruits of his labors will remain upon earth to sanctify numerous souls in both hemispheres. May God continue His blessings upon him for many years to come for the comfort of

⁸*La Semaine Religieuse* of Arras, December 1, 1883. [Author]

⁹Moncalieri, August 17, 1883. [Author]

good souls, and to climax the very best wishes of one who reverently kisses his hand.”

It would certainly be a worthwhile topic of particular research to study the love which Don Bosco enjoyed among the aristocracy of all nations; the instances abound, and more will come up. In July [1883] Maria Pia, daughter of Victor Emmanuel II and queen of Portugal, came to Turin. Her lady-in-waiting went to Don Bosco to ask for a holy card with a few words written in his own hand. On returning, she showed it to the queen, who expressed the desire of having a similar card signed by him. The lady went back to the Oratory the next day, July 25, and the wish was granted.¹⁰ The same lady, expressing her condolences to Father Rua on the death of Don Bosco, wrote: “I am glad I had the good fortune of personally meeting this saintly priest on our Queen Maria Pia’s last trip to Turin. I had the honor of accompanying her majesty, and I made it my duty and had the joy of visiting Don Bosco, whom I knew by reputation and whom I greatly desired to see. I shall always remember the aura of goodness and kindness with which he received my visits.” In closing, she asked for some trifling article belonging to Don Bosco and another for a priest acquaintance of hers who had held “our venerated and lamented father in high veneration.”

4. AN ARBITRATION

In the summer of 1883 an unexpected token of eminent regard for Don Bosco came from Pope Leo XIII. In 1869 Hyacinth Peter Marietti, director of the press of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, had contracted with Father Bernardino of Portogruaro, minister general of the Franciscans, to publish the complete works of St. Bonaventure. It was to be a joint venture, with each party receiving six hundred copies. The original plan was to put out a more complete and better organized edition than the earlier ones, but, with time, the work’s horizons began to broaden and required extensive preparatory studies. Marietti consented and agreed to share the cost of books, transcriptions of the original manuscripts, traveling expenses, and so forth. The Franciscans therefore took on for ten years the responsibility of supplying twenty priests to check out libraries and archives in various European

¹⁰Father [Joachim] Berto personally witnessed this and attested to it in the processes for Don Bosco’s beatification. [Author]

nations. In the meantime the Marietti press moved to Turin; on the other hand, the Franciscans felt the need to have a publishing house closer to their monastery so that they could personally supervise the printing. This was realized with the purchase of a house near Florence, since, by the laws of suppression of religious orders, they had no residence of their own even in Rome. Therefore, it was the unanimous decision of the Franciscans' editorial board that this work should be published at Prato, a town close to Florence. This change of situation seemed to constitute a legal basis for canceling the old contract, and so without further ado the work was commissioned to another printing house.

Marietti was greatly upset to learn this and demanded that either the Franciscans abide by the old contract or he be indemnified eighty thousand lire for the money he had invested and for the damage to his reputation. The minister general then proposed that Marietti take over the reprinting of the Franciscans' breviary—a clear sign to all that there was no rupture between them—and that the order would purchase fifteen thousand copies, at no slight profit to the printer. The latter, however, would have none of it and wrote to Cardinal [Louis] Bilio, apostolic penitentiary, for permission to cite the minister general before the civil court. The cardinal's response was that there were ecclesiastical tribunals, and that he could have recourse to the Congregation of Bishops and Religious. Marietti repudiated the trustworthiness of that Congregation because on a former occasion it had not ruled in his favor, and he sent several unbecoming letters to the cardinal, who indignantly refused to answer any further mail. Marietti did not give up, but went to the Court of Commerce in Rome, suing for eighty thousand lire. The tribunal, backed by the opinion of Attorney Feri of Florence, declared itself unqualified to hear the case. Marietti then brought his case to the civil tribunal of Florence, which passed sentence against him and furthermore charged him court expenses.

Thus backed into a corner, Marietti appealed to the Holy Father. Learning the facts of the case, the Pope ordered the minister general to get in touch with Don Bosco and to work out with him an amicable adjustment. On a return trip from France, the minister general informed Don Bosco of the Holy Father's decision. In this regard, on July 1, Don Bosco received the following message: "Father Luke Anthony Turbiglio, curate of St. Thomas Church, Turin. The Reverend Father Bernardino of Portogruaro, minister general of the Franciscans, passing through Turin, would like to pay his respects to Don Bosco. Could he

see him tomorrow at the Oratory? At what time? July 1, 1883." Don Bosco's reply was: "From ten A.M. to twelve noon."

Once Don Bosco was notified of the Holy Father's wish, he promptly put his mind to a study of the controversy. He had no problem obtaining Marietti's cooperation, for, dedicated as he was to the Holy See, he declared his willingness to abide by the Pope's decision. Thus, thanks to the intensity with which he normally applied himself to unraveling his own affairs, in little more than ten days he was able to formulate the definitive conditions of the settlement. His letter is a document which in its simplicity reveals, we must admit, all his diplomatic finesse and, along with it, his Christian charity.

A Friendly Settlement

Turin, July 14, 1883

For the purpose of seconding the good intentions of the Very Reverend Father Bernardino, minister general of the Franciscans, and those of Chevalier Hyacinth Peter Marietti, printer to the Holy See, I have willingly agreed to arbitrate a settlement between them concerning the publication of the works of St. Bonaventure.

To form a clear picture of this business dispute I judged it best to read all that has been printed and written on the matter; I have also listened to the opinions of impartial persons and to the view of both parties.

It is my conviction that this labor dispute must absolutely be resolved in a friendly manner outside the civil courts. Therefore: Mr. Marietti, who is a distinguished benefactor of the Franciscans and who donated the land on which the Church of St. Anthony is presently nearing completion to the benefit of the Franciscan Order, will forego the indemnity which experts have assessed as high as eighty thousand lire, and will lower his demand to whatever amount the Very Reverend Father General will decide to give for his order's church, of which Chevalier Marietti will continue to be a benefactor.

As regards the cost of supplies, travel, facsimiles, postage and interest, which totals nine thousand twenty-two francs and fifteen cents in favor of Chevalier Marietti, he will be satisfied with seven thousand lire.

Conclusion

The sum of eighty-nine thousand twenty-two lire and fifteen cents set by the court is now definitively reduced to seven thousand lire to be paid by the Very Reverend Father Bernardino to Chevalier Marietti, in addition to a voluntary donation to finish the work on the above-mentioned Church of St. Anthony.

Furthermore, the parties will sign a statement of friendship, good will, and

mutual assistance to promote God's glory and the salvation of souls to the best of their ability.

This peaceful and friendly settlement will also be welcomed by the Holy Father himself. As a loving father, he can only feel happy to see these two sons of his, both distinguished by reason of office, Catholic zeal, and devotion to the Holy See, restored to that harmony and peace which as Head of the Church he ceaselessly keeps recommending.

Rev. John Bosco

It was not by chance that Don Bosco chose the fourteenth of July, feast of St. Bonaventure, to render his decision.

Marietti accepted the agreement unquestioningly¹¹ and the Franciscan minister general was also satisfied. It is obvious that, by obligating himself to contribute to the erection of the church, Father Bernardino was only giving money to his own order, for which he had to answer to no one. And so, in that very year [1883], the Franciscans of Quaracchi¹² set to work and put out in ten volumes the magnificent critical edition of *Doctoris Seraphici Sancti Bonaventurae Opera Omnia* [The Complete Works of the Seraphic Doctor, St. Bonaventure].

5. THE CASAMICCIOLA EARTHQUAKE

Another opportunity unexpectedly arose for Don Bosco to practice charity in a field most suited to him. On July 28 a horrifying earthquake shook the entire island of Ischia, north of the Gulf of Naples, razing to the ground Casamicciola, a delightful little town situated at the foot of Mount Epomeo, and one of the best mineral springs. All of Italy mourned such a disaster. The bishops appealed to the charity of the faithful for help to the poor victims. Also Monsignor [Alexander] Vogliotti, pro-vicar general of the archdiocese of Turin, urged everyone to be generous in lightening the islanders' sufferings. Touched by the plight especially of the orphaned children, Don Bosco wrote to the monsignor:

¹¹We have been unable to find the Franciscan declaration, even in the archives of their headquarters, the convent of St. Anthony on Merulana Street in Rome. Papers therein preserved furnish documentary evidence of the development of the case up to the time that in the name of Cardinal Bilio, protector of the order, and by mandate of the Pope, details are requested concerning the nature of the lawsuit. [Author]

¹²A town near Florence where the Franciscans direct the International College of St. Bonaventure. [Editor]

Turin, August 4, 1883

Very Reverend Monsignor:

Anxious to cooperate in my own little way with your appeal to aid the victims of Casamicciola, I offer to take in at this time two poor orphan boys between the ages of twelve and sixteen. They will be expected to follow the house rules and will be given food and clothing until that time when, having finished school or learned a profession, they will be capable of earning their livelihood elsewhere. I would like to cooperate with you in greater measure to ease this public disaster, but just now I cannot do more. May God grant us happier days, a time of peace and well-being. Please acquaint Archbishop [William] Sanfelice of Naples with my offer to those orphans as soon as you think it feasible. With deep veneration I have the high honor of remaining

Your respectful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The monsignor passed on Don Bosco's offer to the archbishop of Naples and told Don Bosco that the archbishop was grateful for his generosity and, should the need arise, would not hesitate to act upon it.

On August 3 a conversation on the tragedy of Casamicciola led Don Bosco to remark that it was but a tiny sign of God's indignation. Then, recalling how the Roman and Neapolitan merrymakers of old used to gather there, he quoted several verses of [Charles] Boucheron, professor of Greek and Latin rhetoric at the University of Turin until 1838. At Alessandria, while guests were dancing at a Jewish wedding, the floor of the dance hall caved in. In his poem Boucheron quoted the victims' last words: "Wild with joy, we, the doomed lot, are drawn into the nether world." Don Bosco paused on these last words.

He then recounted the story of Pliny the Younger, who, in the tragedy of Pompeii and Herculaneum, managed to save his mother at very great risk to his own life. Praising this pious act of filial love, he said, "God will have rewarded him, and not only in this life. In His hands the means of salvation are numberless."

Then, leaving off with stories of earth, he began speaking of the heavens and interstellar spacings, so boundless that they boggle the mind. Citing figures to bolster his argument, he quoted the distances of the nearest stars as well as of the farthest which are visible to our eyes, trailing off into personal reminiscing. "When I was a youngster," he recalled, "on Saturday nights I used to stand a little while on the balcony before going to bed, looking up at the moon and the planets and consid-

ering the distances between each of them and the stars, then their hugeness and the immensity of the universe. So grand and divine did this all seem to me that I could not stand thinking about it and then I would run (here his listeners waited in awe wondering what I would say), I would run and hide under the bed covers." With this unexpected conclusion, which made them all laugh, he brushed off the admiration he had inspired in them by his spirited and lofty reflections.

6. JOURNEY TO PISTOIA

In the first half of August Don Bosco had to journey to Pistoia. A relative of Mr. Bufalmacchi had become insane, and it was hoped that Don Bosco's blessing would heal him. He tried in every way to avoid going, but in the end, moved by charity, he thought it best to yield. He took with him Father [James] Costamagna,¹³ who had just returned from Argentina. Don Bosco's trip was full of interesting adventures. On the train, while riding between Parma and Bologna, he found himself in a coach with a gentleman and his son, a seminarian. This man was thinking of placing his daughter at the school of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in Nizza Monferrato to prepare herself for her teaching certification. After the usual pleasantries, not knowing Don Bosco, he mentioned his decision on that matter. Meanwhile, the seminarian, whose broad face and big eyes spoke of simplicity and goodness, was glancing through *Unità Cattolica*. This prompted Father Costamagna to start a conversation that led him to speak of the Oratory and Don Bosco, ending up with an invitation to the young man to go to Turin and stay with him. The lad fixed his gaze on Don Bosco, seated next to Father Costamagna, and asked, "Is he perhaps Don Bosco?"

"Yes," replied Father Costamagna.

"Oh dad," exclaimed the seminarian turning to his father, "the priest you are talking with is Don Bosco!"

"Don Bosco?" exclaimed the father. Immediately he began talking to him, manifesting his joy at the encounter.

At one point, Don Bosco suddenly asked the young cleric, "Would you also like to come to Turin with Don Bosco?"

"To do what?"

¹³See Appendix 1. [Editor]

"To stay with him."

"Why?"

"Because there you would be able to do much good, to work, to teach, to supervise the boys and later to preach and teach catechism."

"But I have to continue my seminary studies."

"In Turin you will also have ample opportunity to study. Come, now, decide. There is room also for you."

"But I can't come."

"Why not?"

"I would gladly come. I like Don Bosco, but I love my father more and I can't leave him."

The father was listening to this conversation in silence and with some emotion. The train meanwhile had stopped. It was a through train. The gentleman got off for some reason. Moments later a very long freight train pulled in between the station and the through train, which blew its whistle and began to pull out. The poor man, having his way blocked off, could not get to his coach in time. His son was crying out, "Dad, dad!" But it was useless. Don Bosco said to him, "See? You did not wish to come with Don Bosco, and now you are forced to do so."

The youth burst into tears. "Come, now, calm down," Don Bosco told him. "At the next station you can get off and wait for your father. Father Costamagna will telegraph him that you are waiting there. He will come on the next train, and so you will be together again." And thus it happened.

Past Bologna, on the train's ascent of the Apennines, a breakdown halted the engine in mid-tunnel, obliging it to wait there until eleven that evening for another locomotive. Don Bosco was alone with Father Costamagna in that compartment, and, pouring out his heart, he told him how much he had suffered when coping with Archbishop Gastaldi's hostility and the violence he had to do himself to accept the final settlement ordered by the Pope.¹⁴ "Even the Pope," he exclaimed, "made Don Bosco feel the weight of his hand upon his shoulders!" When relating this, Father Costamagna used to say that Don Bosco poured out his heart as would have done St. Philip Neri, St. Alphonsus Liguori or St. Francis de Sales.

When the train resumed its journey and stopped at the first station, Don Bosco and the other passengers alighted for a breath of fresh air.

¹⁴See Volume XV, Chapter 8. [Author]

At this time a French gentleman who admired Don Bosco, though he had never seen him, was talking about him in a loud voice to a group of people, saying that he was on his way to Rome and would return via Turin in order to see him, since he had tried in vain to see him in Paris. Father Costamagna, who overheard him, remarked, "If you want to see Don Bosco, you don't have to go that far. He is right here." The man went up to Don Bosco, and, as if beside himself, knelt before him, with no concern for the people who were observing, took his hand and kissed it. The consolation he experienced made him oblivious of everything else.

At Pistoia Don Bosco imparted his blessing to the sick man and, stopping no longer than necessary, hastened to return.

At the railroad station of Piacenza three men boarded the train; they were a seminarian who greeted the priests and seated himself in a corner of the compartment, a notary who sat on the same side as Don Bosco, facing forward, and a traveling salesman. Father Costamagna sat facing Don Bosco, so that their knees touched. The salesman entered with his attaché case hanging across his shoulder, a bulky leather suitcase in his hand, his pockets bulging with papers and newspapers, and a large slouch hat on his head, shading his eyes which glowed with a strange look. He greeted his fellow travelers, put down his baggage, and then unconcernedly took out a newspaper and began speaking a barbarous jargon, a concoction of Italian and French with a smattering of other languages. "Gentlemen," he exclaimed, "have you heard the surprising news? Count [Henry of] Chambord has been cured. This newspaper tells the story. One day a girl approached the count and offered him a flower. From that moment on, the count was healed. It is a thing of wonder, truly wonderful."

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted the notary. "That's not the way it was."

"Really? That's the way the papers report it as a fact. How was he healed then?"

"By Don Bosco and his Madonna."

At this point Don Bosco bumped Father Costamagna's knee and smiled. Simultaneously Father Costamagna did the same, hinting that he was expecting quite a scene to follow. At that moment the train began to move. Immediately the salesman, a Belgian, and the notary got into an argument. For the most part the noise of the train smothered their voices, but Father Costamagna kept his ears wide open to hear their arguments. The notary made it quite clear by his words that he

was a Catholic and had a lofty admiration for Don Bosco, while the Belgian apparently professed no faith. Not only did he deny that Don Bosco could have cured the count, calling him an impostor and a swindler, but he also maintained it was superstitious to believe in such miracles and healings, which were the topic of old wives' tales. Wild tales, that's all, just foolish stories were the claims made about Don Bosco. "And just what, then, is a priest's blessing? What is a priest? A man like anyone else."

The notary, who kept rebutting his arguments with precise logic, now tripped him up. "You're contradicting yourself, sir. You disclaim any belief in the Madonna but you believe in a bouquet of flowers. You have no faith in Don Bosco, but the power you deny to Don Bosco you give to a little girl. Between your belief and mine, I think mine is more reasonable."

Meanwhile the train was slowing down as it approached a station. The argument ceased. No one spoke. Father Costamagna asked Don Bosco for permission to get into the discussion. "Go ahead," was the answer.

Father Costamagna addressed the notary. "Apparently you have a great liking for Don Bosco."

"Oh yes, I do have a high esteem of him. He is a man who has done so much to benefit poor youth."

"Do you know him?"

"Not personally. But I know what people say of him. I have read his books and have seen his houses in France, especially that of Nice."

"I'm glad to see how much you appreciate Don Bosco, but let me say that you still do not know Don Bosco's full merit. I have traveled three thousand leagues by sea, from South America, just to see Don Bosco."

"From South America?"

"Yes. I am one of his followers. I entered his school when I was a young boy. I had lost my father, but he has been a father to me in every way, bringing me up with schooling and training."

"How fortunate you have been!"

"Very many others have shared my good fortune. Every city of Italy can boast of having someone who was benefited by Don Bosco in childhood, and he always continues to do good to other youngsters."

"So Don Bosco is really a great and a holy man."

"And you have never met him?"

"Never."

"Would you like to see him?"

"Certainly! It would give me such pleasure."

"You say then that you are extremely fond of Don Bosco?"

"Who would not wish such a man well? I assure you I have always held him in the highest esteem."

"I am quite tempted to make you see Don Bosco."

"You're going to show me his photograph."

"No, not a photograph, but the real Don Bosco in person."

"Then you'd have to take me to Turin, but just now my business would make that impossible. Still, I would go most willingly."

"I don't intend whisking you off to Turin to see Don Bosco."

"How then?"

Don Bosco was following the conversation with just the hint of a smile on his lips. Both the seminarian and the Belgian salesman were not missing a single syllable. It was then that Father Costamagna said to the notary, "Here is Don Bosco!"

At this the three travelers simultaneously leaped to their feet like a jack-in-the-box and fell to their knees. Hands joined, the Belgian kept saying, "Excuse me! Oh, good God, what a surprise. Excuse my rash expressions." It was a moving scene. Don Bosco kept reassuring them, "It's all right. I haven't taken offense. Please get up."

After a few conciliatory words, Don Bosco, wishing to leave them a memento, took some medals of Mary, Help of Christians, and gave one to each.

"Thank you, thank you," the salesman exclaimed. "I am fond of the Madonna, you know. Look!" And from his collar he pulled out a medal which he wore about his neck. "My mother gave it to me when I was a child. I have always worn it. She has rescued me from so many dangers, especially from a horrible storm during a sea voyage in the Indies. Shipwrecked, we were tossed upon the shores on the islands. I was unconscious for quite some time, but I was brought to safety. There, without any aid, we stayed three days in a land infested by tigers, whose nightly attacks we averted by lighting huge bonfires. Finally a passing ship took us aboard and dropped us off at our destination. But, Don Bosco, is it true that you have so many schools and so many boys to care for?"

Briefly Don Bosco described the extent of his work.

"Then you must be fairly rich; you must have millions!"

"I have nothing."

"But how can you have nothing and still keep up so many hospices?"

"It's Our Lady who maintains them."

"I'm afraid I don't understand. It's just not possible. It's pious imagination. Today ... this makes you think of heavenly help ... but those days are over, when.... But that's enough. I also want to help you in your work as best I can. Please take this small donation," and he handed him twenty gold francs.

Don Bosco thanked him and smilingly added, "Consider carefully: you are answering the objections you made a few moments ago. Just as Our Lady has moved your heart to help me, so too She moves thousands of other hearts to come to the aid of our boys."

On parting, the salesman wanted to exchange calling cards with Don Bosco and promised to stop in for a visit when passing through Turin.

A more amusing episode took place toward the end of that trip. At Alessandria the compartment picked up new travelers. One of them began to bad-mouth Don Bosco, picturing him in the darkest of colors, calling him a miser who heaped up wealth by swindling the ignorant.

"Pardon me," Don Bosco interrupted, "but do you know Don Bosco?"

"Why most assuredly! I am Turinese myself and have seen him many times."

"Still I doubt that Don Bosco has all the money you claim he does."

"Are you trying to tell me? Don Bosco is sly: he wants to enrich his family and already has bought many possessions."

"I don't think he has any holdings in Castelnuovo."

"Yes, yes, his brothers have become rich!"

"Excuse me, but Don Bosco has only one brother."

"Be that as it may, I know that for sure his brother, once a poor farmer, now owns horses and a carriage."

"And I tell you that Don Bosco's brother died more than twenty years ago."

"Be that as you say, but you can't deny what I know for a certainty."

"Very well, then, if you want to satisfy your curiosity, go to Castelnuovo and you will see that Don Bosco has only two nephews, who till the soil of two fields, and no more."

"So you're calling me a liar?"

"I am not calling you a liar. I am only saying that what you are affirming is not true."

Thus they argued for a while. The other passengers seemed to be inclined to believe the priest's words. Just as they reached Felizzano, the next stop, who should show up at the compartment but Baron Cova, who, on seeing Don Bosco, exclaimed, "Oh, Don Bosco!" and greeted him, conversing very familiarly. The other travelers burst into laughter as the poor man tried to babble some excuse or other. Don Bosco smiled and said to him, "I'd like to give you some good advice: do not bad-mouth anyone, or at least look carefully at the people around you. It could well be that the person we address is the very one whose reputation we are tearing apart. However, the best thing is always to speak well of all, and if you cannot say anything good, say nothing."

7. THE PERIOD OF THE SPIRITUAL RETREATS

The retreats ran from August to October, and Don Bosco always did his utmost to preside, but his trip to Pistoia made it impossible for him to be present at Nizza Monferrato for the ladies' retreat, as he had planned, and so he asked Father Cagliari to take his place.

Turin, August 7, 1883

My dear Father Cagliari:

It was my desire to spend at least a few days at Nizza Monferrato. However, a string of telegrams have made it necessary for me to leave for Florence tomorrow morning.

Please give the retreatants my regrets and tell them I shall pray for them, that I bless them and will celebrate Holy Mass for their intentions on Thursday morning. I ask for the charity of their prayers. May God bless us all. Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your friend,
Fr. John Bosco

We have no indication that on that occasion he traveled all the way to Florence. Since Pistoia is en route to Florence, he used that expression rather loosely, probably because he did not deem it opportune to state his actual destination.

He was present at the novices' retreat in San Benigno in the latter half of August. From there he cabled his best wishes to the Pope on the feast of St. Joachim, his name day. He received a warm reply on Au-

gust 22 from Cardinal [Ludwig] Jacobini, secretary of state: "Don Bosco, San Benigno Canavese. Your telegram proved most pleasing to the Holy Father. His Holiness blesses you and the Salesians gathered on retreat."

Don Bosco made reference to those retreatants in a letter to Baroness Ricci.

San Benigno Canavese, August 22, 1883

Dear Baroness Azelia Ricci Fassati:

Most willingly I shall keep myself free to celebrate Holy Mass on the 25th of this month for the intentions of Countess Frances de Maistre and for the pious Sacred Heart sister. I shall also see to it that a novena of Holy Communions, prayers and Masses for the intentions of a Franciscan nun will be offered on the closing of the feast of Our Lady's Nativity. Anything else? A special remembrance of you, Baroness, of Baron Charles and particularly of Mama, that God may keep all of you "for many years in holiness and justice all the days of your life." [Lk. 1:75]

I am here with two hundred young men who are on retreat to discern their vocation and then enter the novitiate. All are burning with desire to go to Patagonia.

May God bless you, Lady Azelia, and your whole family at Pessione.¹⁵ I commend myself to the charity of your prayers and have the pleasure of being

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

It was during this retreat that a French priest called on Don Bosco for the first time. He had left the diocese of Chartres to become a Salesian just as the time was coming for Don Bosco to appoint a confrere similarly talented to head the Salesian work in Paris. His name was Father [Louis] Bellamy.¹⁶ As he and Don Bosco were engaged in conversation, Father [John] Branda,¹⁶ director of the Salesian school in Utrera, Spain, came in to ask for a blessing before returning to his house. He was kneeling before Don Bosco, and the latter, turning to Father Bellamy, asked, "Do you see this priest? He is going to Spain, where he is both director of a house and superior of the province. Now, would you like me to tell you what your future will be?"

¹⁵A locality close to Chieri, where Baron Felician Ricci and his family had a villa which today belongs to the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians. [Author]

¹⁶See Appendix 1. [Editor]

As yet unacquainted with Don Bosco's supernatural gifts, Father Bellamy took it as a jest and replied with a smile, "Tell me."

"We shall have you make Salesians."

"What do you mean?"

"You know what cabinetmakers do. They take a piece of lumber, saw it, square it, plane it, and turn out a piece of furniture. So, too, I will give you the lumber, and you will work it and produce Salesians. Would you like to know more?"

"Please continue," replied Father Bellamy, still speaking as one who attaches little or no importance to what he hears.

"We will send you north on a mission ..."

"North!"

"Do you want to hear more?"

"That's enough, Don Bosco." Saying this, he pointed to Father Branda, still on his knees and waiting for a blessing.

Although Father Bellamy attached no importance to these words, they remained stuck in his memory, and he began to understand the first part when he was sent from Paris to Marseille as master of novices. Meanwhile he kept thinking of the northern mission as told him in the second part. He had become a Salesian with the intention of going to Africa, but, having been first assigned as director of the house in Paris, that is, in the north of France, he could not understand how this could be a mission. Finally, in 1891, when he was sent to Oran, North Africa, he believed that the unfinished phrase of Don Bosco would one day have its fulfillment.

He did not immediately stay on in San Benigno, but came back three weeks later during another retreat, bringing with him another French priest, who also wanted to become a Salesian. On presenting Father Bellamy to Father Barberis, Don Bosco told him, "Here is a plant to be transplanted in our garden."

But as for the second priest, when he was alone with Father Bellamy, Don Bosco told him, "This other one will not remain with us."

"Why not?" asked Father Bellamy, somewhat taken aback.

"He lacks constancy."

This judgment seemed too hasty to Father Bellamy, since he did not know his companion very well. But the end result proved the truth of the prediction, for six months later he left the novitiate.

Father Bellamy had not told his own bishop, Monsignor Eugene Regnault, the purpose of his trip to Italy. The latter, on learning that he

wanted to become a Salesian, wrote him and warned that if he did not immediately return to the diocese, he would be suspended from his priestly functions. Don Bosco found out about this while in Nice for the French confreres' retreat. From there he wrote a brief letter to the bishop of Chartres, stating among other things that he had counseled Father Bellamy to obey his bishop, return to his diocese and stay there until the Lord should inspire the bishop himself to allow him to follow his calling. The letter opened with the salutation "Your Excellency," but Don Bosco's words unsettled the bishop, who, in his reply to Father Bellamy, told him that he had passed a sleepless night and that in the morning, on celebrating Mass, he had prayed for the light of the Holy Spirit. Meanwhile Father Bellamy should stay where he was and do his utmost to become a good Salesian.

Making the retreat was also a cleric from the seminary of Magliano Sabino. One day Don Bosco said to him, "Cheer up, another seminarian will be coming from Magliano."

"Who is he?" the cleric anxiously asked.

"Guess."

"I don't know. Tell me."

"His last name begins with a *C* and ends with an *i*."

"I still can't guess. Tell me."

"It's Coradini."

Roger Coradini was a senior in the high school attached to the seminary and had never had even the slightest desire to become a Salesian. The cleric wrote to the rector of the seminary, Father [Joseph] Daghero, about the talk he had with Don Bosco, and some months later personally told Coradini about it because he himself did not continue and returned to Magliano. The latter was itching to find out how Don Bosco had come to know his name; some years later he asked Don Bosco, who was visiting the seminary, but the latter replied, "It doesn't matter how I got to know that you would come. Do this: if you would like to come, calm your mother with some excuse or other and then come and try it out."

These words of Don Bosco made no impression whatever on him because not in the least did he wish to become a Salesian. He was his mother's only son, nor did it ever cross his mind to leave his diocese. However in March 1889 the wish which seemed so distant from his aspirations made its way into his soul and so mastered him that at his ordination to the diaconate he overcame the obstacles of his relatives and

his diocesan superiors and left for Turin. At the time of this writing [1935] Father [Roger] Coradini is working in the Roman province.

8. THE SALESIAN BROTHER

The Third General Chapter—which we will speak of later—had decreed that also the coadjutors were to have their own separate novitiate. This decision was implemented with astonishing speed, so that the following October twenty-two coadjutor novices, all artisans, started their year of novitiate at San Benigno, set apart from the other members of the house. Once the house had settled down, Don Bosco, having gone to San Benigno to give the clerical novices the cassock, paid them a visit and, speaking to them alone, he delineated, as he had never before done, the role of the Salesian coadjutor brother as he conceived it.

This morning's Gospel [he said] told us: "Fear not, little flock." [Lk. 12:32]¹⁷ You too are the "little flock," but you are not to be afraid—"fear not"—because you will grow.

I am very happy that we have begun, with regularity, a year of novitiate for our artisans. This is the first time I have come to San Benigno since you have been here, and, although I came for the investiture of the clerical novices and will be here but one day, I did not want to leave without saying a few words to you in particular. I will develop two ideas.

First, I want to explain to you my idea of the Salesian coadjutor because I have never had either the time or the opportunity to go into a good explanation. Well now, you are gathered here to learn a trade and to train yourselves in religion and in piety. Why? Because I need helpers. There are some things priests and clerics cannot do, and you will do them. I need to be able to take one of you and send you into a printshop, and say, "You take charge and make sure all goes well." Another I will send into a bookstore and say, "You run this place and make it work well." I need someone I can send to a house and say to him, "It will be your job to see to it that this workshop or those workshops run in an orderly fashion and leave nothing to be desired. You will make sure that the work is turned out as it should be." I need to have someone in every house who can take responsibility for matters of greater trust, like managing money, settling disputes, and representing the house to outsiders. I need to have things running smoothly in the kitchen and in the doorman's quarters, to have sup-

¹⁷The quotation was from the Gospel of the Mass on the feast of St. Peter of Alcantara on October 19, a Thursday. [Author]

plies ordered promptly, to see to it that nothing goes to waste, no one goes out, and so forth. I need people I can trust with these responsibilities. You will have to be the ones. In a word, you are not to be those who do the actual work or job, but rather those who direct. You are to be like bosses over the other employees, not their servants. But everything in its proper order and within proper limits. Your task will be to direct, as co-owners of the workshops. This is my concept of the Salesian coadjutor. I really need to have many who will come to help me in this way! Therefore I am glad to see that you are wearing proper and neat apparel, that you have comfortable beds and dormitory cells, because you are not to be servants, but masters, not subjects, but superiors.

And now for my second thought. Since you are to come to my aid in both great and delicate tasks, you must acquire many virtues, and since you are to direct others, you must first of all give good example. It must be that wherever one of you is present, there is also orderliness, morality, goodness. For, "if salt should lose its flavor ..."

Well now, let us close as we started. "Do not fear, little flock." Don't be afraid, for your number will grow, but that growth must particularly be in goodness and work. Then you will be like invincible lions and you will be able to do much good. Furthermore, "it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom" [Lk 12:32], a kingdom, not slavery, but especially an eternal kingdom.

"Co-owners," thrice repeated, is the best way to express the concept of the Salesian coadjutor. The Salesian coadjutor is not the lay brother of other religious orders who is called "brother" but in reality enjoys as little of the "brother" as one who, standing on ceremony, calls himself a "servant" in word or writing. Our coadjutor is a vital member of our family. In a home all the family members are said to be "co-owners" and as such are distinct from servants or outsiders. The Salesian coadjutor, therefore, united as one in the brotherhood of priests and clerics, holds the same rank as they do in relation to the servants, the students, the guests who in one way or another live or work with us in our houses. However, one would stray far from Don Bosco's thought if he were to think that by that title Don Bosco assigned the coadjutors a privileged position in the community. He wanted to show their total belonging to the family of which they are a part and, therefore, also the right that is theirs to be treated equally with the priests and clerics. The degree of respect which is due to them as coadjutors leads them naturally to deal decorously with outsiders, to strive to be exemplary in the house, to be united with the other confreres and to prove their loyalty in their respective assignments. Hence, the title "co-owners," rather than make them

proud, should lead every good coadjutor to reflect upon the sense of responsibility which that title presupposes and imposes upon him.

9. CONFERENCE AT CASALE MONFERRATO

This year also Don Bosco gave a conference to the cooperators of Casale. He went there on November 21 from Borgo San Martino, where he had celebrated the delayed feast of St. Charles, the school's patron. When the moment came for him to mount the pulpit, the bishop's master of ceremonies (because Bishop [Peter] Ferrè had wanted to be present) hinted that Don Bosco should first go to the bishop to receive his blessing. Don Bosco immediately set about doing so, as he had always done before in such ceremonies, but the bishop suddenly exclaimed, "Is Don Bosco to come to me for a blessing? Don't bishops ask him for his blessing?" And he would not let him go through that ceremony; probably, though, he wanted to spare Don Bosco the trouble of walking to the episcopal throne to kneel at the bishop's feet and then rise. At his age these movements were uncomfortable and could only add to the aches and pains which made walking so difficult. Father Caroglio, the bishop's secretary, who was present, saw and heard all this and later made it known.

The conference took an hour or so. Don Bosco did not depart from his usual format: the need to educate the young, the mission of the Salesians and of the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians, in this field, and the necessity of help. All were touched by the trust he manifested in Divine Providence and in the charity of the cooperators. He commented, "Someone might say, 'With all the enterprises he has running, Don Bosco is going to end up bankrupt!' Not at all; we shall not go bankrupt. So far we haven't, and we shall not in the future. Our guarantor has always been Divine Providence and the charity of our co-operators."

10. THE YEAR'S END

An unbelievable event took place at the Oratory on December 20. A woman came from Cervignasco near Saluzzo carrying in her arms her nine-year-old daughter. The child had been paralyzed from the age of

eight months and, according to the mother, spoke only with difficulty and could not walk. A letter from her pastor, which she gave to Don Bosco, stated that her doctors had given up all hope of a cure apart from putting the blessing of Don Bosco to a test.

Don Bosco had the girl placed on the sofa with her mother next to her. He blessed the sick child and then asked her, "What is your name?"

"Mary," she answered readily and alertly, to the utter surprise of the mother, who opened her eyes wide at that unusual burst of energy.

"Make the sign of the cross," Don Bosco continued.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

"Please notice," remarked the mother, "that her right arm is stronger than her left, which she cannot in any way use."

"Well then," replied Don Bosco, "move your left arm."

The girl did so.

"And now," Don Bosco continued, "do you think you can walk?"

"Her legs are dead!" the mother exclaimed in grief. "Look, they're hardly a third of what they should be."

"I tell you her legs are alive," retorted Don Bosco. "Come now, get down and walk."

The girl leaped to her feet and began walking. Don Bosco then immediately escorted mother and daughter to the door and told them to return home. Father Lemoyne, whose custom it had been for some time to go to Don Bosco's room every evening for an hour of familiar conversation, found him still affected by the incident and almost shaking.

As Christmas drew near Don Bosco sent his greetings to the Holy Father through the Salesians' cardinal protector. On December 24 the latter replied: "The Holy Father thanks you and send his copious blessing. Sincere best wishes. Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina." It goes beyond saying how much these repeated signs of benevolence on the part of Leo XIII consoled the heart of Don Bosco after so many afflictions.

When the Christmas celebrations were over, he gave the Oratory the *strenna*¹⁸ which he had already sent to the schools. It was made up of two separate admonitions, one for the pupils and the other for the confreres. For the pupils it read: "Do not steal the goods, time, innocence,

¹⁸A 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 during the year then about to dawn. This custom is still kept by Don Bosco's successors. [Editor]

or soul of anyone by word or deed.” For the confreres it read: “Your first act of charity is to love your own soul.”

This chapter has not recorded all Don Bosco said and did at the Oratory between his return [from France] and the end of the year; more will follow in later chapters. Meanwhile we are very glad to read the impressions of the Oratory and of Don Bosco which visitors from distant parts took back with them. To those testimonies which we have already recorded we shall add a new one which appeared in a Roman newspaper.¹⁹ A correspondent from Treviso wrote: “No one in this world could ever have been able to express in words the peace, the heavenly joy, the holy inspirations which I was given to enjoy in that holy place. Oh, Don Bosco, glory of Italy, in your enviable modesty, allow me to proclaim to the world that you are a saint. It is your works over the past half century, always accomplishing good, that identify you as a saint. Your gifts of mind and heart proclaim you a saint. Your every word, wise and calm and appealing, always level-headed, always instructive, always full of charity, reveals you as a saint.”

¹⁹*L'Amico del Popolo*, December 9, 1883, in an article entitled “A Visit to the Salesian Oratory in Turin,” signed G. Novelli. [Author]

CHAPTER 10

The Distinguished Visit of a French Cardinal and the Historic Visit of a Future Pope

SINCE Cardinal [Joseph] Berardi's visit in 1875,¹ no other cardinal had called at the Oratory until 1883, when His Eminence, Cardinal Henry Gaston de Bonnechose of Rouen, came. Today the endless comings and goings of distinguished people make it hard to appreciate the impression then made upon all by the presence of a prince of the Church in Don Bosco's home. On October 4, His Eminence, wishing to see Don Bosco and the Oratory, decided to stop off in Turin on a return trip from Rome. Unfortunately Don Bosco and all the members of the superior chapter were away because, while directing one of the retreats at San Benigno, he was meeting with them to organize the houses for the coming school year. Nor was there time for him to be notified by telegram and return to receive his eminent visitor. The students, too, were away, due to return some days later.² Nevertheless, the prefect and the confreres hastily prepared a worthy reception, since all they had to do was to follow what had been done before in similar situations. It also helped to have a young French Salesian present for the occasion.

His Eminence graciously went up to the second floor, engaging in conversation with the Salesian priests who accompanied him and eagerly asking a thousand questions. Then, stepping out on the balcony, he addressed the young apprentices who had assembled in the playground below. "My dear boys," he said, "I came here in order to see Don Bosco and talk with him, but his work has taken him away. Since I cannot greet the father, I am glad to see his reflection in his sons. With the warmest affection I bless you and pray God to heap His graces upon you and

¹See Vol. XI, pp. 295-301. See also other references in the Index of the same volume under "Berardi." [Editor]

²At that time the students' school year began during the first week of October. [Editor]

prosper this house and all Salesian works. As a souvenir of my visit, I grant you a holiday, possibly enhanced by an outing. Also, since you are all human and some of you may have committed some offense, I grant all of you a full reprieve and cancel all demerits and punishments.” The superiors immediately consented and promised to abide by his word. The cardinal then continued: “However, my dear boys, I place one condition: each of you is to say one Our Father and Hail Mary for my intention.” His words were greeted with cheers and applause. He blessed the boys from the balcony. Then he descended and walked among them, letting them kiss his ring, and entered the church. Upon coming out, he said he had in his diocese an ancient shrine dedicated to Mary as the Help of Christians and that it was a source of endless favors, spiritual and temporal. He then went to see the printshop recently set up in a new building. In production at that time was Father [John] Garino’s Greek grammar, the proofs of which he perused.³ He also watched carefully to see how the presses operated and the young printers worked.

Before taking his leave, the cardinal enjoyed sitting in the parlor for a little while, inquiring about different things, and then showed his complete satisfaction by accepting the Salesian cooperators’ diploma. As he was saying good-bye, he promised that on another occasion, were he to pass through Turin, he would let Don Bosco know beforehand. He also asked them to tell Don Bosco that he, too, whenever he went to Paris, was to let him know. However, the cardinal was eighty-three years old and Don Bosco would never again see the capital of France.⁴

³Don Bosco, who understood his men and knew how to utilize their skills, had assigned Father Garino to compose a Greek grammar, but a short one, he said, moving his thumb and index finger together. Father Garino set himself to the task willingly and put together a hefty volume, but when, with great satisfaction, he brought his manuscript to Don Bosco, the latter took it in his hands and, smiling while shaking his head, said to him, “Not like this, Garino, not like this. I told you: small, small.” Disappointed, Father Garino remained dumbfounded. Then Don Bosco praised his work and further clarified his thought. Applying himself once more to his task, Father Garino, leaving untouched his original work, which eventually was printed in its entirety, digested it into the brief grammar which is still the choice of some. A few years later, Professor Puntoni remarked in the course of a university lecture, in the presence of Father [Paul] Ubaldi, that, had he known of that grammar, he would not have published his own. [Author]

⁴*Bulletin Salésien*, October, 1883. In his pamphlet *The Finest Flower of the Apostolic College*, Don Bosco left the following biographical notes on the cardinal: “Henri-Marie Gaston de Bonnechose was born in Paris on May 30, 1800. Before entering upon a church career, he was a member of the civil judiciary and subprefect of Audelys and Rouen, the king’s magistrate at Neuchâtel, substitute prefect of the court of Bourges, and attorney general of Riom and Besançon. Having entered upon an ecclesiastical career after the revolution of July [1830], he was soon appointed professor of rhetoric and history at the minor seminary of Strasbourg, and then at the college in Inilly. A dynamic speaker, endowed with an excellent voice, he left teaching in favor of preaching. Paris, Cambrai, and Rome acclaimed him, and Pope Pius IX, who knew how to appreciate noble minds,

That autumn the Oratory received another visit which caused no stir in the house, but which was to prove of untold value. This time Don Bosco was there. A young priest came to see him; he was of slender build, with a broad forehead, a thoughtful air, cautious speech, and a reverent manner. After a conversation which went beyond the usual small talk, Don Bosco said to him, "And now, my dear Father Achilles, consider yourself master of the house. I am sorry I cannot take you around myself because I am terribly busy, and I don't know whom to assign you as an escort since everyone else is taken up. Come and go on your own; look at all you want to see."

Father Achilles Ratti, who had just begun his term at the Ambrosian Library in Milan under the tutelage of the eminent scholar, Monsignor [Anthony] Ceriani, was anxious to learn about the organization of the Oratory's printshop in particular and about the running of a technical school in general. He was most enthralled by the printshop and its related operations, such as the type foundry and the bindery. When he again saw Don Bosco in the dining room and was asked what he had seen of value, he answered, "*Vidi mirabilia hodie* [I have seen wonders today]."

It was the time when the directors of the houses used to come to the motherhouse to confer with Don Bosco, to report to him on their own situations and their needs, and to seek his counsel and encouragement. Don Bosco would receive them informally there in the dining room immediately after supper. As soon as Father Ratti, whom Don Bosco had invited to stay with him for coffee, realized that these talks had begun, he expressed a desire to leave, but Don Bosco told him: "No, no, please stay." The first one to consult Don Bosco was a director from France. Don Bosco was standing, leaning against the table. Not everything coming in sequence under discussion was of a pleasant nature, but, as Father Ratti was later to state, such calm and serenity were visible upon Don

chose him to govern the diocese of Carcassonne on January 17, 1847. On March 23, 1854, he was transferred to the diocese of Évreux, which stood in need of a practical, prudent bishop to quell discord and regularize finances. He accomplished this mission in such a spirit of charity and justice that on March 18, 1858, he was promoted to the archdiocese of Rouen, which he has been governing for twenty-five years. Tall, most refined in manner, he cut a noble figure. Pope Pius IX proclaimed him a cardinal in the consistory of December 21, 1863, and assigned him the titular church of St. Clement. As a member of the French Parliament he showed himself an ardent defender of papal temporal power. In 1875 he published two volumes under the title *Philosophie du Christianisme*." [Author]⁵

⁵A couple of dates in footnote 4 have been corrected in accordance with the *Dizionario Ecclesiastico* by Monsignor Angelo Mercati and Monsignor Augusto Pelzer, Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1953. [Editor]

Bosco's countenance that no one could have guessed from his appearance whether he was being given good or bad reports.

The French director was followed by an Italian coming from Sicily, quite certainly Father [Peter] Guidazio, who in the past four years had been director of our only Salesian school, at Randazzo. Not a little beleaguered for sectarian reasons by the local school board, he dramatically described in his own picturesque language especially the vexations he was suffering at the hands of a particular school superintendent. Don Bosco listened to every word and then began to give him some opportune suggestions on how to handle the situation. "And if this does not work," he added, "tell him that Don Bosco has long arms and can even reach him."

Thus Father Ratti, a keen observer, witnessed a series of reports, but he especially concentrated on Don Bosco's composure in confronting such a wide variety of individuals and topics.

Nor was this trust, extended to an unknown guest, limited to that instance, for, throughout the two days of his stay at the Oratory, Don Bosco drew him into the privacy of his religious family, treating him as one of his own and leaving him free to go about the house and observe its running and take stock of whatever he wished. This did not fail to produce in his guest a sense of equal bewilderment. Be that as it may, two things are certain: it took only a short time for his perceptive gaze to gain a deep insight into Don Bosco's personality and his mission. The words he heard and the impressions he received were never to be cancelled from the mind of the future Supreme Pontiff, as is proven by the reiterated witness he later gave in private as well as in public audiences.

We do not know how much he heard, but we do know enough to make a significant collection. Father Ratti was harboring a deep regret in his heart: a young apprentice whom he had recommended to Don Bosco some weeks before had yielded to homesickness and had run away from the Oratory. "How sorry I am that a boy whom I sponsored has made me cut such a bad figure!" he lamented. "However a good excuse is that he is not very bright." Don Bosco, however, wishing to restore the boy's character, replied with a smile, "On that occasion he gave the first sign of his talent. You will see that he will know how to cope in life and find his way." Although the reality confirmed the diagnosis, that hypothetical possibility did not then and there impress Father Ratti. What had delighted and touched him was the instantaneous kindness of Don Bosco's first reaction and the jovial remark which closed the episode, turning the

boy's escapade into a reason not to despair of his future.⁶

Appreciative of culture, Father Ratti complimented Don Bosco on the wise and bold expansion he had given the Oratory's printshop by "using the most thorough and most up-to-date technology." Don Bosco, the "dear" saint, "with that smiling goodness and that subtle wit that everyone remarked in him, replied, 'In these matters Don Bosco wishes to be always in the vanguard of progress.' " He meant to say that in the spread of pamphlets and books he would be second to none. Indeed, as the present Pontiff today asserts, this was "precisely what he loved most," and "this was his highest boast."⁷

He also confided to his welcome guest that he had at one time felt drawn to literary and scientific studies or, as the future Pius XI put it, "toward grand ideals of knowledge." His meeting a man of books and a librarian prompted him to say even more explicitly that he had once "drawn up a broad plan of studies, and also a broad plan of ecclesiastical historiography," but then, he added, "I saw that the Lord was bidding me take another road. I probably lacked the natural aptitude of spirit, intelligence and memory." But it is Pius XI's opinion that he was one of those souls who, "regardless of the path he might have taken, would certainly have left a brilliant trail behind him."⁸

Don Bosco, who would never pass up an occasion to speak about his cooperators, called them in Father Ratti's presence "my long arm," saying, "with humble self-assurance," yet as one "who gives credit to others" rather than to oneself, that, thanks precisely to the "wonderful legion" of cooperators, he had "arms long enough to be able to reach out to everything."⁹

Even at that time the future Pope heard from Don Bosco's own lips the high priority he assigned in mind and heart to the resolution of the deplorable dissension then dividing Church and State in Italy. In those months the Roman Question¹⁰ had resurfaced as a live issue on everyone's

⁶As Archbishop of Milan [in 1921], the soon-to-be Pope Pius XI [1922-1939] had told this account to Father [Fidelis] Giraudi, economist general of the Salesian Society. [Author]

⁷Discourse on the heroicity of Don Bosco's virtues, February 20, 1927; audience after the inauguration of Pius XI Institute, May 11, 1930; address to the students of the Roman pontifical seminaries, June 17, 1932. [Author]

⁸Discourse, February 20, 1927. [Author]

⁹Discourse on the decree on the miracles for Don Bosco's canonization, November 19, 1933. [Author]

¹⁰The Roman Question was an expression referring to the politico-religious conflict between the papacy and the kingdom of Italy (1861-1929). It was occasioned by the seizure of the Papal States in 1861 and of Rome in 1870, and the voluntary confinement of the Pope to the Vatican.

lips. Journal articles and booklets were proliferating, all full of proposals, more or less wild, to resolve the problem or turn it into an acrid controversy. In the United States too, the *New York Herald* had commissioned one of its Italian correspondents to interview the most distinguished leaders of both Italian Rome and Papal Rome, to study the relative positions of the Quirinal and the Vatican, and to send back a report. This gave rise to a very lengthy correspondence promptly abstracted by several Italian and foreign newspapers. The bitter debate had been started by an open letter sent by Emilio Rendu, former Director General of French Universities, to Ruggero Bonghi¹¹ concerning the burning issue.¹²

Father Ratti saw that in this discussion Don Bosco advocated “not a would-be conciliation, such as many had been puzzling over for a long time, distorting and confusing the issue, but a conciliation which would above all guarantee God’s honor, that of the Church, and the good of souls.”¹³ In fact, he heard him deplore so much tampering with the Church’s rights and those of the Holy See and grieve that those who were then shaping the destiny of the land had not retraced their steps from paths which inevitably led to trampling underfoot the most sacred rights.” He therefore implored “God and men to find a possible remedy to so many woes, a possible rapprochement that would allow the serenity of inner peace to glow brilliantly again with the sun of justice.”¹⁴ Hence, in his encyclical *Quinquagesimo ante anno* of December 23, 1929, while listing the consolations he had received during the jubilee year of his priestly ordination, Pope Pius XI wrote: “At that visit to St. Peter’s Basilica [on June 2 for Don Bosco’s beatification] we realized that after ratifying the treaty of a most desired peace with the Kingdom of Italy, Divine Providence would have it that the first honors of the altar which we were to decree should be for John Bosco. He, while deploring

The conflict was finally settled with the ratification of the Lateran Agreement on June 7, 1929, by the Italian government and Vatican City. The agreement provided a financial indemnity to the former Papal States, which became recognized as part of Italy. The Lateran Agreement became Article 7 of the Italian Constitution on March 26, 1947. [Editor]

¹¹Ruggero Bonghi (1826-1895) was a Neapolitan man of letters, philosopher, politician, journalist and Minister of Education. He was also the founder of *La Stampa*, a still outstanding daily newspaper in Turin. [Editor]

¹²The letter was published by *Rassegna Nazionale* and in two issues of *The Nation* in Florence (July 15 and 17). Cf. *Unità Cattolica*, July 17, 19, 26, 29 and August 18. [Author]

¹³Discourse on the decree on the miracles for Don Bosco’s beatification, March 19, 1929. [Author]

¹⁴Discourse on the decree *Tuto* for Don Bosco’s beatification, April 21, 1929. [Author]

the violation of the Apostolic See's rights, time and again had striven so that, after the restoration of these rights, the very sad rift which had torn Italy away from our fatherly embrace might be healed."

Passing on now to the impressions made upon the young Father Ratti in that one and only encounter he had had with Don Bosco, we must admit that some of them must have been very strong if, after such a long passage of time, he remembered them so vividly and tenderly. "It has been forty-six years," he stated in 1929,¹⁵ "but it seems like yesterday, even today, that I still see him as I then saw and heard him under the same roof, at the same table, having the pleasure of conversing at length with him several times in the indescribable rush of his work." Rather than term it a passing acquaintance, he calls his relationship with Don Bosco an old friendship, one "whose remembrance makes him relive the happiness and cheer he enjoyed in knowing him."¹⁶

The Holy Father is pleased to be not merely one of Don Bosco's admirers, but to have been "one of those who knew him personally, who received from him genuine, heartfelt signs of kindness and fatherly friendship, such as might exist between a glorious veteran of the priesthood and the Catholic ministry of a young priest."¹⁷

There is more. In 1922, after recalling his "good fortune" for having spent not just a few hours with Don Bosco, but having been his guest for two days, "sharing his table, more penitential than frugal, and benefitting most of all from his inspired word," he said that he rejoiced to consider himself in this particular guise a member of his great family.¹⁸ Seventeen days later he repeated:¹⁹ "With the warmest pleasure we count ourselves among the oldest personal friends of the Venerable Don Bosco. We have seen him, this glorious Father and Benefactor of yours, we have seen him with our own eyes. We have stood by him, heart to heart. We have engaged in a neither brief nor trivial exchange of ideas, thoughts, and considerations. We have beheld this great champion of Christian education. We have observed the lowly station he reserved for himself among his own, a lofty post of command as vast as the world and no less beneficial. We are therefore enthusiastic admirers of Don Bosco's work and

¹⁵Discourse of March 19, 1929. [Author]

¹⁶Discourse of April 21, 1929. [Author]

¹⁷Discourse in the courtyard of St. Damasus [in the Vatican], June 3, 1929. [Author]

¹⁸Discourse to the superiors and students of the Salesian school of Frascati, June 8, 1922. [Author]

¹⁹Discourse to superiors and students of the Sacred Heart School in Rome, June 25, 1922. [Author].

we rejoice to have known him and to have been able, with God's grace, to contribute very modestly to the spread of his work." Hence it is not surprising that in his discourse of May 11, 1930, he hailed the two days he spent with Don Bosco as "days of joy and consolation that only he can value who was granted that heavenly good fortune."

Then, if we pass from general to particular impressions, we find that none of Don Bosco's characteristic traits had escaped this acute observer. Although he considered himself "the last arrival, the least of the guests," as he went about the house, still, at his first encounter, he had perceived Don Bosco to be "a dominant, fascinating person, a complete man."²⁰ He noted his "energetic work, unyielding defiance, whenever needed, of the fatigue of every day, hour to hour, morning to night, if necessary";²¹ "a life of enormous work whose sight made one realize how exhausting it was."²² He noted one of his finest talents: his "awareness of everything," while "being involved in an endless tussle, besieged by cares, by a mass of requests and consultations," and still "his spirit was elsewhere, where calm was always dominant, always supreme."²³ In fact, one of his most striking characteristics was that of "an unsurpassable calm, a command of time which allowed him to listen to all who sought him with a tranquillity that made it appear as if he had nothing else to do."²⁴ In all this Pius XI saw him sustained by "an unfaltering, inexhaustible patience," a "true and singular charity which always made him reserve part of himself, his mind, his heart, for the last arrival, regardless of the hour and the work he had been doing."²⁵

He also admired Don Bosco as "a great, loyal and truly dedicated servant of the Roman Church, of the Holy Roman See."²⁶ Yes, indeed, this "generous and dynamic loyalty to Jesus Christ, to the holy Faith, to the holy Church, to the Holy See, this was the outstanding privilege" which the Holy Father was able "to detect and feel in [his] heart," noting that "over and above any praise, Don Bosco prized that of being a faithful servant of Jesus Christ, of his Church, of his Vicar."²⁷

²⁰Discourse, February 20, 1927. [Author]

²¹*Ibid.* [Author]

²²Discourse on the decree *Tuto* for Don Bosco's canonization, December 3, 1933. [Author]

²³Discourse, February 20, 1927. [Author]

²⁴Discourse, March 19, 1929. [Author]

²⁵Discourse, December 3, 1933. [Author]

²⁶Discourse, March 19, 1929. [Author]

²⁷Discourse, June 25, 1922. [Author]

Another “impression still vivid to the soul” of the Supreme Pontiff is that even then Don Bosco appeared to him as “a man dauntless and invincible because firmly and solidly rooted in a complete and absolute trust in God’s fidelity.”²⁸

He was further struck by discovering in Don Bosco a priestliness that was the result of a flawless preparation. In a discourse to the students of the Roman pontifical seminaries, both major and minor, on June 17, 1932, after speaking of the moral and intellectual preparation they had to put in before being ordained, he cited the example of Don Bosco. “We were able to have a very close look at Blessed Don Bosco,” he said, “and to be uplifted precisely because we were witnessing both preparations and could note what not everyone even among his own sons was privileged to see. Everyone could perceive his preparation to holiness, his preparation to virtue, his preparation to piety, because this was Don Bosco’s entire life; every moment of his life was an endless sacrifice of charity, an unbroken recollection in prayer. The impression one most vividly received when speaking with him was his alertness to everything going on. People came from everywhere, and he, standing, yes, standing upon his two feet, as though it would take but a moment, heard all, grasped all, answered all, and always in deep recollection. One might say that he heard nothing of what was being said around him; one might say his mind was elsewhere, and that is truly as it was. He was elsewhere. He was with God in a spirit of union. But then see how he responded to everything, having the precise word for every occasion, enough to make one wonder. And, indeed, one first wondered and then marveled. This is the life of holiness, recollection and assiduous prayer led by Blessed Don Bosco throughout the hours of the night and throughout the endless and unremitting duties of his waking hours. However, many have missed his intellectual preparation, his mental discipline, his study, and very many indeed are those who have no idea of how much Don Bosco gave and dedicated to study. He was a very avid learner, and he continued for a long time to study most assiduously.”

Finally, in recalling with such insistence that fortunate meeting, the Holy Father brought out one over-riding impression: it had been an act of “divine Goodness,”²⁹ a “wonderful grace of God,”³⁰ so much so that

²⁸Discourse, April 21, 1929. [Author]

²⁹Discourse, April 21 and May 11, 1930. [Author]

³⁰Discourse, March 19, 1929. [Author]

he does not hesitate to include among “the greatest graces of his priestly life” his “encounter” with Don Bosco.³¹ So, there is nothing that might keep us from asserting that his unforgettable encounter was not merely by chance or due to purely human circumstances, but rather a predisposition in the inscrutable designs of Divine Providence. Worthy of note is a courteous gesture and a courteous choice of words used by Don Bosco when the two separated, never to meet again.

As they were about to take leave of each other, Father Ratti wanted to show his appreciation by offering Don Bosco a donation, but, uncharacteristically, Don Bosco refused it, saying, “You may be able to help our Congregation in another way.” It is not our intent to give these words a significance beyond that of an exquisitely courteous response, but nothing prevents us from drawing a personal conclusion. The Lord, who gave this humble Piedmontese priest a mission of good works as vast as the Church, guided events in such a manner that the particular Vicar of His who was destined to put the seal of supreme approval upon that mission should discover early and appreciate at close range the treasures of grace poured out upon Don Bosco by the Holy Spirit.

³¹Discourse, June 8, 1922, June 3, 1929, and July 9, 1933. [Author]

CHAPTER 11

St. John Bosco and the Count of Chambord

WHEN Louis XI [1423-1483] became ill, he summoned St. Francis of Paola¹ from Italy in the hope that his blessing might avert imminent death, but the saint did not budge until Pope Sixtus IV² issued him a command. He then went to the castle of Plessis, near Tours, and, although he did not restore the sick sovereign to health, he induced him nonetheless to meet his death in a Christian manner on August 13, 1483. Exactly four centuries later, a saintly Italian priest—Don Bosco—paid a similar visit to a descendant of Louis XI, Henry V of France, though he was never to ascend the throne. And in that case, too, the holiness of the priest could not restore the health of the infirm royal person, but succeeded in disposing him properly for the final passage.

Henry of Chambord was the last scion of the main Bourbon line. His grandfather, Charles X, forced to abdicate in 1830, had renounced his right to the crown of France in favor of his first-born son, the duke of Angoulême, who in turn abdicated in favor of his nephew, Count Henry of Chambord, son of his brother the duke of Berry. Born in 1820, a few months after the assassination of his father, Henry at first assumed the title of count of Bourdeaux, but then, since popular demand had regained for him the castle of Chambord in the Department of Loir-et-Cher, the people loyal to his cause gave him that title which he retained throughout his life.

In 1846 he married the Archduchess Maria Teresa of Austria-Este, daughter of Francis IV, duke of Modena, and Beatrice of Savoy, daugh-

¹An unlettered Italian from Paola, a small town in southern Italy, he founded the Minim Friars (i.e., the least in God's household) in 1435. [Editor]

²Pope from August 9, 1471, to August 12, 1484. [Editor]

ter of Victor Emmanuel I. However, they had no children. In 1873 he came close to regaining the throne of his ancestors. His adherents, taking advantage of the weakness of the Third Republic and joining with the Orléans branch of the Bourbons, would have won the day, except that the count of Chambord, unrelenting in his rejection of the tricolor flag, emblem of the revolution, and in bringing back the lily-spangled banner of the monarchy, brought to naught the attempts to restore the monarchy. From then on he lived in exile in Frohsdorf, in the castle bequeathed him by the duchess of Angoulême, situated in Styria [province of Austria], some twenty-five miles from Vienna, not far from the railroad station of Wiener-Neustadt. He never gave up his aspirations to restore to France its historic regime with no concessions to the revolution. An exemplary Christian in private life, he was resolved to continue on the throne the series of most Christian kings. For him it was either Christian sovereignty or nothing. "I shall never consent," he would say, "to become king of the revolution."

In 1883, four months before alarming reports of his illness began to spread, Don Bosco received from Gorizia, homeland of the grandfather, a letter written on behalf of the count which spoke of an incident that had befallen him and asked for special prayers. "Better than anyone else," wrote the secretary, "you know how precious is the health of the one on whom, after God, rest the hopes of a Catholic France."³

Whatever the incident—some say it was an attack of phlebitis⁴—he was clearly harboring a deadly disease. The press did not come to know of it until July 1, when a telegram to the Paris newspaper *Union* broke the story that the condition of His Royal Highness was arousing grave fears.

³At the beginning of the month, the count of Chambord had ordered a donation to be sent to Don Bosco for his works. Our sources are as follows:

(1) An unpublished account of Father Curé, chaplain of the count (document 84 of the Italian edition, in French), sent to Archbishop Seraphim Vannutelli, apostolic nuncio to the court of Vienna, which has come to us through the family of the count of San Marzano, whose mother, Countess Louise Iankovics, née Montbel, was of Hungarian extraction. Her father, former minister of Charles X, had followed the count of Chambord into exile. Perhaps she got the document through him and kept it as a precious relic, because she greatly venerated Don Bosco. She had met him at Nice. Since her children were in school in the principality of Monaco, she used to spend a good part of the year at Nice, and whenever she learned of Don Bosco's coming she felt honored to send her carriage to meet him. (2) An incomplete account by Father Rua, first published in Father Angelo Amadei's *A Servant of God, Michael Rua*, Turin, S.E.I., undated, Volume I, pp. 326-329. (3) Joseph Du Bourg, *Les entrevues des Princes à Frohsdorf*, Paris, Librairie Académique Perrin et Cie, 1910, pp. 112-169. (4) Newspapers and archive documents that we shall quote. [Author]

⁴René de Monti de Reze, *Souvenirs sur le Comte de Chambord* (Paris: Edition Emile-Paul Frères, 1931), p. 122. [Author]

That same day, within the space of five hours, three telegrams reached Don Bosco from different places asking for prayers. Don Bosco had three letters sent in response, with the assurance that prayers would be offered and that a novena would immediately be begun. A fourth telegram reaching him from Count de Charette was in the same vein, and to him also the same response was sent. The doctors did not agree on their diagnosis; some claimed it was a malignant tumor on the pylorus, others that it was an internal inflammation caused by scar tissue at the base of the stomach.

Meanwhile the newspapers printed daily medical bulletins which were avidly perused throughout France. Princes and monarchical leaders rushed to Frohsdorf, fearing the worst. The legitimists were in a panic. Peaceful demonstrations were held in many cities; everywhere Catholics attended Mass in great numbers to obtain a cure from heaven. *Le Figaro* wrote on July 4: "Those who thought that monarchical ideas had died out in France are now convinced of the gravity of their error."

At noon of July 4 Don Bosco received from Father Curé, chaplain of the castle, a dispatch which read: "His Lordship, the count of Chambord, greatly desires to see you. Please leave immediately for Frohsdorf. Paid response, twenty words." Don Bosco replied that, having just arrived from France, tired and ill, he felt that he could not endure such a long trip, but that in the meantime he was praying and was having his boys pray. Another letter came, to which he made the same response, but we do not know its contents.

His illness worsening, the count received the last sacraments with total serenity. The papal nuncio to Vienna personally brought him the blessing of the Holy Father and remained for some time at his bedside. *Unità Cattolica* of July 7 reported: "If there were ever a prince deserving of this papal favor, it would certainly be the count of Chambord, who always joins to a life exemplarily lived a most tender love for the Holy See and the Roman Pontiff."

The government, though it feigned indifference, was also not without its concerns. It looked with suspicion especially upon the comings and goings of the Orléans princes, whose every movement it watched. A proposal was even made to expel from France any member of the Orléans family the moment they might act as pretenders to the throne. Almost overnight the castle of Frohsdorf had become the talk of Europe.

Medical consultants followed one another to the sick man's bedside, and his condition kept alternating between better and worse. The French populace was becoming greatly concerned over his fate. On the night of

July 12 the situation became so bad that the onset of his agony seemed imminent. At a time of such general trepidation hopes were turned toward Mary, Help of Christians, and the conviction began to form that Our Lady, at Don Bosco's bidding, would work the miracle. A second time the count expressed his desire to see him. Immediately his secretary, the marquis of Forez, telegraphed Paris to send Count [Joseph] Du Bourg to Turin without delay with a mandate to bring Don Bosco back with him to Frohsdorf.

Count Du Bourg of Toulouse, for twenty years a member of the royal court, was of course second only to the count of Chambord, who had complete trust in him. Since he had married a daughter of Count Charles De Maistre, a very close friend of Don Bosco, he soon began keeping in touch with him. There was no one, therefore, in the prince's entourage better suited to carry out the delicate mission.

Count Du Bourg, who had just returned from Frohsdorf and was anxious to rejoin his family, immediately broke off his trip and set off directly for Turin. He arrived at about ten on the morning of July 13. His first thought was to contact his cousin Baron [Felician] Ricci des Ferres and ask him to accompany him to Valdocco. There, as soon as he was announced, he was introduced and received by Don Bosco with a smile of goodness which brought relief to his heart. In response to Don Bosco's first inquiries about his family, he began to explain the purpose of his trip and of his visit. A prompt "No" was the answer, and then followed the reasons. Don Bosco's recent tour of France had thoroughly exhausted him; after his return he had become ill and unable to apply himself to clearing up his many affairs; he had not yet regained the full use of his legs, which felt like rubber. "Besides that," he asked, "what would I be doing in that castle? That's no place for Don Bosco. All I can do for the prince is to pray, and I am praying and am having the whole Congregation pray for him. If the Lord wishes to restore the prince's health, He will do so. But, I repeat, Don Bosco can only pray, and for this he certainly does not have to go so far from Turin."

Count Du Bourg was dismayed. However, he was determined to bring him back, dead or alive. And so he began with the comment that in making up his mind Don Bosco had looked at only one aspect of the question, his own. "It would not be proper for a saint," he said, "to push himself forward and get involved in matters which arouse popular feelings. But this is not the question in our case. Here you must be moved

primarily by charity. A prince is near death, the head of a dynasty that has always served the Church; he is calling for you, and would you have the heart to deny him this comfort? St. Francis of Paola flew to the bedside of the dying Louis XI, because the motive of charity silenced all others.” Then the count went on to point out that France would not forgive a refusal to go to the person whom many considered to be their lawful sovereign.

Don Bosco listened attentively in silence. Baron Ricci, known to be often facetious, broke the silence with the remark, “Well, it won’t be long before we will see Don Bosco tangling with the legitimists of France.”

The “Tolousian eloquence”⁵ of the envoy won the day. Baron Ricci had also scored. “Well, patience!” exclaimed Don Bosco, who certainly would not have made people beg so hard for him to go to the bedside of any poor person. Therefore, with his sweet, serene and loving smile he continued. “From Frohsdorf there came to me telegrams, and I answered with telegrams. Then came letters, and I answered with letters. Now they send me a person, and I answer with my person.” The calm and naturalness with which he spoke seemed to Count Du Bourg those of one who, having pondered the matter before God, was ready to change his mind without the slightest hint of regret. “I am at your beck and call,” he added. “Set the hour of departure and let me know.” He said the last words with a shake of the head, which his listener interpreted to be a sign of bad omen, as though he were saying that there was nothing for him to do there.

An itinerary was drawn up and the departure set for seven that very evening. It was Friday, and the following Sunday the Oratory was to hold its annual reunion of lay alumni. Don Bosco could not absent himself. He therefore preferred to delay his departure by two days, but yielding to the argument of Du Bourg, he ended up admitting that, given the circumstances of the case, the delay was too long and, since they had to go, it was better to go immediately. “Well, then, let’s leave tonight at seven,” he concluded. “I shall be ready at six-thirty.”

As we can well imagine, Du Bourg was punctually at the Oratory at seven! He had already cabled the good news to Frohsdorf, good news

⁵Father Curé’s phrase, in his account. [Author]

truly for the count, who eagerly desired a visit from “the saintly man.”⁶ This is the way Du Bourg describes the scene. “At six-fifteen I was at the Salesians’ door. They escorted me through a maze of narrow corridors to a humble little room. Don Bosco was calmly eating his supper with Father Rua, who was to be his traveling companion. The leading priests of the Congregation and the heads of the various offices were standing around him, each receiving last-minute instructions concerning current business. Those ascetical and wise men, the very frugal and none too appetizing meal, the serenity of Don Bosco, who gave precise answers to all questions, all made for a very impressive scene.”

There was no time to lose. Du Bourg, fearing it was getting late, kept insisting. Finally Don Bosco went downstairs. But what an unexpected disaster! No sooner did he appear than he was surrounded by priests, clerics, and boys running to kiss his hand and consequently holding him back. Then, as always, there were the men and women who wanted to speak with him, and Don Bosco, to keep them quiet, stopped here and there. Poor Count Du Bourg was a nervous wreck. Finally, crossing the courtyard, he pushed his two traveling companions into his carriage, which, eating up the road, got them to the Porta Nuova station just seven minutes before departure. Four of those minutes he spent in buying the tickets; he hoped the last three would be enough to clear their baggage and meet the train, but the baggage master closed the window in his face. What was he to do? Bidding farewell to the baggage, he went to the waiting room, took hold of his two “holy men,” pushed them into a first class compartment and followed them, panting. The train pulled out. Don Bosco was not upset by any of this, but was actually smiling. “It’s somewhat of a miracle,” writes Du Bourg, “this constant living in God’s presence. All earthly concerns disappear without even touching him.”

Don Bosco had to smile to see himself ensconced in a compartment paneled with mirrors and surrounded by comfort. “I shall count this trip,” he said, “among the extraordinary adventures I have encountered in my life. That Don Bosco should travel in such a luxurious carriage! It’s amusing! I must tell my boys about it.” The most noteworthy incident took place at Mestre, the main railroad junction not far from Venice. Our travelers were to board the express train for Vienna, but they missed the connection because their train had been almost an hour

⁶René de Monti de Reze, *Souvenirs sur le Comte de Chambord*, p. 152. [Author]

late. There was nothing else they could do but continue their trip an hour later on the local train which took twenty-four hours instead of twelve to reach Wiener-Neustadt. They spent two nights and one day on the train.

Don Bosco, tired before they had even started and even more exhausted for not having closed an eye all night, exclaimed with a smile, "Patience! Providence wills it thus." The heat was unbearable. During their long stops there was no way to persuade Don Bosco to take some food. A couple of hours after noon Father Rua alone "indulged in two fried eggs," writes Du Bourg. The train's motion upset Don Bosco's stomach, so he ate as lightly as possible. In the meantime he would exercise his legs by walking back and forth along the station platform, his hands folded behind his back, as he used to do in the latter years of his life, so as to ease his breathing.

Notwithstanding his own tiredness he tried to alleviate Du Bourg's boredom with interesting talk. Still filled with the impressions he had brought back from France, he had many stories to tell of that trip. The good count, going over what he heard, makes this observation in his book: "How could so earthly and superficial a populace ever be captivated by a little priest so modest in deportment and appearance, who spoke some kind of a French jargon and even that without the fire and rhetoric usual with Italians? And yet we cannot deny the fact, even if the one concerned were never to have said a word. I am not referring to people who are in varying degrees devout and would flock after him, but the enthusiasm he aroused reached out to all. The more worldly papers, including *Le Figaro*, recounted 'wonders' about his works and miracles."

The irresistible attraction Don Bosco wielded in worldly surroundings is demonstrated in the account of two banquets tendered him by the Russian and Polish communities of Paris, which he accepted because they would help his purpose. At the first of these, his host, a Russian prince, true to a wager he had made, imported in the dead of winter all kinds of summer fruits: melons, peaches, cherries, grapes, pears, strawberries—all fresh fruit, not preserves. The dinner cost him thousands of francs—a display of absurd prodigality which amazed Don Bosco. However, as a remembrance of the evening, he was handed an envelope containing a bulky roll of one thousand franc bills. At the second banquet another Russian prince wagered that he would serve choice morsels of every Russian wild game! And so there were reindeer meat and bear *de la Mouche*, as Don Bosco called it, meaning the city of Moscow

which in Italian is *Mosca*, i.e., house fly. He also described the reception tendered him by the princes of Orléans. Twice had the Princess Blanche of Orléans invited him, to no avail, but the third time she left the date to him. "Out of charity," he said, "I accepted." He also spoke of the help of Divine Providence in his works, and he listed for the count the huge expenses incurred annually by the Oratory. These conversations made the time go faster.

The closer they got to Frohsdorf, the worse were the reports carried by the newspapers. A cable of July 13 read: "A troubled night, a brief period of coma occasioned by weakness, and delirium. The last agony seems to have begun." Another cable of July 14 read: "Chambord's condition has worsened. He has not opened his eyes since midday, and has had a few seizures." They feared they would find him dead.

Around six in the morning of July 15 they reached Wiener-Neustadt, from where a carriage from the castle took them to Frohsdorf in three quarters of an hour. Here, after freshening up a bit, Don Bosco went to pay his respects to the prince; then he was taken with Father Rua to the chapel to celebrate Mass. It was Sunday and the name day of the prince. Many members of the local French community attended and received Holy Communion to obtain the Lord's favor. The prince had already received the Eucharist from the hand of Jesuit Father Bole, his confessor.⁷

The journal of his illness, kept by René de Monti's wife and transcribed in his book, records the impression which Don Bosco made upon the people of that court: "He is a rather short man, intelligent in appearance, but looking old before his time and worn out. He is somewhat awkward in manner and has great simplicity."⁸

While Don Bosco was celebrating Mass, Count Du Bourg was comforting the prince, who wanted to hear about Don Bosco, by telling him many stories of his life, like that of the dog Grigio, the miracles performed through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, and the wonders of Divine Providence in his works. When he finished the prince said somewhat testily, "Go call that holy man and bring him to me."

Don Bosco was still making his thanksgiving after Mass. When told that His Royal Highness wanted to see him, he nodded in acknowledgment but continued to pray. Du Bourg then drew closer and said, "His

⁷The name is spelled *Boll* and *Bole*. In his book René de Monti de Reze spells it *Boll*. The newspaper reports of the illness call him *Bole*. [Author]

⁸De Monti de Reze, p. 155. [Author]

Lordship cannot be kept waiting like this. He is calling, and you must go." Again Don Bosco nodded in agreement but did not move. "Everything in the world comes to an end," writes Du Bourg, "and so also did Don Bosco's prayer." He arose very slowly and took some breakfast; while he was sipping his coffee, another messenger appeared to tell him that His Highness was awaiting his visitor. Du Bourg did his best to explain the delay to the messenger so that the prince could be notified. Don Bosco, however, remained quiet and peaceful. "The calm of heaven," writes Du Bourg, "was in his soul, his heart, his spirit, his attitude."

Don Bosco was led to the sick prince, and the two remained in very lengthy conversation. He seemed convinced that the prince was not to die and told him so in the words of the Gospel, "This sickness is not to end in death." [John 11:4] The joyful news revived the prince, but Don Bosco immediately suggested that he pray fervently to Mary, Help of Christians, who is also called "The Health of the Sick," and he disposed him to receive Her blessing. When Don Bosco left, the sick man called out to Du Bourg in a clear, forceful voice such as he had not been heard to do for two weeks. "My dear Du Bourg," he exclaimed vivaciously, "I told you so. I have been cured.... He did not tell me so that clearly, but I understood his meaning.... He is a saint! I am so glad to have seen him. All of us here do not come anywhere near the stature of Don Bosco." Later he told his chaplain, "Don Bosco says it is not he, but the other one." Since the priest did not understand, he explained: "He says that he is not the one who performs miracles, but his companion [Father Rua]. He too is a saint."

Don Bosco's extraordinary simplicity stood out in his first encounter with the countess, to whom he was introduced by Du Bourg. "And who are you?" he asked in Italian. She smiled and without further ado listed for him her names and titles, adding that her mother was princess of Savoy, but of the first-born's lineage.

Since it was his name day, the prince allowed his household at Frohsdorf to enter and extend their greetings to him. So as not to overtire him, they were to file past the bed, but he had a word of greeting for each one, something he had not felt up to for some time.

Don Bosco then, and also at other times, took a stroll through the beautiful grounds, where he met boys and girls who spoke only German, but he was so quick-witted that, by recalling his schoolday classes, and by asking some kindly people, he put together a small vocabulary and managed to make himself understood and to communicate some good

thoughts to them on eternal salvation. Toward evening, at Father Curé's request, he addressed a fairly large French audience. With utmost simplicity and fatherliness, he urged upon them Holy Communion, devotion to Our Lady, and trust in prayer. Lastly he promised that when he would return to thank the Lord, the count would be present at the chant of the *Te Deum*. In this regard Father Curé has the following comment; "According to him, the healing would come, but not so quickly, so as to have it attributed not to him but to the power of the prayers being offered everywhere."

As evening set in, he sat at dinner. There were eighteen guests, and the banquet was also in honor of St. Henry. The countess presided. There was much rejoicing. The roast had been served and the champagne had been poured when suddenly, to the astonishment of everyone, who entered the dining hall but the count himself, brought in by his attendants in a wheelchair! Beside herself, the countess rushed to his side. Emotion brought tears to everyone's eyes. He was haggard and emaciated, but in a vibrant voice he said, "I did not want you to drink to my health without being with you." He then called for a glass of champagne. [General] De Charette⁹ hastened to give it to him. With exquisite grace the count toasted the countess, all those present, and Don Bosco; he put the glass to his lips, and then he had it brought to his bedroom.

When the news agency *Havas* reported that the prince had himself taken to the dining hall during the banquet honoring St. Henry in order to celebrate with his guests, many readers thought it was a slip of the telegraph; even *La Croix* did not dare to publish the astounding news, so alarming had the medical bulletins been up to then. The hesitation, however, is easily explained: to date no newspaper had reported the arrival of Don Bosco. Little by little, as the details of the count's recovery were confirmed, his friends' hopes revived, while hostility grew stronger in the ranks of his political adversaries. The latter's press claimed it was all a farce, both the illness and the recovery. Had they intended to be thorough, they would have had to add that farcical also was the diagnosis of some of Europe's finest medical authorities, including [Felix-Alfred] Vulpian¹⁰ of world renown. In fact, arriving at Frohsdorf on the afternoon of July 15, and having thoroughly examined the patient, Doctor Vulpian

⁹See p. 102. [Editor]

¹⁰Born in Paris in 1826, he eventually graduated with honors in medicine in 1853. He soon distinguished himself as an outstanding physician, physiologist, clinician and scientific writer. He died in Paris in 1887. [Editor]

signed a joint medical bulletin with two other Viennese physicians, stating: "The patient's condition is relatively satisfactory." So satisfactory indeed that during the day the count spoke several times and at quite some length, without becoming tired, while, before that, rarely did words issue from his mouth and only with great effort. He was able to drink a pint of milk, whereas formerly even a spoonful of liquid caused stomach spasms and spastic vomiting.

Thus Doctor Vulpian's name came to be linked with Don Bosco's in the daily newspapers. Though it had been feared that the Parisian doctor would be reluctant to meet Don Bosco, it was the doctor himself who asked to be introduced to him. He told him that his son, a pupil of the Marianists, had had the good fortune of seeing him during his visit to the Stanislaus School.

At four o'clock, on the morning of July 16, the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the chamber of the count, who, together with his wife, received Holy Communion from his hand. Each time Don Bosco stood at the count's bedside—and he never went unless summoned by the count—he always talked to him as a priest, never as a member of his court. His expressions of hope were always followed by the thought that life and death are in the hands of God, King of kings and Lord of lords, and that everyone, small and great, had to conform to His inscrutable will. A man of lively faith, solidly religious, the count fully agreed, and said that, if Divine Providence should enable him to continue to serve France, he would not refuse the task, but if it pleased God to call him to eternity, he was in every way and in everything submissive to the divine decree. Such holy sentiments of the count and the edifying virtue of the countess left Don Bosco deeply moved.

That evening, Don Bosco, on taking his leave, saw with the greatest pleasure that the recovery was progressing ever more. He asked the count to promise that, if he fully regained his health, he would go to Turin to thank Mary, Help of Christians in Her church and would honor with a visit the Oratory, where so many lads had prayed, were praying and would continue to pray for him. The count embraced Don Bosco and tenderly kissed him, thanking him from his heart for coming.

During the day Don Bosco's mind went to Nice and to engineer Vincent Levrot, whose name day was approaching; he wished to send him greetings from the castle.

Prosdorf (sic), July 16, 1883

My dear Mr. Levrot,

Your charity which benefits our work in many ways obliges me when I am away to remember you on the occasion of your name day.

On the 20th of this month I shall celebrate Holy Mass, and our boys will offer their Holy Communion for you and for all your family. This humble gathering in our community prayers we will carry out every day, so that the Lord's blessings may ever more copiously come upon you and all your family. Please also pray for me, who affectionately and gratefully am always,

Yours in Jesus Christ,
Father John Bosco

Accompanied by [General] De Charette to the railroad station of Wiener-Neustadt, Don Bosco and Father Rua left for Turin on the morning of July 17 and arrived at the Oratory the following day at six in the evening. The prince had given them a donation of twenty thousand francs.

As we follow the two medical bulletins issued to the press every day, we see a steady rise in optimism. Don Bosco's own feelings in this regard are contained in the following letter which he sent to [Count] De Maistre immediately upon his return.

Turin, July 18, 1883

My dear Count Eugene,

I have just returned from Frohsdorf and received your dear letter. With all my heart I will offer Holy Mass for the success of the examinations of your sons, my dear friends, and I hope they will do well.

At Frohsdorf I came across many of your friends who told me much about you. General De Charette sends you his best regards. As of yesterday, the 17th, the count of Chambord continues to make progress in recovery. May God bless you, my ever dear Eugene, and with you may He bless all your family. I assure you that I daily make it my duty to recommend you and your children to God. I recommend myself too to the charity of your holy prayers.

Yours affectionately,
Father John Bosco

The ill-concealed rage of certain Italian newspapers needed to be vented. Had they been content to settle for malignant political gossip, it

would not have been so bad, but, what is worse, they aimed a low blow at Don Bosco. The movement was started by *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, which did not restrict itself to jeering at him, as did *Le Temps*, branding all that praying as neo-paganism and stating that Don Bosco had become “a quasi-god,”¹¹ but it added calumny to mockery. Its issue of July 20, in an article entitled *We Call for a United Press*, cynically dished out this tidbit to its readers: “That has happened to Don Bosco which happened to the astrologer of the fairy tale, who, obsessed with gazing at the planets (*planets* indeed), did not see the ditch on the ground. While he was in Frohsdorf on the occasion of the second miracle,¹² which was to make the count of Chambord the greatest clown of the ‘pretenders’ [to the throne], the judiciary of Turin found itself bound to initiate in the Bosconian institute an investigation similar to that conducted in the diocesan seminary of Biella.”¹³ We wish to think that this will not turn out to be a false alarm as it did there. However, since it is stated that, in confirmation of the facts which form the basis for this investigation, there exist the earmarks of a particular disease, we also hope that in one way or another all will be brought to light. In this connection it would be opportune that the news of this most unpleasant incident be passed on to our pilgrim (if needed, through the channel of the owners of Frohsdorf, the count or the countess) so that he can immediately take defensive steps.”

To understand this cautious and vicious innuendo it is necessary to know that a boy had returned home from a charity institution in Turin and was later found to be suffering from a certain disease. Although it was a known fact that the lad had not come from the Oratory, the masonic groups made sure that this assertion was inserted into the report sent to the department of health, and it took all the influence of Doctor [John] Albertotti, the Oratory’s physician, to wipe out such calumny. However, he had come to learn of it much later, so that the malicious lie made its way into the press, and forceful refutations had to be published.

¹¹*Le Temps*, July 24, 1883. [Author]

¹²The monarchists dubbed the count of Chambord “the miracle child” because of the circumstances of his birth, which took place six months before the stabbing of his father by an emissary of the sects. Hence, his cure would be the “second miracle.” [Author]

¹³More properly the paper should have said “diocesan hostel” instead of “seminary”; the hostel was next door to the clerical seminary. In the “hostel” the students, sons of wealthy families, wore secular clothing and attended secondary schooling as in any other private academy. [Author]

Some fifty newspapers throughout the peninsula and even from Sicily picked up the nasty report. Father [Joseph] Lazzero, the Oratory director, was the first to deny the false charge. Only *Il Secolo* of Milan turned a deaf ear, although it had also received a registered letter, and only twenty days later printed a late and inadequate correction. Don Bosco, always opposed to litigation, did not press charges, but he did allow Father Bonetti to bring it to public denunciation in the *Bollettino Salesiano* in an article entitled "Liars, Ancient and Modern." The article was reprinted in pamphlet form and given very wide circulation. In the same article the author rebutted the false assertions of the irreligious press concerning the illness of the Count of Chambord.

La Gazzetta del Popolo in its July 22 issue had again attacked Don Bosco, hitting upon an article published in the July 21 issue of *Unità Cattolica* which dealt with his trip to Frohsdorf. Among other things *Unità* had cited Don Bosco's invitation to the count to visit Turin after his recovery. *La Gazzetta del Popolo* immediately seized upon this news. "Now," it pontificated, "the affair gets complicated. As long as the political farce benefiting the clerical party of the pretender to the throne of France is enacted in Austria, Italy can laugh at it and pass it off with a shrug of the shoulders. But when the farce is to be re-enacted in an Italian city on the very frontier of France, then not only the progressives, not only the republicans, but also the most moderate parties may have reason to shout, 'Down with them!' to the sanfedist¹⁴ comedians." *Unità* rebutted this charge tit for tat in its issue of July 29, and concluded by assuring *La Gazzetta* that, if the count of Chambord were to come to Turin, it would be only to pray, not to conspire.

Don Bosco had left behind him at Frohsdorf the most favorable of impressions, as we see from a precious document. Father Rua had hastened to write a letter to the countess in Don Bosco's name and in his own, including group letters written by the artisans and students, and he received the following reply in Italian:

Frohsdorf, July 29, 1883

Very Reverend Father Rua:

Your letter touched me to the heart. I immediately read it to my dear pa-

¹⁴The *sanfedists* were members of a political-religious party which in southern Italy rose up against the French invasion and the French government after the Revolution. The affiliates called themselves "Followers of the Holy Faith." [Author]

tient, who was moved by it. Together we thank you and our dear Don Bosco for your every word. It was a great comfort for my husband and myself to receive your blessing and to learn how many pure and innocent souls are praying for the healing of my ever dear and beloved patient.

Thanks to God, every day, though ever so slowly, the recovery keeps progressing, despite the little setbacks that now and then come and go, although they lessen with time and renew our hopes for a complete recovery, which, as Don Bosco said, will be obtained with patience. We both thank you for the letters, so sincere and precious, written to us by the sons of Don Bosco's Oratory, young students and artisans. My husband expressly charges me, and does so now as I am writing, to ask dear Don Bosco to keep up his saintly prayers, in which he places so much trust.

The remembrance of the two days spent here among us by Don Bosco and you, good Father Rua, will always remain most dear to us. I am glad that your trip was a pleasant one; it does not surprise me, because two souls, good and holy like yours, deserve to be accompanied in a special way by your Guardian Angels. I close now, renewing to you and to Don Bosco the assurance of our gratitude and sincere affection, with which I heartily remain

Your indebted servant,
Maria Teresa
Countess of Chambord

P.S. My husband bids me send you his special loving regards.

Concerning the progress of the illness, the count's secretary Huet de Pavillon wrote at the end of July to Father Rua: "After your departure the condition of His Highness has noticeably though slowly improved, and the doctors are beginning to express some hope. It seems, therefore, that the Lord has let Himself be moved by so many prayers, particularly those of the venerable and saintly Don Bosco. Please be so kind as to express to him all our gratitude, partly directed also to you, for you too have prayed and are still praying to obtain the great miracle of our august patient's complete recovery.... This grace, as your holy superior has already told us, is not meant for His Highness alone, but to a large extent it concerns the holy Church and therefore the glory of God." As we can see from this, the French legitimists considered the future of the Church in France to be intimately, if not indissolubly, linked to that of the monarchy. This viewpoint induced them, while wishing for the fall

of the Third Republic, not to use all possible legal means in defense of religious interests and to let the sectarians expand their evil work. This is admitted and deplored by the most enlightened of the legitimists living today. This too was at the heart of Don Bosco's thinking, as we have seen in the resignations of the magistrates in 1880.¹⁵

The situation at Frohsdorf was inspiring more and more, so much so that *La Croix's* daily bulletin entitled "The Illness of the Count of Chambord," in its July 25 issue, changed "Illness" to "Health" and on July 30 to "Convalescence." At the resurgence of such joyful hopes, a request was sent to Don Bosco on the count's behalf for a picture of Mary, Help of Christians, with his autograph. He sent it on August 4 and wrote on the back this prayer to Mary assumed into heaven: "O Mary, in honor of Your Assumption into heaven, bestow a special blessing upon Your son Henry and upon his charitable spouse and grant them good health and perseverance on the path to paradise. Amen."

By the beginning of August the satisfaction of the doctors was such that they felt it was no longer necessary to issue health bulletins. In fact, His Highness was reading his correspondence, joked about the news he read about himself in the papers, had himself taken for hours upon hours out on the estate grounds and watched the hunting. An avid hunter himself, on August 4 he called for a shotgun, and from his wheelchair he shakily raised the weapon to his chest, took aim at a deer, and hit it. When his physicians heard of this escapade, they strictly forbade him to go out again. They were right: his recklessness proved to be fatal. A letter to Don Bosco from the count's confidant, Count de Monti, stated that the hunt had lasted five hours and that, as the count shot, the gun's recoil sent the butt against his stomach. Four days later the health bulletins reappeared with somber news. At about that time Don Bosco in turn wrote to the countess:

Turin, August 14, 1883

My dear Countess,

The newspapers report bad news about the prince of Chambord, and this deeply afflicts me. Prayers unceasingly are being offered in all our houses. I

¹⁵See Vol. XIV, pp. 480-481. [Editor]

continue to celebrate Holy Mass to obtain this longed-for grace: the complete recovery of the count of Chambord. These our prayers, joined to so many others which are being offered throughout almost all Europe, undoubtedly must be heard unless God in His infinite wisdom sees that it is better to summon our august patient to enjoy the reward of his charity and of his other virtues. In that case we will humbly say: thus it pleased God, and thus it happened. But I am convinced that we are not yet at that point. However, while we pray God to obtain the recovery of the Lord Count, we do not forget to raise fervent prayers for you, Countess, for the preservation of your precious health.

May the grace and power of Our Lord Jesus Christ rule always in all your family. Kindly offer a prayer for me, who glory in the lofty honor that is mine to profess myself,

Yours gratefully,
Fr. John Bosco

These comforting words arrived at an exceptionally opportune time because the count of Chambord's days were numbered. He could no longer cope with his weakness, and so on the morning of August 24 he delivered his soul to God. The last descendant of St. Louis, king of France, he died on the eve of his glorious ancestor's feast day.

Proclaimed king (Henry V) by the legitimists, [but compelled] to live abroad and, in later years, at Frohsdorf [in eastern Austria], he was the highly respected exponent of an ancient monarchical tradition that had a grand beginning. He might have been able to shorten his exile by accepting conditions that he considered equivocal, but he preferred to bear with it to the very end with true moral grandeur as befitted a prince who knew how to maintain his dignity also in misfortune. Though he did not reign, he was counted among those who wore the crown. If he stuck up for his inviolable rights to the throne, it was because he considered them inseparable from French tradition and the national interests of his homeland. However, in a half century of exile he never gave expression to even the least thought of fostering internal unrest which might lead to civil war.¹⁶ However, that which most ennobled his princely talents was an eminently Catholic spirit that imbued all the deeds of his life, both private and public. The entire republican and radical press of Paris paid homage to the character of the deceased — something that would seem incredible in that turmoil of parties.

¹⁶This belief is the heart of two articles appearing in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 1 and 15, 1883. [Author]

Don Bosco's letter of August 14 addressed to the countess had gone unanswered. Don Bosco let a month and a half pass, and then he either wrote himself or had someone write to Father Curé, enclosing words of comfort for the widow. Her response was immediate. The tone of her letter is a striking proof of the impression of sanctity which Don Bosco had left of himself in Frohsdorf, and, furthermore, it shows us the salutary results produced by his visit on the soul of the sick man, whose spiritual advantage was certainly uppermost in Don Bosco's mind.

Frohsdorf, October 14, 1883

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

I am certain that in your great goodness and charity you will have forgiven my delay in answering your very dear letter written to me on August 14, while I was still anxiously attending my dear angel, who is now in paradise. Then and later, for a long time until today, I was unable to write, at first because I was crushed by grief and exhaustion, then because I was afflicted with another of my critical attacks of bronchitis, from which, however, with God's grace, I am now recovering. Today, then, I read the most touching letter which you dictated for Father Curé and in which you tell me so many dear things which, I assure you, went straight to my heart, because your words are absolutely the echo of my own thoughts, of my feelings, of what I always say. Oh, I am so certain that my angel is in paradise. He died like a saint, with the enviable peace of a patriarch, without the slightest distortion of his handsome and beloved countenance, always praying and united to God, who certainly took him to Himself at the right moment.

From the time you left him, there was never a complaint, never an act of impatience, but always an offering to God of his pains in union with the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and giving thanks for being allowed to suffer still in this world. In brief, his was an enviable death. Suffering by his side, I thought I should die with him! And this feeling which God put into my heart, and which was almost a hope that it would be so, helped me to have the strength to do all even to the very last moment with a courage that only the Lord could have given me. At the moment in which God took him to Himself and which left me alone, O God!!! ... But God had given and preserved him for me to my immense joy and comfort for thirty-seven years of earthly paradise. God took him from me; may His holy will be done and blessed! May God now help me to be totally His. When it pleases Him and when He judges the right moment has come also for me—which is the only essential thing—may I be able to rejoin my dear angel and then with him praise God

eternally. I thank you as best I know how and can for your prayers for me; my poor prayers for you will never be lacking. Believe me always your most grateful and affectionate friend,

Maria Teresa

The countess' feelings of veneration for Don Bosco never died out even later, as we see in a letter of March 1885, according to which it seems probable that Father [John] Bonetti,¹⁷ having seen her letters to Don Bosco, wanted to publish one of them for the edification of his readers. Learning of this from Don Bosco himself, the countess asked him not to.

Gorizia, March 1, 1885

Reverend and dear Don Bosco,

Your wonderful letter of February 13 would have received a prompt reply, except that my health, ever vacillating, does not always allow me to finish by nightfall all the things I propose to do in the morning. For this reason only now can I take up my pen to beg you *for heaven's sake* never to allow anything that I write to be published.... I am doing the best I can, you understand, but my letters, once they have been read, deserve only to be tossed into the fire. Now, speaking to you from an open heart because I know that you believe me and do *not* publish what I write, I tell you that from the moment I lost my dear angel of a husband my one and only desire is that I be spoken of no longer, as though I were already buried with him at nearby Castagnavizza. I desire nothing from life other than to serve God wherever and in whatever way He wishes, as best I can and must. All the rest is absolutely of no interest to me. I have a further reason for wishing that nothing be said of me. In this world there are many messy situations that I don't want to get involved in, and to succeed in that there is but the one way that I carved out for myself the moment my dear Henry was buried: that is, to withdraw completely from all that might draw attention to me and give people occasion to surround me with things that no longer interest me. Should my letters appear in the *Salesian Bulletins*, some people—well-intentioned as they might be on the one hand, and meddling on the other—might remember me again and draw me in one matter or another in which it is no longer my duty to get involved. See now, I have opened my heart to you, and I feel you will fully understand.

I can make out your writing very well, and it comforts me to see it. I cannot thank you enough for the prayers you and your dear orphans offer for me and

¹⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

which I feel do help me so much. Asking you to continue them, I remain united to you in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, and I profess myself affectionately and most gratefully,

Yours,
Maria Teresa

One day Father [Charles] Bellamy¹⁸ asked Don Bosco how he could have asserted that the count's illness was not unto death, although the count died. He repeated his question three times, and only on the last did he get an answer. Don Bosco, somewhat annoyed, replied, "God gave him back his health for France and not for himself, nor to go hunting.... His place was in France. The countess always kept him from going there because she feared a recurrence of the horrors of 1793.... The specter of the scaffold terrified her." Perhaps from these words we may rightly infer that Don Bosco too, along with so many other Church leaders, did not go along with the prince's scruples concerning the flag, scruples more dynasty-slanted than religious. Don Bosco's rule in such cases was to take advantage of every means possible, as long as it was not evil, to do good.¹⁹

¹⁸See pp. 242-244. [Editor]

¹⁹There was some speculation about the causes of the prince's death. [Count Joseph] Du Bourg maintains in his book that it was due to deadly poisoning, and he offers in confirmation of this that the autopsy showed no signs of cancer. But the monarchical organ *Gaulois* of August 25 published, without denial, a dispatch from Vienna dated August 24, which read: "The sealed envelope given to the count of Blacas by the physicians Vulpian, Drache, and Meyer contained the diagnosis of the illness which caused the count's death, stating that it had been a stomach cancer, an atrophy of the kidney, an *enthartritis universalis*." It is true that this diagnosis had been made prior to the autopsy, but we must recall that in his initial diagnosis Dr. Vulpian had disagreed with his Austrian colleagues on the malignant tumor. As to the immediate cause of death, the family and friends of the deceased were generally convinced that it had been the blow to the stomach. Count de Charette and Count De Maistre, as well as three or four other Frenchmen who came to see Don Bosco at Valsalice in the fall of 1884, all said so. Father Lemoyne was present during their conversation. [Author]

CHAPTER 12

The New Archbishop of Turin

THREE DAYS before Don Bosco's departure for Frohsdorf, Father [James] Margotti of *Unità Cattolica* learned from private sources that the Pope had chosen Cardinal [Cajetan] Alimonda as Turin's new archbishop, and *Unità Cattolica* made the news public in its July 11 issue. All the people were very pleased by the choice. Father [John] Bonetti, writing to Cardinal [Lawrence] Nina, could hardly suppress his exultation, claiming, "I cannot close this letter without telling you that the nomination of His Eminence Cardinal Alimonda as archbishop of Turin is regarded by all as a most singular grace. Oh, how good is the Lord! How well the Holy Father understands the needs of the individual churches! It is impossible not to recognize the spirit of God in him. We now firmly trust that a new era is about to start for this archdiocese, and the Salesians see for themselves too a ray of tranquillity and peace shining, so that they may work with ever greater alacrity for God and for souls."¹ Don Bosco, also, wrote to Cardinal Nina: "I cannot sufficiently express the enthusiasm which greeted the nomination of Cardinal Alimonda as archbishop of Turin. He will begin a new era in the history of our archdiocese."² He had already instructed his Procurator to offer the cardinal his best wishes and those of all the Salesians. Later, however, he wrote directly to the cardinal, who was resting at Castellamare di Stabia, and received a reply thanking him and offering these comforting words: "I come to Turin trusting that God will help me through the prayers of good people, because my only intention is to do God's will as manifested to me by the Holy Father. I take comfort, too, in so many wonderful institutions,

¹Turin, July 30, 1883. [Author]

²Turin, July 31, 1883. [Author]

among which is your Congregation with its multiple works of charity. Please pray and have others pray for me to the Virgin Help of Christians, for she does not begrudge you graces and wonders. I pay you my respects, I embrace you with fatherly affection, and I bless you, your reverend confreres, and your vast family.”³

For almost a century the capital of Piedmont had not had a cardinal for archbishop, and it was certainly a singular honor for the city to have a cardinal of such eminent virtue and excellent renown. Born in Genoa in 1818, at one time rector of the seminary, provost canon of the cathedral of Genoa, and bishop of Albenga, he had won for himself a widespread reputation as a learned and effective preacher. He merited a distinguished place among great Catholic apologists because of his eight volumes of conferences, *The Supernatural*, and four others, *The Problems of the Nineteenth Century*. In addition, he was noted for his serene and conciliatory spirit, whose need for the good of souls was felt more than ever in those days of fierce political strife. Everything therefore made people believe that his coming would be received with rejoicing by the faithful and with respect by liberals of every stripe.

On the occasion of the archbishop’s name day, Don Bosco desired to give him yet a further proof of his personal feelings. He had some of his recently republished books elegantly bound and sent as a homage with an added prayer he had composed to the cardinal’s patron saint: “To Saint Cajetan. Saint Cajetan, you have worked so many miracles both in life and after death. Constantly protect your faithful servant, Cardinal Alimonda. Obtain for him from the Lord good health and make him come quickly to us, his flock, which fervently yearns for him and which places itself as an offering in his hands to do and say all that he will judge best for God’s greater glory. This is the prayer of Don Bosco and all the Salesians. Turin, August 7, 1883.” With the gift he sent a brief letter:

Turin, August 7, 1883

Your Eminence:

With these few words and the simple gift of these books, I want to offer you the respectful homage of all the Salesian Congregation, which humbly and respectfully asks for your holy blessing.

Yours affectionately,
Father John Bosco

³Castellamare, August 5, 1883. [Author]

In the papal consistory of August 9 Cardinal Alimonda was solemnly announced as archbishop of Turin; he received the pallium from the Holy Father the following morning. Milan's prominent newspaper, in an article reporting the consistory, inveighed against Father Margotti, whom it accused of heading the opposition against the archbishop's authority, nor did it spare even Don Bosco. "Father Margotti," it wrote, "works manfully and makes Don Bosco work for matters divine. Some of the books published narrate the *miracles* of Don Bosco, the last of which would be the cure of Chambord."⁴ How many lies in a few lines! One might page through *Unità Cattolica* year by year and find not one irreverent word against Turin's archbishops. The comment that follows on the miracles is equally trustworthy, as our readers well know. The article closed by saying: "For some time the diocese of Turin has given the impression of a derailed train. It has to be put back on track and each one assigned his place. The new archbishop has to work to eliminate the lawless usurpation of power. This is my hope, but not my belief. All the boisterous concern of Margotti and his office to afford their new shepherd an extraordinary welcome, all the addresses, committees, and anthems of the newspapers make it clear that now they have Alimonda in their own hands. By nature very sweet, he is hardly apt to cope with human hypocrisy. Were this to come true, it would be an incalculable travesty." Politics masquerading as religion were already beginning to muddy the waters.

As regards the Salesians, it was not insignificant that at the same time the Pope appointed Cardinal Alimonda he also revoked in its entirety the ruling he had made the year before which limited Father Bonetti's going to Chieri, as we narrated in the preceding volume.⁵ There is reason to believe that the new archbishop had something to do with the changed directive, so much so that Father Bonetti felt it his duty to send him fervent thanks and place himself entirely in his hands. "My voice," he wrote, "and my pen have little power, true, but whatever power they have I shall always exert, under the guidance of my venerated Don Bosco, to ease the exercise of your pastoral care."⁶ We shall soon see how quickly the opportunity arose for him to put his words into practice. The cardinal's reply could not have been more affectionate. Written by the cardinal's

⁴*Corriere della Sera*, August 20-21, 1883. [Author]

⁵See Vol. XV, pp. 218-239, especially 224-226. [Editor]

⁶Letter of August 5, 1883, printed in its entirety as document 85 in the original Italian appendix, pp. 575-576. [Editor]

secretary because Alimonda found it difficult to handle a pen and used to dictate, the letter's last two lines are in his handwriting and read: "My respectful and loving best wishes to your excellent superior, Father John Bosco."⁷

While Father Bonetti's reappearance at Chieri recalled his zeal, it also reactivated old hostilities. There were not only whispered protests, but the press too had its say. Naturally, the prime target was always Don Bosco. Don Bosco and his henchmen in Chieri, a wasps' nest of priests and brothers, it was said, foster bigots young and old; they exploit naive girls so as to fill the convents; their outlawed corporations should have in fact been wiped out; the chief entrepreneur of this endeavor is a would-be secret institute without authorization and without even the government's knowledge; that institute took over a home as the gift made by a certain gentleman well known for his intrigues; eight nuns there, under the pretext of a school, teach trusting little girls to pay no heed to their families and later to inveigle them with their usual tricks and with promises coerce them to abandon their mothers and take the veil, which they will one day strip off, cursing their fate; the victims of those women servants of God are many; every family weeps for the departure of some credulous relative; under the guise of taking an examination one of the girls, fifteen, accompanied by her lady abbess, recently went to Nizza [Monferrato] for good, leaving her grandmother and mother worried and alone in the world; nobody cares, but hope arises that the authoritative word of the liberal press will shake the competent authorities out of their lethargy.⁸ All this diatribe was intended to strike a blow at the Chieri oratory and the home for girls run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

It was not difficult to refute these charges, and, with Don Bosco's permission, Father Bonetti did so, first presenting documentation, then throwing down the gauntlet: "Don Bosco challenges any person in Chieri to prove the contrary."⁹ No one stepped forward. However, it is not easy to dispell the suspicions which normally arise from such accusations hurled against members of a religious institution. We will add nothing else. Father Bonetti had nothing more to fear; he was well covered.

On October 7 Cardinal Alimonda, following the precedent that the flock entrusted to his care as their shepherd should hear his voice before

⁷Letter of August 18, 1883, printed in its entirety as document 87 in the Italian appendix, p. 581. [Author]

⁸*Gazzetta del Popolo*, October 6, 1883. [Author]

⁹*Ibid.*, October 13, 1883. [Author]

he even arrived, sent his first pastoral letter to Turin, entitled "Divine Spectacle of the Catholic Church." He took his title from the words of the apostle Paul to the Christians of Corinth: "We have become a spectacle to angels and to men" [1 Cor. 4:9]. *La Gazzetta del Popolo* directed a venomous, malintended, evil, and scurrilous criticism at the archbishop's message, which aroused Father Bonetti's indignation. He conceived the idea of counteracting with a fiery pamphlet of his own, entitled "The Fly and the Eagle." Over a hundred thousand copies were distributed free. The Fly [i.e., *La Gazzetta*] attempted a rebuttal, calling the pamphlet "Bosconian trash" and the author a "Bosconian advocate," insultingly alluding to Don Bosco. But the Fly made a bad impression.

As the archbishop's arrival drew closer, Father Bonetti republished his pamphlet as an appendix to an article containing brief notes on the life and works of His Eminence Cardinal Alimonda; this publication, too, flooded Turin. It was necessary to unclutter ignorant minds of the prejudices which the sects were spreading about the person of their new shepherd.

A committee of gentlemen formed to prepare for the archbishop's arrival decided to make a handsomely bound album which would be a collection of sentiments and autographs of prominent Turinese, to be presented in homage to him on his arrival. Don Bosco too was asked to take a page. He wrote: "May Mary be for you and for the people of your diocese a help in life, a solace in distress and peril, a support in death, and joy in heaven. Father John Bosco, Rector Major."

The Freemasons, however, did their best to raise obstacles to the cardinal's peaceful entrance into the city. His devotion to the Pope constituted treason in the eyes of the politicians and their satellites in those years of venomous anticlericalism.

As soon as he had been appointed, the cardinal had written a fine letter to [Count Ernest] Di Sambuy, Turin's mayor, who apprised the city council and at the same time notified it of the already granted royal *Exequatur*.¹⁰ Everything therefore led people to believe that the city fathers would have an official role in the reception ceremony. But then an anonymous pamphlet came out calculated to avert such a grave danger. It was entitled "Clericalism in Turin" and was dedicated to the Municipal Junta. Every line reeked of Masonic bile. Insults galore were hurled against the sacred person of the archbishop, nor was Don Bosco spared.

¹⁰Authorization by the civil government to exercise the powers and enjoy the privileges of ecclesiastical office. [Editor]

An alarm was sounded against him in the following terms: "Turin must cease to be the city of revolt, so as to become the center of Italian religious renaissance; it must stop being the citadel of the revolution and become the beloved city of Mary Help of Christians! Thus do the clericals preach, and not in vain... With a self-denial which it would be folly to deny, with a tenacity of resolve that pays them honor, they have sown the city and its environs with schools, works of charity, dens of clericalism. Don Bosco has his motherhouse in our midst—this man of wonders, worthy of inspiring one of the most splendid pages of [the Scottish author Samuel] Smiles, this man who, starting with nothing, has filled Italy and all Europe with his fame, this living incarnation of clericalism's menacing power has his general headquarters in our city. Here he forms his priests, coercing them into blind, passive and idiotic obedience, filling them with prejudices, obstinacy and intolerance, so as to send them forth tomorrow into our suburbs to spread the message of clericalism." In his own way whoever was spewing forth such venom showed less misunderstanding of Don Bosco than some others.

The scorn broke out even in the theater. The Gerbino on November 16 presented a drama translated from French and directed against the legitimists.¹¹ One actor's words were: "Italy has but two legitimists: the Pope and Don Bosco." A voice rang out from the gallery, "And Cardinal Alimonda." The whole hall burst into applause.

Determining how the archbishop was to enter the city was a bit complex. The problem was this: when a prince of the Church arrives in the city after he has very graciously advised the mayor and the council that he will be there in the afternoon hours of November 18, should the mayor and his council go to meet him at the railroad station? The three major liberal newspapers of the city, all more or less sectarian, said no; the mayor and his council said yes. On being told of the dissension, Cardinal Alimonda decided he would enter the city privately. "I am the father of all the people of Turin, even of those who, if there be any, do not accept me; I do not intend to make my first presence in my new native city a cause for discord. I come as a herald of peace, tranquillity, and mutual love, and I would rather sacrifice much more for Turin than the honor of a solemn reception." The mayor, however, for the good name of the city, did not wish to yield to pressure because he felt one did not have to be boorish in order to be liberal.

¹¹It was called *I Narbonneire La-Tour*. [Author]

Nonetheless, the archbishop, realizing that a solemn reception could not be held without serious discord or unpleasantness, wrote a very gracious letter from Genoa, acknowledging the honors being prepared for him and declaring that he would have no part of any official or public demonstration. Therefore, on the afternoon of Sunday, November 18, he went very privately to the cathedral, where he was devoutly received by clergy and laity and completed the ritual prescribed for the occasion. The uproar of insolent youths who had shouted down the closed carriage was censured by all the people, who were nauseated by it, and was merely an indication of the moral and civil decay of certain factions.

The respectful city folk made it their duty to render their homage to the archbishop privately. One of the first to visit him was Don Bosco. The *Bollettino Salesiano* of February 1884, referring to the visit, mentions "words prompted by the most exquisite kindness" addressed to him by the archbishop, but does not quote him. His Eminence and Don Bosco met publicly for the first time in the church of St. John the Evangelist on December 27, the apostle's feastday. The cardinal celebrated the eight o'clock Mass and spoke before distributing Holy Communion. After Mass he went with Don Bosco to the new location of the St. Aloysius Oratory, where he gave the boys a brief talk.

The cardinal, who had already chosen the Oratory press for his publications, had not yet visited Don Bosco's home as archbishop. It happened that Don Bosco, who needed to speak with him, planned to visit the archbishop's residence on the morning of January 15. First, however, he sent someone to ask the archbishop's secretary to inquire whether the cardinal would be at home and would grant him an audience. Learning of this, the cardinal called for the messenger and told him, "Please tell Don Bosco I will let him know soon." Hardly did the messenger have time to deliver the information, than a carriage pulled up at the Oratory entrance, and out stepped His Eminence. To the first person who came to greet him he said, "To save time, I have come myself to give Don Bosco my response." He arrived at ten-thirty and stayed more than an hour with Don Bosco.

When the cardinal arrived the Oratory was in silence. However, at a single order, all the teachers had the boys out of the classrooms and shops and into the playground. The bandmaster lined up his musicians, the bell ringers rushed to their positions, and others festooned the walls with banners, so that, when the cardinal stepped out of Don Bosco's room, and appeared on the balcony, he was greeted with the shouts and applause of

a host of youngsters, the blare of band music, and a concert of the church bells. In utter surprise he could not understand how so much was done in such a short time; he wanted to say something, but, prevented by the clanging of bells, he only called out, "My dearest sons, I thank you, I bless you, and I ask for your prayers." He then visited the new printshop and adjacent workshops, admiring the new machinery. Later, on entering the church of Mary Help of Christians, he found in the sacristy a large representative group of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who had come from their institute next door to pay their respects to their shepherd. Finally, after saying a prayer in church, he was greeted by new demonstrations by many people who had gathered in the square. On re-entering his carriage he remarked to Don Bosco, who had walked at his side throughout, "I expected to surprise you, and you have surprised me. May God bless you, and I pray this with all my heart." All felt true joy and a fervent desire to see him again.

It was the general opinion of the Salesians of those days that, in nominating the new archbishop of Turin, the Holy Father intended to choose a prelate who was known to be friendly to Don Bosco. We have an assurance of this kindly concern of the Pope in the words which Leo XIII later expressed to Don Bosco in his audience of 1884. On the other hand, we can in all truth assert that the goodness of Cardinal Alimonda was for Don Bosco a God-given comfort in the last four years of his life. To show the feelings of this renowned prelate for our saintly father, nothing surpasses those lines that which he wrote on first hearing the news of Don Bosco's death: "My venerated and beloved Father John would not wait for me, that I might once again kiss his blessed hand and commend myself to his intercession before God!"¹² The Lord willed that also in this would be verified for Don Bosco what has been predicted of the Apostles, "You will grieve, but your grief will become joy."¹³

¹²Letter to Father Rua, St. Francis d'Albaro (Genoa), January 31, 1888. [Author]

¹³John 16:20. [Author]

CHAPTER 13

Missionary Developments in South America and a Notable Missionary Dream

TWO HISTORIC EVENTS are recorded in the Congregation's chronicle for 1883: the Salesians' arrival in Brazil and the erection of a vicariate and a prefecture apostolic in Patagonia. The first signaled the start of the extraordinary development of Don Bosco's work in that vast country; the second crowned Don Bosco's lengthy efforts to come to a definitive districting of ecclesiastical territories in the lands already evangelized [by the Salesians] and those to be evangelized, from the shores of the Rio Negro to the Strait of Magellan. It seems to have been the Divine Will that this year should be significant in the records of the tireless missionary apostolate which the sons of Don Bosco were called upon to carry out in South America, for it was precisely 1883 in which a momentous dream burst open the gates of the future to Don Bosco and allowed him to gaze in utter astonishment upon the immense field of work destined for his sons from Cartagena to Punta Arenas. It was a revelation of people and things enough to boggle the mind, yet it was not the illusion of a sleeper, as the facts have either shown or will come to show.

For six years Bishop [Peter] Lacerda of Rio de Janeiro begged and pleaded with Don Bosco to send the Salesians to his diocese. Don Bosco kept promising and delaying, until, with the arrival in Italy of Father [Louis] Lasagna,¹ he charged the latter to proceed to the opening of the first house in Brazil. Father Lasagna, who was anxious to see not one but two or three houses in that empire, immediately recruited seven Salesians to go to Niterói, in the province of Brazil's capital. However, when a dreadful yellow fever epidemic broke out there, the bishop himself, fearing that the disease might claim them too among its victims,

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

counseled a delay. Once the epidemic ceased, the courageous little company, escorted by Father Lasagna and headed by Father Michael Borghino,² set sail from Montevideo for Rio de Janeiro on July 10.

The departure was preceded by a farewell ceremony held in the church of St. Rose in Villa Colón. Many cooperators came from the Uruguayan capital. The emotions of those who were leaving and those who were staying touched the boys and all the bystanders too. "We knew we loved one another," wrote Father [Lawrence] Giordano to Don Bosco, "but we did not believe that parting would be that costly."³

After four days of stormy sailing, they disembarked at Rio de Janeiro. A pastoral letter from the bishop, picked up by the press, announced their coming and recommended them warmly to the goodwill of the diocese, closing with a plea for a residence to be built for them. The letter's effects were quickly apparent: while the enemies of good erupted in a tirade against the interlopers, the good people showed their agreement with generous contributions; one person even donated a complete printshop. But the residence was far too small for the goals they had set for themselves.

As they did elsewhere, there too our confreres set up house near the Protestants, whose boys and girls' school reared its lofty roof close to their humble home, almost burying it in its shadow. The Salesians decided to call their house the Hospice of Mary Help of Christians, in the trustful expectation that they might be able to erect a beautiful church to our Lady under that title; from there the Mother of God would protect so many souls from the danger of heresy. But they did not delay hiring masons to build a festive oratory for the boys in urgent need of help because most at risk.

One of the blessings brought about by the Salesian work throughout South America has been that of stemming the tide of Protestant incursion. In this regard sending the Salesians to Patagonia and the Strait of Magellan proved truly providential because it prevented the Protestants from establishing their empire there. The great enterprises which have been undertaken in South America have all ended up in the hands of the English.⁴ The construction of bridges, aqueducts, roads, railroads,

²The energetic and pious Father Borghino (1855-1929) later became the first provincial of the United States province (1902-1908). [Editor]

³Colón, July 10, 1883. [Author] On Father Giordano, *see* Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁴In 1868 a Protestant mission directed by Mr. Thomas Bridges was set up in a very beautiful locality, where, to attract the Indians, a settlement was established, later called Ushuaia, capital of the Argentine territory of Tierra del Fuego. [Author]

and even cities are works of English entrepreneurs who usually call in ministers of their own persuasion or welcome others warmly when they come on their own. Great Britain's possession of the Falkland Islands in 1832 favored Protestant proselytism on the continent. When our confreres went to Patagonia, the Anglicans were at the height of their activity and were winning over the colonists.

Father Lasagna and Father Borghino went together to pay their respects to the emperor, Don Pedro II, who received them with utmost affability. Also most kind were the Princess Isabella, presumptive heir to the throne, and her consort, [Louis] Gaston d'Orleans, count of Eu, both of whom had met Don Bosco in Paris.⁵ The president of the province, too, assured them of his fullest support. Cheered by this news, Don Bosco, holding a conference of St. Francis [de Sales] for the cooperators of Turin six months later, enthusiastically recounted the first advances of the Salesians in Brazil, predicting the rise of many Salesian houses in that immense country. It all came literally true. In 1933, at the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Salesian work, Brazil had fifty schools or residences of the Salesians and fifty institutes run by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco foresaw more than two hundred.⁶

The eagerness to have Don Bosco's sons in Brazil and in other South American states was especially aroused by the reports of the receptions accorded Don Bosco in Paris. The newspapers, which spread the news in those remote lands, influenced other church and state leaders to ask that his providential work be transplanted there too. Thus it was that in September Father Lasagna had on hand twenty-five requests of that nature.⁷ Ardent by nature and animated by a wondrous zeal, he wanted Don Bosco to give him a legion of Salesians, but he strove vehemently especially for São Paulo, capital of the immense state of São Paulo. To hear directly the appeal of Bishop Linus Diodato Rodriguez de Cavallo, he went there in person, visited several parishes in the city and its environs, and chose the one that he considered the most opportune. He was accompanied by admirers of Salesian works, ready immediately to pour out the fruits of their sacrifices and their financial appeals because the work brooked no delay. However, Father Lasagna had to decline their offerings, exhorting them to have patience and constancy, assuring

⁵See p. 174. [Editor]

⁶In 1994 the Salesians had 144 houses in Brazil, and the Salesian Sisters had 159. [Editor]

⁷Letter of Father Lasagna to Father Lemoyne, September 6, 1883. [Author]

them that he would strive with might and main to obtain the needed personnel from Don Bosco.

He was prodded to write fiery letters to Don Bosco by an incident that happened to him on that tour of inspection. Perched on the top of a ridge was a cluster of huts and cottages, dominated by a little bell tower, which timidly raised its spire above their roofs. Several hundred Italian families had lived there over the past seven years, brought over and then abandoned by avaricious speculators. When he came to know this, Father Lasagna jumped from his carriage and strode straight to the closest house. No sooner did word get around that an Italian priest had arrived than a crowd flocked around him. A man then hastened to open a little chapel and all entered. Father Lasagna gave them a moving sermonette. It is not possible to describe the joy of those good people who were living there without a priest, without the sacraments, and without the Word of God. He was touched by their condition. Having given out all the holy pictures and medals he had with him, and having made several helpful recommendations, he left them, weeping himself and promising to return soon or to send them someone to care for their souls. As we shall see, the Salesians kept their word.

Also the bishops of Pará and Cuiabá were doubling their requests for Salesians to come to their vast dioceses; the latter even went to see Father Lasagna at Colón with a tentative contract which was sent to Turin. However, when it was discussed by the superior chapter on December 28, deliberation was deferred. "Just now," said Don Bosco, "our gaze is fixed upon the Falkland Islands, and we are looking for ways of evangelizing them. In addition, we have to concentrate our forces in the new provicariate and in the new prefecture apostolic and not spread out elsewhere. Rome wants deeds not words. A few years from now Rome will want to see the results of our labors in the provinces entrusted to us."

We come now to speak of Patagonia and the new arrangements Don Bosco was alluding to in this last observation.

Those Indians who, during the military campaign of General [Julius] Roca, had not given up, escaped to Chile, or moved farther south began to come back little by little and to cluster together, drawn as always by the valor of their chief, [Manuel] Namuncurá. This fiery defender of Indian independence had acquired a good deal of experience in the wars against the Argentine army, aided in this not only by the native skill and sagacity of his race but by his personal astuteness. He would have conducted raids to obtain booty and thus provided for his people, but for

the vigilance of General [Conrad] Villegas, who had been left there by General Roca to guard the Rio Negro frontier. Toward the end of 1882, Villegas, having heard threatening rumors, initiated a second campaign against the independent Indian tribes, employing natives who had already been subjugated and mustered into the Argentine army. In the months of December, January, and February [1882-1883] more than two thousand Indians—men, women, and children—had fallen into the hands of the soldiers, some captured in fighting, others surrendering. A hundred were killed in the skirmishes. All this turmoil made it impossible for the missionaries to advance into the lands ravaged by the troops and very difficult to do any good in the prisons. They did their best to catechize the prisoners, but they also had to deal with “soldiers who were very corrupt and officers still more corrupt.”⁸ These messages were the most painful that Don Bosco could ever receive.

Help came from the least expected source, however. Namuncurá, seeing himself reduced to powerlessness and wishing to put an end to his people’s sufferings, decided to make overtures for peace. He therefore sent a delegation of ten chiefs, who presented themselves at Fortín Roca,⁹ asking for a parley with the military officials. But, being mistrusted, they returned in utter dejection to their commander. Chief Namuncurá, who, though an aborigine, was a man of sagacity and did not intend to make his people keep living any longer in such conditions of pain and peril, conceived the idea of asking the missionaries to mediate.

As good fortune would have it, there arrived at Fortín Roca “a great apostle, one of the most prominent Salesian missionaries, a true father to the Indians, with whom he shared his arduous life.”¹⁰ This was Father Dominic Milanesio, who was a man sent by Providence. As soon as he arrived, a group of Indians on horseback rode up to him, escorting one who appeared to be their leader. The latter approached the missionary and asked him to stop and listen to him.

“Very gladly,” replied Father Milanesio. “Where do you come from and where are you going?”

“We belong to the tribe of Namuncurá, our chief. He is now in the Andes, where he has fled with families that have remained loyal. He

⁸Letters of Father Fagnano to Don Bosco, Patagonia, January 1 and March 10, 1883. [Author]

⁹Now the town of General Roca in Rio Negro province. [Editor]

¹⁰Robert J. Tavella, S.D.B., *Las Misiones Salesianas de la Pampa* (Buenos Aires: Rosso, 1924), p. 189. [Author] On Father Milanesio, see Appendix 1. [Editor]

has decided to seek peace with the Argentine government and so has sent us to deal on friendly terms with the army officials to conclude a peace treaty. This is our chief's firm wish. Since we cannot communicate with the government, we are asking you to be our mediator. We have great respect for the ministers of God, because they have always loved and protected us. At the time of Calfucurá, father of Namuncurá, the priest's word was enough to prevent the slaughter of our people."

Father Milanesio could not let such a fine opportunity pass him by. But, since this was the first time he was going to Fortín Roca for his priestly ministry, he felt it would be rash to assume so soon the role of mediator between two parties who were engaged in such an unyielding and ruthless war. Besides, he did not know the real reasons why the former envoys had been rejected. Hence he feared to precipitate matters and alienate the military by endorsing an enemy who may not have been completely sincere. He therefore advised the Indian who had addressed him to go and tell Namuncurá to come personally with his braves to the fort, where he guaranteed the general would receive him with honor. He was to come without fear, because Father Milanesio himself would be there to meet him. The messenger was not satisfied with words. He wanted a written message. Father Milanesio obliged.

The fierce warrior, who not so long before had furiously wielded spears in repeated skirmishes against the regular army, having read the message, put aside his rancor, overcame his natural hostility, and without losing time set out on a march with his numerous followers. They traveled fast. Less than twenty days from the time the message was written, he stood before the palisades of Fortín Roca. The return trip of his messengers and his own journey had covered no less than five hundred and sixty miles.

Namuncurá was never to regret the treaty he made. Father Milanesio was his faithful mentor, and peace was concluded. Indeed, after some years of faithful service, the government of Argentina gave him the rank of colonel with its corresponding salary and assigned him twenty-seven square miles of land for himself and the families of his tribe. Such honorable results made it easier for Father Milanesio to evangelize some of the tribes camped along the shores of the Neuquén River, while in other localities Father [Joseph] Beauvoir¹¹ and their dauntless superior Father [Joseph] Fagnano¹¹ labored in peace. Namuncurá him-

¹¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

self received baptism in the last years of his life at the hands of Bishop Cagliero, to whom he entrusted the schooling of the youngest of his children. This young man, Zepherino, brilliant and of an excellent character,¹² gave great promise. Wishing to become a priest, he followed the bishop to Rome and did his high school studies at the Salesian house of Frascati, where he died an untimely death.¹³

From what we have said we see that by the time the Salesians established themselves firmly in Patagonia, the period of Indian power was over. The missionaries' task was to instruct and reclaim the conquered and to unite into the one bond of Christian love the children of the wilderness and the white population. In 1883 civil territories were created to dispense justice to the people of Argentina, foreigners and natives alike. These poor aborigines spoke a tongue of their own which some of the missionaries, like Fathers Milanese and Beauvoir, undertook to learn so as to be better accepted and to facilitate their work of redemption. The Patagonian dialects were many, but to understand them it helped to know the mother language, which was spoken by the Araucani, who lived in the mountainous woodlands of Patagonia. But at that time this presented a twofold problem: the language was not written, and its sounds were very guttural and aspirate. It was also interspersed with Spanish. Over many years Spanish had infiltrated the Indian languages, so that a certain number of words and phrases came into use which were enough to make oneself understood. Then there was the problem of distance, which could only be mastered by the heroic self-sacrifice of the evangelizers. The area of Argentine Patagonia measures 328,000 square miles and today [1934] has a population approaching 900,000, while at that time it numbered no more than 35,000. The territory could then have very well accommodated thirty to forty million, given the fertility of the soil and the underground wealth which is every day being discovered.

Progress had been made in evangelization. In 1883 the superior of the mission [Father Fagnano] was able to report to Rome the baptism of 500 natives, while the two schools of Patagonia housed 69 boys and 93 girls. In four years the number of baptisms rose to 5,328, and the mission ex-

¹²We know from experience. He was very devout. We have also seen two of his letters written to Father Vespignani from Patagonia. We do not know what happened to them. They were written in a fine hand and had an elegance and loftiness of sentiment that deeply impressed us. [Author]

¹³Young Namuncurá was born August 26, 1886, and died May 11, 1905. He took Dominic Savio as his model and succeeded in imitating that saintly youngster so well that his own cause of canonization was begun in 1944. He was declared Venerable in 1972. [Editor]

peditions had reached the Andes, along the shores of the Limay River as far as Lake Nahuel-Huapí and along the Neuquén as far as Norquin. Further, explorations were made along the Colorado River, in the wilderness of Balcheta, and along both banks of the whole Río Negro. This embraced all northern Patagonia to the extent of more than 21,000 miles. No human praise can ever match the caliber of these brave evangelizers, sons of the Oratory, whom Don Bosco had thrust in small numbers into such a hostile field for the peaceful conquest of souls.

This report produced the effect which Don Bosco had long been waiting for. As we have seen, he had presented to the Holy See a proposal to set up three apostolic vicariates or prefectures.¹⁴ In 1881, when the vicar general of the archdiocese of Buenos Aires, Monsignor [Anthony] Espinosa, came to Turin,¹⁵ Don Bosco had told him of his plan, asking him to explain it to the archbishop and stressing most especially northern Patagonia. The archbishop said he would most willingly favor the plan. "You may assure His Holiness," he wrote, "that I would be most happy if you and your Salesians would set up this vicariate apostolic in those remote areas of Patagonia, since I, much as I would like to, cannot give them the attention I want to give." The archbishop was not overstating the case in speaking of impossibility, for his archdiocese covered a territory seven times the size of Italy.

To study the matter Pope Leo XIII had set up a commission of cardinals, among them Cardinal Alimonda, as we have already narrated.¹⁶ The significant results of this study led to the conclusion that it was time to regularize the situation. Therefore Cardinal [John] Simeoni, prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, asked Don Bosco to state his definitive opinion and to suggest the names of candidates whom he thought most fit for the noble office. Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, July 29, 1883

In accordance with the pious desires often manifested by the Holy Father and basing myself on your farsighted proposals, I express my humble opinion about the way I think Patagonia can be divided so as to bring its inhabitants into the pale of the Church. Geographic and historical statistics I have amply marked on the maps and in the report it was my honor to present to the compe-

¹⁴See Vol. XIV, pp. 499-512; Vol. XV, pp. 509-510. [Editor]

¹⁵See Vol. XV, pp. 22, 24. [Editor]

¹⁶See Vol. XIV, p. 555. [Editor]

tent Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Here I shall concern myself only with those questions which were referred to Your Eminence.

Three vicariates in Patagonia: It seems that just now one vicariate apostolic should suffice for northern Patagonia and one prefecture apostolic for southern Patagonia. Central Patagonia has not yet been sufficiently explored, and the area that has been is predominantly in control of the Protestants.

The vicariate apostolic of Carmen [de Patagónes] could for now take care of the central vicariate and reach out to the natives who dwell along the Andes; some priests and some hardy catechists could meet the religious needs of the few Catholics who, though mingled with the Protestants, are still loyal to the Catholic Church and are asking to be helped. Some of the trips made by our missionaries in that locality assure us that such an undertaking would yield good results.

The vicariate and prefecture of southern Patagonia present greater problems because of the severity of the weather, the few and far-scattered dwellings, and the forceful efforts of the Protestants to get a foothold there. But in undertakings of this kind we pay no mind to difficulties.

Proposed candidates: Father John Cagliero, Father James Costamagna,¹⁷ and Father Joseph Fagnano are three men who could shoulder the responsibility if it should be decided to entrust it to them. They are all seasoned workers, physically sturdy, good speakers, tireless, of proven moral worth. Nevertheless, unless the Holy Father should judge it best to choose other candidates to the Congregation's betterment, I would propose the following:

Father John Cagliero to be vicar apostolic in Carmen, with jurisdiction over the central vicariate until it shall be able to have its own shepherd... Father Cagliero has detailed acquaintance with those places and enjoys excellent relations with all the bishops of the Republics of Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and even Chile.

It is my opinion that Father Costamagna would do as well as Father Cagliero as vicar apostolic of Carmen.

Father Fagnano seems well suited to the vicariate or prefecture of southern Patagonia. Blessed with the stamina of an ox, he has no idea of fatigue or fear in difficult assignments. This prefecture could depend on the vicariate of Carmen until the Holy Father should judge it better to set it up as a vicariate in its own right.

I have tried to meet Your Eminence's request as best I can concerning the division of Patagonia into three vicariates. If Your Eminence thinks I can be of assistance to you in other ways, please consider that all the Salesians deem it a great honor to be of service to you.

With heartfelt gratitude, I am honored to remain

Your Eminence's obedient servant,
Rev. John Bosco

¹⁷On Fathers Cagliero and Costamagna, see Appendix 1. [Editor]

The proposal was sent to the cardinals of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith on August 27 and was approved. The decision was to create two ecclesiastical circumscriptions, one taking in northern and central Patagonia with Father Cagliero as provicar apostolic, the other including southern Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, with Father Fagnano as prefect apostolic. The title of provicar did not call for a bishop; however, as we shall see in due time, it was changed in 1884 with the proviso that it be delayed until Don Bosco saw his way to sending at least a dozen missionaries, including the four then present.¹⁸ The briefs erecting the vicariate and nominating the provicar were dated respectively November 16 and 20. A few days earlier the Cardinal Prefect of the Propagation of the Faith had issued a similar decree for the prefecture apostolic.

While these transactions were going on, Father Cagliero, knowing nothing of the matter, was visiting the school at Randazzo, Sicily, and the houses of the sisters. He was notified by the procurator general on his return to Rome.

Everything was proceeding so smoothly, it was inevitable that the devil should stick his tail in somewhere. The first problems arose from a most unexpected source. Archbishop [Louis] Matera, apostolic delegate and extraordinary visitor to the republics of Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay, having learned from Father Costamagna the new dispositions of the Holy See for Patagonia, told him that there was nothing good the Salesians could do there; that they would reap much harm instead; that there were no longer any uncivilized Indians in Patagonia; that the territory was in the hands of a government hostile to religion; that there was no chance they could enter the territory without the permission of the government of Argentina. His advice was that provision should be made for the Salesians to retrace their steps and follow the regular routine, that is, leave all in the hands of the apostolic delegate. In the first place there was need to await information, instruction, and direction from Rome, that is, the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. Father Costamagna relayed everything to Turin.¹⁹

As for the government, the delegate did not know that it had already asked Father Costamagna for a few missionaries for the Falkland Is-

¹⁸Letter of Cardinal Simeoni to Don Bosco, September 15, 1884. [Author]

¹⁹His letter must be among the last letters of December 1883 or the first of 1884. It is reported in one of Father Cagliero's letters on April 8, 1884, to Archbishop [Dominic] Jacobini, secretary of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. [Author]

lands, and that Father Costamagna had agreed, promising to send them on the arrival of Father Cagliero, who was due to return soon with reinforcing personnel. Moreover, General Villegas was asking for a permanent priest at Pringles. As for there being no longer any savages in Patagonia, that was easier to assert than prove.

This thorny issue was discussed by the superior chapter on April 5, 1884; the minutes show that Don Bosco, after reading Father Costamagna's letter, spoke thus: "Have a copy of this letter sent to Archbishop Jacobini. Certainly objections will be raised against erecting a vicariate in Patagonia. Everyone approves of a good work, and either no one wants to do it or no one can do it. But when one does it successfully, in steps the miserable humanity of the others who resent it and want to claim the credit for themselves one way or another, to enjoy the fruit and wish they had done what the others succeeded in doing. My mother used to say, 'The garden watchdog won't eat the garlic but won't let anyone take it away.' The Republic of Argentina can take no offense at the nomination of a provicar, because I have just written to the archbishop [of Buenos Aires] and the President of the Republic and asked them to study the project."

We have already seen the view of the archbishop of Buenos Aires. To the President of Argentina, General Roca, Don Bosco had already written, showing that he was aware of the delicacy needed in dealing with the Argentine government. The letter, which follows, reveals a fine balance between the simplicity of the saint and the skill of the man of affairs.

Turin, October 31, 1883

Your Excellency, President of the Republic of Argentina:

The Pampas wilderness and Patagonia, which have caused Your Excellency so much weariness and effort and whose evangelization you have been pleased often to entrust to the Salesian missionaries, seem to be on the verge of stability in matters of both civilization and religion.

Four years have passed since our missionaries, guided by Your Excellency, made their first attempts in that vast region. At the present time they have managed to settle in several colonies along the Rio Negro, venturing forth on apostolic missions as far as the Chubut River and Lake Nahuel-Huapí at the foothills of the Andes.

They have succeeded in establishing churches, schools, and hospices for both boys and girls. However, the ever swelling numbers of newcomers into the

Faith have obliged Father James Costamagna to come to Europe in search of evangelical workers. In fact he was able to form an expedition of twenty [Salesian] missionaries and ten sisters who will set sail for the Argentine Republic next November 12. I am doing my very best with the means available to me to see to it that they take with them all that they need in clothing, church supplies, and also the most necessary tools and equipment for trades. But I feel I need Your Excellency to come to our aid by financing their trip across the ocean.

My hope in your aid rests upon the active part you have taken in the civilization of the natives and the vast sacrifices made by your government for the social betterment of the state, particularly in favor of Salesian homes, schools, and orphanages. My hope is further bolstered these days by the Holy Father's decision to establish the Church's hierarchy in those vast regions, as I have already had the honor of notifying you in his name.²⁰ The Holy See will soon be sending you complete information in an official communication.

May God bless Your Excellency and the entire Republic of Argentina. May peace, prosperity, and heavenly blessings descend copiously upon all the people of those regions which Divine Providence has seen fit to entrust to your solicitous care.

While I thank you for the immense good you have done and are doing for our missionaries, I most gratefully affirm the great honor I have of being

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

We do not know whether or how the President replied. As regards the Holy See's delegate and his view of the matter, we have to realize that a certain amount of friction had arisen between Archbishop Matera and the Salesians. Since history is willy-nilly the teacher of life, we will point out the highlights of this problem.

Archbishop Matera, in need of a personal secretary, had his eye on the cleric [Bernard] Vacchina;²¹ he asked the superiors for him and obtained his request. As it happened, this young cleric was obliged to attend His Excellency also at nightly affairs, in which worldly manners predominated; he felt very ill at ease and kept telling the archbishop so, pleading that such a perilous life was not for him and that he had not become a religious to bandy about in such circles. Since, however, no importance was attached to his complaints, he appealed to his superiors and asked to be relieved. Seeing that they in turn were in a bind and

²⁰See Vol. XIV, pp. 509-511. [Editor]

²¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

dared not antagonize Archbishop Matera, one day Vacchina left without saying good-bye to the archbishop and went to the Salesian house at Almagro. Highly offended, the delegate had Archbishop Aneyros suspend him from Holy Communion for a month.

Father Costamagna apologized in writing but received no acknowledgement. Because of this silence or because the matter was considered closed or prompted by a little fear, after that incident no Salesian went to visit the apostolic delegate, not even to voice Easter or New Year's greetings or congratulate him on his name day. Being a highly impressionable and overly sensitive man, the archbishop, who once professed the highest esteem for the Salesians, from then on showed himself ice cold toward them, never showing his former benevolence when meeting them. Father Vespignani,²² distressed by such a state of affairs, obtained permission from his superior to visit the delegate and to make known to him the Salesians' pain, and he spoke with such humility and heartfelt feeling that he moved the archbishop but could not make him change his mind. The latter claimed that the action of Father Vacchina²³ had hurt him not only in his own person but also in his position as the representative of the Holy See; furthermore, word of what had happened had leaked out and had been garnished with remarks doing him little credit. Father Lasagna, when discussing the case with him in Montevideo, had sided with the cleric; Father Costamagna had immediately written to him, but these were not things to be discussed by mail; excuses were in order if made properly, but not justifications. Father Vespignani left with the regret that he had not been able to pacify the archbishop.²⁴ The original blunder had been not to clear the air immediately after the incident by talking face to face and with clear signs of respect for the delegate's dignity. From all this followed the consequences, the most serious of which was the delegate's negative stance concerning the establishment of the vicariate.

On August 7 Father Costamagna arrived in Turin to take part in the third general chapter. He brought with him an affectionate letter from Archbishop Aneyros, who said he was grateful to God for having sent him the Salesians, whose work was so prominent in the schools, the workshops, the parishes, and the missions. He praised the edifying life and tireless zeal of Father Costamagna, asked for more personnel, and begged

²²See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²³Father Vacchina was ordained at Buenos Aires, May 5, 1882, after leaving the delegate's service. [Editor]

²⁴Letter of Father Vespignani to Father Rua, Buenos Aires, August 9, 1882. [Author]

Don Bosco to write more often to him, so that his letters might be his “guide and safe norm for the good of the Salesian family.” Before closing he referred to a tragic loss experienced by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in that region, saying: “We have felt the pain of losing the Reverend Mother Superior of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, Sister Magdalene Martini, an angel who flew to heaven about the feast of St. Peter. She had the good fortune of opening a few houses, lastly that of Morón, and of seeing the provincial house completed and opened with its large school and church of Mary Help of Christians, blessed this past June 7. Her loss has caused us grief because she was such a joy to all. May the Lord grant us a goodly number of holy virgins like her.”²⁵

Father Costamagna had other letters for Don Bosco from cooperators and Salesians, all of whom begged him to send their provincial back with reinforcements. At Father Costamagna’s arrival Don Bosco was just preparing to send another expedition of Salesians and sisters to South America. He announced it in a circular letter dated October 24, put together by Father Bonetti, translated into French, and signed by Don Bosco. Twenty Salesians, priests, clerics, and coadjutors, and twelve Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were ready to depart. The expedition cost one hundred lire, which Don Bosco asked his cooperators to assume; the contributors were thanked in a brief letter he wrote in both Italian and French and had duplicated so as to appear in his own handwriting.

Don Bosco had the future missionaries stay with him at the Oratory for some fifteen days, during which they not only enjoyed his company but also fervently studied Spanish. Our good Father not only very graciously provided them with a trip to the shrine of St. Pancras at Pianezza, but he also went along with them personally.

The departure ceremony was held on November 10. Father Costamagna, the expedition leader, gave the main talk, while Don Bosco gave the benediction. That evening the missionaries went to Sampierdarena, whence they set out for Marseille in the company of Father Cagliero, who was taking Don Bosco’s place, since the latter’s health was too fragile to bear the fatigue of a long journey. The Holy Father himself was concerned about his health; on November 5, when he received in audience Father Cagliero, who was returning from Sicily, and Father Costamagna, who had come to pay his respects, he had said to them: “You must advise Don Bosco to safeguard his health, for it is too precious and useful

²⁵See Appendix 1.

for the welfare and growth of your Congregation.” But Don Bosco’s fatherly heart, strained by the separation, sought to relieve itself in the following few lines which reached Father Costamagna at Marseille:

Turin, November 12, 1883

Dear Father Costamagna:

You have departed, but you have truly wrung my heart. I have reacted bravely, but I have felt the pain and could not sleep a wink all night long. Today I am more at ease. God be blessed!

Here are some holy cards for the confreres of your provinces—or, rather, just of your own. I will send some for Father Lasagna’s province some other time. There is also a letter for Mr. Bergasse.²⁶ If you run into any problems, rely on me unreservedly.

Please greet Madame Jacques and tell her that the first Patagonian Indian girl you baptize on your arrival will be named Agatha.

God bless you, my ever beloved Father Costamagna, and with you may He bless and protect all of your sons and mine who travel with you. May Mary safeguard you and keep you all on the path to heaven. Bon voyage!

I stay behind with a true multitude who are praying for you. Amen.

Your most loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

N.B. The dream [copied by] Father Lemoyne needs several corrections, and you will see it.

We cannot omit a little incident that concerns Father Costamagna. He had sung the high Mass on the feast of All Saints in Don Bosco’s presence, and he had used the Spanish pronunciation of Latin, most noticeably in pronouncing the *g* in *dignum et iustum est*. After Mass Don Bosco asked him in what language he had celebrated Mass.

“I was using the Spanish pronunciation.”

“Why?”

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”

“Oh no! You must use the Roman pronunciation, that of the Pope. Tell that to everyone over there.”

They left Marseille the morning of November 14 on board the *Béarn*²⁷

²⁶A Salesian cooperator who was president of the Society for Maritime Transport at Marseille. [Editor]

²⁷Some information about their departure is contained in a letter from Father Cagliero to Father Rua. See Appendix 11. [Author]

and happily disembarked at Buenos Aires in the evening of December 8. Their reception was recorded by the local newspaper:

As evening drew on, an ever increasing crowd gathered on the Estevarene and Rivadia wharf to welcome him... It was six o'clock when Father Costamagna alighted from the trolley car along with several priests who were coming with him to assume care of the education and religious training of our young people. No sooner did he come into sight than he was rushed upon by all, who spoke to him, shook his hand, and greeted him with expressions at once frank, respectful, effusive, and pleasant, such as one uses in greeting a bosom friend after a long absence. Many of the first embraced him, thus giving eloquent proof of the love which Christ's priest wins in the hearts of the people. Many tears of joy marked the moving scene. Father Costamagna, accompanied by the crowd, then walked to the church of St. Charles, where many other people had gathered and, deeply moved, addressed the crowd a few words of thanks full of tenderness.²⁸

The dream to which Don Bosco alluded in the postscript of his letter to Father Costamagna was a spectacular symbolic revelation of the future of the Salesian missions in South America—a future of epic grandeur, foreseen by those who divined in Don Bosco's work a force not merely human. For example, a French magazine wrote in an article on missionary activity: "Patagonia, still uncivilized and pagan, has proven itself resistant to Christianity, but Don Bosco's sons are beginning to sow in that wild soil the mustard seed which, nurtured by heavenly dew, will grow into a huge tree whose branches shall stretch out over the whole country."²⁹

Don Bosco told this dream on September 4, at the morning session of the general chapter. Father Lemoyne immediately put it into writing, which Don Bosco critically read from beginning to end, making some additions and modifications. We will record in italics those words which are in Don Bosco's hand in the original; we shall enclose in brackets some passages introduced later by Father Lemoyne as reflections based upon further explanations given him by Don Bosco.³⁰

²⁸*Union*, December 11, 1883. [Author]

²⁹*Bulletin de Notre Dame de Bon-secours*, February 1884, p. 45. [Author]

³⁰A critical edition of the text was published by Cecilia Romero, F.M.A.: *I Sogni di Don Bosco* (Turin: LDC, 1978), pp. 79-93. An English-version critical study and analysis was done by Arthur Lenti, S.D.B.: "Don Bosco's Missionary Dreams....," *Journal of Salesian Studies*, III, no. 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 55-80. [Editor]

On the night before the feast of St. Rose of Lima [August 30], I had a dream. I was aware that I was sleeping, and at the same time I seemed to be running very, very much, so much that I was exhausted with running, talking, writing, and wearing myself out in carrying out the rest of my other regular responsibilities. While I was deliberating whether this was a dream or reality, I seemed to enter a recreation hall where I found many people standing about and discussing various topics.

A lengthy conversation centered on the hordes of savages in Australia, the Indies, China, Africa, and more especially America, who in countless numbers are presently entombed in the darkness of death.

"Europe," said one of the speakers with much conviction, "Christian Europe, the great mistress of civilization and Catholicism, seems to have lost all interest in the foreign missions. Few are those who have enough enthusiasm to brave long journeys and unknown lands to save the souls of millions of people redeemed by the Son of God, Jesus Christ."

Another said, "How many idolaters in America alone live miserably outside the Church, far from the knowledge of the Gospel. People keep thinking (and geographers keep deceiving them) that the American Cordillera³¹ is like a wall blocking off that huge section of the world. It is not so. That interminable chain of lofty mountains contains many plains a six hundred and more miles in length alone. In them are forests as yet unexplored, plants, and animals, and also ores rarely found elsewhere. Coal, oil, lead, copper, iron, silver, and gold lie hidden in those mountains where they were secreted by the all-powerful hand of the Creator for the good of humanity. O Andes, Andes, how steeped in wealth is your eastern flank!

At that moment I felt an urgent desire to ask for an explanation of many things and to find out who those persons gathered there were, and where I was. But I said to myself, Before speaking you must find out what kind of people these are. In all curiosity I gazed about at them. Practically all of these people were total strangers to me. In the meantime, as though they were seeing me for the first time, they invited me to step forward and welcomed me kindly.

I asked them, "Please tell me where we are. Are we in Turin, London, Madrid, or Paris? Where are we? Who are you? With whom do I have the pleasure of speaking?" But they all gave me vague answers while they kept talking about the missions.

During this time I was approached by a young man of about sixteen, fascinating for his superhuman beauty and aglow with a brilliance more intense

³¹Conceivably the reference here is not only to the Andes of South America but also to the Rockies of North America. While the Salesians' main concern in the 1880s was South America, Don Bosco had contacts also with missionaries of the North American West; see pp. 212-213. The dream, however, will focus on South America. [Editor]

than that of the sun. His garment was woven with heavenly richness, and on his head he wore a cap shaped like a crown studded with the most sparkling precious stones. Fixing his kindly gaze upon me, he showed keen interest in me. His smile reflected a love that had its own irresistible attraction. He called me by name, then took my hand and began speaking to me about the Salesian Congregation.

I was thrilled by the sound of his voice. At one point I interrupted him and asked, "With whom do I have the honor of speaking? Do me the kindness of telling me your name."

The young man replied, "Don't be worried. Speak with utter trust. You are with a friend."

"But what is your name?"

"I would tell you my name if it were necessary, but I don't have to because you should know me." Saying this he smiled.

I took a better look at that countenance flooded with light. How handsome a face! And then I recognized the son of Count Fiorito Colle of Toulon, a distinguished benefactor of our house and especially of our American missions. This young man had died a short time before.³²

"Oh, it is you!" I exclaimed. "Louis! And who are all these others?"

"They are friends of your Salesians, and as your friend, I would like *in God's name* to give you a bit of work."

"Let's see what you mean. What is this work?"

"Sit at this table and pull this rope."

In the middle of *that vast hall* stood a table on which lay a coil of rope; it resembled a tape measure marked with lines and numbers. Later I also came to realize that the hall itself was situated in South America, straddling the equator, and that the numbers marked on the rope corresponded to degrees of *latitude*.

I therefore took the end of the rope, looked at it, and saw that the tip was marked zero.

I smiled.

That angelic lad remarked, "This is no time to smile. Look carefully. What is written on the rope?"

"Zero."

"Pull it a bit."

I pulled it a little and up came the number one.

"Pull more and wrap the rope into a big coil."

I did so, and out came the numbers 2, 3, 4, up to 20.

"Is that enough?" I asked.

"No, pull more, pull more! Pull until you find a knot," the lad answered.

I pulled up to the number 47, where I came across a big knot. From this

³²See Vol. XV, *passim*. [Editor]

knot the rope continued, but it was split into smaller strands that fanned out to the east and west and south.

"Is that enough?" I asked.

"What is the number?" the youth answered.

"It's 47."

"What is 47 plus 3?"

"50."

"And add 5 more?"

"55."

"Take note: 55."

He then told me, "Pull some more."

"I've reached the end," I replied.

"Now then, reverse the process and pull the rope from the other end."

I did so until I reached the number 10.

"Pull more," the lad told me.

"There's nothing left!"

"What? Nothing? Take a closer look. What do you see?"

"I see water," I replied.

Indeed, at that moment I felt something very strange happening to me which I cannot explain. I was present in that hall, I was pulling that rope, and at the same time I saw unfolding before my eyes the vision of an immense country over which I was hovering like a bird in flight, and the more the cord was pulled the farther out did the view stretch.

From zero to 55 I saw a vast mainland, *the end of which*, after a stretch of water, broke up into a hundred islands, *one of them very much larger than the others*. It seemed that the strands which came from the big knot of the rope *stretched out* to these islands, so that every strand was anchored to an island. Some of these islands were inhabited by fairly large numbers of natives; others were barren, empty, rocky, uninhabited; others were all blanketed in snow and ice. Toward the west were numerous groups of islands inhabited by many savages.

[It would appear that the knot situated at the number or degree of 47 symbolized the point of departure, the Salesian center, the principal mission from which our missionaries branched out to the Falkland Islands, Tierra del Fuego, and the other islands of those American countries.]

That same mainland stretched out from the opposite end of the rope, that is from zero to ten, until it reached the body of water which was as far as I could see. *I thought* that was the Caribbean Sea, *which* I was then gazing upon in a way so wondrous that I cannot describe the way I saw it.

As soon as I said, "I see water," the young man replied, "Now add 55 and 10. What is the sum?"

"65," I answered.

"Now join all together and you will make just one single rope."

"And now?"

"From this side what do you see?" And he pointed to a spot on the panorama.

"To the west I see very lofty mountains, and to the east there is the sea!"

[Please note that I was then seeing a summary, in miniature as it were, of what I later saw in its real grandeur and extent, as I shall narrate. The marks numbered on the rope, each corresponding precisely to the degrees of latitude, were those which allowed me to keep in memory for several years the successive localities I visited as I traveled in the second part of this same dream.]

My young friend continued: "Very well. These mountains form a ridge or boundary. From here to there is the harvest assigned to the Salesians. Thousands and millions of people are awaiting your help, *waiting for the faith*."

Those mountains were the South American Andes and that ocean was the Atlantic.

"How will we manage?" I asked. "How will we succeed in bringing all these people into the flock of Christ?"

"How will you manage? Watch!"

And in came Father Lago,³³ who was carrying a basket of small, green figs. "Take some, Don Bosco," he said.

"What are you bringing me," I replied, looking at the contents of the basket.

"I was told to bring them to you."

"But these figs are not ready to eat; they are not ripe.

Then my young friend took the basket, which was very broad but shallow, and gave it to me, saying, "Here is my gift to you!"

"And what am I to do with these figs?"

"These figs are unripe, but they belong to the great fig tree of life. You must find a way to make them ripen."

"How? If they were a little bigger,...they could mature under straw, as other fruits do, but they are so small...so green. It's impossible."

"Well then, know that to make them ripen you have to find some way of re-attaching these figs to the tree."

"Impossible! How can it be done?"

"Watch!" And he took a fig, dipped it into a basin of blood, then immediately dipped it into another basin full of water, and said, "With sweat and blood the savages will turn back and be re-attached to the plant, thus becoming pleasing to the master of life."

But to accomplish this will take time, I thought to myself. Then I said aloud, "I don't know what else I can say."

That dear youth, reading my mind, continued, "This success will take place before the second generation comes to an end."

"Which will be the second generation?"

"Don't count the present generation. There shall be another, and then another."

³³Father Angelo Lago (1834-1914), Father Rua's private secretary, who died with a reputation for holiness. [Author]

I spoke in utter confusion, baffled, spluttering, as I heard the magnificent destiny awaiting our Congregation, and I asked, "But how many years does each of these generations include?"

"Sixty."

"And then?"

"Do you wish to see what will happen then? Come!"

Without my knowing how, I found myself in a railroad station. A huge crowd was gathered there. We boarded a train.

I asked where we were. The young man replied, "Take notice! Watch carefully! We are traveling along the Andes. You have your road also open to the east all the way to the sea. It is another of the Lord's gifts."

"And when shall we go to Boston, where they're waiting for us?"

"Everything at its own time." Saying this, he took out a map in which the diocese of Cartagena stood out prominently. [This was the point of departure.]

As I was studying the map, the engine blew its whistle and the train began to move. As we went along my friend kept talking much, but, because of the train's noise, I could not fully hear him. Nevertheless, I learned many very wonderful and new things about astronomy, navigation, meteorology, minerals, fauna and flora, the topography of those areas which he explained to me with marvelous precision. Meanwhile he seasoned his speech with a courteous and at the same time gentle familiarity which showed his love for me. From the very start he took my hand and kept me always very affectionately in his tight clasp to the very end of the dream. I placed my other hand lightly on his, but his hand seemed to disappear under mine as though it had evaporated, and my left hand held merely my right. The young man smiled at my useless efforts.

In the meantime I was looking out the carriage window, and I saw whiz before me various astonishing regions: forests, mountains, plains, very long majestic rivers which I could not believe to be so wide at points so far from their mouths. For more than a thousand miles we skirted the edge of a virgin forest which has not been explored even today. My gaze took on a marvelous power of vision. There were no obstacles that could block its view. I don't know how to explain what strange phenomenon took place in my eyes. I felt like someone standing on a hilltop who sees stretching out before him a vast panorama; if he holds even a tiny strip of paper close to his eyes, he can see little or nothing, but if he drops it or moves it up or down, his gaze can reach out to the farthest horizon. This is what happened to me because of the extraordinary insight that was given to me, but the difference was this: every now and then as I set my gaze upon one spot and that one spot whizzed past me, it was as if a series of curtains were being raised and I saw stretching out before me interminable distances. Not only did I see the Andes when I was a long distance from them, but that chain of mountains even stood out in those immeasurable plains and was clearly visible to me in every tiny detail. [The mountain ranges of Colombia, Venezuela, the three Guyanas, Brazil, and Bolivia, even to their farthest boundaries.]

I was then able to verify the correctness of the words I had heard at the beginning of my dream in the grand hall straddling the equator. I could see into the very bowels of the mountains and into the remotest hidden recesses of the plains. Before my eyes lay the incomparable riches of those countries, which will one day be discovered. I saw countless mines of precious metals, inexhaustible caverns of coal, oil deposits so abundant as have never yet been discovered elsewhere. But that was not all. Between 15 and 20 degrees latitude lay a very broad and very lengthy body of water that had its origin from the end of a lake. Then a voice kept repeating to me, "When the mines hidden in the midst of these mountains will eventually be dug out, here will appear the promised land flowing with milk and honey. Its wealth will defy belief."

But that was not all. My greatest surprise was to see how the Andes in several places reverted upon themselves and formed valleys of whose existence present day geographers have not even an idea. They think that in those areas the mountainsides are sheer walls. In those valleys and hollows, some of which extended as much as six hundred miles, lived crowded countless peoples who have not yet come in contact with Europeans, entire nations completely unknown to us.

The train kept rushing along, turning here and there and finally coming to a halt. A fair number of passengers got off at this point to continue their journey through the Andes to the west.

[Don Bosco indicated Bolivia. The station was probably La Paz, where a tunnel could open the way to the Pacific coast and link Brazil with Lima by means of a junction with another railroad.]

The train began to move again, heading always forward. As on the first leg of our journey, we traversed forests, drove through tunnels, passed over gigantic viaducts, plunged into narrow mountain gorges, skirted lakes and marshes on bridges, forded wide rivers, hurtled over grasslands and prairies. We passed along the banks of the Uruguay River. I always thought it was a short river, but instead it is very long. At one point I saw the Paraná River wending its way to the Uruguay as though it were bringing it the tribute of its waters; but, after somewhat paralleling it for a stretch, it pulled away, forming a huge elbow. Both these rivers were enormous. [From these sketchy descriptions it would seem that this future railroad line would go from La Paz to Santa Cruz, then head through the only opening which is to be found in the Cruz della Sierra mountains and is crossed by the Guapay River; it will ford the River Parapetí in the Chiquitos plains of Bolivia, then cut across the extreme northern limit of the Republic of Paraguay; thence it will enter the Province of São Paulo in Brazil and then head for Rio de Janeiro. From some intermediate station in the São Paulo Province, the railroad line will then probably go between the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers and connect Brazil's capital with the Republic of Uruguay and the Republic of Argentina.]

The train kept forging its way, turning here and there, and after a long time it made a second stop. Another large number of people got off there and made their way westward through the Andes. [Don Bosco indicated the province of Mendoza in Argentina. Hence the station was probably Mendoza, and the tunnel led to Santiago, capital of the Republic of Chile.]

The train resumed its journey across the Pampas and Patagonia. The cultivated fields and the few homes scattered here and there showed that civilization was overtaking the wilderness.

At the entrance of Patagonia we passed over a branch of the Colorado River or the Chubut River [or perhaps the Rio Negro?]. I could not ascertain its flow of current or its direction, whether toward the Andes or toward the Atlantic. I kept trying to solve this puzzle but could not orient myself.

Finally we reached the Strait of Magellan. I looked all about me. We alighted. Before me lay Punta Arenas. For several miles the ground was cluttered with mounds of coal, boards, railroad ties, huge piles of minerals; the fields were partially covered with flocks, partially tilled. Long lines of freight cars filled the railroad tracks.

My friend pointed all these things out to me. Then I asked, "And now what are you trying to tell me with all this?"

He answered: "What is now merely a project will one day be reality. In time to come these savages will be so domesticated that they shall willingly come for instruction, religion, civilization, and trading. What elsewhere excites wonder among people will here assume such stupendous proportions as to arouse more astonishment than does anything else now."

"I've seen enough," I replied. "Now take me to see my Salesians in Patagonia."

We turned back to the station and reboarded the train to return. After traveling a very long distance, the train stopped before a town of considerable size. [Possibly on the 47th parallel, where at the very beginning of the dream I had seen the big knot in the rope.] There was no one at the station to meet me. I got off the train and immediately found the Salesians. I saw many houses with many people in them; more churches, schools, various hospices for children and youths, artisans and farmers, and a school for girls which taught a variety of domestic arts. Our missionaries were caring for both the young and the adults.

I walked into their midst. They were many, but I did not recognize them, and none of my old sons were among them. All were looking at me in bewilderment, as though I were new to them, and I asked them, "Don't you know me? Don't you know Don Bosco?"

"Oh, Don Bosco! We know him by reputation, but we have only seen him in photographs. Do we know him personally? Certainly not."

"And Father Fagnano, Father Costamagna, Father Lasagna, Father Milanesio—where are they?"

"We did not know them. They are the ones who came here long ago in the past, the first Salesians to come to these lands from Europe. But so many years have gone by since they died."

I gasped in wonder at their reply. "But is this a dream or reality?" I clapped my hands, I felt my arms, I shook myself, and I really heard the sound of my clapping and I could feel my body, and I kept telling myself I was not asleep.

This visit was but the matter of an instant. Having witnessed the marvellous progress of the Catholic Church, of our Congregation, and of civilization in those lands, I thanked Divine Providence for graciously using me as an instrument of His divine glory and the salvation of so many souls.

Young Colle meanwhile signaled me that it was time to go back. So we said good-bye to my Salesians and returned to the station, where the train was ready to depart. We boarded, the whistle blew, and away we headed northward.

Something new struck my sight and made me wonder. The region of Patagonia closest to the Strait of Magellan, between the Andes and the Atlantic, is not as wide as geographers claim it to be.

The train rushed along at breakneck speed, and I thought we were crossing the provinces of the Republic of Argentina which already had been civilized.

Our journey took us through a virgin forest, interminably broad and interminably long. At a certain point the train stopped and our gaze fell upon a very sorry sight indeed. A huge crowd of savages was gathered in a forest clearing. Their faces were deformed and dirty, their bodies covered with what seemed to be animal skins sewed together. They surrounded a man who was bound and seated on a rock. He was very obese, having been deliberately fattened by the natives. The poor fellow had been taken prisoner and from the sharpness of his features seemed to belong to a different race. Hordes of savages were interrogating him, and he was telling them of the adventures he had encountered in his travels. Suddenly one of the natives arose, brandishing a shaft of iron which was well sharpened, though not a sword; he threw himself upon the prisoner and with one blow cut off his head. All the train passengers crowded at the doors and windows gazing upon the scene in horror. Colle himself was looking in silence. The victim uttered a shrill scream as he was struck. Those cannibals then threw themselves upon the body bathed in a lake of blood and, slicing it up, threw chunks of warm and still quivering flesh upon nearby fires, let them roast awhile, and then ate them half cooked. At that poor man's scream, the train began to move and gradually resumed its breakneck speed.

For hours at a stretch it skirted the shores of a huge river. At times it was on the right bank, at times on the left. I could not tell through the window what bridges we used to make these frequent crossings. Meanwhile along the banks here and there we spotted numerous tribes of savages. Each time we saw them, young Colle kept saying, "This is the Salesian harvest! This is the Salesian harvest!"

We then entered a region packed with wild animals and poisonous snakes of bizarre and horrifying shapes. They swarmed over the mountainsides and hill slopes; they blanketed the hilltops, the lakeshores, the riverbanks, the plains, the gullies, the cliffs. Some looked like dogs with wings and were extraordinarily bloated [gluttony, impurity, pride]. Others were gigantic toads eating frogs. We could see certain lairs full of animals different in shape from ours. All three species of animals were mixed together and snarled dully as though about to devour each other. We could also see tigers, hyenas, lions, but they were not the same as those of Asia and Africa. My companion then spoke to me. Pointing out those animals to me, he exclaimed, "The Salesians will tame them!"

The train was now approaching its starting point, and we were not far from it. Young Colle then drew out a map of astounding beauty and told me, "Would you like to see the journey you have just made? The regions we have traversed?"

"Yes, of course," I answered.

He then explained the map on which all South America was detailed with marvelous exactness. More than that, it showed all that had been, what then was, and what would be in those regions, but without confusion, rather with such a clarity that one could instantly see all at one glance. I immediately understood everything, but, due to the onrush of so many things, that clarity lasted but an hour, and now my mind is just one big jumble.

While I was looking at that map and waiting for the youth to offer me some explanation—I was overwhelmed by the astounding things I was looking at—I thought I heard our Coadjutor Quirino³⁴ ring the morning *Angelus*, but, on awakening, I realized I was hearing the bell strokes of the parish church of San Benigno. The dream had taken the entire night.

Don Bosco concluded his account with these words: "The Salesians will draw the people of [South] America to Jesus Christ by the sweetness of St. Francis de Sales. It will be a most difficult task to teach the savages a moral way of life, but their children will easily yield to the words of the missionaries and live in towns with them; civilization will supplant savagery, and thus many Indians will enter the flock of Jesus Christ."

A few days later, almost in confirmation of these extraordinary prophecies, a letter arrived from Bishop Bernard August Thiel of San Jose, Costa Rica, a Vincentian,³⁵ who wrote to ask Don Bosco for a few

³⁴Brother Camillo Quirino (1847-1892), a holy coadjutor, mathematician, linguist, and bell-ringer. [Author and editor]

³⁵Born at Elberfeld in Rhenish Prussia in 1850, Father Thiel was a theology professor in Ecuador until the anticlerical government expelled him. He was made bishop of San Jose in 1880 and died in 1901. He was also a well-known explorer and student of Indian languages, and he founded an ethnographic and biological museum at San Jose. [Editor]

Salesian missionaries. San Jose is located precisely on the tenth parallel, mentioned in the dream. Don Bosco himself wrote to Count Colle on February 11, 1884: "The journey I made with our dear Louis keeps unravelling itself every day. At this time it seems to have turned into the very heart of our work. Much is said and written and publicized to explain our plans and make them a reality."

Relevant to the dream of Patagonia, Father Lemoyne gathered these words directly from Don Bosco: "When people come to know the wealth which makes Patagonia precious, this land will have an extraordinary commercial development. In the bowels of the mountains lie hidden precious minerals. In the Andes between the 10th and 20th parallels are to be found deposits of lead, gold, and other minerals more precious than gold."

That our readers may have some notion of the significance of this dream, we will highlight some outstanding features. Don Bosco gave us a mass of positive data which he could not have learned from either travellers or explorers, since no explorations of any kind had been made in those southernmost latitudes either for tourism or for scientific study. To these data are to be added prophetic statements which point to a future more or less remote. Concentrating on these data, we shall bring out only four particulars of utmost importance. In this we are corroborated by information passed on to us by Father [Albert] De Agostini,³⁶ the Salesian who explored these southern lands.

Let us consider the description of the Andes given by Don Bosco. It was the common opinion that they formed a dividing wall, that is, a homogeneous chain running north and south for more than thirty degrees of latitude, a single solid wall in both height and length. Instead, explorations and studies over several decades have shown that, as Don Bosco correctly observed, the range is broken up by innumerable depressions in the forms of inlets, valleys, and lake basins, and it is subdivided into groups or clusters of chains which run in opposite directions and in fact show sharp differences in both composition and structure. This is completely opposite to the old idea of one solid homogeneous mass. In Don Bosco's description, which shows a vertical structure of the Andes and its different modifications, we find an impressive precision. Not even the most authoritative geographer could at that time have come out with

³⁶Having recently concluded his explorations, Father De Agostini will give us an account in a later volume and will put under critical examination the statements made by Don Bosco concerning his dream. [Author] On Father De Agostini, *see* Appendix 1. [Editor]

such a definitive and precise affirmation as did Don Bosco. There is no doubt that a vision so clear and exact of those places is due to a power outstripping human limitations.

To be convinced that in those days people had no knowledge of the existence of so many coves and valleys all one needs to do is look at the maps of those years. The Patagonian straits, for example, were the subject of many hydrographic studies, beginning with the celebrated voyages of the English ships *Adventure* and *Beagle* under the command of Parker King and [Robert] Fitz Roy between 1826 and 1836,³⁷ and ending with the Chilean expeditions of Simpson, Valverde, Rogera, and Serrano from 1874 to 1889. Indeed, except for a narrow waterway used by ships of heavy tonnage which traveled from Puerto Montt [Chile] to the Magellan Strait through a tight labyrinth of islands and canals, practically all the coast west of the Andes was enveloped in deep mystery. A most astonishing fact confirms this. Baker Fjord, the largest and most extensive of the Patagonian fjords, which branches out and breaks up the Patagonian Andes into deep basins, valleys, and lakes for more than 250 miles between latitudes 46 and 52 south, was unknown to the world until 1898, after the explorations completed by the famous navigator and geographer John Steffen, when both Chile and Argentina sent out scientific expeditions to determine the extent of the Andes Cordillera.

Secondly, Don Bosco described fantasy railroads where only deserts and wastelands existed. Today the rail networks of the republics of Central and South America have undergone a remarkable development and in many places criss-cross the Andes. Tracks have been laid along the ridge of the Andes, and the day is not far off when, in fulfilment of Don Bosco's prophecy, these railroads will cross all of Patagonia and tie the northern shores of South America to the Strait of Magellan.

Thirdly, Don Bosco asserts that extraordinarily rich deposits of coal, petroleum, lead, and even precious metals lie hidden in the bowels of those mountains, placed there for the good of humanity by the all-powerful hand of the Creator. Who does not know that, year after year, new mineral deposits are being discovered all through the Andes and along the coast of the Atlantic? Especially important was the discovery of oil at Comodoro Rivadavia, Chubut province, on December 13, 1907, as

³⁷*Beagle's* most famous officer was Charles Darwin, naturalist of Fitz Roy's expedition (1831-1836). His first book was *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1839). [Editor]

the Department of the Interior was drilling in search of fresh water. At present Comodoro Rivadavia boasts nine hundred oil wells. In successive years more oil deposits were found near the sub-Andean spurs of Salta and Jujuy provinces and along the Neuquén River—to cite Argentina alone. Explorations and soundings are now in progress from one end to the other of Argentina in locations that show clear signs of deposits of this precious mineral. Extensive oil strata have come to light also in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, and Venezuela. Notable veins of coal have been discovered in the Andes near Epuyen in Chubut and in Punta Arenas. Today the most important mineral output in Argentina is lead, of which ten thousand tons are mined each year.

Lastly, Don Bosco says of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago: “Some of these islands were inhabited by fairly large numbers of natives; others were barren, empty, rocky, uninhabited; others were all blanketed in snow and ice. Toward the west were numerous groups of islands inhabited by many savages.” Whoever has read Father De Agostini’s recent book³⁸ marvels at the truthfulness of Don Bosco’s detailed description. The following are precisely the three elements that make up the landscape of Tierra del Fuego: the prairieland, the steppes occupied by the Ona aborigines, and the region of the Andean islands, perpetually covered with gigantic glaciers; then the numerous island groups to the west, barren, empty, rocky, the home of the Alacaluf and Vagan Indians. Here too we must admit that such a detailed account was humanly impossible if no one had ever seen with his own eyes that landscape so particular and so difficult of access.

We believe that this brief sampling should be enough to convince one of the importance of this dream. Further developments in the Salesian missions and in government projects will render ever more evident the reality of its contents.

³⁸Alberto M. De Agostini, *I miei viaggi nella Terra del Fuoco* (Turin: SEI, 1924-1934). [Author]

CHAPTER 14

Problems Concerning Some of the Houses in Italy, and a Proposal for Boston

IN THE SUPERIOR CHAPTER meeting over which Don Bosco presided on December 28, 1883, the proposal was made to publish in the *Bollettino Salesiano* the requests of various nations to set up new houses; from January alone these numbered one hundred and fifty. The list was never published. However, in his annual circular of 1884, Don Bosco, counting previous demands, mentions two hundred and more requests for houses to be opened not only in Italy, France, and other European nations, but also in India, China, Japan, and the remote isles of Oceania. Having already dealt with foreign missions, we will now speak of some Italian affairs, which we could not fittingly place in the preceding chapters.

In 1883 no new houses were opened in Italy, but ever so many works were being dealt with! The restoration of the paper mill at Mathi, destroyed by a boiler explosion,¹ and the construction of a new building in the same city; the completion of the new print shop and other shops to the right of the church of Mary Help of Christians; the beginning of construction of the hospice of St. John the Evangelist in Turin; the expansion of the hospice at Florence and of the Salesian schools at La Spezia; the continuation of the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome and its annexed hospice—all gave evidence of vitality. Since nothing was started without Don Bosco's knowledge, we can imagine the responsibility that weighed upon him in this matter alone, especially as he tried to find the resources.

The houses in Italy were twenty-two, of which sixteen were regular, that is, having the canonical number of confreres, and six were annexes, having from two to five members.

¹See Vol. XV, pp. 539-540. [Author]

SICILY

In the month of October Father John Cagliero visited the Salesians and the sisters in the communities of Sicily. He gave the former their retreat at Randazzo and the sisters theirs at Bronte and at Máscali. He discussed also the opening of two new residences for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Trecastani in the diocese of Catania, and at Cesarò in the diocese of Patti.

Concerning the Salesians Father Cagliero wrote to Father Rua: “‘Woe to the solitary man,’ says Holy Scripture [Eccl. 4:10], and I say the same of the school at Randazzo, which is in dire need of a companion in this volcanic land. It will be wise for us to direct our attention to this rather than to other things, so that the confreres may soon have a local provincial to whom they can turn.”² Don Bosco thought so too. In fact, discussing a proposal for Agira in the December 28 meeting of the superior chapter, he said he thought it would be better to abide by the request of the archbishop of Catania [Joseph Benedict Dusmet], who so anxiously desired to have a Salesian house. “Although personnel is lacking,” he said, “and since it would be wiser to limit ourselves to a small house, we must sink our roots there. We must have in that city at least only a single room to accomodate Salesians who are traveling to other houses in Sicily. We could well set up a superintendent in residence there, so as not to be at the mercy of go-betweens.”³ Don Bosco’s wish was to be generously realized in 1885, with the providential Oratory of St. Philip Neri on via Teatro Greco.

FLORENCE, ESTE, THE ORATORY

The good director of the house in Florence [Father Faustinus Confortóla], while trying to keep the work operating, kept pestering Don Bosco for financial subsidies, because the people of the city contributed little or nothing. It seems that many were ready to donate as long as Don Bosco made an appearance or at least wrote to them. Now, since he could not go there, he mailed some twenty letters to particular families to com-

²Randazzo, October 24, 1883. [Author]

³See Vol. XV, p. 251. [Author]

mend the work to their charity, but only two responded promptly by sending one hundred lire. However, while Don Bosco was in France, he kept sending a share of the offerings he was receiving. In fact, on April 9 he sent three thousand lire from Valence; on May 10 six thousand from Paris, and on the 14th three thousand five hundred; from Dijon he sent three thousand. In all, the sums amounted to fifteen thousand five hundred lire, which in those days was a handsome fund.

The Manfredini school at Este lost a generous benefactor in the death of Chevalier [Benedict] Pelà, who was preceded to the grave by two other loving and disinterested friends whom our readers have already met, Monsignor [Augustine] Zanderigo, archpriest of the cathedral, and Mr. Anthony Venturini. Of the former, Father [John Baptist] Tamietti writes in his memoirs, "On January 27, 1883, God received the soul also of the last, the dearest, our hard-working and loving benefactor, Chevalier Benedict Pelà, after a brief illness. How great is our grief! For the past five years we have been used to seeing him daily in our midst with the love and concern of a father; he had no other thought than the school and Don Bosco. We understood each other, heart to heart; our souls were bound by one sole desire, as though he too were a Salesian." Today [1934], a tablet recalling his generosity to the school faces the marble bust of Don Bosco; their closeness seems an apt symbol of the oneness of their souls which began when they first met.

The Oratory [of St. Francis de Sales] witnessed the dedication of the building housing the printshop and related trades. When the six old presses became inadequate, three new ones of modern make were installed. Turin had no better equipped printshop. In addition to this expansion, in the space now occupied by the assembly hall, construction was begun on a new mechanical trades building.⁴ One may express surprise at noting the fine architectural decor that marks the first wing of that building also on the west side, entirely facing the interior and opening upon the playground. However, the reason for that is the fear at that time that a new street sketched out in a city plan would run alongside it. Without this concern Don Bosco would never have tolerated superfluous frills.

⁴See Fedele Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco: inizio e progressivo sviluppo edilizio della Casa Madre dei Salesiani in Torino* (Turin: SEI, 1935), tables 9 A-B. [Author]

FAENZA

The most troubled of the houses in Italy in 1883 was that of Faenza. Its original location offered no possibility of developing the work, and so it became necessary to find a place which would allow some reasonable expansion. The suburb offered no such possibility; furthermore, the place was too remote for a school or an oratory or any other work. Added to this was a longstanding rivalry between the suburban people and the city people; the former would not let their children associate with the others either for reason of traditional hostility or for fear of fights among the boys. The only alternative was to look to the city, where the Protestants, as though endorsing the decision, had unnoticeably slipped in and set up a public church. In the end this combination of reasons determined the decision to set up a house inside the city limits. However, several unpleasant incidents were still to be faced.

While many repeated attempts to find a building in the city failed, the anticlericals of Faenza, in both secret and open hostility, tried to oust the Salesians even from their suburban house. In February the royal vice-prefect made an official inquiry of Faenza's mayor whether it were true that the Salesians taught drafting and subjects required by the curriculum for elementary schools; if so, what was the number and age of the students? Were the teachers, including the drafting instructors, duly certified according to law? What were the hours and days of classes? Was the board of education duly notified of everything, as required by law, concerning the scholastic year then in course? In those unhappy years, as well as in those to follow, these investigations were but a prelude to vexing measures masked by legality. In central and southern Italy, where the people were not used to such heavy-handedness, the Catholics were intimidated. However the Salesians, quite skilled in coping with such hostility in Piedmont, were not so easily cowed. Father [John Baptist] Rinaldi,⁵ with utmost care and extreme self-assurance, replied to the mayor that the Salesian house of Faenza was not a school which re-

⁵Father John Baptist Rinaldi (1855-1924) came from the province of Cuneo to the Oratory in 1869. Five years later he made his profession as a Salesian. Sent by Don Bosco to Faenza in 1881 to open the house there, he and his confreres met enormous problems (see Vol. XV, pp. 283-294). Nevertheless, during his twenty years as director of that work, he succeeded in spreading devotion to Mary Help of Christians and the Sacred Heart of Jesus, as well as the Salesian spirit, throughout the region of Romagna. From 1901 till his death he served as director successively in five other communities. [Editor]

quired certified teachers, although the present staff did have the qualifications.⁶ Nothing more was needed to put an end to any further interference of that kind.

This blow having failed, the so-called democratic newspapers entered the field. *La Montagna*, a recent Faenza journal printed at Imola in its April 7 number, lambasted “one of the usual clerical lairs,” which was training three hundred enemies of Italy, having lured that many young lads by every possible means. Around the end of June a petition against the Salesians was circulated in the cafés and stores. At the same time Milan’s *Il Secolo*, popular in Faenza, carried Don Bosco’s photograph and a relevant story, which we have already reported, about Don Bosco’s victorious tour of France.⁷ Such a tribute in a newspaper of that kind came at the right time and was read by most of the citizens; however, some either did not know or made believe they did not know that the beleaguered Salesians were sons of Don Bosco.

Then came attacks from the province. *Il Ravennate* published three articles repeatedly raising the cry and hue of war against our schools. In the first, a liberal journalist who brushed aside the circulating petition claimed freedom for all, but in editing the article gave an introduction which killed its well-meant content and called for energetic action and any needed violence against the teaching friars and nuns, certified though they might be; this, it claimed, had to be done if the young were to receive an education adequate to the spirit of the new times. Hence, to achieve this, lay teachers had to be installed at any cost.

In the second article readers were treated to a virulent petition being circulated, which was to be sent to the minister of education and was to exert pressure on the government to expel the Salesians from Faenza, for [the article said] they had stationed themselves there “to spread clerical propaganda with the excuse that they were teaching reading and writing and music, as well as arts and trades to the people’s children.” Words passed to threats: “We are speaking in the people’s name and hope that the authorities will not think that ours are isolated voices. Wherever they have been so considered, we will demonstrate that we work peacefully within the restraints of the law. Indeed, we shall consider it our duty to warn the civic authorities, so that from this moment on, should the indignation surging against the enemies of our country in assuming the ed-

⁶Correspondence, February 18, 1883. [Author]

⁷See p. 219. [Author]

ucation of our youth degenerate into lawlessness, the responsibility will not fall upon the shoulders of those whose only wish is the honor and tranquillity of the country.”

The third article was aimed at rebutting the statements of the liberals contained in the first, saying among other things:

The democratic faction of Faenza does not contest the training given by the Salesian friars to our youth, but the type of education and the principles they imbue them with. The training, being kept in fine accord with the laws of certification and taxation, is the banner under which these friars cloak their contraband, which is totally clerical and Pope-centered and with which they choke in those young hearts every feeling of generosity and patriotism; they imbue them with clerical teachings, training them to look upon their fatherland, the fruit of so many sacrifices, as a robber; they prepare them to become, as adults, soldiers of the papal temporal power... And, though it may be admissible that outside of Italy there are priests and friars who are also good patriots, this is impossible in Italy, and the very rare exceptions cannot prove the contrary. For in Italy we are being faced with the question of papal temporal power, which they forever keep harping upon, and the priests and religious, being totally dependent upon and subject to the Pope, must perforce be hostile to our country's unity and therefore inimical to the country itself.⁸

The article could not have described in cruder terms the irreparable breach which the sects had opened and continually kept widening between the religious and the secular camps. Nevertheless, while this kind of barbed journalism was thriving, three facts brilliantly emerged: that Don Bosco's work was notably Catholic in every sense of the word, that therefore he had to be attacked with every means the sects had at hand, and that, notwithstanding the fury of his opponents, he succeeded in covering the country with a network of institutions for the young which were citadels of salvation for ever so many of them, so that history will be obliged to pay him the merit that is his due for his incalculable contribution in preserving the leaven of a better future.

Another Ravenna newspaper, *Il Sole dell'avvenire*, vowed that if the Salesians did not leave on their own, recourse would have to be had to ultra-radical means to expel them.⁹

⁸June 28 and July 3, 1883, numbers 27-28. [Author]

⁹July 31, 1883. [Author]

The city itself was divided. The respectable people, unarmed and not yet inured to the battles common to the times, grieved, but they had either no spirit or no expertise. The authorities would periodically call in the director, interrogate him, and then advise him to use caution. One day the lieutenant of the *Carabinieri* warned him that his life was in danger and that he should carry a revolver. Undismayed, Father Rinaldi went about looking for a new site, although he got nowhere.

To rouse the rabble a manifesto was spread throughout the city accusing the Salesians to the government of refomenting the age-old animosity between the people of the suburb and those of the city of Faenza, stating that the only way of re-establishing peace was to clear them out of the way. The manifesto was signed by radicals well known in the city and somewhat feared. The signers of this document were said to have grown to two thousand. The indictment, thus well fortified, was sent first to the authorities at Ravenna and then to the ministry.

Rather than demoralizing Father Rinaldi, this harassment drove him to resistance, anxious as he was to reward the desires of the good. Toward the end of August he went to Turin for his retreat and the general chapter. He met Don Bosco at San Benigno and they spoke together for two hours. After listening to all that warfare, Don Bosco told him, "How true it is that our confreres are safer and have more peace in the Pampas. However, even if you want to, you cannot back down as long as they have not seriously tried to hurt you, which Mary Most Holy will not allow."

"Well then," Father Rinaldi asked, "what is Don Bosco's advice? What would you like us to do?"

"Tell the committee, the bishop, and Father Taroni to keep going. In addition, we must immediately and at any cost open a boarding school."

Father Rinaldi begged Don Bosco, both in confession and out, to relieve him of that responsibility or at least to give him some reassurance. "Go forward," was the response. "God will work even a resounding miracle to support your obedience." After confession he told him "Continue, continue, continue. God will bless you." Such assurances confirmed him in his resolve to resist to the end.¹⁰

Subsequent events proved, and sooner than one could hope, that Don Bosco was right. On September 9, at a grand rally for universal suffrage held in Faenza's main hall, plans had been made to stage a roaring

¹⁰Letter of Father [John Baptist] Rinaldi to Father [Paul] Taroni, San Benigno, September 1, 1883. [Author]

demonstration against the Salesians, but one of the speakers, in the heat of his argument, hurled a base insult against the king, calling him an Austrian colonel. Immediately the committee for public safety dissolved the rally, and from that day forward the authorities, while defending themselves, unknowingly became the Salesians' champions. Thus Don Bosco's words came true: the enemy attempted a blow, and our Lady quashed it. The Salesians regained enough peace finally to locate a place in the city. As for finding the means to pay for it, Don Bosco had said, "We shall hope for Providence to give it to us. If It will not, we shall force It." And to Canon [Joseph] Cavina he had written:

I was deeply grieved to hear of the obstacles hindering the work we do to help poor and endangered youth. Shall we leave the field to enemy hands? Never!

When dangers threaten, we must redouble our efforts and sacrifices. We shall willingly do all that lies in our power, but you and your friends too must lend a helping hand so that we can open a hospice for poor boys. Let all of you think and do something about it.¹¹

Plans were made, the work was done, and the means were not lacking.

BOSTON

We must now clarify one detail of the [mission] dream. Don Bosco had asked Louis Colle when the Salesians were to go to Boston, where they were being awaited.¹² A pastor in Boston, Monsignor [A. Leon] Bouland,¹³ had thought of founding in the city a work which, under the

¹¹Turin, September 17, 1883. See Vol. XV, p. 293. [Author]

¹²See p. 308. [Editor]

¹³Born in France around 1850, Bouland was brought to the United States as a seminarian by Bishop Thomas Hendricken of Providence, Rhode Island, and ordained for that diocese in 1875. He appears to have been a tempestuous character. Five years later he moved to Boston to found a French parish. This was set up in December 1880 in a former Protestant chapel on Beacon Hill near the statehouse. It was Father Bouland's ambition to build up his parish of Our Lady of Victories to rival the one of that title in Paris. He made various trips to Europe to raise funds and to seek priests to assist him; it is known that the Dominicans declined his request. In 1881 Pope Leo named him the first monsignor of the archdiocese of Boston. For reasons unclear the parish declined in 1883, Monsignor Bouland went to Europe again late that year, and Archbishop John J. Williams entrusted the French parish to the Marists, who have retained it to the present. In 1886 they began building a church on Isabella Street, about five blocks from the site to which the Salesians relocated Don Bosco Technical High School in 1955 (founded in East Boston in 1945). Monsignor Bouland, meantime, attempted to reclaim the parish, then to collect an indemnity from

title of Our Lady of Victories and with the auspices of a confraternity, would lead an intensive drive for the conversion of Protestants, for devotion to Mary, for the honor of the Catholic Church, and for the support of the Pope. The individual members would take up the obligation of donating specific sums, while other monies would be raised by the local chapters. The association was to be headquartered in a missionary seminary, excluding the religious. Diocesan priests were to be recruited who would be active, studious, and prayerful; they would live in community and dedicate themselves mostly to preaching and to the education of youth.¹⁴

However, such a wished-for cluster of priests ready to live community life as religious without being such could not be found, nor was there any hope it would. Hence, the monsignor's friends in Paris suggested he turn to Don Bosco, and the well known Father [Francis] Moigno¹⁵ was solicited to initiate proceedings. He sent Don Bosco some of the correspondence that had reached him from the United States, proposing, should it be necessary, to send to Turin an American woman of French descent then living in Paris, named Lafitte, a patron of the opera. The papers remained for quite some time on Don Bosco's desk; at the priest's second request, he dictated his reply to Father Bonetti, and Father De Barruel put it into French. We have the summary which runs as follows:

Weighty and countless duties, as well as my absence from Turin, have kept me from acknowledging your letter dated last July 13 and from studying the attached proposal. I hope this excuse will make it easier to pardon my delay in responding.

Above all, I thank you for your esteem of the Salesians in recommending that they assume such an important undertaking in Boston. You truly show yourself to be a cooperator of ours, and I hope that we will be able to maintain such precious goodwill.

At the same time I must reply that the commitments which we have taken upon ourselves for our very decisive works in Europe and in South America

the Marists, and to found an academy; all these attempts failed. In 1888 he left the Catholic Church for Episcopalianism, for doctrinal reasons; but seven years later he returned. Nothing more is known of him. See the pamphlet by John W. Lynch, S.M., "Parish History of Our Lady of Victories, Boston, Massachusetts" (Boston, 1975). [Editor]

¹⁴Letter of Monsignor Bouland to Archbishop Williams, Boston, November 23, 1882. Some of the documents on this matter are preserved in the Salesian Central Archives in Rome. [Author]

¹⁵See pp. 16, 112, and Appendix 12. [Editor]

place me in the impossibility of immediately assuming the Boston project which you so kindly offer us. In addition, our Holy Father, Leo XIII, is about to create a vicariate and one or two prefectures apostolic in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, and this papal resolve binds the Salesian Congregation to direct and use part of its energies there.

If you could give me some time, some two or three years, I do not refuse my cooperation in such an undertaking. In this case I need to know the situation in which the Salesians would find themselves in Boston. Would they have a residence of their own?

Would they be assured of what they need for their support? In what areas would they be expected to exercise their ministry? More specifically, with adults or with abandoned youths?

Meantime, if the American lady whom you mention in your letter of July 13 is still living in Paris, I will gladly receive her in Turin. Perhaps, by speaking with her, I may be able to understand briefly the nature of the work we are being offered, and give her a more definitive answer. Should she decide to make a trip to Turin, as you give me to hope, I'd like to know the day of her arrival so that I may be at home.

Mrs. Lafitte, who had already tried unsuccessfully to meet Don Bosco in St. Augustine Church in Paris, came to Turin in August, bringing with her more documents and a letter from Father Moigno.¹⁶ The nub of the question was this: to determine whether the association in Boston could be substituted by an association of Salesian cooperators. Once that was settled, Don Bosco would send some of his priests there. The discussion was lengthy, but nothing came of it. "Everything at its own time," Don Bosco had been told by his handsome young guide of the dream. These words made it clear enough that the right time had not yet come.

¹⁶Appendix 12. [Author]

CHAPTER 15

Thoughts and Letters of Don Bosco

WE SHALL CLOSE the biographical facts contained in this volume with a sketch of the thoughts expressed by Don Bosco in the third general chapter and in several meetings of the superior chapter, along with a selection of letters which we were not able to place in the course of our narrative.

On June 20 Don Bosco issued the outlines of the matters for discussion at the third general chapter, so that the directors and the members of each house would have time to formulate their observations and proposals and send them beforehand to Father Bonetti, the moderator of the chapter. The material was organized into eight main headings: I: Regulations for the spiritual retreat; II: Regulations for novices and their formation; III: Regulations for parishes directed or to be directed by Salesians; IV: Training of the coadjutor brothers; V: Guidelines for the shops of Salesian houses and ways to foster vocations among the artisans. VI: Norms for the dismissal of confreres. VII: Founding and developing festive oratories attached to Salesian houses. VIII: Revising and modifying the Regulations for the Houses.

The chapter was held at the school of Valsalice from the evening of September 1 to that of September 7. Thirty-five members, including Don Bosco, took part. The only document which has come down to us is the set of minutes taken by Father [John] Marengo,¹ but unfortunately they are very scanty and piecemeal, since they begin with the third day.² We shall extract as much as will acquaint us with Don Bosco's thoughts on various matters.

¹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

²Some pages at the beginning have been torn out; how many, we do not know since the pages are not numbered. [Author]

In the extant fragment we find Don Bosco's sayings about the *Bollettino Salesiano*, the cooperators, some monographs, the spiritual retreats, the novitiate, and morality. In the afternoon session of September 4 he exhorted the chapter members to keep this principle in mind in their deliberations: "One thing we must bear in mind is whatever we decide here must serve as the norm for ten, twenty, or a hundred years from now. And so we must do as the artist counseled: *Aeternitate pingo*, I paint for eternity."

Concerning the *Bollettino Salesiano* Don Bosco said: "There is a difference between the Salesian cooperators, who are our benefactors, and those who subscribe to the *Bollettino* as a magazine. The *Bollettino* is nothing else but a communication medium to acquaint people with our works and to unite Christians in oneness of spirit and ideals. Hence it must not be regarded merely as a periodical bearing truth and news. Today, because of the political scene, people no longer know how to use their goods for charitable works; hence, the aim of the *Bollettino* is to make them aware of our works, so that, God willing, they may help the Salesian apostolate. But we must therefore advertise it as a public magazine." He also instructed them how to defend the *Bollettino* from the charge made against it by some of pride or vainglory. "The *Bollettino*," he said, "is written for us and for the cooperators, who wish to know everything about our works."

He had two recommendations for the cooperators: to promote the two annual cooperators' conferences, in which a collection is to be taken and sent [to Turin], and to offer a good explanation of the aim of the cooperators, which is to help in the teaching of catechism, to spread proper literature, and to send young people to good schools. "It does not matter to us," he said, "whether we receive a hundred lire more or less, but whether we foster God's glory. For this, unless governments raise obstacles, the *Bollettino* will be a power, not in itself, but in the people it will unite. If the cooperators have a clear understanding of their goal, they will not only help us but will abundantly accomplish the works which are proper to the Salesians."

Since Don Bosco wanted us to keep the chronicle of each house, he stressed it also in this chapter, exhorting the directors to take the task seriously. For the following year he asked that each director bring a copy of his chronicle, and he showed how this could become a precious and rich source of history.

The regulations for spiritual retreats were discussed: some wanted the

regulations more detailed; others, briefer. In conclusion, Don Bosco expressed his thought that a proper set of regulations be drawn up. Since so many sacrifices were being made for the sake of the retreats, some norms should be formulated which would enable retreatants to draw all the benefit they hoped for. He also desired that at every retreat some conferences be given particularly for the priests.

The thoughts Don Bosco expressed about the novitiate for clerics and coadjutors have practically only historical value. So that the spirit of the regulations on the novitiate would be properly understood, he recalled: "Pope Pius IX said often enough that in Salesian formation the aim to be kept in mind was that the novices should be exemplary priests in the world. Hence the need for practices of piety which help toward this end, and at the same time it is proper for novices to have each of their duties assigned to them to discover their attitudes and traits. However, this must be done without downplaying the practices of piety." He also recalled how Pius IX suggested that the word novitiate not be used, but that another word be substituted because the world was loath to accept it. Concerning also the concession made by Pius IX that the novices pursue their studies and be given other occupations during their year of trial, he told the chapter that in his first audience with Leo XIII he had mentioned to the Holy Father the concessions granted by his predecessor. The Pope had replied that he did not intend to change any of them, but that if concessions should occur, he must first be notified. Finally, after Father [Paul] Albera³ brought out the difficulty of forcing the French novices to make their novitiate in Italy both because of the differences in language and schooling and especially because of national resentment, Don Bosco, backed by the chapter, stated that a novitiate would be opened in the Marseille region not only for the Salesians but also for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Concerning the novitiate for the coadjutors, Don Bosco laid down the basic principle which had been observed up to then: that they be trained as good Christians. He said, "If a novice practices the rules of the house and the general rules of the Congregation and carries out his religious duties, he will be doing enough. What is important is to find someone who is interested in the coadjutors and guides and helps them."

The last topic on which Don Bosco said things relating to us was that of morality among the Salesians. After insisting that no stranger be ad-

³See Appendix 1. [Editor]

mitted to the common table (this was to be understood meaning habitually, not occasionally) and that there be a separate dining room for the entertaining of guests, he continued more or less as follows: "The Congregation needs to be purified. The first thing is to close the house to any woman. No woman is to sleep in the house or come to sleep there. See that even the laundry is separated from the house. This deserves serious attention.

"Second, we must see to it that the rule of separation from the sisters be put into practice as soon as possible, for it is of highest importance... Because of some stories reaching Rome, several members of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars wanted to hold an apostolic visitation, and it would have been done were it not for the intervention of the Holy Father. Such a visitation would have left a foul stain on our reputation. This was the cause: A lewd story which bore a semblance of truth reached the Holy See; fortunately, it was not true. A Salesian who often went to the sisters' workrooms was supposed to have agreed to elope with one of them, but for some unforeseen reason, it never happened. A written account was sent to Cardinal [Innocent] Ferrieri,⁴ who suggested to the Holy Father the aforesaid visitation." In response to Father [Francis] Cerruti's⁵ proposal that a deadline be set to conclude the work needed to achieve separation from the sisters, Don Bosco said, "I will give you [plural] one year from today. After that, a formal visitation will be made to see whether the work has been completed or should be speeded up."

While the chapter was discussing the order of the workshops and fostering religious vocations among the artisans, the question came up of dismissing candidates who were a threat. "It would be fine for us to do what I have seen done with grain. I once saw grain being threshed, and many people were involved in the work.

⁴Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. [Editor]

⁵Father Francis Cerruti (1844-1917) was born in Vercelli, entered the Oratory in 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 in forming the Salesian Congregation in 1859 (see Vol. VI, pp. 181-183). In 1865 pneumonia threatened his life, but, as Don Bosco had predicted, he miraculously recovered. In 1866 he made his perpetual profession, was awarded a Ph.D. in literature, and was ordained. 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 at Allassio, and in 1879 the first provincial of the Ligurian province. Don Bosco picked him in 1885 to serve as prefect general of studies, a position in which he 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 author. [Editor]

“‘I also would like to learn how to thresh grain,’ I said.

“‘Very well, do as we do,’ I was told.

“One person was holding a sack and pouring the grain into the sieve. As the sieve was shaken, a lot of dirt and pebbles fell to the ground, so much indeed that I was sure the task was finished. But that grain was passed through a second sieve, and more chaff fell out. Then I thought it was over, and yet it wasn’t. A third sieve discarded still more of the husks.

“‘Now that should do it,’ I said, ‘or we’ll be wasting time.’

“‘No, watch carefully. This grain is not yet clean. These granules that look so good, when you scrutinize them carefully, are spoiled. A sieve is not enough for threshing, you need patience, and with your own hands you must remove these granules lest they spoil the whole harvest.’

“This is what must be done to preserve morality... But this is not to be taken literally. Each one must achieve this purification as best he can.”

Then, speaking in particular of aspirants to the priesthood, he confidentially cautioned that no candidate for the priesthood be accepted who had had the sad experience of going to a house of ill repute.

The last session he closed with a few recommendations which we will take from the minutes with slight changes as to their form.

1. We must make an effort to discern and adapt ourselves to our times; that is, we must respect the men, and therefore the authorities; where we can, we are to speak well, and where we can’t, be silent. If there is a good reason, let the remark be made in private. And what I say of civil authorities I say all the more of ecclesiastical superiors. Respect them and have others respect them; even at the cost of sacrifice, they are to be supported. These sacrifices will in time and with patience be rewarded by God.

2. Up to now we have been able to keep our heads high in regard to morality. Now, because of some imprudence we have been somewhat compromised. Our good name is being re-established, but the directors, who are responsible in the eyes of the public, must exert all their efforts to have morality preserved. The means are the regulations and the chapter deliberations, which must be observed by them and their dependents. But this means they must be known. Let them be taught in the two monthly conferences. Learned conferences are not required; it is enough to have them read and then followed by a brief exhortation and explanation. One of the basic things which we must very strongly inculcate is morality. If we can make sure that after supper all go to rest, this will be

a great gain for morality.⁶ That is the hour of scheming. Therefore, if there is absolute silence from evening to the next morning it is a great gain. Let the same be said of letter writing to outsiders. Remind the confreres that by failing in morality they compromise their own house and the entire Congregation not only before God, but also before the world. Before God, one's soul is lost, before the world, one's honor.

3. No one immediately becomes the best and no one immediately becomes evil. Hence we must heed the beginnings to avoid serious damage. Experience teaches this. If someone embarrasses his director and community, he began by leaving off meditation, the practices of piety; that was followed by certain newspapers, some particular friendship. In a word, disorders!

4. Hence, let directors remember they are responsible for their own moral life and that of the confreres and of the boys. The latter are young and do not talk, but when they are with their parents, they open up and on occasions exaggerate, to the detriment of our reputation and God's glory. Certain innocent signs of affection for the boys may be shown by the superior, but not by others, and only with the aim of leading them to good.

5. As concerns punishments, "whether it is convenient or inconvenient" [2 Tim. 4:2] insist that the preventive system be practiced. It happens that some strike the boys or make them stand up at meals for an entire week. Let it be remembered that a teacher may scold or reprimand a child, but he is never to inflict physical punishment. He is to refer the matter to the director, who will apply the preventive system. It often happens that the boys are less to blame than was thought, as experience teaches us.

"Are there some who like to punish? The director will advise them, but never in public, never before the boys. One-on-one dealing makes it very easy to get the boys to yield to the will of their superior and to the preventive system. Several are the advantages to be derived: (a) he will win over the boys' confidence; (b) the number of vocations will grow; (c) on leaving they will be our friends; otherwise, they will be our enemies; (d) they will never become worse; they will either be exemplary or at least never give bad example."

6. The local superiors must not pretend to have all perfect confreres.

⁶Supper was served around 8:00 P.M., and night prayers were said in common around 9:00 P.M.
[Editor]

Let them be fathers to them, help them, guide them along the way of perfection. In the beginning Don Bosco was free to go and visit the houses often and personally direct them. Now let the director abide by the Rule and never treat anyone brusquely, saying, for example, "It's this way or out you go!" Let him use charity, and if there is someone unfitted for the house, let him write to the Superior General, who will straighten matters out.

At this point Father [Celestine] Durando⁷ interrupted to ask about our participating in political elections. Don Bosco replied: "It has always been my principle to abstain. I have thought it serves no purpose. This has been the norm followed. Ordinarily, do not go to vote. If it is deemed convenient, you may vote, but in a very private capacity. If a house depends in any way on the city government, it is better never to vote."⁸

He concluded by saying: "When you get back to your communities, give my regards to the confreres and all the boys. Bear in mind that the Congregation's glory lies with you; it is all in your hands. God's help will not be lacking. In Turin you have friends and a father. Pray for me, and I will never forget you in my holy Mass."

A statement had already been drawn up and approved charging the superior chapter to formulate the deliberations and to specify other matters left somewhat undetermined. Before going into the church for the *Te Deum* and Benediction, all added their signatures. The chapter deliberations were later published with those of the fourth general chapter, held in 1886.

The better to understand Don Bosco's thoughts, we have hereafter a new source to be tapped: the minutes of the superior chapter. They are contained in a bulky volume in which at each meeting the secretary wrote up a brief report of the sessions, taking special care to record if not the exact words of Don Bosco at least their thought content. These reports run from December 14, 1883, to his death.

Father John Baptist Lemoyne was both secretary of the chapter and Don Bosco's personal secretary.⁹ When he was asked to leave Nizza Monferrato in autumn 1883, his place as the sisters' director was taken by Father [Louis] Bussi. Father Lemoyne took up permanent residence

⁷See Appendix 1. [Editor]

⁸We may assume that voting was done publicly and not by secret ballot. In the United States, the presidential election of 1892 was the first in which the secret ballot, the so-called Australian ballot, was widely used (in thirty-three of the forty-four states). [Editor]

⁹See Appendix 1. [Editor]

at the Oratory, remaining there to the end of his life. We can surmise the high regard in which Don Bosco held him and the trust he placed in him from the particular words he addressed to him when he assumed his new duties.

“How long do you intend to stay with Don Bosco at the Oratory?”

“Till the end of time,” answered Father Lemoyne.

“Very well. I entrust my poor person to you. Be kind to me, especially in listening to me. I shall keep no secrets from you, neither those of my heart, nor those of the Congregation. When my last hour shall come, I shall need an intimate friend to impart to him my last words in utter confidence.”

The superior chapter’s meetings ordinarily took place in Don Bosco’s office. The minutes of 1883 speak of only two meetings, and in both we have Don Bosco’s remarks, some of which deserve to be treasured.

On December 14 the topic of discussion was turning our church at Sampierdarena into a parish. Don Bosco mentioned some difficulties arising from having a parish church attached to a boys’ school. (1) This upsets, indeed destroys, the internal running of the school because all sorts of people come and go. (2) Parish services are not compatible with the presence of youthful students. (3) The parish board could on certain occasions, like Corpus Christi, ask the boys to vacate a portion of the church, and this would infringe upon our ownership rights. It was further argued that at Sampierdarena the residential quarters originally meant for the parish personnel had been taken over by the growing number of students, and indeed they would jam the church, crowding out some of the congregation, so that a new chapel would have to be built for their church services. The point at issue, however, was this: in view of the demands of their training, instruction, discipline, and morality the students should not be allowed to join in public services. For the time being, therefore, it was decided to notify the archbishop of Genoa [Salvatore Magnasco] that three things were required before erecting the church into a parish: a priests’ residence apart from the school, a new church for the students, and new living space for their increasing numbers.

In the meeting of December 24, after the Oratory director, Father [Joseph] Lazzero,¹⁰ claimed that his multiple duties kept him from hearing the manifestations of the coadjutors, Don Bosco said the objection

¹⁰Father Joseph Lazzero (1837-1910) was born in Turin and came to the Oratory when he was already twenty years old. In 1859 he was one of young seminarians who joined Don Bosco in form-

was valid but that the ability of a director was not just to act but to make others act. "For example," he said, "correspondence is certainly a pressing task. If one can do it personally, well and good; but it is not possible. Father Lazzero should choose a trusted secretary to read the letters and jot the contents on the envelopes. That done, he should take the letters and send each one to the proper office as indicated on the envelope. Many letters can be answered by the prefect of the day pupils, such as a pupil's acceptance, forgiving part of the tuition, and so forth. Let each one do his share. Let all agree to help one another. Find ways of cutting down the work, making sure that accuracy be not lost. Let Father Lazzero follow the advice that Jethro gave to Moses.¹¹

In the same meeting Don Bosco spoke of economizing on construction in the church of St. John the Evangelist and the attached hospice and the new printshop being put up at the Oratory. The gas jets he found too ornamental; the printshop director's office looked like an oriental bazaar with its walnut shelving and window drapes. "Who," he concluded, "would contribute alms in the face of such embellishment? Marquis [Dominic] Fassati and Count [Louis] Giriodi exclaimed on seeing an elegant door at the Oratory, 'I will give nothing more. This is fit for a marquis!' True, they were only joking and have remained our good friends, but it's enough that they said it for me to know how to act." After a few other remarks he continued, "We must carefully check out the work to be done before starting on it, and all must be in agreement so as not to multiply expenses. Certain buildings which we have put up, according to everybody, what with setting up and taking down, have cost us double what a private individual would pay. Therefore: (1) Since construction on the walls of the house of St. John has stopped for the winter, let care be taken that a professional purchase lumber, ironwork, windows, and other materials, so that, when good weather sets in, no time will be lost and we won't take three years to finish what can be done in one. (2) Let work be contracted out, don't cut corners, but have capable supervisors. (3) Ordinarily, apart from real necessity (such as in the top floors) I

ing the Salesian Congregation, but he made his first vows only in 1862. He was ordained in 1865 and made his perpetual profession five years later. Don Bosco appointed him to the superior chapter in 1874 with responsibility for the schools of arts and trades; he remained at that post till 1898, when poor health compelled him to step aside. He suffered from illness for the last thirteen years of his life. [Editor]

¹¹Moses's father-in-law Jethro wisely advised him to choose judges to handle minor problems (Ex. 18: 19-23). [Author]

would not allow iron girders supporting the ceilings, because of the resonance they cause. (4) Before any work is begun, make sure that the workers have thoroughly studied and approved the blueprints." Don Bosco closed with four observations: (1) Let us remember that we are poor. (2) Before any work is begun, study the plan well. (3) After the plans have been studied, before they are executed, let them be presented to Don Bosco and the superior chapter; otherwise I am left in the dark. (4) Take in good part critical remarks which may be made about our works."

The letters we spoke of are twenty-four, of which eight are in French.

1. COADJUTOR BROTHER JOSEPH ROSSI¹²

Mr. Manati of Turin, who yearned to be awarded the cross of knighthood, had remitted a considerable debt owed him by the Oratory for certain furnishings, issuing receipts to that effect and presenting them to the secretariat of the Knights of St. Maurice as evidence of his philanthropy. The secretary general of the order, [Commendatore Caesar] Correnti, who was always ready to accomodate Don Bosco, offered no objections. Later, however, when questions arose blocking his application, Mr. Manati threatened to demand payment of those debts. Brother Rossi, Don Bosco's usual agent in so much business, reported the matter to him while Don Bosco was at Nice, and he received the following reply.

My dear Joseph Rossi,

Lest our affairs end up in others' hands, I am writing personally and so our confidence will not be violated.

Please notify Mr. Manati that I completed the recommendation and everything was finished. He had signed a receipt that the debt had been definitively forgiven. The ministry, or better, the council of the Order of St. Maurice, asked for more information about the past, and, despite the assurances given by His Excellency Commendatore Correnti, the decision rendered was not to deny but rather to suspend or postpone the application rather than touch on some sensi-

¹²Brother Joseph Rossi (1835-1908) was born in the province of Pavia. His use of Don Bosco's prayer book *The Companion of Youth* eventually led him to join Don Bosco personally in 1859. He was one of the first lay members of the Salesian Congregation, professing his vows in 1864. Don Bosco noted his administrative abilities and entrusted him with much of the Congregation's business. He also invited him to take part in the first and fourth general chapters. After Don Bosco's death Father Rua retained the same confidence in Brother Rossi. [Editor]

tive matters. At this time, if Mr. Manati were to demand payment of the bills he wrote off, whose receipts are in the Order's office, he would look bad indeed, and then I would have to tell things as they are. Or when I come to Turin, I shall speak to him myself, and I am convinced that, after so much has been said and done and letters written in his regard to Rome and Turin, he will not want it to have been in vain.

Should he insist in demanding the payment he forgave, however, I am ready to pay him back to the very last penny, rather than get involved in such matters; but I shall do so as soon as I return, and that is not very far off.

Take care of your health. Pray for me, who am always in Christ Jesus

Your most loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

2. FATHER ORESTES PARIANI

Don Bosco had been in France a month and a half when this generous Salesian cooperator sent him an offering for the church of the Sacred Heart. The letter reached him at Marseille, whence he sent this splendid reply.

Marseille, March 22, 1883

My dearest Father Pariani:

Your letter reached me in this city in a rather roundabout way, and I gladly take a moment to answer it. I have meanwhile received the generous sum which you and your kind aunt have sent me to continue the construction of the church and hospice of the Sacred Heart in Rome. Blessed be God, who inspired you to do such a wonderful deed! He says in the Gospel: "Give and gifts will be given to you, and [you] will receive a hundred times more in this world and will inherit eternal life." [Luke 6:38; Matt. 19:29] But you have already given, and so it is up to the Lord to grant you and your aunt a bountiful reward.

You do not follow the way of the world [namely]: Let others act after we are gone. This is a snare of the enemy of souls to keep us from acting. How many are trapped!

Meanwhile, every day at holy Mass I shall remember you, and I intend that both of you share in the prayers and all the good works which the Salesians have done and shall do. Will you come this year to celebrate the feast of Mary Help of Christians? I hope so and await you with great pleasure.

May God bless you and Mary protect you, as I very gratefully remain

Lovingly in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

3. BARON FELICIAN RICCI DES FERRES

Baron Felician Ricci des Ferres intended to leave Don Bosco in his will twenty thousand lire for the new church being planned adjacent to the hospice of Nice; but on second thought he deemed it more timely to donate it in portions during his life rather than wait till his death. To provide for this he had asked Don Bosco on what day and at what hour Don Bosco could receive him. Don Bosco answered:

Turin, June 1, 1883

My dear Baron:

Thank you for your kind letter. With great pleasure I await you at any time you can come. You need not make an appointment for a day and time. Come, you shall be immediately received.

The other matters we shall discuss.

May the Lord bless you and preserve you. Believe me in Jesus Christ

Your most loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Eight days later, on the occasion of his own name day, the baron brought Don Bosco half the sum, and the latter sent him the following note as a receipt.

Turin, June 9, 1883

With profound gratitude I state that I have received from the illustrious Baron *Felician Ricci des Ferres* the sum of *ten thousand* (10,000) lire. This is half of the bequest which the Baron intended to leave the undersigned, Fr. John Bosco, to assist him in his enterprises. The desire is that it preferably be used for the building of the projected new church of St. Peter's Hospice in Nice. Knowing well how much more precious in the eyes of God are gifts given during one's lifetime, the Baron has begun to anticipate the above-mentioned sum and to save the other ten thousand for the time when, should he still be living, the new church shall be completed. With deepest thanks the undersigned prays and will have his boys pray to the great Rewarder for this special benefactor, and he gladly promises to celebrate ten Masses for his spiritual and temporal

needs and those of his family, wife, children, and daughters-in-law.

On this lovely feast of St. Felician, our deserving donor's name day and the anniversary of the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians in Valdocco, all the Salesian Society and its numerous pupils offer their heartfelt wishes for every precious blessing to Baron Felician and make their fervent prayer to Mary Help of Christians that she deign to strengthen their sincere best wishes by her powerful intercession.

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

This next letter to the baron is a strong proof of Don Bosco's unyielding stand about dismissing from the Oratory those boys who, by their bad conduct, were a scandal to their schoolmates.

Oratory of San Benigno, October 2, 1883

My dear Baron:

I would most gladly agree to re-accept the Verdi boy, were it not for the fact that all the superiors of this house affirm that permission cannot be granted.

It is the confidential opinion of the superiors that this lad has caused much harm to his fellow students with his bad conduct and could at any moment put the reputation of the entire Oratory at risk.

You know that this house is always open to those you recommend; send someone else in Verdi's place, and he will be immediately accepted.

God bless you, my ever dear Baron, and please pray also for me, who am always with love and abundant gratitude in Jesus Christ

Your most loving and obedient friend,
Fr. John Bosco

Although he had closed the Oratory doors to this lad, he agreed, out of consideration for his benefactor and in the hope that this severe lesson might produce a good effect, to give the boy another chance at Sampierdarena. He wrote the Baron about this and at the same time earnestly begged him for the remaining ten thousand lire because he needed the sum to finance the missionary expedition.

Turin, October 11, 1883

My dear Baron,

Your letter has put both of us in a quandary, my dear Baron.

Trusting that I am doing you a favor, I am accepting the Verdi boy into our school at Sampierdarena, and he will be enrolled with appropriate recommendations.

And now, let's get out of the quandary as best we may. I need at least ten thousand lire to foot the expenses incurred to send the expedition of thirty priests and catechists to Patagonia. And the expedition must be ready by next November 12.

As you may have read in the newspapers, the Holy Father has divided Patagonia and the adjacent islands into three vicariates apostolic. He entrusted all the responsibility to the Salesians, but nary a cent.

Now, please stipulate any conditions you deem necessary in your charity, so that in this exceptional circumstance you may come to the aid of our expedition as well as to the aid of the Holy Father and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, who cannot, because of the times, give me even the tiniest help.

God bless you and grant you a hundredfold of all your charity. Consider me always in gratitude and esteem in our Lord Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

4. TO ANNETTE FAVA BERTOLOTTI

Widowed in 1880, Mrs. Fava Bertolotti kept helping the Oratory. On her name day Don Bosco sent her not flowers (the angels would prepare them for her in heaven) but his best wishes, thanks, and a promise of prayers.

Turin, July 22, 1883

Dear Mrs. Fava,

St. Ann, pray for us.

It is my fond hope that on the 26th of this month Saint Ann will pay you a visit, bringing with her good health, holiness, and a complete and perfect serenity of heart. And for Miss Mary? May she become hale and strong and virtuous so as to be her good mother's consolation in a very old age.

Indeed, may our God reward all the charity that you have shown us in the past and continue to show us, and I shall especially try to show my gratitude on the 26th by celebrating Holy Mass for your intention. The angels will make up a bouquet of flowers, and they will present it to you when you make your entrance into Paradise.

Please pray also for me and for this our family, which grows every day. Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

5. TO CARDINAL LAWRENCE NINA

Father [Francis] Dalmazzo had notified Don Bosco that the Cardinal Protector was thinking of visiting Turin in September. Thrilled with joy, Don Bosco offered him his humble hospitality with the most exquisite courtesy. That visit, however, remained only a pious wish.

Turin, July 31, 1883

Most Reverend Eminence,

Our Father Dalmazzo¹³ has sent me a bit of news which, if correct, will give us the opportunity for a huge celebration. Your Eminence may come to Turin in September: what comfort, what music, what a band we shall have!

Assuming this to be true, I would like to make a request of you. Would Your Eminence kindly accept a room here at the Oratory, that is, here in our house in Valdocco? All your Salesian sons would most ardently wish it.

Everything else will be prepared to suit your pleasure.

In these days Your Eminence has had to put up with a lot of distress for our sake, especially for Father Bonetti, who expresses his deepest gratitude to you.

Presently the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith is considering the division of the mission of Patagonia into three vicariates apostolic. I shall have copies made of each document and dutifully have them sent to Your Eminence.

I cannot express in words the enthusiasm with which the appointment of Cardinal Alimonda as archbishop of Turin was received. He will make history in our archdiocese.

I return to Your Eminence's most fondly awaited trip to Turin to tell you that you could not have chosen a better season. It's neither cold nor hot; we are in the harvest season of every fruit; the possibility of pleasant walks may well contribute to better your precarious health. In a word, we anxiously desire your coming among us and shall do all within our power to make it enjoyable and useful also for our city.

I shall write to you of other matters as soon as I can.

Meanwhile, with the deepest gratitude, I have the high honor in the name of all the Salesians of professing myself

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

¹³See Appendix 1. [Editor]

6. TO FATHER LOUIS TALLANDINI

Father Louis Tallandini, of the family of the Counts Tallandini, pastor of Our Lady of Peace in Bagnacavallo, a city near Faenza, was always a very close friend of Don Bosco and of the Salesians.

Turin, September 17, 1883

My dearest Father Tallandini,

God be blessed in all things! The Blessed Virgin is most certainly our help. A thousand thanks to her from the bottom of our hearts!

I have received your 120 francs for several of your devout intentions, especially for the wonderful exemption of your nephew from the military draft. God reward you! Now for myself. You know how difficult it is to exercise your sacred ministry there. Do what you can. God is with us. Father [John Baptist] Rinaldi will tell you what I consider opportune. But courage and sacrifices!

The Lord's grace be always with you and all your family. Believe me in Jesus Christ

Your most loving friend in J.C.,
Fr. John Bosco

7. TO THE STUDENT FRANCIS MARGOTTI

This letter is our sole source of knowledge about Don Bosco's trip to Nice after September 17; we have several letters up to that day dated from Turin. A letter of the bishop of Liège, which our readers will find in the next volume, dated September 8, hints at Don Bosco's presence at Nice on the 15th. He probably left Nice on Monday, September 24. This is a letter to a nephew of Father Margotti of San Remo, a student of the school at Valsalice.

Nice, September 21, 1883

My dear Frankie,

What wonderful news you give me also in the name of your honorable family! It only increases my sincere regret that I cannot accept the gracious invitation you have sent me; I would so much desire it. I cannot stop, since I will be at San Remo only Monday evening late at night. Patience. We shall make up for it in Turin.

You can do me a great favor, and I beg you, please do. Go to your mother

and father and give them my respectful wishes and assure them that I pray for them and for my dear fundraiser Miss Madeline and for the family that is presently vacationing with you.

God bless you, my dear Frankie, and may the Blessed Virgin protect you in the midst of the many perils that you meet in the world. Pray also for me. In Jesus Christ I am always

Your most loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

8. TO COUNT EUGENE DE MAISTRE

If people everywhere had recourse to Don Bosco to seek his prayers, all the more so did those who, like the De Maistres, considered themselves blessed to enjoy such a close relationship with him.

San Benigno Canavese, October 1, 1883

My dearest Count Eugene,

As soon as you kindly notified me of the illness of Countess Frances De Maistre, I immediately ordered all our families to begin special prayers, Masses, and Communions to obtain a cure for our patient.

I don't know whether God has as yet heard our poor prayers, but we shall continue them every day, trusting in His great goodness. Please give the enclosed holy picture to Count Francis. May God bless you and all your family. May He keep you all in good health and in His grace.

Kindly accept our sincere thanks for all the charity you show us, and add your prayers for this poor priest who will always be in Jesus Christ

Your most loving servant and friend,
Fr. John Bosco

9. TO BERNADINE MAGLIANO-SOLLIER

Don Bosco writes to her at Busca, hometown of the cleric Mark Nassò, who was then at Busca for his health and whom he recommends to her care. Nassò was then a cleric of three years' profession. He was a

Salesian much esteemed for his talents, knowledge, and virtue. He had completed his high school at the Oratory.¹⁴

San Benigno, October 4, 1883
(until Saturday)

Most esteemed Mrs. Magliano,

I was very happy to receive your newsy letter, and I bless the Lord that it was all good news.

The matter of the festive oratory is still quite unravelled, and so I have thought it best to delay action until we can speak face to face and come to some stable understanding, as much as stability is possible on this sad earth of ours.

If the cleric Nassò has nothing keeping him at home, he is free to come to Turin, but at his own convenience.

We have with us at San Benigno Father Costamagna, who joins the other Salesians in sending you his best wishes and assures you of their prayers for you. May God keep you in good health and in his grace, and may He quickly send you, cheerful and holy, to Turin.

Please, also, pray for these sons of yours in Jesus Christ; in their name I am

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

10. FATHER JOHN BAPTIST LEMOYNE

Count Colle, having heard of Don Bosco's dream of the Salesian missions, in which his son had appeared to Don Bosco and had been his guide, asked Don Bosco to send him the account, but translated into French. Father Rua brought it to him in October when he went to receive an offering from the count. While Don Bosco was urging Father Lemoyne to finish the Italian narrative, he wrote on the same day to the Count, "Father Rua will have the account of the South American dream

¹⁴A letter of his to Don Bosco on the occasion of the latter's name day while Nassò was a fourth-year student shows us the enviable confidence which the boys of the Oratory enjoyed with their father. See Appendix 13. [Author]

with him. It has been written in detail and is not brief. Father De Barruel will take care of the translation, but, should he not finish it in time, Father Rua will complete it.”

Turin, October 15, 1883

My dear Father Lemoyne,

Please do me the favor of finishing the dream of [South] America and sending it to me at once. Count Colle is anxious to see it, but he wants it translated into French; I shall take care of that immediately.

It seems like a hundred years since I've seen you; and Father Berto likewise [misses you]. God bless you.

Love me in Jesus Christ and pray for me, who will always be

Your most loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

11. TO MARCHIONESS MARY FASSATI

Don Bosco had promised to visit the Fassati family, which was then vacationing at Pessione; but, prevented by the preparations for the missionary expedition, he sent a splendid pheasant which had been given to him.

Turin, October 22, 1883

Dear Marchioness,

The confusion attendant upon our missionaries' departure for Patagonia thoroughly prevents me from making my projected trip to Pessione. Patience. This pheasant is luckier than I. Please welcome it.

During the approaching novena of All Saints we shall not forget to say special prayers for you, dear Marchioness, and for all your living and deceased loved ones.

God bless you and all your family. Kindly pray also for this poor fellow who will always be in Jesus Christ

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

12. TO SISTER PHILOMENA MEDOLAGO

Born a De Maistre, she was the widow of Count Medolago Albani and became a nun; we have mentioned her elsewhere.¹⁵

Turin, November 30, 1883

God bless you and help you to achieve the work of your sanctification. I heartily thank you, and this family of mine will pray ceaselessly for you, that you may find yourself with Jesus to enjoy the goods which neither the world nor the enemies of our souls can any longer steal from us. Let us therefore pray and help each other save many souls and thus assure the salvation of our own.

Mary, conceived without sin, pray for us.

May the blessings of Heaven descend copiously upon you and your entire religious community. Amen.

Lovingly in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

13. TO COUNTESS GIROLAMA UGUCCIONI

We have received a copy of this letter to Countess Girolama Ugucioni together with many earlier letters which we will publish as an appendix, after we have had time to compare them properly with the originals in the possession of the heirs.¹⁶

Turin, November 30, 1883

My Good Mama,

We are in the novena to Mary Immaculate, during which all our family is praying for your intentions night and day, particularly for your daughter Emily. Let her pray and have trust.

Time is forever pressing, but I never forget to offer a special memento for

¹⁵See Vol. XV, pp. 387-388, 535-536. [Editor]

¹⁶These letters do not in fact appear as an appendix in the Italian edition. The Ceria edition of Don Bosco's *Epistolario* (4 vols., Turin: SEI, 1955-1959) contains thirty-seven letters from the saint to the countess and two to her husband; the earliest is from 1866, the last from 1884. [Editor]

you, my good mama, every morning at Holy Mass. May God bless you and all your family. If you have the occasion, please offer my respects to Marchioness [Henrietta] Nerli. Kindly pray for this poor fellow who will always be in Jesus Christ

Your obedient son,
Fr. John Bosco

14. TO CHEVALIER CHARLES COMASCHI

This is the last letter from Don Bosco to this great Milanese friend of his of which we have an authenticated copy.¹⁷

Turin, December 19, 1883

My dear Chevalier,

Happy feast, ever dear Chevalier, a happy feast, a happy end of the year, and a happy New Year to you, your wife, to our dear Alphonsus. May God bless all of you and grant each of you good health and perseverance on your journey to Paradise.

Please pray also for me and for this much increased family of mine. It is my great pleasure to be able to profess myself

Your most loving friend,
Fr. John Bosco

15. TO MOTHER CATHERINE DAGHERO¹⁸

Mother Catherine Daghero, Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, was upset by certain gossip which was circulating in the sacristies of Nizza Monferrato about the sisters and their house; she wrote to Don Bosco about it in her Christmas greetings. He

¹⁷See Vol. XIV, pp. 101-102, 445-446. Father Lemoyne writes at length about him in Vol. VIII (pp. 303-305 of the Italian edition; omitted in the English). [Author]

¹⁸Mother Catherine Daghero (1856-1924), born at Cumiana in the province of Turin, joined the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in 1874. Mother Mazzarello perceived her fine qualities and guided her through her early difficulties. Sister Catherine quickly revealed characteristics that marked her for responsible administrative positions. After assignments in Turin and St.-Cyr, in 1880 she was elected Mother Mazzarello's vicar. When the foundress died the next year, she was elected to succeed her even though she was ten years under the age prescribed by the Rule; Don

answered to relieve her of any apprehension; it seems, too, that the good superior feared she had inadvertently given him some reason to be displeased, and he replies to reassure her.

Turin, December 25, 1883

Dear Reverend Mother General:

I have received your greetings and those of your sisters and pupils.

I heartily thank you and pray that God may generously reward the love you show me by your prayers.

Pay no attention to the gossip which some may be spreading about our houses. They are vague matters, misunderstood and wrongly expressed. Hence, if they have something to say, let them say it and say it clearly.

Be at peace. If I have something important to tell you, I will not say it through another, but I will tell you or write to you myself.

May God bless and grant perseverance to you, to your sisters, and to all the pupils entrusted to your care. Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

16. TO FATHER VINCENT MORBELLI

Father Vincent Morbelli, provost of Castelnuovo Bormida in the diocese of Acqui, had sent Don Bosco five thousand lire to pay for one of the columns to be raised in the church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. In addition to a thank you note, Don Bosco showed his gratitude in a gracious epigraph which he composed to extol the donor's generosity and serve as a commentary on his offering:

*As a perpetual monument
of the Catholic faith
To the eternal praise of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
In memory of the great Pontiff*

Bosco readily granted the necessary dispensation (see Vol. XV, pp. 300-302). Such was her success at governing and the sisters' confidence in her that seven general chapters re-elected her, several times unanimously, until her death. She displayed a simple but profound wisdom, open-mindedness, and exquisite motherly sense. She guided the sisters through the difficult period when the Holy See ordered them canonically separated from the Salesians, set them up as a distinct congregation, and approved their Rule (1905-1907). They expanded greatly both in Europe and in the foreign missions; Mother Daghero herself made an extended visit to the missions of South America (1895-1897), and she visited the houses of Europe regularly. [Editor]

Pius IX
To the honor of the diocese of Acqui
For the edification of posterity
And especially of his beloved parishioners
In tribute to his family
Father Vincent Morbelli
Provost of Castelnuovo Bormida
erects and dedicates this column
in the year 1883 of the civil calendar

The fourth column on the right as you walk toward the main altar bears this inscription carved into its base: Father Vincent Morbelli, pastor.

17. FRENCH LETTERS

Among the letters which Don Bosco wrote in French in 1883 there is a small group which we will here summarize; they are printed in the appendix of this volume.¹⁹

In August, writing to Countess Beaulaincourt Les Rosches, who was living at Argentré in the area of Mayenne and had sent him a thousand francs, Don Bosco referred to a grace which was due to come, though its coming was delayed. It was a spiritual grace. Her eldest son, who was serving in the colonial military forces, had lost his faith. Concerned about the bodily and spiritual ills to which he was exposed, his mother, who had been a Salesian cooperator for some years, persistently commended him to Don Bosco's prayers. "Without doubt the Lord will hear us," he tells her in his letter, "but only insofar as he sees that this favor will be a blessing for us. The Lord is a powerful and excellent Father; would he ever grant us a favor which would prove to be harmful to us?" The favor was granted in 1886; in that year her son, on his return from the colonies, was married at God's altar and began to live a good Christian life.

In another letter Don Bosco thanks, blesses and entrusts to our Lady a merchant of Aire[-sur-Lys].²⁰

¹⁹Italian edition, documents 95-97, pp. 589-593, omitted in this edition, except document 96. [Editor]

²⁰Printed in the Italian appendix as document 96 but given here in full. [Editor]

To Mr. [Dacquin-]Bleuzet

Turin, September 7, 1883

Dear Sir,

I have received your Christian letter and thank you for it with all my heart. I shall not fail to pray for you in my Holy Mass and to have our boys pray for your intention.

God bless you, kind sir; may the holy Virgin protect you and your whole family [keeping you] in good health and always on the road to Paradise. Amen.

Please pray also for me and my orphans. Believe me to be in Jesus Christ

Your humble servant,
Fr. J. Bosco

We have more than once come across Mrs. Quisard-Villeneuve, a co-operator of Lyons. We have five letters to her in this year, in addition to one to her son. It is astounding how these French families were bound to Don Bosco by a love and veneration which surpasses our imagination. Mrs. Quisard, too, begged him to visit Count Chambord, but he replied: "At this time [July 8, 1883] my health will not permit journeys. Though I am not exactly ill, I cannot leave my room."

Mrs. Quisard was planning a pilgrimage to Turin with her husband and family to pray in the church of Mary Help of Christians, and to discuss her spiritual concerns with Don Bosco. He wrote to her [on July 27]: "I shall gladly remain here [at the Oratory] August 5 and 6 and be at your service for all matters which will add to God's glory and the happiness of our souls." Two months passed after that visit, and no letters. On October 23, writing to both mother and son, whom he called "my little friend" and "future Salesian," he added, "I fully trust that with the passage of time your husband will wish to repeat the visit which he kindly made to us and will renew our consolation at seeing a truly Christian family which exemplarily practices the Catholic faith."

Mrs. Quisard sent three hundred fifty francs for the missionary expedition and one thousand fifty for Christmas. Thanking her for the second offering (for the first he had sent her a mimeographed letter), [on December 22] he wrote: "It is your Guardian Angel who inspired you to come to our aid. We truly were in dire need of winter clothing for our orphans. Kind lady, you have given, and the good Lord will certainly give, or rather, recompense you generously.... May God's peace, tranquillity, prosperity, love, health, and holiness always reign in your family."

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

SALESIAN BIOGRAPHICAL DICTIONARY

ALBERA, PAUL (1845-1921), Father

Paul Albera, from None in the province of Turin, entered the Oratory in the fall of 1858. He made his religious profession in 1862. After his ordination in 1868, he was appointed prefect of the Oratory, a post he held until 1871. As director of the Salesian house at Sampierdarena, a suburb of Genoa, he had responsibility for the Sons of Mary and helped Don Bosco in preparing the first missionary expedition (1875). The printshop which he initiated there in 1877 printed the *Bollettino Salesiano*.

In 1881 Father Albera was appointed provincial of the Salesian houses in France, with headquarters at Marseille. He remained in that position ten years, and, despite the anticlericalism of the times, the houses in France grew from three to thirteen.

Father 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 chapter in 1892 after the death of Father John Bonetti (see below). The rector major, Father Rua (see below), asked him to compile the Director’s Manual and to conduct extraordinary visitations of the provinces of France, Spain, Belgium, and South America; the last journey took three years.

In fulfillment of a prophecy of Don Bosco, known only to Father Philip Rinaldi, Father Albera was elected rector major in 1910, succeeding Father Rua. He headed the Congregation during the trying years of World War I. The depth of his personal piety and asceticism imbued the numerous circular letters which he wrote to the Salesians, as well as the Director’s Manual.

Exhausted by his many journeys as rector major in visiting the houses and strengthening the confreres and Salesian cooperators, Father Albera passed the last years of his life in precarious health. After his death he was interred at Valsalice, alongside Don Bosco and Father Rua, whose sterling virtues he so faithfully reflected.

BARBERIS, JULIUS (1847-1927), Father

Father Barberis had the distinction of being the first novice master of the Salesian Congregation, appointed by Don Bosco in 1874. "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. Father 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 in the province of Turin, made his first vows in 1865, and was ordained in 1870. At the University of Turin he earned his doctoral degree in theology in 1873. As master of novices for twenty-five years 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 Czaratoryski. Don Bosco used his experience to set 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. In 1910 he was elected spiritual director of the Congregation, a position he held till his death. 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), Father

Joseph Beauvoir was born in Turin, made his vows in 1870, and was ordained a priest in 1875. Three years later, when Don Bosco asked him whether he would volunteer for the South American missions, he accepted and left that same year. After short stays 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's 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. Father Beauvoir accompanied a group of Indians who represented Tierra del Fuego at the 1892 Columbian Fair in Genoa. He died in Buenos Aires.

BELLAMY, CHARLES (1852-1911), Father

Charles Bellamy was ordained to the priesthood in his native city of Chartres in 1881. Since his fond desire was to minister to young workers, he consulted his pastor, who retrieved from his trash basket a brochure he had re-

cently received and gave it to him. Father Bellamy read it and pursued his calling. Later, he used to quip that he found his vocation in a wastepaper basket! In 1882 he first met Don Bosco in Paris. The following year he made his novitiate and was perpetually professed in 1884.

Father Bellamy founded the Salesian oratory, secondary school, and trade school at Menilmontant in Paris. In 1891 he opened the first Salesian house in Africa, at Oran, Algeria. Some years later, ill health forced him to retire to the Salesian house at Charlemont, near Geneva. A man of keen intelligence and an excellent speaker, he wrote several books about Don Bosco. He died in Lausanne, Switzerland.

BELMONTE, DOMINIC (1843-1901), Father

Dominic Belmonte, born in Genoa, 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 serving as prefect at Borgo San Martino and catechist at Alassio, in 1877 he returned to Borgo San Martino as director, where his predecessors had been Fathers Rua and Bonetti (see below). 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 Father Belmonte was chosen prefect general of the Salesian Society. On the death of Father Bonetti in 1891, 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, Father John Pagella.

Don Bosco had told Father Belmonte that, if he took care of himself, he would live beyond sixty. But he felt he could not spare himself any work. He died in Turin at the age of fifty-eight.

BERTO, JOACHIM (1847-1914), Father

Joachim Berto entered the Oratory in 1862 and joined the Salesian Congregation three years later. Even before his ordination in 1871, he was chosen by Don Bosco to be his secretary, a post he retained for 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. He was one of the privileged few who witnessed many of Don Bosco's wonderful deeds. While carrying out his

secretarial duties, Father 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 at the Oratory, where he died.

BOLOGNA, JOSEPH (1847-1907), Father

Joseph Bologna came from Garessio in the province of Cuneo 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 Congregation in 1868 and was ordained in 1872. In 1878 Don Bosco sent him to Marseille to open 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 antireligious legislation, which closed the northern Salesian houses. He died in Turin while on a visit to the Oratory.

BONETTI, JOHN (1838-1891), Father

John Bonetti was born at Caramagna in the province of Cuneo. He came to the Oratory in 1855. Father Matthew Picco, 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 and was elected a member of the first superior chapter (see Vol. VI, pp. 181-183). He won high honors in philosophy and theology and soon became a well-known writer. Together with Fathers Michael Rua (see below) and Dominic Ruffino and others, he was one of the early chroniclers of Don Bosco's words and deeds. His book *Cinque lustri di storia dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* [English edition: *Saint John Bosco's Early Apostolate*] merits special mention. Its wealth of detail constitutes a small library of Salesiana, and of course it is a primary source for much of what it recounts.

Father 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 the attacks of vociferous Protestants. A man of balanced zeal, warm piety, and deep spirituality, he was elected spiritual director of the Salesian Congregation in 1886.

When he died in 1891, he fulfilled Don Bosco's prophecy that he would be the first member of the superior chapter to follow him in death. Blessed Michael Rua hailed Father 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), Father

Born at Varengo in the province of Alessandria, 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 founded 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, Father 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 Monsignor Joseph Fagnano (see below) was published. He spent his last years as assistant pastor of the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin,.

BRANDA, JOHN BAPTIST (1842-1927), Father

John Branda came to the Oratory at the age of twenty-six after completing his studies as a surveyor. He patiently took up Latin, donned the clerical habit, and made his first vows as a Salesian in 1869. Ordained in 1873, he was first assigned to Marassi, then to Valsalice, and finally in 1881 to initiate Salesian work in Spain. Don Bosco told him, "Go to Utrera, but you will be there for only a short time. A lady from Barcelona will call us and will provide the means for opening a large school there." In fact, in 1885 Doña Dorotea de Chopitea, as Don Bosco had predicted, wrote to him, and soon afterward work started on a technical school at Sarriá, Barcelona. In 1889 the rector major, Father Michael Rua, called Father Branda back to Italy to direct the St. Teresa Festive Oratory for girls in Chieri. In 1900 he was sent to Zurich and in 1908 to Lorraine to assist Italian immigrants. In 1918 he was recalled to the Oratory, where he spent his last years as spiritual director to countless souls. Outstanding at all times was his love for Don Bosco, also because of extraordinary events he himself had witnessed.

CAGLIERO, JOHN (1838-1926), Bishop and Cardinal

John Cagliero, born in Don Bosco's home town of Castelnuovo d'Asti, was received by Don Bosco into the Oratory in 1851 (see Vol. IV, pp. 200-204) and was among the original members of the Salesian Society (Vol. VI, pp. 181-183). In 1862 he was ordained in Turin and appointed spiritual director of the Oratory. He was endowed with 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. Such composers as Giuseppe Verdi and Lorenzo Perosi

praised his art. Father Cagliero obtained his doctorate in theology at the University of Turin in 1873.

But Father Cagliero is best remembered as an intrepid missionary. In 1875 he led the first group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina, where they carried out a ministry to the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires. Soon, however, Father Cagliero penetrated the interior of Patagonia. He opened a trade school at Almagro in Buenos Aires and another at Villa Colón in Montevideo. Don Bosco recalled him to Turin in 1877 to become spiritual director of the Congregation, an office he filled until 1884, when Pope Leo XIII nominated him vicar apostolic of northern and central Patagonia. The first Salesian bishop, he was consecrated in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin. Immediately afterward he returned to South America and was welcomed by Father Joseph Fagnano (see below), with whom he explored Tierra del Fuego, meeting up with the various Indian tribes. In 1887 he crossed the Andes to open the first Salesian house in Chile, at Concepción (breaking two ribs along the way when thrown from his horse high up in the Andes). 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. In 1908 he founded Patagonia's first hospital at Viedma. Pope Pius X appointed him minister plenipotentiary of Costa Rica and apostolic delegate to the countries of Central America. In 1915 Pope Benedict XV named him cardinal (the first Salesian so honored), and in 1920 bishop of Frascati.

He died in Rome in 1926. In 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 XV.

COSTAMAGNA, JAMES (1846-1921), Bishop

James Costamagna came from Caramagna in the province of Cuneo to study at the Oratory at the age of twelve. In 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 to Argentina. He accompanied General Julius Roca as chaplain on a military expedition calculated to subdue the tribes of the Pampas. He saved many Indians from the vengeful attacks by the soldiers and brought them to the faith (see Vol. XIV, pp. 217-220, 223).

In 1880, on Father Francis Bodrato's death, 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, 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 opened a house at Talca, Chile, 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 church of Mary Help of Christians in 1895. When his return to Ecuador was blocked by the anticlerical government, he went to Buenos Aires; Father Rua (see below) appointed him 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 retired to the novitiate house at Bernal, Argentina, where he died.

DALMAZZO, FRANCIS (1845-1895), Father

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 he was to depart, 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. 453-455). Astounded, he decided to remain at the Oratory, became a Salesian, and was ordained in 1868.

From 1872 to 1880 he was director at Valsalice; 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 the diocesan seminary, which was staffed by Salesians and, within a short time opened also a small secondary school. That same school year, an assassin shot him down; he died forgiving his assailant.

DE AGOSTINI, ALBERT (1883-1960), Father

Father De Agostini was outstanding as both a missionary and a scientist. A native of the province of Vercelli, he professed as a Salesian in 1902 and was ordained in 1909. Arriving in South America, he made Tierra del Fuego his particular field of evangelization and exploration, recording his observations on both paper and film. He published ten books about the Andes, Patagonia,

and Tierra del Fuego. He traversed tens of thousands of miles, baptizing thousands, anointing thousands, witnessing hundreds of marriages over a period of more than forty years. He retired to and died at the Oratory.

DURANDO, CELESTINE (1840-1907), Father

Born at Farigliano di Mondovì, Celestine Durando 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. 181-183). He was ordained a priest in 1864. The following year he became a member of the superior chapter and held that office for nearly forty years. From 1886 to 1903 he also served as provincial of a loose unit of Salesian houses in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Father Durando was well known for several highly praised school publications. In 1869 Don Bosco directed him to compile the collection *Italian Classics for the Young* (see Vol. IX, pp. 51, 196-197, 391). From 1869 to 1885 two hundred and four volumes were published, nineteen of them edited by Father Durando. He also authored an excellent Latin grammar and dictionary.

Father Durando distinguished himself by his zealous ministry in the confessional. "A silent man," wrote Father Rua (see below), "he lived a career of good works, rich in merit. Wherever he passed he left the image of a truly priestly Salesian spirit." He died at the Oratory.

FAGNANO, JOSEPH (1844-1916), Father, Prefect Apostolic

Joseph Fagnano came from Rocchetta Tanaro in the province of Asti. At twelve he enrolled in the Asti diocesan seminary. When the seminary closed in 1859, 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 in 1868.

In November 1875, since one of the ten confreres who were assigned to the first Salesian missionary expedition was unable to go, Don Bosco asked Father Fagnano to replace him, and he gladly did so. 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 144 boarders and as many day students. In 1879, 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, Father 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 1887 and then to Dawson Island, where he established St. Raphael Mission, which the Salesian Sisters 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. When the government withdrew funds, he had to abandon the project. Monsignor Fagnano died in Santiago, Chile.

FASCIE, BARTHOLOMEW (1861-1937), Father

Born at Verezzi in the province of Savona, Bartholomew Fascie enrolled at the age of fifteen as a student in the Salesian high school at nearby Alassio. After graduation he 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 high school. In 1890 he finally decided to become a Salesian and a year later 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, Father Paul Albera (see above) appointed him prefect general of studies in 1919 when this office became vacant. Subsequent general chapters re-elected 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.

GHIVARELLO, CHARLES (1835-1913), Father

Charles Ghivarello, born at Pino Torinese in the province of Turin, entered the Oratory at the age of twenty and received the clerical habit from Don Bosco the following year. He was a friend of Dominic Savio. In 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 councillor of the superior chapter (see Vol. VI, pp.181-183). He made his first vows in 1862 and was ordained 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 Father Ghivarello would be an excellent confessor, and it was in that ministry that he best revealed his fatherly goodness. But he was also a talented architect, engineer, and agriculturist, and in those capacities rendered valuable service to the Salesian Congregation. At San Benigno Canavese, where he spent twenty-five years of his life and where he died, he built the school chapel and a machine shop.

GIORDANO, LAWRENCE (1856-1919), Bishop

After studying with the Salesians at Lanzo, Lawrence Giordano joined the Society in 1872. His first field of apostolate was France, where he was ordained in 1878. He went to Villa Colón, Uruguay, in 1881, and thence to Brazil, where he served as director and later as provincial (1908-1912). He published several books and was a tireless worker for the Gospel. In character he was large-hearted, intelligent, and self-sacrificing. In 1916 he was named prefect apostolic of the Rio Negro (Brazil), a mission entrusted to the Salesians two years earlier. On one of his apostolic journeys he was felled by a mysterious illness and died in a few days.

LASAGNA, LOUIS (1850-1895), Bishop

Louis Lasagna first met Don Bosco in the summer of 1862 during one of the latter's outings with the Oratory boys (see Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179-180). He received the clerical garb in 1866, made his first vows in 1868, was ordained a priest in 1873, and joined the second missionary expedition to South America in 1876. As director and provincial, he achieved marked success in the fields of education, social action, agriculture, vocations, and church construction. In 1893 he was consecrated bishop and entrusted with the evangelization of the Indians of Mato Grosso state, Brazil. He died in a train wreck at Juiz de Fora, Brazil.

LEMOYNE, JOHN BAPTIST (1839-1916), Father

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

In 1883 he came to the motherhouse as editor of the *Bollettino Salesiano* and secretary of the superior chapter. The four-plus 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, Father Lemoyne 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 *Memorie biografiche di don Giovanni Bosco*, the first nine of which he authored. Noteworthy among his other works are a two-volume life of Don Bosco and a biography of Mamma Margaret, Don Bosco's mother. He died in Turin.

MARENCO, JOHN (1853-1921), Bishop

John Marengo was born in Ovada in the province of Alessandria. 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 as a novice without further discussion and admitted him to his religious vows the following year. He was ordained 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 Father Rua (see below) sent Father Marengo to Sampierdarena as director, in 1890 appointed him provincial of the Salesian houses in Liguria and Tuscany, and in 1892 made him vicar general of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Finally, in 1899 Father Rua named him procurator of the Salesian Society with the Holy See. He filled that office until 1909, when Pope Pius X appointed 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 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.

MARTINI, MAGDALENE (1849-1883), Sister

A native of the province of Turin, Magdalene Martini came to the Salesian Sisters in 1875. She aspired to the missionary life, from her first years as a sister living a life of continuous and hidden self-denial. When Mother Mazzarello asked for candidates for the 1879 missionary expedition, Sister Magdalene was the first to volunteer. Though she was professed only three years, she was ap-

pointed superior of the sisters in America; she had already been prepared for such responsibility by her prudence and her profound faith, as well as the guidance of Don Bosco. She needed all her virtues to deal with daily hardship and opposition in Argentina. Matters had barely settled down when she was stricken with an illness that compelled her to spend most of her last two years as an invalid, offering her sufferings for God's glory and the good of her neighbor.

MILANESIO, DOMINIC (1843-1922), Father

Dominic Milanese, a native of Settimo Torinese, in 1866 called on Don Bosco for advice about his vocation. As a result of the advice he became a Salesian, making his first vows in 1869. In 1873 he was ordained a priest. A member of the third missionary expedition (1877), he first worked in the Boca district of Buenos Aires, but in 1880 he became a full-fledged missionary in Patagonia, which he crisscrossed at incredible sacrifice, winning the love of all.

When in 1883 the leading native chieftan, Manuel Namuncurá, decided to surrender to the Argentinian government, he asked Father Milanese to act as an intermediary, as recounted in this volume. It was he again who, on December 24, 1888, baptized the Namuncurá's son Zepherino, whose cause of beatification has been introduced. Father Milanese was rightfully called the "Father of the Indians." He died in Bernal, Argentina.

PROVERA, FRANCIS (1836-1874), Father

Although Francis Provera of Mirabello had long nurtured a calling to the priesthood, he was unable to answer it until 1858, when he met Don Bosco and came to the Oratory. He immediately impressed the saint with his success as an apostle in the festive oratory. Subsequently he became a talented high school teacher. He took part in the first Salesian profession of triennial vows in May 1862. Between 1862 and 1870 Don Bosco made him prefect of the Oratory, Mirabello, Lanzo, and Cherasco in turn, for he showed rare ability in managing the economy of the houses. He was ordained in 1864. His health began to fail around 1869, and he asked Don Bosco for a change. In 1870 the saint brought him back to the Oratory to teach philosophy to the seminarians, and again he displayed wonderful teaching gifts: careful preparation, powerful memory, ease and clarity of expression. These abilities also served him well in the pulpit. In 1872 Don Bosco appointed him to the superior chapter. When he died, after a long, painful illness, Don Bosco lamented that "the Society has lost one of its best members." He is mentioned often in Vols. V-X of *The Biographical Memoirs*.

RUA, MICHAEL (1837-1910), Father (Blessed)

Michael Rua was born in Turin. 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 been dubbed “Don Bosco’s double.” In January 1854 he and three other youths 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 privately 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 at the end of that year 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. 181-183).

He was ordained a priest in 1860 and three years later became the first Salesian director, assuming charge of the junior seminary at Mirabello. On the death of Father Victor Alasonatti in 1865, Don Bosco recalled Father Rua to the Oratory to assume financial responsibility for the Salesian Society. He was Don Bosco’s right-hand man. As Father 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 [Don Bosco’s] 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 64 houses to 341, extending beyond Europe to North and South America, Africa, and Asia.

Father 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 given externally an impression of strictness, he was a gentle, warm, and thoughtful superior, so much so that he rivaled Don Bosco in gentleness and fatherliness.

Twelve years after Father Rua’s death at the Oratory, the process for his beatification and canonization was begun. He was declared Venerable in 1953 and beatified in 1972. His feast day is October 29.

SALA, ANTHONY (1836-1895), Father

Anthony Sala, born near Como, entered the Oratory in 1863 after giving up the management of his family’s silk mill. He was a gift from God to Don Bosco. Since he showed special administrative talent, he was assigned to help Father Alasonatti, the Oratory’s treasurer, who was then in poor health. Entrusting himself to Don Bosco’s guidance, Anthony made his profession in 1865, and in little more than six years became a priest.

In 1875, Father Sala was appointed councillor of the superior chapter, replacing Father Ghivarello. Because of his particular ability, Don Bosco put Fa-

ther Sala in charge of remodeling the motherhouse of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Nizza Monferrato and of 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.

Father Sala worked restlessly to his dying day. He died at the Oratory after a brief illness.

SAVIO, ANGELO (1835-1893), Father

Angelo Savio, from Castelnuovo d'Asti, was a compatriot of both Don Bosco and Father Cagliero (see above). He entered the Oratory in 1850. He was already a deacon when he took part with the first group of young men who banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society in December 1859 (see Vol. VI, pp. 181-183); they elected him economer general, a post to which he was re-elected in 1869 and 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 also a man of deep prayer and great trust. He died while on a missionary journey in Ecuador, after eight years of fruitful mission activity.

VACCHINA, BERNARD (1859-1935), Father

Born at Revignano d'Asti, Bernard Vacchina entered the Oratory in 1871 and grew under Don Bosco's eye. In 1876 he donned the clerical habit during his spiritual retreat at Lanzo. While his fellow novices remained there for a while, Don Bosco called Bernard to the Oratory to assist the newly entered pupils. Volume XIII of these *Memoirs* (pp. 639-645) has a charming description of his vicissitudes as a teacher under Don Bosco's fatherly guidance. In 1877 he made his perpetual vows and, volunteering for the missions, two years later was sent to Uruguay. After a brief stint at Villa Colón, he became secretary of the internuncio at Buenos Aires, where he was ordained in 1882 and exercised his priestly ministry in the difficult parish of the Boca district. Five years later, the vicar apostolic of Central Patagonia appointed him director at Viedma. After some thirty years of zealous missionary work, he retired to St. John the Evangelist school in Buenos Aires, where he continued his priestly work, which was made ever more fruitful by his physical sufferings, until his death.

VESPIGNANI, JOSEPH (1854-1932), Father

Born at Lugo, Joseph started his secondary schooling with the Benedictines 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 hoped to live at least long enough to say 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 as novice master to Argentina with the third missionary expedition. After spending seventeen years with Father 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. In 1948 his remains were brought to Buenos Aires and entombed in St. Charles 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*.

VIGLIETTI, CHARLES (1864-1915), Father

Charles Viglietti was born at Susa in the province of Turin. He received the clerical habit from Don Bosco in 1882 and made his perpetual vows the next year. On various occasions Don Bosco entrusted him with special tasks that offered the young cleric opportunities to assimilate the Founder's spirit. Brother Charles then became Don Bosco's secretary in his last years and, as such, accompanied him to Spain in 1886. In December of that same year, he was ordained, and from then on he took filial care of Don Bosco as his health gradually worsened. He lovingly assisted the saint until his death on January 31, 1888.

In 1896 Father Rua (see above) sent Father Viglietti to Bologna to open the first Salesian house there, which he directed until 1904. During those years he also erected a monumental shrine to the Sacred Heart of Jesus next to the school. From 1904 to 1906 he was director at Savona and from 1906 to 1912 at Varazze. In 1907 he undauntedly faced vicious lies and attacks from the Freemasons against the Salesians, but in the end truth triumphed.

Father Viglietti was a talented and prolific writer. He spent his last years at the Oratory, passing away after a painful illness.

Appendix 2

THE USE OF PUNISHMENTS IN SALESIAN HOUSES¹

(See chapter 1, note 7)

Feast of St. Francis 1883

My dear sons,

Time and again, from various sources, I have been receiving requests, even pleas, to draw up some rules for our directors, headmasters, and teachers to guide them in the difficult cases when punishments are called for in our houses. You are aware of the critical times we live in and how easily a slight imprudence can have dire consequences.

I do want to honor your request and thus spare both you and me some serious unpleasantness or, better still, help us all to do the greatest possible good to the youngsters whom Divine Providence will entrust to our care. Hence these few directives and advice. I hope you will observe them, for they will be very helpful to you in the sacred and difficult task of religious, moral, and academic education.

In general, the educational method we must follow is the *preventive* system,² which aims at motivating our pupils to do what we ask of them with no external force on our part. In other words, this system means that we must never use *coercive means*. Always and only, persuasion and kindness.

Since, however, our human nature, too easily prone to evil, must at times be severely curbed, I think it best to offer you some means which I hope, with God's help, will bring us consoling results. First and foremost, if we wish to be known as true friends of our pupils when we demand they carry out their duties, you must never forget that you represent the parents of those dear young

¹We have based our translation on the critical edition by José Manuel Prellezo, published in *Ricerche storiche salesiane*, V (1986), 263-308, rather than on the version offered as document 1 in the appendix of the Italian edition of this volume, pp. 439-447. Included in Father Prellezo's treatment is a discussion of the manuscripts (pp. 274-284) and possible authorship (pp. 266-268). [Editor]

²See *Regulations of the Houses of the Society of St. Francis de Sales*. [Footnote in the original]

people who have always been the tender object of my concern, study, and priestly ministry, as well as of our Salesian Congregation. And so, if you are to be true fathers to your pupils, you too must have a father's heart and never resort to *repression* or to *punishments* which are unreasonable and unjust. You must also show that you are being forced to punish and cannot shirk your responsibility.

I now intend to point out the true reasons which must induce you to *repression* and which punishments may be used and who should use them.

I. PUNISH ONLY AS A LAST RESORT

How often in my long career, my dear sons, have I had to convince myself of this important truth! It is certainly much easier to lose one's temper than to be patient, to threaten a child rather than to persuade him. Let me say also that it better suits our impatience and our pride to punish those who resist us than to correct them and bear with them firmly and kindly. The charity I am suggesting is that shown by St. Paul to his new Christian converts to our Lord's religion; he was often driven to tears, but he would pray for them whenever he felt they were less docile and less responsive to his anxious care.

And so I ask all directors to be the first to correct our dear children with fatherliness, and let it be done in private, or as we say, *in camera caritatis*. They are never to reprimand anyone in public unless it be a case of forestalling or repairing scandal.

If the first admonition brings on no improvement, let the director consult with another superior who may have some influence over the culprit. Finally let him discuss it with the Lord. I would like the Salesian to be always like Moses, who strove to placate the Lord when He became justly indignant with His people Israel. It is my experience that punishment summarily given without first trying other means rarely does any good. The heart, says St. Gregory, is an impregnable castle, and no one can force his way into it; it can be taken only by love and gentleness. Be firm in pursuing good and averting evil, but always with gentleness and prudence. Be perseverant and lovable, and you will see that God will give you mastery over even the least docile hearts. I know that this demands a perfection not commonly found in teachers and assistants, especially younger ones. They do not want to accept children as they should but prefer to use physical punishments. Thus they get nowhere. Either they let the situation get out of hand, or they deal out punishments whether they are merited or not.

That is why we often see evil spreading and breeding discontent even among the better students, while the one who should be correcting the situation has become powerless to do any good. Here again I must rely upon my own personal experience. I have often come across some youngsters so stub-

bornly opposed to the very notion of being good that they have made me lose any hope for their improvement, forcing me to take severe measures with them; and only kindness won them over. We sometimes think that this type of boy is not profiting from our correction, while actually his heart is strongly prompting him to follow our lead. We would let him go to the devil by an unwarranted severity on our part and by expecting the culprit to take *instant* and *decisive* steps to amend his behavior. Let me say first of all that he probably believes he does not deserve such a severe punishment for the fault he committed more through light-mindedness than malice. I have often summoned such disruptive youngsters, treated them kindly, and asked them why they were so intractable. Their defense was that they were being picked on or that they were being hounded by one superior or another. Later, I had to admit, a calm, unbiased investigation of the matter revealed that their guilt was appreciably diminished if not totally wiped away. This leads me to say with some pain that we ourselves have always had our share of responsibility for their guilt. I have also noticed that teachers who demanded of their pupils silence, punishment, exactness, prompt and unquestioning obedience were also the very ones who took no heed of the sound advice which I and other superiors were obliged to give them. I have also become convinced that those teachers who forgive nothing in their pupils usually absolve themselves of every fault. Therefore, if we wish to know how to command, let us first know how to obey, and let us endeavor to make ourselves loved more than feared.

When the time comes for us to change tactics, however, and *repression* becomes necessary, since certain traits in our pupils can be controlled only with severity, we must know how to act without showing the slightest sign of passion. Hence flows my second recommendation, which I call:

II. CHOOSE A FAVORABLE TIME TO REPRIMAND

Everything in its own time, says the Holy Spirit. And my advice to you is this: when, sadly, we are forced to reprimand we also need great prudence to choose the moment when the punishment will prove helpful. The soul's ailments require at least as much care as those of the body. Nothing is more dangerous than a remedy ill applied or applied at the wrong time. A skillful physician bides his time until the patient is able to handle the medication, and waits for the favorable time. We, too, will be able to know the right time only by experience permeated by goodness of heart. First and foremost, wait until you are in control of yourself. Do not let it appear that you are acting out of caprice or anger, for then you will forfeit your authority and the punishment will prove harmful.

Recall the well known dictum of Socrates to a slave who had displeased him: "If I were not angry, I would strike you." These young observers of ours,

our pupils, can tell from the slightest flush of the face or our tone of voice whether it is zeal or heat of anger that gives rise to that passion within us. That is all that we need to wipe out any good which might result from punishment, for, young as they are, our pupils realize that reason alone has the right to punish them.

In the second place, never punish a boy at the moment of his fault, lest, unable then and there to admit his guilt or overcome his resentment, or even realize that he deserves punishment, he may turn bitter and behave even worse. You must give him time to reflect, to return to his senses, to become aware of his wrong and of the justice and need of punishment, and thus allow himself to benefit from it. I am always reminded of how our Lord chose to deal with St. Paul when the latter was “still breathing murderous threats” against the Christians. It seems to me that the Lord was leaving us, too, the rule to follow when we come across certain stubborn hearts rebelling against our wills. Jesus in His goodness did not strike Saul down *immediately*. He threw him to the ground only after a long journey, after he had had time to reflect upon his mission and was far from anyone who might strengthen his resolve to persecute the Christians. It was there, at the gates of Damascus, that Jesus showed Himself in all His authority and might; with gentle forcefulness He opened Saul’s mind to see his error. It was precisely at that moment that his attitude changed, and from persecutor he became the Apostle of the Gentiles, a vessel of election. I would like my dear Salesians to form themselves after this divine model, so that with enlightened patience and solicitous love, they may in God’s name await *the opportune moment* to correct their pupils.

III. DO NOT MAKE IT APPEAR THAT YOU ARE ACTING OUT OF ANGER

It is difficult when punishing to maintain that necessary calm which will eliminate all doubt that one is trying to assert his authority or to give vent to his anger. The more spitefully we act, the less aware we are of it. The fatherly heart that we should have condemns such behavior. Let us look upon the pupils under our care as our own children. Shying away from anything that might smack of domineering, let us place ourselves at their service like Jesus, who came among us to obey rather than to command. Let our only authority over them be to serve them with increased dedication. Thus did Jesus act toward His apostles, tolerating their ignorance, rudeness, and shaky fidelity, reaching out to sinners with such ease and friendliness as to astonish some people, practically to scandalize others, and to kindle in many the blessed hope of receiving divine pardon. Hence he tells us to learn from Him to be “meek and humble of heart.” Once these pupils have become our children, let us banish all anger when we must correct their failings, or at least so restrain it as to make it seem to disappear. Let there be no vexation in our souls, no contempt

in our eyes, no cutting remarks on our lips. Rather, let us show compassion for the present and hope for the future. In this manner you will prove to be true fathers, and your correction will be genuine.

In particularly serious situations, commending oneself humbly to God will help much more than a storm of words which, on the one hand, will bring nothing but harm to the listeners and, on the other hand, will be of no advantage to those who deserve them. Let us call to mind how our divine Redeemer forgave that town which had barred His entrance, despite the charge by those two zealous apostles of His that His honor had been slighted; they would gladly have wished to see Him blast them with well-deserved punishment. This self-control the Holy Spirit commends to us in those sublime words of David: "Be angry and sin not." If we sometimes see our work as fruitless and all our efforts reaping nothing but thorns and thistles, believe me, my dear friends, the blame must fall upon a defective system of discipline. I know this is not the time to expand upon this somber, down-to-earth lesson which God once taught His prophet Elijah, who, I would say, had something in common with us in his eagerness for God's cause and his rash zeal to repress the scandals that he saw multiplying in the house of Israel. Your superiors can discuss it at length with you as we read it in the book of Kings. I will just quote the closing passage, which is so relevant for us: "The Lord was not in the wind," which St. Teresa interprets as, "Let nothing upset you."

Our dear, meek St. Francis de Sales, as you know, had made a strict rule for himself that his tongue should not speak when his heart was in turmoil. "I fear," he used to say, "that I will lose in fifteen minutes the little sweetness I have striven for twenty years to accumulate, drop by drop, like dew, in the vessel of my poor heart. The bee takes several months to prepare the honey that a person can swallow in one gulp. Besides, what is the use of speaking to one who is not listening?" Reproved one day for having treated with undue kindness a boy who had had a bad run-in with his mother in a serious matter, he replied, "*This lad was in no condition to benefit by my corrections because the bad attitude of his heart had deprived him of reason and good sense. A sharp reprimand would have done him no good and would have hurt me as badly by making me act like one who drowns in an attempt to save others.*" These words of our admirable patron, gentle and wise educator of the heart that he was, I have deliberately emphasized to bring them to your attention, that you may all the more readily impress them into your memory.

In certain cases it may help to remark to someone in the culprit's hearing how sad it is that sometimes people lose all sense of reason and self-respect even to the point of inviting punishment. It also helps to withhold all the usual signs of trust and friendship from one unless you realize that he needs a word of comfort. Often enough the Lord has consoled me by this simple stratagem. Public reprimand must be the last resort. Sometimes you may ask another per-

son with influence to speak to the offender and tell him what you would like to say yourself but cannot. He may move the lad to put aside his embarrassment and be ready to talk to you. For this, choose someone to whom the boy can more freely open his aching heart than to you, either because he fears you will not believe him or because pride tells him he should not talk to you. Let these stratagems be like the disciples whom Jesus used to send before Him to prepare His way.

Make it clear to the lad that you are not suggesting anything more than what is reasonable and necessary. Try to put it in such a way that the pupil will end up blaming himself, and then all there is left for you to do is mitigate the punishment which he is ready to accept. My final recommendation to you in this serious matter is that, once you have managed to win over this stubborn soul, please do not just leave him with the hope that you have forgiven him, but reassure him that by his good conduct he can wipe out the bad name which his misbehavior has warranted.

IV. ALWAYS LEAVE THE CULPRIT WITH THE HOPE OF PARDON

We must always ease the anxiety and fear aroused by correction and put in a word of comfort. To forget and to make a youngster forget the dark hours of his mistakes is the supreme art of a good educator. We do not read that Jesus reminded Mary Magdalene of her past failings, and it was with the tenderest fatherly delicacy that He led St. Peter to admit his guilt and rid himself of his weakness. A child needs to know that his superior has high hopes for his betterment and thus to feel his superior's kindly hand steering him back to the path of virtue. Indeed, we obtain more with a friendly glance, with a word of encouragement, which arouse confidence in a lad's heart, than with a flood of reprimands which only upset him and crush his spirit. I have seen this method achieve true conversions which would otherwise have been deemed utterly impossible. I know that some of my own dearest sons are not ashamed to admit that they were won over to the Congregation, and so to God, by this means. All youngsters have their crises, as you too have had your own. Heaven help us if we do not make an effort to aid them over these moments swiftly and blamelessly. At times just letting them know that we do not think they acted maliciously is enough to prevent them from falling into the same fault. They may be guilty, but they do not want to be seen that way. How blessed we are if we can learn to apply also these means to educate these poor hearts! Be assured, my dear sons, that this art, which appears so easy and not conducive to good results, will make your ministry useful and win over to you certain hearts which were and would long continue to be incapable not only of happy achievement but also of any hope of improvement.

V. WHICH PUNISHMENTS MAY BE USED, AND BY WHOM

Are punishments never allowed? My dear sons, I realize that the Lord chose to compare Himself to a "vigilant rod," *virga vigilans*, so as to deter us from sin also by fear of punishment. We too, therefore, can and must sparingly and wisely follow the pattern which He traces out for us in this effective metaphor. Yes, let us use this *rod*, but let us know how to use it reasonably and lovingly, so that our correction be such as may bring improvement.

We must bear in mind that, while force punishes crime, it does not cure the criminal. Just as a plant does not thrive on harsh or violent treatment, neither is the will trained by being subjected to excessive strain. Here are some punishments which are the *only* ones I wish us to use. One of the most effective kinds of moral force is the superior's unhappy, stern, and grieved look, which tells the culprit—little heart as he may have—that he has shamed himself and may move him to feel sorry and do better. Correction is to be private and fatherly, with no excessive reproaching, but rather impressing the culprit with his family's disappointment and the hope of reward. In the long run he will feel compelled to show himself thankful and even generous. Should he slip again, let us not run short on kindness, but move on to more serious and decisive admonishment which will enable him to recognize the vast difference between the way he is acting and the way he is being treated. Let us show him how he is repaying all the gracious efforts being made to save him from disgrace and punishment. No humiliating words, however. Let him know that we have not lost hope for him but are ready at any time to let bygones be bygones the moment he gives signs of improving his behavior.

More serious infractions may be punished in some of these ways: eating supper standing in one's place or at a separate table or in the middle of the dining room or, last of all, by the door. But in all these cases see to it that the culprit gets the same food as his companions. A grave punishment is to deprive him of recreation, but he is not to be exposed to the sun or inclement weather so that he would be harmed by it.

To ignore him in the classroom for *one day*, and no more than that, can also be a serious punishment. In the meantime he should be encouraged to mend his ways. Now, what do I think of *punishment work*? Unfortunately it is all too commonly used. I have consulted some of the most renowned educators to learn what they have to say about it. Some, I found, approve, while others discount it as worthless and hazardous to both pupil and teacher. I leave it up to your own discretion, but I cite the risk you run. A teacher can easily go to extremes to no purpose at all, while the pupil is free to complain that he is being picked on and thus gain the sympathy of others. *Punishment work* remedies nothing; it is always a penalty and humiliation. I know of one confrere who used to assign as *punishment* memorizing some lines of sacred and secular po-

etry; by such a useful means he obtained greater attention and some intellectual advantage. But this only confirms that “all things work for good” in those who seek only God, His glory, and the salvation of souls. This confrere of yours achieved conversions with *punishment work*, but I recognize it as a special divine blessing not only rare but unique. He succeeded only because he made his kindness evident.

Never are you to use the so-called *reflection closet*. The anger and dejection caused by this sort of treatment can thrust a child into all sorts of problems. The devil uses this punishment to exercise a most violent power over the child, driving him into doing grave offenses, as though in revenge on the one who has punished him in that manner.³

Our consideration of punishments has so far concentrated on violations of school rules. In the sad event, however, that a pupil gives grave scandal or offends the Lord, he is to be referred immediately to the director, who will prudently take the measures which he judges will be effective and opportune. Should this pupil be deaf to these thoughtful measures for his improvement and continue to give bad example and scandal to others, he should be summarily dismissed, his good name being protected as much as possible. This can be done by suggesting that the lad ask his family to withdraw him from the school or by directly advising the family to change schools in the hope that their son will do better elsewhere. This kind of thoughtfulness is always effective, and even in certain very painful situations it leaves both pupils and families with grateful memories.

Finally, let me tell you again who is to prescribe punishments and when and how he is to do so.

It must always be the director, though he is not to appear to do so. His role is to give private corrections, since he can more easily penetrate less docile hearts. He is also to administer general and public corrections. It is also his role to apply the punishment, though ordinarily he is not the one to threaten or carry it out. Therefore I wish that that no one should take it on himself to pun-

³Should it happen by rare exception and extreme necessity that one of our schools should feel that it must use the *closet*, let me state some precautions I would like used.

The catechist, or another superior, must often look in on the poor culprit and, with kind and compassionate words, seek to pour a little oil upon that irritated heart. He should sympathize with the lad's sorry situation and strive to let him understand that all his superiors are sorry that they had to use such an extreme measure. Let him try to lead the boy to ask for pardon, to indicate his readiness to obey, to ask for a chance to show his improvement. The moment this punishment seems to be effective, let it even be cut short. Then you can be assured you have won the lad's heart.

Punishment is meant to be a remedy, and we must be ready to stop it as soon as we have achieved our twofold end: to eliminate evil and to prevent its return. By pardoning we also bring precious healing to the lad's distressed heart; he sees that he has not lost his superior's good will, and he will all the more readily do what he ought. [Footnote in the original]

ish without the previous counsel or approval of the director, who alone will determine the time, extent, and manner of punishment. No one is to evade this loving dependence, nor to seek excuses for avoiding the surveillance of the director.⁴ There are to be no excuses to depart from this most important rule. Obey my recommendation, and God will bless and console you for your virtue.

Remember that education is a matter of the heart, of which God alone is the master, and that we can achieve nothing unless God teaches us the art and hands us the key. Hence let us use all means, including our entire and humble dependence upon Him, to become masters of that fortress which locks itself off from all severity and harshness. Let us strive to make ourselves loved, to instill a sense of duty and of holy fear of God, and we shall see hearts open to us with surprising ease; they will join us in singing the praises and blessing of Him who chose to make Himself our model, our way, our example in all things, especially in the education of the young.

Pray for me, and believe me always in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus

Your most loving father and friend,
Fr. John Bosco

⁴Neither teachers nor assistants are ever to put a culprit out of the classroom. In breaches of discipline let them send him with another pupil to the director. [Footnote in the original]

Appendix 3

PROTESTANT INSTITUTES IN ITALY¹

(See chapter 1, note 16)

It will be useful to describe the conditions existing in our country at the present time, a country which, under the pretext of political unity, is seeking to destroy religious unity. The six divisions or denominations of Protestants in Italy, at least according to the figures specified in the following census table, have:

Places of worship	231
Ministers or preachers.....	282
Elementary schools	280
Directors or teachers in elementary schools	154
Pupils in elementary schools	9,387
Secondary schools	13
Teachers in secondary schools.....	90
Pupils in secondary schools	809
Theological schools	2
Professors in theological schools	7
Students in theological schools.....	25
Charitable institutions	3
Residents in charitable institutions	98
Hospitals	8

Please note that it may happen that the aforesaid ministers and preachers may or may not be ministers and preachers! This is stated in the remarks of the census reports on Protestants! The report is also obliged to state that Protestant schools “leave much to be desired in their instructional organization, while the utility of (Protestant) day schools as means of propaganda is disputed today.”

There are five Bible societies active in Italy.

¹Italian appendix, document 6. [Editor]

The British or Foreign Bible Society in Italy has an agent and 40 canvassers; in 1881 it sold 6,619 Bibles in this kingdom, 19,135 copies of the New Testament, and 44,409 extracts from the Bible.

The Bible Society of Scotland has an agent and 11 canvassers in Italy; in 1881 it sold 850 Bibles, 252 copies of the New Testament, 4,320 extracts, and 6,942 religious books and tracts.

The Society for Religious Tracts has a committee, an agent, and its own printing press in Florence. It publishes several illustrated periodicals and has in Italy 10 depositories for Bibles and tracts.

The Italian Bible Society, founded in 1870 at Rome, reprinted an edition of the New Testament, running 10,000 copies, as well as an edition of the Bible for family use.

Laura says that among the Evangelists of Naples, Messina, La Spezia, and Orbetello the Society for Mutual Assistance has "few members and is not very active."

There are eleven Evangelical newspapers and periodicals published in Italy, two of which are printed at Rome, one at Naples, one at Palermo, one at Pomaretto in the Waldensian valleys, and the remainder at Florence. The only readers these periodicals above listed have, the census report says, are the evangelists of the various denominations.

Appendix 4

AN ATTACK ON DON BOSCO, PUBLISHED IN A NOTORIOUS PERIODICAL¹

(See chapter 1, note 23)

DON BOSCO AND THE CONVENTS

Don Bosco has not been satisfied with acquiring for himself a great many youths whose arms could be exploited in agriculture and in industry, and whose brains could render some service to the nation; he has not been satisfied with harnessing all this manpower to his own Salesian Society, which will one day march forth on behalf of the Pope to the detriment of Italy; Don Bosco for some time now has been turning his attention to girls.

He started by opening a convent at Nizza Monferrato, assisted in this undertaking by a devout, bigoted countess whom he calls the mother of his sons.² This countess, who could instead be doing something for her relatives, has been so soundly tricked by the Saint of Valdocco, who promises her a seat near St. Roch in paradise and a little niche on the altar, that she turns over everything she owns to the cause of our sly Don Giovanni.

Thanks to her, today Don Bosco finds the doors of all the bigoted aristocracy open to him, this aristocracy possessing not only noble lineage but also a fair number of stocks and bonds. By this means he has been able to found a convent in Turin, as well, while he will be opening others in Italy in days to come.

All this takes place under the nose of the government, under the nose of Zanardelli, who is aware that religious corporations were abolished both by law and in fact.³

¹Italian appendix, document 10. [Editor]

²This alludes to Countess [Gabrielle] Corsi. [Author]

³Joseph Zanardelli (1826-1903) from his youth worked and fought for the freedom of Italy from the Austrians and, after unification, was politically a "liberal." After the Left came to power in 1876, he held various cabinet and parliamentary positions, including the premiership (1901-1903). From 1881 to 1883 he was minister of Grace and Justice, the department charged with applying the laws of suppression against religious orders. [Editor]

By doing this Don Bosco makes money. He recruits his victims among wealthy families. He acquires a lamb for God, so he says, and a dowry for the coffers of his association.

I know a poor father who, thanks to these movements, is today but one step removed from misery and bewails his poor daughter, who died without his blessing. She died of tuberculosis, in desperation, died without kissing her father good-bye.⁴

I shall return to this subject and, if necessary, will say everything I have in mind. Would it not be time, though, for the government to open its eyes and take some step?

ACATE

⁴Father Lemoyne wrote in the margin beside this sentence: "This may mean Dr. Ferrero. This is our reward for having taken in three of his daughters gratis at Mornese." [Author]

Appendix 5

OBTAINING AN IMPRIMATUR FROM THE TURIN CHANCERY¹

(See chapter 1, note 25)

It was decided we had best obtain an imprimatur [for the booklet “Jesus Christ, Our God and Our King”] from the Turin chancery. It was no easy matter, however, because the chancery looked upon us with disfavor. So we had to resort to a little strategem. The coadjutor Ghiglione took the task upon himself. He went to the chancery and presented to Canon [Thomas] Chiuso, the vicar general, a copy of the booklet printed at Sampierdarena. Posing as a member of the Catholic Workers Society—which was really true—he said he was interested in selling the booklet. Canon Chiuso received him cordially. Brother Ghiglione requested his imprimatur, claiming that a second printing was most urgent since Turin did not have a single copy. The canon flipped through the pages and replied, “We’ll see.”

“But I’m in a hurry.”

“Come back tonight.”

That evening Ghiglione went back. The canon seemed annoyed. “You’ll have to excuse me,” he said. “I’ve had a very busy day. I had no time, but I’ll look through it. Come back tomorrow.” And he specified the hour.

The next morning Ghiglione returned at the appointed time. A chancery attendant hastened to tell him, “The vicar general is out. He’s in choir.”

“But he assured me I was to come at this time and he’d be waiting for me.”

“I don’t know what to say. The fact is he told us he wouldn’t be in the office today. He probably forgot the appointment with you. Please be patient.”

“My patience goes only so far. This is the third time I’ve come here, and it’s a very long trip for me. Besides, I have my own business to attend to. People like this tempt one to bypass their authority.”

“Come now, why don’t you make one more trip after dinner. You’ll see that the vicar general will be in.”

¹Italian appendix, document 11. [Editor]

Ghiglione returned for the fourth time that evening. Canon Chiuso was in his office with Father [John Baptist] Anfossi, and Ghiglione had to wait. He was finally called in. The canon kept fumbling for more excuses.

"I have work to do! I don't have time to waste!" exclaimed Ghiglione. "I'm a craftsman, and I don't get paid unless I put in a day's work. If you don't care to approve it, tell me, and I'll take it to be printed elsewhere."

"Very well, very well," answered the the canon, searching for the book among the papers on his desk. Picking it up, he leafed through it and then rose with the words, "Here, I've seen it. You can print it. But that title—"Our God"—I have no problem with that. But 'Our King'! Why that title? What does 'Our King' mean?"

"Pardon me," replied Ghiglione, "but isn't Jesus Christ our King?"

"Of course, of course! But couldn't that title be changed?"

"Is he or is he not our King? Excuse me, but I've always been told he is, and every day we say, 'Christ, you are the king of glory!' And the catechism says, 'I believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord.' Isn't the title of Lord equivalent to King? Besides, as you can see, the booklet already has the approval of the chancery of Genoa, which would never have approved an error. This imprimatur would be enough, and I could have the booklet printed there, but I find it more convenient to have it done here."

"Since you already have the imprimatur of Genoa, go ahead and get it printed."

"Futhermore, the plates are already made. Changing the title would mean redoing the plates. You know what that would cost."

Canon Chiuso signed the imprimatur. That was all Ghiglione was waiting for. As soon as he had the approval in his hand, he bade the canon a hasty good-bye and moved toward the door. At that instant Canon Chiuso had a sudden thought. "Young man," he called out.

Ghiglione turned around.

"Are you one of Don Bosco's people?"

"Precisely!" replied Ghiglione. "At your service!" And without further ado he bowed and left.

Appendix 6

ARTICLE ABOUT DON BOSCO IN *L'ECLAIR*, MARCH 31, 1883¹

(See chapter 2, note 30)

Within a few days the city of Lyons will have the good fortune to host Don Bosco. Without a doubt this seat of France's primates² and center of so many marvelous undertakings will once more³ gladly welcome the beloved and saintly priest whom all of Italy has long revered as one of its finest and certainly brightest glories, and whom France—ever an admirer of great accomplishments and of heroes chosen by Providence as instruments of its mercy—is starting to love and bless.

It has been difficult to find anyone since the times of St. Vincent de Paul who has won such wide popularity among the people as Don Bosco has. In Turin, where he began his works, the people acclaim him as their benefactor and call him by the sweet name of the Father of the Poor, *Pater Pauperum*. This was one of the names given to Christ.⁴ At Rome the Sovereign Pontiff, Leo XIII, following the example left by his holy and illustrious predecessor, feels a fatherly affection for Don Bosco and greatly esteems his merits. In conclusion, the name of this humble Turinese priest is blessed even as far away as the distant shores of Brazil and Patagonia.

This aura of popularity which radiates from Don Bosco's brow, this universal wave of esteem and love which comforts the declining years of this venerable old man, constitute the just reward and worthy crown of an existence consecrated entirely to the consolation of human sorrows and, in particular, to the rescue of youngsters abandoned to corruption, debauchery, dishonor, and infamy.

But before he saw his works flourishing, Don Bosco had to sustain a long battle, and very often during the course of his long and arduous career, he underwent the cruel grief to which at times the souls of the elect are condemned, when facing ob-

¹Italian appendix, document 20, in French. [Editor]

²As the original episcopal see of ancient Gaul, Lyons holds the honor of being the primate's see of France. [Editor]

³Don Bosco had visited Lyons just a year earlier; see Vol. XV, pp. 398-403. [Editor]

⁴Perhaps the journalist is confused. In the Bible the phrase "father of the poor" occurs only in Job 29:16, amid a passage that one could read as a messianic prediction. The messianic Psalm 72 announces the salvation of the poor without using the phrase "father of the poor." The Sequence for the Mass of Pentecost, on the other hand, calls the Holy Spirit *Pater pauperum*. [Editor]

stacles and opposition where they should have expected to find only encouragement and favor. A volume would not suffice to record all that he has had to endure in the way of anxiety, privation, and moral anguish ever since that day, now so long ago, when as a young priest he gathered together for the first time in the little church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin a few young vagrants he had met in the public squares of the Piedmontese capital.⁵

Ever since then, Don Bosco's work has progressed; it has grown at an inconceivably rapid pace. God has rendered the efforts of this holy priest fertile and has multiplied the children relying on his charity. The humble refuge of Cottolengo Street has grown into the magnificent Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, the motherhouse of the Salesian works, where more than 15,000 sons of the people⁶ live united under the same roof, animated by the same spirit. It is there, by dint of his *preventive system*, that Don Bosco has solved a philosophical and social problem, which has troubled the sleep of every lawmaker. This system, based entirely on reason, religion, and love, prevents the committing of a fault rather than repress it and has achieved wonderful results in every Salesian establishment.

For the last eight years France has had the joy of having on its soil a few houses founded by Don Bosco. St. Peter's Hospice at Nice and St. Leo's Oratory at Marseille are prospering, despite the agitated times in which we live. There are two agricultural schools in [the departments of] Var and Bouches-du-Rhône.⁷ In these French oratories, as in those in Italy, the young residents are trained for some trade or craft while also receiving a Christian education, so that they may be able later on to earn an honest living in the world and make themselves useful to society.

Don Bosco has been powerfully aided by the members of his Congregation in founding his houses in France. In promoting his works in France, he has been assisted in particular by his zealous collaborator Father [Joseph] Ronchail, one of his favorite sons. As director of St. Peter's Hospice at Nice since it was founded, this worthy priest, who is in the prime of life, has succeeded in only a few years in establishing the Salesian work firmly in our country.

Now a few words about St. Peter's Hospice, Don Bosco's first foundation on French soil, will give the reader some idea of the admirable organization of the Salesian oratories. It is truly a moving sight to see the hum of life in this beehive known as the Hospice, this tender refuge which has rescued more than 200 children reared in vice and poverty. A number of them are orphans, and in Father Ronchail they have found a father to guide them along the path of life and point out the road leading to heaven.

The rules wisely divide their day into a fair share of manual labor and study. They get up at five o'clock and go to bed at nine. The first part of the morning is de-

⁵See Vol. II, *passim*. [Editor]

⁶The boys attending the festive oratory are included in this figure. [Author]

⁷Apparently an error: Saint-Cyr and La Navarre (an estate in the district of La Crau, near Toulon) are both in Var. Marseille, though, is in Bouches-du-Rhône. [Editor]

voted to personal cleanliness, something quite new for the majority of newcomers, and to attending Mass. At eight o'clock the workshops are in full swing, and the pace does not slacken until six o'clock in the evening, except for meal times and recreation. In the evening the children attend classes in which, apart from religious instruction, they are also taught French, music, and basic knowledge that will help them grow up into honest, intelligent workmen. As one walks through the workshops at the Hospice, he feels his heart beat in the grip of a powerful impression, a sincere delight at the joy of being among so many youngsters who emanate the fragrance of their innocence, their freshness and gaiety, growing up under the paternal guidance of Don Bosco's sons, safe from the clutches of poverty and misfortune. The young apprentice carpenters, locksmiths, shoemakers, tailors, printers, and bookbinders are all healthy in appearance and are happy and joyful with their lot.

Alas! Were it not for Don Bosco, were it not for Christian charity, how many of these youngsters, so happy today would be wallowing in the graveyard of vice, and later in thievery, infamy, and finally in prison! All of you who love youth and are rightly concerned with the formidable problems of the social question should give some thought to the immense social peril threatening you and come to the assistance of those people who are fighting and laboring for you. And you readers who go to warm yourselves in the beautiful sunshine of Mediterranean shores during the winter season, do not forget to pay a visit to the Hospice at Nice, and warm your hearts amid Don Bosco's children. These delightful little creatures, creations of the good God, are warm-hearted; they are sensitive to any good you may do for them, and you may be sure that they will display their gratitude to you, lifting up their innocent hands every morning toward their heavenly Father who is also your Father, praying Him to reward your charity generously, according to the words of Christ: "Whatever you did for one of these least [brothers] of mine, you did for me" [Matt. 25:40].

Such is the great work of Don Bosco.

Soon the people of Lyons will hear the voice of that saintly priest, a voice one simply cannot hear without being deeply moved. Don Bosco will speak of his works with that sublime simplicity which lends charm to his words and strikes the innermost chords of the heart when he directs a warm appeal to the well-known outstanding generosity of the faithful of Lyons.

Charitable souls: you will gladly hearken to his appeal, and we are sure that you will be happy to contribute your generous donations to the support and growth of the Salesian works, which are par excellence Christian and patriotic works of sacrifice and love. Thus you will tell that good priest, Don Bosco, that he will always find in this beloved land of France sincere and true friends. Thus you too will be well deserving of both God and the fatherland.

ABEL REYNAUD

Appendix 7

LETTER FROM THE ABBOT OF SOLESMES TO DON BOSCO¹

(See chapter 5, note 4)

PAX

Solesmes
April 20, 1880

Dear Reverend Father,

I know that a number of our Fathers, among others the Reverend Father Fabre of Marseille, have invited you to come to us at Solesmes. Father Fabre tells me that you have almost promised him you would, and I am very glad to hear it. Would you permit me, Reverend Father, to join him in renewed insistence, on my own behalf and in the name of all our Fathers?

One of them² is in such great need of seeing you that he begged me to send him to Paris immediately, unless I could assure him of your visit to us. So please forgive me, Reverend Father, if I solicit the favor of a reply through your secretary.

I do not have to assure you how we are praying for the success of all your works; but how grateful to you we should be if you and your little rascals

¹Italian appendix, document 24, in French. The abbey of Solesmes, dedicated to St. Peter, was founded ca. 1000. During the French Revolution it was suppressed and sold. In 1833 Father Prosper Guéranger bought the property and re-established Benedictine life there, making it a center of religious renewal. It is still renowned for its influence on the liturgy, especially Gregorian chant. [Editor]

²After studying music at the Paris Conservatory, Andrew Mocquereau (1849-1930) entered the monastery of Solesmes in 1875. He worked closely with Dom Joseph Pothier in restoring Gregorian chant, eventually succeeding and superseding him. His work laid the basis for Pope Pius X's restoration of chant, and his influence still underlies the studies, publications, and music of the monks of Solesmes. [Editor]

would pray sometimes for these poor monks who have been driven out of their cloister.³

Yours sincerely,
Charles Couturier⁴
Abbot of Solesmes

³The anticlerical French government expelled the monks from their monastery in November 1880 and, after a brief reoccupation, a second time in March 1882. They were forced to live in three homes in the village and to use the parish church as their abbey church. [Editor]

⁴Louis Charles Couturier (1817-1890) entered St. Peter's Monastery in 1854. He was successively master of novices and prior, and on Dom Guéranger's death in 1875 was unanimously elected abbot. Despite the persecution of the government, he contributed greatly to the revival of Benedictine monasticism in France and continued to foster learning and piety as his distinguished predecessor had done. [Editor]

Appendix 8

WHY FRANCIS BOURNE, THE FUTURE CARDINAL, DID NOT BECOME A SALESIAN¹

(See chapter 6, note 11)

It was said that as a young priest, the future Cardinal Bourne² wanted to become a Salesian; but no authentic documents or testimonies in proof of this assertion were known until recently. While this volume was being printed [1934-1935], Salesian Father Louis Prieri sent us a copy of an important letter written by Father Rua on September 22, 1908, to Archbishop Bourne. Father Prieri had made this copy from the original letter when he was one of Father Rua's secretaries. After expressing his pleasure over the outcome of the [1908] Eucharistic Congress in London, the successor of St. John Bosco continued:

I cannot let the occasion of writing to you pass without recalling past events, events that certainly Your Excellency has not yet forgotten. I refer to the time when Your Excellency, then a young priest, honored the Salesian Oratory of Turin with a welcome visit, spoke privately with our Venerable³ Founder Don Bosco, and made a formal request to be admitted as an aspirant in the Congregation he had founded. But the Venerable [Don Bosco] dissuaded you from this intention and suggested that you return to your own country. He told you that the Lord did not want you to join the Salesian Congregation; instead, the field prepared for your zeal was amid your own compatriots.

Subsequent events have fully justified our Venerable [Father]: the field which Providence destined for your zeal was England; there Your Excellency has sown and reaped abundant spiritual fruit, not least among the crops being the recent Eucharistic Congress.

¹Italian appendix, document 33². [Editor]

²Francis Bourne (1861-1935) was born in London and, as indicated in the text, trained for the priesthood at St. Sulpice, where he was ordained in 1884. He became bishop of Southwark in 1896 and was transferred to Westminster as archbishop in 1903. Pope Pius X named him cardinal in 1911. He defended Catholic schools against government restrictions and consecrated the new cathedral at Westminster, then under construction, in addition to sponsoring the international Eucharistic Congress of 1908. After World War I he defended the rights of Arabs in Palestine, which had become a British mandate. He encouraged Catholics to attend the national universities and become involved in the national political parties rather than to establish separate institutions. See the *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), Vol. II, pp. 737-738; *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Chicago: 1981), Vol. II, p. 199. [Editor]

³The Sacred Congregation of Rites, recognizing that Don Bosco had practiced virtue to a heroic degree, had declared him Venerable just the previous year, 1907. This allowed his cause to progress toward beatification. [Editor]

Appendix 9

CONCERNING THE HEIR PRESUMPTIVE OF THE EMPEROR OF BRAZIL¹

(See chapter 6, note 38)

A

LETTER FROM THE CHAPLAIN OF THE COUNTESS TO FATHER RUA

Paris
August 6, 1883

Very Reverend Father,

Her Royal Highness, the Countess of Eu, only daughter of the Emperor of Brazil and daughter-in-law of His Lordship the Duke of Nemours, whom you know, is very anxious indeed that your saintly Founder Don Bosco send a very special blessing to her, her father the Emperor, His Lordship the Count of Eu, and her three children. She earnestly requests another favor, namely that your saintly Founder commence a novena on August 15 together with all his priests and the many youngsters in his charge, on behalf of her oldest son, the young Prince Pedro, future Emperor of Brazil; his health leaves something to be desired, and *he can barely use one of his arms, and that only with the greatest difficulty*. This disability in his arm persists despite all the care lavished on him. It is hoped that what has been impossible to obtain from physicians, treatments, and material attentions may be obtained from the good God through prayer and, above all, the novena which I have been instructed to recommend to your benevolent intervention. The royal house of Orléans and the imperial house of Brazil, as well as many of their friends, will join wholeheartedly in the prayers, Masses, and Communions offered up by the holy priest Don Bosco and his entire Salesian family. I have been informed by telegram how eager Her Royal Highness the Countess of Eu is for this favor in which we are

¹Italian appendix, document 52, in French. [Editor]

hoping. On August 15 she will receive Communion in union with Don Bosco. Do try, dear Father, to have that holy priest write a letter to Her Royal Highness. He will know far better than we what to write!!! I await a letter from you together with his, which also I shall deliver to the Countess of Eu. In it would you please explain to her in what this novena consists? If you would attend to this matter as soon as you receive this letter and send me a telegram, you would do me a great favor. We shall send it off immediately to Brazil and can telegraph Her Highness ourselves, to inform her that her wish has been fulfilled.

My address: Father Gouverd, 23 Sèvres Street, Paris.

Last Sunday was the name day of Her Highness Princess Blanche. The whole royal family is well.

I recommend my person, too, to the prayers of the Salesian family, for I am in great need of them.

Do not forget Miss Pierre de Canavare, either. There is as yet no great transformation in her outlook. You know what I am speaking of.

Please accept my thanks and my most respectful and devoted regards.

Father Gouverd

B

DON BOSCO'S LETTER TO THE COUNTESS²

Turin

August 19, 1883

Dear Countess,

The Reverend Father Gouverd has written me a letter informing me how, in your devotion, you wish to have special prayers said to obtain a grace from the divine goodness. We shall be glad to unite our feeble supplications to yours, which without any doubt are far more pleasing to God. With this intention we began already on the 10th of this month and shall continue until its end:

1. All the priests of the Salesian Congregation will offer up their Masses for your intention.

2. Our children (150,000 of them) will pray; in Europe and [South] America, and especially in the empire of Brazil, where a few months ago we founded one of our orphanages at Niterói, they will offer up their Communion.

Although our prayers are assigned for this month, we shall nevertheless continue to keep special remembrance of you every day, as well as of your family and the whole imperial household.

²*Epistolario*, ed. Ceria, Vol. IV, no. 2640. [Editor]

May the good God shed His graces and His blessings upon you and assist you in the great work of saving your souls and the souls of others. Amen.³

P.S. Forgive my poor French and my bad handwriting. Allow me to remain in J.C.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

³The prince recovered. Don Bosco later learned from the boy's tutor that the Countess had spoken favorably of him to her father the Emperor. She and her husband counted it an honor to be among the first Salesian cooperators in Brazil. [Ceria, *loc. cit.*] The boy never became emperor; Dom Pedro II and the empire were overthrown in 1889 and a republic established. [Editor]

Appendix 10

BISHOP CRIMONT

(See chapter 8, note 4)

The editor of the English edition of these *Memoirs* has in his possession a typed translation of the passage referring to young Crimont, at the end of which comes this note, also typed, except for the signature and title:

On the occasion of my visit to the Salesian House of Studies, Richmond, California, October 3, 1942, in witness thereof:

+ Joseph Raphael Crimont, S.J.
Vic. Ap. of Alaska

The signature is in black ink, and immediately beneath it is a typed correction to the last sentence of the passage about him:

Correction: "Soon after he received an obedience to go to the Indian Missions. He was ordained in Woodstock, N.Y., but in 1894 the Superiors transferred him to Alaska, where etc..."

In other words, Father Crimont never went to India, but labored as a missionary for the American Indians of the western United States, among whom the Jesuits still have many missions. Bishop Crimont died on May 20, 1945.

The original document is at the Institute of Salesian Studies, Berkeley, California.

Appendix 11

LETTER FROM FATHER CAGLIERO TO FATHER RUA¹

(See chapter 13, note 27)

Marseille
11-14-83

Dear Father Rua,

Our dear brothers and sisters have departed. The immense steamship *Béarn*, whose black smoke turns day into night, wrested them from our sorrowful, tearful gaze, while our hearts beat violently and our lips were dumb!!!

The Sisters received the Lord's blessing at Nizza Monferrato, while the Salesians were most cordially blessed in Genoa by our new archbishop, Cardinal Alimonda.

Divided into two parties, we swallowed in one big gulp the by-no-means-brief distance between Sampierdarena and Marseille, taking tender leave of Father [Dominic] Belmonte and most cordial leave of Father [Paul] Albera.

Our fine brethren Father [Joseph] Ronchail at Nice and Father [Peter] Perrot at Toulon² would have liked to pay us their respects on our journey, but they had to forgo this pious pleasure because the telegram did not advise them in time! But Father Perrot, who is younger and more lithe, turned up in Marseille and gave with his own hand the money collected in his district to the brave leader of our expedition; that amounted to 300 lire.

Father Albera could not have surprised the missionaries more than he did, with his organization of a very touching and moving evening service. The boys sang solemn Compline, there was a moving sermon, then Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, amid a thousand glimmering candles on a magnificent altar; the hearts of everyone present were filled with an eminently holy and deeply religious tenderness.

¹Italian appendix, document 92. [Editor]

²I.e., the La Navarre agricultural school, which is near Toulon. [Editor]

Mrs. Jacques was there and was quite overcome by her feelings, as *Mother* of our sisters! She gave Father Costamagna 100 francs as alms, and this morning came on board with us. We asked her to obtain a few highly necessary comforts for the nuns. The captain, when she spoke with him, was most kind and courteous; he went so far as to offer us his private quarters so that we could celebrate Holy Mass and has made his own lodging in another cabin.

The shipping line permitted us to pay our fares wherever and in whatever manner was most convenient to us.³ So long live Mary Help of Christians, who is manifestly protecting this sixth expedition of ours to [South] America and which promises to be the best of them all!

I went today to inspect the new villa attached to the house of Marseille, and it is just beautiful! It has a wealth of paths, vegetable gardens, flower gardens, meadows, fields, and vineyards, and it is flanked by a wooded area of 50 acres or more. It is all for nothing, fulfilling Don Bosco's dream precisely. Since it is so near Marseille, it will make a wonderful place for a novitiate.⁴

Friday I am leaving for Saint-Cyr; I shall stop over at La Navarre, Nice, Bordighera, and Alassio, and be in Turin the following week.

Most affectionately,
Father Cagliero

³On August 10 the archbishop of Buenos Aires had written to Don Bosco: "Since I have a handsome offering for our missions, there is no one better indicated to receive it than you, to help you pay the fare of the missionaries travelling with Father Costamagna; I have already given it to Father Vespignani, to hold it at your disposal." [Author]

⁴He alludes to the house of *La Providence*, which was destined to be a novitiate [Author]. Concerning the dream, see Vol. XV, pp. 37-39 [Editor].

Appendix 12

LETTER FROM FATHER FRANCIS MOIGNO TO DON BOSCO¹

(See chapter 14, note 13)

August 12 [1883]
St. Clare

My dear Reverend Father,

Mrs. Lafitte, the devout American lady, is leaving for Turin tomorrow evening, delighted to answer your call. Why may I not share in her happiness? I warmly recommend her to you, and even more her business, which the good God wants to see in your hands. The letters that she will show you will persuade you, I hope, to take over the French parish in Boston. The present parish priest, Monsignor Bouland,² will be only too happy to become a Salesian. Oh! make this generous effort for New France!

Mrs. Lafitte is going directly to the Oratory, to find out where she should lodge. I am giving her a little note for our confrere and friend, Mr. Faà di Bruno.³ I am at your feet, kissing them and asking your paternal blessing.

Your humble and devoted co-worker
Father F. Moigno, S.J.
Canon of St. Denis
Salesian Cooperator

P.S. How is the duke of Bordeaux? Pray for him, please.⁴

¹Italian appendix, document 93, in French. Father Francis Napoleon Mary Moigno (1804-1884), a Jesuit, was a prominent physicist, mathematician, preacher, and author. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. X (New York: Appleton, 1911), pp. 432-433. [Editor]

²See chapter 14, note 11. [Editor]

³Francis Faà di Bruno (1825-1888), nobleman and officer in the Sardinian army, studied mathematics and astronomy at the Sorbonne in Paris, where he underwent a conversion. Don Bosco was instrumental in his return to Turin, where he resigned his commission and spent the rest of his life as professor of mathematics at the University of Turin. He founded a work to provide for the social and religious well-being of young female domestics, wrote ascetical treatises and scientific articles, composed sacred music, invented scientific apparatus, and was eventually ordained. He collaborated with Don Bosco on the *Catholic Readings* from the beginning of that enterprise. Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1988. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. V (New York: Appleton, 1909), p. 740, and Dicastero per la Formazione, *Sussidi 2: Dizionario* (Rome: pro-manuscripto, 1988), pp. 264-265. [Editor]

⁴He means the count of Chambord. [Author]

Appendix 13

LETTER FROM MARK NASSÒ TO DON BOSCO¹

(See chapter 15, note 6)

Salesian Oratory
June 24, 1879

Dearly beloved Father,

How delightful to my heart was the dawn of this long awaited day! I longed and yearned for it to break, even as a sailor yearns for a harbor, the pilgrim for his destination, the traveler in a hot, dry plain for a stream to slake his ravaging thirst, so that I might open my heart and pour out its contents to you, dearly beloved Father, who do so much for the spiritual and temporal welfare of my soul. My heart is flooded with love. How can I express it? My tongue cannot speak the language of my heart, cannot find words to express so much sincere affection. Only a father's heart could understand fully his son's feelings! Now you are such an affectionate father; yes, you can understand fully all I would like to do and could do for you. Yes, dearly beloved Father, you have done me immense and infinite good! How can I ever repay you for all the love you nurture toward me, for so much good you have done me? I am poor, possessing nothing, and helpless. Still, I have constantly offered up and always will offer up fervent prayers, especially on this beautiful day, to the Lord and to glorious St. John [the Baptist], whose lovely name you bear,² so that he may deign to obtain all kinds of joy and blessing for you from Heaven. To this end I shall begin a novena of Holy Communions, asking your holy patron saint to obtain from the Lord every spritual and temporal benefit you may need. Meanwhile I beg you, my dearly beloved Father, to remember me in your prayers, that they may help me grow into a good, holy, and fervent Salesian, following straight along the way of the Lord. Pray to the Lord, too, that my dear sister may become a nun [*sic*] of Mary Help of Christians, and that I may be rid of all the

¹Italian appendix, document 94. [Editor]

²In fact, Don Bosco had been named for St. John the Apostle, whose feast is December 27. But St. John the Baptist is one of the most popular saints in Turin and the titular of the cathedral; as early as 1846 the boys of the Oratory, just naturally assuming that his patron was the Baptizer, celebrated June 24 as Don Bosco's name day, and that became the custom. See Vol. II, p. 381. [Editor]

many anxieties that, you know, oppress my heart. Sure that my dearly beloved father has heard me, I beg you to accept the most loving regards of your ever obedient son in J.C.,

Mark Nassò³

³Nassò (1864-1920) entered the Oratory as a very young boy and most confidently allowed Don Bosco to guide him. He became a Salesian in 1880, was ordained in 1887, and was sent to Valsalice to teach mathematics. He distinguished himself in that post for the rest of his life, also publishing six arithmetic and algebra textbooks. He was regarded as an exemplary religious, especially in bearing ill health for many years. [Editor]

Appendix 14

COMPLETE LIST OF DOCUMENTS APPENDED TO THE ITALIAN EDITION OF VOLUME XVI

1. The Use of Punishments in Salesian Houses
2. Form for Registering Salesian Cooperators
3. Circular Letter to the Local Directors of the Cooperators
4. General Norms for Local Leaders of the Cooperators
5. Letter from the Austrian Military Vicar to Don Bosco
6. Protestant Institutes in Italy
7. Review of *The Catholic in the World*
8. Father Bonetti's Protest to the Minister of Grace and Justice
9. Letter from Father Bonetti to Bishop Boccali
10. An Attack on Don Bosco, Published in a Notorious Periodical
11. Obtaining an Imprimatur from the Turin Chancery
12. Letter from the Pastor of Our Lady of Victories to Don Bosco
13. Letter from Father Moigno to Don Bosco
14. Letter from Father Cibrario to Don Bosco
15. Circular Regarding a Lottery at Vallecrosia
16. Letter from a Woman Who Met Don Bosco at Nice
17. Letter Referring to Don Bosco's Visit at Cannes
18. Letter from a Woman Who Met Don Bosco at La Navarre
19. Circular Letter to the Cooperators of Marseille
20. Article about Don Bosco in *L'Eclair*, March 31, 1883
21. Letter from Don Bosco to Mrs. Jouffrey of Lyons
22. Nine Letters to Don Bosco from Some Citizens of Lyons
- 22². Diary of Don Bosco's Visitors at the S  nislhac Home
23. Two Important Invitations Extended to Don Bosco in Paris
24. Letter from the Abbot of Solesmes to Don Bosco
25. Three Letters from the Benedictine Father Mocquereau
26. Letter from Father Moigno to Don Bosco
27. Letter from the Duchess of Aremburg to Don Bosco
28. Letter from Mrs. Philippart to Don Bosco

29. Letter from the Bishop of Le Mans to Don Bosco
30. Affiliation of the Salesians with the Carmelites of Paris
31. Louis Veuillot and Don Bosco Compared
32. Letter from the Rector of St. Sulpice to Don Bosco
33. Invitation to Visit the Assumptionists
- 33². Why Francis Bourne, the Future Cardinal, Did Not Become a Salesian
34. Don Bosco's Visit to the Catechism Classes at St. Sulpice
35. The Benedictine Nuns' Invitation to Don Bosco
36. Petition for a Healing
37. Letter from a Sister of the Good Shepherd to Don Bosco
38. An Old Woman's Fears Expressed to Father Roussel
39. Minutes Concerning Don Bosco's Address to the Central Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society
40. Poem on Don Bosco's First Trip to Paris, May 1883
41. Letter from the Bishop of Evreux to Don Bosco
42. Letter from the Count of Waziers to Don Bosco
43. Invitation to Don Bosco to Visit Nantes
44. Invitation to Don Bosco to Visit Douai
45. Invitation to Don Bosco to Visit Pau
46. Two Letters from the Daughters of the Cross to Don Bosco
47. Letter from the Baroness of Tavernost to Don Bosco
48. Letters from Archbishop Richard to Don Bosco and Father de Barruel
49. A Mother Recommends Her Son's Examinations to Don Bosco's Prayers
50. Concerning the Election of Deputy at Paris
51. Letter from Countess Riant to Father de Barruel
52. Concerning the Heir Presumptive of the Emperor of Brazil
53. Letter of 1934 Concerning Don Bosco's Visit to Paris
54. Letter from the Assistant Priest of Our Lady of Victories in Paris to Don Bosco
55. An Article in *L'Univers*, April 28, 1883
56. Don Bosco's Address at the Church of the Magdalene as Reported in the *Gazette de France*
57. "A Wonderworker in 1883": Article in *Clairon*, April 30, 1883
58. The Collection Takers at the Church of the Magdalene
59. Invitation to Attend Don Bosco's Conference at the Church of St. Sulpice
60. Remarks by Don Bosco at the Church of St. Sulpice
61. Diary Extract Concerning Don Bosco's Visit to the Church of St. Sulpice
62. Don Bosco's Address at the Church of St. Lazarus
63. In the Sacristy of the Church of St. Clotilde

64. Article by Saint-Genest in *Le Figaro*, May 18, 1883
65. Letter from Saint-Genest's Mother to Don Bosco
66. Don Bosco's Remarks to Cardinal Lavigerie
67. Letter from Former Deputy Léfèvre-Portalis to Don Bosco
68. Hymn and Address to Don Bosco at St. Gabriel's Orphanage
69. Hymns and Two Toasts to Don Bosco at a Banquet in Lille
70. Letter from the Archbishop of Cambrai to Don Bosco
71. Letter to Father Rua about Don Bosco's Visit to Lille
72. Letter to Don Bosco from Amiens
73. News Report on Don Bosco's Visit to Amiens
74. Six Letters to Don Bosco Preceding His Arrival at Dijon
75. Five Letters to Don Bosco during His Stay at Dijon
76. Four Letters Referring to Don Bosco's Visit to Dijon
77. A Grace from Mary Help of Christians
78. Letter from Don Bosco to Mrs. Quisard
79. Letter from Bishop Brandolini to Don Bosco
80. Letter to Father Rua from a Lady-in-Waiting of the Queen of Portugal
81. Letter from Peter Marietti to Don Bosco
82. The Health of the Count of Chambord
83. Offering from the Count of Chambord to Don Bosco
84. Report of Father Curé to the Papal Nuncio at Vienna
85. Letter from Father Bonetti to Cardinal Alimonda
86. Father Bonetti's Appeal to Cardinal Nina
87. Letter from Cardinal Alimonda to Father Bonetti
88. Letter from Father Milanesio to Namuncurá
89. Three Decrees Concerning the Provicariate and Prefecture Apostolic in South America
90. Letter from Father Vespignani to Don Bosco
91. Don Bosco's Circular Letter of Gratitude
92. Letter from Father Cagliero to Father Rua
93. Letter from Father Francis Moigno to Don Bosco
94. Letter from Mark Nassò to Don Bosco
95. Letter from Don Bosco to the Countess of Beaulaincourt
96. Letter from Don Bosco to Mr. Bleuzet
97. Six Letters from Don Bosco to Mrs. Quisard and Her Son

EARLIER DOCUMENTS AND EVENTS

***Editor's note:** In Volume XIV Father Ceria began publishing at the back of these volumes materials that were discovered too late to be included in the volume to which they properly belonged. None of these materials were included in the English Volumes XIV and XV, but in the present volume we have made a selection from the total of 18 documents and 134 letters that Father Ceria published in Volume XVI, following the documents pertinent to this volume.*

1. THREE SERMONS BY DON BOSCO¹

These sermons were discovered recently, contained in three booklets of rough-grained paper. We cannot specify the date of the first, which deals with impurity. Its style is still reminiscent of Don Bosco's early preaching style, which he later discarded.² It seems that he wrote it when he was already settled in Turin,³ because he refers to a boy who wished to move to Turin. He says the boy "came," not "went."

The second is unfinished. It is an introduction to a retreat, possibly for ordinary people; in fact, it makes reference to sinful brothers and sisters. It is evident that he intended to add to it, for he left four pages blank and wrote on the fifth: "Introduction to the holy retreat—November 30, 1843."

The third is a panegyric of St. Aloysius for youngsters, students perhaps, since in it Don Bosco says that Aloysius had the same occupation as those listening to his sermon. On the second page, where he says that St. Aloysius was born in 1568, there is a reference mark, with a marginal note: "276 years ago." Hence, he probably drafted this sermon in 1844. We say probably, without excluding the hypothesis that the sermon was composed earlier, while the calculation refers to some occasion when he delivered it again.

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 1. [Editor]

²On the development of Don Bosco's preaching style, see his autobiographical *Memoirs of the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales*, trans. Daniel Lyons, S.D.B. (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1989), pp. 140-142, and *The Biographical Memoirs*, Vol. II, pp. 179-181; Vol. III, pp. 45-53; Vol. IX, pp. 14-16. He was very much influenced by his training under St. Joseph Cafasso at the Convitto Ecclesiastico; see Vol. II, pp. 65-67. [Editor]

³Don Bosco came permanently to Turin on November 3, 1841, five months after his priestly ordination. He enrolled at the Convitto, where he remained until October 1844, when he took the post of assistant chaplain at the institutions of the Marchioness Barolo in Valdocco. During these three years, he tells us, he was very busy as a preacher of triduums, novenas, and retreats (*Memoirs of the Oratory*, p. 202). [Editor]

A

PART ONE

"You shall not commit adultery" [Matt. 5:27].⁴

The Old Law had already forbidden every action which might lead one to the always dreadful vice of impurity. But when the Son of God came into this world to fulfill definitively the whole Law, he not only confirmed what was written but added that anyone even looking with a lustful eye or a corrupt heart upon another was already guilty of that same offense. "You have heard," he cried, "that it was said [to our ancestors], 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart" [Matt. 5:27-28].

After profound reflection upon the severity of this law, and the ugliness of what it forbade, the Apostle Paul did not even want Christians to mention it. But O! for bygone days! O! wretched habits of our own day! There is hardly any conversation in which this sin does not find its place; there is no banquet in which impurity does not take the first place; there is no urban district, square, meadow, field, no flower of purity that has not been soiled by some such filth.

What are people thinking of, then? Libertines speak out in their own defense: Is it so serious an evil, then, to season one's amusements with a witty or loose remark? Is it so serious an evil, then, to yield to our nature's weakness? In short, is it so serious an evil to commit...an act of sensuality...? O God! Is this not a serious evil? Is sin only an indifferent action? Are human and divine laws only illusions? Shall the Lord of all that is good cause disorder and corrupt natural justice? What unheard of impudence and boldness!

Since such people do not accept statements but demand reasons and have excuses for everything, I shall give them the most convincing reasons why impurity is a serious evil, so as to eliminate every excuse. Truly, this argument will not affect the people to whom I am now speaking, while on the contrary, those who most need to hear it are following other paths than those leading to sermons. But even if this sermon shall not reprove or disturb you, it will at least serve as a safeguard and protection.

It cannot be denied that anything which seriously moves God to anger and which he has already punished severely, must be a serious evil. Now even though God created a place of eternal suffering for everyone who stubbornly breaks his holy law, still he did not wish to wait until after death before releas-

⁴Don Bosco generally quotes the Scriptures in Latin in this and the two following sermons; this suggests that he was speaking to secondary school students, who would have had that language as a major component of their curriculum, or to educated adults (retreat sermon). He almost never cites book, chapter, and verse. Scripture translations are taken from the New American Bible with revised New Testament, unless otherwise noted. [Editor]

ing the terrible thunderbolts of his vengeance upon the impure; he wished instead to do that even in this life. And at this point it will be useful for me to describe to you the tragic scene in which this sin was first punished.

It was in the seventeenth century of the world's existence. All parts of the globe then known were already dwelt in by the human race. There were good people, and we must admit that there were bad people too. When the good began to have contact with the evil, they looked each other over, and after looks they exchanged words, and after words they passed to behavior, to invitations, to series of sins and sensuous excesses. The sacred text assures us that, everywhere and anywhere, horrible offenses were committed. What offenses? I shudder to tell you! Sins of the flesh: "All mortals led depraved lives" [Gen. 6:12].

God was silent while every other sort of wickedness was committed. But when he saw the vile brute we speak of growing stronger, it was as if he had been mortally wounded by a piercing sword and, full of grief and bitterness, he cried out: I regret that I created human beings: "I am sorry that I made them" [Gen. 6:7].

What words are these? Is God then subject to change, to grief, to regret? Yes, he is. Although in himself he is unchangeable and cannot suffer, the insult against him in the form of the sin of lust was so great that, as we understand it, if were possible it would move God himself to feel regret and would cause him most bitter grief, such as he had not shown for any other offenses, even the most horrible: "We do not read of any other sin that God said, 'I am sorry that I made the human race,' except of sins of the flesh." These are the words of the outstanding doctor St. Jerome. Hence neither Adam's disobedience nor Cain's murder of his brother nor the many infidelities of the Israelites, and not even the killing of God, committed in a manner most unspeakable and shameful, against the person of our Savior, could ever make anyone utter about God something so vivid with indignation: "We do not read of any other sin that God said, 'I am sorry that I made the human race,' except of sins of the flesh." Now tell me, can anything which causes such bitterness in God be a minor evil, something which causes him such immense anguish, to the extent that he is sorry he created the human race?

God did not express his indignation only in words; he took action, inflicting the most terrible punishment that had ever been heard of, or that would be heard of in future ages. Since humanity has given itself over to such shameful sins, to such vile actions, to such ugly filth, God said in his growing wrath, I myself shall visit upon them all the weight of my vengeance. It was not through the earth, as happened to Nadab and Abihu, who were swallowed alive by flames from the earth; nor by some deadly plague, nor by cruel mortality, nor by abandoning them to the power of brutal enemies who harassed them cruelly. No, I myself shall exterminate them from the earth: "I will wipe out from the earth the men whom I have created..." [Gen. 6:7].

It would surely have been enough had God done away with the sinners. But as though he feared that those wicked people might yet have some offspring escape his wrath, he wished that everyone, save the family of Noah, even the just and the innocent, should be included in the awful punishment. So big and small, old and young, children, the rich and mighty, the poor and humble, all had to die: "I will wipe out the men...and not only the men, but also the beasts..." [Gen. 6:7]. Even the very animals perished, either because they had been used as instruments of sin, or because they had merely witnessed the misdeeds of the human race; from first to last of the quadrupeds, and the birds too; from birds down to the lowliest insects, all of them were exterminated, "the creeping things and the birds of the air" [Gen. 6:7].

All of them were exterminated from the earth, but in what way? Behold, the sky grows dark, thick clouds and gloomy fogs veil the whole earth; lightning flashes; thunder and thunderbolts blaze and roar; nothing is visible any longer; all is shadows and darkness; rain pours down; the floodgates of heaven burst open and immense water wheels send storms of water upon the earth; the shattered earth lets the streams hidden within her breast flow freely, so that seas and rivers, floods and rain all unite to cover the face of the earth.

What of the human race, what of the indecent? Where are now the impure, the lustful, those who deemed impurity a minor evil? They all pay the price of their filth and infamy; it takes ceaseless rain for 40 days and 40 nights to wash away such iniquity, so that the stench of their sins might be noticed no longer. The waters rise to immeasurable height over their bodies, until they stand fifteen cubits above the very highest mountains. The whole world was thus drowned by this universal flood for more than 150 days, so that the filth of the impurities that had been committed might be washed away. "We do not read of any other sin that God said, 'I am sorry that I made the human race,' except of sins of the flesh, on account of which" (what dreadful words!) "the whole world was destroyed by flood." Thus exclaimed St. Jerome.

The flood came to an end, the earth was inhabited again, and behold, the dreadful vice which had been wiped out became active again. Did it perhaps go unpunished? Not at all. God swore that he would not again drown the world in a universal flood, almost as if he thought it unbelievable that the human race could turn to commit such iniquities after so terrible a punishment. Their punishment would no longer be universal but would be even more fearful than the first time.

So the all-seeing Lord turns his attention to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors. He sees all of them ravaged by the lusts of the flesh. Moved to wrath and considering the rain of water an insufficient punishment, he sends a rain of fire upon them. A rain of fire? Precisely; and what a miserable sight! Now let the indecent learn how great an evil is impurity.

The sacred text tells us that the sun was rising in the sky when its rays were covered by a dark veil, while fearful darkness spread through the whole atmo-

sphere. Then the terrible darkness was dispelled by a terrible light, amid which a new kind of rain streamed furiously down, a rain of fire. Balls of flame and crackling, blazing sulfur streak like lightning, falling as if hurled down upon all those sinful cities and the whole surrounding countryside. In the cities, the squares, the streets, the houses are all already on fire; in the fields are already burning, blazing, and being devoured the fodder, the grass, the plants, and all the vegetation. And what has become of the lustful inhabitants of these cities? These vile inhabitants who no longer find any satisfaction except in orgies, in immorality, in shamelessness, are now all surrounded, flooded, and assailed by the fearful conflagration. Some are outdoors, some indoors; some are asleep, some standing watch, some engaging in their shameful pleasures. The voracious flames have already fallen upon all of them, leaving them no time to try to escape; the flames cling to their foul and unclean flesh, burning it, pouring into their throats and choking them, springing into their bowels, destroying them and reducing them to ashes. Nor does this fire of divine wrath cease until it has turned that entire pleasant valley and its accursed inhabitants into the bleakest and most fearful solitude.

Still more, the cities and their citizens with all their possessions sank beneath the ground; the earth opened up and swallowed everything into its bowels, to form the immense sea which we call the Dead Sea. Many reliable writers tell us that this sea is useless for navigation and is entirely unproductive; moreover, those fish that are carried into it by some current are choked and die in its diseased water. Birds that try to fly across its expanse are halted by its filthy stench and fall lifeless into its water. For its stink, the stench of its water, and the sterility of the land about it reveal continually the fulfillment of what the Apostle St. Jude wrote, namely that the iniquity and uncleanness of Sodom and Gomorrah would leave behind them the dreadful testimony of their punishment for all future peoples to see, a true portrait of eternal punishment that will never end. "Likewise, Sodom, Gomorrah, and the surrounding towns...serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire" [Jude 7].

Oh, for pity's sake, you who are listening to me, shall this evil count for nothing, shall that sin be rated as a featherweight? Or is it not rather the pestilential filth for which so terrible a conflagration was sent upon the earth to exterminate and wipe out those who committed it, and so wash the filth away?

I know what indecent people say, namely that these great punishments are true, plainly enough. But there is no great reason to be afraid, since God never sent them again and certainly will not send them again in our time. If that is how you talk, what can I tell you? If God stays the hand of punishment over you, if he does not want to visit such fearful punishment upon you at once, as he did to others, you are right; continue going your own way, doing whatever you please. But you should at least notice that if God is so good, so generous and long-suffering with you, you should not behave so ungratefully toward

him. It might well come about that if too much outraged, his patience may give way to wrath; it may well happen that, as he has waited for you so long, he will visit upon you his weightier punishments. "Those for whom he waited longer, he condemns more severely," St. Gregory the Great says.

But frankly, such thinking is utterly erroneous. Yes, yes, such thinking already testifies to the influence of sensuality, which makes the lustful incapable of recognizing their own unhappiness. Their reasoning is blinded and no longer perceives; their intellect is darkened and no longer sees; their will is slack and wants only tangible things. How miserable is the condition of such people, those who no longer recognize, perceive, or understand! They tumble from their elevated, dignified level and become like unclean animals. Through the words of his prophet, God says: "Man, for all his splendor, if he have not prudence, resembles the beasts that perish" [Ps. 49:21].

Have you ever watched unclean animals? Whatever kind of food is given to them, whatever is given them to drink, whether wholesome, filthy and foul-smelling, or even deadly, does not matter: they gobble all of it, and down it goes into the avid belly; they devour everything just so that they can gratify their ravenous greed and satisfy their bestial appetites.

I am ashamed to say it, my dear friends, but such is the state of the indecent. They are in the grip of their passions, prey to their own impurity. They no longer hear nor heed the voice of their Lord calling them, they are no longer aware of the divine vengeance hanging over their heads. They are no longer conscious of the gaping jaws of hell ready to swallow them up alive. They know only desire, know only their avid longings and follow them alone, wherever their enticing sensuality leads them. Such persons are dishonored and degraded, debased to the level of the senseless animals: "Man, for all," etc. What a fearful plight, what frightful decadence! How great an evil is impurity!

If you want tangible punishments which afflict not only the spirit but also the body, how frequent are these too! I will not recite for you the incidents that we find in great number in the Bible or Church history. You need only take a look at the city streets about you, go into the squares, and you will see people in the flower of their youth, who could have been the pride of their families, an honor to their country, a glory for society. But having become the prey of such vice, they fritter their days away in futile pastimes and grow nervous, pale, and haggard. There is nothing to them but a beard which makes them all the less attractive, strangely matted hair, nothing remaining in them but the aspect of people exhausted, eaten up, and corrupted by vice. They have become the scandal and the scum of society.

I will not speak of so many families who suffer bitter conflicts and discord on account of such vices, who find themselves in the utmost, disastrous financial condition in consequence of them, having lost their former prosperous standing. And why? Because of the shameful squandering of money. I will not

speak of droughts, floods, hail storms, the famines which are all calamities that manifest the divine wrath in punishment for the sins we speak of, even as the Apostle tells us (Col. 3:6).

But—what can I say about those unfortunate people who “are caught when the evil time falls suddenly upon them” [Eccl. 9:12], struck by the lightning of divine vengeance in the very moment that they are consummating their evil deeds, who cease to live their lives of infamy and begin their unhappy eternity? What could I ever say of all the many, many youths we find in homes and hostels? O God, how many of them there are! They lie in bed, covered by repulsive ulcers or eaten up by pneumonia or tuberculosis, drained of strength and so oppressed by illness that one is moved to tears. If we ask the cause of all their troubles, they are forced to confess to their shame that their sicknesses “are the sorrows of the wicked” [Ps. 32:10]. Their riotous and indecent way of life was the cause of their misfortune.

Allow me to give rein to my zeal, you cowards and wretches! Recognize for once your dignity and what it is that makes you unhappy. Stop looking for doctors and medicines for your evils; instead, abandon sin, which is their cause, and do not, I implore you, do not say ever again that freedom of speech, immodest clothing, indecent conversation, scandalous behavior, hanging out with gangs, drunkenness, and parties are minor evils; avow sooner that they are serious evils, enormous sins, sins which God has always punished by the most severe calamities, sins which shame and degrade the human race, making us like beasts and rendering us completely wretched and unhappy. Therefore you must flee such sins as enemies that overwhelm the human race with every kind of disaster and misfortune.

PART TWO

Now you may tell me that I exaggerated in my sermon this morning when I said that the dissolute are all unhappy, for we can see them all having a good time and doing whatever they wish; they are always laughing and in good spirits and never seem bothered by any menace. You may say this, but I ask you to pay careful attention to my reply, because it is precisely in this that the deceit lies. Do libertines enjoy peace of mind? No, and the Lord himself says so: “There is no peace for the wicked” [Is. 48:22]. They and their wickedness are an abomination before the Lord: “Odious to God are the evildoer and his evil deed” [Wis. 14:9]. They may seem happy to you, but the feeling of terror is with them all the time: “The sound of terrors is in his ears” [Job 15:21].⁵ They may go to dinners, to balls, to the theater, to salons; they may go carousing and get drunk; they may appear jovial and merry. But they always bear within their

⁵Don Bosco's Latin text is printed *spiritus terroris*, but the Vulgate reads *sonitus terroris*. [Editor]

consciences the inseparable companion of their remorse, which constantly agitates them cruelly, flogging them, everywhere mingling bitterness with the apparent sweetness of their pleasures. What should most reassure them only makes them unhappy: "Destruction and unhappiness [are] in their ways" [Ps. 13(14):3].⁶

If you can point out to me any sinner who has stifled all the remorse within his conscience, who has wholly dimmed the light of his reason and common sense, so that his life is peaceful and happy—oh, how wretched is he! The Lord allows him to enjoy this apparent happiness, and in the very moment when he believes he has it in hand and is acclaiming his "peace and security" [1 Thess. 5:3], God will just then weary of enduring his outrages and insults and will raise his almighty right hand to sever the thread of that person's days. In a flash our sinner has been removed from life into death, from time into eternity, from his impure delights into the terrible sufferings of hell. "When people are saying, 'Peace and security,' then suddenly disaster comes upon them" [1 Thess. 5:3]; these are the infallible words of the Holy Spirit.

I could confirm this amply with a great number of cases from the Bible and Church history. But I wish to relate only one such case which occurred recently; you are very well aware of it. A few years ago, a young man whose name I should not mention moved to Turin after completing his higher education, with the intention of entering a profession becoming to his high station in life. He came, and at first he gave hope of great success. Then—alas for that misguided youth! That unhappy youth! He began to keep bad company. He imitated their manner of speech and pattern of behavior; he enjoyed a dissolute life. He was apparently cheerful, quite satisfied with himself, and thought himself lucky whenever he had a chance to mock our holy religion and those faithful to it.

Poor youth, you did not want to believe that you would find no peace in your pleasures. But in a little while you will confess it yourself, when you have experienced lack of peace.

It was not long before he contracted the disease peculiar to libertines; he went to see doctors, he visited surgeons, but for him no medicine worked. The disease became incurable, and he had to get ready for eternity. Alas, how did he get ready? Condemned by doctors, torn apart by his inner torments, he reflected and made up his mind to commit suicide. He decided the day and the hour of his last misdeed. He wrote a note, stating that he preferred to endure the torments of hell rather than those of his present life. Then he drank prussic acid, the deadliest of poisons; no sooner had he swallowed it than he died. This, then, is the peace, the security, of the impure: "When people are saying, 'Peace and security,' then suddenly disaster comes upon them."

⁶Douay version, following the Vulgate. [Editor]

Now let us turn to ourselves. What would you resolve after reviewing the unhappy life and tragic end that await the libertine? Look to heaven and to the blessed glory awaiting you there. Consider hell and the eternal desolation prepared for you. Then listen to what Jesus crucified has to tell you: If you will leave the path of iniquity, he says to you, I will welcome you as a father would, will regard you as my sons; I will help you to obey my laws, refresh you in your weariness, give peace both temporal and eternal to your souls. Even though you might be all filthy and foul, your souls scarlet, they shall become as pure and white as snow: "Though your sins be like scarlet, they may become white as snow" [Is. 1:18].

But if you wish to persevere in your evil pleasures, understand that it is over for you; for you there will be no happiness. For it has already been written that neither adulterers nor fornicators nor impure libertines shall possess the kingdom of heaven. After I have shown them that they will find no peace in this world, I shall exterminate them from the face of the earth with my avenging sword and condemn them to the greatest of all tortures, to groan and shriek amid the desolating flames of the endless eternity of hell: "But if you will not and will provoke me to wrath, the sword shall devour you: because the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it" [Is. 1:20].⁷ Where? "Where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'" [Mark 9:48]. Oh, would you forfeit such joy and face such sorrow for a base satisfaction? Think carefully about it.

B

*"Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened,
and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).*

Our Divine Savior came down from heaven to earth to bring the word of life eternal to the human race. One day when he saw a vast crowd following him, eager to hear him, he said: "May you be praised, O my heavenly Father, for you have hidden your secrets from the wise of this world and revealed them to your humble followers" [see Matt. 11:25]. Then with an utterly simple and modest manner, with a kind and joyous countenance, with a most lovable voice, he said to the crowds: "You who are following me, do not be afraid that my yoke will be heavy and burdensome, for it is easy and light [see Matt. 11:30]. If you now feel weak and weary, come to me and I will relieve your weariness, I will refresh you: Come to me, all you," etc.

Although these words are addressed to the whole human race, since all of us are subject to many sorrows in this world of grief, our Savior's words

⁷Douay version, following the Vulgate. [Editor]

should be understood as addressed especially to those who unfortunately find themselves in a state of sin. Now this evening I seem to hear the voice of our most beloved Savior addressing all of us and saying: "Come to me, you who are troubled, and I shall comfort you, I shall refresh you: Come to me, all you," etc. Come, you who for so long have hesitated to abandon the path of evil. Come, you who are no longer looking for me; it is I who ask it of you. You have waited for a favorable moment, a propitious occasion. Behold the moment, behold the occasion in which I call you: "Come to me, all you," etc.

You are well aware, my dear listeners, that we are going to start our retreat; this is the principal point to be made this evening. Nor do I wish this word *retreat* to cause any distressful feeling among you. Instead I want the word to be one of joy and consolation to you. Of this you will be more fully convinced when you have reflected together with me on: 1. the reasons why we must undertake a retreat; 2. the way to make it well. These are the two themes that this sermon shall treat.

Now listen to me, O my dear Jesus: I will preach this holy retreat solely for the benefit of my neighbors' souls and your greater glory. I realize, though, that I am but a wretched creature, a poor sinner; I therefore put this undertaking in your hands. I shall do everything I can, but I pray you to help me. Influence the hearts of those who come here to listen not to my, but to your, divine word. Inspire my tongue; fire my heart with holy love, so that whatever I say from this holy place may be to your honor and glory and the spiritual benefit to my own soul and the souls of those who come to listen.

1. Reasons. If you are to understand why you should attend this retreat, you first have to form a clear idea of what it means. A spiritual retreat is nothing other than *a series of reflections and instructions designed to move people toward friendship with God*. First of all, it is a series of reflections whose purpose is to enable people to know themselves; to understand that they were not created for the worthless things of this world, but were destined for an infinitely superior form of happiness; to understand how basely people insult their Maker when they act contrary to this design; to know what reward awaits them in heaven if they act in keeping with this design and what terrible punishment awaits them if they behave contrary to it. This enables people to know themselves. But they are still without perception and guidance; they therefore need instructions to assist them in reviewing their past behavior, to discern the faults of their past lives, the present state of their consciences, and the most suitable means for each of them to put their consciences at ease. Can there be anything more essential, more important than this?

I will not tell you how the Blessed Virgin inspired St. Ignatius Loyola to this kind of reflection, this arrangement in preaching. I will not speak of the many indulgences granted by the Supreme Pontiffs to the faithful who devoutly make spiritual retreats. I will only tell you that God has prepared very great and spe-

cial graces for each of you on this occasion. For, the holy Gospel tells us, wherever some of the faithful come together for spiritual purposes, he will be in their midst to gratify their aspirations. I myself, the Lord says elsewhere to those who take part in this retreat, I myself shall take these souls who are searching for me, and I shall lead them into the solitude of privacy with me; there I shall speak to their hearts: "I will lead her into the desert and speak to her heart" [Hosea 2:16]. Ah! how many things the Lord will have to confide to our hearts, how many graces, how many blessings will he not grant us in these days!

In the second instance, we are told that retreat helps move people toward friendship with God. This is the most important reason, one which is the urgent desire of each of us. Truly, at the present day, one could divide people into three different classes: those who live divorced from the grace of God; those who live in fatal lukewarmness; and those who are steadfast and fervent in holy service to God.

Now I maintain that all three of these classes of people need a retreat. Is there someone among you who is now in a state of mortal sin? Oh! what a tragic plight he is in! All the more if he is engulfed in long chains of ugly sins, of some hardened habit. He is severed from God, far removed from him: "Your crimes separated you from your God" (Hosea 1:19).¹ "His heart [is] hardened" [Ex. 9:35], his mind is blunted, and it is difficult for him to perceive things that concern his eternal salvation. Even though he may recognize the unhappy state of his soul, his will, misled by sensual considerations; his blinded reasoning; his weak flesh will prevent the sinner from escaping the unhappy plight in which he finds himself, inducing him instead to defer his conversion day by day. Meanwhile he continues living in enmity toward God, accursed by both angels and saints, the gates of hell yawning at his feet. What would you say was necessary for him to forsake his sinful condition and return to God? Remorse of conscience is not enough, for he is barely aware of it. Sermons, Sunday instructions, and explanations of the Gospel during the course of the year, however telling, however skillfully delivered, with whatever persuasive sanctity, will not suffice. If a few drops of rain fall in summer time on the dry, parched fields, they are unavailing; the same can be said of these barren, dry sinners who already give forth the stench of their faults. Sermons for them are no more than a few refreshing drops of water, soon drunk up by the burning rays of the sun, or we had better say, they are absorbed by the evil of sin and by the deceit of the devil. What can a sinner in such a tragic plight do? Oh! blessed days of spiritual retreat! You can restore to that soul the life that was lost! You are that abundant rainfall which will soften even the hardest hearts; you cause the dew of heaven to descend upon us! Yes, my sinful brothers and sisters, it was these days that the Apostle St. Paul hailed as days beneficial to

¹The quotation is not from Hosea but Isaiah (59:2). [Editor]

the welfare of our soul, days of salvation and sanctification: "Behold, now is a very acceptable time; behold, now is the day of salvation" [2 Cor. 6:2], the day of your sanctification.

Those who live in a lukewarm state likewise need a retreat. The lukewarm are those who are satisfied that they do not commit any great sin, but who live untroubled that they are not progressing in the ways of the Lord. The sacred scriptures tell us that it would be better if they were entirely cold or entirely warm in the service of God. "I wish you were either cold or hot" [Rev. 3:15], says the Lord to the lukewarm. For someone who is cold may yet embrace the way of virtue and progress along it, and rarely does such a person turn back. The lukewarm, on the other hand, are in danger of a serious fall with little hope of rising from it. Furthermore, not only are the lukewarm not going forward; they are already falling back: "not to go forward is to go backward." Who could urge, who could prod these cold [*sic*] souls! Only a retreat is capable of shaking them out of the baseness which already conditions them for perdition.

Now if a person, whether a sinner or someone lukewarm, so urgently needs a retreat, we may say the same of those good souls living in the happy state of God's grace and progressing tirelessly in the way of virtue. O God! How few are such souls! I call these souls fortunate and adventurous, and I envy them their condition. I bless the Lord who supports them. Nevertheless, I maintain that they also need a retreat. Are they more fervent than the Apostles? purer, holier than the most holy Virgin? more advanced in perfection than the faithful in the first days [of Christianity]? Even then the Savior ordered them not to leave Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit (Acts 1). The Apostles, Mary most holy, and the other faithful disciples obeyed, gathering together in a place of prayer, engaging in no other occupation than to sing the praises of the Lord, give thanks to him, and bless him: "And they were continually in the temple praising God" [Luke 24:53]. How long were they thus assembled? (true image of a retreat) They remained there for ten days until they had been filled with the Holy Spirit and became those unshakable pillars and unwavering champions of Holy Church. No matter how far advanced one may be in the ways of the Lord, one is never sure that he will not sometimes fall into some sin; we are therefore uncertain of persevering until the end. Who knows but that the signal grace of perseverance, the greatest of all graces, may not be precisely the gift which our Lord wants to give us in these days?

No matter how holy one may be, one must never think it is enough. This is precisely what our Divine Redeemer impressed upon us: let him who is just, he cried to all, become even more just, and let him who is holy become holier still: "The righteous must still do right, and the holy still be holy" [Rev. 22:11]. Be perfect even as my heavenly Father is perfect, he said in another place [Matt. 5:48]; be perfect even as I am perfect. To attain such justice, such holiness, such perfection, no time is more opportune, no occasion more propitious,

than these days of retreat. Therefore, no matter what the condition of each one of us, we need this retreat: the sinner, so that he may be converted, the lukewarm so that he may become fervent, the just so that he may persevere in virtue. Now if all of us are in such urgent need of making the retreat, it is certainly important to make it well; and now I will discuss our second point, namely:

How to make the retreat well.

Introduction to holy retreat
November 30, 1843

C

*"You have made him little less
than the angels"—David [Ps. 8:6].¹*

When someone goes into a garden to pick a flower, he will extend his hand to pluck the first one which strikes his eye as fair. But as he is about to take it, he notices another still lovelier and hastens to take that one. Then he notices another yet more magnificent blossom. So he looks at this one and at that, wondering which flower he ought to select, but the garden is fragrant everywhere; all about him, high and low, to left and right, it is adorned by spotless roses, white lilies, and other flowers, each lovelier than the last. The bold adventurer would like to pluck this one, but is reluctant to pass up that; and still in doubt as what choice to make, he is almost obliged to say: "All these flowers are lovely. I would like to take them all, but that is impossible. Must I then go away without any of them?"

¹This sermon expresses the early spirituality of Don Bosco, like that he so admired in Louis Comollo in the Chieri seminary; see Vol. I, pp. 298-300, 340-352. Comollo was also the subject of Don Bosco's very first publication, *Cenni storici sulla vita del chierico Luigi Comollo...* (Turin: Speirani, 1844), which was reprinted three times and expanded in the Saint's lifetime; see Vol. II, pp. 153-156.

St. Aloysius likewise was the subject of one of Don Bosco's earliest works, *Le sei domeniche e la novena di san Luigi Gonzaga...* (Turin: Speirani, 1846); that went through seven reprints before Don Bosco died and was also included in *The Companion of Youth*. See Vol. II, pp. 281-285. St. Aloysius was consistently held up to the boys of the Oratory as a model; see *Memoirs of the Oratory*, pp. 303-304, and among many references in these volumes: Vol. IV, pp. 187-188, 208-209, 319.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco's spirituality for young people underwent a major change before many years had passed. Thus we find a quite different approach in the lives of Dominic Savio (1859), Michael Magone (1861), and Francis Besucco (1864) that the Saint wrote after their deaths. *St. Dominic Savio*, trans. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., is readily available in English (2nd ed., New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1979). That biography together with those of Magone and Besucco and other materials is also found in W.L. Cornell, *Don Bosco: Spiritual Director of Young People* (Makati, Metro Manila: Salesiana, 1986). More and more the Father and Teacher of Youth downplayed Aloysius's severe penances and instead stressed his sacramental life, purity, and doggedness in following his vocation. Meanwhile, the asceticism of daily life—study, obedience, resignation to the weather, etc.—and of what we today call peer ministry took priority in the spirituality of young people fostered by Don Bosco. [Editor]

I am in that position, for I wish to choose one of the virtues which adorn that incomparable hero whose feast we are celebrating today, that saint so pleasing to me and beloved by you—Aloysius Gonzaga. I see before me such a magnificent array of outstanding virtues that I would like to treat one without omitting another and without foregoing still another. So I am confused, forced to exclaim with the royal prophet that the virtues of Aloysius are so many and his glory so great that he needs only a little more, even as a mortal being, to be counted and take a glorious place among the ranks of angels: “You have made him little less than the angels.”

Must we then be silent about his virtues because they are so radiant and outstanding? Hardly, because it gives me too much pleasure to talk to you of this saint, while you, too, enjoy hearing about him. I cannot tell you everything, even though I would like to, so I will tell you a little bit of everything. I will sketch his life for you, and in it you will see a picture of virtue, a genuine model, a real guide that you may follow, if you want to become a saint. Do you want to become saints too? Pay attention to what Aloysius did, and it will serve as a rule and example for you.

At Castiglione, the stronghold of the duke of Mantua, which borders on our own Piedmont, the young angel Aloysius was born on March 9, 1568.² His father, Ferrante Gonzaga, was the prince and master of the area;³ his mother Martha was the daughter of the noble Counts Tana of Santena, near Chieri. God wished to reveal even from his infancy what Aloysius would become some day. It is said that even when a little child, his nurses or anyone else who embraced him or held him in their arms, kissing him and pressing him to their hearts, noticed a certain fragrance and felt such reverence that they felt they were holding an angel from paradise. He was only four years old when he already began to steal away from the observation of others to recollect himself in prayer. Not seeing him near her, his mother would ask the servants where he was, and after they had hunted for him high and low, they would cry to her, “Oh! come and see him!” And where was he? There in some remote corner of the house, in the garret or some other spot where he was not likely to be seen. There he was with bowed head, his tiny hands clasped at his breast, kneeling on the floor, completely absorbed in his delightful communion with God. While he was in that state, it was hard to get him away from it, which could be achieved only by telling him that some poor beggar of Jesus Christ had been found, whereupon he would rise instantly, run gladly to meet him, and come back to inform his mother, impatiently asking for something with which to relieve the man’s want, insisting on personally putting the alms in his hands.

²Here Don Bosco wrote “276 years ago” in the margin. [Author]

³The reader may be interested in a monograph on the Gonzagas: Kate Simon, *A Renaissance Tapestry: The Gonzaga of Mantua* (New York: Harper, 1988). [Editor]

Since Aloysius had such an exceptionally virtuous nature, you may easily imagine how he passed his childhood and adolescence. Charity toward his neighbor, love of God, desire to do penance for the sake of Jesus crucified filled his entire heart. Even as a little child, he took no pleasure in games, amusements, or the pastimes suitable to his age. As he walked through the streets or the squares, he never got involved in jokes or playing around with anybody, nor teased his companions with nicknames or tricks; instead, he walked with downcast eyes, modest and quiet behavior, captivating everyone who saw him. In church whoever else was present would marvel at him, for he never said a word, never smiled, never moved, so that crowds of people would come running, anxious to take delight in watching him and marveling over such modesty and virtue in so young a boy. Extremely obedient, he would never leave his parents' side without first obtaining their express permission; not only did he try to carry out everything that either his parents or his school teachers told him to do, but he also tried to anticipate the kinds of little services that would please them. He would never give orders to his own servants without prefacing his request with, "Please be so kind as to...", "If you could do this or that...", "If it is no trouble" ..., "I would like you to..."; and on several occasions he was obedient even to those he should have commanded.

Experience taught Aloysius that from bad companions he would derive only evil. This is what happened. He kept company with some boys who, as happens in our own day, were in the habit of using bad language; Aloysius, too, learned to use vulgar words, obscene and unbecoming words. Another time he even took a little gunpowder, loaded a cannon, and fired it, not without risk to his life. These were his two sins, if indeed one could call them sins, since at the time he was not older than four, an age in which one is hardly aware of the significance of what he says. As soon as he was told, he mended his ways so that there was never again any need to scold him.

These two faults caused him many tears and much grief; when he was old enough to make his confession (ten), he confessed these faults of his; but, O my God! you know how contrite he was. He prepared for his confession with the utmost care, fasting and praying. When he had approached his confessor, he was so overcome by the thought that sin is an insult to the infinite majesty of God, that embarrassment and sorrow over his sins seized him utterly, and he burst into tears and sobs; he fainted as if dead at the feet of his confessor. He had to be brought back again to finish his confession.

Nor was this painful confession with the penance given to him enough for Aloysius. This was exactly when he began those severe penances which would take far too long to relate; I will merely allude to them. Besides many prolonged prayers which he said according to his own timetable, he heard and served many Masses and attended Vespers and every other church service. He even indulged in exterior austerities. It would not surprise me that people in

need or those in deserts where there is nothing but coarse and wild food should practice great abstinence. What astonished me was that Aloysius, who sat down every day to princely and abundant fare, so ardently mortified his sense of taste. It was enough for a course he liked to be served to him, that he instantly refrained from touching it; it was enough for him to see some dish he did not care for, for him to partake of it. He imposed on himself to fast at least three days of the week. On Fridays he ate only bread and water. When he fasted he so limited his food that his whole nourishment (according to weight verified) was no more than one ounce per day. The people waiting on him were astonished that so little could maintain his life, and they reckoned it a great miracle by which God, in his mercy, wished to show what human beings could do, and what we ourselves also can do by the power of his heavenly assistance.

Such an austere way of living did undermine Aloysius's health to a dangerous extent, but this did not deter him in his mortification. Although he was frail and delicate of constitution, he used to scourge himself three times a week at first; later, every day; and finally, three times between morning and night. Nor was he gentle with these scourgings, for they drew blood; his own innocent blood stained the whole floor.

Here I want to tell you something you will not find in his published biography. When he came to Turin and later to Chieri to visit his relatives, he was given a festive and resplendent welcome; among other things a great ball was organized. "You'll enjoy this, Aloysius," [he was told]. After pleas, exhortations, and orders, he was obliged to attend, but only on the understanding that he would not take part in any way. Aloysius was there, but he kept his eyes downcast, his thoughts and his heart with God, with Jesus crucified. But then someone who had not been told of the agreement which Aloysius's relatives had made with him came up and took him by the hand, to compel him to join the dancing. Aloysius trembled at the invitation, and with an outraged look, struck the hand touching him and fled. The members of the household hunted high and low for him, at last finding him in a hiding place. And in what condition? It was a wonderful sight! He was kneeling on the ground, scourging himself mercilessly with some strange instrument, which bespattered his clothing with blood, splashing the walls about him, while blood streamed down to bathe the very floor. With my own eyes I have seen that wall and floor stained with his precious blood and, as I gazed at them in wonder, could not keep back the tears which filled my eyes in tenderness.

He could not find a suitable scourge in his magnificent mansion, but made one out of a dog leash which he had come upon accidentally. He scourged himself with this cruel discipline, until he cut his flesh and abundant blood streamed to the ground. He had no hair shirt to wear against his bare skin, but he took some sharp spurs and pressed them to his bare flesh, piercing his body

painfully. One day the servants found Aloysius's shirts drenched with blood and showed them to his mother, the Marchioness; she was terribly upset at the sight. His father, too, was informed, and in his anguish he cried: "Woe is me! My son means to kill himself."

Because of his noble station, soft feather cushions were put for Aloysius to kneel upon. "What is this!" he cried in his heart. "My Jesus was wounded with nails, but I should kneel on all this softness? Away with it! The bare floor shall be my sole support." And the beds in which he was supposed to sleep were soft, and this grieved him very much, for he wished to sleep on the bare ground but was scolded for it: "My poor Aloysius, what are you doing?" "Should I sleep in this soft bed," he explained, "when my Jesus is nailed to the sorrowful wood of the cross? Never!" In order that he might suffer even while he slept, he took some shards and some sharp pieces of wood; putting them under the sheets, he felt them pierce his flesh all night long.

But by Almighty God, you will ask me, why did Aloysius indulge in so many penances, in such self-torture? Was it on account of his sins? But he was faultless. Was it temptations? But he overcame them to such an extent that they never had any power for over him. Ah! I know quite well why: to teach me, to teach us all to resolve to be steadfast and persevering in imitating him at least in those penances that may be possible for us.

These virtues that we have outlined for you are already sufficient in themselves to make a saint; and indeed Aloysius was proclaimed one. But even this was not yet enough. He had yet to undertake his greatest act, his most glorious triumph; he had yet to abandon the world and give himself entirely to God.

Aloysius had reached an age at which he could discern the state of life that he ought to choose. He saw open to him the path of honors, splendor, greatness. He was a brilliant youth, endowed with very great personal talents, the first-born son and heir to the house of Gonzaga. He was dearly beloved by both his parents, revered and respected by his subjects, honored by emperors and kings. Everything invited him to walk on the field of glory.

But he, like a true philosopher of Christ, reasoned within himself: How long would this wealth last? At best until my death, and then I would have to give it up. What is this glory, honor, and worldly greatness? I do not know whether I shall be able to attain it, and if I do, how long will it last? For death is the end of vanity, pleasure, glory, and greatness; what will all that avail me in eternity: "What is this compared to eternity?" So what shall he do? Aloysius, what will you do? I shall seek other honors, other wealth that are capable of satisfying this heart of mine and making me happy some day. Begone, both honors and greatness; begone, worldly splendor! I want Jesus, and Jesus alone shall be my treasure, my wealth. Even though a bird is happy as it soars through the air, it only knows contentment when it is peaceful in its nest. Thus did Aloysius find a

place that would be the center where he could rest all his affections: "The swallow finds a nest in which she puts her young" [Ps. 84:4]. This meant kicking away the world and its blandishments and entering religion.

Aloysius's mother was a sincerely devout woman, and on several occasions had expressed the hope that one of her children might enter religion. "Mama," Aloysius said to her one day, "I believe that Christ means to make you happy in this wish of yours, and that I will be the one to enter religion." Aloysius revealed this wish on Mount Crea;⁴ he manifested it at Florence in the church of the Annunciation when, although he was only nine years old, he took a vow of perpetual chastity.

But how was he to go about it? As soon as he revealed his intention to his relatives, he met with untold opposition and conflict. The people of Castiglione wanted him to be their lord; the family wanted him to be their successor. His friends exhorted him against the idea, his relatives opposed it, except his mother, while his father, who was concerned solely with his temporal welfare, was absolutely against it. But Aloysius knew that this urge came from the Lord; he turned to the Lord and prayed.

After long prayers, fasting, and mortification, his prayers were finally answered, as follows. One day in particular, after five hours of prayer he felt moved by an impulse from heaven to go to his father and make a last effort. He went straight to him; he was confined to bed by gout. Kneeling down before him, he said very intensely and seriously: "My lord father, I put myself into your hands. Do with me whatever may be your pleasure. I assure you that God wants me to enter the Society of Jesus, and if you fight me in this, you are resisting the certain will of God." After that, he left the room without waiting for an answer.

These words so wounded his father the Marquis that, recalling all the severe tests to which Aloysius had subjected himself, he no longer wished to resist the manifest will of God. On the other hand, he regretted the loss of so dear a son who gave him so much joy; deeply moved, touched, he began to weep and sob unrestrainedly. After he had given rein to his tears for some time, he sent for Aloysius and spoke with him as follows: "My son, you have plunged a knife into my heart. I have always loved you, and I love you now. Oh, how much it grieves me to let you go away from my fatherly embrace! But if the Lord has summoned you elsewhere, then go there. The Lord be with you, heaven bless you, as I now bless you. Go on your way in peace." He wanted to say more, but he broke into such unrestrained weeping that he could say nothing else.

⁴A shrine near Chieri dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. [Editor]

Like a fragile little bird which has broken the thread that held him and rejoices to fly free, Aloysius was delighted at obtaining his father's consent. He settled some personal matters, renounced his claim to the marquise, said farewell to his relatives, and like a warrior set out for Rome to enter the Society of Jesus at the age of seventeen, on November 3, 1585.

I very much regret that time does not allow us to review even briefly all Aloysius's virtuous action as a religious. Let it be enough for us to know that he attained such a degree of love for God that whenever he passed in front of the Most Blessed Sacrament, he felt himself compelled to stop; he was constrained to cry out to his beloved Jesus: "Let me go, Lord, let me go where obedience has called me. 'Depart from me, depart from me'" [Gen. 13:9].⁵ This shows how there was no vestige of worldliness left in his heart, and that Aloysius belonged entirely to God. He was a saint, an angel, a seraph, wholly filled with divine love.

Only one thing did Aloysius lack, and he wanted it: the martyr's palm. He could not as yet go to seek it in the foreign missions, but by God's will he found it in his own vicinity. It was not a martyrdom of blood but the martyrdom of charity. In 1590 there broke out in Rome a plague so stubborn that it sent very many people to the tomb. Aloysius was overjoyed when the hour of his own imminent death was revealed to him; he felt that it offered him a wonderful chance to give his love a final outlet by laying down his life for his neighbor. His biographer⁶ says that it was wonderful to see this young prince in the flower of youth, with a money bag about his neck as he went from door to door in the town, begging alms for the poor who were ill. He then visited the hospitals, completely happy and aflame with holy love for God, and went to the unfortunate victims of the plague wherever they had collapsed or fallen dead; he busied himself washing them, clothing them, making their beds, lifting them into them, feeding them, assisting them, and comforting them in what pertained to their souls as well as to their bodies. He sought out the most wretched and most repugnant diseased so that his charity might find greater outlet. Oh, what immense charity, what virtue! O Aloysius, what more could you do? This Aloysius did for a long time and would have done still longer

⁵Douay version; the phrase is not repeated in the biblical text. [Editor]

⁶For this sermon Don Bosco relies heavily upon the *Vita breve di san Luigi Gonzaga* (Piacenza, 1829), by the Oratorian Antonio Cesari (1760-1828). Pietro Stella draws out some of the similarities and otherwise comments on this early sermon in *Don Bosco: Life and Work*, trans. John Drury (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1985), pp. 95-96. Later Don Bosco became very familiar with Pasquale De Mattei, S.J. (1705-1779), *Il giovane angelico san Luigi Gonzaga proposto in esemplare di ben vivere*, which had been reprinted at Genoa in 1843 and from which he borrowed much for his own *Le sei domeniche*. He also drew on Virginio Cepari, S.J. (1564-1631), *Vita dell'angelico giovane S. Luigi Gonzaga* (Turin: Rameletti, 1787). [Editor]

had God not seen that he was already worthy enough for himself, and nothing more was needed to make of him an angel, save to separate him from his body. And so it happened.

God had revealed his forthcoming death to Aloysius on several occasions, and the moment had come. Since in his service to the plague victims he spared himself no effort, but hastened with increasing ardor wherever the danger was greatest, he contracted the disease himself. From the hospital he was taken back to his monastery and put to bed. Although the illness was a long one, he never left his bed again; the moment of death approached.

It is usual for those whose souls are stained by some sin that as death approaches, they grow agitated, are afraid, tremble, and show their desperation. It is not so with devout souls: to them, the swifter approach of death means greater joy, because they are happy to go to see the one whom they have loved, praised, and served. It was so with our dear Aloysius. Delighted in his certainty of attaining heaven, with which he was totally in love, he kept repeating whenever someone came to see him: "We're on our way, we're on our way." "Where?" "To paradise," he would answer. The worse the disease became, the more serene, jovial, and cheerful he seemed to be. He would exclaim in ever greater rapture, "We're on our way to heaven."

When he was near death, he wished to give Jesus Christ yet one more sign of his immense love for him. When the Father Provincial came to see him one day, Aloysius said to him: "I ask one grace of you, Father, and that is that you allow me to scourge myself once more before I die." The provincial was astonished at such a request and responded: "My dear son, you could not flog yourself in your present state." "Then have someone else flog me from head to foot," Aloysius replied. But neither was this permitted, because it would have killed him outright. "Oh! please," Aloysius pleaded passionately, "at least have them lay me on the bare ground to die, as Jesus Christ died on the cross."

After receiving the last sacraments, close to his last breath, he kept his eyes fixed on the crucifix that had been set in front of him. Those about him saw him move his hand toward his head to remove the cloth cap he was wearing. Someone instantly adjusted it for him, but he made another effort to remove it. "No, Brother Aloysius," the Father Provincial said, "the night air would harm you." Aloysius looked toward the crucifix and answered: "Jesus Christ had nothing on his head when he died."

At these words, at such a desire for suffering in so pure and innocent a soul, everyone was touched, moved to tears. O Aloysius, Aloysius, you have suffered enough. You may indeed go to heaven, for earth is no longer worthy of holding you. You overflow with merit. Paradise is open to you; your beloved Jesus is anxious to embrace you affectionately. The angels and all the blessed of heaven have ready for you a crown of immortal glory. Go, then, to claim it.

It was around three o'clock in the morning. That same day, maintaining his serene expression, without any visible movement or effort, Aloysius's face became covered entirely by a cold sweat, indicating that he had entered his final agony. Those about him wept and sobbed, and their grief prevented them from talking, while Aloysius, his heart uplifted toward God, pronounced these words: "Lord, into your hands I commend my spirit" [Luke 22:46].⁷ Pronouncing the most holy names of Jesus and Mary, with a gentle smile as if he beheld a joyous, comforting vision, he handed his soul back to his Lord as though he were quietly relapsing into slumber. He was aged twenty-three years, three months, eleven days (1591).

We will stop here and proceed no further: not because there is nothing more to say about Aloysius, but because such things surpass the abilities of the human intellect to penetrate them. We shall only say together with St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi, who saw him in the glory of heaven and exclaimed: "Aloysius is a great saint. I would never have imagined that there was so much glory in paradise. Go tell the whole world that Aloysius is a great saint."

Did you like the story of how Aloysius died, my dear boys? Certainly you did. If you liked his glorious death, imitate his virtues and you will become saints like him. If at the age you are now, engaged in the same occupations as you, facing the same and even greater dangers than we do, Aloysius became a saint—why cannot we become saints too? How can we succeed in this? By praying that St. Aloysius help us to imitate his virtues. And what you must ask him in particular is this: to flee from bad companions. Bear this well in mind: flee from bad companions. I repeat it: flee from bad companions. If Aloysius became so great a saint it was because he fled from bad companions. Had he not forsaken bad companions and followed those who were good, in my opinion there would not have been any St. Aloysius, and who knows whether he would even have been saved?

Therefore, would you start this evening to say: I liked the story of Aloysius's holy death, but I cannot attain the same unless I flee bad companions. Therefore I mean to flee them all in the future. Any companion who is not very devout in church, who talks, laughs, plays, or disturbs others, will prevent me from dying like St. Aloysius. So I no longer want him in my company. Any companion who hurts others by his speech or action anywhere in the area, any companion who likes to use bad language, who tells lies, is disobedient, is reluctant to go to church, to class, or to devotions, who rarely receives the holy sacraments and is distracted whenever he does— Oh! you say instantly, such

⁷Offering this quotation first in Latin and then in Italian, Don Bosco changed "Father" to "Lord." [Editor]

companions as these will prevent me from dying like St. Aloysius. So away with them all! I want no more of them. Since it is very important to do this, we must be specially devoted to St. Aloysius, in order to obtain that [grace] from God. Be truly devoted to this saint, who is truly the patron of people your age, of youth. Make this your constant maxim: Never to say your morning or night prayers without adding an Our Father and Glory Be to St. Aloysius. During the day, from time to time raise your heart to heaven and exclaim: "O Aloysius, make me a saint. Help me too, to die like you." Will you really do that? Do you sincerely promise it? Then come with me, all of you, and let us prostrate ourselves at his feet and pray as follows:⁸

⁸The text ends abruptly thus. [Editor]

2. LETTER FROM THE ROSMINIAN SUPERIOR GENERAL¹

A letter written by Father [Bernardine] Balsari, Superior General of the Rosminian Congregation, referring to Don Bosco's visit to Father Rosmini at Stresa, must be brought to the historian's attention. The visit was described in Volume IV of these Biographical Memoirs. The letter itself tells us to whom and why the letter was written. The Father General sent it in 1923, but we received a copy of it, signed personally by him, only quite recently. He sent it in 1922 to a Turin periodical, published by Berruti, but the letter was never published.

Rome (8), St. Charles al Corso,
February 13, 1923

To the Editor of *La Scuola dei Fatti*, Turin:

I am mailing you a money order for ten lire, renewing my subscription to *La Scuola dei Fatti* for 1923. At the same time I wish to bring the following to your attention.

The September 1922 issue of your esteemed periodical contained an article entitled "The Venerable Don Bosco," in which reference was made to Antonio Rosmini, as well as to Don Bosco. Now this article contained certain statements which were inexact, others which were absolutely unlikely, and a few which were definitely false; these, however, are not to be blamed on *La Scuola dei Fatti*, but on the source from which the periodical obtained its information and which was cited at the end of the article.²

The article said that Rosmini gave a banquet at Stresa for some thirty guests, men of learning and philosopher friends of his, among whom were Tommaseo, Bonghi, Grossi, and Farini,³ and that he also invited Don Bosco,

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 2. [Editor]

²See Vol. IV, pp. 90-92. [Author]

³Niccolò Tommaseo, Ruggero Bonghi, and Tommaso Grossi were men of letters and Luigi Farini a statesman. All were prominent in the Risorgimento. [Editor]

who was staying with him as his guest at the time. This must have taken place in September 1850, when Don Bosco spent a few days with Rosmini at Stresa.⁴

I wish to point out at once that there is no recollection either in writing or in any of our traditions, of such a solemn banquet for thirty guests, and that indeed this is in direct conflict with all the recollections we have of our Founder. When Rosmini retired to the house he had inherited from Mrs. Bolongaro, who had died two years previously, on February 8, 1848, he certainly did receive many people of various classes who came to see him; but in our Congregation no mention has ever been made (even by those who knew our Founder personally and were still alive in recent years, the last of them having died February 4, last year), of the fact that he ever gave banquets or had big parties of friends and acquaintances. He continued a life of retirement in the Bolongaro residence, like the devout religious he had been during the years prior to this period, when he had lived in the novitiate on the hill near Stresa. Only he added a longer and more frequent exercise of a Christian, a most courteous, and even a distinguished hospitality,⁵ since his new residence permitted it.

The banquet for thirty guests therefore sounds discordant to the members of the Rosminian Congregation; it contradicts all our recollections of our Father Founder's life and seems most unlikely to us.

Another notable thing is that there is no remembrance of either Grossi's or Farini's presence among the thirty supposed guests; not only are we unaware that they ever visited Rosmini at Stresa, but neither did we ever hear of any particular relationship between them and him. As for Tommaseo, it is certain that he could not have been present, even if the banquet had taken place, because Tommaseo first came to see Rosmini at Stresa in March 1855, when Rosmini was already bedridden with the sickness which caused his death later. "After a quarter of a century and more I saw him again," Tommaseo himself declared.⁶

As we continue reading the article published in *La Scuola dei Fatti*, we find that the opinions expressed by the guests at the banquet on political and religious topics were far from correct. "They all flirted with liberalism in the truest sense of the word today," so the article says, "and they all criticized the dispositions of the Roman Court,⁷ and praised the governments in Italy which had

⁴G.B. Pagani, *Rosmini e gli uomini del suo tempo* (Florence: Libreria Arcivescovile, 1919), p. 255. [Author]

⁵*Vita di Antonio Rosmini* by a priest of the Institute of Charity (Turin: Unione Tipografica), II, 329-330. [Author]

⁶"Nella inaugurazione del monumento di Antonio Rosmini a Stresa," speech by Fra Paoli. Words of Niccolò Tommaseo et al. (Genoa: Sordomuti, 1859). [Author]

⁷I.e., the papal court. [Editor]

by their illegal actions obstructed the exercise of rights on the part of the Holy See.” That “all” includes Rosmini himself. Such an assertion is more than merely unlikely; it is downright *false*. During those years, Rosmini had been militantly active in defending the freedom of the Church in several articles dealing with the Constituent Assembly,⁸ matrimony, and other topical religious problems of the day. He had both proposed and championed a federation of Italian states in order to safeguard the temporal power of the Pope. Is it likely that during this banquet, he should have forgotten and contradicted all this? that he should have joined the others in those unbecoming remarks?

The article then goes on to say that Don Bosco was silent, and Rosmini made a sign to the other guests that they, too, should be quiet and reminded Bonghi that Don Bosco was present. Bonghi is said to have replied, “That idiot does not understand a thing.” This was an insolent remark. Yet, although Bonghi was an impetuous young man, he was nonetheless well-mannered, at least, and it seems very unlikely that such words should have passed his lips so that Don Bosco could overhear them.

As for the remainder of the story, if what is said about the frank retort to Farini is true, and it sounds likely (I say this because here the doubt does not fall precisely on the Christian fortitude of Don Bosco, but on this entire article), if what Don Bosco is said to have retorted so frankly to Farini is true, then the Venerable Don Bosco is certainly to be praised. But it is altogether unlikely that Antonio Rosmini did not join him in his frankness. Rosmini, who had been so bold as to reprimand [King] Charles Albert’s ministers for their hostility toward the Church and the Pope;⁹ who for this same reason, broke off his relations with Count Cavour; who was ready to break off his ties of friendship with the Count’s brother, Marquis Gustavo,¹⁰ would certainly have had no less courage than Don Bosco in speaking out truthfully to Farini or anybody else. At length the article concludes: “Someone else admired Don Bosco—Niccolò Tommaseo.” Yet Tommaseo was not present!

In pointing out these things, Sir, in connection with this article published in *La Scuola dei Fatti*, I feel that I am fulfilling a duty in the light of the office which has been entrusted to me by Providence. I am fulfilling it somewhat late, because only lately did I learn of and read the article, and even after I read it, I was prevented from writing you until today by many important matters. At last I have written you today, hoping that I have not done so in vain; rather, I look confidently to your kindness and loyalty for some reference in your periodical

⁸The body elected by the people of Rome after a revolution forced Pope Pius IX to flee the city; it met in February 1849 and established the short-lived Roman Republic. [Editor]

⁹See *Vita*, II, 159. [Author]

¹⁰See Pagani, p. 165. [Author]

to the inaccuracies concerning Rosmini which were contained in the article in question.

I have yet another duty, which is most welcome to me, and that is to thank you for the other article which appeared in *La Scuola dei Fatti*, following immediately upon the first (with which, to tell the truth, it had little in common), and which described the holy, noble figure of A. Rosmini in its true light, the light which beyond any doubt, will be reserved for him in the future.

With sincerest regards,

Your devoted servant in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bernardine Balsari
Father General of the Institute of Charity¹¹

¹¹When sending this copy, Father Balsari corrected yet another assertion made in Vol. IV, p. 143, where it says that Canon Gastaldi passed his novitiate at Stresa, but that "having modified his philosophical principles, he was sent to England as a missionary." Father Balsari says: "I am in a position and under obligation to declare, in full and certain knowledge of the facts, that Canon Gastaldi joined our Congregation already fully convinced of Rosminian doctrine, and remained so convinced throughout his lifetime. After his two years of novitiate in Stresa ending in the early months of 1853, he taught Rosminian theories in England at the end of that same year, having been sent there as professor of theology and superintendent of studies as well as revisor for publications." [Author]

3. DON BOSCO AT THE MINOR SEMINARY IN BERGAMO¹

(From the memoirs of a venerable Bergamasque priest)

Everyone knows about St. John Bosco's two visits to Bergamo, but very few know that on the first occasion, he lodged at the minor seminary on Tassis Street, especially since such a rumor hardly seemed probable, the noble Episcopal Seminary already having been installed at that time in the new building on Arena Street. To do away with any doubts about the matter, we called on one of the few fortunate witnesses of the event who are still alive, the Venerable Father Ruggeri, former parish priest of Boccaleone, and today a priest of the Congregation of the Holy Family at Martinengo.

No sooner did we speak to him about the Saint than his face lit up: "Ah, Don Bosco, Don Bosco! How well I remember him! Word got about that he was a saint, even before he arrived here. I had only just entered the seminary. I was ten years old, but I remember him well; in his simple, unassuming way, his mere presence was already worth a sermon. I could even paint him...."

"Then it really is true that the Saint was at the minor seminary?"

"Oh, certainly! There were soldiers wounded in the war occupying the new seminary, and the first six classes had been brought back to Tassis Street. During my first year, the first year of [the] Latin [program], I attended class there, and it was there that Don Bosco preached our retreat. What a retreat that was! It is still vivid in my mind, though seventy-five years have passed since then, and perhaps my memory does not retain all the details. The first sermon began with the words of the Gospels, *Venite mecuma seorsuma in desertuma locuma*:² his Piedmontese accent played him another disagreeable trick when he was preaching to us about hell, for the traditional words *sempre mai* became *sempre maia*. But we were all listening to him, our mouths agape. What, too, of

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 3. [Editor]

²The old priest stresses Don Bosco's Piedmontese accent, indicated by the addition of an *a* to the Latin nouns and pronouns of Mark 6:31. [Editor]

Holy Mass? What an impression it made to watch him celebrate! Everyone wanted to confess to him at the end of the retreat, and the Superiors were obliged to give priority to the older boys. This excluded me, and I recall how I cried in my disappointmentWhat a saint! Come here, come here, he said, and you felt that you wanted to hurl yourself into his arms and confide your whole heart to him. After the retreat was over, everyone begged our superiors to have him come back again the following year. But I did not see him any more....”

L'Orfanello, Bulletin of the Congregation of the Holy Family, April 1934

4. PROVIDENCE AND FORESIGHT¹

Countess Adele Castelnovo Castellani, one of the earlier cooperators in Turin, left the following report in her family, and it was forwarded to us by Countess Castelnovo delle Lanze Filiari (Isle of La Scala, Verona).

Turin, March 1, 1891

Many years ago I decided to offer a modest contribution toward the casting of a bell in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, to obtain special protection from our loving Mother Mary for my dear family. During a visit to Don Bosco, of revered memory, I gave him a bit of the sum I had promised to this project, resolving to finish my offering on a later occasion.

A long time went by without my attending to my obligation. But one morning I woke up thinking that the time had come to attend to it, and so insistent was this feeling that I rushed to the Oratory in great haste. Before going upstairs to the venerable priest's room, I wanted to attend Holy Mass and receive Communion, but I could not; I had to give way to the urgent feeling in my heart and go straight to Don Bosco without delay, almost as though I were afraid I might not meet him.

I was waiting for my turn to see him because, as always, there were so many people eagerly waiting for him, and these had been there before I arrived. Suddenly a servant came over to me, asked my name, and said that Don Bosco had directed that as soon as I appeared I was to be brought to him, ahead of the others. At this I said there must be some mistake, because I was not expected; but the man insisted, and a few minutes later, I was ushered into audience.

I made my offering, very perturbed by this exceptional foresight, and asked him very simply how he had divined my intention. He took two soldi from his

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 4. [Editor]

pocket and answered: "This is all I have at my disposal this morning. Today, Monday, the master builder came asking for some down payment on his bill. I told him to come back later, because I was expecting your offering."

My surprise was overwhelming, yet greatly was I gratified to have fulfilled my promise at such a propitious moment.

Countess Adele Castelnovo Castellani

5. TWO LETTERS FROM DON BOSCO TO FATHER OREGLIA¹

These letters were published by La Civiltà cattolica (June 1, 1929), which retains the originals. The Saint had sent them to Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J., brother of Frederick Oreglia.² The first letter is most important for its historic reference to the origins of the Congregation.

A

Turin, August 7, '68

My dear Fr. Oreglia,

You have been told about the project for a religious congregation, new-born and still at a delicate stage, whose purpose is to preserve the spirit in our gatherings, which are called festive oratories.

From the report here enclosed³ you will see where the situation now stands. I had presented a memo to the Holy Father,⁴ a copy of which I enclose also; I have not yet received an official reply to it. But I was told in confidence that there are difficulties concerning the dimissorial letters in general, and that all the bishops who gave me letters of commendation, when questioned by Rome,

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 9. In the Ceria edition of Don Bosco's *Epistolario* (4 vols., Turin: SEI, 1955-1959), they are nos. 675 and 691. A critical edition of Don Bosco's letters is underway; the first volume, 726 letters dated 1835-1863, was published in 1991: Giovanni Bosco, *Epistolario: Introduzione, testi critici e note*, ed. Francesco Motto (Rome: LAS). [Editor]

²Father Oreglia was on the staff of the Jesuits' distinguished journal, *La Civiltà cattolica*; his brother was a Salesian coadjutor brother for nine years before he, too, decided to become a Jesuit. [Editor]

³*Notitia brevis Societatis Sancti Francisci Salesii et nonnulla decreta ad eandem spectantia*. Turin, 1868. [Author]

⁴Petition for the final approval of the Society, or at least for the faculty of issuing dimissorial letters. It was dated *a domo Sodalitiae Pagi Mirabelli quartus idus Junii MDCCCLXVIII*. [Author]

all [*sic*] responded negatively on this point, without any exception. Thus Card. [Joseph] Berardi.⁵

On the other hand, there seems to be a tendency to grant the dimissorials to a determined number each year, and to permit us to instruct the clerics in a regular style of living⁶ according to the needs of the oratories and of the Congregation itself. For me this arrangement is indispensable because of serious reasons which you can easily imagine. But this was told me only orally and is somewhat uncertain.

Now I need to ask you to consider that it would be a great charity if you would obtain an audience with His Eminence Cardinal Berardi and ask him, also confidentially, the following questions:

1. Are the bishops whose opinion was against approving our Rule those of the [ecclesiastical] province of Turin, to whom letters of commendation were not submitted, or are they the same ones who had already written them and forwarded them to the Holy See, and that only for form's sake? That is, must I follow their advice, or should I act contrary to what they are telling me in order to make sure I do what they want me to?

2. If this is how things stand, is there anything that can be done, and is the support of the Cardinal Vicar⁷ and of Cardinals [Philip] Guidi and [Dominic] Consolini any help in this case, or shall I appeal to others?

3. Is the matter already being considered by the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars? Is it better to push it or to let things run their course?

4. Msgr. [Stanislaus] Svegliati⁸ has never shown himself against us; if we could get his support, it would be a great help.

5. There is fear that the clerics would present themselves for [holy] orders without having studied enough, but the experience of twenty-four years excludes every fear. Also, it must be remembered that any ordaining bishop has the right, even the obligation, to examine the candidate in his studies and in matters pertaining to his vocation to the ecclesiastical state.

6. Do you think I should make a trip to Rome to offer explanations which might clarify many apparent difficulties?

These are the matters which I entrust to your proven goodness. Should your relations with Card. Berardi not be such that you can discuss these matters [with him], I would leave everything to your discretion. Since everything would be done confidentially, and all we are doing is to find some way of en-

⁵As undersecretary of state and a close friend of Cardinal James Antonelli, the secretary, Cardinal Berardi was very influential at the Vatican. He was a staunch supporter of Don Bosco, as the Saint will mention toward the end of the letter. [Editor]

⁶I.e., in a style of living suitable to religious ("regular") clergy. [Editor]

⁷Cardinal Constantine Patrizi. [Editor]

⁸The secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. [Editor]

sureing the existence of our congregation before my death, I believe that you will be able to discuss it with His Eminence Cardinal Berardi, who for many years has been a father to us and for whose health we offer special prayers to the Lord every day.

Frederick has gone to Sardinia, as you know; I know he arrived there, and nothing else. *He arrived unexpectedly this very moment; he is very well and sends you his regards.*⁹

You would be doing me a real favor if you would offer my most respectful regards to all the reverend Fathers at *La Civiltà cattolica*, for whom I have put aside a commemorative medal of our church,¹⁰ which I hope to have an occasion soon to present to them.

God bless you and your work. With the utmost gratitude, I remain

Your obedient and affectionate servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Count della Margherita is seriously ill; he has rallied but relapsed several times, and today his condition has worsened. He is at his La Margherita estate.

B

In his second letter Don Bosco responds to Father Oreglia's information and suggestions.

Turin, October 5, '68

My dear Fr. Oreglia,

I have acted on the advice you so kindly gave me in the name of a gracious person,¹¹ and through the Cardinal Vicar I have applied to the Holy See for the faculty of training my own clerics after our congregation has been formally approved and a superior general appointed for it.

His Eminence the Cardinal was gracious enough to take this step with the Holy Father and received from him the reply I am now enclosing.¹² Now *quid agendum* [what shall we do]? Do you think it would be better to have someone near the Holy Father who, given the occasion, will speak in our favor, Msgr. [Francis] Ricci,¹³ for example; or to leave things to mature in God's eyes, and

⁹The words in italics were written between the lines in another colored ink. [Author]

¹⁰The Church of Mary Help of Christians, consecrated the previous June 9. [Editor]

¹¹One of Father Oreglia's Jesuit confreres; Father Oreglia's letter of August 16 may be found in the Italian edition of these *Memoirs*, Vol. IX, pp. 373-374. [Editor]

¹²Cardinal Patrizi communicated the Pope's response to Don Bosco in a letter of August 30; the letter appears in the Italian of Vol. IX, p. 374. [Editor]

¹³The Pope's chamberlain; he had visited the Oratory and Lanzo in July. [Editor]

then next winter make another trip to Rome? Do you think it wise to let the thread be guided by another hand while the Holy Father is not opposed [to us]? If you would be so good as to give me your advice in this matter, I shall immediately follow it and leave the happy result to Divine Providence.

What a lot of trouble I am adding to your serious duties! Please be patient; it is a work of charity. God will put it to your soul's account. You shall have our gratitude and prayers, which in our littleness we shall daily raise to the Lord for you.

Your brother Frederick is definitely settled in Turin and is in excellent health.

I commend my poor soul and those of my boys to the charity of your holy prayers. I am, with the greatest esteem,

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. If you have an opportunity, please give my regards and those of Father Francesia to Father Angelini.¹⁴

¹⁴A distinguished Jesuit Latin scholar who corresponded with Father John Baptist Francesia. This could be either Nicholas or Rota Angelini, according to the Institute of Jesuit Sources in St. Louis. After Don Bosco's death, Father Angelini paid tribute to him by composing noble inscriptions for a funeral commemoration in Rome. *See Italian Vol. XIX, pp. 17, 393-394.* [Editor]

6. THE PURCHASE OF THE HOUSE AT BORGO SAN MARTINO¹

This item was published by a former student, L. Gabotto, in Vita Casalese, the Catholic weekly of Casale Monferrato, May 12, 1934. In Vol. IX of these Memoirs, by Father Lemoyne, one may read two letters from Don Bosco to Father [John] Bonetti about this contract on pages 427 and 433-434.

When, for various reasons, Don Bosco found it necessary to transfer his first boarding school [outside Turin] from Mirabello to another site, he called one day on the nobleman Marquis [Ferdinand] Scarampi [di Pruney] of Villanova to ask whether he were willing to sell him his villa at Borgo San Martino. The noble gentleman told me that Don Bosco told him directly, "I know, my dear Marquis, that you wish to sell me your house." In reply to this unexpected request the marquis told him that it not even remotely occurred to him that he should give up his beloved villa. Don Bosco was not in the least discouraged; he insistently renewed his request, urging the marquis to name the price. Unwilling to give the saintly priest another flat refusal, the marquis asked for an exorbitant price—even he thought so—in the hope of getting rid of him. What was his surprise at hearing his price instantly accepted! As a perfect gentleman who had been taken at his word, he wanted to abide by it; and thus the Villa Scarampi became our own boarding school of Borgo San Martino.

All this took place when Don Bosco had not a penny to his name. For, shortly before taking his leave of the noble gentleman, he cheerfully asked him to loan him the few lire he needed to pay for a ticket back to Turin. Yet two weeks after their conversation,² he paid the marquis the full price agreed upon for this Baroque country residence where a great many of us spent our early years, which were the best of our lives.

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 10. [Editor]

²More than two weeks elapsed after the conversation, but the exaggeration does not detract anything from the promptness with which the payment was actually made. [Author]

7. LETTERS TO MRS. CESCONI AND HER SON

A chance encounter introduced to Don Bosco a boy named Victor Cesconi of Domodossola, who confided to him his desire to become a priest. The youth must have been deeply impressed by him, for he wrote him not long after; this was the beginning of correspondence between the Saint, the young fellow, and his widowed mother, who became a zealous cooperator. The family had relatives in Toulouse, whom they visited from time to time. After Don Bosco's death, Victor Cesconi married a young lady from Paris of the De Coincy family. He died in 1927, and his widow sent us the originals of these fourteen letters in 1934.¹

A (945)

Turin, October 3, '71

My Little Friend,

May the grace of O.L.J.C.² be with us always. *Amen.*

I remember very well my gracious meeting with the charming Victor Cesconi, whose manners and intelligence won all my admiration. Every single thing was confirmed by the courteous and Christian letter which you, my dear Victor, so kindly wished to write to me. I thank you with all my heart.

We weren't able to talk as I wished, though, and I hope that, God willing, we'll see more of each other. Should you ever chance to be passing through Turin, and should your family allow you to do so, I invite you to spend a few days here in our house. Thus I would have time to tell you things which concern you, things which you don't know but I do.

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 12. We have translated eight representative letters. The capital letter labels here correspond to those of the individual letters in the Italian edition. Each letter is further identified here by its number in the Ceria edition of Don Bosco's *Epistolario*. [Editor]

²Our Lord Jesus Christ. As nearly as possible without sacrificing clarity, we follow Don Bosco's abbreviations and other matters of style. [Editor]

I've given instructions that the *Italian Classics*³ and *Catholic Readings* be mailed to you at Preglia.⁴ There's also another book, *The Companion of Youth*, and this is a gift I'm sending you as a guarantee that you'll pray for me.

Please give my regards to your family and your pastor, and also to your superiors at your boarding school⁵ when you return there. Tell them that, in my littleness, I recommend them all to the Lord and beg them to pray for me.

God bless you, my dear Victor, and may he grant you the grace of keeping the holy thoughts you've expressed to me. Become a good priest, a holy priest. Then pray for me that, while I'm taking care of others, I may also save my own soul. Amen.

I'm all yours in J.C.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

D (1343)

Turin, 8-15-75

My very esteemed Lady,

I received your kind letter at the beginning of this month; in it you recommended a relative of yours who was *sick in both body and soul*, as you put it. I've done as you asked me and immediately given instructions that special prayers were to be said, morning and evening, at the altar of Mary Help of Christians for this intention. If our request isn't contrary to the plans of Divine Providence, I hope something can be accomplished. I myself have made a special *memento* every day at Holy Mass.

Your letter enclosed a 100-franc note, which I immediately spent for my poor boys; it truly was an act of providence for them. I thank you for it from the bottom of my heart.

I'm delighted that our Victor's in good health. Give him my best and tell him not to forget the deal we made, namely, that I'm to pray for him every day at Holy Mass, on the condition that every morning he commend me, too, to the Lord.

I hope we'll be able to talk a little, somewhere in the area, when you go to Preglia.

³Italian Classics for the Young was one of Don Bosco's many enterprises; he published 204 volumes between 1869 and 1885; see Vol. IX, pp. 195-197. [Editor]

⁴Town in the district of Domodossola, where the family had its summer estate. [Author] Domodossola is far up into the Alps of northeastern Piedmont. Preglia is a short distance north of it. [Editor]

⁵The Rosminian boarding school at Domodossola. Perhaps he attended the school as a day student. [Author]

God bless you and, with you, your whole family. Recommending myself to the prayers of all, I'm delighted and grateful to declare myself

Your most obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. My humble regards to Victor's tutor.

G (1531)

Turin, 12-15-76

Dear Madam,

I was very pleased to get your news of Victor and your whole family, and I bless the Lord that his examinations were successful and he's regained his health. But don't push him too hard in his studies. It's better to defer his examinations a bit than to prejudice his health.

During the second half of next January, I'll be going to Nice and then to Marseille, God willing. Either on my way there or on the way back, I'll stop at Cannes to call briefly on your mother and your sister.

From Nice I'll write [to inform] you of the day I'll reach Marseille. His Excellency the Archbishop⁶ kindly offers me lodging with him, but my first visit will be to your family.

God bless you, our dear Victor, and your pastor. Please pray for this poor fellow, who will always remain in O.L.J.C.

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

H (1705)

Rome, February 2, '78
Torre Specchi 36

My dear Victor,

You've been changing your address so often that one of these days you'll fly off to heaven without my even knowing where you left from. Isn't this true? At any rate, I know you're at Toulouse now; so I learned at Rome, where I received your welcome letter.

⁶Marseille was not then an archdiocese nor its bishop an archbishop. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

I begin by thanking you for the gracious offer you make of your savings for the sake of our poor lads, who will certainly pray for you, your mom, and the people you recommend to me.

I've pondered and reflected on what you say about [becoming] a private chamberlain of His Holiness. This is hard because of the great difficulty of speaking to the Holy Father, much less of handling such matters. Note that I've been in Rome for forty days and haven't yet been able to obtain a single moment of audience, since the Holy Father has kept to his bed till now.⁷ Nevertheless, I'll try, and if it's possible I won't fail to seize the opportunity.

I recommend myself to your prayers, and your mother's and your pastor's. God bless us all and keep us always in his holy grace. I remain with heartfelt Christian affection,

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I received the announcement of the death of your uncle, Mr. Mettelretto, and haven't failed to pray for him and to ask our orphans to pray for him.

L (1939)

Turin, 7-2-79

Dear Mrs. Cesconi,

My eyes are getting better, and so I myself am resuming my usual correspondence with my friends at Toulouse.

Thanks to you and our dear Victor for the cordial best wishes you were both so kind to send me for my name day, for this poor priest who has no other merit than what your goodness and charity bestow. I'll try zealously to repay you with special prayers, that both of you may enjoy long life and good health and that our Victor may reap ample success in his coming examinations.

Last April 8, as I was on my way to Rome, I found at Turin your letter with 50 francs enclosed; now I've received another 20 francs from Mrs. Magdalene Ragazzoni. Oh, so many reasons to thank you! God reward you properly!

I too wish I could greet you in person and see once more the little fellow who's now become my big friend, Victor Cesconi. I have no business that will call me away from Turin before mid-August; if you should pass through the city, you must stop over to discuss a few things in the Lord's name.

⁷Pius IX was dying; moreover, persons in the papal court unfriendly to Don Bosco blocked his efforts to see the Pope before he fell ill. *See* Vol. XIII, pp. 360-372. [Editor]

It would be prudent, however, to advise me of your itinerary some time in advance, and I'll make sure to be someplace to which you won't have far to walk.

It's a year since we opened a house for poor boys at Marseille; it has multiplied, and now there are already three [houses].

Every day at Holy Mass I pray for you, for your son, and for your mother. God bless you all and keep you in his holy grace.

Lastly, I recommend myself and my poor boys to the charity of your holy prayers. With gratitude and esteem, I'm honored to declare myself

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

M (1974)

Lanzo Torinese
Sept. 9, '79

My dear Victor,

If you'd like to come and spend some ten days at Lanzo, our retreat begins there on Saturday evening. Talk it over with Mother, and if she gives you permission, you can come to Turin, right to the Oratory, where your room's already awaiting you. Then on Saturday you can leave with the others on the 4:30 train for Lanzo, where I'll be waiting for you. We'll see whether you're a good warrior.

God bless you and Mom. Pray for me, who remain always in J.C.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

N (2003)⁸

My dear Victor,

My heartfelt thanks for the Christian best wishes you sent me in your own name and your tutor's and your mother's. Please give them in return my own most affectionate regards and my good wishes for choice blessings.

We'll probably see each other in Rome;⁹ but shortly before you leave, write to me and I'll pave the way for an audience with the Holy Father and, further,

⁸This letter lacks a date. Most probably Victor's best wishes were for the new year. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁹Don Bosco went to Rome on March 11, 1880. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

[find] a cozy hotel [for you]. I'll do everything you tell me; but you'll prepare a purse of gold coins for me, won't you?

Now to yourself: What grade are you in? Do you still intend to become a priest? Are you in good health, and your tutor and your mother too? Do you still pray for Don Bosco? Please bear in mind that so far we've never been able to talk together somewhat confidentially about what pertains to your soul.

See how ready I am to chatter! God bless you, my dear Victor, and may he free you from dangers to your soul. If you wish me well, pray to the Blessed Virgin Mary that I may save my own soul.

Believe me always in J.C.

Your affectionate friend,
Fr. John Bosco

O (2204)

Turin, 7-4-81

My very esteemed Mrs. Cesconi,

I was pleased to receive your news and good wishes. May God repay you for them, and our dear Victor and all your relatives.

I also received the money order for 60 francs that you offered for our various houses, all of which generally require help.

Please give my heartfelt thanks to your mother and sister, assuring them that every day I pray fervently for them at Holy Mass, just as I do for you.

The Holy Father entrusted to the Salesian cooperators the building of the church and hospice of the Sacred Heart in Rome. The Holy Father has also directed me to appoint some ladies and gentlemen as collectors. I've been thinking of including you and our Victor among their number, and I hope you'll accept. When the opportunity presents itself, you'd collect donations from relatives, friends, or acquaintances, even in small sums of a few soldi.¹⁰ Just make sure to note the name and surname of the giver and the amount offered. I'm enclosing in the mail several circulars and the sheets for listing the donations. Remember that we're working for the Sacred Heart, through whom God pays generously.

God bless you and keep you in good health. Please pray for me, who will always be in J.C.

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

¹⁰The soldo was a coin worth five centesimi, or one-twentieth of a lira. [Editor]

8. FIRST MEETING BETWEEN THE MARQUIS OF VILLENEUVE-TRANS AND DON BOSCO¹

In March 1934² a daughter of the marquis of Villeneuve-Trans, a Sister of the Sacred Heart, sent this account to Turin.

[My father met Don Bosco] during the winter of 1879. We were spending it at Hyères, where we had been hoping the mild climate would be good for my father's health, which had been badly shaken by successive periods of mourning. But neither laughing, sun-warmed nature nor the efforts of [medical] science, on top of all that our loving devotion could inspire us to do, had produced the improvement we wished for, and his illness did not improve. He was under the care of Dr. [Charles] d'Espiney, an excellent Christian, the same gentleman who was one day to become Don Bosco's historian.³

When the good doctor was convinced that human means were of no avail, he did not hesitate to appeal to supernatural ones.

Knowing that Don Bosco was due to visit the orphanage at La Navarre, he decided to bring to his patient the priest who was already venerated as a saint. I was just a little girl at the time, but I can still hear the tone in which my father said: "A saint is coming to our house." Our first joy was to be renewed many times. I can still see Don Bosco entering the room, supported by two of his priests; his kindly air; his smile, so delicate, so benevolent. He blessed my brother and me.

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 16, in French. On the meeting, see also Vol. XIV, p. 19. [Editor]

²Don Bosco was to be canonized on April 1. [Editor]

³Dr. d'Espiney wrote what Father Arthur Lenti has called "the first 'serious' biographical essay on Don Bosco to appear in book form": *Dom Bosco* (Nice, 1881), which went through ten printings, including some revisions, before the Saint's death. The doctor, a benefactor of the Salesians from their arrival at Nice in 1875, attended Don Bosco during his periodic visits to France and became a close friend. He died in 1891. See Arthur Lenti, "The Earliest Biographies of Don Bosco and Their English Translations," *Journal of Salesian Studies* I, no. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 17-21. [Editor]

What took place during the interview he had with my father? I only know that Don Bosco invited him to pray to Our Lady Help of Christians, then to undertake a pilgrimage of thanksgiving to Turin on May 24. This happened in February, and on May 24 he kept his word and went to thank his heavenly benefactress, whose protection was to be felt constantly in his household. When he got home, his first thought was to erect on his estate a statue of the Madonna on a granite pillar. Every day he laid flowers affectionately at its base, nor did he let any of his children neglect honoring her.

Our family always revered Don Bosco as a saint. Anything that he had used was preserved as a relic. My father always carried on his person a picture of Our Lady Help of Christians, on the back of which Don Bosco had written a few lines. He called it his passport and wanted to acquire an identical talisman for each of his elders for them to save jealously. His devotion to the Salesian work was the second form my father gave to his gratitude. The triumph of Our Lady Help of Christians and the wonderful progress of the Salesian works were always sources of joy to his heart.

A.M.V.T.⁴

⁴Anne-Marie Villeneuve-Trans. Also in March 1934 she sent to Turin an account of how Don Bosco healed her three-year-old brother Raymond in April 1880. See Vol. XV, p. 139, and Italian Vol. XV, pp. 701-702. [Editor]

9. A LETTER FROM DON BOSCO TO FATHER FELIX BAVA¹

The originals of three letters to Father Bava are preserved in the parish archives of Casorzo Monferrato, where he was pastor.

B.S. Martino, Dec. 14, '80

Dearest Father,

Thank you, Father, for your kind cooperation in our works of charity. If only everyone understood *quod superest date eleemosynam*² as well as you do!

I enclose the letter for Father Vincent Dalla Valle. Read it for your own guidance, then seal it and make yourself our protector before this priest. If you should ever encounter anybody with whom you can discuss charity, help me by emphasizing the straits in which I find myself in order to clothe about 300 priests and clerics and to maintain the works begun near Protestant churches and schools.

In the meantime, in accordance with the faculty received from the Holy See, I grant to you as a distinguished benefactor of our humble congregation:

1. The faculty of blessing medals, rosaries, and crucifixes with all the indulgences of St. Bridget and St. Dominic.

2. Application of a plenary indulgence to all the sick whom you should visit whose illness may be at all serious.

3. Faculty to read and keep forbidden books. *Exceptis de obscenis*.

Please accept, kind Father, this respectful token of gratitude and pray for me, who am in O.L.J.C.,

Gratefully yours,
Fr. J. Bosco³

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 17; three letters, of which we give here the second. *Epistolario*, no. 2118. [Editor]

²"That which remaineth, give [as] alms" (Luke 11:41, Douay version). [Editor]

³The closing and signature are missing in the Italian edition but are supplied in the *Epistolario*. [Editor]

10. A LETTER OF THANKS¹

This is addressed to the two young daughters of Mr. Bòffano, a notary at Cuneo.

Turin, Nov. 29, 1882

My very esteemed Misses Bòffano,

I receive your offering gratefully and thank you. I do not fail to pray for you. God be with you in your youth and enlighten you so that you may recognize your vocation and become saints. Faith, courage, patience, and God will do the rest.

The Lord bless you and keep you both in the state of his holy grace and on the road to heaven. Pray also for me and my very numerous family (150 thousand), and believe me always in J.C.

Your humble servant,
Fr. J. Bosco

¹Italian edition: *Documenti e fatti anteriori*, no. 18. *Epistolario*, no. 2374. [Editor]

11. LETTERS TO CLAIRE LOUVET

***Editor's note:** The appendix to Vol. XVI contains fifty-seven letters from Don Bosco to Miss Claire Louvet, a Salesian cooperator who lived at Aire-sur-Lys in the Pas de Calais department of France. All of Vol. XV's nineteenth chapter is devoted to her, and many of these letters are included there—translated into English from Father Ceria's Italian version. There is no need, however, to reproduce those letters here. Instead, we will offer translations, directly from the original French, of other letters from the collection that are of special spiritual or biographical interest. We shall give the letter's number from Vol. XVI, followed in parentheses by its number in the Ceria edition of Don Bosco's Epistolario, vol. IV (Turin: SEI, 1959), to which we frequently refer.¹*

1 (2713)

Turin, January 1, 1882

Kind Miss [Louvet],

It was without doubt an excellent idea for you to send us a 500-franc note for our works. The benefit's all yours; for you began to collect your hundred-fold² from the day, the very moment you sent it. You have time to get other money ready for me between now and my visit to Aire (April). Isn't this so, my kind Miss Claire?

¹For further reading on Miss Louvet and her correspondence with the saint, see John Itzaina, "‘Charitable Mademoiselle’: Don Bosco's Fifty-eight Letters to Clara Louvet," in the *Journal of Salesian Studies* I, no. 1 (Spring 1990), pp. 35-46; idem, "The ‘Epistolario’ of Don Bosco: Fifty-eight Letters to Clara Louvet," in *Don Bosco's Place in History: Acts of the First International Congress of Don Bosco Studies*, ed. Patrick Egan and Mario Midali (Rome: LAS, 1993), pp. 487-499, a slightly more developed version of the same essay. [Editor]

²See Matt. 19:19. [Editor]

I'm very sorry to hear that Monsignor Scott's age and sickness grow continually worse. I shall indeed pray for him during Holy Mass, and our children will offer up, or rather, have offered up their Communions and prayers.

Be patient, both you and your spiritual director; God will order both your spiritual and temporal affairs for his own glory. But while you're waiting, try to approach the sacred banquet as often as you can, and when for whatever reason you can't do so, don't be distressed. You'll tell me your troubles, and I'll try to give you advice and guidance.

In conclusion, the Salesians and the sisters of O.L.H.C.³ thank you for your acts of kindness toward them. Everyone's praying for you, sends you good wishes, and is very eager to see you among us again.

God bless you, and may he shower the blessings of heaven upon you, your family, and all your affairs. May he grant you perseverance along the road to heaven. Amen.

Please pray also for this poor priest, who will gratefully always be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

3 (2715)

Turin, June 17, 1882

Miss Claire,

I think our letters must have crossed. In my letter I told you I'd received the 5 thousand francs; and now I inform you that I've received the two thousand enclosed in your last letter. Your intentions will be faithfully carried out.

Ten thousand francs—what a bouquet for the feast of St. John!⁴ O Miss Claire, if everyone who comes on that occasion would bring me bouquets of this kind, I'd be a second Rodeskuil.⁵ But all I have is one *Miss Claire Louvet*, and I'm quite happy about that.

But I want St. John to pay you the expenses of his feast, and to force him to, that day I'll celebrate Holy Mass myself at the altar of Our L.H.C., and our children will offer up their prayers and Communions for your intention.

In your letter you tell me you're worried because you're not saving something for a rainy day. But this isn't the case at all. I want you to save all your income, investing it at a hundredfold interest on earth so as to receive the true

³Our Lady Help of Christians. As nearly as possible without sacrificing clarity, we shall follow Don Bosco's abbreviations and other matters of style. [Editor]

⁴An allusion to the traditional celebration of Don Bosco's name day on June 24. [Editor]

⁵He means to say Rothschild, the famous Jewish banker in Paris. [Author]

reward of saving it forever in paradise. Do you follow me? I hope so. My objective has always been to do whatever I can to detach the hearts of my friends from the wretched things of this world and to lift them up to God, to eternal happiness.

You see, Miss Claire, I'm trying to help you become rich, or rather, to make fruitful your earthly wealth, which lasts so poorly, by exchanging it for eternal treasures that last forever.

You've asked me: in what work can you best invest your money?

I believe it'll be very well invested if you come to the assistance of the Church and of the Holy Father, who stands in need; come to the aid of the works recommended by the Holy Father himself, such as the construction of the Church and Orphanage of the Sacred Heart in Rome; aid works which are dedicated to training young men for the priesthood. In a word, prepare priests, but good priests who will really win souls for God.

If you're patient enough to read and can understand my bad handwriting, I'll write more on this subject.⁶

Meantime, may God bless you. Continue to pray for me, who will always be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

4 (2716)

Turin, July 15, '82

Kind Miss Claire,

Let me tell you an interesting story.

I was faced with a considerable debt for the seminary where we train young men for the priesthood and, not knowing where to turn, I thought, 'If I didn't think it indiscreet, I'd ask Miss Louvet; but she has already given and continues to give us so much that I must be discreet.'

Meanwhile July 14 comes around. I'd collected something, but I still needed two thousand francs to complete the required sum. And lo and behold, Divine Providence steps in. The mailman arrives and hands me a registered letter with a declared value of two thousand francs.

How'd this happen? The good God himself inspired Miss Louvet to anticipate her offering and send her money, which arrived at the very moment it was due. Blessed be God! A thousand thanks to you!

⁶This paragraph is missing in the text published in the *Epistolario*. [Editor]

I now mean to write to [South] America that in all fifteen settlements⁷ when they baptize orphaned savages who are embracing our faith, at least one girl per settlement should receive the name of *Claire*, and she'll be obliged to pray for you her whole life long.

For our part we continue to pray for you every day in both our private and our community prayers.

My health and my business prevent me from going to baptize the child of Lady Villeneuve, but in the event that you should be coming [to Turin], please let me know, because it's absolutely necessary for us to meet and talk together.

Be completely tranquil about public affairs. You have nothing to fear.

Continue receiving Holy Communion every morning. You say you're afraid it might become a habit. When a habit's good and guides us in virtue, we should continue to follow it and practice it.

You're far away from here, but every day you have a *memento* for yourself alone in my Mass.

God bless you and keep you in good health. Please pray also for me, who remain always in J.Ch.

Your grateful servant,
Father John Bosco

P.S.: Can you read my bad handwriting? Would you prefer that I use my secretary, whose writing's much better?

5 (2717)

Turin, August 10, 1882

Miss Claire,

It's now the feast of St. Claire, and I don't want to forget you today. Here is my humble bouquet. On the 12th of this month I'll say Holy Mass, and our children will say their prayers and receive Holy Communion for your intention and to thank you for the charity you've shown us on several occasions.

In reply to your kind letter, I'll say: Next winter, if the good God grants it to us, I'll make an excursion by way of Turin-Nice-Marseille-Lyons-Paris. Perhaps we'll have an opportunity to meet. At the moment there's no great need to discuss personal matters. We can write to each other and make ourselves understood about all there is to do.

Lady Villeneuve will without doubt pass through Turin with her family on their way to either Nice or Marseille, and I hope to see them and talk with them.

⁷I.e., places where the Salesians had missions in Patagonia. [Editor]

The little cross I sent you means God's preparing many flowers for you in the midst of crosses and thorns. But don't worry about that. I'll explain it all to you in its own good time.⁸

You say you'd like to offer me two thousand francs on some occasion. But since we always, and especially at present, need money, I believe it'd be as well to forward the offering. In this way you'll also anticipate your hundred-fold, and we'll find assistance sooner.

Oh! God bless you, Miss Claire. God keep you in good health and reserve a place for you beside O.L.H.C. in paradise. Amen.

Please continue praying fervently for this poor priest, who will always be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

P.S. My regards to your companion,⁹ if you'll be so kind.

7 (2719)

San Benigno Canavese, Oct. 5, 1882

Miss Claire,

On the 8th of this month I'll be in Turin to await your arrival. You may come with a companion or two; there's room for anybody you may bring.¹⁰

All you have to do is tell me the hour of your arrival in Turin so someone can meet you at the station.

God bless you on your journey. Our children will pray for you, and every morning I'll remember you at Holy Mass; meanwhile I assure you I'll always be in J.Ch.

Your grateful, humble servant,
Father John Bosco

⁸Don Bosco had sent her a holy card with a small cross. Such a gift made some impression on Miss Louvet, who had her crosses to bear, and she wanted to know what he meant thereby. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁹Miss Des Lyons, who had accompanied her to Turin late in 1881. [Editor]

¹⁰She was to stay, as before, with the Salesian Sisters. [Editor]

8 (2720)

Turin, November 2, '82

Miss Claire Louvet,

I've received your kind letter, which gives me very little news of yourself.

I trust all's well. You ask for an answer for Father Engrand. I already answered him and will write him again. I pray together with all our orphans, and at Holy Mass every morning I remember him at Holy Mass [*sic*]. He is to have great faith in Our Lady Help of Christians, and then without doubt he'll obtain what he wants, provided our prayers aren't contrary to his soul's eternal happiness.

I've asked the Holy Virgin to give him a special benediction.

You'll be reading in the *Bulletin*¹¹ about the consecration of the Church of St. John the Evangelist.¹² It was a truly wonderful sight. Thousands and thousands of people came to go to confession and Communion with most remarkable devotion.

God bless you, Miss Claire, and keep you in good health, with peace of heart and serenity of spirit. Please pray also for this poor fellow, who will always be gratefully in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

9 (2721)

Turin, December 5, 1882

Miss Claire,

The Holy Virgin has inspired me to write to you now.¹³ To acknowledge your acts of kindness toward us, we wish to do something that may please you. So on Friday all our children (150 thousand) will offer their prayers and Communions for your intention, and poor D. Bosco, unable to do anything better, will say Holy Mass for you, that God may bless you and the Holy Virgin may protect you always, be your help in danger and your upholder at the hour of death, your joy in paradise. Does that sound agreeable to you? But everything in its own good time.

Fr. Rua, Fr. Lazzero, Fr. Cagliero,¹⁴ and others want to be remembered to you and send you their respectful regards.

¹¹Since April 1879 there had been a French edition of the *Bollettino salesiano*. [Editor]

¹²See Vol. XV, pp. 324-326. [Editor]

¹³The novena of the Immaculate Conception was drawing to its close. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

¹⁴On Fathers Rua and Cagliero, see Appendix 1. On Father Lazzero, see pp. 333-334. [Editor]

Our sisters do likewise; they remember your visit very well and desire very much to see you again, but for a good many days, weeks, and...for years,¹⁵ but particularly during the hot season, so you can make a retreat at Nizza Monferato, where you're eagerly awaited.

For myself, if things are tranquil in France, I'll leave next January 20. Genoa and Nice, the Maritime Alps, Cannes, Toulon, Marseille, Valence, Lyons, so that I'll be in Paris at the end of March. As you can see, there are projects, and I'll keep you well informed before carrying them out.

In the meantime, I won't fail to remember you every morning at Holy Mass, to pray for the priest whom you've recommended to me, for Miss Des Lyons, and for all your intentions.

God keep you in good health and on the road to paradise. Please pray fervently for this poor priest, who will always be obliged to you in our Lord J.Ch.

Your grateful servant,
Father John Bosco

10 (2722)

Turin, December 18, 1882

Miss Claire,

Lest I forget anything in your letters, I'll write you in chronological order. I begin by thanking you for the very fine collection you took up for the Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in Rome: 500 francs. Only 6 people contributed, but Miss Claire's 395 francs were there. That offering put everything right. May the Infant Jesus reward all the donors a hundredfold; I won't fail to pray fervently for their intentions.

Please be so kind as to give the enclosed note to Father Engrand.¹⁶

Please tell Miss Naomi Sénéchal that the Mass for her [intention] will be said, precisely on Christmas Eve, with the prayers and Communions of our children. Our poor orphans send you their special thanks for your charity toward us, since they're in direst need. They don't have enough bread or clothing against our cold climate. Therefore they're praying and will [continue to] pray very particularly for their benefactors..

Before you decide on your journey to Rome, wait for things to quiet down. Hence during April I hope we'll be able to talk either at Aire or by letter.

¹⁵Probably an allusion to Miss Louvet's idea of becoming a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, which she considered now and then. [Author]

¹⁶*Epistolario*, no. 2663. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

We're now in the Christmas novena. Every morning I remember you at Holy Mass. But you, too, are to pray for me in your holy prayers. Believe that I'll ever be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

13 (2725)

St. Leo's Oratory, Marseille
March 2, '83

Miss Claire,

I'm at Marseille; the count and viscount¹⁷ are here too, and we see each other very often, and very often we speak of you.

On April 1 I'll leave for Lyons, and I hope to reach Paris by the 15th. At the end of the month, I'll make a trip to Lille. All that, God willing.

We could meet and talk at our convenience at either Paris or Lille.

Time is tight, but if you absolutely want me to go all the way to Aire, I'll keep my word. If you allow it, however, I'll make that trip some other time when my schedule's more flexible.

God bless you always; be at peace and don't worry about either public affairs or your private ones. Pray fervently for this poor fellow, who will always be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

My address in Paris: c/o Mrs. de Combaud, 34 avenue de Messine.

18 (2730)

Turin, September 17, 1883

Miss Louvet,

Only a few things, but see that you observe them carefully.

Every year:

An annual examination of conscience, reflecting on the progress and regression of the past year.

¹⁷Of Montigny. [Author in Vol. XVI] Of Villeneuve. [Author in the *Epistolario*]

Every month:

Exercise for a Happy Death, with monthly confession and Holy Communion as though they were to be the last of your life. [The Prayers for a Happy Death.]¹⁸

Every week:

Holy Confession; great pains to remember to act on your confessor's advice.

Every day:

Holy Communion if possible. Visit to the Most Blessed Sacrament. Meditation, [spiritual] reading, examination of conscience.

Always:

Consider every day as though it were the last of our [*sic*] life.

God bless you, and may the Holy Virgin make you happy in time and in eternity. Doing whatever good deeds we can.

Please pray for your poor servant in Jesus Christ.

Father John Bosco

20 (2732)

Turin, Dec. 21, '83

Miss Claire Louvet,

During these days we've been talking a lot about you, about your charity, and about our hope of seeing you in Rome sometime during next April. Will you be going there? I believe you will.

You know well that we pray for your intention every day, but on the great feast of Christmas I beg you to accept a gift of three Masses said at the altar of Our Lady Help of Christians with many prayers and Communions. This is all to thank you for the charity you show us; to ask the Infant Jesus to keep you in good health for a very long time, that he give you much consolation through a great many days, weeks, months, years; and to crown everything, a big reward in paradise. Does that make you happy? Amen.

All the Salesians, the Sisters of the Help of Christians send you their best wishes, and everyone is praying for your long life, but always in good health.

Our missionaries have left;¹⁹ we have news [from them] as far as the island of St. Vincent,²⁰ but nothing more. We won't be hearing any news about their voyage until the fifteenth of next month.

¹⁸The bracketed phrase does not appear in the *Epistolario*. [Editor]

¹⁹The expedition that left Turin on November 10. See pp. 301-303. [Editor]

²⁰One of the Cape Verde islands, a trans-Atlantic coaling station. [Editor]

Good-bye, Miss Claire. Pray accept our gratitude, and pray for this poor priest, who will always be in J.Ch.

Your grateful, humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

P.S. Just as I was about to mail this letter, I received yours, which was, so to speak, an answer to mine. Very well. I can only say that until now we've never noticed that our letters were opened at the post office.²¹

Just now Father Albera and Father de Barruel are at Lille to arrange the date of opening St. Gabriel's Orphanage. We'll go²² there during the first days of the year.

For now don't worry about setting up scholarships for this orphanage. Everything in its own good time. Right now we have many debts to pay, especially for the construction of our church and our orphanage at Rome; and for the enormous expenses we have to undertake for our missions and our missionaries in Patagonia among the savages.

22 (2734)

Turin, January 26, '84

Miss Claire,

You're always a providential mother to us and our works. I've put off writing to you because I wished to do it myself. Now one thing at a time.

I received the sum of 500 francs, for which we'll pray fervently for your intention, especially during these days of the novena of St. Francis de Sales.²³

Very particular prayers and Holy Communions will be offered for your sick friend Mrs. Margaret Mazinguem. May the Holy Virgin bring her a special benediction which brings [*sic*] and obtains for her every grace that isn't contrary to the happiness of her soul.

As regards the things they're publishing about France, remain at ease. You may undertake your journey to Rome, where you'll find D. Bosco waiting for you.

While you're away at Rome, you could entrust your valuables to the person to whom you usually entrust them on these occasions.

²¹Miss Louvet was afraid that some of the money she had forwarded had been stolen at the post office and so informed Don Bosco. He answers that he has never been alerted to it; later he learned that there had indeed been tampering and thefts. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

²²I.e., the Salesians will go. [Editor]

²³St. Francis's feast was observed on January 29 until the calendar reform of Pope Paul VI. [Editor]

Nevertheless, should you want to reassure yourself further, you can deposit them in D. Bosco's bank; he'll look after them, or better, promptly spend them, but in such a way that thieves will never be able to touch them.²⁴ Do you like this idea? That is the way to secure your money.

You understand, Miss Claire, that I'm joking.

You ask me when our religious will be at Lille. They began on Monday of this week,²⁵ and every time you pass through that city you can always take a rest or make a stopover as you wish.

May God bless us and keep us in his grace until [we reach] paradise. Amen.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

23 (2735)

Turin, Feb. 14, '84

Miss Claire,

I didn't mean, Miss Claire, to oblige you yourself to refund the money which was stolen at the post office. Patience, and now thank you.

Among the great quantity of letters we receive, it's impossible to check whether by chance a letter's been opened. Nevertheless we'll pay greater attention to it.

If it please God, during the last days of March I'll be at Marseille, and from there I'll go from house to house²⁶ so as to spend April in Rome, where I believe you'll surely be.

Please give the enclosed few lines to Miss L. Des Lyons.

The other things some other time.

My lungs are somewhat run down. Pray for this poor priest, who will ever be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

²⁴See Matt. 6:19-20. [Editor]

²⁵The Salesians assumed the direction of St. Gabriel's Orphanage, but actually on January 29 and not on the date here indicated. [Editor]

²⁶Visiting the Salesian houses. [Editor]

27 (2739)

Oratory of S. Benigno Canavese
October 4, 1884

Miss Claire,

You wish to receive news of me, and I'm happy to be able to send it to you myself. My illness has eased considerably, and I've already been able to come to S. Benigno to receive the religious profession of our novices. Tomorrow I'll be going back to Turin, and I hope my health will continue to improve. Blessed be God.

Now I don't want to urge you to come to our aid with your charity, because whenever you're in a position [to do so] you are always helping us. But just now I'm very worried about money. The cholera epidemic has forced us to fill our houses with orphans, and we don't know what to do. You'll pray and do what you can, and nothing more.

Meanwhile we've been praying and shall always pray for your intention and the preservation of your health, and above all that the evils afflicting our countries may ever stay far from you.

O Mary, protect your daughter Claire along the road to paradise. Amen.

Your grateful servant,
Father J. Bosco

32 (2744)

Turin, December 20, 1884

Kind Miss Claire,

While I was writing you my letter of good wishes for the holidays, you got a head start on me with your kind donation of 300 francs.

May God generously reward your prayers, your good wishes, and your charity. In testimony of our gratitude we'll pray fervently for your intention during this novena;²⁷ our children also will offer their prayers and Communions, and I myself shall offer the sacrifice of the Holy Mass on Christmas Day.

My health has improved considerably, but I'm not sure of making a trip in the spring as far as Lille. We'll see.

Don't worry about the agricultural crisis. If your income has diminished, you'll diminish your good works of charity or better, you'll increase them,

²⁷The Christmas novena. [Editor]

you'll consume your capital, you'll become as poor as Job, and then you'll be holy like St. Teresa [of Avila].

But it'll never happen. God assures us of *a hundredfold on earth*; so "give, and it will be given to you"! [Luke 6:38 RSV] Be generous and patient toward your tenants. God's all-powerful. God's your Father; God will furnish you with everything necessary for you and for them.

Regarding the sum of money for your father's family, in the present crisis it's hard to be definite. I'd suggest leaving in your will a sum of 30,000 francs. All you need is a note as testament. But I hope the good God will allow us to talk with each other in person, listen to each other, and determine things better.

Please tell Father Engrand that I don't forget him, and the entire household will pray for him; and [we're praying] very specially for you, for your relatives, your friends, your business in time and eternity.

Please pray fervently for your poor Don Bosco, who will ever be in our Lord,

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

33 (2746)

Turin, Feb. 1, '85

Kind Miss Claire Louvet,

I hope Our Lady H.C. has continued her holy protection and you're presently in good health; but our children, priests, and directors are continuing their prayers at Mary's feet.

Now, despite horrible devastation, communications have been definitively established.²⁸

You know, Miss Claire, about our catastrophic fire that destroyed a substantial part of our house. Approximately 100,000 francs [in damage] but, thanks be to God, everyone was saved.

Divine Providence has always helped us and at the moment of exceptional need won't forsake us.

I recommend to you one thing only: take care of your health. Other business we'll discuss when times are calm.

My health is still quite feeble, but I'm out of bed and attending to my affairs.

Please give my regards to Father Engrand, Miss Claire, and assure him that in my humble prayers I won't forget either him or his mother.

²⁸He means to say communications with foreign countries, which had been disrupted by the cholera epidemic. [Author]

Good-bye, Miss Claire. Be brave. I hope during the course of the year we can see each other and thank the good God for the health he's given us.

Please continue your prayers for this poor priest, who will always remain in O.L.J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

34 (2747)

Turin, Feb. 21, '85

Miss Claire,

Your Christian letter swiftly brought me a thousand-franc note sent by your charity.

May God bless and reward your charity generously. During the whole of Lent we'll pray every day for your intention, especially for the preservation of your health.

In the course of these days you mustn't think about either abstinence or fasting; they're strictly forbidden to you. Let sinners like D. Bosco do whatever penance must be done.

I thank Father Engrand for the earnestness with which he's trying to sell lottery tickets.²⁹ I believe he'll find a warm welcome, with no charge, if he points out that each ticket procures an indulgence of 10 days granted by the Holy Father.

I commend him [to God] every morning at Holy Mass, and his undertaking will succeed very well.

My health's always better, but it improves very slowly. I rely very much on your holy prayers.

May God bless you, Miss Claire, and with you may he bless all our benefactors. May the Holy Virgin guide them along the road to paradise. Amen.

I'll always be in J.Ch.

Your grateful servant,
Father J. Bosco

²⁹A lottery for the Church of the Sacred Heart. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

35 (2748)

Turin, 2-27-85

Miss Claire,

By now you've received my letter acknowledging that the sum of 1000 francs your charity sent us has come into my hands and been promptly spent by Fr. Rua. I've also received the money for the lottery tickets that you, Miss Claire, and Father Engrand sent.

Your last letter speaks of your health and your plan to look after it by making a trip to Italy. You can do nothing better. When your plan's set, write to me about it. Our Sisters are waiting for you with joy. Tell me a little beforehand; [and also] whether you'll be alone or with a companion.

In case Father Engrand should be with you, he'd come to us for lodging and meals while he's in Turin.

Tell me your plans, and I'll be happy to be your humble servant in everything that may help you spiritually or temporally.

The whole house is praying for you and waiting to see you again in good health.

May God bless you, kind Claire, and with you may he bless your relatives and the Engrand family; please pray fervently for me, who remain in J.Ch.

Your grateful servant,
Father J. Bosco

42 (2755)

July 27, '86

Kind Miss C. Louvet,

My health has obliged me to suspend every kind of work. Now I'm just beginning to do some things and feel it's my duty to write my first words to you, kind Miss Claire.

First of all I'd tell you that our business was settled by Father Rua according to the wishes you expressed in your letters and personally to me. On that subject we can be completely at peace.

Are your serving women doing their chores well? Are you always duly patient with yourself and the household? Remain peacefully in France; nothing will disturb you and even though there may be some disturbance, it won't touch you.

For two weeks I'll be *with the bishop of Pinerolo*.³⁰ There my health improves considerably.

³⁰Bishop Philip Chiesa. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

All the Salesians are praying every day for your intention. God bless us, and may the Holy Virgin protect you and help you to read my awful handwriting. Amen.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

46 (2759)

December 9, '86, Turin³¹

Kind Miss Claire Louvet,

The world's future looks quite bleak, but God is Light and the Holy Virgin is always *stella matutina* [the Morning Star]. Trust in God, and in Mary; don't be afraid of anything. "*I can do all things in him who strengthens me*" [Phil. 4:13 RSV], Jesus Christ.

Patience. Patience is absolutely necessary for us to overcome the world, assure our victory, and enter paradise.

May God generously reward your kind gift to us of 500 francs. Our entire household continues praying for your intention.

Good-bye. May Mary be your guide. Pray for us and our missionaries.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

57

Turin³²

To Miss Claire Louvet

Aire-sur-Lys. Pas de Calais.

I have to depart before you; but I'll never fail to pray for your blessed eternity. Go on sustaining our orphans, and our orphans will constitute your crown when the angels one day take you to enjoy the glory of paradise.

O Mary, protect your daughter forever.

Please pray for the eternal rest of my poor soul.

Always your grateful servant,
Father John Bosco

³¹The script and the phrasing of the Saint's last letters, from this period on, reveal the effort he needed to manage his pen. [Author]

³²This letter, to be mailed after the Saint's death, is omitted from the *Epistolario*. We have only a copy. The original, like similar letters, was torn out of the exercise book in which Don Bosco wrote them, to be mailed to the addressee. [Author's note with editorial addition]

12. LETTERS TO COUNT AND COUNTESS COLLE

Editor's note: *The appendix to Volume XVI contains seventy-seven letters from Don Bosco to members of the family of Count Louis Anthony Colle of Toulon, whom the Saint had met during the last illness of their only son, Louis, and who became ardent Salesian cooperators. The whole third chapter of Volume XV treats of his relationship with the family and includes some of his letters, translated from Father Ceria's Italian version. (All but one of the originals are in French.) The deceased lad Louis is Don Bosco's guide in the dream of the South American missions, narrated in this volume (pp. 302-315). Here we offer a selection of the letters not used in Volume XV. We give the letter's number from Volume XVI's appendix, followed in parentheses by its number in the Ceria edition of Don Bosco's Epistolario, volume IV (Turin: SEI, 1959), to which we frequently refer. Within the text of the letters, brackets [] as usual indicate an addition by the English editor, or if so noted, text given in the Italian edition of Volume XVI but omitted from the Epistolario; braces { } indicate an addition by Father Ceria in the Italian edition.*

1 (2770)

Rome, May 4, '81
42 Porta S. Lorenzo

Madam,

Often have I received news from you, and often have I prayed for you and your family. But I never forget to make a memento at Holy Mass for our dear Louis.¹

You must be at peace about the boy. He's certainly saved; he asks of you two things: to prepare yourselves seriously, when it shall please God, to go and join

¹Louis, aged seventeen, had died on April 3. [Editor]

him in paradise; pray very much for him, while he's obtaining special graces for you.

Other things I don't want to commit to paper. Just note: your Louis is waiting for you in paradise.

When people tell you that in May a public disaster will take place, don't believe it. Just ask for the grace of a happy death.

God bless you, kind Mrs. Colle. God grant you good health and perseverance in virtue.

Please give my respectful regards to Mr. Colle, to whom I hope to write very soon.

Pray for me and for our poor boys, and allow me to be in J.Ch.²

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

4 (2773)

Turin, July 3, '81

Mrs. Colle,

My behavior will undoubtedly have persuaded you that I've forgotten your visit, your thoughtful deeds, and your acts of charity. But I beg you, please excuse my situation. I've been quite besieged by business that has stolen all my time.

Yet, despite my delay, every morning I've made a special memento for you, for Mr. Colle, and for him who's left us to go to paradise.

I've prayed several times that God allow us to know something. Only once³ have I had the consolation of seeing him and hearing his voice. Last June 21 during Mass, around the consecration I saw him in his usual bearing, but with the color of a rose in all its beauty and with a resplendent glow like the sun. The moment of the consecration was approaching; the only difference was that he was, so to speak, tinged by the full beauty of the color of the rose, radiant like the sun. Immediately I asked him whether he might have anything to tell us. He answered simply: "St. Louis has protected me very much; he's done me a lot of good." Then I asked again, "Is there anything to be done?" He gave the same response and then disappeared. Since then I've neither seen nor heard anything more.

²Jesus Christ. As nearly as possible without sacrificing clarity, we follow Don Bosco's abbreviations and other matters of style. [Editor]

³It was "Only once" since the count and countess visited Don Bosco at Turin in May, when he informed them of two other apparitions, as we know from a note of the countess. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

Should God in his infinite mercy deign to reveal something to us, I'll hasten to inform you of it immediately.

Now please give me some news of your health; I hope you've improved considerably. I and our children are praying to obtain from the good God this grace, for which I ask every day.

Mister Colle in his great kindness wished very much to tell me he's put his purse at my disposal. So far I've been able to get along, but I foresee that as the months progress I'll be obliged to appeal to his charity. But that'll only be in a case of necessity and within the limits of what's possible for you.

God bless you, kind Mrs. Colle. God keep you in good health and holiness. Please pray fervently for me, who remain always in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

5 (2774)

S. Benigno Canavese, August 30, 1881

My very dear, esteemed Chevalier,

A little vermouth is nothing;⁴ but in your great kindness you've courteously accepted it. I'm very delighted that so small a thing could bring you some pleasant moments.

But the very important thing was undoubtedly your previous letter. It brought me the wonderful notification that you'll donate 20 thousand francs for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome. This truly means coming to the aid of the holy Catholic religion and her despoiled Head.⁵ God will give you the hundredfold⁶ now and even more in due time in the next life; but the Sovereign Pontiff and all good Christians and upright people will bless you for your charity.

I was truly astonished over the elegant style and very polished form of your letter. Undoubtedly you wrote it *currenti calamo*.⁷ But that letter will always be a perfect model and example of how to write a letter. I've read it and reread it, and I believe I'd be doing a deed worthy of you and the city of Toulon itself by

⁴Don Bosco had sent the Colles some bottles of Piedmont's famous vermouth. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁵The Pope, having lost all his domain to the kingdom of Italy, had no means to build a much needed church in the Castro Pretorio neighborhood of Rome, and so Leo XIII had turned to Don Bosco. See Vol. XIV, pp. 455-474. [Editor]

⁶See Matt. 19:19. [Editor]

⁷"With a running pen," i.e., offhand. [Editor]

sending it to the Holy Father;⁸ it'll reveal that lawyers⁹ in their time can blend their learning and piety. God be praised in everything! I'm writing a few lines here for Mrs. Colle; would you be so kind as to pass them on to her.

Good-bye, my very [dear and]¹⁰ honorable friend; allow me to call you such. God keep you in good health for a very long time on earth and [give you] eternal happiness one day in paradise; but with your wife, me, and our beloved Louis as companions forever. Amen.

I commend myself to your devout prayer, while calling myself in J.Ch.

Your humble servant and friend,
Father John Bosco

7 (2776)

S. Benigno Canavese, Oct. 4, '81

My very dear and good friend,

I received the notes you sent me about our ever lamented Louis, and I've taken care to read them with attention. They were what I wanted.¹¹ Now they have to be completed, and for that [purpose], be so patient as to list for me: 1. Any expressions, words, thoughts he may have expressed with his relatives or when giving alms to the poor, when carrying out his duties, when speaking of religion, etc.

2. His most edifying actions regarding mortification, patience, his relatives, friends, the poor.

3. The particular circumstances of his audience with the Holy Father. What they said to each other, and above all, any expression of the Holy Father.

4. The same thing regarding his visits to shrines, some church, more solemn church ceremonies, etc.

I believe that if you speak with Mrs. Colle, you'll be able to recall to mind many edifying and very useful things for a biography such as ours.¹²

In order not to multiply the work, I believe it'll be best if I write in French,

⁸It should cause no surprise that Don Bosco would send an otherwise private letter to Pope Leo, who had entrusted to him the building of the Church of the Sacred Heart and who took a personal interest in it and appreciated being kept informed of everything about it. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁹The count was a lawyer by profession. [Editor]

¹⁰"dear and" is missing in the *Epistolario*. [Editor]

¹¹Don Bosco wished to write a short biography of Louis Colle, the late son of the count. [Editor]

¹²Don Bosco seems to be attributing an element of authorship to the youth's parents. [Editor]

then have a friend¹³ review it, but you'll see it before it goes to press, and you'll make all the remarks or modifications you may wish.

One more thing: You'll have to put your humility aside for a moment and tell me which good works you take care of or protect —any [religious] associations or public charities: each word, each act of virtue will take its own very proper place.

Be so kind, then, as to help me gather all this information, and then I'll put everything in its place.

May God bless you, my very dear and good friend, and with you may he bless Mrs. Colle. May he keep you both in good health for a very long time. Please pray also for me, who remain always in J.Ch.

Your friend and servant,
Father John Bosco

P.S. Address: Always in Turin.

9 (2778)

Turin, Dec. 30, '81

My dear and honorable Mr. Colle,

Just a few words, but I want to write before the end of the year. The biography of our good Louis is completed. All that remains is for it to be read and a copy made that I can bring with me on my next trip to Toulon. It's indispensable that we read it together.

Action on our business in Rome is in the hands of Cardinal Jacobini, who assures me that it's all settled; but *Roma è eterna* [Rome is eternal], they say, even in business.¹⁴

Fr. Perot [*sic*]¹⁵ writes to me very often about you and your wife. Building at La Navarre is moving forward very rapidly, and I hope we can make a visit to

¹³The cleric Camille Henri de Barruel, who actually composed the text from Don Bosco's outline. See Vol. XV, pp. 57-58. Barruel, who accompanied Don Bosco on his fund-raising tour of France in 1883, has been mentioned often in this volume. He was born at St.-Denis Grignan in 1851, became a lawyer, and then joined the Salesians, making his perpetual profession June 1, 1882. After his ordination in December 1882, he was instrumental in the opening of several of the French houses; but he later left the Society. [Editor]

¹⁴Cardinal Ludwig Jacobini was papal secretary of state. The business referred to is a grant of Roman knighthood by the Pope to Count Colle, which Don Bosco was trying to arrange as a token of gratitude for the count's generosity. See Vol. XV, pp. 81-82. [Editor]

¹⁵Despite his French-sounding name, Father Peter Perrot (1853-1928) was a native of Turin. He made his religious profession in 1872, was ordained in 1876, and was appointed director of La Navarre in 1878. Helped by generous benefactors, he overcame many serious difficulties, and the

the works, but together, and spend a day among our orphans. Please tell Mrs. Colle of this.

God bless you, [my]¹⁶ dear Chevalier, and you, honorable Mrs. Colle. May God keep you both in good health and in his holy grace for a very long time.

Please pray also for me and for my big family, and allow me to be always in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father John Bosco

11 (2780)¹⁷

My very dear good friend,

It seems incredible to me that I should have let so long a time elapse without writing to you! Forgive my negligence; I'll try to do better in the future.

I received with the greatest appreciation your good wishes for the feast of St. John.¹⁸ It was a wonderful feast, a feast of the heart which caused me to weep several times.

I also received the photographs of our good Louis. They've been included in the book. This pamphlet is creating a stir among us, and an Italian translation of it is being made for publication.¹⁹

You could call the Brief from Rome the Brief of annoyances.²⁰ It was sent to me at Turin; I read and find: "Sir: *Comes Colle Dioecesis Taurinensis* [Count Colle of the Diocese of Turin]." I immediately sent it [back] to Rome and am awaiting the corrected Brief.

At Turin, in our school[s] at Lanzo, at S. Benigno, at Valsalice, we've talked and continue to talk a great deal about you and Mrs. Colle. Everyone's been impressed with your popularity, with your spirit of practical piety. You've done us

new house flourished; eventually he was able to add an academic department to the agricultural program. He was provincial of the Marseille province from 1898 until the anticlerical laws of 1905 forced him and most of the Salesians to leave the country until the atmosphere improved after World War I. [Editor]

¹⁶"my" is missing in the *Epistolario*. [Editor]

¹⁷The letter is undated. The postmark is July 5, 1882. [Author in the *Epistolario* and Italian Vol. XV, p. 107]

¹⁸St. John the Baptist, June 24, celebrated at the Oratory as Don Bosco's name day. [Editor]

¹⁹The "pamphlet" of 123 + v pages 4.4" x 6.8" was called *Biographie du jeune Louis Fleury Antoine Colle*, par Jean Bosco prêtre (Turin: Salesian Press, 1882). See also Vol. XV, pp. 58-59. It does not appear that an Italian translation was published, but eventually one in German was: *Ludwig Florian Anton Colle: Lebensbild. Eine Anleitung zur Lindererziehung* (Regensburg: Verlaganstalt, 1887). The same publisher also issued a translation of the biography of Dominic Savio at the same time. [Editor]

²⁰This was the papal brief granting the desired Roman knighthood to Count Colle (see previous letter). [Editor]

good both spiritually and temporally. On all sides, I'm assured that people are praying earnestly for you, Mr. and Mrs. Colle.

On this occasion I thank you heartily for the assistance you give us for founding, repairing, and enlarging our houses. The souls that the Salesians, with the help of the good God, will be able to save will be on your behalf; and when you and your wife enter paradise, you'll no doubt be welcomed by the souls who were saved by your charity. *Animam salvasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.*²¹

I hope to write you something more in a few days.

Fr. Rua, Fr. Cagliero, Fr. Durando, Fr. Lazzero,²² and you might say all the Salesians here have fond recollections of you, commend themselves to your kind prayers, and send you their respectful regards.

May God bless you both and keep you in good health. Please pray fervently for me, who remain always in J.Ch.

Your very devoted friend and very humble servant,
Father John Bosco

P.S. The clerics de Barruel²³ and Reimbaud²⁴ both wish me to send you their regards.

15 (2784)

S. Benigno Canavese, August 28, 1882

Dear Count,

I'm here at *San Benigno Canavese*, where I speak very often of you and your wife with Fr. Barberis, Fr. Rua, Fr. Durando,²⁵ and others who didn't have the good fortune of making your personal acquaintance when you visited us. But just now, as I've already had the honor of writing to you, I'm in great need of money for our young men who are studying for the priesthood and to become foreign missionaries.

If you, Mr. and Mrs. Colle, if you [*sic*] could come to my aid so that [I can] buy wheat and make bread for the residents of this house and provide some

²¹"By saving a soul you have predestined your own soul" (St. Augustine). [Editor]

²²For Fathers Rua, Cagliero, and Durando see Appendix 1; for Father Lazzero, see pp. 333-334, note 10. [Editor]

²³Barruel was ordained a priest on December 23, 1882. [Editor]

²⁴Probably Jules Reimbeau, who had accompanied Don Bosco as secretary on his visit to southern France in the spring of 1881. See Vol. XV, chap. 2. (Don Bosco was a notoriously bad speller of surnames.) Father Reimbeau may have been ordained together with Father de Barruel, for Don Bosco calls him "Don" in a letter of Christmas Day 1882. He certainly was a priest at the time of his death in Turin on January 31, 1884, at the age of 27. [Editor]

²⁵See Appendix 1. [Editor]

items which they're asking us for from *Carmen*²⁶ in Patagonia, you will undoubtedly be doing a great act of charity.

At other times you might come forward spontaneously; now it's I who am asking. But I beg you to behave toward me as I behave toward you: with all confidence. So that if you can't just now, you'll answer me with all confidence: *yes or no*.

The sum I need is 12,000 [francs]. Your good heart will do all you can without unsettling yourselves.

I hope your health and Mrs. Colle's health are good, and I pray every morning at Holy Mass that God preserve it perfectly for a very long time, and after a long and happy life on earth that the Blessed Virgin welcome you to enjoy with her the glory of heaven forever. Amen.

Please pray also for this poor fellow, who with the greatest gratitude and love will remain always in O.L.J.Ch.

Devoted to you like a son,
Father John Bosco

25 (2794)

Turin, Oct. 15, '83

My dear and very kind friend,

Your very kind letter, dear Count, found me here in Turin, but everyone is still scattered.²⁷ Fr. Cagliero is still preaching two or even three retreats in Sicily; Fr. Rua is preaching at Cuneo but will be back here in Turin tomorrow evening.

Thank you, then, for the happy news you give me.²⁸ It is really a propitious time. In these days work is advanced, and the contractors are demanding [their money].²⁹ God be praised, and a thousand times thanks to you, dear Count and Countess; you are without doubt our providence, the instruments chosen by the hand of the good God to come to our aid.

Next Monday (the 22nd) Fr. Rua will go to La Farlède³⁰ to pay you a visit, bring you news of us, bring us news of you, and carry out the business that's the main reason for this journey.³¹

²⁶Carmen de Patagónes, at the mouth of the Rio Negro, was one of the main mission outposts. It is about five hundred miles south of Buenos Aires. See Vol. XIV, pp. 496-498. [Editor]

²⁷The end of June to the beginning of November was school vacation time. [Editor]

²⁸This vague allusion must indicate a considerable sum of money if Don Bosco sent Father Rua to Toulon to fetch the providential gift. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

²⁹A reference to the construction of the Church of the Sacred Heart. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

³⁰The Colles' estate at Toulon. [Editor]

³¹It must have been to arrange a journey to Rome that the count and countess wanted to make but finally were unable to. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

Fr. Rua will have with him the American history.³² It's written in detail and isn't short. Father [de] Barruel will try to translate it, but in case he can't finish it, Fr. Rua himself will complete it.

Fr. Rua will let you know the day and the hour of his arrival.

May the grace of the good God be always with you and keep you for a very long time in good health, so that you may see the fruit of your charity in the Salesians' hands.

May the Bl. Virgin guide us always along the road to paradise. Please pray also for this poor priest, who with the greatest veneration and gratitude will remain for you in J.Ch.

Your humble servant and friend,
Father J. Bosco

26 (2795)

Turin, Dec. 4, '83

My dear and very kind Count,

I must at last put an end to all procrastination and let you know I'm still alive, for the good of things.

First of all, thank you for all the acts of charity which you, dear Count, have lavished on us on many occasions. If we've succeeded in making progress in South America and above all in Patagonia, it's due to you; we owe it to your charity. So be glad, you and the countess: the souls our missionaries win for heaven will be for you and your wife the bearers of the keys to paradise.

Now add the other houses and the other savages who, by means of your good works, will come to the faith, will increase the number of souls saved, who will pray fervently for you.

I'm very happy that the vermouth reached you in good condition. It's a modest but singular way we have of telling you we're deeply grateful, we love you, we're praying for you in a completely particular fashion.

But I must inform you of some very pleasant news. The house at Mathi [Torinese] was bought on October 10;³³ it's now furnished, inhabited by some fifty young men who could no longer be accommodated at the house in S. Benigno,³⁴ and who are there now: they are studying intensely for the priesthood.

³²The dream about the missions. [Author] See pp. 302-315, 343-344. [Editor]

³³Evidently this is a house additional to the one that had to be built to replace the one destroyed in an explosion the previous year. See p. 316. [Editor]

³⁴He means Sampierdarena, whence the Sons of Mary had just been transferred to Mathi. They remained there only for the 1883-1884 school year, however; then they settled at the hospice of St. John the Evangelist [in Turin]. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

Last Thursday this house [at Mathi] was blessed and consecrated to God under the title “House of St. Louis,” which is to remind us ever more of our Louis and your whole family. It’s the first of our houses to be so named. God be praised.

The house begun alongside the Church of St. John the Apostle, despite all our efforts, hasn’t yet got as far as the roof. Construction’s at the fourth floor.³⁵ The work goes on ceaselessly.

The whole Salesian Congregation sends you regards. On Saturday we’ll celebrate a Mass for your intention and that of the countess at the main altar of the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians; our children will receive Communion and pray for your intention.

Good day, happy holidays, dear Count and Countess. May God bless you and may the Bl. Virgin protect you always. Please pray for one

Who loves you like a son,
Father J. Bosco

29 (2798)

Turin, 2-20-84³⁶

My dear Count Colle,

One day, dear Count, from my balcony we were observing a little house. “We ought to buy that house,” you said, “because it would relieve us of a heavy constraint. I’ll put thirty thousand francs at your disposal for that purpose.”³⁷

The matter then stayed unresolved because the owner wouldn’t sell. Now they want to sell not only the little house but also the land belonging to it.³⁸ The matter suits us in every aspect; all our friends and all the Salesians desire it and recommend it, but the price would be much too high. Between the land, seven thousand kilometers,³⁹ the trees, and the buildings, it would cost us a round 100,000 [francs].

I don’t wish to be indiscreet; nevertheless I don’t wish to keep silent about business which would settle our whole house, the festive oratory, the classrooms, and the workshops.

³⁵In British usage, the third floor. [Editor]

³⁶The date according to both the *Epistolario* and Italian Vol. XV, p. 98. The text in Vol. XVI gives 2-21-84. [Editor]

³⁷The house belonged to the widow Teresa Bellezza. To prevent grave evils, Don Bosco had been renting it at great expense since 1853. See Vol. II, pp. 421-422, and Vol. IV, pp. 423-428. [Editor]

³⁸Mrs. Bellezza had died in 1883, and her heirs were willing to sell. [Editor]

³⁹A curious slip of the pen, for he meant 7000 square meters [Author]—in English measure: 1.73 acres. [Editor]

So, dear Count, is it possible for you over a more or less long time to come to our aid with this sum?

I speak with you in all confidence, for in your great charity, you've told me many times that you put your purse into my hands in everything [by] which you can contribute to the greater glory of God.

You'll think this business over a moment and then answer me with the same confidence with which I've addressed you.

I believe you received one of my letters a few days ago.

Here I renew all my feelings of thankfulness and gratitude toward you, dear Count, and toward the countess; and in the hope of seeing you and speaking with you personally next month, in March,⁴⁰ I take much comfort in calling myself in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

P.S. My health's been troubling me somewhat, and I'm still a prisoner in my room, but the doctors tell me that in March I'll be able to take and would handle very well a trip to the South of France.

34 (2802)

Turin, July 5, 1884⁴¹

My dear Count Colle,

Your very kind letter came as a consoling angel to us.⁴² Everywhere people were asking us for news of you and the countess, but no one knew anything. Fr. Rua, Fr. Cagliari, Fr. Durando, Fr. de Barruel, and all the Salesians were asking about your trip, your health, and where you were staying. But none of us knew what to say until we received your welcome letter. Now [we know] you're at La Farlède in good health. God be praised.

The news about the public health seems to be getting better, and we are praying ceaselessly for you, the countess, and all your friends, that nothing perturb your health, your peace of mind. And that we'll do morning and evening in our prayers both private and communal. Me—I'm doing it with all my heart! Every day I remember you at Holy Mass.

You conclude your letter with finely expressed sentiments: *Commander entirely ready to put himself under Don Bosco's orders.*

⁴⁰He did in fact go to see them, accompanied by Father Barberis. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁴¹The count and countess had come to Turin at Don Bosco's invitation for the celebration of his name day at the end of June. On that occasion the count was presented with the papal brief citing him a knight commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great. See Letter 11. [Editor]

⁴²The count's delay in sending news of himself after leaving Turin had worried Don Bosco because of a cholera epidemic that was spreading. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

But you don't know: Don Bosco's pockets are always empty of money, and Fr. Rua's insatiable to have it.⁴³ So how can you get yourself out [of such a situation]? We'll try always to be quite discreet, always happy to receive the charity you shower upon us to help us win souls for God.

You understand, dear Count, that the end of this letter is just a jest; and that my handwriting is very bad, and therefore it's very difficult to make myself understood.

God bless you, my dear Count, and God bless the dear countess together with you. May Our L.H.C. keep you both in good health, but always on the road to paradise.

The whole house, including our priests, clerics, and children, send you their respects, commend themselves to your kind prayers, and tomorrow will receive Holy Communion for your intention. Amen.

Your grateful servant,
Father J. Bosco

35 (2803)

Pinerolo, July 20, 1884

My very dear friend,

I've just now arrived⁴⁴ at the villa of the bishop of Pinerolo. My health was very shaken in Turin by the intense heat. Here one's barely out of the cold, and I find great relief; I have Father Lemoyne with me, and the bishop overwhelms me with attention.

Every day I keep an eye on how the cholera epidemic is developing, and I bless the good God who until now has preserved you.

Our prayers, dear Count, our children's Communions, and the blessing which is given every day at the altar of O.L.H.C. will be offered up to God ceaselessly to obtain the preservation of your health and that of the countess.

Fr. Perrot has often given me news of you, and the whole house rejoices whenever we have good news about your health.

Right now the wind and the cold are bothering me, and I have to get up from my desk to put on my overcoat. You see what a change in just a few hours. But I'm on a mountain.

If you'll give me news about yourselves from time to time, dear Count and Countess, you'll be doing me a great pleasure, for your health these days is in our hearts as a matter of prime importance.

⁴³Father Rua paid the Society's bills. [Editor]

⁴⁴He had reached Pinerolo on the 19th, and after spending the night at the episcopal palace, ascended the mountain the next day to the bishop's villa. [Author]

My address will always be: Father J. Bosco, Bishop's Villa, Pinerolo.

May the Bl. Virgin guide you and protect you, dear Count and Countess, and may the good God keep evils far away from us, while I will always bear for you the affection of a son in J.Ch. and be

Your grateful servant,
Father J. Bosco

36 (2804)

Pinerolo, August 11, 1884

My dear Count and kind Countess,

God be blessed, God be praised. The newspapers no longer give us bulletins on the cholera. I trust you're in very good health and nothing's been troubling you.

But behold, the friend of ill omen is beginning to visit us. We are free of this scourge until now, but the surrounding areas give us daily bulletins of cases and of deaths.

Our trust is in the aid of Our Lady Help of Christians. Nevertheless, our houses have been upset. All our children who have homes or relatives have gone to them, the poorest boys remaining with us, and we try to look after them and keep up their spirits.

If things are pretty quiet, we'll see each other toward the end of September; otherwise Divine Providence will give us the necessary guidelines.

All the Salesians and their children are praying ceaselessly for you, and we, too, trust greatly in your prayers and your devotion.

May {God} bless us and the Blessed Virgin protect us always.

I'll always be in deepest affection and gratefulness in J.Ch.,

With filial gratitude in J.Ch.,
Father J. Bosco

37 (2805)

Turin, August 23, 1884

My dear Count,

I arrived home this very minute from Pinerolo in fairly satisfactory health, God be praised. I found our city of Turin surrounded by cholera, but the city until now perfectly free [of it]. Thanks be to God, our houses are in good

health, with the antidote of the Bl. Virgin.⁴⁵ Our priests, [clerics],⁴⁶ boys are praying and will receive Communion for you and your wife.

I thank you and the countess for the rosary you say for our intention. Our Lord and his heavenly Mother will never allow anyone to cry in vain: Mary, helper of Christians,⁴⁷ pray for us.

I've already begun the novena with Masses, Communions, and special prayers for our dear Louis, who, I believe, will laugh at us for praying for him, for his relief; in fact, he's become our protector in paradise, and he'll continue to protect us until he receives us into eternal happiness.

While I was at Pinerolo, I gave serious thought to whether you and the countess might come to spend the months of intense heat {at Pinerolo}, which would be very good for your health. Couldn't we arrange for a little lodge there for you during that season? It's a {matter} for discussion during the coming year.

May God bless you and give you abundant consolation on earth, but surely great consolation with Jesus and Mary in paradise.

In filial gratitude,
Father J. Bosco

38 (2806)

Turin, Sept. 10, '84

My dear and kind Count Colle,

The cholera epidemic has disturbed several parts of France and is now ravaging Italy. So far our houses and our children have been spared, but contributions to us are seriously lacking, and we're faced with the expenses of building and maintaining our works.

That's why, if at this time you can come to our aid, you'll be, as always, our mainstay. Should that be inconvenient to you, however, since you're at La Farlède, and you can't return home because of the cholera, I implore you to remain peacefully at your villa, and we'll try to free ourselves of our problems as best we can. But I implore you, please don't trouble yourself if present circumstances make it impossible for you to do good.

⁴⁵During the cholera epidemic of 1854, Don Bosco told the boys to put themselves under our Lady's protection and to make sure they kept free of serious sin. See Vol. V, pp. 53-54, and the following pages for this formula's perfect success even when many of the boys involved themselves in caring for the city's stricken. [Editor]

⁴⁶"clerics" is missing in the text of the *Epistolario*. [Editor]

⁴⁷Not *Auxiliatrice*, as usual, but *aide de chrétiens*. [Editor]

Just this moment the mailman delivered your kind letter. I beg you, dear Count, please consider all that I've noted about our finances as though it hadn't been said. I prefer to tell you how delighted I am that both you and the countess are in good health. I've given your news to all the directors assembled here; they were very happy, and each assures [you] that he's praying and having prayers said for your spiritual and temporal happiness.

With all my heart I thank the dear countess, who has been praying devoutly *for this poor fellow* in these days. May the Blessed Virgin reward her generously.

You see, dear Count, I can barely write even a little presentably; be patient in reading [this]. I'll try to do better another time.

Accept the humble respects of all your Salesians and of him who with filial affection will always be in J.Ch.

Your grateful servant,
Father J. Bosco

40 (2808)

Turin, Nov. 7, '84

My dear Count and very honorable Countess,

I wish to make you a difficult but not impossible suggestion; you'll decide.

I believe you've been informed that Fr. Cagliero's appointment as bishop will be ratified formally on the 13th of this {month} by our H. Father Leo XIII. He'll be consecrated a few days later. He's the first of our pupils to be elevated to this dignity, the first bishop of Patagonia; he's also one of your own proteges and is very fond of you.

We'll have a most splendid celebration; but here's the great desire we have. Everyone, I first of all, wants you to be with us that day, to be the *godfather* and *godmother* of the religious ceremony.

Such is my invitation, and such is our common desire.

Nevertheless, I love and respect your health before all else, and therefore if you're afraid that this might prejudice your health somewhat, I'll make [what is for me] a great sacrifice: I absolutely want you to stay home.

There it is, dear Count and Countess: my sincere invitation, but with full and complete freedom for yourselves, with a great desire to see you in our home. As soon as the date has been fixed for the ceremony, I'll inform you of it.

May the good {God} be always with you, kind sir; and please pray for me, who will always be in J.Ch.

In filial affection,
Father J. Bosco

42 (2810)

Turin, Dec. 29, '84

My dear and kind Count,

I'd like to pay you a visit and render my deep thanks in person. Unable to do so in [spoken] words, I wish to close the year by writing a letter to you, kind Count and Countess Colle.

God be praised and thanked; he has kept us in good health and I hope, in his grace too.

Among other good works, you've paid the debts of La Navarre for Father Perrot; and the good God won't fail to reward you generously, and our poor orphans will pray for you ceaselessly. Lucky Fr. Perrot, who has such paymasters.

But why can't we find similar benefactors in Italy?

If such a paymaster did exist in Italy, would he come and pay seventy-five thousand francs which Father Rua must expend for our missionaries in [South] America, another pretty similar sum for the outfit, for the voyage of those who will leave very soon?

Why doesn't he come to pay off the debts of our houses in Turin, and of the church and hospice in Rome?

The reason is clear. In France and Italy there's only one Count Colle; and we bless the good God a thousand times that Count and Countess Colle are alive to help us, support us, and sustain us in our difficulties. May God keep both of you in good health for a very long time and grant you the grace of spending happy year after happy year, in reward for your acts of charity here on earth, and finally [grant you] in the other life the true prize, the great prize of sojourning in paradise, where, I'm fully confident, we'll be able to live with Jesus, Mary, and our dear Louis, to praise God, speak of God eternally.

On Thursday, the first day of the year 1885, in all our houses prayers and Communions will be offered for you.

Please also commend your poor [Don Bosco] to God.

Your grateful, humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

44 (2812)

Turin, Feb. 11, '85

My very [dear] Count Colle,

I'm better again and out of bed. And I can write you this letter.

I've written to the countess of Chambord,⁴⁸ [asking her] to come to our aid.

In a very gracious letter she assures me that she'll do very little now, being swamped with petitions, but she promises to do [something in the future].

Today Fr. Bonetti, editor of the *Bulletin Salésien*, is at Marseille. Upon taking leave of Bp. Cagliero,⁴⁹ he'll return to Turin, stopping at Toulon for a few hours to get news of you and the countess in person, and then he'll continue his journey directly back home.

May the good God bless you both and keep you both on the road to paradise, but always in good health.

Please pray also for your poor but very loving

Humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

48 (2816)

Nice, April 25, '85

My dear Count,

The family of the duke of Norfolk will arrive in Turin on May 5,⁵⁰ so I have to anticipate my return [home] by several days. If it please God, I'll leave Nice next Tuesday in order to be in Turin on the 6th of that month. There I will expect you and Countess Colle at your convenience.

My earthly paradise is always my own room, or better, the room you gave me during my stay at Toulon.⁵¹

The Bl. Virgin bless you, protect you in your home, on your journey to our home at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

⁴⁸See chapter 11. [Editor]

⁴⁹On the 11th the newly ordained bishop joined the Salesians and Sisters who were to depart with him for South America from Marseille. Because of illness Don Bosco could not see them off himself, as he would have wished. So he delegated Father Bonetti to act for him, to give them his farewell blessing, and to Bishop Cagliero a precious letter, which is published in Italian Vol. XVII, pp. 308-309. [Editor]

⁵⁰The duke of Norfolk is the foremost peer of England, and Henry Fitzalan-Howard (1847-1917), the fifteenth duke, was the leading Catholic layman of his time. Educated under Father John Henry Newman, he was influential in Newman's being named cardinal in 1878. Norfolk later became the first mayor of Westminster and served as earl marshal for the royal coronations of Edward VII and George V. The duke exchanged letters with Don Bosco in 1882; see Vol. XV, pp. 465-466. His 1885 visit to Turin will be treated at length in Vol. XVII, chap. 18. Don Bosco sent the first Salesians to London in November 1887 with a letter to the duke asking for his support, and the duke visited Don Bosco during the Saint's last illness. [Editor]

⁵¹Don Bosco had visited Toulon earlier that month; the count had made him a donation of 100,000 francs. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

I commend ceaselessly to your kind prayers this priest, who will always be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

49 (2817)

Turin, 5-10-85

[Dear] Count and Countess Colle,

The feast of O.L.H.C. has been definitely scheduled for next June 2,⁵² as you may see printed on our announcement of today. We'll try to make it a truly splendid solemnity, but the duke of Norfolk can't stay with us until then.

He's just left for Rome with his family (18 persons). But after receiving the blessing of the H. Father, he'll return to Turin to resume their [*sic*] practices of piety morning, evening, and noon in the Church of Our Lady Help of Chr. {They} are to travel to Austria toward the end of the month.

But I'll tell you from time to time what may be necessary. For the present, though, we're always {saying} our prayers [in preparation] for this solemn feast.

The ceremonies for Rome have been planned;⁵³ for [laying] the cornerstone we might be represented by one of the Borghese family; Father Dalmazzo will see to it and instruct us.

Nevertheless there is one matter which concerns us. Some mementos have to be placed within the stone, and among other things a statement about the family and the two persons acting as godfather and godmother.⁵⁴

To that end you'll have the patience to seek out a friend who gives [*sic*] me a draft with the principal information: names, dates of birth, and details you may see fit.

Be patient: these are historic matters which we must hand on to posterity. As soon as I have this statement, it'll be my business to get together some other things to complete the job.

Now my head's worn out. I'll write you another letter in just a few days.

May the good God bless you and the Bl. Virgin protect you. Amen.

In filial gratitude,
Father J. Bosco

⁵²The feast falls properly on May 24, which in 1885 was Pentecost Sunday. The celebration was moved to a convenient open date; June 2 was a Tuesday. [Editor]

⁵³Concerning the Church of the Sacred Heart. [Editor]

⁵⁴I.e., the Colles, who were so generously supporting the building of the church and hospice. [Editor]

50 (2818)

Turin, 5-26-85

My very dear Count Colle,

All the Salesians are expecting you on the the morning of the 31st of this month. By not telling us whether you'll be arriving by way of Savona or by Genoa—I don't want to inconvenience you in any way—but we're expecting you *at noon for dinner*, [and are ready] at any hour to welcome you.

You're truly two friends of Our L.H.C., *the sponsors* of our great feast.⁵⁵ The duke of Norfolk and his family left yesterday morning for Germany; everyone was quite delighted by his sojourn in our home and by the improvement of his sick child.⁵⁶

I believe we'll have time to go over other business here in our home in a relaxed atmosphere.

In this expectancy, I've made and will continue to make a memento for you every day at Holy Mass until your happy arrival among us.

May the good God bless you, dear Count and Countess, and the Bl. Virgin protect and guide you throughout your journey. Amen.

In filial affection,
Father J. Bosco

52 (2820)

Turin, August 10, '85

[Dear] Count and Countess Colle,

I believe that during this novena of the Bl. Virgin's Assumption you won't forget your poor D. Bosco; he is undoubtedly praying every day for you, for your spiritual and temporal happiness. We Salesians are praying ceaselessly during this novena that the Bl. Virgin assure you a place next to her in paradise, but that she not give it to you for a very long time to come.

My health in these last days has deteriorated somewhat; but now, thanks be to God, it's much better; God be praised.

Our friend Louis led me on a trip with him to the heart of Africa, *the land of Ham*,⁵⁷ he said, and to the lands of Arpachshad⁵⁸ or into China.⁵⁹ If God will allow us to converse in person, we'll have the substance for a good chat.

⁵⁵The feast of Mary Help of Christians, mentioned in the previous letter. [Editor]

⁵⁶The duke's only son had been born blind and was incurably ill. The duke and his wife hoped that a visit to Don Bosco would bring beneficial results. [Editor]

⁵⁷See Gen. 9:18-27. [Editor]

⁵⁸See Gen. 11:10-13 and 1 Chr. 1:17-18, 24. [Editor]

⁵⁹A dream pertaining to the missions, narrated by Don Bosco to the superior chapter on the evening of July 2 (Italian Vol. XVII, pp. 643-645). [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

Fr. Francesia has finished his task,⁶⁰ and you'll be receiving it within just a few days.

The newspapers are publishing that the cholera is threatening France. I believe La Farlède will be spared; but whenever you decide to spend some time at Lanzo, a very safe area, you only have advise me a few days in advance, from day to day, and you'll find for yourselves and your whole family a little home prepared [and] at your disposal.

On Sunday (August 15) I'll be in Turin, and on Monday I'm going to S. Benigno for our retreat. But you'll receive news of us regularly.

May all evil be far from you, and may the Bl. Virgin protect you always.

Your humble friend,
a servant who loves you like a son,⁶¹

My handwriting gets worse and worse. Forgive me.

55 (2823)

Turin, Sept. 27, '85

[Dear] Count and Countess Colle,

Fr. Rua's journey to Nice [and] to Marseille has been postponed because of the public health situation, which is still not very satisfactory.⁶² Fr. Bonetti went in his place; he visited our houses in the South of France to preach a few days' retreat which will serve as the [annual] retreat for our French houses.

But we've continued our prayers every day for the preservation of the very precious health of you and Countess Colle.

While Fr. Dalmazzo was here with us for the retreat, Prince Lancellotti⁶³ returned to Rome. As soon as Fr. Dalmazzo speaks with him, he'll write to us about our business relative to our orphanage, whose construction is ever pro-

English versions of the dream may be found in *Dreams, Visions and Prophecies of Don Bosco*, ed. Eugene M. Brown (New Rochelle: Don Bosco Publications, 1986), pp. 91-95, including some of Father Ceria's commentary; and in Arthur J. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Missionary Dreams—Images of a Worldwide Salesian Apostolate [III]," in *Journal of Salesian Studies*, IV, no. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 2-17, including comments and a critical treatment of the text. [Editor]

⁶⁰A translation of the papal brief making the count a knight of St. Gregory. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*] See Letters 11 and 34. [Editor]

⁶¹There is no signature. [Author]

⁶²Father Rua was to have preached a retreat for the Salesians in France, but the cholera was still spreading. Don Bosco thought it best to make him defer his visit to the French confreres till December. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁶³The Lancellottis were one of the leading families of Rome. [Editor]

gressing, although the spot chosen for the cornerstone always remains in reserve.⁶⁴

Fr. Cagliero wrote a long letter in which he speaks warmly of you, the countess, our dear Louis, and a young man he's baptized with the name of Louis Colle; [he included] also the boy's photograph. You'll receive it all as soon as the postal service is no longer damaging the mail.⁶⁵

I've spent a month here at Valsalice, but tomorrow I'm going again to S. Benigno for the coming week; then I hope to return to Turin for good.

As you can see, I'm half blind, and you'll be able to read my letter [only] with difficulty. Forgive me; be patient. I won't fail to make a special memento for you both every morning at Holy Mass.

O Mary, be our guide on the road to paradise.

I'll always be in J.Ch.

Your humble servant,
Father J. Bosco

58 (2826)

Turin, January 15, '86

[Dear] Count and Countess,

I talk about you every day, I could say every minute, but since my poor head's always somewhat confused, I must write very little in comparison with what I ought to do to thank you for so much goodness and charity you do us.⁶⁶

At this time you're not only the mainstay of our works and of the Salesians themselves, but in these days you've become almost our only benefactors. For in these times donations have dwindled alarmingly, especially in our French houses and our American missions.

But our kind alms collector, Our Lady Help of Christians,⁶⁷ is beginning to come to our aid with exceptional favors in Russia, in Prussia, and notably in Poland.

⁶⁴It was hoped that Count and Countess Colle would be able to act as ceremonial godparents for the blessing of the cornerstone, which took place on December 8, 1885, at the hands of Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda. [Since they could not go to Rome] family friends who lived at Toulon, General Count d'Ancieu de la Bâtie and his wife, stood in for them. The [official] parchment of the rite included a long encomium of the Colles. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁶⁵By disinfecting it [against cholera]. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁶⁶Before Christmas the Colles had sent a very generous offering. The cholera epidemic had caused a big decline in donations. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁶⁷In his last years Don Bosco used to call Mary Help of Christians his "kind alms collector" who, by dispensing favors, came to his aid. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

Fr. Rua is sending you news of the orphanage at Rome. Rome's an eternal city. Talk a lot, do a lot, and be satisfied with doing things very slowly.⁶⁸ Patience.

You'll also be receiving the account of the journey to China with our good Louis.⁶⁹ When the good God does us the favor of getting together in person, we'll have a lot to talk about.

As a reward for your charity, may God give you every happiness on earth, but may he assure you of the great and eternal happiness of paradise with all your⁷⁰ relatives and friends. Amen.

I'll always be in sincerest gratitude and veneration in J.Ch.

Your humble and loving,
Father J. Bosco

60 (2828)

Pinerolo, July 25, 1886⁷¹

My dear Count and Countess Colle,

I've been at Pinerolo for several days⁷² in *la villa*⁷³ of Bp. [Philip] Chiesa of this diocese, but he's going to be transferred to the diocese of Casale.⁷⁴

There we have two very numerous houses,⁷⁵ and therefore we're very happy.

My health's fair; my thoughts are always with you, praying the good God to keep you and the countess in good health for a long time.

The Salesians are in good health. No *cholera* or other evils that disturb us. Therefore if our houses, our people can be of any service to you, you'll give us the greatest consolation, and we're at your disposal without reservation.

At this time, or rather in these days, our children are seriously occupied with their examinations;⁷⁶ but we're very satisfied with their moral conduct and the

⁶⁸He means that anyone who wants to do business with Rome must say and do a great deal but then be resigned to slowness in carrying out his business. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁶⁹See Letter 52. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁷⁰The text of the *Epistolario* reads "our" rather than "your." [Editor]

⁷¹This was Don Bosco's first letter to the Colles since March 26. It was illness that brought him to Pinerolo as the guest of the good bishop. [Authors' note in the *Epistolario*]

⁷²He had arrived on the evening of July 15. [Editor]

⁷³Italian in the original. [Editor]

⁷⁴Bishop Chiesa was transferred to the diocese of Casale, where Bishop [Peter] Ferrè had died; but he was himself suddenly called to his reward on November 4. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁷⁵At Borgo San Martino and Penango. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*] He means "numerous" in students. [Editor]

⁷⁶The school year normally ended at the end of June. Perhaps the cholera had caused an interruption in studies. See Letter 36, which speaks of students being sent home in 1884 because of an epidemic. [Editor]

considerable number who are asking to enter the priesthood and the larger number who are asking to go to the missions.

Every day there are applications for the missions among the savages.
Now [I ask] your patience to read and understand my handwriting.

In filial affection always,
Father J. Bosco

63 (2831)

Turin, Dec. 14, '86

[Dear] Count and Countess Colle,

Our missionaries have left your house. Fr. Lasagna was very pleased to write to us about the details of their stay with you and the infinite charity which you and the countess lavished on them with a truly paternal goodness.⁷⁷

They're leaving, but with hearts on which you've made an extremely fine impression, which assures me that they'll hold you both up in America as models of a Christian life. They're leaving to win souls for our good Jesus, to win their own [souls], [to win] yours. So there! a platter they'll present to you one day when you enter paradise; but a truly appetizing platter: *a platter* of gold, a platter formed with diamonds and full of good works. And among your other good works the aid you're giving the Salesians for the conversion of the savages [and of sinners will bring you a joy beyond description and without end].⁷⁸

But what's become of your jujube?⁷⁹ Pay attention: your jujube, which was of an excellent quality, was divided thus:

1. Fifteen thousand [francs] for a bill of exchange which Bishop Cagliero had sent me from Patagonia.⁸⁰
2. 35 thousand to the Tiberina Bank.⁸¹
3. The rest to St. John the Apostle,⁸² to S. Benigno, to Foglizzo, where we have young men studying for the priesthood. [Around three hundred clerics

⁷⁷Father Lasagna had been at the Colles' with a group of missionaries, who had to embark from Marseille. Naturally they had not been sent on their way empty-handed. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁷⁸This letter is very irregularly written. Don Bosco dictated the bracketed words to someone who must have pointed out that the sentence's thought was incomplete. The handwriting of this and other corrections and additions appears to be Father Rua's. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁷⁹He means a sum of money. [Author]

⁸⁰The text in the *Epistolario* reads: "...which has been sent to Bishop Cagliero of Patagonia." [Editor]

⁸¹Father Dalmazzo deposited funds for the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome in this bank, which administered them for him. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁸²The hospice attached to the Church of St. John the Evangelist [in Porta Nuova]. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

who would hardly be able to attain the priesthood without your charity, which will help them to save many souls.]⁸³

You see that each word of this {letter} conveys something, but your {wish} will be {satisfied} when we're able to talk over our business calmly.

I'd like to write you many other things, to testify to you the affection and gratitude that all the Salesians profess toward you, but my poor head isn't very cooperative, and my dear Countess, please put a kindly interpretation on this wretched script.

Meanwhile, during the forthcoming Christmas novena,⁸⁴ all the Salesians will pray, say Masses, offer up Communions for your spiritual and temporal happiness.

May God bless you both, and O.L.H.C. keep you in good health and generously reward all your charity in this world, and even more generously in paradise. *In paradise! Amen.*

In filial gratitude,
Father J. Bosco

64 (2832)

Turin, March 22, '87

[Dear] Count and Countess Colle,

A bit for ourselves to talk over our business a little.

We've agreed to schedule the consecration of the Church of the Sacred Heart in Rome for May 14 and to come thence to the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians on the 24th of the same month.

Does that suit you?

If the matter's possible from your point of view, I'll write you in detail about everything that concerns us.

I tell you with the greatest consolation that in the terrible disaster of the earthquake⁸⁵ not one child, not one person was harmed.

Only the buildings suffered much; and the house, the classrooms, and the church at Torrione⁸⁶ were practically destroyed.

But Divine Providence always helps us, and it won't fail us at this time.

⁸³The bracketed words were added by the aforementioned scribe, certainly under Don Bosco's dictation. [Author's note in the *Epistolario*]

⁸⁴The novena in preparation for Christmas begins on December 16. It is still a solemn occasion in every Salesian house. [Editor]

⁸⁵On February 23 an earthquake struck Liguria and was felt also in much of Piedmont. See Vol. XVIII, chap. 12, and a letter to Claire Louvet, Vol. XV, p. 494. [Editor]

⁸⁶It seems that he means Ventimiglia (Vallecrosia). [Editor]

Everyone's expecting you for the established date; we pray every day for your health and preservation; and your poor but very loving Don Bosco every morning never fails to make a special memento [for you] at Holy {Mass}.

May the Blessed Virgin protect and guide you and guide you [*sic*] through all life's dangers.

In filial affection,
Father J. Bosco

65 (2833)

Turin, Apr. 8, '87

My dear Count and honorable Countess Colle,

I don't know whether our news has reached you for some time. For I was practically forced to quit writing any letters except on matters strictly confidential.⁸⁷

Now it's been established that the Church of the Sacred {Heart} is definitely to be consecrated to God on May 13. I'm obliged to travel in short stages, but for that day I hope to be in Rome, and to find both of you there in good health and to speak in peace of ourselves.

From Rome we'll come home to Turin for the feast of O.L.H.C. on May 24.

We'll see how things stand; we'll talk them over.

Good-bye, my dear and kind friends. May God protect you, and may the Bl. Virgin ever be your guide as far as paradise.

In deepest gratitude I'll always be in J.Ch.

In filial affection,
Father J. Bosco⁸⁸

⁸⁷For a treatment of Don Bosco's steadily declining health, see Arthur J. Lenti, "Don Bosco's Last Years, His Last Illness and Saintly Death From Eyewitness Accounts," *Journal of Salesian Studies*, V, no. 2 (Fall 1994), pp. 23-97. [Editor]

⁸⁸Father Rua added a postscript: [Author]

If you'll allow me, I'll add my own respects and good wishes for the celebrations. Father de Barruel wrote me good news regarding you and also informed me of the charity you showed our dear Fr. Perrot on the day he called on you. May the good God be praised for that and you well thanked. I, too, hope to see you in Rome, and already I'm praying to the S. Heart of Jesus to grant you a pleasant voyage and every kind of blessing.

Your very devoted servant in J.Ch.,
Fr. Michael Rua

77 (2845)

*(To be sent after my death)*⁸⁹

[Dear] Count and Countess Colle of Toulon,

I await you where the good God has prepared our great prize, eternal happiness with our dear Louis.

The divine mercy will grant it to us. Always be the support of the Salesian Congregation and the aid of our missionaries.

God bless you.

In filial affection,
Father J. Bosco

⁸⁹Unfortunately, Count Colle himself suffered a fatal heart attack on January 1, 1888, thirty days before the Saint's death. [Editor]

13. COMPLETE LIST OF EARLIER DOCUMENTS AND EVENTS IN THE ITALIAN EDITION OF VOLUME XVI

1. Three Sermons by Don Bosco
2. Letter from the Rosminian Superior General
3. Don Bosco at the Minor Seminary in Bergamo
4. Providence and Foresight
5. Five Letters from Don Bosco to the Lawyer Ferdinand Fiore
6. Letter from Don Bosco to a Teacher
7. Letter from Don Bosco to a Lady
8. Two Letters from Don Bosco to Bishop Ferré of Casale
9. Two Letters from Don Bosco to Father Oreglia
10. The Purchase of the House at Borgo San Martino
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17. Three Letters from Don Bosco to Father Felix Bava
18. A Letter of Thanks
- [19.] Letters to Miss Claire Louvet
- [20.] Letters to Count and Countess Colle

INDEX

ABBREVIATIONS

abp.	archbishop
bp.	bishop
Card.	Cardinal
CBR	Congregation of Bishops and Regulars
CPF	Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith
coad.	coadjutor
Cong.	Congregation
CSH	Church of the Sacred Heart
CSJE	Church of St. John the Evangelist
DB	Don Bosco
dir.	director
FMA	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (<i>Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice</i>)
GC	general chapter
MHC	Mary Help of Christians
OSFS	Oratory of St. Francis de Sales
pref.	prefect
Sal.	Salesian
SC	Salesian cooperator(s)
SS	Salesian Society (Congregation)

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