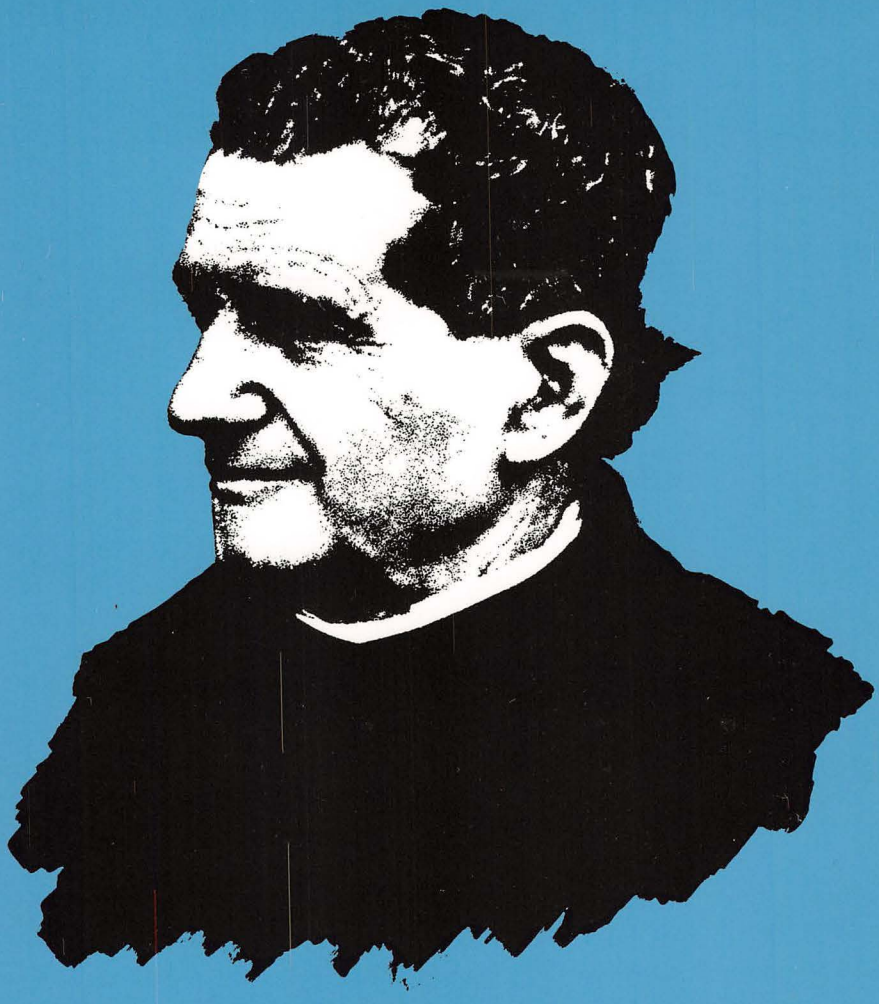


VOLUME V - 1854-1858

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne

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

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

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

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

The Salesian Society

2004

Membership	16,645
Countries	132
Provinces	98
Houses	2,086
Bishops	84
Archbishops	24
Cardinals	6

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

2004

Membership	15,286
Countries	90
Provinces	79
Houses	1,533

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO

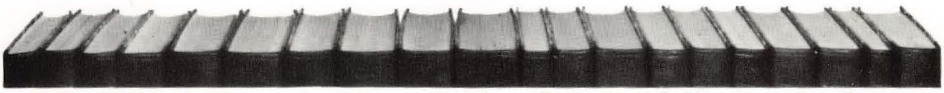
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THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO



SALESIANA PUBLISHERS

THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco

by

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

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

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

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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 AMBROSE ROSSI, S.D.B.

(1893–1964)

Salesian Provincial

In The Eastern United States

From 1933 to 1941

***

His Stalwart Leadership

And

Dedication To Salesian Ideals

Left An Indelible Mark

In North And Central America,

His Field Of Labor For Thirty Years

Editor's Preface to the First Nine Volumes

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

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

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

To help in the difficult art of educating the young, Don Bosco planned to expound his method of education in a book but, absorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious congregations and in unceasing other labors, he had to content him-

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

self with a simple outline of his ideas in a golden little treatise entitled *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth.*

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

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

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

[2] True history in the sense that what he narrates is substantially true, though his method of presentation, his chronology, and his treatment of sources stand

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

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

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

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his spiritual

---

improvement. The episodes and incidents he reports did not necessarily take place exactly as described.

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

children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

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

New Rochelle, N.Y.
June 5, 1965
124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

Acknowledgments

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

As regards this volume, we wish to express our sincere thanks to those who have been so generous with their time, above all to Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Director of the St. Dominic Savio High School in East Boston; also, to Rev. Arnold Buja, S.D.B., Librarian of the Don Bosco Technical High School in Rosemead, California; to Rev. Pietro Stella, S.D.B., of the Pontificio Ateneo Salesiano in Rome; to Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City, and to all who have helped in one way or another. To one and all, our heartfelt and lasting gratitude.

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

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SALESIAN GLOSSARY

(For the General Reading Public)

ARTISANS: trade school students.

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

ASSISTANT: a Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

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

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from heat 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

Zealous Activity

DON BOSCO untiringly pursued the path God had marked out for him; purity of intention, genuine humility, and utter selflessness were clearly evident in all his undertakings.

The January 1854 issue of *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] was almost entirely devoted to a reprint of Don Bosco's short biography of Louis Comollo.[1] The only change was a new Preface written to replace the original one that had been addressed to his fellow seminarians.

To the Reader. Virtuous behavior is far more effective than eloquent speech. This is why I offer you the biographical sketch of a young man who throughout his brief life practiced virtue to such an extent that he became a model for all Christians who wish to save their souls. There was nothing especially extraordinary about Comollo's life, save that whatever he did, he did perfectly. To him we may well apply the words of the Holy Spirit: *Qui timet Deum, nihil negligit.* He who fears God neglects nothing that may help him to progress in the ways of God.

Our story is filled with stirring episodes but it seldom moralizes; rather, it allows the reader to apply to himself whatever suits him best.

Almost everything the reader will find here was written at the time of Comollo's death and published in 1844. I vouch for the authenticity of this account without the slightest hesitation. Whatever I relate here is public knowledge; I either personally witnessed the events or learned of them from unimpeachable sources.

Read with an open mind, dear Christian reader. A pause now and then to absorb what you have read will prove to be a source of inspiration and will enable you to map out your own program of Christian life.

[1] A fellow seminarian of Don Bosco. *See* Vol. I, pp. 249–56, 339–35. *See also* Vol. II, p. 155. [Editor]

Don Bosco issued another reprint of this biography in 1867; then, in 1884, he published a new edition. To corroborate his previous statements, he added: "Comollo's superiors in the Chieri seminary insisted on personally reading this biographical sketch and correcting even the slightest detail that did not completely accord with the facts. I wish to stress that this edition contains much information which previously did not seem suitable for publication, as well as many other facts which have since come to our knowledge."

This short biography [in the January 1854 issue of *Letture Cattoliche*] also carried the following announcement:

We are delighted to inform our readers of a cherished letter from His Eminence [James] Cardinal Antonelli written on behalf of His Holiness Pope Pius IX.

The gracious support of the Vicar of Christ has encouraged us to zealously endure the burdens we have assumed in our desire to defend our holy Faith and unmask the seductive wiles of the foes of our religion. Undoubtedly, this support will also greatly encourage our friends and strengthen the hope of those whom we strive to protect against error.

However, although such support brought comfort to the spirit, the body, too, demanded its share of sustenance. The food shelves of the Oratory kitchen were frequently bare, and Don Bosco had no alternative but to appeal again to his benefactors, particularly to Count [Clement] Solaro della Margarita, the cabinet minister and councilor of state.

Letture Cattoliche
(which I warmly recommend to Count and Countess della Margarita)
Office of the Editor

Turin, January 5, 1854

Your Excellency:

Although I have never come to you for help, your interest in so many charitable works and my own pressing needs lead me to hope that you will at least read this letter.

What with soaring food prices, swelling numbers of destitute boys, and dwindling contributions from charitable people who no longer are

in a position to help, I am in straitened circumstances and know not where to turn. Without even considering other expenses, the bread bill alone for this quarter exceeds 1,600 lire, and I have no idea where I can find even a single cent. Nevertheless, we must eat. Were I to deny a piece of bread to these boys (who have been a problem to themselves and to others), I would expose them to physical and moral harm.

These exceptional circumstances prompt me to appeal to Your Excellency for whatever help your charity may deem suitable. May I also ask that you plead our cause to other charitable persons. This is not just a question of helping a single individual. I must provide food for many boys whose Faith and morals may be imperiled by hunger.

I hope you will favorably consider this most serious need that I face. I assure you of my complete gratitude. May God's blessing be upon you and your noble family. I am honored to remain,

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Should you in your charity wish to make a donation immediately, you may, if you see fit, give it to Father Cafasso.

P.P.S. May I also respectfully invite you to attend a religious play to be presented tomorrow afternoon at 1:30 in the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales?

According to Ascanio Savio,[2] this play, staged by the boys, was one of those which Don Bosco himself had written to entertain and instruct the Oratory boys, especially the artisans.

Meanwhile another issue of *Letture Cattoliche* was about to go to press for the second half of January [1854].[3] It was the fourth reprint of a pamphlet in defense of the Church and the existing social order. Presented in question-and-answer form, it was entitled *A Catholic Handbook on Revolutions.* The following is a sample of the vigorous line of reasoning adopted by the author:[4]

Catholicism stands alone in teaching respect [for authority]; Protestantism advocates revolt. Rebellion against one's king is a most serious offense. The revolutionist at first poses as a liberator, but once he man-

[2] Don Bosco's first seminarian. [Editor]

[3] At this time it was a bimonthly publication. *See* Vol. IV, p. 374. [Editor]

[4] The reader should not forget that what follows represents the thinking of a century ago. [Editor]

ages to destroy public order, he turns into a tyrant and rules with an iron hand over the lives, consciences, possessions, and the very thoughts of citizens. He hates both Pope and king because he hates God. At every moment some obscure agitator—worthy only of the gallows—promulgates laws or decrees. Revolutionists advocate giving full vent to one's own passions. They wage war on kings to remove all obstacles to their treason against God. They protect and favor godless societies and groups because of their evil tenets. As a rule, such rebels are members of secret societies denounced and condemned by the Popes. They generally confiscate church property, both diocesan and religious—a crime demanding excommunication, the same penalty threatened to those who dare to usurp the temporal power of the Holy See. Revolutionists hate priests and falsely accuse them of opposing the Constitution[5] and the state merely because they raise their authoritative voice against the decline of morals advocated by these godless agitators. The temporal power has both the right and the duty to take action against such people, even to the extent of inflicting capital punishment, because the sovereign "is God's minister." [Cf. Rom. 13, 4] He is accountable for all the harm, both temporal and eternal, perpetrated by the revolutionists. The clemency of the king should not hurt society and embolden the sworn enemies of the public good by allowing their audacity to go unpunished. God has repeatedly ordained this in Holy Scripture. A citizen is bound in conscience to inform the government about any secret conspiracy of which he is aware, for the king is the father of his people.

Bishop [Louis Moreno] of Ivrea had wanted this pamphlet to be published as an issue of *Letture Cattoliche*. Don Bosco did not share his opinion. He believed this move to be dangerous since the pamphlet attacked many persons then in power, but he yielded to the bishop's insistence and courageously endured the clearly foreseen consequences. He was summoned before the civil authorities and reprimanded, and he also suffered other vexations which fortunately soon subsided.

Sometime during this period, Don Bosco went to Ivrea. While there, he received a letter from Father Vincent Devit of the Institute of Charity at Stresa. On behalf of Father [Antonio] Rosmini, the priest asked him to submit a plan for the proposed printshop at the Oratory.[6] Don Bosco replied as follows:

[5] King Charles Albert granted a Constitution on March 4, 1848. Pope Pius IX did likewise on March 14 of the same year. *See* Vol. III, pp. 213ff. [Editor]

[6] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 479f. [Editor]

Ivrea, January 11, 1854

Reverend and dear Father:

In response to your welcome letter signifying Father Rosmini's kind interest in the welfare of the boys attending the festive oratories here in Turin, I shall present my suggestions for the establishment of a printshop.

I have no doubt that Father Rosmini's intention is to found a charitable institution to benefit my poor boys by giving them work; nevertheless, wisdom demands that we clearly state all pertinent matters before God and man. My suggestions are as follows:

1. Father Rosmini will furnish enough capital to complete one section of the building and to purchase printshop equipment.[7]
2. As collateral for the money advanced, I offer the building itself and the printshop equipment, over which Father Rosmini will retain ownership.
3. I will provide supervision of the shop—personally and through a cleric—besides the rent-free use of the premises.
4. The printshop will be available for the use of both parties. At such time as shall be determined, an audit shall be conducted.
5. Father Rosmini will receive an additional five percent discount on all orders.
6. Both parties agree to provide work and ensure the smooth operation of the shop.
7. Both parties shall share profits and expenses.

I do not know whether I have expressed my ideas clearly, but Father Rosmini is free to add, delete, or alter whatever he sees fit. I leave it fully to him.

Meanwhile, thanking you for your kind words and wishing you and your Father General all God's blessings, I beg you to remember me in your prayers. I remain,

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's plan, which he had already personally explained, consisted in converting part of the main Oratory building into a printshop. Father Devit replied to Don Bosco's letter on January 21, informing him that Father Rosmini, after careful deliberation, had come to the conclusion that no decision could be made about

[7] *See* Vol. IV, p. 480. [Editor]

the printshop without first inspecting the premises and discussing the matter with Don Bosco in Turin in order to anticipate and smooth out difficulties likely to arise. Therefore, he promised to send someone to Valdocco within a few months.

CHAPTER 2

First Use of the Name "Salesian"

DON Bosco wrote in one of his memoirs: "A keen observer will be amazed by the striking characteristics of each successive decade of the Oratory." In its first decade it could well have been called "The Wandering Oratory." In the second it acquired stable quarters, became "The Permanent Oratory," and moved forward through various phases of organization. The third decade was that of growth; new houses were opened at Mirabello, Lanzo, and elsewhere in Italy. During the first years of the fourth decade, the Salesian Congregation spread beyond the confines of Italy, establishing itself in Nice and Marseille, and even in the New World in Argentina and Uruguay; this was the decade of world expansion.

Our present narrative is concerned with the second decade, of which Don Bosco goes on to state: "We could say that the year 1854 marked the end of the romantic period of the Oratory and the beginning of its systematization. The boys no longer went to school carrying their spoons in their pockets; now they could eat their meals in a dining room.[1] The arrival of Father Victor Alasonatti, a quiet, orderly person, enabled me to establish a routine for the house, since I was now no longer alone. At that time I began jotting down whatever I considered important in the development of the Oratory—just notes, not detailed accounts."

Let us now resume our narrative. As the feast of St. Francis de Sales was approaching, Don Bosco again[2] tried in a roundabout way to instill the idea of a religious congregation in the minds of a few of his pupils. He summoned them to a meeting during which he spoke about the good that many of them could do for their fellow

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 247f. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 294ff. [Editor]

men in general and boys in particular if they were all united into one body. Preserved in our archives are the minutes of this meeting as recorded by the cleric Rua, from which we learned the following: "On the evening of January 26, 1854, we gathered in Don Bosco's room. Present were Don Bosco, [Joseph] Rocchietti, Artiglia, [John] Cagliero, and [Michael] Rua. Don Bosco suggested that, with the help of the Lord and St. Francis de Sales, we should first test ourselves by performing deeds of charity toward our neighbor, then bind ourselves by a promise, and later, if possible and desirable, make a formal vow to God. From that evening on, those who agreed—or would later agree—to this were called 'Salesians.' "

Don Bosco's suggestion deeply impressed the young clerics. He had also prepared them indirectly for that occasion by his sermons which were designed to make them favorably disposed to his—as yet unrevealed—intention [to found a religious congregation]. For the most part his religious instructions concerned church history or the lives of the Popes. To make sure that the boys had understood what he had said and to inspire them with a spirit of emulation, he would end his sermons by asking the day boys or the boarders to give their opinions about the story and to suggest a moral that could be drawn from it. This method had the effect of making the boys pay attention and think for themselves, and their answers supplied Don Bosco with various suitable conclusions which he embodied in a meaningful moral. In this way he dispensed knowledge and formed character. Particularly striking were the simplicity, order, and clarity with which he portrayed the fraternal bond uniting the early Christians, the filial fellowship of priests with their bishops and the Pope, and the intense fervor of the first religious orders in their apostolic worldwide labors. When he was through, he would turn to one of the clerics and ask what particular factor could possibly explain such wonderful results. While all listened attentively, the conclusion was drawn that obedience unites, strengthens, and, with God's grace, produces astounding results.

As a result of Don Bosco's sermons and the inspiring example of his life, many boys heard the call to a religious or priestly vocation and later became a credit to both the Oratory and the Church. He strove to give these boys a religious formation by encouraging them to practice the virtues necessary to their state of life, especially

humility and sacrifice; he urged them to be faithful to these virtues even in the smallest details of their daily life, and he constantly reminded the clerics of their sacred duty to be models of obedience to the rest.

Meanwhile, the feast day of the Oratory's patron saint had arrived. We have already mentioned[3] that in order to arouse the spirit of emulation among the boarders and reward their good conduct, Don Bosco had introduced a praiseworthy custom which endured for many years: he would award prizes to those boys whose conduct had been outstanding. The recipients of this award were chosen by their schoolmates in a secret ballot. The ceremony was generally held on the eve of the feast of St. Francis de Sales at an assembly attended by all the students and artisans. During the preceding week each boy would submit a list of companions who in his opinion were the most exemplary in conduct and prayer. There was no prior discussion among the boys as to possible choices, and no reasons were given for their selections. The superiors did not interfere, not even to the extent of making suggestions; the voting was entirely free of any influence. The boys simply handed in their signed lists to Don Bosco who tabulated the results. The names of the boys who had received the greatest number of votes were publicly announced that evening, and a book was awarded to each of the winners in a solemn ceremony, as their superiors and schoolmates looked on. It is noteworthy that the selections made by the boys were always so eminently fair and judicious that the superiors themselves could not have done better. No unworthy boy was ever selected; no dissembler—no matter how cunning—ever made the list. However, in a sense, this is not surprising, for who can know us better than those with whom we live in close contact and who, without our ever realizing it, notice our every word and move? This awarding of prizes at the close of the first school quarter not only spurred the ambition of the better boys, but it also acted as a warning and a revelation to those who had not received any votes. In addition, the voting of this year had an added category, for the boys had been allowed to submit a list of the clerics they considered to be outstanding.

In a register in Don Bosco's own handwriting we read: "This

[3] *See* Vol. III, p. 253. [Editor]

year, in the solemn awarding of prizes on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, two clerics were also included for the first time, Michael Rua and Joseph Rocchietti. The honor students were Bellisio, Artiglia, and Cagliero. Four other boys—Maggiorino Turchi, Angelo Savio, L. Pepe, and Comollo—received honorable mentions.

This register also contains the conduct marks of all the boarders —then numbering seventy-six—for the period of November 1, 1853 through August 1, 1854. A rating of ten was the equivalent of excellent. Also recorded are the overall monthly marks for the moral, religious, and scholastic conduct of the clerics. In addition to Dominic Marchisio, three other names are listed which we have not previously mentioned: Joseph Olivero, John Luciano, and Louis Viale. A clue to the reason for the departure of two of the clerics can be found in their progressively poorer marks as the school year advanced, as well as in Don Bosco's own observation: "They were particularly negligent in their religious duties, wasting a good deal of time during study periods and proving to be less than edifying in speech and deportment."

Occasionally the conduct marks received by the clerics were read out publicly along with those of the boys at the appointed times; however, no one ever resented it or showed any surprise. True democracy reigned at the Oratory; clerics, students, and artisans treated each other with brotherly familiarity and continued to do so even in their adult years when the inequality of their social status could have influenced them to do otherwise. True affection does not waver. This was the bond gradually being forged under the inspiring example of the heroic, constant, and generous charity of Don Bosco who was always ready to make sacrifices for his sons. He gloried in their successes, suffered and wept with them in their sorrows, rejoiced when they were happy, and grieved when they became ill.[4] He was so concerned with their well-being that he even became sick so that they could recover. During the early years of the Oratory, whenever a boy had a fever or was afflicted with a toothache, headache, or other ailment, Don Bosco would visit the Blessed Sacrament and plead with Our Lord to relieve the

[4] A scriptural reference to 2 Cor. 11, 29 has been omitted here because it is no longer apropos in the new versions. [Editor]

poor boy of his pain by transferring it to him. These prayers were answered.

To a lad in pain he would say: "Come now, don't worry. I'll take on some of it." He would laugh as he said this, but soon afterward he would get a splitting headache, earache, or toothache and the suffering boy would be instantly relieved. A few years later, however, he realized that this practice prevented him from attending to his duties. Since his presence was indispensable for the proper handling of important matters and the smooth running of the Oratory, he resolved to pray no longer for such a purpose. "I was foolish!" he told his boys, and he played down his selflessness as much as he could. But they knew from firsthand experience how much their good father loved them, and it was in vain that he tried to convince them that such heroic acts of charity were simply the result of foolishness.

One day he saw a boy tormented by an agonizing toothache that was causing him excruciating pain. Don Bosco comforted him: "Don't worry. I shall ask God to give me a share of your pain." The boy replied that he did not want to see Don Bosco suffer, but his loving superior kept his word.

Immediately after supper that evening, Don Bosco began to suffer the torment of a toothache. The pain continued to increase and finally became so intense that he had to call his mother and beg her: "Please stay with me! I'm afraid I'll jump out that window. This pain is driving me out of my mind." Nevertheless—as was his habit—he did not regret his sacrifice or ask God to free him from that torment; he selflessly accepted the consequences of his generosity.

His good mother was quite upset and did not know what to do or what to give him to alleviate the pain. Don Bosco passed part of the night in torment, but finally, when he could bear it no longer, he sent for [Joseph] Buzzetti to take him to a dentist. As they hurried along, they saw a door with a shingle reading: "Dr. Camusso, Dentist of the Royal House." When they knocked, a young man answered and told them that Dr. Camusso was already in bed.

"Please call him," Don Bosco said. "Ask him if he can pull this tooth out, for I am in terrible pain."

"Come right in," the young man replied. "My father is a good dentist, and in no time at all he'll make you feel better."

The dentist came down and examined Don Bosco's teeth; they were all perfectly sound, although the gums were badly inflamed.

"This is puzzling," the dentist remarked. "There is only one way to find the trouble. I'll have to take a chance and extract one tooth."

This was no easy matter, since all the teeth were perfectly sound and firmly embedded. But in his condition, Don Bosco was ready to have them all pulled out if necessary to get some relief. He sat down and the tooth was deftly extracted with a single yank. The dentist did it as gently as he could, but Don Bosco fainted and smelling salts were needed to revive him.

By the time Don Bosco had returned home, the pain had subsided, and in a short while it ceased completely. The boy's toothache also had vanished.

We are convinced that Don Bosco was rewarded for this generosity in cases such as this with the gift of healing—a power that he possessed for the rest of his life. John Turchi, an eyewitness, kept a record of many of Don Bosco's amazing cures in the early years of the Oratory. He assures us that he tried to be as accurate as possible as to dates and details, and that, rather than cast the least doubt on what he recorded, he deliberately omitted things of which he was uncertain, even though they might be true. We have already availed ourselves of this source in previous volumes,[5] and we shall continue to do so in the course of our narrative, particularly in regard to cures; these we shall describe in the context of the year in which they occurred. At the moment, however, we shall limit ourselves to only two.

Prior to 1850, a boy who had previously attended the festive oratory at Valdocco was suffering from an infection. Pus kept oozing from several sores in his leg, and there was distinct danger of gangrene. Don Bosco came immediately when the boy's parents sent for him, and they revealed the discouraging news that the doctors were considering amputation of the leg.

"Don't worry about that," Don Bosco said. "Just have faith and there will be no amputation."

[5] *See* Vol. II, p. 21; Vol. IV, pp. 199f. [Editor]

He asked the boy to make some promises and then blessed him, invoking St. Aloysius Gonzaga and Louis Comollo. When the doctor came to examine the leg the next day, he found it healed, although the sores were still visible.

In the winter of 1853, [John] Turco, a student at the Oratory, went to bed one evening with a high fever. Since his whole body was a mass of aches, he tossed about restlessly, unable to find a comfortable position. When Don Bosco was told of this after supper, he went to see the lad while the rest of the boys were at recreation or at singing practice. After he had comforted Turco and urged him to trust in St. Aloysius, he persuaded him to make a special promise to this saint. Then, invoking St. Aloysius, he blessed the boy, and left him with an affectionate good night. The sick boy could never explain later what happened. He remembered nothing except that he instantly fell sound asleep in a sweat and that, on awakening the next morning after an unbroken slumber, he felt perfectly well. The next morning, immediately after Mass, solicitous as ever for the health of all his pupils, Don Bosco inquired about the boy and was told: "Turco is up and is eating breakfast with the others." The boy himself stated: "Both then and later I regarded my instantaneous recovery as almost miraculous."

However, the Lord did not always see fit to allow an immediate or speedy recovery. In such cases Don Bosco's charity would show itself in some other way.

Father Ascanio Savio told us: "If a boy became sick, Don Bosco would have him transferred to the infirmary where, either personally or through others, he solicitously looked after him, as I myself know from personal experience." "When I was sick with typhus," Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi reported, "he nursed me with what I would call motherly care." Notwithstanding his numerous duties, Don Bosco never failed to visit his young patients. He would do so immediately if the case was serious, sending for a doctor and taking him to the bedside personally. He was so concerned about them that if at times he was unable to visit them, he would repeatedly inquire after their health, ask if medication had been provided, and reiterate his order that no expense be spared to restore them to health. He used to say: "Let's be thrifty in other things, but the sick must be given everything they need." If a boy's condi-

tion took a turn for the worse, he would spend hours at his bedside during the day and, if necessary, at night as well. Above all, he made sure that in serious cases the boy received the Last Sacraments with the proper disposition. His manner was so friendly and his words were so affectionate and persuasive that sick boys seemed to forget their pain. "It was the opinion of all," Father [John] Turchi and Bishop [John] Cagliero declared, "that dying at the Oratory would be a delightful experience if one could be assisted by such a solicitous father."

Don Bosco showed the same concern for convalescents; he would instruct the prefect[6] to serve them more substantial food, and he would continually make anxious inquiries about their health. "That's the way he was," [Peter] Enria stated. "He always neglected himself to look after us."

[6] The superior entrusted with the administration of all temporal affairs. [Editor]

CHAPTER 3

Defending the Faith

THE charity that inflamed Don Bosco's heart with love for his Oratory boys also inspired him to continue publishing and spreading *Letture Cattoliche*. He could not, however, cope single-handedly with the needs of the faithful whose Faith was constantly being threatened. He therefore strove to induce learned priests and laymen to contribute their talent by writing articles on specific topics. Some willingly agreed to do so, but others, shying away from involvement in this type of work, did their best to keep at a distance because they were well aware that, if they met him face to face, they would not have the heart to refuse their help. Consequently, during the first fifteen years of publication, a great number of issues of *Letture Cattoliche* were authored by Don Bosco himself; the rest he carefully checked and edited in addition to proofreading the galleys.

The two issues of February 1854 were bound together and published under the title *Rules of Proper Behavior for Farmers and Others*. He addressed the farmers as follows: "My dear friends, I wish I could make you prize your station in life above all others. I wish I could make you realize that your lot is most honorable, most favored by God, most conducive to holiness. . . . You are the ministers, the instruments of the Creator's power. . . . If you were all to abandon your work, life could no longer continue. . . . Your calling deserves the highest respect because God made the first man on earth a tiller of the soil."

He then went on to describe in glowing terms the advantages of rural living, the spirit of helping one's neighbor that particularly prevails among farmers, the peace and love reigning in their households, and the spiritual value of their hard work which he declared to be as meritorious as that of the desert saints.

He urged them to retain the simplicity, modesty, and purity of their ancient customs, to avoid gambling in cafés on market days, to insist that the members of their families dress modestly, and to avoid speaking in a disparaging manner about civil and ecclesiastical authorities in the presence of children or farmhands.

To promote their spiritual welfare, he suggested vocal or mental prayer as a reminder of God's presence, the observance of Sundays and holy days, the frequent reception of the sacraments, docility in accepting their confessor's advice and suggestions, and wholesome reading such as the Bible or church history in the evenings or other occasions. "But before buying books," he advised them, "consult your pastor in order to protect your home from the harm of a bad book. Do not accept books from persons who are unknown to you, for there are people roaming the countryside for the precise purpose of spreading irreligious publications."

This issue of *Letture Cattoliche* also carried this statement:

To Our Subscribers

This twenty-third issue of *Letture Cattoliche* concludes our first year of publication,[1] and we have more than fulfilled our promises.

In our original announcement[2] we promised subscribers a monthly issue of no less than 96 pages; however, the warm reception accorded our venture, the encouragement we received, and the advice and the pleas of many subscribers prompted us to publish two issues per month averaging some 50 or 60 pages each, notwithstanding the extra cost. Thus we have offered our readers 108 pages a month instead of 96; that means 1,296 pages a year instead of 1,152, as may be seen from the report at the end of this issue.

We trust that we have not fallen short of our subscribers' expectations either in the number of pages or in subject matter. Regarding the latter, we have tried to follow the suggestions and wishes of distinguished readers.

We wish to publicly express our sincere thanks to our revered bishops for their support, to our fellow priests who contributed their talent, and to those noble, generous persons who helped us with their subscriptions. Their continued backing strengthens our hope that, with God's help, we shall have even greater success as we now enter our second year.

[1] The first issue appeared in March 1853. *See* Vol. IV, p. 400. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. IV, p. 541. [Editor]

We shall strive to promote both the temporal and the spiritual welfare of society in these critical times and thus meet the expectations of the faithful. If our efforts succeed in at least checking the determined and diversified corruption of minds and hearts now taking place in our unfortunate land, especially among the uneducated, we shall be God's instruments for good. The merit will not be just our own, but will be shared by all those who have cooperated with us in defending our Catholic Faith and spreading the principles of Christian conduct.

We are encouraged by the approval of the Holy Father, conveyed to us by His Eminence James Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State, in a letter published in the combined issues Nos. 20–21. We trust that the blessing of His Holiness Pius IX will also encourage our kind benefactors to continue the assistance that they have so generously given us in the past and that is so earnestly needed again.

The enemies of our Faith and country strive feverishly with all available means to corrupt the minds and hearts of lukewarm, uneducated people. Therefore, it is our duty and the duty of all good citizens to exert every effort and use all lawful means to stem this raging torrent which threatens to sweep away both Church and State in its murky waters.

Unity of purpose is indispensable to a task so righteous and beneficial to society. Let us therefore unite and strive for a single goal, secure in the knowledge that God will bless and speed our efforts. One day we shall rejoice to see our enemies—the foes of both Church and society —either join us after rejecting their errors and utopian fallacies, or grovel in the dust, once their malicious lies have been exposed and they are incapable of doing further harm.

We notify our readers that the subscription rate of *Letture Cattoliche* will remain the same, but from now on each topic will be treated in a single issue. Every effort will be made to expedite delivery.

As a final note, we are happy to announce that a French translation of all the issues published to date is now being prepared for the French-speaking provinces and dioceses. We again call your attention to the notice that appeared on the cover of the combined issues Nos. 20–21.

Letture Cattoliche was now entering its second year of life. To increase circulation, Don Bosco had the Doyen Press print three thousand circulars. The two issues of March were combined in one booklet entitled *The Conversion of a Waldensian,* a contemporary true story with a few minor alterations to protect the person's identity. The heroine was a young girl born of non-Catholic parents.

Yearning for the peace of mind enjoyed by her young Catholic friends, she asked for and secretly received instruction in the Catholic Faith from the local pastor. When this became known, she had to face the opposition of her minister and the anger and punishment of her father. Eventually, amid startling circumstances, she managed to run away from home and become a Catholic despite the snares laid by the enemies of her soul.

The Foreword contained an extract of a notice sent by Bishop [John Peter Losana] of Biella to the faithful of his diocese on March 15, 1854.

In earlier days the Waldensians used to hand out free copies of an adulterated Bible and other publications attacking Catholic dogmas, worship, and moral teachings. When these tactics proved unsuccessful, they decided to bribe consciences with gold. Now they have gone one step further. Deceit is their latest weapon. Only the infernal enemy could have devised this new strategy. Evil salesmen have now taken to the road. Under the pretext of selling various wares, they enter stores and homes, accost pedestrians, and push low-priced heretical and impious books or give them away free. Their eye-catching titles lure the uneducated who unsuspectingly carry the poison into their own homes—a poison all the more deadly because it is not recognized as such beforehand.

Don Bosco added a few lines of his own as follows:

My dear friends, the enemies of Catholicism, and especially the Waldensians, are doing their utmost to undermine our beliefs. We exhort and urge all who cherish the Faith of their fathers to join us in defending this most precious gift of God. Help us to spread *Letture Cattoliche* so that we may unmask deceit and heresy and safeguard the Catholic Faith of our people. It alone has the whole truth; without it one cannot please God; outside of it no one can be saved.

The Waldensians became all the more insolent as they realized they would get away with their evil practices, and as a result Catholics were mercilessly smeared with the most malicious slander.

In January 1854, the bishops protested to the king about the serious and clearly unjust charges of rebellion leveled at the clergy, and they urged him to reconcile his differences with the Holy See.

In reply, Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of Grace and Justice, submitted to the Chamber of Deputies a bill he himself had drafted which proposed several amendments to the criminal code. This bill not only lessened existing penalties for religious crimes, but also advocated jail sentences of three months to two years for clergymen who, in the public exercise of their ministry, criticized state practices or laws. In the event such criticism was in writing, read in public, or in any way published, the jail sentence was to run from six months to three years; in both cases there was a fine of up to two thousand lire. The bill was passed on March 16 [1854] by a vote of 93 to 33.

In a letter of March 30 of the same year, the bishops of Piedmont and Liguria appealed to the Senate to guarantee to the Catholic clergy the civil rights enjoyed by all citizens. The Senate instead decided to approve the bill after making a few minor amendments, and the king ratified it on July 5 [1854].

That was not all. In 1853 the government had drawn up a new plan for military service. The Chamber of Deputies had approved Article 98 which was couched in the following terms: "The religious needs of each diocese will be ascertained each year subject to the king's approval through the Minister of Grace and Justice. Accordingly, the following may claim exemption from military service: 1. Catholic seminarians who were drafted before their ordinaries could claim exemption. 2. Students for the ministry drafted under the same circumstances."

From this article it became clear that clerical exemption from military service had ceased to be a privilege and a right, and had become instead a royal concession that could be secured just as easily by Waldensians, Jews, or any other denomination with enough funds to buy a few dozen disciples.

The bishops appealed to the king and to the Senate, proving that many dioceses were *de facto* suffering from a shortage of priests, but on February 2, 1854, the senators approved the law by a vote of 50 to 12, and the king ratified it on May 20. Every bishop was allowed to claim exemption for one cleric for every twenty thousand communicants, but if the cleric did not receive at least one of the major orders before his twenty-sixth birthday, he forfeited his exemption. There was no such limitation for Protestant ministers.

CHAPTER 4

A Third Workshop at the Oratory

NEGOTIATIONS with Father Rosmini in regard to the opening of a printshop [at the Oratory] were still in progress. The idea of converting several rooms of the hospice under construction for this purpose had been discarded; plans now called for an entirely separate building. With this in mind Don Bosco had his eye on a triangular lot that measured 41,000 square feet. The apex of the triangle began where Via della Giardiniera and Via Cottolengo branched away from each other at a sharp angle—a divergence still noticeable in the layout of the Oratory playground later named in honor of Mary, Help of Christians. The base of the triangle extended more than halfway to the site now [1854] occupied by the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Don Bosco had purchased this lot from the archdiocesan seminary through Canon A. Vogliotti, its rector. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars and Archbishop Fransoni had approved this contract respectively on December 1, 1849 and February 28, 1850. The royal exequatur had also been obtained on February 5, 1850.

A few months later, on June 18, 1851, Don Bosco sold part of this triangle to John Baptist Coriasco for 2,500 lire. This piece, rectangular in shape, measured approximately 52 feet along Via Cottolengo and was 59 feet deep. The doorkeeper's lodge and main entrance now stand on this site. Here Mr. Coriasco, a cabinetmaker, built a one-story house with two parallel wings. On November 20, 1851, Don Bosco also sold the apex of the triangle, located to the east of Coriasco's little house, to Mr. John Emmanuel for the sum of 1,573 lire.

Since Don Bosco had reserved the option to repurchase the two above-mentioned lots, he suggested this site to Rosmini as ideal for their project. Father Rosmini wrote for more details and told him

to continue negotiating with Coriasco and Emmanuel. He also advised him to take the matter up with the chancery. Although we cannot find Father Rosmini's letter in our archives, we can reconstruct its contents from Don Bosco's reply.[1]

From these negotiations we gather that the value of real estate in Valdocco had skyrocketed and that many investors were eager to purchase land. In fact, in those days there was a fairly well-founded rumor that the railroad station for Milan—later built at Porta Susa—was to be constructed near the Oratory, and that an access square would front it. Don Bosco unquestionably informed Father Rosmini of this government plan.[2]

On March 7, 1854, Don Bosco wrote another letter to Stresa. Father Charles Gilardi replied on March 10, saying that his superior was sending him to Turin the following week and that hopefully all details would be ironed out at that time. He also requested Don Bosco's hospitality at the Oratory if it would be at all possible, and he offered to pay for this kindness.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco was readying the two April issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. Again they were bound into one title, *A Collection of Curious Contemporary Episodes*. Don Bosco himself had compiled this collection. The articles, presented in lively dialogue form, concerned Protestant proselytizing, and were entitled: *A Pastor in the Midst of Assassins; A Workman's Common Sense; A Fine Similitude; Catholic Steadfastness; Calamities of the Year; The Truth Known;* and *Working on Sundays and Holy Days*. To this collection Don Bosco added the story of the apparition of the Blessed Virgin to the two young shepherds at La Salette, another about the conversion and death of a Protestant young man, and several other interesting anecdotes.

Don Bosco's Foreword read as follows:

In publishing this collection of contemporary episodes, we think it advisable to inform our readers that Protestants have expressed great indignation over certain publications that have exposed their activities. They have done so orally, by letter, and through their own press. We

[1] These two letters and a reply from Father Rosmini deal with real estate matters. We have omitted them in this edition. [Editor]

[2] Italian railroads are still operated by the government. [Editor]

expected them to question our veracity or to point out errors, but nothing of the sort has occurred.

They had nothing but a tissue of insults and abuse against *Letture Cattoliche* and its writers. We shall not reciprocate in the least; when it comes to insults and abuse, we gladly accord them the palm of victory. It has always been our policy never to publish anything offensive to charity; this we owe to every person. We willingly pardon those who abuse us. On our part, we shall continue our policy of avoiding personal attacks, but we shall also continue to be unrelenting in our goal of unmasking error.

May God abundantly bless our readers and all those who cooperate with us in upholding the truth and defending the holy Catholic Faith.

The two May issues, also bound into one volume, struck an even mightier blow against doctrinal errors. The work of a distinguished author, Father John Perrone, S.J., its title was *A Popular Handbook on Protestantism*; it dealt with the history and doctrine of Protestantism, its insidious wiles, and the unhappy life and miserable death of apostates.

In the early part of this year, Don Bosco, whose hopes were still high for a printshop of his own in the not too distant future, almost jokingly—as was his wont in many undertakings—started a third [3] workshop at the Oratory designed to teach bookbinding. At that time there was not a single boy in the house who knew a thing about this craft, and no money was available to hire a craftsmaster. Nevertheless, one day Don Bosco put the printed signatures of a book entitled *The Guardian Angels* on a table; then, picking a boy called Bedino but nicknamed Governo, he said to him:

"You're going to be a bookbinder!"

"Me? I don't know a thing about it!"

"Sit down and I'll show you. Do you see these sheets? Start by folding them."

Don Bosco sat with him, and together they folded all the signatures, readying them for sewing. At this point Mamma Margaret came to their assistance and their united efforts were successful. Next they made some paste with flour and applied the paper covers

[3] The first two were the shoemaker and tailor shops opened in 1853. *See* Vol. IV, pp. 459f. [Editor]

to the book. The pages then had to be trimmed, but they were at a loss as to how to do it. All the boys had crowded around the table watching this performance. Suggestions flowed freely, most of them in favor of a knife or scissors since nothing else suitable was available. However, Don Bosco was never at a loss when an ingenious idea was needed. He went to the kitchen and with mock solemnity returned holding the steel crescent-shaped cleaver for mincing vegetables. With this tool he began trimming the book amid the boys' laughter.

"Laugh all you want," Don Bosco exclaimed, "but we need a bookbinding shop and I want to make a start."

The book was finally trimmed.

"Now," Don Bosco asked, "how shall we gild the edges?"

"That I want to see!" Mamma Margaret exclaimed.

"Since we haven't any gold leaf," Don Bosco went on, "we'll just tint the pages a shade of yellow. How about that?" He took a little umber and then said: "Let's see. I think we'll mix it with plain water!"

"It won't hold," the boys chorused.

"How about oil?"

"You'll smear up the whole book!"

Don Bosco thought a while and then sent a boy to buy a little varnish. He mixed it with the umber and then applied it to the edges. The process worked, and Don Bosco laughed happily, as did everyone else. This marked the opening of the bookbinding shop. It was located in the second room on the ground floor of the partially completed new building, near the stairs where one of the refectories is now located. (For lack of funds construction had been limited to whatever was indispensable to make the finished part habitable.) Meanwhile, Don Bosco tried to learn something about bookbinding by visiting various shops in Turin and passing on what he had learned to his first young apprentice. He then assigned other boys to this craft and provided a few tools. Later on, when several lads who had already served as apprentices in this craft came to board at the Oratory, further progress was made, and the shop thereafter handled the binding of *Letture Cattoliche* and textbooks.

These humble beginnings provided the seed that resulted in rich

growth and progress. By autumn of that same year, the November 9, 1854 issue of *L'Armonia* carried an announcement that also mentioned a calamity which we shall soon describe:

A bookbinding shop was opened by our praiseworthy Don Bosco at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco in order to provide employment for several boys boarding there. Those who wish to support this charitable enterprise (and at the same time benefit by lower prices) can do so by having their books or other publications bound there. We warmly recommend this institution which, among others, now shelters eighteen boys orphaned by the deadly cholera epidemic and is about to accept more.

In that same year, 1854, a small commercial bookshop was opened alongside of this bindery.

CHAPTER 5

The Festive Oratories

DON Bosco's building plans and his publishing of *Letture Cattoliche* did not sap his zeal for the festive oratories to which many boys continued to flock for catechism instruction. His young clerics toiled from morning to night on Sundays and holy days teaching catechism, supervising the boys both in church and at play, and taking part in all the games to keep them active.

Once a month at Valdocco, after Vespers, Don Bosco used to raffle various articles of clothing, food, and books. Both boarders and day boys were eligible for prizes, but Don Bosco had these raffles particularly to encourage the day boys to attend the festive oratory regularly. The same custom was observed at the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories. The clerics attached to the St. Aloysius Oratory had to select the articles for this little lottery with the five lire that until 1861 Father [Ignatius] De Monte gave them for this purpose. They handled the sum so shrewdly that they always managed to keep all the boys happy. It was also their responsibility to find a priest to say Mass, preach, and hear confessions on Sundays whenever the young director, Father Paul Rossi—a zealous but sickly priest—could not do so. They always found someone willing to offer his services for such a charitable purpose. They also found priests for confessions on solemn feast days and on the occasion of the Exercise for a Happy Death. When they could not get anyone from town, the clerics went up to the Monte dei Cappucini [Capuchins' Hill] [1] to ask Father Guardian to send some of his monks. He usually obliged, and those zealous religious would charitably listen for hours on end to their youthful penitents. This happened many times over a period of years.

[1] A hill on the outskirts of Turin across the Po River. On top there stands the Church of Santa Maria del Monte and a 15-foot statue of Mary Immaculate. [Editor]

The yearly awarding of prizes and the feasts of the patron saints of the oratories were solemnized with assemblies at which the boys entertained with prose, poetry, and vocal and instrumental music. Nothing was neglected that could enhance the solemnity of these occasions. The clerics attended to everything. They also chose the "prior" [2] and invited him to accept the post. The "prior" was often a young man of a distinguished family. He was treated with great deference when he arrived, seated in a place of honor during the religious services, and given an ovation on leaving. Attorney Garelli, later a candidate for the office of mayor in Turin, told us with great pleasure that at the age of twenty he had once been "prior" of the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova.

Both there and at the Guardian Angel Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, one of the seats of honor at the assembly was always reserved for the "prior." At the end of the program one of the clerics would give the closing speech or ask the guest to address a few words to the crowd of boys in the presence of their parents and friends. If the "prior" was not an adept speaker or rather shy, the cleric would stand beside him and give him a cue. He would also start a round of applause to encourage him, and sometimes he would take over and continue the speech on his behalf, approving everything he had said. However, he would do this so expertly that nobody seemed to notice it. The cleric Rua in particular was very adept at coming to the guest's assistance at such awkward moments. The "prior" would usually contribute generously toward the expense of the festivity.

Thus Don Bosco trained his clerics to use their talents, contenting himself with laying down guidelines and then letting them pursue the goal. Nevertheless, he was always ready to come to their assistance.

While the festive oratory was a very effective training ground for the clerics and benefited the boys in many other ways that have already been mentioned, it also helped rid their minds of certain prejudices harmful to civil society. It broke down their deep-rooted

[2] Originally he was a duly elected officer of the St. Aloysius Sodality. (*See* Vol. III, p. 459.) Later the "prior" was usually a prominent benefactor invited to be the honorary chairman of a particular festivity. He usually responded by treating all the boys. [Editor]

antagonism for the upper classes which rabble-rousers, books, newspapers, and stage plays sought to nurture in the populace. When the boys saw gentlemen of the middle and upper classes join them in church, kneel by their side, receive Communion with them, teach them catechism, take part in their games, and conduct evening classes for them, they could not help feeling a sense of respect, love, and friendliness toward them. As a natural consequence, they would greet them on the streets, speak highly of them, follow their good example, and be proud of their acquaintance.

The boys regarded them not just as aristocrats, or middle-class people, but also and above all as friends of the poor. This helped to break down social barriers and bridge the gap of distrust. The workmen's children could verify for themselves the lies of the revolutionists. They gradually grasped God's wisdom in allowing men to be born into different social conditions. It became clear to the boys that the rich and the poor needed each other and that both were created by God for His glory. They learned that the rich must be humble in dealing with the poor, and that the poor must humbly bear the disadvantages of their social condition; only in this way would both be able to attain eternal happiness. It was also a great consolation to know that Our Lord, born of a kingly family, chose to live the life of the poor, proclaimed them blessed, and considered as done to himself what was done to them.

Indeed, these distinguished laymen were real benefactors to these poor, disadvantaged boys. When grown to manhood, many of them told us: "If I have been able to improve my social condition, if I now earn a decent living, I owe it to Don Bosco, to the good habits he taught me, and to the contacts, recommendations, and help that I received simply because I had frequented the Oratory." We shall cite one instance here, taken from a letter of Don Bosco to Count Xavier Provana of Collegno,[3] dated April 1, 1854: "I wish to introduce Mr. Morra to you. I believe we can entrust him with the boy in whom you are taking such a charitable interest. He is willing to help in every way possible, and he will explain the domestic routine to you. Remember me to the Lord and rest assured that I am entirely at your disposal if I can help you in any way."

[3] The Provana family was very close to Don Bosco. Count Xavier Provana regularly taught catechism to the festive oratory boys. [Editor]

These gentlemen not only performed a meritorious work in the sight of God and thereby earned blessings for their families, but they also had the joy of seeing their efforts and trust bear fruit. "On feast days," Attorney [Cajetan] Bellingeri remarked, "what irresistibly drew us to the Oratory was the sight of our little rascals going to Communion. The altar rail was dotted with hundreds of faces. Not long before, those faces had seemed more or less nondescript, coarse, sinister, scornful, arrogant, or even grim. But now, those lads became transfigured, and their countenances radiated purity, simplicity, faith, love, and beauty as if reflecting the real presence of Our Lord in their hearts. Such a sight was very edifying to us."

However, the great triumph of the festive oratory was the love and respect the boys acquired for the priesthood, treasuring it throughout their lives. To this respect must be traced their perseverance as good Christians, their return to the state of grace if they went astray, and their eagerness to seek advice and help in difficult circumstances. In later years they instinctively turned their steps to Valdocco and the room or the chapel where Don Bosco was always ready and waiting for them.

How many marvelous pages could be written on this subject, showing how the festive oratory prepared boys for adult life. Its traditions and the success of the many boys who, in spite of the vicissitudes of life, attended faithfully from their early years attest to its magnificent record. Many instructive and highly entertaining biographies could indeed be written. We would then have an inspirational record of a display of moral strength and weakness, an exposition of good qualities and frailties in all their stages, and a succession of episodes, some startling, but most of them revealing God's infinite mercy and the Blessed Virgin's protection. We could say that the success of the festive oratory was mainly the result of the good seed sown by the daily Lenten catechism classes. The evangelical fields were blessed by the Lord in proportion to the effort of the laborers.

That year [1854] Lent began on March 1, and Don Bosco was fortunate to have courageous disciples who were eager to emulate his spirit of sacrifice. On weekdays the clerics and older boys who taught catechism at the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories

had to eat an early lunch, walk several miles, and, after the catechism class, rush to the seminary for their own classes. In addition, after supper they would frequently give religious instruction to special groups of workmen. These devoted servants of God were true missionaries.

In a letter to Father [Peter] Abbondioli, pastor at Sassi [a suburb of Turin at the foot of the hills], Don Bosco mentioned the catechism classes at Valdocco. But while the grace of God was being rekindled in the boys' hearts, Don Bosco also had in mind the enriching of Mamma Margaret's little vegetable garden. Thus, in a light vein, he wrote:

Turin, April 4, 1854

My dear Father:

My mother has plenty of *beans*[4] here, really quite large ones, but she longs to have the kind you have at Sassi. Would you kindly give her some seeds of the so-called "regina beans," as you did once before? She would also like to have some vegetables if you can spare some. The bearer of this letter will explain in greater detail about my needs.

I have about four hundred boys attending the daily Lenten catechism classes at noon. As you see, this speaks pretty well for our youth.

Love me in the Lord and consider me to be always at your disposal.

Your most humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco, *Leader of the Little Rascals*

P.S. I'll pay you a visit after Easter.

What Don Bosco had said in the letter was true. The day boys were fine lads. Despite pernicious allurements and the general moral decay, these poor youths responded promptly to Don Bosco's simple and affectionate words.

No one could possibly evaluate the beneficial effects of the catechism classes at the Oratory. Young boys who had sought a safe refuge in the Oratory to shield themselves from the bad example and deplorable upbringing encountered in their homes succeeded in bringing their entire families back to God. Many of the

[4] Meaning the Oratory boys. The pun is on the word "beans" in the Piedmontese dialect. [Editor]

boys were truly heroic in their perseverance. Let one instance here suffice as an example. One day a father said to his young son who was employed in the family workshop: "If you go there one more Sunday and listen to those priests, I won't let you work for me; I won't give you a cent!" The boy continued to attend the Oratory, and he also continued to work diligently and skillfully even without pay. His fellow apprentices sided with his father and taunted him unmercifully, but his courage and his faith were finally rewarded by the conversion of his father.

Meanwhile, Father Charles Gilardi, procurator general of the Rosminians, had come to Turin. After examining Don Bosco's plans for the printshop, he abandoned any idea of purchasing the Coriasco house and instead offered to buy the larger part of the triangular plot that had formerly belonged to the seminary. There seems little doubt that Don Bosco must have hesitated a bit before agreeing to a further diminution of the site to which, for many reasons, he was deeply attached. Previously, on March 8 and April 10 of 1849 and again on June 10, 1850, forced by straitened circumstances, he had been obliged to sell several pieces of land on the other side of Via Cottolengo; these lots, although small, were important to him because they comprised part of the field he had seen in his dreams. Now he was being asked to give up even the hallowed place where he believed he had seen the Queen of Angels rest Her foot.[5] However, since this sacrifice was necessary for the welfare of his boys, he accepted it, leaving it to Divine Providence to fulfill its predictions.

Early on the afternoon of April 10 [1854], the Monday of Holy Week when the boys were beginning to prepare for their Easter Communion, Don Bosco sold to Father Charles Gilardi, who was representing Father [Antonio] Rosmini, some 20,968 square feet of land for 10,000 lire. The deed was drawn up by the notary Turvano. The plot adjoined Coriasco's house on the east, the seminary property on the west, Via Cottolengo on the south, and the Oratory on the north.

At the same time, by private agreement, Father Rosmini cancelled Don Bosco's debt of 3,000 lire and assumed responsibility

[5] *See* Vol. II, pp. 232ff. [Editor

for 5,000 lire that Don Bosco owed to the Turin Seminary. However, under the terms of this agreement, Father Rosmini was still entitled to the return of the 20,000 lire he had loaned to Don Bosco at 4% interest for the purchase of the Pinardi house.

Happy that the printshop would soon be a reality, Don Bosco paid off several of his more pressing creditors. Then, during the second week after Easter, he journeyed to Castelnuovo d'Asti with Bishop [Louis Moreno] of Ivrea, whom Father [Anthony] Cinzano, the pastor, had invited to administer the sacrament of Confirmation. At nearby Pranello, a student was confined to bed. For more than a year he had been suffering from serious eye trouble that had forced him to interrupt his studies, and the doctors had no hope that he would ever recover. Don Bosco went to see him with John Turchi before returning to Turin. "When we got there," Turchi told us, "the boy was lying in bed with his eyes bandaged. Near the bed a curtain hung from the ceiling, while another thick double curtain shut out all the light from the closed window. Even despite these precautions, whenever the door would open the boy would scream and beg someone to shut it because he couldn't bear the least glimmer of light. Don Bosco entered alone while we waited outside. I was never able to find out what happened inside that room, but I do know that the boy's bandages were removed the following day and that he began opening his eyes to get them accustomed to the light. Within a few minutes he was able to see clearly and he got out of bed fully recovered. After a few days, he came to the Oratory and was never again afflicted by eye trouble."

Upon his return to Turin Don Bosco wrote to Father Charles Gilardi giving him certain information regarding a memorandum to be sent to Rome for the approval of their agreement.

Turin, May 9, 1854

Dear Father Charles,

I received your welcome letters and the enclosures—i.e., a book for the cleric Olivero (which he received) and the play *Il Giannetto* which I like very much indeed and which you will see performed on your next visit. I have also seen Father Louis Setti. He cannot take up permanent residence at the Oratory because he teaches in various

schools and his schedule is quite hectic. In a few days I shall send you the deed of sale that the notary Turvano has promised to complete without delay.

Regarding the memorandum to be sent to Rome, I do not believe it will do any good because, as things stand now, Rome cannot authorize the seminary to sign the contract, since the seminary is forbidden to perform any administrative act. The same holds true for the steward appointed by the government whom the Holy See does not yet recognize as lawful possessor.

This, at least, was the experience of Mr. Dorna.[6] He, too, wanted to purchase a piece of land like the one in question, but when he discussed the matter with Canon [Michelangelo] Vacchetta and the government officials, he was told to wait for a definite reply from Rome. This, I believe, is also what will happen to us.

We often speak of you here, and we have surely missed you since you left.[7]

My mother, all our clerics, Mr. Dorna, and a great many of the boys wish to be remembered to you. Please give my regards to your Father General. I wish you God's blessings and beg you to remember me in your prayers,

Your sincere friend,

Fr. John Bosco, *Leader of the Little Rascals*

We shall now explain what Don Bosco meant by his references to Rome in connection with ecclesiastical property.

On March 2 [1854], a royal edict appointed Canon [Michelangelo] Vacchetta as administrator of the archdiocesan seminary which, after having first been converted into a military hospital, had later become an army depot.[8] On the following day, the administrator, without informing the vicar general, had hastily called on the rector, Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, and bluntly ordered him to hand over to him the funds in the safe, the archives, and any other asset. Canon Vogliotti at first refused, but when threatened with the intervention of the carabinieri, he yielded under protest.

[6] A surveyor. [Editor]

[7] During his stay in Turin he had been a guest at the Oratory. [Editor]

[8] The seminary had been closed in 1848 by Archbishop Louis Fransoni. *See* Vol. III, p. 210. [Editor]

As a result, the seminaries at Bra and Chieri were deprived of their support, since the funds of the Turin seminary paid the teachers' salaries and provided for the students' maintenance. By contrast, the Waldensians fared quite well, since their resources came from England and America.

CHAPTER 6

An Important Visitor

WE must now mention a truly memorable episode that occurred at the Oratory on a Sunday morning in April, 1854. At about 10:30 the boarders and many day boys were in church listening to Don Bosco's customary sermon following the second Mass and Matins and Lauds of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. As Don Bosco was speaking of some event of church history with his usual delightful simplicity, a stranger entered through the main door. Noting that a sermon was in progress, he sat in one of the rear pews and remained to listen. On the previous Sunday Don Bosco had begun the life of Pope St. Clement, and he now was narrating how the holy pontiff, because of his Faith, had been exiled by Emperor Trajan to what is now known as the Crimea.

At the end of his story Don Bosco queried one of the day boys for questions or suggestions for a moral from what he had heard. The boy's response was somewhat startling. Quite pertinently, but very inopportunely in view of the times, he asked: "If Emperor Trajan did wrong in banishing Pope St. Clement, what about the action of our government in exiling our archbishop?" Don Bosco simply replied: "This is not the time or the place to discuss this matter; there will be some other occasion when it will be more fitting to do so. For the present, let it suffice to mention the fact that the Church's enemies, at all times since her foundation, have aimed their attacks against her leaders—popes, bishops and priests —hoping that once the pillars are gone, the whole edifice would collapse, and that, by striking the shepherds, the flock would disperse and fall prey to ravenous wolves. Whenever we hear or read of popes, bishops or priests being imprisoned, exiled or even killed, we must not immediately come to the conclusion that they were guilty. It is quite possible that they were victims because they

simply did their duty, and thus they may well be confessors of the Faith and heroes of the Church like the Apostles, martyrs, and many popes, bishops, priests, and laymen. We must always remember that many hundreds of years ago the world, the Jews and Pontius Pilate condemned even Our Lord to death on the cross. They called Him a blasphemer and rabble-rouser, even though He was the true Son of God and had taught obedience and submission to established authority by ordering all to give unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar and to God what belongs to God."

After a few more words on the Christian's duty to remain steadfast in the Faith and to revere and respect God's ministers, Don Bosco left the pulpit. Then, after the usual Our Father and Hail Mary in honor of St. Aloysius Gonzaga and the singing of the invocation "Praised forever be the names of Jesus and Mary," the boys filed out of the chapel by the side door. The stranger followed and told someone that he wished to speak to Don Bosco. A boy led the visitor up to Don Bosco's room and—as was customary in those precarious times—remained in the room waiting to be dismissed. Thus he was present during the early part of the conversation.

Both Don Bosco and the visitor spoke Piedmontese.

Don Bosco: With whom do I have the honor of speaking?

Visitor: Rattazzi.

Don Bosco: Rattazzi? Are you the famous Rattazzi,[1] member of Parliament, former president of the Chamber of Deputies, and now Minister of Justice?[2]

Rattazzi: The same.

Don Bosco (*smilingly*): Well, I suppose I had better get ready for handcuffs and a rest in jail.

Rattazzi: Why do you say that?

Don Bosco: Didn't Your Excellency hear what I said a little while ago in church regarding the archbishop?

Rattazzi: Yes, I did. What of it? The boy's question may have been inopportune, but you handled it quite prudently, and no cabinet minister could possibly find fault with your answer. Besides, although I myself believe that politics should never be discussed in church—particularly

[1] In Piedmontese dialect "Rattazzi" can also mean "rat." Don Bosco gave a special tone to that word, thereby provoking a smile on the part of his guest.

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

with boys who are immature in such things—I would not expect anyone to give up his beliefs in any person's presence. I might add that, under our constitutional government, cabinet ministers are accountable for their actions and can be criticized by any and every citizen, including Don Bosco. Furthermore, although I do not approve of everything that the archbishop stands for or has done, I am glad that the harsh measures against him were not taken during my term of office.

Don Bosco (*humorously*): If that is the case, then I may rest assured that for now, at least, Your Excellency will not lock me up, but will let me go on breathing the free air of Valdocco. So let's talk about something else.

A serious conversation then ensued for more than an hour. With numerous questions, Rattazzi encouraged Don Bosco to tell him in detail about the purpose, origin, growth, and achievements of the festive oratory and its adjacent hospice. He was also interested in Don Bosco's disciplinary method to control so many boys.

Rattazzi: Don't you have two or three city policemen or plainclothesmen to help you?

Don Bosco: I don't need them, Your Excellency.

Rattazzi: How could that be possible? Boys are boys. They must be unruly, quarrelsome, and quick to use their fists. What reprimands and punishments do you use to restrain them and prevent trouble?

Don Bosco: Most of the boys are certainly quick-tempered, but in spite of that, no violent punishment of any sort is needed to prevent disorders.

Rattazzi: That hardly seems possible. Tell me more about how you manage things.

Don Bosco: Your Excellency surely knows that there are two systems of education: the repressive and the preventive. The former leans on force to repress and punish the guilty; the latter relies on gentleness to help the subject to observe the law by offering him the most suitable and effective incentives. This is our method. First and foremost we try to inspire in these boys a reverential fear of God, love of virtue, and horror of sin through catechetical and moral instructions. We guide them to the right path and help them with good and timely advice, especially by teaching them to pray and to frequent the sacraments. Furthermore, we do our utmost to supervise them with kindness at play, in school, or at work and to encourage them unreservedly. The minute that they

seem to be forgetting their duty, we call it to their attention in a friendly manner. In short, we do everything recommended by Christian charity to form in them a right conscience which, enlightened and sustained by moral principles, will lead them to do good and avoid evil.

Rattazzi: This is certainly the best method for educating rational beings, but does it work with everyone?

Don Bosco: It succeeds wonderfully with some ninety percent of our boys; as for the rest, it succeeds at least in making them less obstinate and dangerous. I rarely have to expel a boy because he is defiant or incorrigible. Here at Valdocco, as at the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories, boys show up either of their own accord or because they have been brought by friends. These boys have been a problem to their parents and employers. They are ill-natured, unmanageable, or downright mean. Yet, in the space of a few weeks, they undergo a remarkable change; in a sense, they are like wolves who have turned into lambs.

Rattazzi: It's too bad the civil authorities cannot adopt this system in penal institutions where hundreds of guards are needed to quell disorders and where the inmates grow worse with each passing day.

Don Bosco: Why can't it be adopted? The authorities can make a start by allowing the Church inside the prisons to introduce religious instruction and practices of piety. Then they can give importance to religion by allowing priests to visit the inmates often so that they may freely comfort and encourage them. By so doing, they would put the preventive system in operation. After a while, guards and wardens would hardly be needed and the government could take pride in restoring useful, upright members to society and their families. On the contrary, with the other system, the government's attempts and expenditures for the rehabilitation or punishment of hundreds of criminals will all be in vain. The authorities will still be forced to watch the convicts after their release lest they do greater evil than before.

Don Bosco kept talking in this vein for a long time. He had firsthand experience with delinquents, both young and old, because he had repeatedly visited the city jails since 1841,[3] and he could therefore convince the Minister of the Interior of the effectiveness of religion in their moral rehabilitation. "When convicts see a priest," he maintained, "and hear his comforting words, they are reminded of the happy years of their boyhood. They recall the

[3] *See* Vol. II, pp. 48f, 82ff, 136–145. [Editor]

advice of their pastors and teachers and realize that they are now in prison because they either stopped going to church or did not follow her teachings. More often than not, these fond memories move them to repentance. They accept their punishment, resolve to do better, and, after serving their sentence, return to society ready to atone for the harm they have done. On the contrary, if convicts are deprived of the soothing influence of religion and the sacraments, if they cannot have the comfort of consulting and receiving advice from the friend of their souls, what will their lot be in their hated confinement? They will never hear a loving voice to uplift them and to help them understand that they have broken not only the laws of the state, but the Law of God, the Supreme Legislator. No one ever will urge them to seek God's pardon or exhort them to endure their temporal punishment in lieu of the eternal one which God wishes to forgive. In their present wretched state they will see only their own ill fortune. Instead of shedding tears of repentance, they will curse their chains with ill-concealed rage; instead of resolving to mend their ways, they will resolve to do worse. From their companions in misery they will widen their knowledge of crime and learn new techniques to avoid falling again into the hands of justice. They will never even consider turning over a new leaf."

Don Bosco took advantage of this favorable opportunity to point out all the advantages of the preventive system to the minister, especially for children in public and private schools. "I am well aware," Don Bosco concluded, "that it is not within your power to promote such a system, but I'm sure that a suggestion from you would carry great weight with the Minister of Education."

Rattazzi listened with great interest to Don Bosco, became quite convinced of the great advantages of the system used at the Oratory, and promised to do all he could to encourage its adoption by the government. He had not always kept his word in the past, primarily because he lacked the courage to speak out and uphold his religious convictions. However, this particular conversation so impressed him that from that day on he became a staunch supporter of Don Bosco. This was providential in those ever worsening times because he often held key government positions and was always a man of con-

siderable influence. Without Rattazzi's support the Oratory could have been badly shaken or even have suffered great harm.

Readers who are familiar with Rattazzi's leftist political views and with his effective part in deplorable events that gravely harmed the Church will undoubtedly be amazed to learn that he took such a vital interest in Don Bosco and his work. Yet such was the case, as God so willed in His Providence.

When God chooses a man as the instrument of His wondrous designs, He endows him with everything he needs to accomplish his mission. If the assistance and cooperation of many other people are needed, He sets a mysterious seal, as it were, on His chosen instrument so that everyone—even his adversaries—will revere him and be ready to help him. Holy Scripture and church history abound in proofs of this truth. In ancient times, Joseph was destined to be the savior of his brethren in Egypt, and God so ordained that the slave, the prisoner, the foreigner, should win the favor of the pharaoh and his people and achieve the second highest position in the land. In the tragic days of the Babylonian Captivity, Daniel was given the mission of encouraging his fellow exiles. Therefore the Lord endowed him with such extraordinary powers that he was able to have tremendous influence over all of Chaldea's kings from Nabuchodonosor to Cyrus and Darius for almost fifty years. The same was true of St. Benedict, St. Francis of Assisi, a host of other saints and our own Don Bosco. The influence he had over numerous men who were hostile to the Church is but another proof of his Divine mission.

CHAPTER 7

Priestly Zeal

IN 1854 Piedmont was hard hit by a poor harvest and a sharp rise in the cost of living. This condition was further aggravated by war in the Near East. In 1853 Czar Nicholas I had formulated plans to seize Constantinople. As a first step, he had demanded that the sultan turn over to him complete jurisdiction over all Greeks in the Turkish dominions and proclaim the supremacy of the Greek Church over the Latin Church. The sultan refused. In July Russian troops invaded and occupied the principalities of Walachia and Moldavia, and in November they destroyed the Turkish fleet in the harbor of Sinope. The following year they unsuccessfully besieged the fortress of Silistra on the Danube along the Bulgarian frontier. As a side effect of this war, imports of grain into Italy from the Black Sea became scarce.

Public charity in Piedmont began to decrease alarmingly. Foreseeing that his boys were bound to suffer, Don Bosco again resorted to his practice of soliciting small contributions from many individuals by launching a lottery with the prizes left over from the former one. He obtained a license and set up headquarters in Via Santa Chiara, displaying the prizes in the Dominican monastery in Turin where the older boys of the Oratory took turns guarding them. Each ticket was priced at 20 centesimi. Through this lottery and the large number of circulars he sent out,[1] Don Bosco managed with a great deal of hard work to provide the necessities of life for his large family.

The drawing of prizes had originally been set for April 27, but Don Bosco secured a delay of a few weeks. A remarkable incident occurred during this period.

[1] A sample circular and the routine acknowledgments and donations of Minister Rattazzi and of the mayor of Turin have been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Among the many people visiting the display of prizes was a gentleman who insistently asked Don Bosco to hear his confession. Don Bosco told him to go to the nearby cathedral and wait a few moments for him. Shortly afterward, Don Bosco went over to the cathedral and sat in an empty pew waiting for the gentleman to come over to him for confession. However, the man instead went to the nearest confessional and knelt there. Don Bosco was puzzled. He feared that the sexton might show up and tell him not to use that confessional since it was reserved for a particular canon, or, worse yet, that the canon himself might come along to hear confessions. After some hesitation, Don Bosco finally went in. By the time the first penitent was through, however, many others had already lined up for confession, and as a result he was there for several hours.

Among the penitents was a man employed at the Oratory. He had come to the cathedral specifically because he wanted to confess to a priest who did not know him personally. When he saw that confessions were being heard, he took his place on line outside the confessional. When he finally entered, he told the priest that he had come there because he did not want Don Bosco to know about a rather serious offense he had committed (perhaps it concerned his handling of Oratory money). Don Bosco listened silently to what he said. Then he told him: "I promise you that Don Bosco will never hear of this. And if you have any worries about the future, remember that Don Bosco is always ready to forgive such things." We can imagine the man's amazement at discovering that he had made his confession to the very priest he had tried to avoid. He returned to the Oratory very comforted and told Joseph Buzzetti[2] about his strange adventure.

The drawing of the lottery prizes took place on May 24 [1854] at 2 in the afternoon at the Oratory. A listing of the winning numbers appeared in *L'Armonia* on May 30.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had also been quite active in priestly work. On Saturday, April 22, with his assistance, several zealous priests began to conduct an eight-day retreat for boys and adults in the Church of the Confraternity of Mercy. This undoubtedly proved to be a special grace to many of them in regard to their eternal

[2] A Salesian coadjutor brother of the early years. [Editor]

salvation because, barely three months later, a devastating epidemic ravaged Turin.

After the retreat Don Bosco held the Forty Hours' devotion and an octave in honor of the Blessed Virgin. *L'Armonia* carried an account of this on May 20, 1854.[3]

During these devotions Don Bosco again told the boys how he had seen a luminous globe of fire hovering above the site of the future Church of Mary Help of Christians. He thought that the Virgin was thus indicating Her refusal to renounce this possession. Joseph Buzzetti, who was present, reminded Don Bosco of this talk at Lanzo in 1887 and asked him: "Was the dome illuminated?"

"Of course it was," Don Bosco replied.

The solemn feasts of St. Aloysius and St. John the Baptist were now approaching. Don Bosco, who wanted things to proceed smoothly, impressed on all those in charge the need of detailed plans for church services and external festivities in order to forestall breaches of order. He therefore gave the following instructions:

1. A written record—as a guide for future occasions—was to be made every year about any cause of disorder.
2. An up-to-date list of benefactors and friends was to be compiled so that invitations to religious services, stage plays, or scholastic assemblies could be handled easily.
3. A detailed agenda of the material details of the festivities was to be kept in the prefect's office.

Some notes we found among his papers concerning the feast of St. Aloysius provide an example of his painstaking care.

1. Select a "prior" well in advance of the occasion and send a committee to invite him to accept this office. Not later than the eve of the feast, send him a copy of the hymns, a schedule, etc.
2. Send a schedule of novenas or triduums to the benefactors.
3. Do not neglect the cleanliness of the procession grounds. Have canopies put up.
4. Have finger towels ready for use in displaying and kissing the relic.
5. If advisable, hold a lottery in the playground area.

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

6. Serve soft drinks to the band.
7. Send a program to the police inspector.

In preparation for the feast of St. Aloysius, Don Bosco reprinted the booklet *The Six Sundays and Novena in Honor of St. Aloysius Gonzaga*[4] in the first semimonthly June issue of *Letture Cattoliche.* In addition, he had five hundred holy pictures of the saint printed by the Doyen Press for distribution among the boys. A poem in honor of St. Aloysius, still preserved in our archives, was also printed, and each copy was undersigned: *Father John Baptist Vola, Spiritual Director of the St. Aloysius Sodality, on behalf of the Sons of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.*

Count [Charles] Cays,[5] again elected "prior," donated red drapes with an imitation gold border to decorate the entire interior cornice of the church.

In the midst of all these festivities, Don Bosco kept up his combat with the Protestants. *Letture Cattoliche's* second issue of June and the two of July were entitled *A Popular Handbook on the Catholic Church* by Father John Perrone, S.J. This volume of more than 200 pages explained the origin and nature of the Catholic Church as well as the marks and prerogatives of the true Church of Jesus Christ—her infallibility, holiness, steadfastness, and immutability. It then described her structure, stated the members' obligation to heed her ministers, and refuted Protestant objections to the Inquisition, the sacrament of Penance, the Mass, purgatory, Benediction, and the veneration of the saints. Finally, it brought out the duty of the faithful to love the Church.

Don Bosco briefly interrupted these activities to hear confessions at St. Ignatius' Shrine, but resumed them on his return to Turin. He took along the cleric Michael Rua for his spiritual retreat.

The two issues of *Letture Cattoliche* for August were anonymous and entitled: *A Discussion about the Sacrifice of the Mass.* It consisted of a series of dialogues between a father and his son that proved the Divine institution of the sacrifices of the Old Law and

[4] *See* Vol. II, pp. 281ff. [Editor]

[5] Count Cays became a Salesian. He made his religious profession on December 8, 1877 and was ordained a priest on September 20, 1878. He died at the Oratory on October 4, 1882. [Editor]

the Mass and refuted the brazen lies of some Protestants by appealing to the various ancient liturgies of the Christian churches—including the schismatic ones—all of which fully confirmed Catholic beliefs. Finally, it brought out the excellence of the Mass, its infinite value, and its benefits to the celebrant and to the faithful, whether living or dead.

CHAPTER 8

A Helping Hand

ON August 15, 1854, King Victor Emmanuel II granted Don Bosco a subsidy of 250 lire in response to his appeal made at the beginning of that month.* However, money was not Don Bosco's only problem. For over a year he had been so overburdened by his many responsibilities that by himself he could no longer attend to the moral and material needs of his ever expanding Oratory. But then, at precisely the right moment, the Lord sent him a priest who was to become his right-hand man and a strong, intelligent mainstay of the festive oratories. For some time Don Bosco had had his eye on Father Victor Alasonatti of Avigliana who, as a close friend of Father [John] Giacomelli, was therefore also a friend of Don Bosco. Frequently, in former years as well as in this, Father Alasonatti and Don Bosco had walked together from Turin to Lanzo for their yearly retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine.[1] Don Bosco, well aware of Father Alasonatti's qualifications for the important and arduous task he intended to entrust to him, asked him to come and share his work at the Oratory as prefect. The only things Don Bosco could offer him in return were much work and little rest, many inconveniences, few comforts, a life of poverty, self-denial, and sacrifice, food and clothing, and, in the name of God, a rich crown of glory in heaven. This resembled the invitation extended by Our Savior to Peter and John. Shortly after his oral invitation, Don Bosco also wrote him a letter. Father Alasonatti read it in his little room, raised his eyes to heaven as if trying to ascertain God's will, glanced at the crucifix, bowed his head, and accepted.

What do we know about this worthy priest who was so eminently

* Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

[1] See Vol. II, pp. 96f, 112f. [Editor]

qualified to be a member of the Salesian Congregation and one of its glories?

Father Victor Alasonatti was born on November 15, 1812 in Avigliana.[2] After elementary school, he enrolled at the [nearby] Giaveno seminary where he studied grammar, the humanities, and rhetoric. Subsequently he donned the cassock at Avigliana with the encouragement of his pastor, Father Pautasso, and then went to the Turin seminary for his philosophy and theology courses. He was regarded everywhere as a model of virtue. After completing his moral theology course at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin, he was ordained in 1835. An indefatigable priest in his home parish, he was unanimously chosen by the townspeople to be the elementary school teacher of Avigliana. This was a joy for him since he loved to be with children. Though dignified in bearing, he knew how to come down to their level so that they almost felt he was one of them. The townsfolk and his fellow priests deeply admired his loving kindness in bringing the children to church and his untiring patience in correcting his restless pupils. Beforehand, in school, he would tell them what devout behavior was expected of them in the house of God. Then, with true priestly zeal he would bring them to church, make sure that they blessed themselves reverently with holy water, take them to their places, and try to get them to follow the Mass devoutly by setting the example himself.

In addition to giving free instruction to those adults who desired to study some particular subject, he would help the pastor in the parish functions, preach, serve at the altar like a plain altar boy, teach catechism and Gregorian chant, and spend long hours hearing confessions, or visiting the sick and dying. He was a genuinely apostolic man.

When he would at length retire at night to his bare little room, he would recite his rosary and other lengthy prayers. To his very last years, though weary and exhausted by hard work, self-denial and ill health, he always recited his breviary kneeling and bareheaded. The austerity he continually practiced in every aspect of

[2] Fifteen miles from Turin, the town has two lakes dominated by the ruins of the Old Arduino-Savoy castle. The larger lake mirrors the shrine of Our Lady of the Lakes where a fine triptych by Defendente Ferrari and two paintings (the Crucifixion and St. Francis of Assisi) of the Caravaggio school are preserved. [Editor]

his life was never mitigated. Such fortitude was undoubtedly traceable to his strict rule of moderation in food, rest, and recreation. He would spend a long part of each day in meditation, a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, and a careful examination of conscience. During the last ten years of his life he read the *Proficiscere* every evening as though he were at the point of death.

Just when this worthy priest of God had become almost indispensable to Father Vignolo, his pastor, his fellow priests, and the townspeople, Don Bosco invited him to Turin with a phrase he had often repeated: "Come and help me say my breviary!" Therefore, on August 14, 1854, Father Alasonatti generously forsook the comforts provided by his well-to-do family and the sizable salary he was receiving as an experienced and appreciated teacher. He brushed aside the more or less worldly objections which acquaintances and even some distinguished fellow priests had put forward and entered the Oratory, breviary under his arm, to ask Don Bosco: "Where do you want me to say my breviary?"

Don Bosco led him to the room he had set aside for the prefect's office in the old Pinardi house and answered: "Right here!"

From that moment Father Alasonatti put himself completely at Don Bosco's disposal. He begged to be told frankly what he could do for the good of the house and not to be spared in whatever could redound to God's glory. It was not long before he found himself ladened with a variety of tasks. Don Bosco's invitation and offer had been no idle compliment. At that time there were about eighty boarders, between students and artisans, in addition to the day boys. Father Alasonatti was responsible for the overall administration and discipline—that is, the supervision of the boys' conduct, the running of the classrooms and workshops, the assistance of the boys in church and study hall, the scheduling and performance of religious services, and all the bookkeeping and correspondence.

Always the first at work, he was the last to retire, and frequently he worked through the night. Often he would receive such a great number of people during the day that a letter he had begun in the morning would not be finished until evening or the next day. Many interviews were often doubly burdensome because of the wide range of his responsibilities, the indiscretion of his visitors, and

the occasional unpleasant reprimands—lengthy, stern talks or glances of reproach—which he had to give to unruly boys. Sometimes during an audience he would be called to a dormitory and then to the boys' study hall. Often, on his way to look into the workshops, he would have to return to his office where parents of students or other persons wanted to see him. The entire management of the house was in his hands and everyone had to consult with him. His manifold duties included teaching, assisting in church, managing the workshops, and occasionally nursing the sick.

He attended to these multiple tasks with such an unvarying appearance of serenity that it was hard to say which was greater—his patience or his foresight, his calm or his ease of manner in dealing with thorny problems, his satisfaction in clearing away difficulties or his desire to face new ones. We must also say that his zealous efforts were not always crowned with success; at times the only thing he received for his trouble was ingratitude.

On such occasions he would think of his parents who would only be too glad to welcome him back with open arms, and of his home town where he could live a serene, peaceful life under his father's roof. We must also recall his advancing years and the unavoidable ailments aggravated by his arduous work. However, far from yielding to such nostalgia, Father Alasonatti only found in it further reason for greater efforts. He would tell himself: "Victor, do not forget why you came here! Our Lord took His rest on the cross; don't take yours halfway along the road."

Cheered by such reflections, he then would go in search of more work. He relieved Don Bosco from the task of teaching the boys Gregorian chant, and he formed two choirs for the singing of Vespers and Mass, thus preparing the boys to do likewise in their own parish churches. Teaching sacred ceremonies and the New Testament to the clerics, directing church services, hearing confessions, preaching, and teaching catechism became his daily routine. Often he was even seen tidying beds, sweeping stairs, or waiting on tables with a simple humility that would shame the lowliest employee in the house.

Don Bosco shared many of Father Alasonatti's heavy duties and sought to alleviate them, but Father Alasonatti always refused

firmly. However, as soon as Divine Providence rewarded their common zeal by sending them capable help, Don Bosco gave Father Alasonatti an assistant bookkeeper, thus lightening his burdens and enabling him to devote himself to more important matters. Don Bosco also appointed a procurator to look after the purchases, a prefect of studies, and, later, a catechist.

An insight into the extent of his self-denial can be gleaned from what Fr. Alasonatti said to Father [John] Giacomelli before leaving for the Oratory: "I shall stay with Don Bosco until he has found someone else to help him." Upon his arrival at the Oratory he found that there was a lack of everything. The wine that was served at table came as an occasional gift from City Hall or from wine dealers and usually was a mixture of wines that tasted sour or mildewed. Father Alasonatti could not stomach it and decided then and there that he would confine himself to water, notwithstanding the fact that at home, with a well-stocked cellar, he had been accustomed to choice wines. Unwilling to give any basis for criticism to his family who had reluctantly given their permission for him to go to the Oratory, afraid to embarrass Don Bosco by asking for better wine, and thoroughly averse to exceptions that might lead others to keep wine in their own rooms, he determined to abstain from that beverage and be content with water. He continued to do this until he died, save on rare occasions when courtesy demanded otherwise. He felt this privation acutely, but he nevertheless always remained serene and tranquil as though the matter were of no importance. His favorite motto was: "Always give thanks to God. He who is just lives by Faith." (Rom. 1, 17)

Such was the man whom Divine Providence sent as prefect to the Oratory boys on the eve of the feast of the Assumption. On the following day the schedule of church services for Sundays and holy days was permanently established with Father Alasonatti saying the Community Mass at about 7:30 and Don Bosco the 10 o'clock Mass followed by a sermon. He kept saying this Mass until 1858. The boys chanted or recited Matin and Lauds of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin before the second Mass, as is still the custom, while Don Bosco heard the day boys' confessions.

On that same day, Father Alasonatti inaugurated his work at Valdocco by giving spiritual assistance to a man stricken by cholera. The fatal Asiatic plague had by this time reached Turin.

CHAPTER 9

Cholera Outbreak in Turin

ACCORDING to Father Rua, Don Bosco had told the Oratory boys in May [1854] that a disastrous outbreak of cholera would strike Turin. However, he had added: "Don't worry. Do as I say and you will all be safe."

"What are we to do?" they all asked.

"Avoid sin, wear the medal of the Blessed Virgin which I will bless and give to each of you, recite daily the Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, and prayer to St. Aloysius, and say: 'From every evil, deliver us, O Lord.' "

True to his prediction, the cholera spread rapidly from India, where epidemics seem quite routine, to Europe, and it reached Italy, first ravaging Liguria and Piedmont. In July it broke out in Genoa, felling 3,000 victims within two months.

When the first cases were reported in Turin on July 25, the Health Department contacted the vicar general to solicit the cooperation of the clergy. The diocesan response was prompt and generous; Camillians, Capuchins, Dominicans, and Oblates of Mary volunteered to assist the victims.

The cholera symptoms—abdominal pains with vomiting and persistent diarrhea, a feeling of pressure on the stomach, cramps and convulsions in the limbs, sunken eyes that were ashen and lifeless, pinched noses and gaunt features—frightened even the most courageous. The tongue became cold and whitish, the voice feeble, the entire body livid and, in more severe cases, cadaverous. When stricken by the disease, some dropped dead on the spot as if they had suffered a heart attack; others survived a few hours, and only a few lasted beyond twenty-four hours. There were no survivors during the first few days of the outbreak. Later on, fatalities reached sixty percent—the highest mortality rate of any known disease

aside from the bubonic plague which, however, had lasted considerably longer. Everyone was understandably frightened, especially because there were no effective means of immunization. Furthermore, the cholera was contagious, and to make matters worse, a wild rumor was making the rounds that doctors were killing off the victims with a poisoned potion which in Turin was called "acquetta."

Striking evidence of the serious dimensions of the panic was the widespread shutdown of business and the headlong flight from the stricken neighborhoods. In some cases, not only neighbors but even the relatives of victims panicked so greatly as to desert the victims, leaving them in the care of some rare, charitable, courageous person. Occasionally, undertakers even had to break into homes to remove rotting corpses. As a result, some areas became living examples of the hideous nightmares of epidemics so vividly described by past and modern writers.

Heedless of the prevailing terror, like an enemy emboldened by an adversary's fear, the cholera pushed on from hamlet to hamlet, from town to town, everywhere claiming countless victims. Not even the hill and mountain districts were spared. On July 30 the cholera swept past the Apennines into the outskirts of Turin, felling its victims within the first few days of August. The entire royal household, at Count Cay's invitation, sought safety for three months in his castle at Caselette on a hill at the foot of the Alps.

As soon as the cholera made its tragic appearance, the civil authorities of Turin gave a striking proof of their religious fervor. After making necessary arrangements for the treatment and care of the sick and issuing adequate instructions, Mayor [John] Notta saw fit to invoke the aid of the Queen of Heaven whose powerful intercession had been experienced in other similarly critical situations. He ordered a special religious service to be held at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. On the morning of August 3 [1884], accompanied by a delegation of councilors, he assisted at Mass and Benediction in the presence of a vast crowd. That same day he informed the ecclesiastical authorities of what he had done in a letter. Among other things, he wrote: "A delegation of the municipal council, anticipating the wishes of the people of this capital at the feared outbreak of cholera, has this morning assisted at Mass and

Benediction in the Church of Our Lady of Consolation to implore Her protection."

Our Lady of Consolation did not ignore their prayers, for inexplicably the dreaded plague was much less virulent in Turin than in other parts of Piedmont, Italy or even Europe.

Nevertheless, it still claimed many victims. The reported cases steadily rose even to fifty and sixty per day. From August 1 to November 21, the toll for Turin and its province was approximately 2,500 cases of cholera and 1,400 deaths. The district hardest hit was Valdocco where, in the parish of [SS. Simon and Jude in] Borgo Dora alone, eight hundred people were stricken and five hundred died in a single month. In the Oratory neighborhood many families were not only decimated but completely wiped out. Charles Tomatis[1]—who tirelessly assisted the victims—informed us that in the Bellezza, Filippi, and Moretta houses and at the Cuor d'Oro Inn, a stone's throw from the Oratory, more than forty people died in a very short period of time; the same was true of other districts such as Regio Parco and Bertola.

We shall now briefly discuss how the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales fared during these troubled times and what part it played while the epidemic raged around it and even the bravest panicked.

As soon as word spread that cholera had struck the area, Don Bosco showed himself to be a true father to his boys, prudently taking all possible precautions that were appropriate. He had the whole house thoroughly cleaned, furnished additional rooms, reduced the number of beds in each dormitory, and gave the boys better food, thus incurring rather heavy expenses.

Realizing Don Bosco's straitened circumstances, the reputable Catholic newspaper *L'Armonia* issued a rousing appeal to the charity of the faithful in a brief but stirring article[2] on his behalf.

However, Don Bosco did not limit himself to physical precautions, for he also adopted efficacious spiritual measures. A reliable witness told us that at the very first sign of danger Don Bosco knelt at the altar and uttered this prayer, as a good shepherd offering up his life for his little lambs: "My God, strike the shepherd, but spare

[1] A young artist whom Don Bosco first met in 1847. Thereafter he regularly attended the festive oratory at Valdocco. *See* Vol. III, pp. 118f. [Editor]

[2] *L'Armonia,* August 10, 1854. Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

the tender flock!" Then, turning to the Blessed Virgin, he added: "Mary, You are a loving and powerful Mother! I beg You to spare these beloved children of mine. If a victim is needed, let the Lord take me whenever and in whatever manner He may wish."

On the evening of Saturday, August 5, the feast of Our Lady of the Snow, Don Bosco assembled all the boarders around him and gave them a little talk which we have been able to reconstruct substantially from the testimony of several witnesses:

As you have already heard, the cholera has already broken out in Turin and been the cause of several deaths. People are frightened, and I know that you are too. Therefore, I want to make some suggestions. If you carry them out, I trust that you will all be spared this terrible disease.

First of all, you should know that this plague is not something new.[3] What I suggest is also recommended by doctors: moderation in eating, drinking, and sleeping, peace of mind, and courage. However, let me emphasize that no one can enjoy peace of mind or be courageous in times of trial if through mortal sin he has lost the grace of God and knows that if he should die, he will be condemned to hell.

We should also place ourselves, body and soul, in the hands of the Blessed Virgin. If the cholera is caused by contagion, we need a remedy, and none is better than the Queen of Heaven whom the Church invokes as the help of the sick. But if this fatal pestilence is rather a scourge of God punishing the sins of the world, then we need an eloquent advocate, a compassionate mother whose powerful prayers and tender love will appease His wrath, stay His hand, and obtain pardon and mercy for us. Mary, the mother of mercy, alone can help us. She is our advocate, our life, our sweetness, and our hope.

In 1835 the cholera raged in Turin, but the Blessed Virgin soon drove it away. To commemorate this blessing, the city of Turin erected the handsome granite column topped by the white marble statue of the Blessed Virgin that still stands in the little square of the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. Perhaps the Blessed Virgin will again protect us by driving away this plague or at least tempering its virulence.

Today is the feast of Our Lady of the Snow, and tomorrow we will begin one of the most solemn novenas in honor of the Blessed Virgin. The approaching feast of the Assumption recalls Her peaceful and holy

[3] A pertinent scriptural quotation (Sir. 37, 29) is no longer apropos in the new versions and has been omitted. [Editor]

death, Her glorious triumph, and Her power in heaven. I earnestly urge all of you to make a good confession and Communion tomorrow so that I may offer all of you together to Mary and implore Her to save and protect you as Her beloved children. Will you do that?"

"Yes, yes," they replied in unison.

Don Bosco then paused slightly and concluded in an unusual, indescribable tone:

Sin is undoubtedly the cause of death. If you will all put yourselves in the state of grace and not commit mortal sin, I promise that not one of you will be stricken. But should anyone persist in his hostility to God, and, worse still, dare to offend Him grievously, from that moment on I can no longer vouch for him or for anyone else in this house.

It would be impossible to describe adequately the effect of these memorable words. Between that evening and the following morning all the boarders and many day boys went to the sacraments, and from that day on the boys' conduct was so edifying and exemplary that no one could have asked more of them. Perfection is the only apt word to describe the way they prayed and received the sacraments, their diligence and obedience, their charity and reverential fear of God. They were so afraid of committing sin that as soon as any one of them said or did anything that seemed even slightly sinful, he would rush to confide in Don Bosco and ask his advice and penance. After night prayers especially, they would gather around him to tell him their worries or the possible faults they had committed during the day. At times Don Bosco would stand patiently for an hour or more listening to their problems, reassuring, consoling, and comforting them, and finally sending them all off to bed content and at peace. It was a moving scene and a clear indication that each boy was determined to preserve a clear conscience in the sight of God. Even the day boys began to lead a very virtuous life. They were punctual at church services and many received the sacraments. During the week they also behaved in a most edifying manner.

Meanwhile, the cases of cholera in the city and its outskirts kept multiplying. As soon as Don Bosco heard that the epidemic had struck his neighborhood, he hastened to assist the victims. Mamma

Margaret, who on other occasions had manifested great concern for her son's safety, now declared that it was his duty to risk contagion and go to their aid.

To meet the emergency the civil authorities were rapidly setting up temporary medical facilities for those who could not be cared for in their own homes. Two of them were located in Borgo San Donato, which then formed part of [SS. Simon and Jude's parish in] Borgo Dora. Opening such facilities was easy, but it was difficult to staff them and to provide nurses for patients in their own homes. People were terrified of contagion, and they refused to risk their lives in the service of others. In this situation, Don Bosco received an inspiration which resulted in a generous and most praiseworthy decision. For several days and nights he had assisted the sick whenever he could with Father [Victor] Alasonatti and other priests of the festive oratories. After personally seeing the dire needs of some patients, he assembled his boys one day and movingly described the wretched state of many cholera victims and how some died for want of care. He explained what a great act of charity it would be for anyone to devote himself to nursing the sick, and he recalled how Our Divine Savior had solemnly stated in the Gospel that he would regard as done to Himself any service rendered to them. He went on to say how in all epidemics and plagues there had always been generous Christians who risked death to bring physical and spiritual relief to the victims. He then added that the mayor had issued an appeal for nurses and aides and that he himself and several others had already responded. He concluded his talk by expressing the hope that some of the boys would also volunteer for this work of mercy. His invitation did not fall on deaf ears. The Oratory boys listened with religious devotion and then proved themselves to be worthy sons of their father. Fourteen volunteered at once; a few days later another thirty enlisted in the cause.

It must be remembered that in those days fear had so gripped the populace that many, including doctors, were fleeing the city; even relatives were abandoning their own kin. In view of this and the instinctive repugnance felt by the young for sickness and death, one cannot help admiring this unselfish gesture of Don Bosco's boys. He himself was so overjoyed that he wept.

Before sending them into action, however, Don Bosco, as a good

father, briefed them carefully so that their work would prove beneficial to the bodies and souls of the victims. The dread disease generally had two phases: a first shock—usually fatal, if not promptly attended to—and a reaction that would be favorable if circulation could be quickly restored by massages and heat applications, especially in the area of the extremities. After adequately instructing his young charges and turning them into emergency medical corpsmen, Don Bosco added a few suggestions of a spiritual character to ensure that—as far as possible—no patient would die without the Last Sacraments.

He then divided the boys into four groups. He assigned one to the temporary medical facilities, another to private homes, and a third to search for unknown victims; the last group he kept on standby to handle emergencies.

As soon as the word spread that the Oratory boys had volunteered to nurse the sick and were doing an extraordinary job, there was such a great demand for their services that within a week scheduling became impossible. The boys had to rush from one place to another with barely any time to grab a bite of food; occasionally they even had to eat while on the move or in the home of some patient. At night there was a continuous commotion in the Oratory dormitories with some boys going to bed and others getting up; many boys also spent sleepless nights tending the sick, but all were happy and calm.

In the beginning, when setting out on their charitable missions, the boys would take along a small flask of vinegar, a dose of camphor, or some similar preventive, and on returning they would wash themselves with disinfectant; however, after a while they had to cease even these precautions for lack of time, and they placed themselves in the care of Divine Providence.

During this tragic crisis the help given by the Oratory was not merely medical; poor as the Oratory was, it also looked after the material needs of many patients who often lacked sheets, blankets, clothing, and other necessities. Whenever the boys noticed any such need, they would inform the goodhearted Mamma Margaret, who would then compassionately search through the wardrobe and somehow provide what was needed. However, soon there was nothing

left except the boys' own clothing and their bed linen and blankets.

One day a boy told Mamma Margaret that a new patient of his was writhing in agony on a bare cot and he asked for something with which to cover him. The generous woman searched the Oratory for some linen but found only a tablecloth. "Take this," she said pityingly. "I have nothing else; this will have to do." The boy ran joyfully back to his patient.

Women and girls were also beseeching Mamma Margaret for clothes for their daughters, mothers, or other female patients. She gave them her bonnets and shawls and even her own dresses and petticoats until she had nothing left except the clothes on her back.

One day someone came to ask for bed linen. Margaret felt deeply grieved because she had nothing left. Then, as the result of a sudden inspiration, she took an altar cloth, an amice, and an alb and gave them away with Don Bosco's permission. On that occasion, therefore, sacred vestments served to clothe the limbs of Our Lord in the person of the sick. In this regard, Don Bosco had once jotted down these words: "What worthier use for the vessels chosen to hold Our Redeemer's Blood than to employ them to ransom again those redeemed by this same Blood? So thought St. Ambrose when, to ransom slaves, he had to sell the sacred vessels." Don Bosco's predicament was similar to that of the saintly bishop of Milan.

Meanwhile, the government had decided to dissolve all religious orders. Using the cholera epidemic as an excuse, Urbano Rattazzi informed the chancery on August 9 that in order to meet the shortage of emergency medical stations, the government intended to seize the monasteries of the Dominicans and the Oblates of Mary as well as the convents of the Canonesses Regular of the Lateran and the Capuchin Nuns. The pro-vicar general, Canon [Celestine] Fissore, protested this unlawful act and refused his consent to this usurpation. Rattazzi bluntly retorted that his orders were not subject to debate and that the government was the sole judge of civil needs. Hence, on August 18 [1854], at three in the morning, the police scaled the walls of the convent of the Canonesses Regular of the Lateran and escorted the nuns to a suburban villa owned by Marchioness [Giulia] Barolo. Then, on the night of August 22, forty carabinieri and police broke into the convent of the Capuchin

Nuns while they were in church and forcibly removed them to the convent of St. Clare at Carignano.[4]

The Dominicans and the Oblates of Mary were also forced to evacuate their monasteries, leaving only a few religious to minister to the needs of the congregations of the two public churches. Under the same pretext, several other monasteries in Piedmont were taken over—for example, the stately Carthusian monastery at Collegno[5] which was converted into an insane asylum. Not only were such actions in violation of the rights acknowledged by the Constitution, but these monasteries and convents were never employed for the purpose for which the government had ostensibly taken them over.

[4] A small town on the left bank of the Po about twelve miles from Turin. [Editor]

[5] A small town of Roman origin five miles from Turin. Up to the beginning of the 15th century it was still officially designated as *Ad Quintum*—i.e., "the fifth milestone" from Turin. [Editor]

CHAPTER 10

Cholera Outbreak in Turin (Continued)

DON Bosco had been appointed chaplain of an emergency medical station in the parish of [SS. Simon and Jude in] Borgo Dora on the site where St. Peter's Retreat House and the adjoining house now stand. Both he and Father Alasonatti were always on the go, unmindful of their need for meals, sleep, or even a little rest. They tried to take turns, but the volume of work precluded that possibility. Don Bosco was so involved with his many responsibilities that he no longer bothered with precautions. After his first visit to the medical station, he did wash with chlorine water as was then the practice, but that was the first and only time. He had too much to do. He was on call day and night, and for a long time the only rest he took was an hour or two on a sofa or armchair. Sleeping in bed was simply inconceivable to him in view of the circumstances.

Accompanied by the older boys, Don Bosco visited patients and brought them medicines, money, or whatever else they might need. He overlooked no one, but his visits were always brief because so many needed his priestly services. In homes where physical assistance was needed, he stationed one of his boys, and they spent many a night at a victim's bedside. With admirable calm Don Bosco encouraged his young helpers, praising their good will and never showing the slightest impatience. On one occasion, the cleric [John Baptist] Francesia was caring for a sick man in a small house where our printshop now stands. It was already past midnight. Seeing that the man had lost consciousness, Francesia ran out and jumped over the dividing wall of the playground to call Don Bosco who had arrived home only a short time before. He went at once, but the man was already dead. Don Bosco did not complain in the least,

either about the summons or about the fact that it had come too late, and calmly returned to his room.

The dedication of the Oratory boys rivaled Don Bosco's, but it was not easy for them. At the start the boys had to steel themselves to overcome their natural fear and repugnance and persevere in their efforts. The case of one of those first courageous volunteers adequately proves the point. The first time he set foot inside the emergency medical station he received quite a shock. The contortions of the victims, their sunken eyes with the glare of death, and their desperate final gasping for breath so terrified him that he fainted. Fortunately, Don Bosco had been standing nearby. He alertly caught the boy and carried him out to revive him. Had he not been there, quite possibly the poor boy might have been diagnosed as a cholera case.

A calm disposition was indeed a must where pain and death were so commonplace. Some victims were afflicted with excruciating pain; it was a heartrending experience to see how, as soon as they died, they were quickly removed to the adjacent morgue for almost immediate transfer to the cemetery. Some of them were declared dead even though they were still alive, as the following episode illustrates. In the emergency medical station where Don Bosco's boys served as aides, a corpse had just been carried to the morgue. While Don Bosco was talking to the doctor, an orderly came up and said to him: "Doctor, that man is still moving! Shall we bring him back here?"

"Leave him alone," the doctor quipped. "Just see that he doesn't run away." Then, turning to Don Bosco, he said: "We have to joke about it to be able to stick it out. I dread to think of what would happen to our patients if we became depressed." As a matter of fact, the staff morale was very low. The orderlies were so disturbed when they had to move patients or carry the dead away that it was almost necessary to get them a little inebriated. Thus, fortitude was another indispensable requirement in those days in addition to a calm disposition.

Aside from the fear of contagion, another problem was the opposition of those who lived close to the emergency medical stations. People did not like the idea of having them in their neighborhoods.

These medical stations were generally located—and rightly so—on the outskirts of the city, but this arrangement pleased neither the neighbors nor the patients. The former feared contagion and the latter believed that in such centers they would die even sooner, possibly through the dreaded "acquetta." Those who had been unable to keep the centers out of their neighborhoods now tried to get them shut down by means as vile as they were illegal. In Borgo San Donato, as elsewhere, a crowd of young toughs tried to frighten away would-be helpers, hoping that by cutting off assistance to patients, their number would dwindle and the centers would be closed. They began with threats and soon resorted to blows and rock-throwing, making a police escort necessary in going or coming from the centers, especially at night. On one of these first days of trouble, two of our boys—one of them the cleric Michael Rua—had an ugly experience. They had left the station after dark and were walking down a slope toward the Oratory, when suddenly the air was filled with shouts and catcalls, intermingled with cries of "Get them! Get them!" A barrage of stones, which were very plentiful in that area, showered down upon them. They were saved by their nimble feet and the timely arrival of two guards. Don Bosco also had the same experience on more than one occasion. But this cruel attitude did not deter Don Bosco's boys from helping in the center as long as they were needed; later, hostility gave way to admiration.

It was much more difficult, however, to dispel the patients' fear of the dreaded "acquetta," as the following episode clearly illustrates.

In the Moretta house a cholera patient was convinced that the plague was traceable to the "acquetta." In self-defense he kept a pistol at his bedside and let no one into his room but his family. A priest who once tried to visit him had to leave abruptly when the sick man pointed his pistol at him.

As the patient's condition rapidly worsened, his family became alarmed. Finally they decided to send for Don Bosco who knew him and had won his respect. Don Bosco came promptly, and when he reached the door, he called to the man.

"Ah, Don Bosco!" the sick man exclaimed.

"May I come in?"

"By all means, come in, Don Bosco! I am sure you won't bring any 'acquetta!' "

Don Bosco had barely crossed the threshold when the man ordered him to halt, and then commanded him: "Open your hands!" Don Bosco showed him his right hand.

"The left one, too!" Again Don Bosco complied.

"Now hold your arms down and shake them."

Don Bosco obliged, but he also had to turn his pockets inside out before being allowed to the man's bedside to hear his confession.

A few moments later, the man lost consciousness. [Charles] Tomatis then came in with another companion; they wrapped the patient in a blanket and carried him on a stretcher to the medical station where he died.

Another rumor making the rounds was that the cholera was caused by well water containing a certain white powder. As a result the people refused to drink water.

At the peak of this rumor Don Bosco was called to the bedside of a dying man. After giving him the Last Sacraments, he noticed that the man's throat was parched. Don Bosco surmised the reason. As he had successfully done in similar cases, he filled a pitcher and assured him that he could drink without fear whenever he felt thirsty. The sick man promised to do so. Don Bosco then left a boy to look after him during the night and continued his rounds. Shortly afterward, the boy observed that the man was in pain and offered him water.

Unmindful of Don Bosco's assurances, the sick man turned with a great deal of pain and glared at him.

"Come now, drink it!" the boy said as he tried to hand him a glass.

"Drink it? Get out of here!"

"Don't upset yourself," retorted the boy. "Just drink this and you'll soon feel better."

"Did you hear me?" cried the patient. "Get out of here!" Then, in a frenzy, he staggered out of bed and started to reach for a rifle in the corner of the room. The boy lost no time in racing down the stairs.

Several times Don Bosco physically carried cholera patients. On

one occasion he was on his way to Valdocco. It was the morning of August 16, the feast of St. Rocco, a patron saint of Turin. As he walked along, he saw a young man sitting on the edge of a ditch that bordered the meadow owned by the Filippi brothers,[1] where he had once held his wandering oratory. The youth was gulping down a big melon.

"Take it easy," Don Bosco said; "eating so quickly could do you harm."

"Not me!" he replied. "The only thing it could harm is this melon!" Again Don Bosco tried to dissuade him, but his efforts were in vain, so he went on. He had scarcely reached his room when someone rushed in to tell him that a young man was writhing in agony in the meadow. Don Bosco rushed to the spot and immediately recognized the victim; a half-eaten melon was still by his side. Several people, drawn by curiosity, were gathered a little distance away, obviously afraid to approach. Don Bosco went up to him and tried to comfort him. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know. I feel cold. All my joints are aching."

Don Bosco touched his hands; they were ice-cold, a sure sign of the fatal disease. He tried to coax him to stand up and walk, but the poor fellow had no strength.

Don Bosco looked about him for help. Fortunately, [Charles] Tomatis was passing by. Together they took the sick man by his armpits, lifted him, and started out. For a while the youth was able to drag his feet and walk a little, but then he was seized with cramps and such excruciating pains that he sagged to the ground like a corpse. Don Bosco and Tomatis then formed a seat with their hands to carry him. "Where are you taking me?" he asked.

"Just over there, to a friend of mine where you'll be looked after," Don Bosco answered. He did not mention the medical station, not wishing to frighten him.

As they were carrying the victim, he dropped the half-eaten melon which he was still holding, and they had to stop to pick it up for him. Tomatis—a very robust man—seeing that Don Bosco was quite fatigued, hoisted the sick man to his shoulders and carried him alone the rest of the way while Don Bosco tried to comfort him. At the medical station, the attendants immediately prepared

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 294ff. [Editor]

a hot bath while Don Bosco tactfully induced the youth to prepare for death with a good confession; this he did as well as he could, exhibiting true sorrow. Immediately afterward he became delirious, worrying about his melon and eight soldi which he had in his pocket; he was afraid that someone might steal them. To put him at ease, Don Bosco asked whether he could hold them for him. The boy grew quieter and agreed. He gave Don Bosco his small treasure, telling him: "Hold it for me until I get better." In the meanwhile the doctor arrived, and the boy was put into the hot bath and massaged, but all was in vain; he expired before noon.

The raging epidemic demanded continual self-sacrifice in corporal and spiritual works of mercy, but Don Bosco could hardly meet all the needs. On some occasions all of his volunteers were out on calls, and the only ones left at the Oratory were the smaller ones, the sickly and the fainthearted. This was a distinct problem, for Don Bosco needed helpers to accompany him or to go where they were badly needed. One morning he had to go to the medical station to give the Last Sacraments, but [as was the custom] he needed a server. However, none of the boys in the house had the courage to volunteer. After several declined, Don Bosco turned to John Cagliero who was playing with some companions.

"Will you come with me?"

"Sure!" Cagliero replied without hesitation. When they arrived there, Cagliero helped Don Bosco with the preparations and gave the responses to the prayers, going from one bed to another. A doctor who happened to see the young boy there asked: "Don Bosco, what's the idea? This boy has no business being here. This is a very imprudent move on your part."

"Don't worry, doctor," Don Bosco replied. "Neither of us is afraid and nothing will happen."

As a matter of fact, Cagliero was so brave and competent that he could have matched any experienced orderly. The same can be said of John Baptist Anfossi who left us this report: "I was lucky enough to accompany Don Bosco on several visits to cholera patients. I was only 14 then, and I remember that I was calm and completely confident that I would not catch the disease as I nursed the sick. That's how much we trusted Don Bosco's word. His ardent

spirit of sacrifice encouraged me. It was heartwarming to see with what great tact and kindness he managed to persuade the dying to receive the sacraments and how he allayed their fears for their children who were about to be orphaned. One day I saw him return to the Oratory with sixteen orphan boys in tow. They all stayed at the Oratory as students or artisans, according to their capabilities. There were many others whom he entrusted in their time of sorrow to the loving care of Divine Providence."

The example set by Cagliero, Anfossi, and several others was also instrumental in enlisting other boys who had previously been afraid to volunteer, as we can surmise from the witness of the cleric Felix Reviglio: "During this period, Don Bosco returned from town one day. As the boys gathered around him, Don Bosco asked: "Who wants to help me with the sick?" "I do, I do!" they all cried eagerly with a true spirit of generosity. Then he turned to me "How about you?" he asked. I did not volunteer—perhaps I was the only one—because I wanted an order to do so. Don Bosco did not press me. He simply smiled and seemed willing to leave me in peace. But soon afterward, as though he had seen into my heart, he chose me to accompany him. During the remainder of the epidemic, I took care of six cholera patients until their deaths."

John Turchi and Charles Gastini occasionally helped to nurse the sick through the night with Don Bosco, but those who truly distinguished themselves by their continued efforts were the three clerics—Michael Rua, Joseph Buzzetti, and John Baptist Francesia.

Don Bosco prayed constantly for the health of his boys, and the Blessed Virgin heard his prayers, even giving Francesia an additional proof of Her motherly protection.

The mother of this good cleric became critically ill. As soon as her son was informed, he rushed home and found his mother in a hopeless condition. He hurried back to the Oratory and returned immediately with Don Bosco. She lived opposite the Church of Our Lady of Consolation. As Don Bosco crossed the square where the statue of Mary Immaculate stood, he uncovered his head and, pointing to the statue, said to Francesia: "If you promise that, when you become a priest, you will consecrate yourself to spreading devotion to Her, She will cure your mother without fail." The cleric

immediately gave his solemn pledge to do so. Don Bosco then went to the sick woman, comforted her, and, after hearing her confession, anointed her. Then he left her to her son's care.

When the doctor came, he prescribed bloodletting as the only remedy. Her neighbors who had crowded into the room disagreed, and they urged her to refuse. The doctor let them have their say. Then he left after stating firmly: "I'll do nothing without her consent." Francesia quickly cleared the room and, trusting in Don Bosco's word, asked his mother: "What shall we do?"

"What do you think?" the good woman answered.

"I think we should do as the doctor said."

"Then call him back."

The boy overtook the doctor at the foot of the stairs and begged him to come up again, assuring him that his mother fully trusted his advice. The doctor drew blood from her five or six times; the sick woman recovered and lived for another twenty-one years.

CHAPTER 11

A Glimpse into the Future

ANOTHER sign of the Blessed Virgin's protection and of her gratification at the outstanding record of the Oratory boys was the almost miraculous recovery of young John Cagliero. "When hope had been given up for him," Father Rua wrote, "Don Bosco urged him to pray to Our Lady, assuring him that She would cure him. I was amazed to see this prophecy fulfilled." The event happened as follows:

Toward the end of August, after a long day at the medical station, John Cagliero became sick and went to bed. A few days later his confession was heard and he received Holy Communion. During the next two months he was racked by severe typhoid fever. Don Bosco lavished all possible care on him, but his efforts were in vain. Within a month, his condition became critical. Don Bosco had stated publicly that none of his boys would die of cholera if they remained in the state of grace. Cagliero, who was then 16 years old, had complete confidence in Don Bosco's words, but his illness was not a result of cholera.

Everyone at the Oratory was sure that Cagliero would die almost any day, but the boy was not disturbed. After consultation, the two most renowned physicians of Turin, Dr. Galvagno and Dr. [Celsus] Bellingeri, pronounced his case hopeless and told Don Bosco that it would be wise to give him the Last Sacraments that very day since he might not survive the night. The cleric [Joseph] Buzzetti then told Cagliero of his critical condition and added that Don Bosco would soon be coming to hear his confession and give him the Last Sacraments. Don Bosco did not delay, but as soon as he entered the room, a surprising sight stopped him. A dazzling light emanating from a beautiful dove fluttering in the air filled the

whole room; an olive branch hung from its beak. After a few swirls, the dove finally descended and gently brushed the boy's lips with the olive branch, which it then let fall on his head before vanishing in a gleam of light. On seeing this, Don Bosco instinctively knew that Cagliero would survive to carry out many undertakings for the glory of God. He saw in the olive branch a symbol of the peace that Cagliero would preach, and he regarded the radiant dove as a sign of the fullness of the grace of the Holy Spirit. From that moment Don Bosco constantly had a dim but firm conviction that young Cagliero would one day become a bishop. This omen he regarded as on the road to fulfillment when Cagliero left for [South] America.[1] This conclusion was prompted by the fact that a second vision had followed. As Don Bosco had advanced toward the middle of the room, the walls had disappeared as if by magic, and surrounding the bed was a host of savages anxiously and suppliantly peering at the sick boy. Two of them stood out: one dark-skinned and hideous, the other bronze-skinned, a blend of majestic bearing and native goodness. Both were bending over the dying boy. In later years Don Bosco was able to discern that the features of those savages identified them as Indians of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.

The two apparitions were momentary and unseen by anyone except Don Bosco. As he approached the bed slowly, with his habitual calm manner and gracious smile, Cagliero asked him: "Is this perhaps my last confession?"

"Why do you ask that?" Don Bosco replied.

"Because I want to know if I'm going to die."

Don Bosco reflected for a moment and then said: "Tell me, John. What would you rather do: go to heaven now, or recover and wait till later?"

"Don Bosco," Cagliero answered, "I want to do whatever is best for me."

"It would certainly be better for you to go to heaven now, young as you are, but your time hasn't come yet. Our Lord wants you to live because you still have many things to do. You will recover and don the clerical habit as you have always wanted to. You'll become a priest. . . ."—Don Bosco again paused momentarily—

[1] *See* Vol. XI, pp. 348–384 [Editor]

"and then you'll do a lot of traveling, breviary in hand, and you'll give of yourself to others too. Yes, you will have many things to do before your time is up! You'll go far away, far away. . . ."—and then he said no more.

"If that's the way it must be, I needn't receive the sacraments," Cagliero exclaimed. "My conscience is clear. I'll wait till I get out of bed and then I'll go to confession and Communion with my companions."

"Very well," Don Bosco answered, "that will be fine."

From that moment on Cagliero no longer worried in the least. Despite the seriousness of his condition, he felt certain that he would recover; his confidence proved to be well founded, for shortly afterward he began to convalesce. But in September, just when he seemed completely out of danger, he gorged himself with grapes that he had received from home, and he suffered a critical relapse.

His mother had to be summoned [2] from Castelnuovo. As soon as she entered the room and witnessed her son's condition, she cried out: "My poor boy is done for! This is the end!" However, John was so delighted to see his mother that he scarcely heard her laments. Instead, he began at once to ask her to make him a cassock with all the accessories because he was soon going to don it. The good woman thought he was delirious. When Don Bosco walked in, she said to him: "Don Bosco, I can see my boy is really very ill! He's delirious and keeps talking about donning the cassock and asking me to get everything ready."

"No, no, my good Teresa," Don Bosco replied. "Your son isn't delirious at all. He's perfectly normal. And you can get him whatever he needs because he *is* going to don the clerical habit. He has no intention of dying; he still has many things to do."

Cagliero was listening to this exchange, and he broke in: "Do you see, Mom? Make me a cassock and Don Bosco will help me to don it."

"Sure, sure," his mother cried. "Poor boy! Yes, you'll don something, but, God forbid, it will be something altogether different."

Don Bosco tried to reassure her by promising that she would indeed see her son don the clerical habit, but she kept muttering:

[2] Cagliero's father had died in 1851. *See* Vol. IV, p. 200. [Editor]

"Yes, they will make you don something when they put you in your coffin."

Totally unperturbed, the boy continued to talk excitedly to all who came to see him about the cassock that he would soon be wearing.

As soon as he regained his strength, his mother came to take him home to convalesce. He had lost so much weight and become so weak that he looked like a skeleton, and he had to support himself on a cane. He was indeed a pitiful sight, but he remained undaunted and continued to press his mother to get his cassock ready. Finally the poor woman decided to satisfy his useless desire. When people saw her busily sewing, they asked her: "What are you doing, Teresa?"

"I'm making a cassock for my son."

"But he can hardly stand on his feet!"

"This is what he wants!"

In reply to a letter, Don Bosco had written to Cagliero from Turin on October 7 [1854]: "My dear Cagliero, I'm very glad to hear that you are getting better. We're expecting you back as soon as you're strong again and your old cheerful self. You are doing the right thing in getting your cassock ready. . . . Remember me to your family and ask them all to pray for me. The Lord bless you all. Affectionately yours, Don Bosco."

The day set for the clerical investiture [at the Oratory] was approaching, and Cagliero was preparing to return to Turin. His relatives and friends were trying to persuade him to postpone his trip because of his poor health, but he had his answer ready: "Nothing doing! I must don the cassock now because Don Bosco told me I would do so."

Other people believed that he was much too young for the clerical habit, but his reply was: "It doesn't matter. Don Bosco has given his approval."

By coincidence, his brother's wedding had been scheduled for the same day that young Cagliero was to return to the Oratory. Naturally he did all he could to persuade John to attend the wedding, but the boy's answer was, "You chose your bride and so will I!", meaning the clerical habit.

As a last resort his relatives tried to deter him by claiming that his absence would seem to be a disapproval of his brother's choice of a bride.

"What my brother did is his business. Honestly, I am very pleased with his choice. What else can I say? Do I have to put it in writing and have it notarized?"

On November 21, 1854, fully recovered, Cagliero left for the Oratory. The following day, the feast of St. Cecilia, Don Bosco blessed Cagliero's clerical habit and invested his beloved son. About a year later, on November 5, 1855, Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, rector of the diocesan seminary, allowed the young cleric to reside at the Oratory and attend classes at the seminary. In this way he received the attendance certificates required for admission to final exams, in conformity with regulations dating back to November 1, 1834. These privileges had also been granted to all the other clerics residing at the Oratory.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco, unable to forget the vision of the dove and the Indians, apparently had revealed this secret to Father [Victor] Alasonatti. On one occasion, the latter, chancing upon Cagliero, remarked to him: "Do your best to become better and better. Don Bosco told me a lot about you."

Around 1855 several clerics and boys were gathered about Don Bosco at table one day lightheartedly discussing their future. After a moment's silence. Don Bosco assumed a grave, thoughtful air, as occasionally was his wont, and looking at each one he said: "One of you will become a bishop!" They all looked at him in astonishment. Then he added in a light vein: "But Don Bosco will always remain plain Don Bosco!"

At this they all laughed because they were just clerics and had no idea to whom his prediction could refer. None of them came from the upper class, and generally in those days only men of noble lineage, or at least of rare talent and scholarship, were raised to the episcopal dignity. Furthermore, Don Bosco and his institute were still so humble that, humanly speaking, it really seemed impossible that any pupil of his would be chosen a bishop—and all the more so since in those days at the Oratory no one was thinking about the foreign missions. But the very improbability of this prediction kept

its memory fresh in their minds, not to mention the vanity of some who for a long time flattered themselves with the illusion that they would be the chosen one.

The clerics [John] Turchi, [Felix] Reviglio, [John] Cagliero, [John Baptist] Francesia, [John Baptist] Anfossi, and [Michael] Rua were all present and heard Don Bosco's prediction. They also heard him say on another occasion: "Who would ever dream that one of you is to become a bishop?"

Several other times he was heard to comment: "I wonder if Don Bosco is wrong. I see a mitre among you, and it shall not be the only one. But I'm sure of at least one." The clerics then would try jokingly to get him to reveal which one of them, then simple clerics, would become bishop, but Don Bosco's answer would only be a mysterious smile!

However, he would occasionally let something slip out concerning this secret, as, for example, in the following episode narrated to us by Bishop Cagliero.

> One day in my early years of priesthood I met Don Bosco at the foot of the stairs. He looked very tired, so I said to him with filial affection: "Don Bosco, let me hold your hand and help you up the stairs." He did so in a fatherly way. When we reached the top floor he tried to kiss my right hand. I was so stunned that I could not react quickly enough to it. Then I asked him: "Why did you do that? Were you trying to humiliate me or yourself?"
>
> "Neither," he replied. "In due time you will know my reason."

In 1883, before setting out for France, Don Bosco gave an even clearer hint. After making his will and distributing keepsakes to each member of the Superior Chapter, he gave Father Cagliero a small, sealed box and said: "This is for you!" Some time later, overcome by curiosity, Cagliero opened it. Inside he found a precious ring.

Finally, in October 1884, after Father Cagliero had been appointed titular bishop of Mageddo, he asked Don Bosco to reveal the secret of thirty years before when he had said that one of his clerics would become a bishop. He replied: "I will tell you on the eve of your episcopal consecration." That evening, pacing up and down in his room with the bishop-elect, he said to him: "Do you

remember how ill you were when you were still a boy and just beginning your studies?"

"Yes, Father," Cagliero replied, "and I also remember that you had come to give me the Last Sacraments, but then you changed your mind. Instead you told me that I would recover and, with breviary in hand, go far, far away. You didn't tell me anything else, though."

"I'll tell you the rest now," Don Bosco said, and he then described to him the two visions in detail. Afterward, Bishop-elect Cagliero begged him to reveal this story to the members of the Superior Chapter that evening at supper. Don Bosco, always very obliging but especially when it would redound to the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls, consented. That same evening we wrote these pages as they were dictated to us by Bishop Cagliero.

CHAPTER 12

A City's Gratitude

WE shall now resume our narrative from September 1854. The help given by the Oratory boys to the cholera victims was indeed so praiseworthy as to deserve special mention in the leading Turin newspaper, *L'Armonia.* In an article of September 16, 1854, No. 112, it commented on the generous assistance of the clergy during the epidemic, and we record the pertinent paragraphs here in confirmation of everything we have written on this subject.

In reporting the assistance given by the clergy during the cholera epidemic, we have so far merely mentioned the help offered by many clergymen, such as the Dominican Fathers and the Oblates of Mary. But if the mildness of the epidemic in the downtown section did not offer the Turin clergy the opportunity to fully display their zeal, the little they were able to do was a sign of how much more they would have done, had the need arisen.

First of all, we wish to report how the clergy managed to dispel the people's old wives' tales about doctors and medicines. Despite the smear campaign of the anti-clerical press, the cholera victims in the city slums welcomed the priests with open arms, but through ignorance they slammed their doors when a physician tried to enter. However, one word from a priest was enough to persuade the sick to admit a doctor and to take medicine, even though they had up to then abhorred both even more than the plague.

Rather than enumerate the good works of the clergy, we shall illustrate them by describing their work in the emergency medical station of Borgo San Donato which was entrusted to the care of Father Galvagno and Don Bosco, founder and director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. For several weeks they subsisted on no more than snatches of rest at night, fully clothed, usually squeezed in between three or four calls. Moreover, Don Bosco persuaded fourteen of his boys to volunteer

their services to the Health Department for work in the medical centers or in private homes. They were sufficiently trained to offer spiritual and material assistance. Inspired by Don Bosco's example, whom they regard more as a father than a superior, they bravely went to the aid of the sick and restored their courage and confidence by talking to them and massaging their hands with no repugnance or fear. When visiting victims who were confined to their homes, they would promptly urge the frightened relatives and servants to leave, if they wanted to do so, while they ministered to the sick. If the patients were female, they would ask a member of the family to remain—if not at the bedside, at least in the room. In case of death they would even lay out the bodies of their own sex for burial.

Besides the fourteen volunteers, Don Bosco had a reserve of thirty standbys similarly trained who were always ready to join their companions.

We have cited the help given by the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales because we feel it is our duty—one we make our own—to make known its activities to its benefactors. A few weeks ago, when the Oratory was in grave need, we appealed to their generosity. The response was heartwarming, and we now thank these good people on behalf of the Oratory's worthy director. We are certain that they will be happy to know from at least one source how helpful their contributions have been. May this knowledge further arouse their sense of charity, lest those who readily offer their lives in the services of their fellow men be themselves in need.

Don Bosco's immediate concern for the victims of the cholera in Turin did not keep him from trying to help out-of-town victims. When he learned that the epidemic was also raging in Pinerolo,[1] he wrote to the mayor of that town and offered the services of his young trainees. The mayor replied in the following letter:

Pinerolo, October 2, 1854

Dear Reverend Father:

A thousand thanks for your generous and compassionate offer of four young men to assist the cholera victims of this town. If additional nurses should be needed—God forbid—I shall avail myself of your gracious offer. At the moment, however, it seems that the epidemic has

[1] About 23 miles from Turin. [Editor]

about run its course. Cases have been on the decrease these last few days, and hopefully the worst of the epidemic may be over.

There are now only twenty-nine patients in the emergency medical station; twenty-four are out of danger and most likely will be released in a week or so. That station was opened a month ago and has cared for about two hundred victims. Had I known then that you had founded a group in Turin to nurse cholera victims, I would most certainly have sought the help of this charitable organization which could have been of inestimable value during these difficult times.

Please accept my heartfelt appreciation and the gratitude of the municipal authorities of Pinerolo. Should the need arise, we shall hasten to request your assistance.

Your most humble and devoted servant,

Giosserano, *Mayor*

In a letter from Niccolò Tommaseo[2] we discovered another mention of these events, of which Don Bosco could justly be proud. Tommaseo had come that year [1854] to reside in Turin where he lived until 1859.

Turin, October 3, 1854

Very Reverend Father:

If you happen to have Volumes XI through XVI of Rosmini's works, would you be kind enough to lend them to me, at least one at a time? My eye trouble and other slight occasional indispositions prevent me from coming to ask you personally. May I also offer my belated thanks for your gracious gift of books. I am happy to say that my two stepsons are employed respectively in a printshop and a bookbinding shop; both live with me.

I have heard of your self-sacrifice and that of your boys during the cholera epidemic which particularly plagued the poor of the city. As a Christian I offer you my heartfelt thanks. Should the bearer of this letter not find you at home, kindly drop me a line in reply at 22 Via Dora Grossa.

Very sincerely yours,

Niccolò Tommaseo

[2] Niccolò Tommaseo (1802–1874) authored several dictionaries in addition to other writings on moral and political philosophy, literary criticism, poetry, biography, and history. [Editor]

Occasionally Tommaseo called on Don Bosco; both were friends of Father Rosmini and Marquis Gustavo Cavour. We know of one such visit through Charles Tomatis, who related the following story:

One morning I had just returned from the emergency medical station and gone to my dormitory, a small four-bed room in the Pinardi house. At about nine I saw Don Bosco come in with a gentleman who seemed to have very weak eyesight. Don Bosco was showing him around. It was Niccolò Tommaseo. Walking behind Don Bosco, he was saying: "Don Bosco, my friend, I'm glad to observe that you have developed an easy style perfectly suited to put your ideas across to the people. You've popularized and simplified even abstruse subjects." As soon as Don Bosco noticed my presence, he called me over and introduced me to his visitor. I was not surprised because one day in 1853, as I was accompanying Don Bosco from town back to the Oratory, we ran into Silvio Pellico, and Don Bosco introduced me with words of praise to the author of *Le Mie Prigioni* before entering into a long conversation with him. He showed such attention not only to me but to all his adopted sons of the Oratory. Whenever we were with him, he always introduced us to anyone we met, unfailingly showing us respect. I would like to stress that, even in the years when I first lived at the Oratory, many important people and renowned authors came to Valdocco to visit the Oratory and its dedicated founder.

Among such visitors Don Bosco was particularly happy to receive the cleric Emilian Manacorda, who later [as bishop of Fossano] became a very valuable friend of his. This young man had originally come to the Oratory fully determined to remain with Don Bosco, and he sought his advice while pacing up and down with him for some time in the playground fronting the house. Seminary life was not quite to his liking, and his temperament inclined him to a more active apostolate. After patiently listening to him, Don Bosco, notwithstanding his great need for clerics, persuaded him to return to the seminary to complete his theology course and to postpone a final decision until that time. In succeeding years the cleric Manacorda came to see Don Bosco from time to time and confided to him his intention of going to the foreign missions. However, Don Bosco apparently did not approve this idea. After his ordination, around 1863, Father Manacorda lived at the Oratory for some six months, and then he left for Rome after being advised by Don Bosco to follow an episcopal career. During his stay at the Oratory he studied Don Bosco closely and was filled with admiration for his heroic virtues. Later as a monsignor and then as bishop of Fossano, he became his staunchest advocate and champion.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco's ministry to the cholera victims had not prevented him from readying for the press the two September issues of *Letture Cattoliche* bound in one anonymous booklet entitled *Trafficking in Souls.*

The following is an excerpt from that booklet:[3]

With thirty pieces of silver, like Judas, the Waldensians seek to bribe Catholics, especially the poor, to deny Jesus Christ and His Church. Although many are Protestants in good faith, the leaders of the various sects believe neither in the Bible nor in God. While they are in hopeless disagreement in matters of belief, they are united on one point: their venomous hatred of the Catholic Church.

Protestant ministers, catechists, and missionaries do not act in good faith for two reasons. First, their untenable principle of free thinking denies the infallibility of the Pope and the Church while granting it to every illiterate dolt; second, their motive is the handsome remuneration they receive. Their purpose is not to convert sinners but to corrupt innocent, unsuspecting souls and persuade them to rebel against truth. Their model is Satan who deceived our first parents in Eden; they knowingly ape his evil ways.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco's enemies tirelessly plotted new ways to attack him. On October 17 *L'Armonia* reported:

One of the pastors living on the outskirts of Turin wrote to us that on the evening of October 13 he was on his way home when he came across a plain, honest looking young man. The youth, in Don Bosco's name, offered him some booklets and asked him to recommend the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales to his parishioners. He also volunteered the information that several pastors had donated either two or three lire to the Oratory. He said that Don Bosco had sent him to solicit contributions from all the pastors. Since it was late, he also asked the priest for a place to spend the night. The good priest accepted the books, gave him three lire, and entered his name and contribution in a register presented by the young man, but he discreetly chose to ignore the request for hospitality.

When he got home, the priest examined one of the booklets and was shocked to see the contents! Only then did he realize that he had been the victim of a swindler who made a living by deceiving priests and ruining Don Bosco's reputation. Let this report serve as a warning!

[3] The reader should not forget that what follows was written over a hundred years ago and reflects the thinking of the time. [Editor]

CHAPTER 13

A Lad of Promise

TOWARD the end of September, when the cholera epidemic seemed to have run its course, Don Bosco took a group of boys to Becchi to relax in the pure fresh air after weeks of hard work. Here, as if to reward the Oratory for its assistance to the sick, the Lord sent Don Bosco a pupil destined to become the Oratory's pride and glory—Dominic Savio.

Father Joseph Cugliero, the boy's teacher in the little village of Mondonio near Castelnuovo, had gone to Turin around midyear to speak to Don Bosco about Dominic. After an excellent report on his pupil, he concluded by saying: "You may have boys equal to him, but hardly anyone to surpass him in intelligence or goodness. Speak to him, and you'll find him another St. Aloysius." They finally agreed that the boy would meet Don Bosco in Morialdo[1] when he would be there for the novena and feast of the Holy Rosary.

Don Bosco described his first encounter with Dominic Savio in the following words:

Early on the morning of Monday, October 2 [1854] I saw a boy coming toward me with his father. His bright smile and his jolly but respectful manner drew my attention.

"What's your name?" I asked him. "Where are you from?"

"I'm Dominic Savio. My teacher, Father Cugliero, told you about me. We come from Mondonio."

Taking him aside, I asked about his school work and his home life. We understood each other perfectly. I realized that this boy's soul was imbued with the spirit of God, but I was somewhat surprised to see the wonderful workings of Divine grace in a boy so young.

[1] Becchi, the birthplace of Don Bosco, was situated on the outskirts of Morialdo, one of five hamlets which made up the town of Castelnuovo, 15 miles from Turin. *See* Vol. I, p. 20. [Editor]

After we had spoken for some time and I was about to call his father, Dominic asked me: "What do you say, Father? Will you take me to Turin with you to study?"

"Well, you look like good material to me!"

"Good material, Father? Good for what?"

"Good to make a lovely vestment for Our Lord."

"Then I am the cloth and you must be the tailor. Please take me with you and make me into a beautiful vestment for Him."

"I'm a bit afraid that your health may not hold up under the strain of study."

"Don't worry about that, Father. God has given me health and strength so far, and He won't fail me in the future."

"What do you want to do when you finish your studies?"

"With the grace of God, I very much want to be a priest."

"Fine! Now let's see how quick you are to learn. Take this book (it was an issue of *Letture Cattoliche*) and see if you can learn this page by heart. Come back tomorrow and recite it to me."

With that I told him to join the other boys at play and turned to have a word with his father. To my surprise Dominic was back in just eight minutes. Smiling pleasantly, he said: "I can recite the page now if you want me to, Father." I took the booklet and found to my amazement that he had not only learned the passage by heart but had also truly grasped its meaning.

"Very good," I said. "Since you have anticipated my wishes, I will anticipate my answer. Yes, I will take you with me to Turin. From now on you are one of my boys. Pray with me that God will give us both the grace to do His holy will."

Overjoyed and grateful beyond words, Dominic pressed my hand and repeatedly kissed it, saying: "I'll do my best never to cause you any regret!"

Don Bosco remained only a few days at Becchi because urgent business called him back to Turin. Angelo Savio had already donned the clerical habit; now John Turchi and some others were about to do likewise. Don Bosco used to prepare them carefully for this important step by stressing that the vocation to the priesthood was a signal gift of God. He pointed out to them for their self-examination the aptitude, qualifications, and purity of intention required for a priestly vocation. He explained simply and plainly St. Paul's words on the sublime dignity and obligations of the priest-

hood: "Those whom He has foreknown He has also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, that He should be the firstborn among many brethren. And those whom He has predestined, them He has also called; and those whom He has called, them He has also justified; and those whom He has justified, them He has also glorified." (Rom. 8, 29–30) Then he would not fail to describe the heavenly reward awaiting those who persevere in their vocation.

Persons close to Don Bosco, seeing him so concerned about securing clerics to help him, would ask: "Do you really need so many people for only three oratories?"

"I know what I'm doing," he would reply.

"What do you expect to do with so many clerics?"

"Let me worry about that!"

"What bishop will ever ordain them if they don't belong to a diocese?"

"I'll find a bishop."

"But can't you see that once they are priests, the bishops will take them from you?"

"I'll see about getting around that difficulty, too."

Remarks such as these were made quite often, for no one could foresee the future. One notable exception was Father [Sebastian] Pacchiotti, chaplain at the Rifugio. Recalling Don Bosco's prophetic words, he would frequently say to him: "Now I believe that you will have priests and clerics." [2]

It was almost the end of October, and the school year was now about to start. The newly admitted boys were beginning to arrive at the Oratory. Among the first was Dominic Savio. Immediately he went to Don Bosco's room and stated his desire to entrust himself entirely to his superiors. His gaze fell upon a poster containing, in bold lettering, a favorite saying of St. Francis de Sales: *Da mihi animas, caetera tolle.* He read it carefully. Don Bosco, anxious that he should grasp the meaning, asked him to translate it, giving him the necessary help: "Lord, give me souls; take away the rest." Savio thought for a moment and then exclaimed: "Oh, I see! Here you're not concerned with money, but with souls. I hope you'll be concerned with mine, too!" And without further ado, he threw himself

[2] *See* Vol. IV, p. 297. [Editor]

heart and soul into his scholastic and religious duties. Don Bosco himself described his splendid virtues in a precious issue of *Letture Cattoliche*.[3]

Savio had studied elementary Latin at Mondonio; by diligence and superior intelligence he was soon promoted to what was then called "second year Latin." His teacher was Prof. Joseph Bonzanino, a religious-minded charitable layman who ran a private school and generously allowed several other Oratory boys to attend.

Dominic was rather slight of build, but his blend of seriousness and warmth, his gentle and pleasant disposition, and his constant cheerfulness made him the favorite of all. In no time he was liked and respected by everyone. "Death but not sin" was his life's motto.

Another boy to enter the Oratory about this time was Joseph Bongiovanni, a seventeen-year-old orphan whose aunt had recommended him to Don Bosco. He arrived at the Oratory in November 1854 somewhat reluctantly, forced to do so by circumstances. He was rather worldly-wise and definitely not the religious type. However, God's grace soon won him over. In no time he felt quite at home and became fond of his superiors and of the house routine; gradually he changed his way of thinking and became intensely religious. Intellectually gifted, he eagerly took to his studies and in a surprisingly short time completed the classical courses with excellent grades. He was also a poet; with equal ease he composed humorous and religious poems in Italian and Piedmontese. Several of his religious poems were published—for example, the one in honor of Mary, Help of Christians entitled *Salve, salve, pietosa Maria* which can be found in the Italian edition of *The Companion of Youth*.[4]

Of course, other boys entered the Oratory as students, and they too were so favorably impressed by their first acquaintance with Don Bosco that they at once became fond of him and showed him

[3] This was the first biography of Dominic Savio. Authored by Don Bosco himself, it has since gone through many editions in many languages. The revised American edition, translated from the fifth Italian edition with an Introduction and notes by Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., is available from Salesiana Publishers. [Editor]

[4] A prayerbook for boys compiled and first published by Don Bosco in 1847 under the title *Il Giovane Provveduto*. *See* Vol. III, pp. 7–18. [Editor]

great respect. Likewise, Mamma Margaret's motherly solicitude for them as well as her devotion, piety, and lively faith so impressed them as to be one of the main reasons for their undying gratitude to the Oratory. This is what the alumni of 1854 and 1855 have reported to us.

Don Bosco carefully studied the temperament, behavior, and inclinations of all the Oratory boys. If they showed no sign of a priestly vocation, he nevertheless strove to make them good or better Christians so that by word and example they would raise fervent Christian families and vitally contribute to the Christianization of society. Yet he did not intend to give them an education at the expense of the Oratory. He admitted his own nephews on the same terms as any other boy. He was ready to help his relatives if they were in need, as charity would demand, but under no circumstances would he concur to improve their economic condition. For example, in the fall of 1854 he sent home his nephew Francis because he did not seem to have a priestly vocation, although he was very good and intelligent. Francis followed his father's calling and became a fine family man. His place at the Oratory went to his brother Louis, the second son of Don Bosco's brother Joseph. Don Bosco used to tell his two nephews: "I do not intend to make you lawyers, doctors, or professors. If the Lord calls you to the priesthood, well and good. Otherwise my suggestion is that you follow your father's profession."

He took a truly fatherly care of Louis, too, and gave him a suitable intellectual and moral education, but no more. He frequently remarked: "The contributions I receive from my benefactors must buy bread for my poor boys. Woe to me if I were to use that money for any other purpose!"

And indeed it seemed on occasion that even bread might be hard to come by. The war in the Middle East had disrupted commerce and its repercussions had financially hurt many of his benefactors. France and England, to protect their own influence and interests in the East, had sided with Turkey and landed troops at Varna and in Crimea. After defeating the Russians in several battles, they finally besieged Sevastopol on October 9, 1854.

Pressed by need, on November 2, 1854 Don Bosco applied for and received a license to raffle off an artistic ivory crucifix, approx-

imately 12″ high, a gift of Mr. James Ramella, a benefactor. The proceeds provided food for a few days for the Oratory boys whose ranks were being swelled by an influx of orphans. The Turin municipal authorities also were aware of the needs created by the plague; besides taking immediate health measures they opened a makeshift orphanage near St. Dominic's Church, thus earning the gratitude of the whole city. Not satisfied with providing for the physical well-being of these children, the mayor took steps to provide for their intellectual and moral welfare. To this effect he voiced his opinion that no one was better suited than Don Bosco for this task. As soon as Don Bosco learned of the mayor's wish, he gladly hastened to cooperate with him and so notified him by letter. The mayor replied as follows:

Turin, October 31, 1854

It was gracious of you to offer schooling to the poor boys temporarily sheltered in St. Dominic's Orphanage. The Central Welfare Committee has gratefully accepted your offer, and I gladly convey to you its thanks and my own.

At your convenience, kindly contact Mr. Ioassa, administrator of the orphanage, for necessary arrangements.

Thanking you again, I take this occasion to express my own personal esteem and appreciation.

[John] Notta, *Mayor*

Necessarily, Don Bosco began spending several hours each day with the sick and the orphans. He provided for their intellectual and moral education by assigning some of the more gifted Oratory boys and a cleric or two to teach them religion and other subjects. This went on until the end of November.

We must not think, however, that Don Bosco started to care for the orphans at St. Dominic's only when he formally volunteered. Our own brother Peter Enria has left us the following written report:

I first met Don Bosco in September 1854 at St. Dominic's where about one hundred cholera orphans were sheltered and cared for through the efforts of a private committee. Don Bosco came to visit us one day,

escorted by the administrator. I had never met him before, but he was so friendly that I could not help liking him right away. He smiled at everyone, asked us our names, and inquired whether we knew our catechism or had already been admitted to confession or First Holy Communion. We told him everything. When he came to me, I felt my heart throb, not with fear, but with affection. He asked my name and surname, and then said: "Would you like to come with me? We'll always be good friends and get to heaven together. How about it?"

I answered: "Oh, yes, Father!"

He then added: "Is this boy with you your brother?"

"Yes, Father," I answered.

"Very well, he may come too!"

A few days later we both were taken to the Oratory. I was then thirteen and my brother was eleven. My mother had died of cholera, and my father was still stricken.

Seventeen years later in Varazze[5] I recalled this incident to Don Bosco, who was then sick. "Do you remember, Don Bosco, how your mother used to scold you for always taking in new boys? 'You keep taking in new boys, but who is going to feed and clothe them? We have nothing, and soon it will be winter!' "

In fact, the first few nights I had to sleep on a pile of dried leaves with nothing to cover me but a little blanket. "Do you remember how, after we had gone to bed, you and your mother mended our only pants and jackets?" Don Bosco smiled as I reminisced, and he remarked: "How hard my good mother worked! What a saintly woman! But Providence never abandoned us."

When the plague ended at the beginning of December, St. Dominic's Orphanage was closed and the orphans were parceled out to various institutions. Twenty of the smaller children were given to Don Bosco and became that day his adopted children. They formed a group by themselves, jokingly nicknamed the "babies." Before the end of that year, as Peter Enria told us, another thirty boys of the same age joined them.

The Public Welfare Committee of Turin deeply appreciated Don Bosco's help at St. Dominic's Orphanage and his generosity in accepting a good number of orphans at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. On its behalf, the mayor wrote to Don Bosco as follows:

[5] A Salesian school was formally opened there in 1872. [Editor]

Turin, December 7, 1854

Very Reverend and dear Father:

On behalf of the Public Welfare Committee for the cholera victims and their families, I hasten to express my most sincere thanks to your Reverence for your noble and generous assistance to St. Dominic's Orphanage. I am sure the orphans will pray for their worthy teacher.

While fulfilling this pleasant duty, I am happy to express my own personal esteem and consideration.

[John] Notta, *Mayor*

In a previous letter, dated December 4, while asking Don Bosco to accept an orphan named Andrew Fioccardi, the mayor had added: "I take this opportunity to thank you on behalf of the Public Welfare Committee for sheltering boys orphaned by the fatal epidemic which for nearly four months has ravaged our city and suburbs."

Meanwhile Don Bosco had arranged more suitable quarters for his little orphans by setting aside classrooms and dormitories for them. He then provided for their religious, scholastic, and technical education, first by himself for almost a year, and then with volunteers from outside the Oratory. One of these orphans, named Cora, was a very gifted boy and became quite an amateur actor. For several years, both he and Charles Gastini provided lively entertainment for the Oratory boys. Several orphans left the Oratory as soon as they learned a trade, but they always retained their affection for the man who had been a second father to them; others remained longer, and some are still there, living witnesses of those memorable days.

Peter Enria concluded one of his reports as follows: "I stayed on at the Oratory, where Don Bosco and his mother had welcomed us so lovingly. We looked upon Don Bosco's mother as if she were our very own. We were all happy and content."

CHAPTER 14

A Lost Sheep

THE events we have just related did not disrupt the publication of *Letture Cattoliche*. An anonymous work entitled *Informal Talks on Maintaining Good Health* was readied for printing in five issues: two in October, one in the first half of November, and two more in February 1855.

The work consisted of ten talks on the physical and moral consequences of excessive drinking and eating, of some immoral habits, and of anger and selfishness. The author offered suggestions to help overcome these faults, and he described the beneficial effects of such self-reform. He also touched upon the private sinful lives of the leaders of Protestantism. The final conversation offered a golden rule for family and social life. The speaker was a friendly guidance counselor who had been able to direct several young men and restore peace and happiness in their homes.

On the side, Don Bosco continued his efforts to increase the number of subscribers by mailing out circulars to all the vicar generals in Piedmont. Some of the replies are still in our archives.[1]

He was also busy readying *Il Galantuomo*,[2] the 1855 almanac. Its contents included recipes for non-alcoholic beverages and for stain removers, a list of major liturgical feasts, edifying anecdotes, a dialogue on the sacrament of Penance, and two humorous poems, one in Italian, the other in the Piedmontese dialect.

Particularly noteworthy is the Foreword in which Don Bosco humorously breaks down some popular prejudices and gives credit to the mayor and to other citizens for helping the poor during the cholera epidemic. We shall here provide a few excerpts:

[1] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. IV, p. 449. [Editor]

Il Galantuomo to His Friends

I'm still alive, but what didn't I go through this past year! Around midyear I lost my job; money ran out and debts began piling up. But this was the least of my troubles. The cholera broke out and hit my neighborhood. Ten friends my own age—I'm forty myself—healthy and strong, were swept away like chaff. How ghastly their death! If they had only agreed to go to the emergency medical center, they might have survived. But no, they believed old wives' tales of a poisoned drink, and so they died anyway even without it! May the poor souls rest in peace! I'm glad, though, that they received the Last Sacraments and I hope that they're now with God in heaven.

Just as I was sure the worst was over and was ready to celebrate, the blow fell on me. One of my sons and I caught the cholera. Lacking proper care in our very poor home, we were both taken to an emergency medical center. We were well looked after, but my son died. In those anguished hours Divine Providence came to my assistance. The mayor took my other two children into an institution—soon I hope to have them back with me—and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul came to my aid. Several times they brought me money, bed linen, and blankets; they still give me one coupon for meat and two for bread each week. If I am still alive, thank God, I owe it to public and private charity. May Heaven reward these good people and keep them all from the cholera.

Meanwhile I've decided to mend my ways and pay more attention to my soul. So don't be surprised, good friends, if this year I give up some of my tomfoolery and become a little more serious.

I've been collecting bits of useful information and a few anecdotes, and I hope they'll help you and your families. God be merciful to us, keep us from danger, and grant us better days. God willing, I hope to see you again next year.

As long as the cholera raged, the Waldensians and the Evangelicals—two Protestant sects that seemed to have joined forces in assailing Don Bosco—suspended their attacks. However, once the danger was over, they again resumed their vicious campaign. This time, though, discord flared between them when a committee of three ministers submitted a common catechism that they had previously been assigned to compose. Doctrinal differences and mutual distrust split them wide open. As a result, new sects sprang up in

the Alpine valleys and other localities, all proclaiming themselves "free churches."

The seeds of discord had already been planted some time before when they had tried to agree on the appointment of a minister for their new church on the Viale del Re.[3] The Waldensians' choice was Amadeus Bert, whereas the Evangelicals preferred Father [Louis] De Sanctis, an apostate Catholic priest. Things came to a head in November 1854 when the Supreme Magistrate of the Waldensian Church officially deposed De Sanctis, and the latter immediately broke off relations with the Waldensians. The official organ of the Evangelicals, *La Luce Evangelica* [The Light of the Gospel], in its November 4 [1854] issue, broke the news in these stinging terms:

> Minister De Sanctis, who has evangelized during the last two years in Turin to everyone's satisfaction, has suddenly been deposed by the Supreme Magistrate of the Waldensian Church. This shocking decision may unfavorably reflect on Minister De Sanctis' reputation among foreigners but not among Italians who know him. In view of this, *La Luce Evangelica* invites the members of the congregation with enough stamina for independent thinking to state whether or not they can in all conscience, and in the presence of God our judge, approve the decision of the Supreme Magistrate.

This setback for De Sanctis was God's way of calling him back to the right path and to the bosom of the Catholic Church which he had so shamelessly abandoned. Don Bosco, who always treated his adversaries far differently from the way they treated him, on this occasion tried his best to make De Sanctis' change of heart easier by writing to him as follows:

Turin, November 17, 1854

Reverend and dear Father:

For some time I have thought of writing to you to let you know I earnestly wish to talk to you and be a friend to you. I have been prompted to do so now after attentively reading your books, in which I think I perceive a genuine distress of heart and mind.

According to the papers you appear to be in trouble with the Waldensians. If so, I offer you the hospitality of the Oratory, if you

[3] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 157, 481f. [Editor]

wish it. Why? So that you may do whatever the Lord may inspire you to do. I offer you a modest room and board without the least obligation on your part.

This is the feeling of friendship springing from the depth of my heart. If you only knew how loyal and genuine my friendship for you is, you would accept my invitation or wish me well for it.

May the good Lord grant my desire and make us one in heart and soul for that same Lord who justly rewards them who serve Him in this life.

Your sincere friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

This letter profoundly stirred the misguided De Sanctis, and he promptly replied:

Turin, San Salvario, Via de'Fiori, No. 1

[November 18, 1854]

Dear Reverend Father:

You cannot imagine how moved I was by your gracious letter of yesterday. I never expected to find such generosity and kindness in one who is my avowed opponent. Let us not fool ourselves; your stand is diametrically opposed to mine. Yet, in my hour of affliction, you offer me a helping hand even as you contend against me. You show that you love me sincerely and practice that Christian charity which so many can only preach. Would to God that *Il Campanone*'s staff would imitate you. They simply cannot write without insulting, discrediting, and ridiculing even the most serious things.[4]

I accept your offer of friendship as a precious gift. I hope soon to have the occasion, without going against my conscience, of proving my love for you not in words only but in deed and in truth.

For many reasons I cannot now accept your gracious offer, but its deep impression upon me will not be easily erased. Meanwhile, let us pray for each other that God may grant us the grace of being together

[4] *Il Campanone* was a small Catholic daily which began publication that same year in Turin. Sparkling with life, it became the scourge of the heretics and earned their fierce hatred. On August 5, 1854 the Evangelicals published a manifesto of resentment and rancor in these terms: "We appeal to the government, our laws, and public opinion to destroy the troublemaking brood publishing *Il Campanone*." A fine example of tolerance!

for all eternity before His throne, singing the hymn of those who have been redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb.

Believe me in all sincerity to be

Your devoted friend and servant,

Louis De Sanctis

It is regrettable that De Sanctis did not accept Don Bosco's offer and that he did not have the strength to cut himself off from his shameful bondage! Unfortunately he rejected God's voice and contented himself with thanking Don Bosco by letter and publicly in *La Luce Evangelica*: "While the Waldensians keep treating Minister De Sanctis in the manner known to all, Father John Bosco writes him a kind, charitable letter offering him room and board. Praise to whom praise is due!"

Then, in an open letter to the editor of *La Buona Novella* [The Good News], he wrote: "I must pay due homage to truth. Catholic priests have not treated me as badly as the Waldensians have."

Not satisfied with mere praise, Don Bosco still pursued his aim by writing another letter to De Sanctis:

Turin, Valdocco, November 30, 1854

Dear Father:

I was very pleased to learn that you welcomed my letter. You tell me that you are having difficulties. Since you graciously accept my humble but loyal friendship, please allow me to bring you some comfort. I wish I could convince you that there are far more people who sincerely love and respect you than perhaps you yourself imagine. I do know that Canon [Louis] Anglesio, rector of the Cottolengo Hospital, Father [John] Borel, spiritual director of the Rifugio, Father [Joseph] Cafasso, rector of the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and very many others share my own sentiments toward you, and all would welcome an opportunity to prove it.

Since you have graciously called me your friend, I am anxious to meet you, both to make the acquaintance of one I hold dear but have never seen, and also to tell you personally what I am now writing to you. Perhaps you will let me visit you or meet you somewhere in town. I would be delighted and honored if you would come to my home. It would be mutually satisfactory, I am sure. Do not feel uneasy on any-

one's account. You need only tell me the specific day and possibly the hour so that I will be sure not to be out.

Please accept my most cordial regards, and continue your friendship with me. I wish you every blessing from God.

Yours most affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

De Sanctis, a pitiable apostate priest and a writer of the anti-Catholic *Amico di Casa* [The Family Friend], accepted Don Bosco's invitation on condition that he make no mention of him in his writings, and he went to the Oratory. In greeting him, Don Bosco doffed his biretta and did not cover himself until requested to do so by his guest. He showed him his quarters and then led him through the bookbinding shop run by Charles Gastini and the other shops which were then beginning. He then conferred with him at length that day and the next few days, especially about the marks of the true Church.

Like all Protestants, De Sanctis admitted that the Church was a visible society as clearly stated in the Gospels, but he maintained that Protestantism was as old as the Gospels and was actually the visible society of those believing in Jesus Christ and following His genuine doctrine.

"But where was this church of yours before Luther and Calvin, during the 1,500 years between the early Church and the Reformation?" Don Bosco objected. "If your church was a visible one, it must have had leaders. Tell me their names, their country of birth, their succession, when and where they lived, and what liturgy and discipline they used. I'd be satisfied if you could produce just the name of a single one before Luther and Calvin who professed the doctrines which you yourself profess today."

"One name? Is that what you want? Easy enough!" And De Sanctis brought up the usual standbys—ancient heretics who had had nothing in common with the 16th-century reformers.

After refuting his contentions and convincing him all the more readily because De Sanctis was not altogether ignorant of church history, Don Bosco concluded by saying: "Since your sect or church was invisible for 1,500 years, it lacks the proper credentials and so is not the true church!"

Occasionally some Oratory boys, sneaking up to the windows of Don Bosco's rooms, managed to catch some words. Playfully they would repeat among themselves: "Just tell me the name of one, a single one!"

De Sanctis was convinced of his errors, but recanting was another matter altogether. Father [Francis] Marengo was right, when at about this time he wrote to Don Bosco: "The last issue of *La Luce Evangelica* makes me think that Father De Sanctis is firmly linked to the Italian Evangelical Society. It may prove fatal to him."

Nevertheless, some good came of these talks. Don Bosco's generosity to a well-known opponent, now fallen in disgrace, somehow softened his enemies. From that time on the Waldensians put aside violence and limited their attacks to polemics.

Yet Don Bosco did not give up trying to bring Father De Sanctis back to the Church. He wrote to him again during the following year:

May 20, 1855

Reverend and dear Father:

Anxious that our friendship not be merely in words, I have always hoped for a chance to make it a fact. Your words and writings seem to reveal a certain uneasiness, and therefore I have kept looking for some favorable circumstance to tell you of my earnest concern for your eternal salvation. I trust that—having granted me the gift of your friendship—you will reciprocate by confiding your hopes and fears. I am anxious to talk to you, not in an argument unbecoming friends, but in a kindly manner in search of truth.

I tell you quite frankly that I wholeheartedly and fervently desire your soul's salvation and am willing to make any sacrifice to achieve that end. All I want to know is whether you feel tranquil about your eternal salvation, whether you believe that a good Catholic may be saved, and whether there is greater assurance of salvation in the Catholic Church than elsewhere. Rest assured that whatever you say or write will never compromise your social, civil, or religious status, because everything you say or write to me will remain strictly confidential.

This letter may surprise you, but that is the way I am. When I strike up a friendship, I am anxious to continue it and to do all I can for a friend.

May the good Lord bless and keep you in good health. With the greatest esteem I am at your service for anything I can do for you.

Your affectionate servant and friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Father De Sanctis was well aware how sincere Don Bosco's friendship was. Passion may have dulled his intellect, but he could not help recognizing the falsity of his teaching. When he visited Don Bosco, he could not rebut the cogent reasons with which the saintly priest tried to win him back to the Church. He could only attempt to justify his stand by saying: "I have a family, and I have no other means of support."

Don Bosco would reply: "You may be sure that Catholics will not forsake you; I am ready myself to share my bread with you. I shall assist you in every possible way."

"Yes, yes, but what about my wife? She will never consent."

To overcome this difficulty, Don Bosco even volunteered to provide for her, but De Sanctis would not hear of it. The last time he visited Don Bosco, he did seem to hold out a ray of hope for his conversion, for he was grateful and moved to the point of tears for the kindness that had been shown to him.

However, the poor apostate could not bring himself to break his shameful ties. Some years later he suffered a stroke and died almost instantly, whispering to the companion of his sinful life: "I'm dying, I'm dying!" Let us hope that in those last moments of his life he was able to make an act of contrition.

CHAPTER 15

A Heavenly Mother

ON August 1, 1854 Pope Pius IX proclaimed a Holy Year in an encyclical that exhorted the faithful to do penance and call upon the Immaculate Virgin's intercession that God might revoke or at least mitigate His impending punishments. In granting the Jubilee, the Pope also requested the prayers of the bishops and faithful that God would mercifully "enlighten us with His Holy Spirit and enable us soon to reach a decision concerning the conception of the Most Holy Mother of God, the Immaculate Virgin Mary—a decision redounding to the greater glory of God and of our beloved Virgin Mother."

In the Turin archdiocese the Jubilee celebration was set for October 1 to December 31. For the occasion, the November issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* printed by De Agostini Press, was entitled *The Jubilee and Prayers for the Visits to Churches.* After giving the full text of the encyclical, Don Bosco wrote this Foreword:

The main purpose of this booklet is to show the Jewish origin of the Jubilee and its adoption by the Catholic Church.

For the sake of authenticity and accuracy I have diligently checked the most ancient and reliable authors. I have also included some practices of piety for the prescribed visits to the three selected churches.

This booklet will also disprove the allegation of Protestants and fallen-away Catholics that the Jubilee and other indulgences are of recent origin.

My dear friends, read these pages attentively. This could possibly be the last Jubilee for both me and you. Happy will we all be if we take advantage of it. Our merciful God welcomes us; heavenly treasures are within our reach. Would to God that we all avail ourselves of them.

Fr. John Bosco

The December issue was also timely because in those very days anticlericals diabolically blasphemed Our Blessed Mother in speech and writing. The booklet, written by Father Costa of Rome, was entitled *Considerations on the Expected Dogmatic Definition of the Immaculate Conception and a Novena.* It briefly outlined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, the thinking of the Church throughout the centuries, her intent in promulgating this dogma, and the duties this would impose upon the faithful.

This booklet was also an expression of the Oratory's gratitude to Mary. The promise which Don Bosco so assuredly had made to his boys[1] had been kept so well that even skeptics were astounded. At the time there were about a hundred boys living at the Oratory with Don Bosco and his mother. In their immediate neighborhood the cholera had raged so violently that no family had been spared. Yet, after a four-month-long epidemic, not a single person at the Oratory had succumbed. A roll call showed that no one was missing. The plague had surrounded them, had advanced to the very gates of the Oratory, had even penetrated into Don Bosco's very room, yet an invisible hand had forced its retreat and spared the lives of all. Another amazing fact was that the boys who had volunteered to nurse the sick were in excellent health. Their rosy cheeks suggested a pleasant vacation in some healthy country spot rather than the pestilential atmosphere of makeshift hospitals. All who knew the facts marveled, for it was impossible not to see God's visible protection and mercy.

We stated above that the plague had penetrated even into Don Bosco's room; to be more specific, it attacked him, and we must now say that it even laid hands on him.

As we formerly said,[2] Don Bosco had begged God to accept his life in exchange for that of his boys, should the cholera strike any of them. His offer was put to the test. Mamma Margaret told Father [John] Bonetti what happened. One evening, during the first week of the epidemic, Don Bosco came home dead tired and went straight to bed. After a short sleep, he awoke extremely weak and cold. He felt all the symptoms of the cholera: dizziness, nausea, and cramps in his legs and feet. He sat up in bed. What should he do? He

[1] *See* p. 50. [Editor]
[2] *See* pp. 52f. [Editor]

grasped the bell to call someone, but on second thought he did not ring it, so as not to alarm the boys. Instead he prayed to the Blessed Virgin while resigning himself to God's will. Then he gave himself the standard treatment for cholera. Tightly holding the sheet and blankets he began to exercise his legs and feet as vigorously as he could, so much so that within a quarter of an hour, weary and gasping from fatigue, he broke into a sweat and again fell asleep. When he awoke all the symptoms had disappeared. This was the only case of cholera at the Oratory. We conjecture that it must have been prompted not only by his love for his boys, but by an even more sublime motive of lively faith—the triumph of the Church and of the Blessed Virgin Mary. From certain words and writings of his, we have well-founded reasons to believe that Don Bosco generously offered his life to God so that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception would be proclaimed that same year. We also know with certainty that he spoke highly of people who in 1854 had made a similar vow. We therefore believe that the cholera attack was proof that his sacrifice was acceptable to God and that his recovery was due to the Holy Virgin's goodness.

Once the plague had completely spent itself in the city and its environs, Don Bosco wanted his boys to show their gratitude to God for having protected them so lovingly. As a day of thanksgiving, he chose December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the very day when Pius IX would solemnly proclaim that dogma in St. Peter's, attended by two hundred cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops, many from distant countries. On the morning of that memorable day the boarders and many of the day boys devoutly received the sacraments to honor Mary Immaculate who had shielded them with Her motherly mantle. In the evening, Don Bosco gave a suitable talk to dispose their hearts to render public thanks to God. After explaining to them in simple terms the dogma that was being promulgated that day, he went on to speak of Mary's power and goodness to Her devotees and concluded by saying that since all danger from the cholera was now over, they all had reason to give thanks to God for being spared. He compared the cholera to the Angel of Death who of old had stricken Egypt. For a better appreciation of the singular favor they had received, Don Bosco narrated several mournful episodes which had taken place in Liguria

and Piedmont and in Turin itself, right in their own neighborhood. "Yes," he concluded, "yes, my beloved sons, let us thank God. We have good reason to do so because, as you see, He has rescued us from a thousand mortal dangers. That our thanks may be more acceptable to Him, let us accompany them with a heartfelt, sincere promise to consecrate our lives to Him alone by loving Him with all our hearts, practicing our religion faithfully, observing His commandments and those of the Church, and avoiding mortal sin, which is infinitely worse than any cholera or plague." He then intoned the *Te Deum,* to which the boys responded with the greatest fervor and love.

Indeed overjoyed during those days, Don Bosco transfused his joy into his pupils, who showed it in song, music, and poetry in a special assembly program. For Don Bosco the promulgation of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception had been the answer to many prayers and Masses he had said to hasten this long-awaited definition. Now he continued to pray to and thank the Lord for having so glorified the Queen of Angels and of men. The feast of the Immaculate Conception became his favorite feast, although, of course, he continued to observe the feast of the Assumption with great solemnity.

No one could adequately describe Don Bosco's love for Our Lady. His devotion to Her came second only to his devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and he continually fostered it with visible filial love, whether preaching, hearing confessions, or talking informally. He seemed to live only for Her. He often visited Her shrines, and he always had a supply of medals and holy pictures to give away, especially to the children. As they crowded about him, he urged them to wear the medals devoutly and pray every day to the Blessed Virgin.

With a sense of holy joy he joined his boys in singing Her praises both inside and outside the church. Not content with that, after intoning the hymn *Noi siam figli di Maria* [We Are Mary's Sons], he would also joyfully tap out the tempo with saintly simplicity. Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi informs us: "Don Bosco wanted his boys to praise Mary at all times. I remember singing many a hymn with him. He could inspire such enthusiasm for Our Lady that one Sunday evening, on his way to Valdocco from the Guardian Angel

Oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia with a crowd of boys, including myself, as soon as he intoned the hymn *Mille volte benedetta, o dolcissima Maria,* we immediately joined in and sang it lustily while crossing Piazza Emanuele Filiberto." During these same years he was overjoyed whenever his pupils asked permission to build little shrines in the study hall and in the dormitories to add solemnity to Mary's month.

On his part, during the month of May and the novenas in honor of the Blessed Virgin, he would speak of Her virtues, prerogatives, or favors, and end up by suggesting the practice of some virtue in Her honor. He never failed to announce forthcoming feasts of the Blessed Virgin, on which occasions he always exhorted his boys to receive the sacraments, while he himself would hear confessions for hours on end. If he could not preach on one of these feasts, he always saw to it that a priest was invited who knew how to inflame the boys' hearts with love for the Blessed Virgin.

Often, when speaking to a student, he would quote a passage of the Vulgate which the Church applied to Our Lady, such as: *Beatus homo qui audit me, et qui vigilat ad fores meas quotidie et observat ad postes ostii mei. Qui me invenerit inveniet vitam et hauriet salutem a Domino.* (Prov. 8, 34) He would then ask the boy to translate it and would comment on it, exhorting him to trust his heavenly Mother with all his heart, assuring him that through Her he would obtain all the graces he needed.

He urged the festive oratory boys to recite the third part of the rosary daily, and rather than have them omit it for lack of time, he asked them to say it while at work or on their way to and from their shops. He maintained that the rosary was a wonderful means for acquiring the virtue of purity and a sure protection against the snares of the devil.

He ardently promoted all forms of devotions which he knew pleased the great Mother of God. He was instrumental in introducing into many parishes of Piedmont the recitation of three "Glory's" after the *Angelus.* By and large, this was not then the custom, but Don Bosco did it because he learned that a devout person had come to know through private revelation that this would be most pleasing to Our Lady.

As a matter of policy he always began, pursued, and completed

his undertakings by invoking Her aid. Whenever he had to mail circulars, he always saw to it that they went out under the date of one of Her feast days, postponing the mailing for several weeks if necessary. He did the same when launching a new project or conducting a serious meeting with his co-workers. He credited all his achievements to the Blessed Virgin; in his sermons and talks he kept repeating that all the success of the Oratory and the Congregation was due to Mary's goodness. Throughout his life he never took an important step without first entrusting his plans to Her protection.

His most familiar invocation was: *Maria Mater gratiae, Dulcis parens clementiae, Tu nos ab hoste protege, Et mortis hora suscipe* [O Mary, Mother of Grace, sweet Mother of Mercy, defend us against the enemy, and receive us at the hour of death], and Mary truly assisted him in all his needs.

"Mary has always been my guide," he would often exclaim. No one can deny the evidence of the very many favors he obtained from Her for himself, his boys, and the people who sought Her protection through him. The boys often said among themselves: "Don Bosco must be very influential with Our Lady because She obtains so many favors for him." People were also convinced that the Blessed Virgin would not refuse him. His boundless faith in Her became even more lively when ministering to the sick and obtaining extraordinary recoveries. When giving his personal blessing he invoked the powerful protection of Mary upon those present or far away. He claimed credit for nothing and kept repeating: "How good Our Lady is!"

The Queen of Heaven and earth, whom Don Bosco always looked upon and invoked as his sweetest Mother, reciprocated his love and that of his boys by watching over the Oratory directly. Her novenas spelled disaster to the unworthy ones. On announcing them, Don Bosco would say: "Let us make this novena well because Our Lady wants to clean up the house and drive away the undeserving." Unfailingly some fox or wolf was unmasked during these novenas, notwithstanding a clever disguise, and for one reason or another—and often of his own accord—left the Oratory. It was common knowledge that this happened hundreds of times.

Let the above suffice for the present. What Our Lady did for

Don Bosco, and what Don Bosco achieved with Her help by his efforts, words, and writings, we shall narrate in the course of our story.

Bishop [John] Cagliero, Father [Michael] Rua, Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, Father [Francis] Cerruti, John Villa, and others still living bear testimony to what we have narrated. We also possess written authoritative depositions by Father [Felix] Reviglio, Father [John] Giacomelli, and Father [John] Bonetti whom God has already summoned to eternity.

CHAPTER 16

Don Bosco and Purity

DON Bosco's ardent love for Our Lady stemmed from his purity of heart and was, in turn, a proof of that purity. We are indeed convinced that more than anything else this was the secret of his greatness. God endowed him with extraordinary gifts and made him the instrument of wonderful works because he always kept himself pure and chaste. "Just by looking at him," Father [John Baptist] Piano[1] once declared, "you could tell how much he loved purity."

His words and gestures, indeed his whole manner, effused such candor and virginal innocence as to charm and edify all who approached him, even reprobates. His angelic countenance had a fascination of its own. He never uttered a word that could be considered less than becoming. Nothing in his demeanor even slightly suggested worldliness. To his intimate friends the most extraordinary thing about him was his extreme care never to offend modesty even in the slightest way. Some of his co-workers took pains to scrutinize his exterior life thoroughly, sometimes even to the point of spying on him through keyholes, yet they never once observed him in any unbecoming attitude. Not even once was he seen to cross his legs, to stretch out in an armchair, or to put his hands inside his coat or in his pockets even in extreme cold. He never permitted horseplay in his presence, even if only for its coarseness; any slightly off-color remark made him blush and drew an admonition from him.

His writings are all veritable models of extreme delicacy in this respect, a crystal-clear reflection of his state of soul. Father [Michael] Rua stated: "As young clerics, both I and my companions

[1] Assistant pastor and later pastor of the Gran Madre di Dio Church in Turin. [Editor]

sometimes felt at a loss on how to present certain Old Testament episodes. On consulting his *Storia Sacra* [Bible History] we always found a way to describe them without the slightest indelicacy. We can say also of him what was said of Our Divine Savior: his enemies accused him of many things, but they never dared to question his chastity. We must conclude, therefore, that he heroically maintained this virtue through his entire life."

One day Father [Michelangelo] Chiatellino[2] sought Don Bosco's advice as his spiritual guide. Whenever this good priest heard confessions, he worried over their integrity because he always feared he had not asked the necessary questions. To restore his peace of mind, Don Bosco told him that once he had gone to confession to an inexperienced priest. To the various questions put to him in regard to one sin or another, Don Bosco kept replying that, with God's grace, he had never fallen into it.

"Have you ever committed this sin?" the young priest asked him.

"No, Father, never. God has always helped me."

"And what about this other sin?"

"Not that one either, thank God!" Don Bosco had replied. He then told Father Chiatellino that the confessor had seemed unconvinced and apparently doubted his sincerity. It was his opinion, he added, that if a person was presumably sufficiently instructed, the confessor would do well to observe the safe, prudent rule of accepting at face value his self-accusation and not to worry himself or the penitent. He was therefore to put his mind at rest, for his fears were without basis.

Relating this, Father Chiatellino added: "As I listened to Don Bosco's words and matched them with something else I remembered hearing him say inadvertently on one occasion when giving me important advice, I became convinced that Don Bosco had never fallen into a grievous fault."

Father Ascanio Savio, who closely studied Don Bosco for forty years from the first day of their acquaintance, declared that he, too, was positive that Don Bosco had never lost his baptismal innocence, and that this opinion of his was shared by fellow priests.

Don Bosco allowed men to kiss his hands because a priest's hands are consecrated and endowed with a divine character and authority.

[2] One of Don Bosco's first co-workers at the Oratory. [Editor]

His every action made that obvious. Occasionally he also permitted women this token of respect, but without holding their hands; frequently he evaded them courteously.

During the early years of the Oratory there was no reception room, and so he received people after Mass in the porticoes; he was never seen to give audiences to women in his room. When additions were later made to the building, the room where he received visitors had an adjacent waiting room attended by a member of the household who announced his visitors. When women were ushered in, he always kept the door ajar so that people could freely look in. If at times a lady visitor dressed somewhat frivolously, he would always stare at the floor. Father Rua, Father Piano, and hundreds of others stated this.

During the audience he always kept a little distance from his lady visitors and never positioned himself directly opposite them. He never looked squarely at them and never shook hands when they were introduced or left. He usually tried to dispatch business as quickly as possible. Since many of them sought comfort, he always refrained carefully from endearing expressions that would have healed a wound only by opening another. With a grave mien he consoled them in their troubles with a remedy which he often used—the invocation "God's will be done!" Another frequent exhortation of his was: "God never forsakes anyone. Those who have recourse to Him with a clean conscience and fervent prayer will obtain everything they need."

He never addressed women, even relatives, with the familiar form of "thou" except little girls, and even with them he was always quite reserved. Occasionally some woman would ask him to bless her by tracing the Sign of the Cross over her forehead or eyes, in the hope of a cure, but Don Bosco never consented. When a woman one day took hold of his hand and tried to place it on her head, he scolded her severely in the presence of Father Rua.

On the streets he never greeted ladies of distinction first, even though they might be his benefactresses. He never called on women unless his priestly duty or some other grave reason demanded it. Several times he was offered a ride by noble ladies who happened to be going his way, but he always graciously declined the offer unless he was accompanied by a co-worker or by another man.

Such careful reserve he also inculcated into his followers. Father Felix Reviglio writes: "I remember on my appointment as pastor and vicar forane of Volpiano that Don Bosco cautioned me never to caress young girls, even lightly, as a reward or encouragement. 'That can only cause gossip,' he said. Later, when I was transferred to St. Augustine's in Turin, he urged me to be on my guard and reserved even when it might not be needed, so as to keep the reputation of a chaste pastor untarnished."

Don Bosco was very jealous of this reputation. We are indebted to Father Angelo Savio and Bishop [John] Cagliero for the following episode. Don Bosco once arrived at Castelnuovo in need of a shave and immediately went to a barbershop. A woman greeted him courteously and asked him to take a seat, assuring him that he would be taken care of quickly. The barber, her father, having no sons, had taught her the trade. She began wrapping a towel about Don Bosco. "So far, so good," Don Bosco thought, expecting to see the barber appear any moment. But when he saw the woman strop the razor and prepare to lather his face, he leaped to his feet and took his leave, saying: "I shall never let a woman lead me by the nose. No indeed! Until now no woman but my mother has ever touched my face!" And out he stalked. We must add, too, that when he was sick he never allowed women to look after him—not even nuns. Likewise, he never permitted anyone at his bedside except older co-adjutors who always admired his extreme care to avoid even the slightest suggestion of immodesty.

"Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." [Matt. 6, 45] In his sermons, homilies, talks, and conferences, Don Bosco knew how to kindle love for purity. He always spoke of the priceless value of this virtue. He loved to describe the beauty of a chaste soul, its inner joys, its temporal and eternal rewards, and its singular privilege in heaven to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. His words had such a marvelous effect that his hearers could not help being enamored of purity, as John Villa[3] and thousands of others still fondly attest. When speaking of purity, Don Bosco appeared to be more an angel than a man. His listeners were prompted to remark to each other: "Only one as pure and chaste as an angel can possibly speak in this way about purity!" Often—even during playtime—he

[3] A pupil of Don Bosco. He started frequenting the Oratory in 1855. [Editor]

startled his boys with such exclamations as: "I wish you were all like St. Aloysius!" or "Let us keep our promises! I hope that our infinitely merciful God will let us all be together one day in heaven robed in baptismal innocence." To some doubting Thomas Don Bosco would say: "There, now! Remember: 'I can do all things in Him who strengthens me.' " [Phil. 4, 13] He especially inculcated devotion to the Blessed Virgin, urging all, when tempted, to invoke Her and say: "Mary, help me!" He even suggested that they initial this invocation in their books. He also forewarned them of possible dangers.

Besides recommending the usual spiritual means, he stressed the need to keep oneself constantly occupied and to be active in games during recreation. He disliked anyone laying hands on others, linking arms, or holding or tightly grasping hands. He would not tolerate the boys' horseplay or playful hugs. Rigorously, but discreetly, he repressed particular friendships, even if harmless at their start; on this point he was adamant. He not only heartily abhorred foul talk; he could not stand any vulgarity that might arouse thoughts or feelings less than chaste. "Let such words not even be mentioned among you," he exclaimed. [Cf. Eph. 5, 3] He also exhorted all to behave so well as to dispel every slightest doubt of their conduct.

When giving these exhortations, although Don Bosco spoke more of purity than its opposite, he alluded to it sparingly and prudently. He avoided enumerating such sins; temptations of this sort he called "bad," and a fall he labeled a "misfortune." He was not quite satisfied either with the word "chastity"; he preferred "purity" as being more comprehensive and less suggestive.

The horror his boys felt for this sin was the effect not so much of his words as of a complex blend of Divine grace, personal conviction, love, and fear overflowing from Don Bosco's heart into their own. To encourage them to resist the devil, he would frequently exclaim: "Short are our sufferings, eternal our joys." [Cf. 2 Cor. 4, 17] He would sadly weep over the many young people ruined by impurity. Once he even wept publicly when developing this theme with great depth of feeling. "Rather than have such sins committed in the Oratory," he exclaimed, "it would be better to close it! Such sins call down the wrath of God even on entire nations." The boys

would go to bed deeply moved and pensive, determined to keep their hearts pure for God.

"Blessed those days," Father [Joseph] Bongiovanni observed, "when even the slightest blemish moved us to tears and drove us at once to the confessor. Such was the effect of Don Bosco's words."

Father [Felix] Reviglio, who lived many years at Valdocco, added: "One could swear to the fact that at the Oratory there was an air of purity that was indeed extraordinary."

In this matter Don Bosco fashioned his young clerics after himself, admonishing them if he ever detected undue familiarity between them and the boys. He never permitted them to hold the boys' hands, bring them into their cells, or linger near their beds unless it was strictly necessary. He insisted that all dealings with boys take place in the open, and under no pretext at all in a secluded spot. He warned them to guard their actions, words, and writings lest the slightest doubt be cast on their purity. He stressed the need of strict self-control over the senses; whenever he sent them to girls' academies for religious services, he cautioned them to leave their eyes at home. "This act of self-denial," he used to say, "is purity's effective safeguard."

One day he went out with a young man of the Oratory. On reaching a particular square, the young man absent-mindedly began staring at a certain window. Don Bosco interrupted his reverie and asked: "What are you staring at?" His reply was satisfactory. Reassured, Don Bosco, as though voicing his thoughts, said in a low tone: "I made a pact with my eyes." [Job 31, 1] For this reason he tried to prevent young women from calling on him at the Oratory by arranging some other meeting place. Various letters of his bear this out. We shall cite one here:

Turin, July 13, 1854

My dear Countess:

When I arrived at St. Francis [of Assisi Church], it was already too late to send word to you. Please be so good as to tell your mother that I shall be at the Convitto Ecclesiastico tomorrow afternoon from 3 to 5. Ask the doorkeeper to call me.

May God bless you, so that your virtuous life may gladden your wonderful parents.

Gratefully,

Fr. John Bosco

When asked for his advice on a priestly vocation, his adamant reply was that Holy Orders should never be suggested to or conferred on those who could not be depended on for purity of life.

When exhorting clerics to take anxious care of the boys, he cited Our Lord's example, but lest it might be misconstrued, he never quoted in full, or without suitable comment, those Gospel passages telling how the Divine Savior clasped children to His heart. His reason was that they could not duplicate without risk what Our Lord had done. He never ceased urging them to watch over the boys and to keep from them anything that could arouse unseemly curiosity or evil thoughts. "Keep this in mind," he would tell them. "Morality! That's what really matters. Safeguard morality! Put up with everything—liveliness, impudence, thoughtlessness—but never tolerate the offense of God and especially the vice contrary to purity. Be truly on the alert in this regard! Concentrate all attention on the boys entrusted to you."

When with youngsters, he was himself a teacher and model in word and deed to all his priests, clerics, and coadjutors. His purity was so sterling, spotless, and evident as never to be called into the slightest doubt. His love for boys—particularly the poorest and most abandoned, those who needed him most because of their greater moral dangers—was always gentle in the extreme, deep and strong, but totally spiritual and truly chaste. He endeavored to express his love in many ways, but he never permitted himself too tender a gesture and never held a boy's hand in his at length.

He was a true image of Our Savior among children. His purity was like a robe which clothed him from head to foot; knowing his innocence and purity, boys willingly approached him and opened their hearts to him. Father Leonard Murialdo declared that Don Bosco's love for boys prompted them to reciprocate to such a degree that we would be hard put to find a similar example.

Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio also testified in this regard:

Don Bosco displayed a simple, genuine, and very chaste nimbleness when playing with his boys, while they tugged at him from all sides during games, or when he performed sleight-of-hand tricks or challenged them to a race. Not only his words but his very presence and, even more, a glance or a smile of his inspired love for purity. In our eyes this virtue was one of his most magnificent ornaments and the reason for our reverence and affection. Often, if he was not playing himself, a crowd of boys would clasp his fingers while he entertained them in pleasant and useful conversation. Always reserved, if at times he wanted to whisper a word in private to a boy, he would bend the boy's head toward him a bit and either suggest a favorite invocation or ask for a prayer. He permitted the kissing of his hand and availed himself of this gesture to detain some lad he wished to admonish or encourage. Both then and later on as adults, the boys and even the priests were always eager to pay him this act of respect. They were prompted by esteem and profound veneration for him as though they were kissing a relic.

Father John Turchi also stated: "When we gathered around him, his presence inspired us with such love of purity that it would have been unthinkable for us to harbor unbecoming thoughts. My companions felt the same way." Bishop Cagliero remarked: "When Don Bosco heard our confessions, his manner was so reserved and composed and such candor breathed from him that we could not help assuming a devout deportment and feel as though we were in heaven itself. How well he knew how to inspire an ardent love of chastity with just a few words!"

We shall add that he was never seen to caress any of the boys, as others might quite becomingly have done in the same circumstances. As a reward or a sign of his benevolence, he would at most lay his hand for a moment on the boys' heads or shoulders, or barely brush their cheeks. "These caresses," Father Reviglio testified, "were so pure and fatherly as to transfuse in us his own love of purity. We were enchanted and became ever more determined to practice this beautiful virtue." We must also stress that whenever any boy went to consult him privately in his room, he treated him with even greater reserve. Although always affectionate in all he said, he never permitted himself even the slightest sign of familiarity.

From his earliest years to his dying day, Don Bosco instilled a love of purity in his boys. Notwithstanding their varied social backgrounds and places of origin, they so fully appreciated and treasured this virtue that its splendor shone in most of them. It was obvious in their words, looks, and deportment. No one could describe the horror they had of sin. From this stemmed that sound, genuine, endearing piety that was the chief hallmark of the Oratory—a piety indeed beyond their years and incredible to outsiders. We saw those boys in church thousands of times, their faces so radiant with love as to enchant the spectator, and suffused by such innocence as to defy description. Truly, they reflected the image of Our Divine Savior. "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God." [Matt. 5, 8]

Occasionally Don Bosco took along some of these boys—without their suspecting the motive—when visiting certain noble families so that they might serve as models for their sons. For the same purpose, patrician families took their children to the Oratory church services.

A certain distinguished old professor, a former Oratory pupil, gave the reason for the love of God and the purity of the Oratory boys. "When I think back over all the things I saw during the more than ten years I was at the Oratory, I am sure that no other priest among the many I have known was ever inspired by such pure and ardent love of God as Don Bosco, or labored so intensely so that all would love Him."

CHAPTER 17

Ominous Messages

IN marked contrast to the peace and guilelessness of the just, evil passions kept leading many people to scheme up new ways to harm and vex the Church. They yearned to strip her of her property rights as a step toward destroying, if possible, her influence over the people; in reality, they were aiming at rebellion against God.

The Catholic Church is a true spiritual society totally independent of all earthly jurisdiction by reason of her supernatural goals. But being made up of men, she cannot do without material things such as churches, seminaries, episcopal residences, rectories, convents and monasteries, and various other possessions. These are necessary for the maintenance of the clergy and of her numerous charitable institutions and for the fulfillment of all the other obligations stemming from her Divine mission. Since the Church is destined to last until the end of time, she will always need material things. Her very nature, therefore, postulates the right of ownership, a right not stemming from, or depending on, the State but proceeding directly from Jesus Christ Himself in virtue of His dominion over the entire universe. "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations." [Matt. 28, 18–19]

In their vast campaign of hate against the Church, the anticlericals—after contesting her legislative, executive, and judiciary rights —now plotted to deny to her the right of ownership and all territorial jurisdiction. Very craftily they were steadily carrying out their plans. Some provincial councils [in Piedmont], taking their cue from them, had already passed a bill confiscating all ecclesiastical property, but in 1852 the government had officially refused to ratify it. This sparked a campaign of petitions. An ad hoc com-

mittee submitted to the two Chambers the petitions of one hundred municipal councils, of thirty-two delegate councils, and of 20,213 citizens in favor of confiscation of ecclesiastical property, a reduction in the number of dioceses, the suppression of monasteries, and the abolition of clerical exemption from military service. The ad hoc committee declared itself favorable to such demands and pointed out that Church property—including simple benefices, confraternities, legacies, and other charitable foundations—represented a capital of three hundred and eighty million lire with a revenue of fifteen million, assets that would have greatly bolstered the State coffers.

To parry these blows, the bishops issued timely statements which termed the very grievous injustice of the confiscation of church property a true sacrilege. Civil law itself acknowledged the Church's right to own property. Article 2 of the *Codice Albertino* stated: "The king considers it an honor to defend the Church and uphold the observance of her laws in matters subject to her jurisdiction." Article 25 was even more explicit: "The Church, municipalities, public institutions and societies authorized by the king, *and other moral bodies have a juridical personality* and enjoy civil rights in conformity with the modifications determined by the law." Moreover, the Constitution, guaranteeing personal liberty, declared inviolable one's domicile and all properties without exception.

But all this was ignored. The monasteries that had been turned into emergency medical stations at the outbreak of the cholera were not restored to their rightful owners once the emergency ceased. Countless hints were given that the passage of the confiscation law was imminent. Understandably, Catholics in Piedmont were gravely apprehensive. Under these circumstances Don Bosco felt inspired and constrained to try to avert further attacks on the Church. We shall now relate a memorable incident which throws fresh light on the mission which God had entrusted to His faithful servant, Don Bosco. We shall report this incident as we heard it from Father Angelo Savio, who not only was one of the many witnesses but also played a leading part. We shall not depend only on our memory but shall avail ourselves of notes which Father Savio himself dictated and then edited.

After it became public knowledge that plans were afoot to sup-

press religious orders, Don Bosco in one of his Good Nights dwelt on the maledictions with which the dukes of Savoy had threatened their own descendants, on founding the abbey of Altacomba,[1] if they should dare to destroy it or usurp its possessions. The curse had been written into the abbey's charter. The recital of such dire threats caused Angelo Savio, then a young cleric, to conceive a bold idea. Without suggesting it, Don Bosco had cleverly put it into his head, and that was enough. The cleric found a copy of the foundation charter, made a transcript of all the maledictions, signed his paper, and mailed it to the king. Victor Emmanuel II understood the message. At once he sent for his friend and trusted counselor, Marquis Dominic Fassati, the scion of one of the most noble families of Piedmont. Loyal to his king, he had served him valiantly in war and peace, distinguishing himself on the battlefields of Lombardy in 1848 and 1849. In recognition of this, he had been named commander of the king's bodyguard, the modern version of the Praetorian Guard. He had married Marie De Maistre, daughter of the illustrious Rudolph and worthy niece of Joseph De Maistre, a skilled diplomat, profound philosopher, and talented writer greatly appreciated to this very day. Marie De Maistre was so gifted and beloved that Queen Maria Adelaide, consort of Victor Emmanuel II, chose her to be her lady-in-waiting and her most intimate friend and confidante.

It so happened that Marquis Fassati was also a warm admirer and supporter of Don Bosco. He often visited the Oratory as though it were an extension of his own family home and taught catechism to both day boys and boarders.

The king showed the marquis the copy of the foundation charter of Altacomba Abbey. He felt offended at what he considered lack of courtesy. Who was this Angelo Savio? Marquis Fassati knew him but prudently said nothing. Rather, he called on Don Bosco and complained of Angelo Savio's audacity, saying that it was wrong to treat the sovereign so insolently and that the young cleric should be severely reprimanded. Don Bosco listened patiently to the rather indignant remonstrances of the marquis, his good friend, but he would not agree on the reprimand. "In certain cases we cannot and

[1] A 12th-century Cistercian abbey on the western shore of Lake Bourget in Savoy, France. [Editor]

must not conceal the truth," he said. "I think this young cleric did the right thing. His letter was in no way disrespectful to the august person of the king; rather, it showed his love for the royal family." The marquis left somewhat dissatisfied. He had no idea of what was about to happen, and that the bill whose passage was being discussed was but the tragic beginning of a period of harassment of the Church.

For a time the belief at court was that the behind-the-scenes prompter or writer of that letter was none other than Canon [Louis] Anglesio, rector of the Little House of Divine Providence. The suspicion had arisen because the canon had been telling his friends, doctors, and other prominent people: "When the dust will settle, some stars will no longer be seen, and deceit will bear its bitter fruits." It was not long before suspicions became better founded and ceased to be mere suspicions.

While primarily concerned about upholding the Church's rights, Don Bosco was also anxious to prove his love and gratitude to the House of Savoy for its many kindnesses to the Oratory boys. Both Queen Mother Maria Teresa and Queen Maria Adelaide were very generous with the poor. Maria Teresa, Charles Albert's widow and mother of King Victor Emmanuel II, often sent substantial alms to Don Bosco through Father Robert Murialdo or the count of San Giusto. Once she even donated a thousand lire for prayers to be said on behalf of her august deceased husband. On another occasion, when Don Bosco, in dire need, wrote to her for help, the saintly woman immediately sent him another thousand lire. On several occasions she was the instrument of Divine Providence for the Oratory. Her last donation was given toward the end of 1854, as we gather from the following letter:

Household of Her Majesty, Queen Mother Maria Teresa

Moncalieri, November 19, 1854

Very Reverend and dear Father:

On the occasion of the Holy Jubilee, my august lady, Her Majesty Queen Mother Maria Teresa, wishes to include charitable and educational institutions of this capital among the recipients of her generosity. She has therefore instructed me to place at your disposal the sum of

four hundred lire, of which two hundred are for the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and its hospice, and the rest for the St. Aloysius and the Guardian Angel oratories.

I inform you of this charitable bequest of Her Majesty so that you may arrange to collect the said sum from this office by signing the appropriate receipt. Meanwhile, I offer you my most sincere and devoted regards.

Count of San Giusto, *Procurator General*

As we were saying, Don Bosco was anxious to scatter an ominous cloud that loomed darker and darker over the royal house. Toward the end of November 1854 he had a dream in which he seemed to be standing by the pump near the wall of the Pinardi house—where now the main portico, then only half built, is located. He was surrounded by priests and clerics. Suddenly a red-coated court valet appeared, rushed to Don Bosco, and said aloud,

"News! News!"

"What news?" Don Bosco asked.

"Make this announcement: A state funeral at court!"

Don Bosco was shocked by the sudden apparition and cry. The valet repeated: "A state funeral at court!" Don Bosco wanted more information, but the valet vanished. Don Bosco awoke in distress. Grasping the significance of his dream, he instantly drafted a letter for the king, revealing this dream.

That morning Don Bosco had to go out and returned well past midday. He walked into the dining room quite late for the noon meal, carrying a bundle of letters. Many still recall that it was very cold that day and that Don Bosco wore old, threadbare gloves. As he appeared, Father Victor Alasonatti and many others—for the most part young clerics—crowded around him. Among them were Angelo Savio, [John] Cagliero, [John Baptist] Francesia, John Turchi, [Felix] Reviglio, [Michael] Rua, [John Baptist] Anfossi, [Joseph] Buzzetti, [Peter] Enria, and [Charles] Tomatis. Don Bosco remarked with a smile: "This morning, my dear sons, I wrote to three very important people: the Pope, the king, and the executioner." There was a general burst of laughter on hearing these names lumped together. They were not surprised, however, at the mention of the executioner, for they were aware that Don Bosco was on friendly terms with the prison personnel, and they knew

that the man in question was quite religious. In fact, he helped the poor as best he could and even wrote to the king and authorities on behalf of those who could not write. He was also much distressed by his son's having to leave school because his schoolmates kept shunning him on account of his father's occupation.

As for the Pope, the Oratory boys knew that Don Bosco corresponded with him. What really whetted their curiosity was that Don Bosco had written to the king. They knew well enough how he felt about the usurpation of ecclesiastical property. Don Bosco did not keep them in suspense but clearly told them what he had written in order to persuade the king to oppose that infamous law. He then narrated his dream and concluded: "It deeply upset me and left me exhausted." One could see that he was worried. Now and then he would say: "Who knows? . . . Who knows? . . . Let us pray!"

Dumbfounded, the clerics kept asking each other whether anyone had heard of any important person at the court being ill. Nobody had. In the meantime Don Bosco sent for the cleric Angelo Savio and showed him the draft of the letter to the king. "Copy it," he said, "and send it to the king." Savio did as he was requested. Don Bosco later learned from confidential sources within the royal palace that the king had read the letter.

Five days later, Don Bosco had another dream. He seemed to be writing at his desk when he heard a horse's hoofbeats in the playground. Suddenly the door flew open and again the red-coated valet appeared. He strode into the middle of the room and exclaimed: "Make this announcement: Not *one* state funeral at court, but state *funerals* at court!" He repeated these words twice before withdrawing. Anxious to know more, Don Bosco rushed out to the balcony. The valet was already in the playground, mounting his horse. Don Bosco called out to him, but the valet, once again shouting "State funerals at court!" vanished into the night. At dawn, Don Bosco personally wrote to the king. He informed him of his second dream and begged him to oppose that bill at all costs and save himself from the threatened punishments.

After supper that evening Don Bosco said to the young clerics around him: "I have something to tell you that is even more surprising than what I told you the other day." Then he narrated his second dream. More mystified than ever, they kept wondering what

it might portend. We can well imagine how anxiously they waited to see how these predictions would be fulfilled. On the side, however, Don Bosco unequivocally revealed to the cleric John Cagliero and to a few others that these predictions were genuine threats of punishments which God would inflict on those who were conspiring to cause still greater harm to the Church. He was indeed profoundly grieved and kept remarking: "This law will wreak havoc upon the royal house." These things he said to his boys so that they would pray for their sovereign and mercifully obtain from God that the religious would not be dispersed and so many vocations lost.

Meanwhile the king had handed the letters to Marquis Fassati. After reading them, he returned to Don Bosco to remonstrate. "Do you think this was the proper thing to do? You deeply hurt the king and made him furious."

Don Bosco replied: "What if those predictions come true? I regret having upset the king, but after all, his own good and that of the Church are at stake."

Don Bosco's warnings went unheeded. On November 28, 1854, Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of Justice, submitted a bill for the suppression of religious orders to the Chamber of Deputies. He had the support of Count Camillo Cavour, Minister of Finance, who was determined to push it through at all costs. In their philosophy it was an incontestable principle that there existed no society superior to or independent of civil society; the State was all; therefore, no moral persons—not even the Catholic Church—could claim juridical existence without the consent and recognizance of the State. Now—the two gentlemen argued—the State did not recognize the universal Church as having dominion over the properties of each religious congregation. These congregations could claim juridical existence only insofar as they were recognized by the State. The State could therefore modify or even cancel their juridical existence. In such a case, the properties, without heirs, would fall under the sole, absolute ownership of the State. This was a crass assumption, because should a religious congregation cease to exist for any reason, its heir would be the Church of which it was a member, the Church established by Jesus Christ and represented by the Pope.

The news that such a bill had been submitted deeply grieved all

good Catholics, and Don Bosco above all. Following a Divine inspiration, he had repeatedly warned his king—a perilous move with unpredictable repercussions. Any other person—no matter how cold-blooded or bold—faced with so many adversaries would have been apprehensive ever after, but not Don Bosco. Imperturbable, drawing strength from Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and from His heavenly Mother, he was preparing for the joys of Christmas by making plans for preaching the Word of God to simple country-folk, as we gather from this letter to his former teacher, Father [John Baptist] Appendini, parish administrator at Villastellone.

Turin, December 21, 1854

My dear Father:

I need to know when the novena which I have agreed to preach at Villastellone will start so that I may set a date for a spiritual retreat I must preach elsewhere.

In the meanwhile, a Merry Christmas to you and your sister. God bless you! Respectfully and gratefully,

Your pupil and friend,

Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 18

Predictions Verified

WE have now come to the beginning of 1855. As we continue our study of Don Bosco we shall repeatedly come across marvelous happenings. The learned teacher, Father John Turchi, a discerning witness of much that occurred during the first fifteen years of the Oratory's life and a pupil there himself, has thoughtfully recorded some of these incidents for posterity. He prefaces his account with the following words which echo the testimony of his schoolmates:

When God raises a man to sainthood He does so mainly to manifest His own glory, which shines forth wondrously during the saint's lifetime and far more so after his death, for then posterity reads of his saintly deeds, praises God as the dispenser of all graces, and follows in the footsteps of His faithful servant. People consequently amend their lives, many strive for greater sanctity, and entire nations seek what is truly good. The common duty of promoting God's glory now charges me to record as faithfully as possible the more outstanding episodes in Don Bosco's life, lest so many worthy deeds of my revered superior—whether they are more deserving of admiration or of imitation, I do not know—be consigned to oblivion.

Thoroughly concurring with this judgment, we now resume the thread of our story.

The bill which provided for the confiscation of monasteries and convents had not yet been formally debated in the Chamber of Deputies, but reference had been made to it in two sessions—on December 27 [1854], and again on January 2 [1855]. The archbishop of Genoa and the bishops of Annecy and Morienne, prior to their departure for Rome, had been urged by the Piedmontese government to consult with the Holy See for ways and means to

cede church property to the State. This was merely a sham, since the government had already decided to trample the rights of the Church. The Holy Father showed himself willing to help the hard-pressed Piedmontese treasury, and he offered some very reasonable suggestions, but the government's only reaction was to send to Rome a draft of the bill. In effect this ended all negotiations for the lifetime of that cabinet. Meanwhile, petitions reached parliament from all over Piedmont opposing the bill. Two of them, respectful but forceful, bore the signature of all the bishops of the realm.

Catholics in the government steeled themselves for a fight. Frequently, of an evening, some of the most important political figures of Turin would call on Father [Joseph] Cafasso at the Convitto Ecclesiastico while the students were at supper. They came to strengthen their convictions, bolster their courage, and find enlightened guidance to resist enticements and evade pitfalls. Father Cafasso—ever striking the right balance—knew how to give clear-cut answers as to the proper course of action; he urged singleness of purpose, respect and obedience to the Holy Father, and firmness in carrying out one's Christian duties. All these people were friends of Don Bosco. Among them was Marquis [Dominic] Fassati, who was well aware of what Don Bosco was doing in this regard, doubtlessly in full agreement with Father Cafasso. There was also Count Clement Solaro della Margarita, a weekly visitor who drew from Father Cafasso the strength he so forcefully displayed in championing the Church's rights in the Piedmontese Chamber.

The bill came up for debate in the Chamber of Deputies on January 9, 1855. Liberals voiced such opinions as: "The State has the right to take over church property when it no longer serves its original purpose. The Church has no qualification to ownership. The possessions of the Church belong to the poor; when a nation is poor, it is only right that it should draw upon the wealth of the Church. Religious orders have juridical rights only if the State grants them." Count Clement Solaro della Margarita refuted these ridiculous assertions with unparalleled eloquence and courage, boldly qualifying Rattazzi's bill as "sacrilegious robbery." He ended his rousing speech by foreboding calamities for Piedmont should such a law be passed. Other deputies, as well as the two Catholic papers

—*L'Armonia* of Turin and *Il Cattolico* of Genoa—bravely opposed the bill.

Such was the state of affairs when a sorrowful event caused a postponement of the debate. On January 5 [1855], Queen Mother Maria Teresa suddenly fell ill. Throughout the following night she was painfully thirsty, but she steadfastly refused relief so as to be able to receive Holy Communion in the morning, the feast of the Epiphany. From that moment on she was bedridden. At this time King Victor Emmanuel II wrote to General Alfonso La Marmora: "My mother and wife keep telling me that they are dying of distress on my account." [1]

The queen mother died at the age of fifty-four during the early afternoon of January 12. In mourning the Chamber adjourned. Queen Mother Maria Teresa's death was a real loss for Piedmont, a loss felt particularly by the poor, to whom she was very generous. They mourned her, praised her, and blessed her memory.

As she was being laid to rest, a mysterious letter was handed to the king, stating: "A person enlightened from on high warns: 'Beware! There has already been one death. If the law is passed, other misfortunes will befall your family. And this is just the beginning. *Erunt mala super mala in domo tua.* Evils upon evils will fall upon your house. If you do not turn back you will be opening a bottomless abyss.' "

The king was dumbfounded. His peace of mind was overcome by a sense of terror. Enrico Tavallini hints at this in his book when he writes that the king was "threatened with divine punishment by numerous letters from prelates." [2]

Queen Maria Teresa's solemn funeral took place on the morning of January 16. She was interred at Superga.[3] The extreme cold caused many soldiers and the count of San Giusto, the queen's equerry, to become ill. Hardly had the court returned from paying its last respects to the king's mother when it was again hastily

[1] Enrico Tavallini, *La Vita e i Tempi di Giovanni Lanza,* Vol. I, p. 150.

[2] Enrico Tavallini, *op. cit.,* p. 150.

[3] The Superga hill, three miles east of Turin, has an elevation of over two thousand feet and is crowned by a basilica dedicated to the nativity of the Virgin Mary. It was built by Juvara in fulfillment of a vow by Victor Amadeus II on the occasion of the victorious battle of Turin, September 17, 1706. (*See* Vol. II, pp. 299f.) Kings and princes of the House of Savoy are buried in its crypt. [Editor]

summoned to the bedside of the king's wife. Four days prior to the queen mother's death, Queen Maria Adelaide had happily given birth to a son, but soon complications set in endangering her life. Her sorrow at the loss of one very dear to her further aggravated her condition and made it critical. At about 3 in the afternoon of January 16, Holy Viaticum was brought to her from the royal chapel of the Holy Shroud, while people flocked to church to pray for her recovery. All the realm shared the grief of the royal family, once more proving true an old Piedmontese maxim that the king's sorrows are his people's sorrows. On the morning of January 20 the queen received the Anointing of the Sick, toward noon she was in the throes of death, and at 6 in the evening she breathed her last at the age of thirty-three.

But tragedies were not yet over for the house of Savoy. That same evening, Holy Viaticum was also brought to the king's only brother, Duke Ferdinand of Genoa, whose health had recently been failing. Victor Emmanuel was crushed with sorrow.

On January 21, the day after the queen's death, the Chamber of Deputies met at three in the afternoon to declare a two-week period of mourning and an adjournment of ten days.

The funeral of Queen Maria Adelaide took place on January 24; she, too, was laid to rest at Superga.

The clerics at the Oratory were terrified to see Don Bosco's prophecies so quickly fulfilled, and all the more so since they had attended both funerals. As an interesting sidelight, at the second funeral, also, the cold was so intense that the court master of ceremonies had to let the clergy wear topcoats and hats during the outdoor funeral procession.

For the Oratory, too, these two deaths were a great loss. The clerics kept telling Don Bosco: "Yes, your dream was more than a dream. The court valet was right about state *funerals* at court."

"Quite true," Don Bosco replied. "The ways of God are really inscrutable. What's worse, we do not even know whether these two funerals will suffice to appease Divine justice."

Judging from a written statement of Countess Felicity Cravosio-Anfossi, Don Bosco must have known a great deal more than he indicated:

In 1854 I asked Don Bosco to take an orphaned foster brother of my son into the Oratory. He agreed on condition that, since I had access to the court, I would ask the two queens for two thousand lire with which to pay an urgent debt. I promised to do so and meant to keep my promise, but complications made me postpone my visit to their majesties. In the meantime they had gone to the villa of Count [Charles] Cays at Caselette, and I, too, went to the country for a rest and did not return until late autumn. When I called on Don Bosco, he at once said: "I took in your protégé, but you did not keep your promise. You did not speak to the queens about my bread bill."

"True," I replied, rather embarrassed, "but rest assured that as soon as they come back to Turin, I shall do so."

While I was speaking, Don Bosco kept shaking his head. Then he remarked with a rather sad smile: "Too bad! Many things can happen. You may not have another chance to speak to their majesties!"

"Why do you say that?" I asked.

"That's the way it is," he replied. "You'll never see the two queens again."

Fifteen days later, while visiting a noble family, I heard that both queens had returned to Turin, and that the queen mother was very ill and had received the Last Sacraments. Shortly afterward we had news of her death. The young Queen Maria Adelaide died eight days later. Both were deeply mourned and revered in saintly memory. Only then did I recall Don Bosco's words and realize that he was endowed with a truly prophetic spirit.

Another important thing happened in Turin at this time—the arrival of the full text of Pius IX's allocution of January 22. With customary frankness, the Pope, after disclosing all he had done to mitigate the hardships of the Church in Piedmont, went on to expose the numerous hostile decrees of the government and to prove that the proposed law of confiscation of religious property was contrary to human and Divine rights and would only pave the way to the evils of socialism and communism. He also specifically warned that the sponsors of the law and all who usurped the Church's rights would be excommunicated.

Everyone was anxious to know what Pius IX had said. At first the government affected indifference; Rattazzi even had copies of the allocution distributed to the deputies. Secretly, however, orders

were sent to mayors and higher provincial authorities to take legal steps against any pastor who dared disclose or even mention the papal allocution to the people.

Nevertheless, ever kind and compassionate, on January 26 Pius IX wrote a very warm letter to the king, expressing his sympathy for the two deaths in the royal family and offering his paternal advice as to a son.

It is remarkable that while all these things were happening, Don Bosco's brave outspokenness did not lessen the benevolence of the civil authorities toward him. But we should not be surprised if we reflect that, apart from the fact that God watched over him—and that is very important—even his enemies were well aware that they could not resist the goodness of his heart. Don Bosco knew this and utilized it throughout his life. No matter how straitened the Oratory finances were, he never refused to help someone in need. Whenever disaster struck—be it fire, a collapsed building, an epidemic, a landslide, or an avalanche—he immediately sent word to the civil authorities that he was ready to accept orphaned boys. His prompt and generous offer of help was always gratefully received and loudly acclaimed. In 1855 and 1856 particularly, the straitened circumstances of many families multiplied requests for admittance to the Oratory. For lack of room, the answer in most cases regretfully had to be negative, but sometimes the spiritual and material abandonment of the applicants was so urgent that Don Bosco could not find it in his heart to refuse. Municipal authorities and government officials also very frequently recommended boys to him—children of civil employees or of soldiers, orphans, underprivileged youths or boys in trouble, not bad enough for a reformatory yet in need of close supervision.[4]

Naturally, as the number of boys increased, so did expenses, especially bread bills. This burden weighed heavily on Don Bosco, but nevertheless, if any of his co-workers suggested taking in less boys, he would calmly reply with a smile: "The Blessed Virgin has always helped me and will always do so!" However, unless the boys were really destitute, he never accepted them entirely gratis, but insisted that some fee be paid by those who could do so, no matter who had recommended them. He used to say: "I am not the owner

[4] One such letter of recommendation has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

but only the administrator of the treasures entrusted to me by Divine Providence; it is not right that the bread of the poor should feed those who are not poor!"

By taking in boys recommended by the authorities, he also profited by their good will. For instance, Alfonso La Marmora, Minister of Defense, became well disposed toward the Oratory. We already know that Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of the Interior, and [Louis] Cibrario, the Minister of Education, thought very highly of Don Bosco. Another official who soon became a great friend of his was Senator Bartholomew Bona, Superintendent of Public Works. Therefore, it is not surprising that Don Bosco was warmly welcomed in their offices not only by the ministers but by their subordinates as well.

These visits proved to have moral fringe benefits as well. Don Bosco believed that the more men came together and got to know each other, the easier it was to dissipate suspicions, antagonisms, and misconceptions; thus a way could be found to overcome difficulties that precluded solutions to problems. Those who met Don Bosco could not fail to be struck by his genuine optimism, humility, and sincerity. They soon became convinced that he nursed no grudge against anyone, regardless of political affiliation. For this reason no one ever took offense when he—uncompromisingly but without acrimony—took a stand opposed to theirs.

Several officials used to come to Valdocco personally to inquire about boys they had recommended and to watch him in the midst of his youngsters, a sight quite different from the usual one seen at other institutions. The Oratory was a living proof that genuine cheerfulness and joy can be found only in purity of life, peace, and tranquility of conscience. Discipline was no problem because duties were carried out with love; study and work were enjoyable because they were prompted by a sense of duty and honor. These considerations, spontaneously presenting themselves to the visitors, swept away the last remnants of prejudice they might have had against Don Bosco and turned them into fond admirers. The king, too, did not doubt Don Bosco's genuine intentions. When those tragic days of distress were over, he again gave generously to the Oratory and subsidized boys recommended by palace officials.

In February Don Bosco began getting ready for preaching assign-

ments outside of Turin despite his anxiety over the debate in the Chamber of Deputies and the straitened finances of the Oratory. These became more pressing whenever he was away because donors wanted to give their contributions to him personally. The other alternative was for him hopefully to go out after the money himself. Don Bosco's zeal, however, was not affected by such considerations, as we can see from this letter to Father [John Baptist] Appendini of Villastellone:

Turin, February 6, 1855

My dear Father:

The novena is about to start and I am getting ready to keep my promise. But I would like to make a suggestion, if I may. Could you, perhaps—or someone else—give the first sermon on Saturday? Would I arrive in time if I left on the 2:30 P.M. train? An affirmative answer in both cases would solve some problems of mine here at the Oratory.

Please let me know. I will set my schedule accordingly.

Love me in the Lord.

Your most grateful pupil,

Fr. John Bosco

Thus he left for Villastellone. Whenever he had to be away from the Oratory, he was careful not to let the boys know it. They could never tell if he was in or out until the next morning when those who wanted to go to confession, not finding him at his usual post, realized that he was out. As a rule, he did not inform even the other superiors, except the prefect, his vicar, nor did he say when he would return.

From the moment he left the Oratory until he returned, he kept exercising his priestly ministry, not only in the pulpit, but in the streets and wherever he stayed. He never missed a chance to give spiritual advice even to chance acquaintances. Priests or young clerics who happened to go with him were amazed to see how much people liked him. Sometimes people who had casually met Don Bosco on a trip would call on him at the Oratory for confession as they had promised to do. One such person was a coachman. On his trip Don Bosco had sat beside him. As he drove, Don Bosco was very pained to hear him blaspheme. Unable to stand it, he courte-

ously begged the man to cease. The coachman tried to excuse himself, saying it was a habit and he just could not help it. Don Bosco replied: "If you can control yourself until the next stop, I'll give you a bottle of wine."

That did it. Don Bosco kept his word and then remarked: "If you can control yourself for such a small reward, why don't you give up the habit altogether by thinking of the far greater reward that awaits you? And don't forget that you can fall into hell at any moment!"

CHAPTER 19

A Zealous Catechist

DON Bosco returned from Villastellone just as parliament resumed debate on the bill calling for the confiscation of monasteries and convents. Once again, however, a grave event forced adjournment.

On January 10, 1855 Premier [Camillo] Cavour had signed a treaty of alliance with France and England against Russia. He hoped thus to win territory for Piedmont, and he anticipated that the Piedmontese parliament would ratify the agreement. According to the terms of the treaty, Piedmont was to equip and send 15,000 men to the Crimea and maintain its forces at this level. Parliamentary debate began on February 3 and ratification followed on February 10. The matter had been hastily brought to a vote so as not to delay Rattazzi's bill any further. A few hours later, however, during the night of February 10–11, Prince Ferdinand of Savoy, duke of Genoa and the king's brother, died at the age of 33. Debate on the ill-fated bill had to be postponed once more. The prince's funeral, attended by the Oratory clerics, took place on February 14; he, too, was laid to rest at Superga beside his ancestors.

These successive deaths should have convinced the king that the mysterious letters he had received were an indication of God's will. As a matter of fact, he was beginning to realize it. Never—even in the worst epidemic—had the royal family suffered the death of three members so closely related to the reigning monarch in less than a month. Catholics were not alone in interpreting these misfortunes as a heaven-sent warning to Victor Emmanuel not to proceed on the course which he had set.

Yet, despite this, with deplorable obstinacy, debate on the Rattazzi bill was resumed in the Chamber and kept up for seventeen sessions. The most blatant reason advanced for passing the bill was:

"The Pope has condemned it!" Did the solemn requiem Masses at the cathedral for the two queens on February 23 and March 3 make people wonder about Don Bosco's predictions? Perhaps! Nevertheless, on March 2 the Rattazzi bill was approved by the Chamber of Deputies by 117 votes to 36. It was then submitted to the Senate, which had received 97,700 petitions opposing it versus only 36,000 in favor.

While people worried over the war and this anticlerical legislation, the Oratory was blessed by God and by men. We shall here quote from Father John Bonetti's *History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales* some charming pages on this year of 1855:

In past years many priests and laymen had befriended the Oratory, and now their numbers increased along with their interest. Its deeds of charity, the boys' assistance during the cholera epidemic, and especially the public tribute of Turin's municipal authorities publicized Don Bosco's Oratory, its nature, and its charitable purpose. On the other hand, the extraordinary—one might almost say miraculous—way in which every one of the boys had come through the cholera epidemic unscathed showed that God protected and sanctioned Don Bosco's work. Hence, former benefactors continued and increased their help, while many others followed their example.

Here we should mention several most deserving persons who were the instruments of Divine Providence for Don Bosco, but we shall do so at a more opportune time. For the present, we shall speak only of Marquis Dominic Fassati. For many years, on feast days and daily during Lent, he would come to the Oratory to teach catechism to a large class of poor artisans, even putting off meals to a less convenient hour on this account. Once, on arriving somewhat late and finding another catechist in his place, the noble but humble man exclaimed: "It's my fault; I should do penance." Then he sat on a bench with the boys and listened until the end of the class.

Zealously he thought up ways and means to get the boys' attention and arouse their desire to learn about their Faith. A man of order, like a good soldier he arranged his pupils so that all were seated in his line of vision; unexpectedly he would fire questions from one to another, so that no one knew who would be asked next and all paid attention. In his roll book he recorded attendance and conduct. Periodically he rewarded the most diligent students with holy pictures, medals, book-

lets, and the like. Although he had a serious, military mien, the boys so liked him that they hardly ever missed his class; on seeing him come, they greeted him with signs of pleasure. In a word, Marquis Fassati kept such perfect discipline and had such complete mastery over his students that he might well serve as a model teacher. Anxious to learn more about the art of teaching young children, he was not above attending the conferences Don Bosco gave now and then to his catechists. He used to say that no conversation, no meeting, no social gathering, however brilliant, was as rewarding as his half-hour catechism class with the Oratory boys. He was a truly edifying example worthy of imitation in these days!

In other memorable ways, too, the marquis showed his kindness. For example, on the last day of carnival in 1855, when the boys made the Exercise for a Happy Death in suffrage for the souls in purgatory, Marquis Fassati remarked: "On this last day of carnival Don Bosco's boys help the souls in purgatory by offering their confessions, Holy Communions, and prayers. I must do something for them in return." And he did. It was February 20. More than one hundred boarders and many day boys heard Mass that morning, went to the sacraments, and joined in the prayers for a happy death led by Father Alasonatti in suffrage for the holy souls. For them the boys also offered the discomfort of the exceptionally intense cold which numbed their limbs. On leaving the church they found an unexpected reward—a generous breakfast. The holy souls of purgatory seemed to be rewarding them through the marquis for the relief afforded them through their spiritual exercises.

But the dinner they got that day exceeded expectations. The generous nobleman wanted the boys to have meat ravioli besides other dishes. Twelve hundred ravioli were needed, and Mamma Margaret had enlisted the help of several boys and set to work the day before. "But ravioli need something to wash them down," the kindly gentleman remarked. So he sent a good supply of excellent wine,[1] a product of his own Monferrato vineyards. He gladly joined them at dinner, saying: "I want to see how the boys like my wine!" He heard and saw and was not disappointed. Five minutes after the first glass, the boys became very talkative. Their chatter was like the chirping of so many birds, broken now and then by cheers hailing the marquis. A true and innocent carnival spirit reigned. When the time came for a second glass, Don Bosco, seeing that the boys' spirits were high, asked the marquis

[1] The reader should keep in mind that wine was and is the family beverage in Italy and many other countries. [Editor]

to let him baptize the wine a little lest the youngsters become too exuberant. They may have been overjoyed that day, but the marquis' happiness was even greater. The deep faith that always inspired him assured him that he had made those poor boys happy, and that they would pray that God in His mercy would admit him into everlasting happiness. This thought gave him unspeakable consolation. We do not doubt that his charity was rewarded by that patience, resignation, and fortitude of spirit which he constantly showed in the many afflictions that purified his soul and prepared him for heaven. God, too, in His goodness gave him the saintly death He grants His beloved.

And now, using this opportunity, we would like to make a few remarks for the guidance of directors and promoters of festive oratories. If they want boys to attend, wholesome attractions are indispensable. Without them, most boys—free to do as they please, either because they are orphans or because their parents take no care of them—will not have any interest in church and religious instruction. Boyish unruliness and high spirits incite them to instinctively shirk the least restraint or supervision; they must be caught like flies with honey. Games and all kinds of amusement as well as tactful kindness are necessary for an oratory to run properly. There must be plays, lotteries, gifts, outings, treats, and the like. Such enticements keep the oratories full of boys at all times. Without them streets and squares on Sundays will unfortunately be crowded with boys who are ignorant of their Faith but wise in the ways of evil. A whole generation can grow up with no respect for God, religion, or law; civil society can revert to paganism and barbarism, as we now see in many towns of Italy and France. Let Catholics make some sacrifices in proportion to their means in these difficult times; let them give up even legitimate pleasures to secure a Christian education for the young and thus win them back to God, their country, and heaven. If we delay any longer, it will be too late. Ignorance, wild habits, and bad companions will lead many inexperienced youths into the ranks of evil societies, make them disciples of boastful votaries of Satan, and marshal them under his evil banner.

Let the rich beware lest sooner or later God should use these unfortunate youths as a scourge to punish the well-to-do because through their indifference these lads have embraced a life of crime. We must all strive as best we can through charity and good works to obtain God's mercy on the day, perhaps not too distant, when He shall manifest His just wrath.

CHAPTER 20

A Young Apostle

MEANWHILE, *Letture Cattoliche* vigorously entered its third year, Don Bosco being mainly responsible for editing and printing, and appointees of the bishop of Ivrea handling the circulation.[1] Both March issues, printed by Paravia Press, formed a new edition of a question-and-answer booklet by Don Bosco in thirty-one chapters, *Easy Method for Learning Bible History*. The Appendix contained a map of the Holy Land, a comparative list of geographical names, and the chronology of the patriarchs, judges, kings, and high priests of the Jewish people.

In reference to Christ's teachings, Don Bosco laid particular stress on what He said about honors, wealth, earthly pleasures, chastity, temperance, envy, anger, and sloth. Don Bosco ended the work with this exhortation:

> Let us pray for those outside the Catholic Church and beg God to give them the grace to overcome all human considerations to join her—thus fulfilling Christ's earnest desire that there be but one fold and one shepherd—and to grant to all an eternal heavenly reward.

The last page contained several scriptural maxims, the first one being: "For those who love God, all things work together unto good." [Rom. 3, 28] We shall see this verified in Don Bosco's life, especially in the most ardent of his aspirations—the salvation of souls. It is evidenced by the following article from the March 7, 1855 issue of *L'Armonia* entitled "Conversions to the Catholic Faith at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales":

> Nothing consoles Catholics more than the daily increase in the number of the children of light. We have already mentioned repeatedly

[1] A footnote reporting a routine business letter has been omitted. [Editor]

how several fallen-away Catholics, by attending the festive oratories of this city, came to realize their sad plight and returned to the Catholic Faith. Then three months ago, a Jewish lad frequenting the Festive Oratory of St. Francis de Sales became a Christian. A month and a half ago we carried a story of a boy named Michael Trombotti. Lured by gifts and promises, he had joined the Waldensians, but after attending the said Oratory for some time, overcome by Divine grace, he again became a good, fervent Catholic. Finally, two Sundays ago we were delighted to meet at this same Oratory two boys who used to attend the Waldensian school because of its attractions. Now they once more wholeheartedly practice their Faith.

Last Sunday, March 4, we witnessed the baptism of a Waldensian boy named Avandetto who was born in Torre di Luserna.[2] His parents deliberately neglected his moral and religious education and left it to him to choose his own religion when he grew up. During the cholera epidemic both parents died. Alone at fifteen, with no moral upbringing, he could have fallen prey to serious dangers. But Divine Providence, watching over the fate of mankind, brought him to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales where he found shelter, food and clothing, and a Christian education. When asked to choose a religion, he replied: "I want the one that will save me." After four months' instruction he was baptized a Catholic by Bishop John Peter Losana, who performed the solemn rite last Sunday afternoon, March 4, at 3:30 at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

We find it difficult to say what surprised us most: the happiness that filled the heart of the neophyte or the joy that shone on the faces of the many boys surrounding him. Chevalier Mark Gonella and his wife, Angela Gonella, née Piacenza—following their family tradition of never bypassing a charitable or pious deed—were his godparents.

After the ceremony, the bishop gave a short homily and expressed his delight at seeing so many children of darkness turning away from error during these days and entering the fold of the Catholic Church. Then he movingly deplored the folly of those who, by foolishly allowing themselves to be led astray by novelty, embrace a religion which has no belief in authority or the sacraments and is therefore at the mercy of its adherents.

"My dear children," he said, "believe me: the Protestant faith has no creed because every Protestant is free to believe whatever he wishes and as he wishes. No two Protestant countries, families, or even members of the same family profess the same doctrine. Is it possible that

[2] Now called Torre Pellice, not far from Turin. [Editor]

there could be Catholics so foolish as to exchange their holy Faith for a religious phantom which, all in all, offers nothing more than whims, inanities, and confusion?"

The bishop concluded by admonishing the neophyte to continue his religious instruction and to courageously persevere in the Faith until his death. He then exhorted all present to practice their Faith and to demonstrate in word and deed that the Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, outside of which no one can be saved, is most holy and Divine. He then imparted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, as the Oratory choir sang liturgical hymns.

The Catholic Church thus has another member. We can only hope that he will so live as to deserve to be among the elect in heaven one day.

The prayers and frequent Communions at the Oratory played an important part in paving the way for these triumphs of grace. Mamma Margaret was overjoyed whenever she spotted a truly devout boy. One day she remarked to Don Bosco: "You have many good boys, but none has a more beautiful soul than Dominic Savio."

"What makes you say that?" Don Bosco asked her.

"Well," she replied, "I always see him at prayer, even after the services are over. He often assembles a group of boys around Our Lady's altar and leads them in the rosary. Every day he breaks off his games to visit the Blessed Sacrament. Frequently he even forgets his meals and stays in front of the altar in prayer as though in a trance. In church he looks like an angel."

Dominic Savio did pray a good deal, especially for the conversion of Protestants. He was often heard to exclaim: "So many souls need our help in England! If I were only strong enough and good enough, I'd go there now and do my utmost by word and example to lead them to God." This was no mere wishful thinking, as the following story, related by Don Bosco himself, reveals:

One day Savio came into my room saying, "Quick, come with me. There is some good you must do."

"Where?" I asked.

"Hurry," was all he would say, "hurry!" I held back, but on his insistence—and I knew from past experience that similar requests of his were fully justified—I followed. Quite hurriedly Savio led me down several streets without stopping for a word. Finally he turned into

Via delle Orfane and, entering a doorway, took me to a third-floor apartment where he clanged the bell briskly. "They need you here," he said, and left.

A woman opened the door. "Come quickly," she greeted me, "or it will be too late. My husband unfortunately became a Protestant. Now he is dying and wants to return to the Church." I hastened to his bedside. He was truly anxious to put his conscience in order. We did so very quickly and none too soon. The pastor of St. Augustine's, who had already been sent for, arrived barely in time to give him the Last Rites with a single emergency anointing.

Some time later I asked Savio how he had known about the dying man; he looked at me tearfully and started to cry. I did not press the point, mindful of Holy Scripture's admonition: "It is good to keep the secret of a king" [Tob. 12, 7], and of the fact that saintly souls find it more painful to reveal God's graces than to confess their own sins.

Amid these manifestations of God's mercy, all three festive oratories began their Lenten catechism classes. One Sunday in Lent, Don Bosco spoke on becoming a saint, stressing three points which made a deep impression on Savio's receptive soul: it is God's will that we become saints; it is quite easy to do so; there is a great reward in heaven for one who becomes a saint. Dominic later told Don Bosco: "I feel a deep yearning, an earnest need, to become a saint. I never knew it could be so easy, but now that I see one can be happy and holy too, I definitely want to become a saint."

Don Bosco praised his resolve and showed him that the first thing God wanted of him was a constant, moderate cheerfulness. He advised him to carry out his scholastic and religious duties diligently and always to join in the games of his companions at recreation. At the same time he forbade austere penances or long prayers as unsuitable to a boy of his age.

Savio obeyed, but one day Don Bosco saw him very dejected. "I really don't know what to do!" the boy complained. "The Lord says that unless I do penance I can't get to heaven, and you won't let me do any. What are my chances for heaven?"

"The penance Our Lord asks of you is obedience," Don Bosco replied. "Just obey, and you will be doing enough."

"But won't you please let me do some other penance?"

"Yes, I will let you do the penance of daily bearing with insults

and patiently suffering heat, cold, wind, rain, tiredness, and all the discomforts which God may send you."

"But I have to suffer these things anyway."

"If you offer it all to God, it will become virtue and bring you merit."

"Is there anything else I can do?"

"Yes! Strive to win souls for God."

"Thank you, Father!"

From that moment Dominic became so anxious for the salvation of souls that he resembled a true, if young, apostle. To find out how he could best help his neighbor, he avidly read the lives of those saints who had particularly distinguished themselves in this regard such as St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, St. Francis de Sales, and others. He loved to talk about missionaries; he prayed for them and envied their lot. He often exclaimed: "How many souls are lost because there is no one to preach the Word of God to them! How many boys will perhaps never go to heaven because there is no one to instruct them in the Faith!"

Not content with wishful thinking, he decided on action. To the extent allowed by his age and education, he eagerly offered to teach catechism to smaller boys in the church at the Oratory. If anyone ever needed extra instruction, he was always glad to teach him any day at any time. If what was asked of him had anything to do with saving souls, it immediately became a pleasure for him. He was amazingly resourceful in achieving his goal at playtime. Candy, fruit, and religious articles were saved for this purpose. "Who wants this?" he would call out. "I do! I do!" many would shout and dash over to him. "Fine! I'll give it to the one who answers this catechism question best." The saintly youth would ask only the more mischievous boys, and hardly had one of them answered with some degree of satisfaction than he would give him the small gift. Thus, in a very short while he won over the difficult ones, and he spent most of his free time with them.

But these were not his only friends; he also sought another type of boy. Among the boarders and day boys there were some who—because they were clumsy, ignorant, or ill-bred—were shunned by the others. Dominic would eagerly seek them out as if they were the most likable. With almost supernatural perception, he over-

looked their outward appearance or his own tastes for the sake of their souls. He would associate with them, cheer them up, get them to talk, and help them to overcome their shyness and feel at home.

We would particularly like to mention his ingenuity in achieving a certain goal. Whenever he noticed that any boy had not been to confession for some time, he would find a way to go up to him and join him in a game for a while; then suddenly he would look up and say:

"Do me a favor?"

"Sure! What is it?"

"Will you come to confession with me this Sunday?"

Usually the boy agreed just to please him. Dominic was satisfied with that for the moment, and he would then get on with the conversation or the game. The next day he would try the same approach on another boy. On Saturday evening or Sunday morning he could be seen kneeling by the confessional with, at times, seven or eight boys notoriously disinterested in spiritual matters. This happened often, to the great benefit of the boys and the great delight of Don Bosco, who used to say that Dominic Savio caught more fish with his methods than preachers with their sermons.

However, there were other young apostles besides Savio. Outstanding among them was John Massaglia who came from a village close to Savio's and had arrived at the Oratory at the same time as Dominic. He, too, wanted to become a priest, and he was firmly resolved to become a saint. "It's not enough for us to say that we want to be priests," Dominic told him one day. "We must strive to acquire the necessary virtues."

"Right!" agreed his friend. "But if we do all we can, God will surely give us the grace and strength we need."

In all this Don Bosco saw the motherly protection of the Blessed Virgin; in turn he did his best to meet Her expectations. This is the secret reason that made him take a first step toward what was to be his greatest achievement—the founding of his long-desired Salesian Congregation. Thus, after explaining at length in conferences to several of his most trusted young clerics the three religious vows, he one day encouraged the cleric [Michael] Rua—then in his second year of philosophy—to make these vows for a year. But he did not disclose his grand plan. Rua agreed, thinking that these

vows only meant that he was to live with Don Bosco and help him with his work at the Oratory. The simple ceremony took place on the evening of [March 25, 1855], the feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin. Michael Rua, kneeling in Don Bosco's room in plain clerical attire, and with him as the only witness, pronounced his vows for a year. Shortly afterward, Father [Victor] Alasonatti, who surely knew more about Don Bosco's plans, did the same.

During those days—March 25, 26, 27, and 28—very solemn ceremonies commemorating the new dogma of the Immaculate Conception were being held in the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation in Turin, and the whole city was illumined. Among the important guests were the archbishop of Chambéry and the bishops of Mondovì and Casale. The joy of these sacred festivities was greatly enhanced by the news that something extraordinary had happened in Taggia,[3] where the proclamation of this dogma was also being commemorated. In the parish church of that city there was a much venerated, three-foot-high statue of the Blessed Virgin made of very hard material. Our Lady wore a rose dress and a blue mantle. In her hand She held a heart. On March 11 [1855] Her eyes—very lifelike and set slightly to the right—were seen to gaze at a girl kneeling before the altar. Then they moved to the side and up and down several times—now slowly, now swiftly. Occasionally the Virgin's glance—at times loving, at times majestic—would rest on those kneeling before the altar. Occasionally Her features lost their usual sweetness and assumed a look of affliction, while Her rosy cheeks would fade into extreme pallor for some two minutes. Her features kept changing very frequently, but mostly they seemed to portray deep thought.

Besides the swollen eyes and quivering eyelids one could notice that the Virgin's gaze became so animated that the cornea, softer and more luminous than usual, took on the watery appearance of the human eye. Her forehead and neck seemed to perspire, and the muscular contractions of the cheeks were even more noticeable than the movements of the eyes.

Children and a number of pious women were the first to see this. Soon the entire city flocked to the church, deeply moved by the sight. There was no denying the fact, which was repeated almost

[3] A town in the Italian Riviera, not far from Monaco. [Editor]

daily until March 25, and then occurred again at intervals during April, May, and June. A rigorous ecclesiastical investigation and the sworn testimonies of a hundred and twenty witnesses led to the declaration that these happenings could only be attributed to a heavenly intervention. Don Bosco sent for a copy of the official report—still in our possession—and spoke of it to the boys, hailing Mary's goodness and Her help during the present troubled times. Father [Anthony] Belasio, a witness, on his return from Taggia, enthusiastically confirmed what Don Bosco had already narrated.

Thus, with hearts and minds set on the Blessed Virgin, the Oratory boys prepared for Easter—which fell on April 8—by taking part in the Holy Week services, which from this year on were held with some regularity. The yearly spiritual retreat was also held at this time, and Don Bosco mentioned it in a written memorandum about Dominic Savio and a schoolmate of his named Garigliano. As Easter approached, they diligently and edifyingly took part in the yearly spiritual retreat. At its close Dominic said to his companion: "I want us to be true friends in everything concerning our souls. From now on we should counsel each other in whatever may help us spiritually. If you notice some fault of mine, please tell me at once so that I may correct it. If you can suggest a good deed for me to do, tell me too."

"Gladly!" Garigliano replied, "although you don't really need this kind of help. But promise that you will positively do it for me. I need it much more than you do."

Dominic settled the problem. "No more compliments! Let's just help each other spiritually."

And so they did!

CHAPTER 21

An Historic Outing

DURING these years [1854 and 1855] Don Bosco continued his priestly ministry in the city jails. However, there was one place in which he was particularly interested—a boys' reformatory called "La Generala," a State institution on the south side of Turin which had been opened in March 1845 to house three hundred juveniles. The reformatory had originally been conducted by the Brothers of St. Peter-in-Chains, an Order founded by Canon Fissiaux in 1839 and approved by Bishop [Charles] de Mazenod of Marseilles, but as times changed, these religious were replaced by secular authorities.

The boys of "La Generala" mostly came from families of dubious moral background. Some lads had become public wards after one or both of their parents had been sentenced to jail; many were orphans who had gotten into trouble with the police. On reaching the age of twenty the boys were generally drafted into the army, while those who had not yet completed their sentences were transferred to adult prisons. During the day they worked in the fields or at some craft under the watchful eye of a guard; at night they were locked up in separate cells.

As long as the authorities showed respect for religion and allowed it to exert its beneficial influence, discipline was easily maintained, the whole atmosphere gradually improved, and the youths turned to a new life. Instead, when it was banned, vandalism, quarrels, brawls, stabbings, and immoral behavior became almost routine. At times fixed bayonets provided the only effective means of maintaining discipline. As long as the friendly attitude of the authorities and his own work schedule permitted it, Don Bosco managed to visit these unfortunate boys every now and then. He taught cate-

chism, preached, heard confessions, and chatted with them as freely as he did with the Oratory boys. It need hardly be said that these juveniles soon began to regard Don Bosco as a father, and they responded to his kindness with love and respect. For his sake they strove to improve their conduct.

One truly extraordinary event demonstrated the true effectiveness of the preventive system of education[1] on even the most recalcitrant and rebellious youths. Several authors—including Father Louis Mendre,[2] Dr. Charles d'Espiney,[3] and Count Carlo Conestabile[4]—have previously written accounts of the incident we are now about to relate. Shortly after Easter in 1855 Don Bosco conducted a very successful spiritual retreat at "La Generala." His gentle, understanding manner won over even the most difficult youngsters. As a result, all but one of them received the sacraments. In his conversations with them and in hearing their confessions, he realized the sincerity of their conversion and the depth of their love and gratitude. Deeply moved by their change of heart, he decided to plead for an easing of their strict confinement. Figuring that the boys would appreciate more than anything else an outing in the countryside, he went to the superintendent of the city prisons.

"I'd like to make a request," he began. "Is there any likelihood that it will be granted?"

"You've done a lot to improve the character of our boys, Father, and we shall do our best to oblige."

"Well, then, this is what I have in mind. For some time now, the boys at 'La Generala' have behaved exceptionally well. Why not let me take them on an all-day picnic to Stupinigi?[5] The outing would do them a lot of good, both physically and spiritually."

The superintendent fairly leaped from his chair. "Are you joking, Father?" he gasped.

"Not at all!" Don Bosco replied. "I sincerely beg you to consider my request."

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 379–98. [Editor]

[2] *Don Bosco prêtre, fondateur de la Congrégation des Salésiens,* Marseilles, 1879. [Editor]

[3] *Dom Bosco,* Nice, 1881. [Editor]

[4] *Opere religiose e sociali in Italia,* Padova, 1879. [Editor]

[5] A suburb of Turin and the site of a magnificent hunting lodge of the House of Savoy. The lodge has recently been converted into a museum of art and interior decoration. [Editor]

"Don't you realize the responsibility I'd be taking on? What if some escaped?"

"I promise you that won't happen. I'll take complete responsibility for bringing them all back."

They argued at length, as the superintendent countered Don Bosco's arguments by citing prison regulations. Finally he agreed to refer the matter to the Minister of the Interior. Meanwhile, acting on his own, Don Bosco called on Chevalier Charles Farcito of Vinea. The latter, in his role as prefect of the province, could have given the required permission, but he stubbornly refused.

Fortunately, the superintendent of the city prisons kept his word and conveyed Don Bosco's request to Urbano Rattazzi, then Minister of the Interior, a man of great intelligence though not equally endowed in his ethics. He pondered the unusual request and then sent for Don Bosco. The enemy and the defender of religious orders were now finally to confront each other. We can assume that Rattazzi had heard—at least in a garbled version—about Don Bosco's letters to the king, but apparently he decided to ignore the matter.

Don Bosco called on him in his usual disarming way—natural to him even with very important people—and was very courteously received.

"My dear Father," Rattazzi said, "I'm willing to grant your request. You may take the boys on a picnic. I'm sure that it will benefit them physically and morally. Plainclothesmen will escort them at a distance so that they may restore discipline, when necessary."

Rattazzi was firmly convinced that he had met Don Bosco's fullest expectations. But Don Bosco smiled at the mention of guards.

"Your Excellency," he said, "I am more than grateful for your permission, but I will not take the boys out unless you allow me to be alone with them and give me your word of honor that you will not send guards tagging after me. I take complete responsibility. Should anything go wrong, I'm willing to go to jail."

Rattazzi was stunned!

"Don't you realize," he exclaimed, "that if you are alone you won't be able to bring even a single one back?"

"Leave it to me," Don Bosco replied in a tone of finality.

It was a take-it-or-leave-it proposition. Rattazzi, curious about

the outcome and optimistic about Don Bosco's ability, finally consented, feeling that any escapees could be recaptured fairly easily.

On the evening before the memorable day Don Bosco returned to "La Generala" to break the good news to the three hundred inmates. He assembled all the youngsters and spoke more or less as follows:

Boys, I have some great news for you. You have been very good to me; you made a very fine spiritual retreat and you have behaved well ever since. To reward you, I went to see the prefect of the province and the Minister of the Interior. From the latter I got permission to take you on a picnic to Stupinigi.

Roaring cheers and joyous shouts greeted his words. After they calmed down, Don Bosco went on:

"I hope that you realize what a wonderful treat this is. Such permission has never been granted before!"

"Long live Rattazzi! Long live Don Bosco!" the boys shouted boisterously.

"Yes, cheer for Rattazzi," Don Bosco replied, "but now please listen carefully. I have promised Minister Rattazzi that every one of you will behave so well that there will be no need of guards. I have given my word that tomorrow night each and every one of you will be back here. Can I be sure that you will behave and that none of you will try to run away?"

"Yes, yes! We'll behave, we'll behave!" they all cried out. At this point one of the older boys shouted: "Father, if anyone tries to escape I'll chase him and wring his neck." No less threatening were two other youths. "If anybody gives you trouble, I'll bash his head in!" said one. "Anyone who breaks our promise won't come back alive!" bellowed a husky 18-year-old.

"Enough, enough!" cried Don Bosco. "No threats, please! I don't like them! I trust all of you. I know that you like me and that you'll do your best to please me. But let me tell you that tomorrow the whole city of Turin will be watching us! If anyone misbehaves, he will hurt us all. And I'd be in more trouble than anyone else because this picnic was my idea. People will rightly say that I was a fool. Besides, what good would it do you to escape? Unless you can sprout wings, you'd be caught within a few hours, or at most in a few days, and locked up more securely. But if you all behave and come back in

the evening, maybe you can get this privilege again. Wouldn't that be great? However, these are only earthly considerations. There is a far more important reason. A short time ago you sincerely promised God that you would be good and no longer offend Him. Well, from heaven God sees you. If you keep your word, He will bless you now and in the future. Tomorrow I want you to prove that you really meant your promise. Be on your best behavior: no disobeying, no quarelling, no fighting. Do you promise?"

"Yes, Father, we do," they all chorused. One of them, voicing their common feeling, added: "Father, you'll be our general. On behalf of all of us I assure you that no general ever will have more disciplined troops."

Reassured by this response, Don Bosco gave them the times of departure and return and other details; then he said good-bye. The boys were beside themselves with joy. On retiring that night, they were so quiet and orderly that the guards were astounded.

Early the next morning they set out with Don Bosco for Stupinigi. This village, four miles southwest of Turin and near the Sangone River, is renowned for its royal hunting lodge. The pastor, Father Emmanuel Amaretti, a good friend of both Don Bosco and Father Alasonatti, was waiting for them. Of course, the boys fully enjoyed their day outdoors. The thoughtful attention they showed Don Bosco was really touching. As soon as he seemed a bit tired, they snatched the provisions off the donkey's back and made Don Bosco ride while two of them held the bridle. At Stupinigi, Don Bosco first took them to the church, where he said Mass; then he treated them to a wholesome lunch, followed by games and another snack before leaving. The whole day was one of complete joy. The youngsters encountered a whole new world of delights as they went through the hunting lodge and roamed along paths in shady groves, by the side of ponds, and across green meadows carpeted with gay flowers.

The boys behaved beautifully. There was not a single squabble, and Don Bosco had no need to warn or scold. When evening came, they all trooped back to their prison home, more resigned and docile than ever.

Meanwhile, Rattazzi was impatiently worrying about the outcome; despite his confidence in Don Bosco, he felt uneasy. Without

wasting a moment, Don Bosco reported to him. The man was truly astonished.

"My thanks to you, Father," he said, "for all you have done for these young prisoners. I wish you would tell me why we cannot exercise the same influence over these boys."

"Your Excellency," Don Bosco replied, "our strength is moral. The State relies on commands and punishments, whereas we speak in God's name and appeal to the boys' hearts."

Minister Rattazzi undoubtedly understood the Church's mysterious supernatural power which no persecution can ever weaken. "You're right," he admitted. "The influence of the Church over the hearts of young people is something we cannot match. That domain is exclusively yours."

This episode caused him to realize the effectiveness of the preventive system in molding the characters of even the most unruly youths, just as Don Bosco had told him a year before.[6] Later Rattazzi remembered this when a young nephew of his became a problem. After considering a reformatory for the boy, he wondered whether Don Bosco might possibly be able to save him, and he took the lad to the Oratory. "Don Bosco accepted him," Father Rua recalls, "and made of him a good workman and a fine practicing Catholic, as everyone here is well aware. I got to be quite close to him."

Father John Baptist Piano—now pastor of the Gran Madre di Dio [the Great Mother of God] in Turin—testified to having heard of this memorable outing from his schoolmates, many of whom are still living. Some years after he had left the Oratory, Father Ascanio Savio also confirmed the facts of the story. Likewise, Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi heard it from Senator Joseph Boschi, his paternal uncle, who was the head of a department in the Ministry of the Interior which exercised jurisdiction over "La Generala." The senator thought very highly of Don Bosco's work and occasionally obtained government grants for him. A record of this memorable outing can also be found in the *Bollettino Ufficiale della Direzione Generale delle Carceri,* Nos. 1–2, 1888, p. 85.

We conclude by remarking that the spiritual retreat conducted

[6] *See* pp. 37f. [Editor]

by Don Bosco had profound and lasting effects. When Don Bosco was no longer able to take care of "La Generala" himself, he regularly sent his priests there to hear confessions. From that year on until the present time [1905], by official request of the authorities and Don Bosco's own exhortations, the Salesians have carried on their priestly ministry to these unfortunate boys—especially through spiritual retreats—notwithstanding some lack of cooperation on the part of the authorities who wanted the retreat schedule to be so planned as not to interfere with work periods.

What must have been Don Bosco's thoughts after hearing the grateful thanks of those boys and seeing the prison gates once again close behind them? Undoubtedly, deep sadness must have dampened his joy, for not all of those boys were delinquents. Some had been sent there by heartless parents because of disobedience—thoughtless rather than deliberate; others were only guilty of petty thievery caused by hunger. To make matters worse, many of them, still fairly innocent when they entered the reformatory, were in serious danger of being corrupted by other youths who were already hardened in crime. The repressive system of education in force there was no help at all.

For these reasons, Don Bosco continued his policy of always trying to obtain the release of any boy who had not yet been convicted in court. If no one could take care of him, he either accepted him at the Oratory or found him an honest, suitable job. In the latter case, he would visit the boy, encourage him to be good, and exhort him to attend Mass on Sundays and holy days, either at the Oratory or in his parish church.

Anxious to do more, Don Bosco also offered his services to a society that had been formed in Turin under royal patronage for the protection of boys released from reformatories. Its purpose and reputation are revealed by this letter to Don Bosco.

Turin, August 8, 1855

Dear Reverend Father:

The employment committee of this society is entrusting Louis Pesciallo of Vacarezza, age 16, to the care of its member, the Rev. John Bosco. The youth will be released from the reformatory on the 15th day of this month. He would like a job in a tailor shop, since this is the trade he learned while serving time.

The undersigned, while informing the Rev. John Bosco of this arrangement, begs him to do all he can for this youth in accordance with the instructions herewith enclosed.[7]

The Rev. John Bosco is to consult with Mr. Costa, general superintendent and secretary of this society, and Father Tasca, rector of the Artigianelli Institute where the boy may be visited.

Yours very truly,

Cagnone
Vice-President, Senior Member of the Society, President of the Employment Committee

The prefect of the Oratory replied as follows:

Turin, August 14, 1855

[Dear Sir:]

My superior, Father John Bosco—whom you have appointed guardian of the boy Louis Pesciallo as of the 15th of this month—has asked me to inform you that he accepts the charge. He is also willing to admit the boy to the hospice annexed to this Oratory and to relieve your committee of all responsibility regarding this boy's future. My superior assures you that the boy will continue his apprenticeship as a tailor, and he wants it understood that he expects the usual maintenance fees and benefits.

I would have come in person to discuss this matter with you, but the absence of my superior has made it impossible for me to do so.

Please accept my superior's most respectful regards and my own.

Your servant,

Fr. Victor Alasonatti, *Prefect*

Don Bosco took in not only young Pesciallo but also a friend of his named Morgando. Later on he accepted a few others after their release from the same reformatory. However, he soon found that the unwholesome climate of reformatories had made them incorrigible.

Since he wished to save as many boys as possible from falling into such a state, Don Bosco therefore strove to prevent their commitment to such institutions. To this end, whenever a new mayor took office, he immediately wrote to him offering to accept into

[7] In this edition we have transferred these instructions to Appendix 2. [Editor]

the Oratory any boys whom the authorities did not know where to place. The police directed many such lads to him, but Don Bosco always screened them to avoid accepting some who might be morally dangerous to the rest. If they had parents or relatives who were legally responsible for them, he wanted those persons to appreciate the service they received from the Oratory, and he demanded their full cooperation for the boy's moral reform.

This good will of Don Bosco toward the civil authorities bore handsome dividends on many occasions, especially in times of political turmoil.

CHAPTER 22

True Loyalty

CATHOLICS in Piedmont feared that the Rattazzi bill would be approved, and they apprehensively awaited developments. Meanwhile, Don Bosco had made public the foundation charter of Altacomba Abbey with its maledictions on anyone who should dare to expropriate it. Then, as a follow-up, he combined the two April issues of *Letture Cattoliche* into a booklet attributed to Baron Nilinse, entitled *Stealing Church Property and Its Consequences.* The frontispiece featured a quotation of St. Ambrose: "What! A private citizen's home is inviolable, and yet you dare lay hands on the house of the Lord?" The incidents related in this booklet, many of which had their source in the testimony of Protestant authors, detailed the frightful punishments that had befallen those rulers or private citizens who had confiscated, sold, or purchased what had once been consecrated to God. Moreover, it emphasized the fact that Divine punishment had fallen not only upon those directly involved in the spoliation of the Church and of religious orders, but also nearly always upon their families, thus proving once again the wisdom contained in the saying: "The family of him who steals from God shall not attain the fourth generation!" Its publication naturally caused quite a stir and helped to dissuade many from buying church property.

The authorities were alarmed at the possible effects of this booklet on the people. There was even some talk of confiscating all copies, but finally they thought it would be best to ignore the whole matter. Nevertheless, Deputy Angelo Brofferio declared on the floor of the Chamber of Deputies that this booklet was a provocation and an insult to the legislature, and he demanded that the

author be identified and punished. However, his tirade went unsupported, and the outcry soon died away.

The senate debate on the bill for the suppression of monastic orders began on April 23 [1855]. At times the debate degenerated into a shouting session as proponents of the bill tried to drown out its opponents. The battle of words had gone on for three days when Bishop Louis Nazari of Casale—a senator—rose to speak on behalf of the Piedmontese bishops. With the consent of the Holy See and with the king's knowledge, he offered the government the sum of 928,412 lire if it would withdraw the bill. His intent was to unmask the hypocrisy that had prompted the measure and thereby to turn the tables on the enemies of the Church. This sum had a special significance, since it matched the exact amount that had first been budgeted—and then revoked—for benefices and supplements to benefices to pastors on the mainland. This offer was the source of considerable embarrassment to the cabinet, because their strongest argument for the confiscation of monasteries had been the lack of funds for the maintenance of benefices. Count [Camillo] Cavour, fully aware that Victor Emmanuel II favored the acceptance of this offer, moved for adjournment. On their deathbeds, both the king's wife and his mother had warmly and effectively pleaded the cause of the persecuted Church. When Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi of Mondovì called on the king on the evening of April 26 to tell him of the terms offered by Rome and to point out the advantages of such a settlement, Victor Emmanuel was so delighted that when the bishop took leave at a very late hour, he escorted him personally, arm in arm and bareheaded, halfway down the road by the cathedral. However, on the following day, April 27, the whole cabinet resigned. General Giacomo Durando[1] was then entrusted with the formation of a new cabinet, provided that: 1. He would choose men holding the same views as the former ministers. 2. He would aim for a settlement with Rome.

Since these conditions were mutually exclusive, they clearly indicated the king's fears and confusion. Meanwhile, the anticlericals, as usual, were trying to sway the king to their point of view.

[1] A politician of the Risorgimento. He, too, pressed King Charles Albert to grant a Constitution. He died in 1894. [Editor]

Through the press, they threatened dire reprisals if the bishops' offer was accepted and Count Cavour was not returned to power. College students paraded the streets, shouting: "We support Rattazzi's bills!" The mob threatened violence.

Senators opposed to the bill were publicly insulted. The usual hired rabble smashed the windows of Monsignor Anzini's house, where the bishop of Casale was staying. While authorities published inflammatory and illegal manifestos, daily dispatches falsely told the king of unrest in the provinces. Moreover, several high-ranking officials threatened to resign. One day top army officers unexpectedly called on the king to warn him that they would resign their command of the Crimean campaign—which they had wanted—if the Crown approved a cabinet not to their liking. The situation was so tense that troops were deployed in front of the royal palace to quell imaginary insurrections.

When Marquis Massimo d'Azeglio[2] received word that the king seemed inclined to let matters rest with the Church, he was greatly disturbed and at once sought an audience, but in vain. On April 29, therefore, he wrote to the king in these daring terms: "Your Majesty should trust an old and faithful servant of yours, whose foremost thought has always been your welfare, your honor, and the good of the country. Kneeling at your feet, I tearfully implore you not to yield. It is still not too late. Retrace your steps. In one day a conspiracy of friars has succeeded in destroying your accomplishments, stirring up the whole country, undermining the Constitution, and jeopardizing your integrity. You have not a minute to lose. Official statements need not be final. It has been said that the Crown was seeking fresh advice. Let the Crown now declare that it has been advised that the bishops' offer is unacceptable, and must be considered as never made. . . . Then let things take their natural, constitutional course. Piedmont is long-suffering, but she must not be subjected to the priestly yoke again. . . . You know very well what a shameful concordat the queen of Spain unwisely signed through the intrigues of friars. Similar wiles ruined James Stuart, Charles X, and many others. Your Majesty, you know that what I

[2] Massimo d'Azeglio (1798–1866), a politician, writer, and painter, had been premier from 1849 to 1852 under Victor Emmanuel II. [Editor]

previously predicted came true. Believe me, it is not a question of religion but of finances. Amadeus II wrangled with Rome for thirty years, and he won. Be firm, and Your Majesty will win, too."

Toward the end of December, 1849, in a parliamentary debate, Massimo d'Azeglio—then the prime minister—made the incredible statement that "he did not know much about the Constitution and had never read it." [3] He was the evil genius who tried to lure the king from the right path; yet he had never even read Article 29 of the Constitution which stated: "All property, without exception, is inviolable."

Meanwhile, General Durando was going through the motions of forming a new cabinet, but it was all a mere farce! Eight days later, May 3, when the Senate convened, General Durando announced that all the former cabinet ministers had been returned to office and that Count Cavour was again premier. Immediately he called for the resumption of the debate on the Rattazzi bill on May 5. While this was going on, the royal palace was once more wreathed in mourning on May 17. Earlier that year, on January 8, the late Queen Maria Adelaide had given birth to a baby boy. The child, Victor Emmanuel Leopold Mary Eugene, who until then had been in excellent health, suddenly became critically ill and died. Within four months, the king had lost his mother, wife, brother, and son. Don Bosco's dream had indeed turned out to be truly prophetic.

Despite all these developments, the Senate approved the bill, as amended slightly by Senator Des Ambrois,[4] by 53 votes to 42. The bill suppressed specified monastic orders and authorized immediate confiscation of their property; the religious themselves, however, were allowed to remain in designated monasteries for their lifetime and were entitled to a pension proportionate to the revenue of their former property, but not to exceed five hundred lire for each professed religious, or two hundred and forty lire for every lay brother or sister.

No one doubted that the bill would be speedily passed by Parliament. Deploring this evil measure, Don Bosco had promoted prayers

[3] Enrico Tavallini, *La vita e i tempi di Giovanni Lanza,* Vol. I, p. 110.

[4] Louis Des Ambrois de Nevache (1807–1874) had been Minister of the Interior from 1844 to 1848. His amendment exempted orders connected with education, preaching, or charity. [Editor]

in several religious institutes; at the Oratory he had exhorted his boys not only to perform special acts of devotion but even to fast for a whole day on bread and water. Father John Turchi informs us that all the boys responded generously.

A few days later, after supper, as Don Bosco was in the dining room with the clerics [John] Turchi, [Felix] Reviglio, Angelo Savio, [John Baptist] Francesia, [John] Cagliero, [Michael] Rua and a few others, the conversation turned to the law of confiscation. Don Bosco remarked: "Only Victor Emmanuel's signature stands between many monasteries and convents and their dissolution. If I could only speak to the king, I would tell him: 'Your Majesty, do not sign this bill or more misfortunes shall befall you and your family.' "

One of the clerics asked: "Wouldn't it be a good idea if one of us wrote to the king?"

"Of course! What about you, Savio? Would you do it?"

"Yes, I will," he replied. "Just tell me what to write."

"Tell him this: 'Your Majesty: Yesterday I happened to be talking with Don Bosco and some other people about the Rattazzi bill just passed by the senate. Don Bosco said: "If I could only speak with His Majesty, I'd say: 'Your Majesty, do not sign this bill; it would be a warrant for more calamities for yourself and your family. I am apprising you of this as a loyal, devoted, and respectful subject.' "

The cleric wrote down what Don Bosco had dictated and signed his own name. However, Don Bosco was not yet satisfied. Prompted by an inner impulse that brooked no delay, he wrote a short note to the king in Latin, repeating his previous warning, *"Dicit Dominus: 'Erunt mala super mala in domo tua.' "* "The Lord says: 'Evils upon evils will fall upon your house.' " Don Bosco no longer implored; he now threatened greater punishments, should the king sign the bill. He hurriedly sent the new message to a court valet who enjoyed the king's confidence—a certain Occhiena from Castelnuovo d'Asti whose sons frequented the Valdocco festive oratory. He was a close friend and distant relative of Don Bosco.

As luck would have it, the king had just left for Susa.[5] The valet

[5] Thirty-three miles from Turin. [Editor]

therefore said to the bearer: "Tell Don Bosco that the king will have the letter as soon as he returns. I'll put it on his desk."

"But it's extremely urgent. The king should have it at once."

"Very well! Tell Don Bosco not to worry. I'll forward the letter immediately." He then ordered a messenger to saddle a horse and to overtake the king. The messenger reached him at Sant'Ambrogio.[6]

"Your Majesty! I have a letter for you."

"A letter? Give it to my secretary."

"It's extremely urgent and important."

"Whom is it from?"

"Don Bosco."

"Don Bosco! Can't he ever leave me alone? Let me see it."

The king scanned the note rapidly. "I knew it," he exclaimed. "Hold it for me." He then walked away, but after taking only a few steps, he turned back to the messenger and said: "No, let me have it." Then he put it in his pocket and continued his journey.

The king was already deeply grieved by his son's death, and Don Bosco's letter disturbed him greatly, as the cleric Cagliero learned from Marquis [Dominic] Fassati, who had seen it open on the king's desk. On returning to Turin, the king showed Don Bosco's letter to some of his cabinet ministers, remarking: "You see what Don Bosco has written. Now tell me whether or not I ought to sign this bill!" We do not know what advice they gave him, but on May 28 [1855] the Chamber of Deputies approved the bill by 95 votes to 23. The new law covered five points: 1. The suppression of all religious houses whose members were not engaged in education, preaching, or charity. 2. The suppression of all benefices and collegiate chapters in towns whose population did not exceed twenty thousand. 3. The establishment of an ecclesiastical fund. 4. The assignment of a pension for the religious. 5. Finally, the levying of a tax on religious bodies that were not suppressed.

When the law was submitted to the king for his signature, he stalled. "Let us wait a while," he said. "I want to think this over." It was perhaps on this occasion that General [Alfonso] La Marmora[7]

[6] A small town about seventeen miles from Turin. [Editor]

[7] Alfonso La Marmora (1804–1878), a soldier and statesman, was Minister of War from 1848 to 1859 with few interruptions. He was Prime Minister of Sardinia in 1859–60 and from 1864 to 1866 when he was made Chief-of-Staff. [Editor]

or some member of his family secretly met with Father Cafasso from two in the morning until dawn.

The ministers, aware of the king's hesitancy and unwillingness to sign the bill, proposed that he seek the advice of trusted court theologians. We do not know whether they suggested this on their own initiative or at his prompting, but the king agreed. At this time he was so determined to do what was right that had those theologians given him the correct advice, he would either have never signed the law or would at least have deferred it. Four court theologians—doctors of Canon Law of the University of Turin and disciples of Nuytz[8]—gathered in the royal palace. Victor Emmanuel put the matter before them and gave them Don Bosco's letters to read, adding that he wanted them back. Then, in order not to interfere with their freedom of discussion, he withdrew to a nearby room nervously waiting for their reply.

The theologians did not take long to settle this matter. They told the king: "Your Majesty, do not be frightened by Don Bosco's letters. The age of prophecies is past. Ignore his dire predictions and threats. As for the law concerning monasteries and convents, it is an accepted principle that the authority which creates a thing can also do away with it. It is the State that grants the privilege of forming a moral body, and therefore it is also within the power of the State to withdraw such privilege with all its implications. The State has full and exclusive rights to enact whatever laws it deems necessary regarding the existence or non-existence of religious orders. The alleged rights of the Church in this matter are simply non-existent."

The king, who understood little about such technicalities, interrupted: "What I want to know is this: Can I in conscience sign this bill?"

"Most certainly!" they replied.

He did so that very same day, May 29, 1855. This law affected 35 religious orders, 334 houses, and 5,406 religious. At the same time a royal edict suppressed the Superga Academy[9] which after the expulsion of Father [William] Audisio, its president, had not accepted

[8] Johann Nepomuk Nuytz was a lecturer at the University of Turin. Several of his works and propositions were condemned by the Holy See in the brief *Ad apostolicae sedis* of August 22, 1851. [Editor]

[9] It had been founded in 1833 with King Charles Albert's assistance. *See* Vol. I, p. 212. [Editor]

any more students. By another decree, the large revenues that had accumulated there were later assigned as temporary or life pensions for unfrocked priests or ecclesiastics subservient to the government.

This law resulted in untold hardships, especially on nuns. Many priests, too, were dragged into court for having done their duty in administering the sacraments.

The day after this questionable advice had been given to the king by the court theologians, one of them, a canon in a small provincial town, happened to meet Don Bosco near Valdocco Circle. Don Bosco greeted him. The canon reciprocated, then stopped and asked: "Are you Don Bosco by any chance?"

"Why, yes."

"Did you write certain insolent letters to the king?"

"I did write to him, but my letters were not insolent. As a loyal subject, I felt bound to dissuade him from pursuing a dangerous course."

"So you presumed to impose your own opinions on the king and dicate to him rather than obey him! I am shocked by your audacity."

"Did the king take my advice?"

"No. He had every right to sign that law."

"Do you believe that?"

"Certainly!"

"And you advised him to sign it?"

"Of course."

"Pardon me, but before we go any further, I'd like to ask you one question. Did you say Mass this morning?"

"What has that got to do with this matter?"

"Never mind! Just tell me: Did you say Mass this morning?"

"Yes, I did. Why not?"

"Before saying Mass, did you go to confession?"

"What a question! Why?"

"Why? How could you dare approach the Holy Eucharist without first asking God's forgiveness for the evil advice given to your king and repairing as far as possible the harm done to the Church?"

Needless to say, the canon was greatly offended by these remarks. To justify himself he brought up all the stock arguments the University of Turin had devised to prove that the State had exclusive authority over certain areas which the Church rightfully claimed for

herself. Don Bosco refuted each of these false arguments and left the canon greatly perplexed and shaken. Finally, the canon walked off, deeply incensed. It was not long, however, before he became a lifelong friend and benefactor of Don Bosco. The secularistic education he had received in his youth had so darkened his mind that he had been unable to see the truth.

Don Bosco wrote other letters besides those we have mentioned. He did not desist from his efforts as long as there was any hope that he could dissuade the king from a step he foresaw to be ruinous. The king lamented one day: "I can't have any peace at all! Don Bosco hounds me!" And he charged one of his aides to inform Don Bosco of his displeasure. Don Bosco remained unperturbed. Earlier, while debate on the controversial bill still raged in the two chambers, the king, worried and nervous after the first two deaths in his family, became curious about this priest who had so shattered his peace, and he decided to see for himself where Don Bosco lived. Therefore, early one Monday morning, accompanied by an aide, he rode on horseback to Valdocco in civilian clothes and went all around the Oratory. Catching sight of the cleric Cagliero, he called to him and asked about Don Bosco. The cleric answered that he was in church, but that he was very tired because the day before he had been quite busy hearing confessions, preaching, and taking care of the boys. The king then rode away, but returned a few days later in his carriage. It so happened that on that day, just a few minutes before the king's coach reached Valdocco Circle, Don Bosco had come down from his room to tell the doorkeeper, [Dominic] Goffi: "I am quite busy today; even if the king himself should come, tell him I'm not in." Shortly afterward, the king's aide—General Alexander Lucerna, count of Angrogna—alighted from the coach and walked to the Oratory gate asking for Don Bosco, only to hear that he was not in. [John Baptist] Francesia, then a cleric, saw the count get back into the coach and drive off in the direction of the gun factory.

Apparently the king had spoken rather heatedly of Don Bosco's bold letters, and the general—impetuous by nature—considered it his duty to take Don Bosco to task for what he considered to be an offense to the king.

A few days later, in fact, accompanied by an orderly, he rode on

horseback into the Oratory playground, asked directions to Don Bosco's room and went straight there.

Don Bosco arose to receive him.

"Are you Don Bosco?" the general asked harshly.

"I am."

"Was it you who dared to write to the king telling him how to run his kingdom?"

"I did write to him, but I never told him that!"

The general then spat out a stream of invectives, calling him an impostor, a fanatic, a rebel, and a foe of the king whose honor and sovereign authority he had grievously offended.

At intervals Don Bosco tried to stem the torrent of abuse by pointing out that his letters were far from irreverent and that their sole purpose was to enlighten the king, whom he loved and for whom he was willing to make any sacrifice as proof of his loyalty. However, the general only raved all the more. Raising his voice, he shouted: "I did not come here to debate. You must make amends for your disgraceful letters."

"How?"

"First of all, I order you on behalf of His Majesty never to write again about his court or the royal family. The king is extremely angry and if you do not obey, he will have to resort to harsher measures. Now sit down and write what I am going to dictate."

"I'll do it, if it is not a recantation or denial of the truth," Don Bosco replied.

The general began dictating a humble apology in which Don Bosco was to beg him to disregard the threats and predictions of his earlier letters. Don Bosco put down his pen.

"This I cannot do," he firmly said.

"You must!"

"If I do, will you account to God for whatever will happen?"

"God has nothing to do with this," shouted the general. "Do what I tell you!"

Don Bosco stood up. "I will not!"

The general became furious and his hand flew to his sword, as if he were challenging Don Bosco to a duel. Very calmly, Don Bosco remarked that his only weapons were reason and religion.

"The only duel I'd challenge you to," he said, "would be a duel

of prayer. You would surely win; having more time you could pray better and oftener."

Snorting, the general rattled his sword. Undaunted, Don Bosco said firmly, "You are not frightening me in the least!"

This unexpected stand left the general dumbfounded.

"I am not afraid," Don Bosco continued, "because as a gentleman and a brave soldier you would not disgrace yourself by attacking a defenseless priest who only did what he thought was best for his king's soul. I am so sure of this that had I known you wanted to see me, I would have called on you myself. Calmly we could have looked for a way to give His Majesty satisfaction without doing violence to my conscience. I am sure that you, as a gracious host, would have brought out drinks, and I would have toasted your health."

The general was stunned. Much to his surprise his anger was now gone. In a daze, he took his leave, mounted his horse, and rode off. After he had crossed the gate, though, he turned around and rode back. Once more he went up to Don Bosco's room.

"Did you say that had you known you would have called on me?"

"Exactly!"

"Would you still do it?"

"Of course!"

"Is that a promise?"

"Yes!"

"Then come tomorrow at eleven."

"I can't just then."

"How about three in the afternoon?"

"Fine! I'll be there!"

The general looked intently at Don Bosco for a moment and then left. Don Bosco kept his appointment. Together they drafted a letter expressing Don Bosco's regrets for any displeasure he might unwittingly have caused the king. As for Don Bosco's predictions, His Majesty was to use his own judgment. Finally, Don Bosco promised not to write letters of that kind again. By this time, however, the controversial bill had been signed into law and the deaths in the royal family were facts that no one could deny. Nevertheless, Don Bosco later declared that he would never have signed that letter had there been some other way to forestall greater evils.

Don Bosco lingered on. The general became ever more cordial

and asked him to stay for dinner, but Don Bosco excused himself. Just as he was about to leave, the general said: "Before you go, let us seal our friendship. Do me the honor of sampling the wine of my vineyards."

A butler brought in a bottle and some pastry. After sipping the wine, Don Bosco looked at the general and smiled. The general smiled back, and then offered some pastry. Don Bosco took a piece and jokingly remarked: "It's not poisoned, I hope!"

Falling in with his joke, the general replied: "Let's share it!" Then he took half of the portion for himself. They parted as friends and they remained so ever after. Some time later, he entrusted a young African boy to Don Bosco for instruction in the Faith and Baptism.

CHAPTER 23

Indefatigable Activity

DON Bosco, not in the least shaken by these struggles and trials, continued to correspond with Father Charles Gilardi [of the Institute of Charity]. On May 6 he forwarded the interest due on the sum which he had borrowed from the institute's superior, Father [Antonio] Rosmini.

[Turin, May 6, 1855]

My dear Father Charles:

Eastertide is running out and I had better put my conscience in order. . . . Thus far I have not yet written to your superior because I know that he is in poor health. I wish to inform you that a provisional railroad station will definitely be built here at Valdocco. Therefore, property value in this neighborhood has unavoidably gone up.

Mr. Coriasco, who owns the small house near the piece of land that you purchased, now is forced to sell; he tells me that he is ready to let us have it for 7,000 lire. We offered him 10,000 last year.

May the Blessed Virgin bless your superior and restore his health for the Church's good. My boys and I are praying for this.

Please pray for me and love me in the Lord. My mother and our clerics send you their best.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Meanwhile, the Ribotta Press was printing the two May issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *Evangelical Comfort to Christians Living in the World,* by T. . . K. . . A series of short meditations on St. Matthew's Gospel, they clearly demonstrated how easy Our Lord's precepts are to obey and how holy and beneficial His counsels have proved to be. They also pointed out the perpetuity of His

Church, the duties of her members, her God-given power to forgive sins, the importance of prayer—especially communal prayer—and the mercy and justice of God.

The two June issues, authored by Don Bosco and printed by the Paravia Press, were entitled *Dialogue between a Lawyer and a Rural Pastor on the Sacrament of Penance.* Don Bosco explained its purpose in a Foreword:

There is not the slightest doubt that our Faith is being bitterly attacked in these tragic times. Since its enemies will fail unless they can first persuade Catholics to give up confession, the forces of evil will direct their major attacks against this wholesome practice. One who abandons confession, if left to himself, will sink deeper in sin; like a frail plant exposed to the fury of the winds he will fall into most deplorable excesses. To destroy the very idea of confession, Protestant publications are continually telling Catholics that confession is not of Divine institution and must therefore be rejected.

Without making false statements and without confusing the issue or acting in bad faith—as our opponents usually do—we shall prove beyond all doubt from the Gospels and from history that even pagans recognized a need for confession, that confession was practiced by the Hebrews at God's order, and that Our Lord Himself raised this practice to the dignity of a sacrament, declaring it to be beneficial to all Christians and absolutely necessary for those who have committed mortal sins after Baptism.

Since Protestants keep saying that there was no mention of confession in the primitive Church, we shall prove from history that confession was constantly practiced in the Church from Christ's day to ours.

As much as possible I have refrained from citing or quoting authors who are opposed to confession. I have done this for two reasons: first, I do not wish to make good Catholics grieve at the desecration of the most revered practices of our Faith; second, I do not want to take the chance of possibly arousing the desire to read such impious books.

I have restricted myself to explaining the Church's doctrine regarding this sacrament. In the process I have refuted the more common errors without mentioning them any more than necessary. I think that I have adequately rebutted all objections.

Meanwhile, deeply grieved by the harm daily perpetrated against the Church, I urge all Catholics to be brave and steadfast in the Faith.

Yes, dear fellow Catholics, be brave! Let us cling firmly to the Church founded by Jesus Christ, and to His Vicar, the Pope. Let us hold fast to the Church that has been persecuted through the centuries but has always triumphed.

The Catholic Church is the only Church founded by Jesus Christ. No one can call himself a Catholic and still reject the Pope. Disaster awaits one who cuts himself off from the Vicar of Christ; he will become an outcast without salvation. One who does not have the Church for his mother cannot have God for his father.

Let the same Faith, the same commandments, the same sacraments, and the same charity unite us all in life and in death. Above all, let us take advantage of the sacrament of Penance, the powerful means instituted by Christ Himself to confer the merits of His passion and death on our souls, to free them from the clutches of the devil, and to shut the gates of hell while opening those of heaven. Amen.

In the ensuing dialogue a pastor explained the seal of confession through an incident which had happened to Don Bosco during one of his debates with Protestants.

Not so long ago, a cocky individual came to me and asserted that he could cite many instances when priests had violated the seal of confession. I replied that even if a priest should betray his ministry, this would not lessen the sanctity of the sacrament. Are we to blame all the Apostles because Judas was a traitor?

Since my opponent insisted that he knew what he was talking about, I said: "I will wager five hundred lire that neither you nor any of your friends can prove even one such case."

"Fine!" he replied. "Put the money down. I'll be back here Saturday."

"Wait," I said. "I've been through this sort of thing before! One fellow said he would return, but he never did."

"I'll be back without fail," the man asserted. "I give you my word of honor."

Well, I never saw the man again! Nor do I expect to see him because he will never be able to prove his claim. Time and again I have found that those who decry confession have no better arguments than vague allegations.

On May 25 [1855] Don Bosco was in Ivrea preaching on Mary Immaculate and discussing some matters concerning *Letture Cattoliche* with Bishop Louis Moreno. He then returned to Turin to prepare the two July issues. They formed a single booklet entitled *The*

Conversion of a Wealthy Noble English Lady to the Catholic Faith, during the Period When Anti-Catholic Laws Were Still in Force in England. A summary follows:

In 1772 Catholic priests were obliged to remain in hiding. Penalties for celebrating Mass or permitting its celebration in one's home were, respectively, death and confiscation of property plus hard labor for life in the colonies—quite an apt illustration of the much vaunted Protestant tolerance. Persecution of Catholics went on without interruption for over two hundred years. The booklet also described this lady's trials in entering the Catholic Church, her perseverance in her newly-found Faith while living with her Anglican family, and God's reward for her heroic virtue.

Pamphlets of this kind were devastating to the Waldensians. But if Don Bosco never tired of warning the faithful, he also strove to rescue those who had gone astray, especially the youth of the area. Besides sheltering Protestant orphans, later on he accepted boys from the Hospice for Catechumens in Turin and from the Hospice of Charity in Pinerolo.[1] The mayor of this town, Mr. Giosserano, remembering Don Bosco's offer of the previous year,[2] sent him a boy named Peter Plancia and contributed sixteen lire every month toward his maintenance as long as he would stay, up to a total of 400 lire.

Some of these boys were eager to become Catholics, and in such cases the catechist's task was easy. But those who came from the streets presented a problem, and their conversion required a great deal of patience. Some were dullards or completely ignorant; others were hard to handle and unmanageable. Don Bosco was well aware that by accepting such boys he was taking on more work and trouble, yet he gladly took them in as boarders in order to win them over to the one true Church. A letter written to him that we shall now quote gives testimony of his zeal:

Pinerolo, June 22, 1855

Dear Reverend Father:

My thanks to you for having sent me news of young Daniel Brunerotto through your worthy assistant, Father Alasonatti. I trust that

[1] A Waldensian stronghold about twenty-three miles from Turin. [Editor]
[2] *See* pp. 75f. [Editor]

you will continue to be pleased with the boy. Your institute is better equipped than ours for looking after the temporal and spiritual welfare of boys like him. Please let me know when he will be received into the Catholic Church so that I may enter this information in our records.

As for Peter Plancia, please God that his latest stupid prank will be his last. Knowing him as I do, though, I am afraid it will not be. His long stay at the hospice here was not my idea, and if he should want to come back I will not accept him. Now I have that power. That's why I have no intention of reporting his escape to the welfare authorities, even if it would not be entered in his record. But I did mention his escape and return to Canon Badariotti, the seminary rector, not in my capacity as co-administrator, but only as a friend. Since we will both be passing through Turin on July 4 on our way to the retreat at St. Ignatius', we will bring you two hundred lire then, or, if not then, on the 13th on our way back. If it is no trouble to Your Reverence, there would be no uncertainty or delay if you could meet us at the railroad station on July 4. We shall be there at 8:30 A.M. without fail.

My sincerest regards to you.

Your devoted servant,

Canon John Baptist Fortoul

Time passed as Don Bosco's activities in God's service continued without interruption, and soon it was June 24, the feast of St. John the Baptist.[3] To grace the occasion Don Bosco wanted to give all the Oratory boarders a special token of his affection. He told them to request some little gift either orally or in writing, assuring them that he would do his utmost to oblige. Possibly he may have done this also in order to get to know them better. Naturally, there were a few ridiculous and extravagant requests but Don Bosco satisfied the reasonable ones, such as books, clothing, condoning of fees, and so on, notwithstanding the financial sacrifice on his part.

"I had a new proof of his extraordinary kindness," one cleric informed us, "when I needed a new cassock. I got up enough courage to ask him for one; he promptly provided it." Dominic Savio's written request was: "I ask only that you help me save my soul and become a saint!"

Another day on which generosity triumphed was the solemn feast of St. Aloysius. For this occasion Don Bosco provided four

[3] Don Bosco's name day. *See* Vol. II, p. 381. [Editor]

thousand holy pictures of this angelic youth. Marquis Dominic Fassati was "prior" [4] of the feast, and he did his share to make it a memorable occasion. On that day—the first Sunday in July—after afternoon church services he treated the eight hundred or more boys—both day students and boarders—to a generous serving of bread and salami [a favorite treat]. It was quite amusing to watch the boys raise their slice of salami to their eyes and happily exclaim: "You can't see Superga, you can't see Superga!" [5]—their own way of saying that the slices were thick.

Treats of this kind, given in turn by various Turinese laymen, induced the day boys to attend the Oratory catechism classes and church services. They saw in these treats a fulfillment of Our Lord's promise: "Set your hearts on His kingdom first and on His righteousness, and all these other things will be given as well." [Matt. 6, 33] Since "these other things" were given to them now and then in an appreciable way, they were more responsive to spiritual things. Gradually they became more spiritually-minded, stronger in their religious convictions, and better Christians and citizens.

The joyousness of these festivities, however, was soon followed by yet another vexation. On June 29 [1855], Giovanni Lanza, Minister of Education, ordered all school superintendents to enforce the law on certification of teachers: no one was to teach without first passing State examinations. There were to be no exceptions, not even for private schools conducted by nuns. These new restrictions made it more painful and considerably more difficult for religious to conduct their own schools. In practice, these directives prevented nuns from teaching, since certain conditions required of them were such that they could not accept.

The Holy See, however, took steps to ease the problem. To the inquiry of the bishop of Novara, Rome replied: "Secular authorities cannot restrict the Church's rights to education; therefore, government decrees which seek to limit these rights are not to be honored or accepted. However, so as not to create an impasse and precipitate

[4] An honorary title bestowed on a prominent benefactor. He usually responded by treating the boys. [Editor]

[5] A hill about three miles east of Turin, over two thousand feet above sea level, crowned by Juvara's masterpiece, the basilica of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. [Editor]

the closing of private schools conducted by religious, State examinations and inspection may be tolerated if the bishops will at least be allowed to retain control over the religious and moral instruction programs."

CHAPTER 24

Indefatigable Activity (Continued)

THE year of 1855 proved to be a difficult period for both the rich and the poor of Piedmont. Several factors contributed to their hardships: the fifteen thousand troops sent to the Crimea as allies of Turkey, England, and France, a vine disease which for years had been ravaging the most productive vineyards, a succession of poor harvests, a renewed outbreak of cholera in Sardinia, and other calamities. Naturally, the Oratory, which depended so greatly on charity, found itself in rather grave financial straits.[1]

But from time to time God showed that He had not forsaken His little ones. On one such occasion, just as Don Bosco was preparing to go to town in search of financial aid, he received a visit from Count Renato Agliano, a man of noble lineage and outstanding piety. He told Don Bosco: "My wife is very ill. Please pray for her and have your boys do likewise." After saying this, he gave him a substantial offering sufficient to cover half of Don Bosco's debt to the baker. Don Bosco thanked the kind gentleman profusely and encouraged him to be confident, remarking that since he had performed an act of charity even before receiving the favor he sought, he had in a sense obliged God to grant it. That same evening, Don Bosco added an Our Father and a Hail Mary for the sick woman to the usual night prayers and gave instructions that these extra prayers should be continued on the following days until further notice. Three days later, the count returned to the Oratory to thank Don Bosco and to tell him that, much to the doctor's amazement, his wife now was out of danger and felt quite well. Grateful for a grace so speedily granted, he made another donation which, thanks

[1] A footnote reporting an appeal by Don Bosco to a welfare organization has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

to the inspiration of Divine Providence, equaled the amount of the first. Thus within three days Don Bosco's debt was wiped out.

These extraordinary, startling gifts generated trust in God's goodness and at the same time spurred Don Bosco on to exert himself to the utmost in meeting the needs of his young charges. Those people who provided us with information about this period are unanimous in describing him as a hard-pressed, dedicated father who, finding himself burdened with a large family, left no stone unturned to provide for his children. To this end, in order not to overtax the generosity of his regular benefactors, he planned an appeal to public charity. Since he still had several paintings left over from two previous lotteries, he decided to hold a third one on a somewhat smaller scale, with tickets at one lira each. This project kept him busy for the next six months, during which time he often remarked: "Two years ago our goals were a church and a dormitory; now we are simply hoping to stave off hunger." He first formed two committees of prominent ladies and gentlemen of Turin; then he applied to the authorities for the necessary authorization, submitting detailed plans, the names of the committee members who would sign the tickets, a sample of the tickets, and the list of paintings to be given as prizes.

Don Bosco's application was worded as follows:

March 22, 1855

To the Finance Office:

The undersigned respectfully states that in order to provide for approximately one hundred destitute boys now sheltered at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales (many of whom were orphaned by last year's cholera epidemic), he is planning to raffle some paintings in order to meet his more urgent expenses.

He therefore asks that, for the sake of these poor boys, you approve the proposed committee, appoint an expert to appraise the paintings, and grant all other necessary permissions for the execution of the enclosed plan.

Since the lottery is on a small scale, it is requested that the seal of the committee, as per the enclosed sample, be accepted as valid, in substitution for the seal of the Ministry of Finance, as granted last year.

Rev. John Bosco,

On Behalf of the Committee

There were eleven prizes in all: nine canvas oil paintings and two bas-reliefs. Professor Cusa, secretary of the Albertina Academy, appraised them all. We list them here along with their donors, all of whom were members of the Oratory family, either as residents or as frequent visitors.

1. *The Crowning of Our Lord,* an altarpiece by Padovanini, the gift of Count Charles Cays.
2. *St. Mary Magdalene,* in a gilt frame, the gift of Dr. Viriglio.
3. *The Sacred Heart of Jesus,* in a gilt frame, by Professor Gastaldi, the gift of Canon Lawrence Gastaldi.
4. *The Sacred Heart of Mary,* in a gilt frame, the artist and donor as above.
5. *The Virgin Mary,* painted and donated by Charles Tomatis, a pupil of the Oratory.[2]
6. *St. John the Baptist,* in a gilt frame, painted and donated by Charles Tomatis.
7. *The Virgin Mary Nursing the Child Jesus,* in an octagon gilt frame, the gift of Father Victor Alasonatti.
8. *St. Francis of Assisi,* in a gilt frame, the gift of Father Peter Merla.
9. *Charles Albert and Victor Emmanuel II,* anonymous.
10. *Faith,* a bas-relief in papier-mâché, the gift of Mrs. Margaret Gastaldi née Volpatto.
11. *Leonardo da Vinci,* a bas-relief in wax, in a gilt frame, gift of Duke Litta Visconti.

The City Finance Office accepted the appraisal of the prizes, and on April 20, 1855 it authorized the lottery.[3]

Three days later, on April 23, at Don Bosco's repeated request, the Ministry of Finance again exempted him from the requirement that each ticket should bear the seal of the ministry and recognized the validity of the Oratory seal.[4]

The way was now clear. The following month, Don Bosco busied himself with distributing a handbill informing the public about his lottery[5] and naming the committee members authorized to sign the

[2] *See* Vol. III, p. 118. [Editor]
[3] The routine authorization has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[4] The official notification of this exemption has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[5] *See* Appendix 3. [Editor]

tickets. Those so designated were Dr. Francis Vallauri, *Chairman;* Caesar Francesetti of Mezzenile, *Vice-Chairman;* Lawrence Agliano of Caravonica, *Secretary;* Count Charles Cays of Giletta, *Treasurer;* Baron Charles Hyacinth Bianco of Barbania; Rev. John Bosco, *Director of the Oratory;* Marquis Henry d'Angennes; Count Charles Fantoni; Marquis Dominic Fassati; Count Pio Galleani Agliano; Chevalier Mark Gonella; Count Alexander Lucerna of Angrogna; Count Joseph Ponte of Pino; Count Alexander Provana of Collegno; Count Casimir Radicati of Bròzolo.

Noteworthy here is the inclusion of the name of Count Alexander Lucerna of Angrogna. This major-general of artillery, who was also the aide-de-camp to His Majesty, was the same individual who had heatedly upbraided Don Bosco for his letters to the king. He, too, had graciously agreed to be on the committee.

Don Bosco lost no time in spreading the tickets far and wide. He sent them to church and civil officials at all levels, as well as to people of modest means so that they might have the opportunity of contributing to a worthy cause. Each packet of tickets was accompanied by this form letter:

Turin, May 8, 1855

Dear Sir,

The current critical times and the wave of orphans left in the wake of last year's cholera epidemic have compelled me to increase considerably the number of boys sheltered at the hospice adjoining the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. We are now caring for nearly a hundred boys.

For this reason, I find myself in serious straits. Looking for ways and means to feed them, I sought the advice of the charitable laymen herein listed as committee members, and they suggested that I raffle off a number of paintings. I took their advice and followed the necessary legal formalities. Now there remains only the task of disposing of the tickets. As in the past, I again rely on the help of generous people like yourself. I am enclosing . . . tickets and ask that you dispose of them as you see fit. If you cannot sell them all and cannot take them yourself, please be so kind as to return them to any committee member at least eight days before the drawing which will take place on July 12. You may at the same time enclose payment for the tickets sold.

I regret this inconvenience to you, but the heavy financial burden of

feeding so many boys gives me no other choice. Believe me: it is truly a matter of feeding the hungry.

I am deeply grateful for your help, and I assure you that, together with my sons who will benefit from your kindness, I shall ask God to shower many blessings on you and on all whom you wish to be particularly blessed now and in the life to come. With great esteem, I am honored to remain,

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Marquis Gustavo Cavour was one of those who graciously accepted the tickets. He had been visiting for a few days with Father Antonio Rosmini who was seriously ill, and had talked with him at great length. On leaving he was deeply moved because he feared that he would not see his friend again. On his return to Turin, he wrote to Don Bosco as follows:

Turin, June 3, 1855

Dear Reverend Father:

My absence from Turin, which was longer than expected, is responsible for my delay in acknowledging your letter about a lottery on behalf of your numerous and interesting family. I now hasten to inform you that, because yours is such a worthy cause, I am keeping all fifty tickets and herewith enclose my remittance.

With sorrow I must inform you that I bring discouraging news from Stresa, news confirmed by this morning's mail. Please pray that Our Lord may restore our wonderful friend to health for the sake of his congregation and the whole Church, to which I am sure he can still render much service.

I take this opportunity to state again my deep esteem for you.

Your devoted and grateful servant,

Gustavo Cavour

Father Antonio Rosmini died the night of June 30–July 1, 1855. Don Bosco had the whole Oratory pray for the repose of the soul of his great benefactor.

Meanwhile, Father Joseph Cafasso graciously permitted the lottery prizes to be exhibited in one of the halls of the Convitto Ec-

clesiastico, which was centrally located. All of the students were then away on vacation. By this time all the tickets had been sold and the drawing was held as scheduled.[6] Its results were immediately made public through the following circular:

Turin, July 16, 1855

Dear Friend,

I hasten to inform you of the results of the lottery which I recommended to your kindness. Enclosed are the winning numbers. Nevertheless, I am sure that your main interest was in helping the boys whom Divine Providence has entrusted to me. For this reason I am doubly grateful to you.

I assure you of our lasting gratitude and beg you to continue your benevolence and charity. Since we can express our gratitude in no other way, my colleague Father [Victor] Alasonatti, all the Oratory boys, and I will pray that God may generously bestow His blessings on you. With the greatest esteem, I remain,

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

[6] *See* Appendix 4. [Editor]

CHAPTER 25

A Brave Deed

THE school year of 1854–55 was now drawing to a close. The Oratory's resources had consistently been meager, yet no one had ever gone hungry. Notwithstanding the high cost of even inferior bread—seventy centesimi a kilogram—Don Bosco not only did not cut down the number of boys, but he actually increased it. Moreover, he even managed to give them a special treat every now and then. The lottery proceeds which met his immediate needs were a reward for his tireless efforts and the foreseen humiliations which had given his sacrifices all the more merit. For this reason Divine Providence never abandoned him, and he himself placed his whole trust in Divine Providence with so much confidence, love, and gratitude that one can say he spent his whole life giving thanks to the Lord.

Daily happenings, great or small, prompted him to extol God's goodness, providence, wisdom, or omnipotence. One summer day while in town with Father [Michael] Rua he paused in front of a fruit stand; then, pointing to its fine assortment and beauty, he remarked: "How good the Lord is to give us such abundance and variety!" The same thoughts he gratefully expressed on countless other occasions.

He was never the least bit impatient when help was slow in coming—to make his faith more meritorious—or even when his fondest hopes for a project particularly dear to his heart were not fulfilled. One such instance occurred when he realized that he would have to postpone his long-cherished plan for a printshop and resign himself to the fact that he could not buy back the piece of land that he had sold for just this purpose.[1] Father Rosmini's death had

[1] *See* p. 20. [Editor]

dashed a great many of his hopes. Yet, unperturbed, he sent the following reply to Father Charles Gilardi who was seeking his help to resell—wholly or in part—the field that Don Bosco had sold to the Institute of Charity [the year before].[2]

Turin, August 15, 1855

Dear Father Charles:

I am grateful for your kind letter informing me officially that Father John Baptist Pagani is your new superior general. Praise be to God! I firmly believe that this is God's will. Please give your superior my best regards.

Regarding the lot you would like to sell, this is the way matters now stand. True, this land is valuable because of its proximity to the projected railroad station in the Valdocco area, but the many encouraging inquiries of last spring have somehow given way to some uncertainty. No one at this time is in a mood to buy or build. I would suggest that we wait until next spring. In the meantime, if a good offer comes up we might accept it, but we must be careful not to act hastily. In any event, at the moment I am not in a position to buy.

My mother and the clerics fondly remember you and reciprocate your regards. Keep us all in your prayers.

Your friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The serenity clearly evident in the above letter stemmed from Don Bosco's trust in Our Blessed Mother and from the joy he experienced at the excellent conduct of the Oratory boys. They were now well known and greatly respected in Turin where they frequented the private junior and senior high schools conducted by Professor Joseph Bonzanino and Father Matthew Picco. The Oratory boys dressed plainly, as befitted their humble condition, but they were so neat and well mannered that their wealthy and aristocratic classmates enjoyed associating with them. The friendships they formed fostered emulation and good conduct. The two professors often thanked God for the presence of the Oratory boys, especially since one of them was credited with preventing a serious fight.

[2] *See* p. 30. [Editor]

Dominic Savio was studying second year Latin under Professor Bonzanino, when two of his classmates unwittingly afforded him the opportunity to show how much he loved God and to what extent he would go to prevent sin. One day an argument broke out between them, starting with unpleasant remarks about each other's family and ending with foul insults. At this point they decided to settle matters with a stone fight. As soon as Dominic learned of it, he was deeply grieved, and he decided to intervene, even though he wasn't sure how he could stop them, since both were older and stronger. He tried to talk them out of it, reminding them that revenge is against both common sense and God's Law. Then he wrote a note to each of them, threatening to inform their teachers and their parents of the proposed fight. However, all of his efforts were useless. They had so angered each other that nothing would stop them. At this point Dominic was inspired to an act which could rightly be termed heroic. Waiting for the boys after school, he told them: "If you still insist on this senseless fight of yours, will you promise me just one thing?"

"All right, as long as you don't try to stop the fight."

"He's a good-for-nothing bum!" shouted one boy, and the other spat back: "I won't be satisfied until I've split his skull!"

Dominic shuddered at the threats, but, to check a greater evil, he steeled himself and said: "What I ask won't stop the fight."

"Well, what is it?"

"I'll tell you only when we get there."

"You're trying to trick us!"

"No, I'm not! I'll be with you all the time."

"Then you're going to call somebody."

"I should, but I won't. Let's go! I'm coming along. But remember: you must keep your word."

After that exchange, they set out for the citadel meadows near Porta Susa, where St. Barbara's Church now stands. When they arrived, Savio did something that caught the other two completely off guard. He waited until they had paced off their positions, each armed with stones. Then he spoke: "Before you start, you must keep your promise." Taking a small crucifix which he used to wear around his neck, he held it up in his hand. "You must first look at this crucifix," he continued, "and you must then throw the first

stone at me and say: 'Jesus was innocent and died forgiving His murderers, but I, a sinner, am going to offend Him by bloody revenge.' "

He strode up to the angrier boy, knelt before him, and cried: "You start! Throw the first stone at me. Aim at my head!"

Completely stunned, the boy began to tremble. "No!" he protested. "Never! I have no grudge against you. I'll even defend you if anyone hits you."

Dominic ran up to the other boy. He too was taken aback and shouted: "I'll never hurt you—never!"

Dominic then stood up and, in tones vibrant with emotion, exclaimed: "You are both ready to face danger to save me—a nobody. Yet to save your own souls, for which Christ died, you aren't even willing to overlook a stupid remark made at school. Don't you realize that you could lose your souls by committing this sin?" He stood there, silent, crucifix in hand, his eyes welling with tears.

The two boys were stunned at his courageous and generous stand. "At that moment," one of them later admitted, "I was deeply moved. A cold shiver ran through me and I hated myself for having forced a good friend like Dominic to go to such lengths to keep us from that evil deed." A few days later the two classmates, once again on friendly terms, made their peace with God by going to confession.

Each year Don Bosco viewed the approach of the summer vacation with some apprehension. Several weeks in advance he would warn the boys that unless they kept on guard, the devil would wreak havoc in their souls and undo all the good that he had accomplished. He spoke of the dangers they would face from bad companions, evil books, idleness, and self-indulgence. He stressed the need of great caution in dealing with people, and he highly deplored the unwise practice of many parents in allowing boys and girls to play together, characterizing this as "the shipwreck of innocence and the primer of evil." He also remarked that St. Philip Neri would not even permit boys to play with their own sisters.

For these reasons Don Bosco made it clear to the Oratory boys that they would greatly please him if they did not go home for vacation, or if they would at least cut it short. On his part he promised to reward them for their sacrifice with longer recreation periods, snacks, plays, and picnics. He had already done away with

the Christmas vacation and the carnival holidays, although in the early days of the Oratory he had been forced to tolerate them, at least for some boys, because that was the custom in boarding schools. He still allowed the boys to go home for the Easter vacation, and he continued to do so for several more years. The summer vacation, however, was rather long, lasting from the middle of July to about the twentieth of October. Therefore, he arranged for the boys to return to the Oratory about the middle of August for one month during which they took remedial and preparatory courses. He let it be understood that if they failed to return and could offer no satisfactory explanation, that would be sufficient grounds for dismissal. Meanwhile, he was determined to eliminate the Easter vacation as soon as possible and to reduce the summer vacation to a single month.

Needless to say, all of these measures were inspired by his heroic love of souls, for whose sake he not only chose to ignore the ever greater financial burdens that resulted as the number of boys gradually rose to over eight hundred, but also generously exchanged a well-deserved rest for increased worries and labors.

The assembly for the awarding of prizes used to be held during the first half of July, after the examinations. Customarily, Don Bosco gave the main address and spoke from the heart. One of the first alumni has acquainted us with one of these talks which, if not given in 1855, certainly belongs to this period. On this occasion Don Bosco told the boys that the first prize rightfully belonged to the Blessed Virgin because of the help She had given them during that year. He then illustrated his thought with this episode:

One day in May—the month of Mary—prizes were being awarded in a boarding school in the presence of many important guests. The prizes consisted of books, framed pictures, statuettes, and the like; vases of fresh flowers decorated the auditorium. The award winners had the privilege of choosing their prizes as their names were called. The first boy to be called up chose what he liked best. The next boy, outstanding for his conduct and piety, looked over the prizes and for a few moments seemed hesitant as to what to pick. Then, after looking intently at one of the vases of fresh flowers, to the surprise of all he took it and jubilantly went to place it in front of Mary's statue in the nearby chapel. This simple act of devotion was carried out with such obvious sincerity

that it won over the hearts of the audience. The boy's schoolmates were particularly moved, as they indicated by repeated bursts of applause. His example was soon followed by several other prize winners who showed the love they all had for their heavenly Mother.

Don Bosco concluded by saying that the prize Our Lady cherished most was their good Christian conduct while at home.

The school year closed with the Exercise for a Happy Death. Louis Fumero, a choirboy whose very fine voice seemed to turn the chapel and later the church of St. Francis de Sales into another heaven, had now reached the age when his voice would change. Since he was about to leave the Oratory, he went to confession to Don Bosco. On this occasion Don Bosco suggested to him that whenever he sang, he should do so with the intention of giving glory to God. On his part Fumero confided that he had prayed to Our Lady for the grace to keep his soprano voice unchanged, promising in return never to sing worldly songs or take part in worldly concerts or shows. Don Bosco assured him that Our Lady would grant him this grace. It is a fact that Fumero kept his promise and that his beautiful voice remained clear and pure all his life.

At last the day came for the departure of many boys who had not renounced going home, either because they genuinely missed their parents or because of their parents' insistence or their own youthful lightheartedness. In his usual warm manner Don Bosco encouraged all of them not to forget the weekly reception of the sacraments. He also urged each of them to report to his pastor immediately and to consider him as another Don Bosco. Finally, he exhorted them to serve Mass daily, to listen carefully to the Sunday sermon, and, if they could, to teach catechism to children. To each of them he gave a leaflet with tips on how to spend a sinless vacation. Joyous and outwardly serene, he nevertheless felt a tug at his heart as each one left the Oratory, and they felt the same way. Several of them used to walk ten or more miles just to be able to go to confession to him, to seek his advice, or merely to visit him. Some actually came from as far distant towns as Asti, Bra, or Alessandria,[3] and other places even farther away.

There were also some who, in their desire to please Don Bosco

[3] Respectively about 35, 36, and 48 miles from Turin. [Editor]

or in their anxiety to learn more or to continue in their regular practices of piety, chose to remain at the Oratory. Among these there were Dominic Savio and John Massaglia. One day, knowing that their parents missed them and that both boys needed a rest, Don Bosco asked them: "Why don't you go home for a few days?" In reply, they merely chuckled.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Don Bosco asked.

"Well," Dominic replied, "we know that our parents would like to have us home, and we would be glad to go. But we also know that when a bird is in a cage, it is safe, even if it isn't free; that isn't true if it is free to fly wherever it wants. It's the same with us; if we are free we could fall into the snares of the devil."

Nevertheless, Don Bosco thought it best to send them home for a while. They went, but only in obedience to him, and they stayed only for the period of time that he had specified.

Others who had gone home came back, as prescribed, after a month. In the 1854–55 school register we find that in August 1855 there were 115 boarders at the Oratory: 35 students and 80 artisans, not counting clerics and other persons.

When the boys returned, first in August and then in October, Don Bosco's chief concern was to check on whether or not they had followed his advice.

CHAPTER 26

Don Bosco's Almanac

TO be one step ahead of the Waldensians, Don Bosco began preparing his national Catholic almanac *Il Galantuomo*[1] in July. It was to be printed by the De Agostini Press and mailed to the subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche*; the remaining copies were to be placed on newstands. New material included highlights of Pius IX's life and the 1856 schedule for the Forty Hours' devotion in Turin's churches. There were also humorous, scientific, and devotional articles, references to the latest discoveries and inventions, and a charming poem in the Piedmontese dialect entitled *The Vice of Gambling.*

The two previous issues of *Il Galantuomo* had been very successful, but even before publication this one sparked great interest because of several predictions it made. We report them here along with other less important pages because we feel that they will throw more light on Don Bosco's character and on his forthright defense of religious principles. Besides, the 1856 issue of *Il Galantuomo* has been out of print for the past fifty years, and there is no likelihood that these pages may ever again see the light of day apart from this reprint.

Il Galantuomo to His Friends

The Beginning of 1855

For the third time I have the honor of addressing you, my dear friends, about things to come. This year's events have been so serious and important that I must present them in separate chapters.

I start by recalling the first events of the year. As you know, the law against monks and priests caused quite a furor. Incidentally, these

[1] *See* Vol. IV, p. 449. [Editor]

monks visited me when I was sick and helped me a great deal in feeding my boys. Well, whether the Lord meant to punish us by this law, or whatever the reason may be, the fact is that troubles came thick and fast. Our dear queen mother, Maria Teresa, fell ill and shortly afterward passed away. Only a few days later, the reigning queen, Maria Adelaide, followed her mother-in-law to the grave. Poor queens! They were so good and so generous to the poor! I deeply mourned their deaths and so did many others. Throughout the days of their burial I prayed for the repose of their souls. True, many people consoled themselves by saying: "We've lost two benefactresses on earth but have gained two protectors in heaven." Yet the common feeling was that these two mothers of the poor had passed away because the world was becoming ever more evil and did not deserve such good queens. Many believed that God took them so that they would not have to witness the thousand infamies about to be committed.

The period of mourning was still upon us when a new sorrow struck. The duke of Genoa, a brave and illustrious warrior who had risked so many perils in Lombardy and in the Novara campaign, died in the prime of his life. Not long afterward one of the king's sons also died. These misfortunes all occurred during the debate on the bill against monks and priests. I am not saying that God made all these good people die because of that law, but that's what many people believed, and they still believe it. Even now the feeling is that God called the good to Himself in order to punish the bad as they deserved.

During all these afflictions, our government saw that France and England were not faring too well in the war against Russia and decided to help them—a very good idea, I think, because helping one's neighbor is an act of charity and therefore a good deed.

I was one of the hotheads who got the itch to join the army and fight. But I couldn't enlist because—as everyone knows—I'm forty years old, lame in one foot, somewhat of a hunchback, deaf in one ear, and blind in one eye. Nevertheless, I wanted to volunteer—not because I was anxious to kill (I wouldn't even kill a flea)—but because I wanted to make some money to support myself and my boys.

I was in desperate straits indeed and had no idea where to turn for help. Our archbishop used to give me money nearly every week, but then he was exiled; the monks used to give me soup, but now there was talk of shipping them all back to their homes. What could I do? I got a kitchen job with a man who was going to set up shop for our forces in the Crimea.

The Sight of the Sea

I know you'll be anxious to hear something about my trip, so I'll oblige, but I'll leave out whatever is frightening or brutal.

I took the train at Porta Nuova and reached Genoa in a few hours. After loading a hundred and one things on board, we put out to sea. I felt fine as long as land was in sight, but when the towns, beaches, hills, and mountains began to fade in the distance, I became quite uneasy and said: "Poor Galantuomo! Who knows if you'll ever see these shores again?"

Once we were far out at sea, I became interested in the ship. Ships are like the boats you see floating on the Po, except that they are a great deal larger, with plenty of rooms for eating, sleeping, walking, smoking, and other pastimes—all free—to those who have the money to pay for them.

Another thing that impressed me was the sea. How immense it is! Just imagine a boundless plain without hills or mountains, without streets, houses, vineyards, meadows, trees, or groves, and you'll have an idea of the sea.

I enjoyed watching the waves and the fish—large and small—as they swam close by. They seemed to know that I was a true *galantuomo*[2] and that they had nothing to fear from me. By now darkness had set in. Therefore, brushing aside all thoughts of the past or the future, I went below deck to get a bite to eat and a glass of wine, and then I went to bed.

I was sleeping peacefully when, accidentally or otherwise, a soldier grabbed my wooden leg, perhaps thinking it was firewood.

"What are you doing?" I yelled. "That's my leg!"

"That's no leg!" he replied. "It's just wood!"

"You idiot!" I shouted. "If you want to burn a leg, burn your own. I'm paying taxes on this one! Just leave it alone!"

He finally did and walked away. But after that I couldn't go back to sleep, so I went on deck for fresh air. There I witnessed something I had never seen before: an infinite number of stars surrounding me on all sides. At that moment I felt like a tiny speck of dust lost in the universe. The more I gazed at that vast expanse, the smaller I felt, and I couldn't help exclaiming: "Poor Galantuomo, you're just fading into nothingness!"

But then I realized that I was still living. My head was on my shoul-

[2] Italian for "good fellow" or "trustworthy man." [Editor]

ders, my heart was beating, and my mouth was forming words. Nevertheless, I was aware of my littleness and I said to myself: "Look here, Galantuomo, see how little you are compared to all those stars which are so large and so distant from each other. How great must He be who made all these things!"

Continuing on our voyage, we crossed the Tyrrhenian Sea between the island of Sardinia and Tuscany and reached Malta where we stocked up on water. As you know, sea water is not drinkable. Moving from one sea to another, we finally docked at Constantinople, a city that is larger than Turin but not as beautiful. I decided to stroll through the winding and rather dirty streets. For the first time in my life I saw a Turk. Turks are renowned for their great courage in battle, but to look at them you'd think they were all comedians. They wear baggy pants, a loose shirt, and a large cap—so large that it can hold a bushel of corn. They are not very smart either; they can't even speak Piedmontese, a thing that any little child of ours can do.

I asked one of them what time it was and he replied: "Rakid, rakid."

"I didn't ask you that," I said. "What time is it?"

"Rakid rabadam rabadam," he answered.

I finally gave up and returned to the ship, and none too soon, for it was about to set out for the Black Sea. I was looking forward to seeing it because I really thought it would look black, but it wasn't so! Later I learned that it was given that name because it looks black at night and because it's covered with thick, dark clouds the greater part of the year.

The Crimea

After two weeks at sea, I heard shouts one morning: "The Crimea! The Crimea!" I ran out in my shirt sleeves. Far off I could make out a little speck which looked like a man submerged but with his nose sticking out. It grew larger as we drew near, and at last a whole town took shape with people just like ourselves.

I found very little difference between this country and ours. There, too, the sun rises in the morning and goes down at night; it's light by day and dark at night, except when the moon is shining. The natives aren't different from us, either; they have hands and feet, mouths and tongues, eyes and ears. There, too, you have to work if you want to eat, unless you ply some other trade like stealing.

The main difference I noticed had to do with food. Here it's expensive; there it's *very* expensive. A bowl of soup costs fifty centesimi; a weak lemonade, forty centesimi; a pound of bread, a lira and twenty-five centesimi; a quart of ordinary table wine, three lire; a capon drumstick,

a lira—and so on down the line. Practically everything was expensive, but this was to our advantage—that is, my master's and my own—because we were making money.

There were some nuisances: stifling heat and nasty gadflies during the day, and freezing cold, bugs, and fleas at night. Several times I heard army officers saying that these pestiferous insects gave them more trouble than Russian guns. Fingernails are far better weapons against these little pests than swords or guns.

To learn more about this country, I sought information from a captain. He generously invited me for an afternoon walk during which he briefed me as follows:

"My dear Galantuomo, since you want to learn about the Crimea, I'll gladly tell you about the things you can more easily understand.

"The Crimea, the old *Chersonesus Taurica,* is a peninsula surrounded by the Black Sea, the Sea of Azov, and the Putrid Sea. It is joined to the Russian mainland by the Isthmus of Perekop, a strip about four miles long.

"You have already heard about Balaklava, Alma, Inkermann, and Yevpatoriya where the Allies won great victories last year. At the extreme southern tip of the peninsula there's a strongly fortified little hill called Fort Malakhov. From that little hill you can see the city of Sevastopol. Back of it there are several fortresses which will soon fall to the Allies. There are few lakes and rivers. One important small river is the Chernaya which at the moment separates the Allies from the Russians whom we shall soon attack. The population is about two hundred thousand people, mostly Tartars and Mohammedans. The capital is Simferopol. The main ports are Almeschetta, Balaklava, and Sevastopol; this last one is the most strongly fortified.

"Agriculture is little developed because the land is mostly steppe country, scorched in summer and frozen in winter. The main crops are oats, vegetable oil, linen, hemp, and tobacco; there are also excellent vineyards. Lesser crops are figs, olives, and pomegranates. Locusts are a constant plague. There are many livestock herds: oxen, camels, goats, sheep, horses, and donkeys as large as those we have at home. (I'm not referring to you.)"

There are also other cities, mountains, rivers, lakes, and streams worth mentioning, like Karabi, Jaila Tkhadyz-dugh, and many others that the courteous captain rattled off and which I could not even pronounce, let alone remember.

Nevertheless, I thanked him for his courtesy and then ran some errands for my master who had called me just at that moment.

Cholera in the Crimea

As soon as our soldiers got to the Crimea, several fell ill with various diseases and—what's worse—with cholera. At first nobody realized it. It appeared to be an ordinary sickness brought on by a long, fatiguing voyage. But soon the truth became known that it was actually cholera, the same disease that had ravaged our country last year. Then and there I too became frightened, but soon I revived my spirits a bit, saying to myself: "Now don't be afraid, Galantuomo! Fortune favors the brave. Do what you can for your neighbor and trust in Divine Providence." Then I got busy helping the sick as best I could.

However, things soon took a very ugly turn. Every day more and more people kept dying. The hospitals were packed, and both doctors and medicines were scarce. The only remedy available was canal salt. One officer took an ounce of it, but instead of feeling better he suffered a terrible attack of stomach cramps. Out of his mind with pain, he leaped from his bed and ran about madly until he dropped dead. I won't tell you anything else because these things would only sadden me again and upset you, too, if you are the sensitive type. Let me just put it this way: everyone was scared stiff! They tell me that in two months twenty-five hundred people died.

What really hit me harder than anything else was my master's death. I was very fond of him and the feeling was mutual. I stayed at his bedside until the end. When he realized that he was slowly losing his power of speech, he called me over and said: "Galantuomo, I want to thank you for nursing me. I know that I'm going to die and that I'll never see Piedmont again. Here's a bag of scudi,[3] the capital we brought from home. Take it back to my family. The money in this other pouch is what we earned. Half of it is yours; give the other half to the more needy soldiers. Sell what's left of our stock of supplies and keep the money for yourself. Write off all debts listed in the ledger. I'm ready to die because I've received the Last Sacraments. Stay with me till the end, but after you have buried me, go back home and tell my family and friends of my death. I can't draw up a last will and testament, so let the law handle that. Dear Galantuomo, don't abandon me in these my last moments. May God reward you! Pray for me!"

He couldn't say another word. A scorching fever, accompanied by choked breathing, soon took his life. Imagine my feelings! There I was, all alone, after having watched two men die! I prepared my master's

[3] The scudo, approximately equivalent to a U.S. silver dollar, was a silver coin used in Italy until the 19th century. [Editor]

body for burial, and then, with no priest or anyone else around, I wrapped him in a blanket, picked him up, and buried him in a grave that I dug not far from our tent. Afterward, to comfort myself, I knelt down and recited the *Pater, Ave,* and *Requiem* five times for the repose of his soul.

The Future Destiny of Our Country

After carrying out my poor master's last wishes I secured passage on a ship that was to leave on July 2. Late on the eve of my sailing, a stranger came to see me. His courteous manner and bearing inspired confidence. "Galantuomo," he said to me in Piedmontese, "tomorrow you will be going home. Before you leave, I want to show you something that you will certainly never see in any other part of the world. Come with me."

"Where?" I asked. "And what is it that you want me to see?"

He replied: "I want to take you to a *Mosul* who will reveal to us the outcome of this war and the future of our country." Curiosity and his Piedmontese tongue got the best of me, and so I followed him. He led me down several streets to a huge building. I entered a room and then walked down a string of corridors for some two hours in semidarkness until I found myself in a handsomely decorated, well-lit cave.

At first glance it seemed unoccupied. I was beginning to think that I would have to spend the night there when my guide pointed out to me a venerable old man sitting at a small table. His hair was as white as snow and his face was rather lined but healthy-looking and majestic. He was reading a book very intently. Straining my eyes, I managed to make out its title, *Experience: The Best Teacher.*

Becoming aware of our presence, he slowly looked up and asked: "What has brought you to this secluded spot?"

My guide replied: "We have come to pay our respects and to ask you about the outcome of the war and the future of our country."

The old man replied: "Only God and those to whom He has deigned to reveal it can disclose that. Nevertheless, I'll tell you whatever I can. This war will be long, bloody, and ruthless. The Allies will win, but both sides will suffer heavy losses. The world will know no peace until it has been plagued with hunger, war, and pestilence.

"You, Galantuomo, will return to your country and see it ravaged by a horrible plague. Since people will attribute it to chance, other evils will follow: hailstorms, droughts, earthquakes, famine, and other economic hardships. Men will react to these Divine punishments with

sacrilegious thefts, suicides, murders, blasphemies, and other impious acts that will call for even greater punishments.

"Tell your friends that evil people in your country are determined to destroy both throne and altar. The former will collapse, but not the latter. If people will not mend their ways and avert God's anger, frightful things that have never been seen before will take place. The Faith will have its heroes; priests and faithful will shed their blood. Many will yield, but many others will remain steadfast unto death. Human authority will finally collapse and God's law will triumph. Then the evil ones will wish that they had never been born, but in vain. For the sake of God's glory, it is necessary for the bad to be punished and the faithful to be comforted. Only after all this will there be world peace."

I wanted to say something but the old man stopped me. "Hush!" he said. "No one must interrupt me when I speak. You wanted to know when all these evils will come to pass. I now tell you that some have already begun this year; others will come about later. If men continue to ignore Divine Law, even greater punishments than those already predicted will occur. The only way to ward them off and prepare a better future is to abandon evil."

I wondered whether I was dreaming as I listened to his words, and I did not know whether or not I should believe them. I was so flabbergasted that I dared not ask any questions. I thanked him, bowed deeply, and left. My guide again led the way. I asked him repeatedly to tell me the name of the man and the name of that place, but to no avail.

My friends, I do not know if you will believe what I have told you. Do as you wish. As for myself, I'll believe those things as they gradually come true. I would only point out that, as a general rule, old people are more experienced than the young and they rarely are wrong.

I hastened to leave, and after an uneventful voyage I arrived home. Unfortunately I have noticed that what the old seer predicted is coming true. Let us only hope that the rest of what he said will prove wrong. But I—a *galantuomo* ever worrying about myself and others, too—have grave misgivings about the future. If I'm still alive next year, I'll have many more serious, strange, and very important things to tell you.

Don Bosco had begun writing these pages in July. Meanwhile, this is what was happening in the Crimea. In May [1855] the Piedmontese, led by General Alfonso La Marmora, had landed at Balaklava and laid siege to it, but soon they were stricken with

cholera. Many soldiers and officers died—among the latter the brave colonel of the bersaglieri,[4] Alessandro La Marmora.

On August 6, fifty thousand Russian troops launched a surprise counterattack. The Piedmontese army, though outnumbered, contained the enemy's offensive so effectively near the Chernaya River that Allied reinforcements were able to reach the scene in time and win a resounding victory on August 16, 1855.

On September 8, French troops, supported by the British, stormed and seized Fort Malakhov, the formidable line of defense of Sevastopol. The siege lasted almost a year, with both sides daily unleashing heavy artillery bombardments. It is estimated that 500,000 men fell during this conflict.

In December 1855, Russia at last accepted peace proposals. Negotiations were carried on in Paris by the nations who had been involved in the war, and finally a peace treaty was signed on March 30, 1856.

[4] A swift corps created by General Alessandro La Marmora in 1836. [Editor]

CHAPTER 27

Charming Ways

DON Bosco's very name charmed even boys who had not yet met him in person, as we gather from the written report of one such lad, John Villa from Ponderano near Biella:

I first met Don Bosco in July 1855 in Turin, but I had already heard of him in 1852. In his Sunday sermon our pastor, Father Ferrero, told us of Don Bosco who at that time was building the church of St. Francis de Sales in [the section of Turin called] Valdocco. Father Ferrero said that many boys from Biella were going to Turin as apprentice bricklayers, and that on Sundays and holy days they were quite lonesome, not knowing what to do or where to go. Fortunately there was a young priest there—Don Bosco—who looked after such boys, provided wholesome recreation for them, and taught them catechism. This priest was now building a church. Our pastor then exhorted us to contribute generously to the collection which was to be taken up for Don Bosco, assuring us that our money would benefit many of our own boys who worked in Turin. He praised Don Bosco and his work so highly and he spoke so warmly of his solicitude and self-sacrifice for boys that the congregation was deeply impressed. I was only fourteen then, but Don Bosco became a hero to me and I could not wait to meet him. Three years later, family circumstances took me to Turin and I hurried to Valdocco. He greeted me in such a fatherly way that I was deeply impressed and very happy. I shall never forget our first meeting. It sparked a strong love for him which never abated. I could not help comparing his friendly way with boys with that of other priests I knew. None of them had ever been as kindly and amiable. Nor was I the only one to feel this way. I learned that many other boys around him had exactly the same opinion. When we first met, Don Bosco said to me: "From now on we'll be good friends until we meet again in heaven!" This, as I later discovered, was a familiar expression of his.

From then on until 1866, except for the period of my military service,

I regularly attended the festive oratory. At home I used to receive the sacraments fairly often, but I now began to go to confession and Communion almost every week, and even more frequently at Don Bosco's advice. From 1866 on I visited the Oratory every now and then and always managed to talk to him.

But now let me return to my first impressions. I got to know Mamma Margaret, of course. She was a housekeeper, a devout woman, and a loving mother to all of us. Everyone loved her and thought the world of her. Her virtuous life was an inspiration to everyone who knew her.

When I first went to Valdocco, I found there about two hundred boarders, including some clerics, and about six hundred day boys attending the festive oratory. Whenever Don Bosco showed up in the playground, they would all cluster around him, and they considered themselves lucky if they could get near enough to kiss his hand. He would whisper a few words to practically every boy. This was always a holy, unforgettable experience.

I noticed that Don Bosco made a point of allowing the boys to be active and enjoy their games in order to attract them. The more noise they made at play, the happier he seemed to be. Whenever he saw us looking lonesome or not quite as lively as usual, he would leave no stone unturned until he had cheered us up again with new games and new ideas. He also took pains to gather us around him on Sundays and holy days in order to keep an eye on us. When it was time for church services, he would ring the bell or have others ring it. Then all playing would instantly cease and we would all file into church.

Thus reads the testimony of John Villa. However, in contrast to the spirit of love reigning within the Oratory, outside its grounds an evil spirit seemed to stir wicked or thoughtless people. A gang of youths—probably egged on by anticlericals—had begun calling Don Bosco an insulting nickname that had first been coined by hostile newsmen; they would chant it scornfully either individually or as a group whenever Don Bosco appeared. He understood perfectly how deadly the weapon of ridicule could be in the hands of the ignorant and the potential harm it could cause his priestly ministry. Occasionally, he would good-naturedly ask the youths to stop their raillery, but when he realized that this approach would be useless, he simply endured their jibes and resignedly went his way. We learned of this fact from Father [John Baptist] Francesia who often accompanied him.

Unfortunately these youths did not confine their jibes to words. For several months a gang of these delinquents had been roaming the grounds immediately surrounding the Oratory, insulting those who were entering or leaving, and occasionally tossing stones at them. On Sundays and holy days they would throw stones into the playground, endangering the boys at play. One of them, Louis Fumero, told us:

One Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1855, around 5 in the afternoon, I saw something very unusual as we boarders—both students and artisans—and a group of day boys had just come out of church. The playground in those days was not entirely fenced in. The so-called "Valdocco Gang"—which made a practice of assaulting Oratory boys whenever they happened to meet us—suddenly showed up and showered us with stones.

At this Don Bosco told us to scurry for shelter behind the walls. Then he calmly walked toward the ruffians as they continued to hurl stones at him. Miraculously he was not hit. His words and his courageous manner finally induced the gang to call off its attack.

However, the matter did not end there, as we learned from Father [Michael] Rua:

A few days later, Don Bosco chanced upon a dozen of those delinquents as they were indulging in their usual pastime of annoying passers-by. He stopped and asked them in a friendly manner why they were not working. When they replied that no one would give them work, he invited them to the Oratory to learn a trade, and they accepted his offer. Thus Don Bosco not only got rid of a troublesome gang but had the satisfaction of turning them into good workmen. Some remained for six months, others for a year, and some for two and even four or five years. When they left, they were all well instructed both in their Faith and in a trade by means of which they could earn their livelihood. Many years later one of these boys, upon returning from [South] America, went straight to the Oratory to express his gratitude to Don Bosco for having so charitably helped him and his friends. I personally spoke with him. It would be a long story if I had to tell about the many times Don Bosco helped boys who had been rude and hostile to him.

It was now the middle of July. Taking the clerics [John Baptist] Francesia and [John] Turchi and others along with him, Don Bosco went to St. Ignatius' Shrine near Lanzo[1] for the yearly spiritual retreat which was also attended by many laymen from Turin. At Father Joseph Cafasso's request Don Bosco was the retreat master, and as in previous years—through God's grace—his efforts transformed many lives as his charisms drew the retreatants to him for confession. One incident should suffice to indicate this.

One of the retreatants was a freethinking journalist who perhaps had come mainly with the idea of getting a few days' rest in the healthy mountain air. He had written many articles attacking Don Bosco, even though he had never met him personally. During the first few days, either because he kept to himself or because he associated with people who did not know Don Bosco either, he was entirely unaware of the identity of this man of God. However, impressed by his sermons, he decided to go to confession, and seeing a crowd near a confessional, he joined them. In making his confession, he happened to mention that he was a newspaperman. Don Bosco realized who he was, listened sympathetically, and, after giving him advice, imposed an appropriate penance. Although the journalist had been impressed by the priest's kindness, it had not occurred to him to ask his name. He kissed Don Bosco's hand and was about to withdraw when the suspicion suddenly flashed through his mind. Turning back, he asked the confessor: "Are you Don Bosco by any chance?"

"Yes I am," he replied with a smile. Deeply moved, the journalist turned away with tears in his eyes.

This retreat was marked by an even more remarkable incident. On the last day Don Bosco was leading the evening rosary as usual, kneeling on one side of the sanctuary to the left of the main altar, with about a hundred laymen behind him at his left.

As he came to the end of the *De Profundis,* he suddenly stopped; then, while attempting to go on with the responsories and *Oremus,* he hesitated and stammered, unable to continue. He seemed to have lost his memory or to have suffered a distraction. "That was what I thought," Father [John] Turchi later testified in writing, "but since I was far back, I couldn't see what he was doing. After a few mo-

[1] *See* Vol. II, pp. 96f, 112f. [Editor]

ments he resumed the prayers, and I figured that my guess was right. When we left the church and retired to our rooms, I asked several people if they had noticed that interruption, but from their answers I gathered that, generally, the incident was considered quite trivial.

Nevertheless, quite a few people were surprised that Don Bosco should have stumbled on such a common prayer. However, his more intimate friends sensed that perhaps something extraordinary had happened, and they were right. As Don Bosco was praying, he had seen two tongues of fire suddenly appear and hover over the altar. One flashed the word "death"; the other, "apostasy." Then the two flames, as if detaching themselves from their wicks, had glided through the Church. Don Bosco stood up to follow their course. The two flames, after circling the group of men a few times, finally rested on two of them. The light they cast enabled Don Bosco to see them clearly. Then the two little flames vanished.

On the following day, as everyone was leaving, Mr. Bertagna of Castelnuovo, who was curious about the incident, managed to board the same coach as Don Bosco, and he took a seat beside him. The clerics, too, were burning with curiosity. When he was questioned about the incident, Don Bosco waited until the coaches had begun to move before he replied. Then he told them what had happened, beginning with the words: "Last night I had a funny experience." After describing the incident, he concluded as follows: "When I came out of the church, I watched to see if there would be any comments. Nothing of the sort happened, and so I figured that no one had noticed my hesitation. That's why I didn't say anything. You are the first ones to find out what really took place. Now let's wait and see what happens."

His vision was fulfilled that same year. The man upon whom the little flame of "apostasy" had rested was a wealthy businessman, widely regarded as a good practicing Catholic; he became a Protestant. The other man, over whose head the second flame had hovered, was a baron; he died the same year.

Don Bosco disclosed their names to Father [John Baptist] Francesia who never forgot them. When Father [John] Turchi several years later inquired about the man over whom the first flame had hovered, he was told: "He became a Protestant."

It is a known fact that small flames appeared at other times over the heads of various people and revealed to Don Bosco what would become of them.

On returning to Turin, Don Bosco busied himself by sending out the two August issues of *Letture Cattoliche* that had been printed by the Ribotta Press, this time with the imprimatur of the Turin archdiocese. Joined into one booklet entitled *Marriage Instructions* by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, they were brief, to the point, and written in a popular style. The author's Foreword stated:

A veritable stream of publications has been poured out lately, spreading false notions about the nature of the matrimonial bond and leading astray even university professors, members of Parliament, and judges who are loath to accept the infallible teaching of the Church.

Worse yet, these people strive to turn these errors into laws.

The author then went on to prove—as a natural result of Christian marriage—the rights of the Church in the education of Catholic children. He also brought out the obligations of parents to bring up their children according to Christian principles, to entrust them to genuine Christian teachers, and to give them complete freedom of choice in their vocation.

He concluded with this statement: "Should the government propose marriage legislation which the Holy Father or the bishops declare contrary to sound doctrine, all Catholics should vigorously petition Parliament to reject it."

Meanwhile, Don Bosco wrote to Count Pio Galleani Agliano:

Turin, July 31, 1855

My dear Count:

Now that I am back from my spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius', I hasten to thank you and thus ease my conscience.

I am very grateful for your remittance of 130 lire for the lottery tickets, and also for the 105 kilos of breadsticks for the young orphans and other boys sheltered here. Let me also thank you for your standing order to the Fornello Bakery for 15 kilograms of breadsticks each month.

These and similar acts of charity are like so many pearls that will

enrich the heavenly crown of glory you are daily preparing for yourself with the cunning of the serpent and the simplicity of the dove.

I now need something altogether different. I am preparing another issue of *Letture Cattoliche* and I need to get away from here for a few days. More than once I have thought of coming to your home at Carraglio. Of course, I must first ask your permission. Would you give me a little corner in which to work and sleep and something to keep body and soul together? If so, I could leave Turin [Monday] morning, August 6, and return on Saturday.

Will I pay for my room and board? Of course! How? We shall split the profits! What profits? Well, if some spiritual good results from this issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* I will credit you with half the merit to compensate for your hospitality.

Meanwhile, I beg you to forgive me if I have been too familiar. I shall not fail to pray—and to have my boys pray—for you and your family.

Respectfully and gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

The count graciously obliged, and Don Bosco acknowledged his letter as follows:

Turin, August 3, 1855

My dear Count:

Poor Don Bosco riding in your carriage! I'm afraid this will shock all the democrats in Carraglio. Nevertheless, since in this case the honor will redound on those who do honor, and also because I am a complete stranger in your part of the country, I accept your kind offer. I'm leaving on the first train in the morning, and I'll have no reason to make a stop-over at Cuneo until the return journey.

Very grateful for your gracious and frequent favors, I thank you cordially and respectfully.

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco received a warm welcome when he arrived at the count's villa. While there he prepared the two September issues of *Letture Cattoliche* that formed a single booklet entitled *A Bio-*

graphical Sketch of Charles Louis Dehaller, Member of the Supreme Council at Berne, and His Return to the Catholic Faith. In the Appendix Don Bosco inserted Dehaller's letter to his family explaining the reason for his return to the Roman Catholic Church.

This booklet stressed two important points. The first was that it is the most brilliant and upright Protestants who become Catholics, whereas it is the scoundrels among Catholics who become Protestants. For the former, conversion is a sacrifice; for the latter, conversion simply means an easier way of life. The second point was that whereas Protestants harassed those who became Catholics, they did not in the least bother those who switched to other denominations or even to other religions.

On his return to Valdocco Don Bosco gave the manuscript to the Paravia Press and then wrote to Count Pio Galleani Agliano.

Turin, August 14, 1855

My dear Count:

I am glad to write that I had a pleasant trip back from Palasazzo. It was uneventful except for the company of two rabid democrats who conversed with me all the way from Cuneo to Turin; however, they were quite discreet and respectful.

The week of quiet and rest I enjoyed with you was very beneficial to my health, but my stay in your house also proved to be to my great spiritual advantage because it afforded me the opportunity to benefit from the Christian atmosphere reigning in your family. Thus I am doubly grateful to you.

I am sending you one hundred copies of a booklet on confession; it might do some good in your thriving democratic territory. You will also receive three full sets of *Letture Cattoliche* from its very beginning; one for you, one for your countess, and the third one for Father Allione. I am also sending two sets of this year's issues for Father Guardian of the Capuchin monastery at Carraglio, as I promised him I would.

I'll see you on the feast of St. Philomena. The young man I plan to bring along to help with the singing would like to try Maestro Corini's *Tantum Ergo.* This might interest the organist; if so, perhaps he could also teach it to a few others, although this is not really necessary.

Happy feast day to you, dear Count, to your family, and to Father Allione. May the Blessed Virgin bless you all and obtain for you from

Her Divine Son tranquillity, peace, and courage to persevere in doing good, so that all of you may praise and bless Her together in heaven some day. Amen.

I also ask all of you to pray for me.

Respectfully and gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

Some two months later he again wrote to the count:

Turin, October 7, 1855

My dear Count:

The boy Menardi—whom you recommended last spring—was immediately accepted and told to report on October 1. He has now been here for a week. We shall do our best to make a good boy out of him.

I was very sorry to learn of Father Cavallo's death. Death is no respecter of even young priests; this should be a lesson for all of us who are growing old.

I am thinking of making another trip to Palasazzo, but I am not yet sure whether I can get away; many things have come up that still remain to be done.

I can assure you that I shall fulfill my second promise and pray for you and your growing family. I add my own humble prayers to those of my poor boys; among so many little scamps there are really quite a few who are very good.

May Our Lady of the Rosary grant you and your family true peace of mind and all the graces you need for this life and the next one.

With the greatest esteem, I am,

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

We have included these letters as an example of the loving trust and Christian familiarity with which Don Bosco treated his benefactors. In the following chapter we shall see how often and for what reason Don Bosco visited noble families.

CHAPTER 28

A Way with Benefactors

IT was Don Bosco's policy never to make visits or to concern himself with anyone's business unless the Oratory's needs or the glory of God demanded it. However, such cases arose frequently, and therefore, at considerable personal sacrifice, he resigned himself to the necessity of calling upon the wealthy.

Don Bosco preferred the company of poor ignorant boys to the elite who often came to see him; but, when he was in their presence, he always displayed a consummate courtesy and simplicity without the faintest trace of self-consciousness. Likewise, he was never a slave to etiquette; standing on ceremony was alien to his sincere and affable manner. Once, when asked by a co-worker how to act in the presence of important people, he replied: "Just be yourself. Act naturally."

One year he sent one of his clerics to vacation at the summer villa of a noble family. In the presence of the lady of the house he told him: "Act as if you were in your own home. If you need anything, ask the baroness as you would your own mother."

When introducing himself—especially in a formal gathering—he did so very humbly. If questioned about his birthplace or present status he would candidly reply that he had been born poor and that good people had helped him to get an education. He was glad to say that he was only a simple priest, with no degree in theology or even a certificate for teaching in elementary schools. "I'm just Don Bosco," he would say, "and my only title is 'leader of street boys.' " Yet at the same time he meticulously addressed people by their proper titles; like St. Francis de Sales, he preferred to be overgenerous rather than wanting in proper respect.

He also visited the wealthy so that he could be of help to them in their family needs. His conversation usually tended to be serious and

edifying, but he was always very welcome because he seemed to be a living illustration of the words of Wisdom: "A kindly turn of speech multiplies a man's friends." [Sir. 6, 5] In this way he made friends for the Oratory, a goal which was constantly on his mind, as evidenced by remarks of his—seemingly inopportune—such as: "What a large room! I could put twenty beds in here!" Yet such remarks were always made tactfully and with due respect. In reply to the many questions put to him, he could not help mentioning his boys and what he had done and was doing for them, but he always spoke of his accomplishments with the utmost simplicity. Father [Joachim] Berto heard Baroness Gabriella Ricci exclaim: "It's amazing! Don Bosco recounts his remarkable deeds as though he were speaking of someone else."

If there were any young boys in these wealthy families, delightful scenes would take place. Don Bosco would greet them warmly and exhort or praise them in such a way that they would be spurred to greater efforts to please God and their parents. He would often join in their games as if he were one of them. He treated all boys he met as he did his Oratory boys, to the delight of the mothers, who would not let him go without first obtaining his blessing. Countess Teresa Bricherasio was one of the mothers who mentioned this to Father [Michael] Rua. As soon as her little boys heard that Don Bosco had arrived, they would run to him. His words and little presents so deeply impressed them that they remembered him fondly ever afterward.

During his visits he tried not to inconvenience or embarrass his hosts in any way. On one occasion when he was offered refreshments, he departed from his usual custom and accepted a cup of coffee. Somehow on the tray was not the sugar bowl, but one with epsom salts. Don Bosco helped himself and then drank the coffee without showing the slightest sign of disgust. While waiting for his hosts to appear, he used to converse amiably with the domestics as if with friends, candidly letting them know that he had once been a waiter himself. The servants were delighted by his visits and felt a rapport with him that they did not feel with their employers. This attitude of his did not stem from affectation, but from true humility. This was obvious from the way he greeted his own relatives or the aging Mrs. Dorothy Moglia—whose farmhand he had

once been[1]—when they called at the Oratory in their humble peasant garb. He always treated the latter as his own mother and sat her beside himself at table.

Visits to wealthy families unavoidably resulted in invitations to dinner, for these families regarded it as an honor to have Don Bosco with them. He accepted not only to show his gratitude for their help, but also so that he would not appear unappreciative of people who were genuinely fond of him; then, too, such occasions gave him a chance to talk at length of his Oratory's many needs and of his other undertakings. However, on leaving for one of these dinner invitations, he would often say to Father Rua or to his secretary: "If you only knew how much I dislike eating away from the Oratory! But I must for the sake of our work. Some generous families promise me a donation, but only on condition that I have dinner with them. They tell me: 'Come for our contribution in person,' or 'If you ever need anything, you have only to come to dinner.' If it were not for this, I'd never accept these invitations, even though they are sincere. I much prefer our frugal meals to dining in those homes with their good china and a lot of courses. I don't like it, but there's nothing I can do about it." As a matter of fact, sometimes on sitting down at one of these dinners and unfolding his napkin, Don Bosco would find a 100, 500 or even a 1,000 lire bill in it; at other times, with the dessert his hosts would present him with a substantial donation on a dish.

Yet in spite of his incessant need for money, Don Bosco declined numerous invitations because of his many pressing activities, especially those of a priestly nature. He had often promised to have dinner with Count Charles Cays at his castle at Caselette on the count's name day, November 4, but he had never been able to keep his promise. Finally, one year he sent word to the count that he would unfailingly come this time.

"If Don Bosco comes, I'll eat a dog!" the count exclaimed with a laugh.

When Don Bosco learned of the remark, he brought along some pastry, various pieces of which had been shaped to look like puppies. While dessert was being served, he put them on the table. "Keep your word now, Count," he said. "Eat your dog!"

[1] *See* Vol. I, pp. 144ff. [Editor]

Marquis [Dominic] Fassati was another person who complained that Don Bosco's visits were much too rare for his liking. Therefore, one day he personally called at the Oratory with the marchioness to invite him to dinner. Don Bosco politely begged to be excused since the Oratory was then insufficiently staffed and he was needed. He further tried to explain that he was very busy and that he still had to proofread the next issue of *Letture Cattoliche*. When the marquis continued to insist, Don Bosco added that he had to go in search of money to pay for a building that he had put up in 1852 near the Filippi house.[2] The marquis then and there pledged a contribution of three thousand lire. He told him: "Every time that you have dinner with me, I'll give you a hundred lire." Driven by necessity, Don Bosco dined with the marquis fifteen times that month, receiving a hundred lire bill on each occasion. Although the marquis was very fond of Don Bosco, he did not want to take up too much of his time. Therefore, he said to him at the end of the fifteenth dinner: "I don't want to make things too hard for you; here is the balance of the three thousand lire I promised you. But remember: you'll always do me a great favor if you can have dinner with us without serious inconvenience to yourself." He then handed him fifteen hundred lire and escorted him as far as the Valdocco Circle. On the way, Don Bosco disclosed that a bill of several thousand lire was due in January for construction material and labor. The marquis replied: "Dear Don Bosco, I promise that by that time I'll have ten thousand lire for your most pressing debts." By that time they had reached the Valdocco Circle where one of the Oratory boys, Joseph Reano, was waiting for Don Bosco. After taking leave of the marquis, Don Bosco, while walking to the Oratory, told the boy what had happened that evening, concluding with: "May God bless this generous and devout nobleman!" Marquis Fassati—who indeed was generous but had been exhorted by Don Bosco to greater generosity—often exclaimed: "It's strange, but true! The more money I give to Don Bosco, the more I make."

However, other benefactors adamantly refused to give Don Bosco any money by mail no matter how many circulars or personal letters he sent to them. There was only one way they would give him a donation: he had to have dinner with them. One of these benefactors,

[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 327ff. [Editor]

Duchess Laval Montmorency, was a friend of Marchioness Barolo and similarly dedicated to charitable causes. She was the daughter of Joseph De Maistre and had accompanied him when he was appointed ambassador to St. Petersburg; there she had learned Russian, French, English, German, Latin, and Greek to perfection. After becoming impoverished and orphaned by the revolution, she married the duke of Montmorency, who soon afterward died and left her his entire fortune.

The duchess truly deserved this legacy because of her goodness, and she always referred to the duke gratefully as "my benefactor." She thought very highly of Don Bosco, and since she lived in nearby Borgo Cornalese, she wished him to call on her frequently. Throughout his lifetime she provided him with shoes which he very often gave to his clerics. However, when it came to money, she had laid down the rule: "If you want money, come to dinner." Whenever he did, she kept her word generously.

We might wonder why people so desired Don Bosco's company. The reason is clear from the testimony of several clerics whom Don Bosco often took along on such occasions: [John] Cagliero, [John] Turchi, [John Baptist] Anfossi, and [John Baptist] Francesia. They are witnesses to our words and confirm the written testimony of Father Rua which we now report:

> In accompanying Don Bosco to dinner several times, I found out why people were so anxious to invite him. Though serious and reserved, Don Bosco always brought up interesting and edifying topics that delighted his host and guests. He had the knack of giving a good sermon without making others aware of it. His words made a lasting impression on all who were present. His more frequent topics were the goodness, wisdom, providence, and mercy of God. He spoke with such relish and warmth that his listeners were filled with inner joy and fervor. They could not help but realize that they were listening to a saint. He also spoke with ease on science, art, history, and literature, much to the amazement of all, although he always managed to work in some pertinent religious thought or to stir his listeners to make some charitable contribution to help him in his undertakings.

Several times he used chance situations to achieve this end. One day, seated at an abundantly laden table, he remarked: "If only my

boys were here! How well they'd dispose of all these gifts of God!" On another occasion, when the second and third courses were being served, he did not help himself. "Aren't you well, Don Bosco?" his host asked.

"I feel fine," he replied, "but how can I feast when my children are hungry?" A guest immediately leaped from his chair and said: "How true! We must think of Don Bosco's boys, too!" An impromptu collection netted Don Bosco four hundred lire. Once, [Joseph] Cotta, a banker, while dining with Don Bosco, saw that he looked pensive and asked him if he were worried. "Yes," Don Bosco replied. "I'm worrying about all the money you lent me."

"Cheer up," the banker said. "There is nothing that a good cup of coffee won't cure!" With the coffee the banker served him the promissory notes endorsed "paid in full."

His table jokes and conversation were always impressive because of his spirit of self-denial and humility which greatly amazed both his hosts and their guests. Dinners meant nothing more to him than an opportunity to achieve some good. Alleging that certain dishes did not agree with him, he did his best to pass up the choice ones.

On one occasion, while dining at the house of Count Francis De Maistre, his host served a course toward the end of the meal which he thought Don Bosco would like. Perhaps because he had already had enough, or possibly because he wanted to mortify himself, Don Bosco courteously declined. When he noticed this, the count turned to his neighbor, Marquis Dominic Fassati, and whispered: "Did you see that? He is very fond of that dish, but he refused it out of penance." Don Bosco surmised the essence of the count's words, and in his humility he felt undeserving of such high praise; therefore, when the dish came around again, just as the waiter was about to pass him by, he said to him, as if noticing it for the first time: "What about me? I like this dish! May I have some?" Then he took a generous helping. This prompted the count and marquis to remark: "How humble he is! He only took it lest we think he is doing penance." In narrating this episode to his clerics and priests, Don Bosco commented with a smile: "Do you see what a reputation means? If you don't eat, you're mortifying yourself; if you do, it's because you're humble." There is quite a bit of truth in this statement, and the lesson it teaches is particularly important to priests.

At such dinners Don Bosco always ate so frugally that people would not believe it had they not witnessed it with their own eyes. Some Salesians who accompanied him to a few of these dinners—Father Francis Cerruti among them—tried to imitate him by taking only as much food as Don Bosco did; they returned home hungry.

Father [John] Cagliero told us a delightful story in this connection: "I recall that by oversight we once accepted dinner invitations from both Count Radicati and Marchioness Dovando for noon and two o'clock on the same day. On realizing the mix-up, Don Bosco told me quite calmly: 'Don't worry. We'll do justice to both dinners.' At Count Radicati's, taking advantage of the lively conversation, Don Bosco helped himself very sparingly. Then, while on our way to Marchioness Dovando's, Don Bosco laughingly remarked: 'Now we'll have the other half of our dinner, and tonight we'll still be able to do justice to our own Oratory supper.' "

From this story we can infer how adroit Don Bosco was at disguising his mortification without disregarding etiquette. For example, he would let his host pour wine into his glass, and every once in a while he would bring it to his lips as if to take a sip; when dinner was over, however, his glass would still be practically full. Likewise, he would occasionally help himself to the tastiest dishes and not eat them. His ruse was to keep his fellow guests so absorbed in what he was saying that they would not notice that when the next course was served, the waiter—often at Don Bosco's nod—would remove his plate, still untouched.

Usually the dinners Don Bosco attended were family affairs, but occasionally he was also invited to state banquets at which some guests were not practicing Catholics and others were shy of priests. Even at such gatherings Don Bosco always managed to become the center of attention. There was nothing austere in his mien; in fact, he was always the life of the party, and no one felt uneasy with him. Although frugal himself, he apparently enjoyed his food and kept urging the other guests to eat with relish. His humor and sparkling wit, his toasts and his replies to toasts of others were always permeated with some spiritual thought which he expressed so delightfully that all who heard him were charmed. Even confirmed nonchurchgoers often remarked: "Meeting such a holy priest is a

pleasure. We always thought that religion and a somber face went hand in hand."

Don Bosco's patience was as outstanding as his other virtues. His many activities took up every minute of the day. Yet these dinners often dragged on for hours, followed by long conversations over coffee. Everyone had something to ask Don Bosco; however, he was always gracious and he never displayed any annoyance, undoubtedly exercising great self-control. In this connection Father Cerruti related the following episode to us: "I happened to be with him once when he was at the home of one of the leading noble families of Turin, the Radicatis of Passerano. After dinner, we moved to the drawing room and a member of the family went to the piano. Sitting on a sofa, Don Bosco turned to me and whispered: "Do you see what happens? With so many things to do, I have to sit here and listen. But that's the price I have to pay to feed our boys, and, besides, these generous people deserve every consideration."

When he returned to the Oratory in the evening, his boys could easily see time and again that Don Bosco's habit of temperance and mortification was indeed very deep-seated and that it made no difference to him where he happened to be eating. Seated at our common refectory, he partook of the meager, warmed-up Oratory soup with as much gusto as if it were a tasty dish prepared for a lavish dinner. He never spoke of the various choice dishes served at those dinners; he somehow managed to forget them, despite his prodigious memory. He often remarked that the meals he liked best were those he took at the Oratory. Only if asked would he say anything about the outside dinners and the guests who were there.

We must also mention another of Don Bosco's outstanding virtues that deeply amazed and edified many noble households. He was admirably courteous to the ladies and their daughters, yet reserved in manner and speech. Even when a refusal would seem discourteous, he knew how to decline an offer with disarming simplicity. Occasionally during these years, and especially toward the end of his life when his poor eyesight made walking hazardous, the lady of the house would offer him her arm as they went downstairs. One day Father Rua—who had accompanied him—was curious to see how he would manage to refuse. With a kindly smile,

Don Bosco said to the lady: "Wouldn't it be a disgrace if Don Bosco —a former physical education instructor—were now unable to walk downstairs by himself?" Then, with some effort, he managed to negotiate the descent unassisted.

But besides being a model of Christian affability, Don Bosco provided an outstanding example of sincerity and charity. He never flattered the rich or those in authority; rather, at the proper time and in a suitable way, he advised and admonished, but his flair for gaining people's affection soon won their gratitude too. He exemplified the words of the Apostle: "Godliness is profitable in all respects, since it has the promise of the present life as well as of that which is to come." [1 Tim. 4, 8]

To substantiate this, it will suffice to let the facts speak for themselves. First we shall narrate episodes showing how Don Bosco patiently put up with the faults of others, concealing his own hurt feelings and maintaining self-control when dealing with impulsive and overbearing people. There was, for example, a noble lady who, although extremely generous to the poor and genuinely virtuous, could not bear to be crossed in the slightest matter. To correct this fault she kept a shrewish woman in her house and paid her an annual salary of three thousand lire, besides room, board, and a clothing allowance. Her generosity was repaid with verbal abuse, tantrums, and daily squabbles which she endured until the woman died.

One day in 1857, this lady paid a visit to the Oratory. As was the fashion then, she wore a hoop-skirt. Accustomed to having all doors flung open wide by servants, she was not quite prepared for the door to Don Bosco's room—a double door, but with only one section open. Impatiently she tried to force her way through, notwithstanding her hoop-skirt. Something had to give, and it was the hoop-skirt. In a towering rage she declared that never again would she come to the Oratory. Don Bosco tried to appease her. "My dear lady," he said, "you know very well that my doors are not as wide as those of your palace!" However, more furious than ever, the lady, clasping her skirt as best she could, stormed down to her carriage and left.

The following day her maid came to the Oratory. Apologizing humbly, she informed Don Bosco that her mistress had sent her to say that she would never set foot inside the Oratory again.

"Very well," Don Bosco replied, unperturbed. Formerly he had called on that lady once a month, but now he began calling on her every week. The second time he came, she asked: "Why have you returned so soon?"

"If you won't come to see me," Don Bosco replied, "I must come to see you. My boys need your help!" Disarmed, she laughed and retracted her previous resolution. She had always been generous to Don Bosco, but that did not keep him from admonishing her about her all too frequent temper tantrums. In sincere humility, she listened in silence and admitted her fault. But later on there was another outburst. One year, in the fall, Don Bosco was unable to accept her invitation to her villa. She sent off a furious letter telling him that never again would she help him. After some time, Don Bosco called on her and placidly mollified her. "I've returned your letter," he said, "because I didn't want to see it around on Judgment Day."

Another person who had an excessively high opinion of his own importance and who would brook no dissent was the distinguished man of letters, Professor Thomas Vallauri. He was a relative of Dr. Francis Vallauri, at whose house he had met Don Bosco who was a frequent caller there. The professor had written several articles on the Christian Latin authors, deploring their shoddiness of style and language in their preoccupation with the presentation and defense of doctrine. Don Bosco was familiar with the professor's articles and was anxious to correct him. He soon had the opportunity when Professor Vallauri called on him. Don Bosco welcomed him with generous praise, saying: "I feel honored by your visit. Your writings are well known all over Europe and do great honor to the Church."

Vallauri, noticing a twinkle in Don Bosco's kindly eyes, interrupted him: "Are you serious?"

"Well now, professor," Don Bosco continued, "with all due respect, I don't agree with your opinion about the style of our Christian Latin authors. There are competent people who think that St. Jerome is as fine a writer as Titus Livius, Lactantius, or even Cicero; others regard him as the equal of Sallust and Tacitus."

After a few moments Vallauri replied: "You're right. Tell me frankly what I should correct and I'll do it. Believe it or not, this is

the first time that I have accepted somebody else's judgment." From then on, when speaking of Don Bosco, he used to say: "That's the kind of priest I like; he speaks straight from the shoulder."

Don Bosco's charming ways also succeeded in restoring Christian customs that had gradually been discontinued in many families, such as saying grace before and after meals—a practice very dear to him. Once when invited to dinner by one such family, Don Bosco decided to correct the situation. When dinner was announced, he lingered for a moment with the young son and then walked to the dining room where his parents were already seated. As they entered the room, Don Bosco remarked to the youngster: "Now let's say grace. You know why we do that, don't you?"

"No, I don't," the child replied.

"Well, it's to show that we are different from animals. They have no intelligence, and thus they don't know that food is a gift from God. But we do, and for that reason we thank Him. Besides, a crumb of bread or a fishbone might go down the wrong way and choke us; we pray to God to spare us from such dangers." He then said grace while the parents blushed in silence. However, from then on they never forgot to say grace at every meal.

Don Bosco never failed to admonish persons when respect to God and Church was at stake. In 1855, as Father [Michelangelo] Chiatellino confirmed to us, Don Bosco himself told his boys this story:

Not long ago I visited a well-to-do family. While I was conversing with the parents, their five-year-old boy was playing with a toy wagon, pulling it around the room. As the toy bumped into a chair and overturned, the child swore angrily.

His mother scolded him, and I called the boy over, saying gently and kindly: "Why did you say that?"

"Because my wagon turned over," the child replied.

"Don't you know that we must never use Our Lord's name without devotion and respect? Don't you know the Commandments?"

"Sure I do," he replied.

"Will you recite them for me?"

As he came to the Second Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," I interrupted him: "Do you know what that means? It means that we must never mention God's name

unless it's necessary, and then we must always do so with respect. God is very good to us and we must do our best not to displease Him. We should never use His name in anger, as you just did."

"But daddy always does!" the child blurted out. The father turned red and the mother paled visibly. I said nothing. Then the father rose to the occasion. Anxious for his son to grow up properly, he called him and then, sitting him on his knee, said: "You're right, but I'm sorry. From now on I will not do it anymore. Neither must you. Do you understand?"

I know that the lesson did him a great deal of good, for as a result he gave up that bad habit. Only recently that good wife and mother thanked me for having helped bring this about.

Things did not go so smoothly in the case of another boy, the gifted twelve-year-old son of a distinguished general. The father was a good man but somewhat careless in his parental duties, and he thoughtlessly had publications of all kinds scattered about the living room. He would not allow his son to read some articles, but he gave him full freedom with the tabloids that glorified the heroes of the revolution and described their struggles, triumphs, and setbacks, interspersed with comments hostile to the Church. Their anticlerical slant so impressed the boy that, notwithstanding the sincere religious spirit of his family, he began to despise religion.

One day Don Bosco called on the general, who greeted him warmly and kissed his hand in respect. However, the boy acted quite coldly.

"Charlie," his father said, "kiss Don Bosco's hand!"

The boy did not move.

"Don't you remember Don Bosco? He's no stranger here. We've spoken so much about him!"

"Don't I know it!" the boy muttered.

"You saw me kiss his hand. Why don't you?"

"Because I don't want to."

The boy's father was terribly embarrassed; Don Bosco was utterly astonished. As conversation got under way, the boy, who was intelligent, well-mannered, and attached to his parents, joined in whenever the topic concerned history, geography, Italian independence, or music, but he would become silent as soon as any reference was made to religion. Finally he excused himself.

His father, heartbroken as he realized the extent of his son's deep-seated aversion to religion, asked Don Bosco: "Whatever could have happened to my boy? Until now he was deeply religious. I just can't understand it. He never got such ideas from us, nor did we give him bad example. We have always watched over him carefully lest he fall in with bad companions or groups. What could have turned him so strongly against priests?"

Don Bosco, who knew the general's permissiveness with regard to reading habits, had meanwhile noticed—scattered throughout the room—*La Gazzetta del Popolo, La Piemontese, Il Secolo,* and other anticlerical newspapers.

"General," he replied, pointing to the newspapers, "that's the cause of the trouble."

"It can't be! Those papers are way over his head. Besides, I've told him not to waste his time on them. He loves and obeys me; I'm sure he doesn't read them!"

"Perhaps, but. . . ."

"The only papers I allow him to read are the tabloids that portray our most outstanding contemporary figures."

"Then it's obvious that the reason for his aversion to the Church is to be found in those publications. You must realize that a boy's imagination is always fired by things which impress him, and one's first impressions are never forgotten."

"What can we do then?"

"Give him something to read that may act as an antidote."

The general followed Don Bosco's advice, but perhaps it was too late. Gradually the boy became taciturn; then he fell ill and died at the early age of sixteen without ever indicating any change of heart.

Now let us say a few words about Don Bosco's admirable modesty and his frankness in warning offenders against that virtue. One day, while visiting one of his benefactors, he saw an immodest picture in the waiting room. Without a moment's hesitation, he stepped on a chair and turned the painting around so that it faced the wall. His host got the message, thanked Don Bosco, and removed the offending picture.

On another occasion, when he had accepted an invitation to the home of Marchioness Dovando, a steady benefactress, he found that she had as guests a number of elegantly dressed ladies who wished to

talk to him. Two of them immediately approached him as he entered the room. Their necklines were low and their arms half covered. As soon as Don Bosco noticed that, he lowered his eyes and murmured: "Excuse me. I fear I've come to the wrong place." Then he turned to go.

"No, Don Bosco, you're in the right place. We were expecting you."

"It can't be," he insisted. "Where I go, a priest need not be embarrassed. But I know how it is, ladies; nowadays so much silk and linen go into pleats that there is hardly any left for sleeves!"

Hastily donning shawls and kerchiefs, the ladies ran after Don Bosco who was already on the stairway, begging him to excuse them and return.

"Of course," he replied with a smile. "Everything is all right now." The two ladies kept on their impromptu garb throughout the dinner.

Wherever he went, Don Bosco always had something to say that was spiritually uplifting. Once he was dining at the home of Count and Countess Camburzano. Among the guests was a brave, retired general who was not particularly religious. Don Bosco seemed to have cast such a spell on him that the officer could not take his eyes off him throughout dinner. When Don Bosco was finally about to leave, the general came up to him and said: "Please give me some words of wisdom as a memento of your visit."

"General," Don Bosco replied discreetly, "pray for me that I may save my soul."

"Me, pray for you?" exclaimed the officer in astonishment. "You'd better give *me* some good advice instead!"

"Pray for me!" repeated Don Bosco. "As you see, my friends here seem to think that I'm ready for canonization. That's pure nonsense! They don't realize their error! Will you, at least, help me to save my soul?"

However, the general, still unsatisfied continued to insist. Don Bosco, whose words had finally begun to sink in, then said to him: "If you still insist, my advice is that you too should think about saving your soul!"

"Thank you, Don Bosco," exclaimed the general; "thank you very much. Yes, I'll do that and I'll also pray for you, but please remember me in your prayers." He was later heard to remark: "How timely

Don Bosco's advice is! No one else would have been able to tell me this so tactfully and frankly." Don Bosco's words proved to be quite effective. The general put his conscience in order with such sincerity and thoroughness that his friends were amazed and delighted.

We could go on and on with similar episodes that clearly demonstrate Don Bosco's consummate tact in not offending the feelings of those whom he wanted to lead to God. He was admirably prudent, courteous, and delicate as he tried to provide some spiritual inspiration for those who needed it.

He also felt it his duty to do so out of a sense of gratitude toward his benefactors. That he was grateful was evident even in trivial things. He showed his appreciation for even the slightest service—to a boy showing him the way, to a servant lighting a lamp, to the member of a household bringing him a glass of water. Whoever did the least thing for him was certain to be thanked. We often heard him say at the conclusion of a visit or a somewhat lengthy conversation: "Thank you for your patience in listening to me." These episodes are a clear indication of his feelings toward those who supported his work by their sacrifices.

He prayed daily for his benefactors and had his boys do likewise by inserting in the morning prayers an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory Be for them. He often urged the boys to go to Communion and pray for their benefactors; on his part he offered Masses and had Masses said for them, especially in case of illness or death. He never forgot what they had done for him. Father Francis Cerruti told us how one day at Alassio, just as Don Bosco was going to the altar, he motioned to him to come near and said: "I'm going to offer this Mass for our dear saintly Father Vallega who, years ago, was so good to us."

Don Bosco also tried to teach gratitude to his boys, speaking of it with such warmth that he instilled the same sentiments in them. "Look," he often said to them, "once, when we didn't have any money for bread, this gentleman or that lady helped us. How great is God's goodness!"

We must also add that he never claimed credit for his achievements, but gave it to his benefactors. Again and again he declared that what little good he had done was all due to the generosity of good people. "We live by the generosity of our benefactors!" he

would exclaim. Bishop John Cagliero wrote: "I remember Marquis [Dominic] Fassati and Commendatore [Joseph] Cotta often saying to him: 'Don Bosco, you say that you can't thank us enough for the little we've done for your Oratory, but it is we who should thank you. By asking us to help your boys, you give us the chance to do some good, and through your prayers God blesses us and repays us threefold.' "

He would go out of his way to please his benefactors, no matter what inconvenience that might entail for him or his spiritual sons. For example, he was occasionally asked to send a priest to some distant spot over rough roads for a late Mass. He never hesitated to oblige, even when this commitment would last for quite some time. When someone would point out how burdensome this obligation was, Don Bosco would say: "He is our benefactor. Let us also make some sacrifice for him!" For example, to oblige the Bonier family who had provided the ecclesiastical patrimony for two of his clerics, he sent a priest every summer for many years to say Mass on holy days in their wayside chapel. Often he too traveled long distances to say Mass or to preach at the request of a benefactor. We must also not fail to mention his zeal in obtaining from the Holy See indulgences or papal blessings for them and their families.

Particularly during the last years of his life, he received numerous requests to open new houses. Other things being equal, he always gave preference to those made by distinguished benefactors. He also expressed his thanks by sending them holy pictures with these words in his own hand: "May God bless the benefactors of Salesian works." Amazingly, his wish and prayer would be answered.

Several times Don Bosco helped his benefactors when misfortune struck them, and he himself related one such instance to Father Francis Cerruti. A childless couple had at different times given him a total of six thousand lire for the construction of the Church of Mary Help of Christians. Some years later, their financial situation took a turn for the worse as the banks where they had deposited the greater part of their money went bankrupt. Reduced to poverty, they had moved to Milan and were living in a garret. When Don Bosco learned of this fact, he went to see them and offered to return what they had given him. Weeping, the husband refused, saying that he had given that money as alms.

"Very well," answered Don Bosco, "then let the Madonna return what you gave Her, according to your need."

From then on he sent them a hundred lire every month. When the entire sum of six thousand lire had been repaid, the husband died. Later his widow married a man of comfortable means and she then resumed her practice of sending offerings to Don Bosco.

He carried on an incessant correspondence with his benefactors, first writing for donations and then thanking them, a thing he never failed to do, for he not only wanted them to realize how much he appreciated their contribution, but he also wished to encourage them to persevere in their charity.

Gratitude was one of the things he insisted upon with his boys. If the offering amounted to only a few centesimi, he acknowledged it with a calling card; if it was more substantial—two lire or even only a lire and a half—he would thank the donor with a personal letter. He considered this not merely as a duty of gratitude, but also as a means to obtain more help for the Oratory. Few people realize how deeply hurt a benefactor can be by a lack of acknowledgment or how gratified at learning that his donation has been gratefully received. Very often people who received Don Bosco's personal thanks for only a few lire sent hundreds and even thousands a few days later and considered themselves favored when Don Bosco accepted their gift.

He never neglected any opportunity to let his benefactors know that he had not forgotten their help. He wrote regularly to them on all joyful occasions—name days, wedding anniversaries, birthdays, conferring of honors, or a stroke of good fortune. When misfortune struck or there was a death in the family, he would join in their grief and transmit some consoling message inspired by Faith. Every year he spent the whole month of December sending out Christmas and New Year's greetings—all written in his own hand. In due course we shall present some of these letters which are true models of simplicity, brevity, and Christian sentiment. Invariably, they always resulted in further donations.

Several times during the year he would urge his boys to write thank-you letters to their past or present benefactors; at other times he would draw up such a letter and have it signed by a whole class or by all the boarders.

For example, in January 1869 he sent the following letter of thanks to the Banca Nazionale:

> We, the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, together with our director, Don Bosco, send our sincerest thanks to the officers of the Banca Nazionale for again sending us a gift of 250 lire.
>
> This generosity is all the more appreciated not only because our number has increased, but also because other circumstances have made the need of help more urgent and acute.
>
> We all unite in grateful prayer to invoke heaven's blessings upon the well-deserving officers of the Banca Nazionale and all who in any way contribute to our moral and social well-being.

Don Bosco did even more when civil authorities were involved. In such cases he resorted to the press so that the benefaction would receive greater publicity.

He also had another way of expressing gratitude which he later recommended to the directors of all his houses. Whenever he received some delicacy or choice food as a gift, he did not keep it but passed it on to one of his benefactors. Mostly, these gifts were firstfruits or vegetables, pastries, rare wines, fowl, or venison. He did this constantly to their great delight, and they in turn generously reciprocated to show their appreciation. On one occasion a truffle was given to him because of its extraordinary size; he sent it to a benefactor, and it then passed from one family to another until it reached Marquis [Dominic] Fassati who, not knowing whence it had first come, donated it to Don Bosco. He finally mailed it to a very wealthy lady in Marseilles who reciprocated with a substantial donation. The benefactor to whom Don Bosco had first sent it also responded with an offering. On another occasion, a similar gift yielded the sum of twelve thousand lire.

On still another occasion when he received a large box of such truffles, he parceled them out to railroad station masters, mayors, and other civil officials who had helped the Oratory in one way or another. It was these little attentions that won him so much affection. He later recommended to the directors of his schools that they use the choicer products of their areas to show their gratitude to benefactors.

Nor must we fail to mention Don Bosco's readiness in trying to

gratify some particular wish of his benefactors. To a distinguished lady who was looking for birds for her children, Don Bosco promptly sent a whole nestful of fledglings. The family was so touched by this unexpected gift that they all knelt down around the table upon which they had placed Don Bosco's gift and prayed for him. When the birds were raised and set free, the lady sent a donation to the Oratory.

These episodes were taken from Don Bosco's whole life. We shall now return to the year 1855.

CHAPTER 29

A Cherished Yearly Event

IN its issue of August 27, 1855, *L'Armonia* carried gratifying news:

Conversions at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales

It is always a pleasant task to report the rescue of souls from heresy despite the frantic efforts of freethinkers to discredit the doctrinal and moral teachings of the Catholic Church. Don Bosco, the well-known zealous priest who tirelessly writes and works for our people, frequently wins converts from heresy.

On Saturday, August 18, in the church of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, two Calvinists—father and son—returned to the Roman Catholic Faith from which their ancestors had unfortunately strayed. Marquis Dominic Fassati and his wife Mary, née De Maistre, were godparents.

During that same month there was another outbreak of cholera in Turin, but—thanks to God—it was a mild one. Don Bosco and his boys were once again[1] ready to give physical and spiritual assistance, but there was no need. Most of the victims recovered. Dominic Savio—who by then had returned to the Oratory—mentioned this new outbreak in a letter to his father which we treasure in our archives:

Turin, September 6, 1855

Dear Dad:

I have something important to tell you, but first I want to let you know that—thank God—I have been and am quite well. I hope the same is true of you and all the family. I'm doing all right in my studies; Don Bosco is ever more satisfied with me. Now the big news is that for the first time ever I was able to spend a whole hour alone with Don

[1] *See* Chapters 9 and 10. [Editor]

Bosco. Before this I never had a chance to be alone with him for even ten minutes. This time I had a long talk with him about a lot of things, including an association to protect us from cholera.[2] Don Bosco told me that the epidemic was just starting, and that if the summer weren't almost over, there would be many more victims. He also enrolled me in a sodality that he founded; its main activity is prayer.

I told him about my sister, as you asked me to do. He said that you should bring her to Becchi on the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, since he wants to see her personally before deciding on her qualifications. You'll be able to come to some decision with him.

Please remember me to the whole family, to my former teacher, Father Cugliero, and also to Andrew Robino and my pal Dominic Savio of Ranello.

Your loving son,

Dominic

The Oratory boys devoutly celebrated the feast of Our Lady's Nativity and solemnized it with a musico-literary program during which they presented timely classical sonnets for the benefit of the prefect, Father Victor Alasonatti. Something rather unusual—perhaps even slightly miraculous—happened on that day to make it even more joyful for Don Bosco.

A good woman reported for work each day in a house in Via Cottolengo, not far from the Rifugio,[3] leaving at night. On those very rare occasions when she stayed overnight, she had permission to use a small, dingy room in the attic where she kept a few belongings and where she regularly took her lunch. On September 8, Dominic Savio called at that house and asked her employer: "Is there anyone sick here with cholera?"

"No, thank God," the man replied.

"Are you sure?" Dominic insisted.

"Look, my boy, you must have come to the wrong place. There's no one sick in this house." The man sounded so positive that Dominic left, but after looking around for a while, he finally returned.

[2] Probably this must be understood in the context of Don Bosco's promise to the Oratory boys on the occasion of the first outbreak of cholera. *See* p. 50. [Editor]

[3] A house for wayward girls where Don Bosco had been a chaplain. *See* Vol. II, pp. 184ff. [Editor]

"Please, search very carefully, because there must be a sick woman in this house," he told the man. Together they went from room to room all the way up to the attic where—to the man's dismay and amazement—the poor woman lay huddled up in her last agony. While resting in that room she had suddenly become ill without being able to call for help. Her employer thought that she had gone home as usual. A priest came promptly, and the poor woman was still able to make her confession and receive the Anointing of the Sick before breathing her last in the grace of God.

Meanwhile, a new blow was falling on the royal house. In September, King Victor Emmanuel II—while in his castle at Pollenzo —was stricken with a high fever, accompanied by arthritic pains that were particularly severe in his joints. His serious illness caused considerable concern, eventually forcing him to delegate his power to Prince Eugene of Savoy-Carignano on September 27. The fever finally broke as the result of a miliary eruption, and after a period of convalescence, the king gradually recovered.

The law suppressing the monasteries continued to bear bitter fruit. Ever faithful and devoted to the king, Don Bosco had risked his freedom, the Oratory's existence, and even his own life to warn him. The fear of unfavorable publicity had been the only deterrent restraining the government from taking action against him. Yet the government did find a way to harass Don Bosco when, ironically, it tried to tempt him into accepting some of the valuables that had been seized from the monasteries. One day Count Camillo Cavour sent to the Oratory two huge carloads of linen that had been confiscated from the Dominican monastery. Don Bosco was in severe financial difficulty at the time, but he nevertheless ordered that the carts were to remain untouched. He then sent word to the superior of the Dominicans asking what he wanted done. The superior replied that he would send someone with instructions. When the man came, Don Bosco had the carts taken to the appointed place.

On another occasion a load of books arrived that had been confiscated from the Capuchin Friars; among them were the volumes of the Bollandists.[4] Don Bosco at once informed the rightful owners and promptly returned their books.

[4] A small group of Jesuits in Antwerp, Belgium, organized into a society in the 17th century by Jean Boland (1596–1665) for the critical study and publica-

He also shied away from buying anything that had belonged to suppressed monasteries, even though the prices were ridiculously low. Some people pointed out to Don Bosco that many sacred vestments were falling into profane hands and that it would therefore be better if he bought them, but Don Bosco always replied: "You're probably right, and this would also be a golden opportunity to provide my churches with many things that we need and perhaps will never be able to afford. However, if the Oratory were closed down, I would not particularly like to see my things in other people's churches. It would hurt me deeply, and I'm sure that the monks would feel the same way if they saw me in possession of their goods."

For that very reason he also had no wish to accept monasteries or convents that the government, the municipalities, or even private persons offered to give or sell to him. He gave in only when Pius IX—to whom he had revealed his feelings on this matter—told him: "Accept the monasteries that were confiscated. I want you to do so. It is better that they return to the Church through you than that they remain in the hands of outsiders who might put them to profane uses. But first try to obtain proper authorization in order to avoid future complications or controversies with the former owners."

Meanwhile, the Ribotta Press had printed the two October issues of *Letture Cattoliche* authored by Don Bosco, entitled *The Life of St. Martin, Bishop of Tours.* There were three Appendices. The first discussed the worship of the saints and their powerful intercession with God as proved by Holy Scripture and Tradition and confirmed by many miracles. The second dealt with the glorious martyrdom of the Christian Arab, Jerome, who had been sealed alive in a tower in Algiers for refusing to apostatize. The third outlined the Church's teachings on purgatory and their foundation in Holy Scripture.

After completing this project, Don Bosco began preparing the two November issues which were combined in one booklet entitled *The Power of Good Upbringing* and printed by the Paravia Press. It told the story of a young man named Peter who by his patience

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tion of the lives of the saints. Jean Boland edited the first volume. His collaborators and successors were named after him. [Editor]

and exemplary conduct succeeded in converting his father. In an Appendix Don Bosco added litanies in suffrage for the dead that had been translated from English—a further indication that English Catholics agreed with the rest of the faithful on the dogma of purgatory, in which the whole United Kingdom had firmly believed before the Reformation.

After this work was completed, Don Bosco went to Becchi toward the end of September for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The trip also had the purpose of rewarding those boys whose conduct had been outstanding. This year there was an added attraction at the Oratory—a brass band. Don Bosco had organized it among the artisans because he considered it another highly effective way of keeping them out of mischief. He used to say: "Boys should be kept constantly occupied. After they are through with their school or shop duties, we should entice them to join the choir, the band, or the altar boys' society. This will keep them busy. If we do not give them something to think about, their minds will turn to unwholesome thoughts."

Don Bosco also gave vocal music a place of honor in the festive oratories. Once, when he was in Marseilles, a priest who belonged to a religious order called on him. The latter had opened a festive oratory and wanted to know if Don Bosco approved of music as a means of attracting boys. After asking his question he went on to point out the potentially good effects of music on the boys' character and its usefulness in keeping them away from mischief and affording them relaxation. Don Bosco listened approvingly and finally said: "An oratory without music is like a body without a soul."

"But," the priest added, "music has also its drawbacks, and they are not minor ones by any means." He then mentioned his concern that some boys might become worldly-minded and sing or play at theatres, cafés, dancehalls, political demonstrations, and the like. Don Bosco listened patiently without saying a word; then he firmly repeated: "An oratory without music is like a body without a soul!"

The brass band finally made its debut at Becchi. Its conductor was Callixtus Cerutti, a very fine musician who boarded at the Oratory; an excellent organist, he played in many churches of

Turin. His friend and assistant was Bersano, another fine organist and an outstanding musician. Other bandmasters in later years were Giani, Bertolini, and Francis Massa; the latter two were also members of the police band. The Oratory band at this time—and for a few years to come—had only twelve instruments, but it soon made the playground resound with martial airs and melodies, thanks especially to its two top performers, Joseph Buzzetti and Peter Enria.

This yearly outing of Don Bosco and his boys to Castelnuovo deserves a more detailed and orderly description. Throughout the month of September there was much talk about it and a great deal of speculation as to who would be chosen to go and what villages would be visited. In this way they had a foretaste of the fun that they would have in the verdant hills, particularly during the celebrations of the feasts of the local patron saints and at the harvesting of the grapes. The reminiscing about the fun enjoyed during the previous summer by those who had gone there heightened the expectations. The outing to Becchi was the main thought that fired the boys' imagination, and it also induced many to cut short their vacation at home. Those who had no hope of being among the lucky ones resolved to try harder to deserve that treat the following summer. Meanwhile, the necessary preparations were getting underway.

Usually Don Bosco and a few boys left for Becchi in the second half of September at about eight in the morning. Preference was given to those who needed this diversion the most—orphans or those in poor health. Since Don Bosco could not afford the coach fare, they generally walked, their route taking them through Chieri, Riva, and Buttigliera d'Asti. Becchi[5] was a long distance away, but the boys did not mind because Don Bosco knew how to make the trip seem shorter by telling stories about Italian or church history. When they drew near to Chieri, several of Don Bosco's closest friends, who had been previously notified, would meet him at the outskirts of the town and invite him and his young friends to lunch. After a few hours' rest, they would all set out again for Morialdo where his brother Joseph was waiting. The following day Don

[5] Becchi was situated on the outskirts of Morialdo, one of five hamlets that were part of Castelnuovo, some 18 miles from Turin. *See* Vol. I, p. 20. [Editor]

Bosco would show the boys the humble home where he had been born, exclaiming: "Behold the feudal estate of Don Bosco!" At Becchi the boys were always greatly edified at seeing the people flock to the novena services conducted by Don Bosco. Since the little chapel could not accommodate them all, a great many had to stand outside. The services consisted of a sermon, the rosary, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It was hard work for Don Bosco, but it produced abundant spiritual fruit.

The bulk of the boys who were going were notified the day before by Father [Victor] Alasonatti, the prefect; they usually left Turin on Saturday morning, the eve of the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Every year their number increased, and all went on foot by way of Chieri. Two boys carried stage props and another was entrusted with the musical scores. Not all the boys were the same age, nor were they all good hikers, and so they would reach Becchi at different hours. Only a few arrived in a group; more than once, stragglers came in late at night. Especially during the first years of these outings, some boys would become lost along those country roads and find their way only the following morning after spending the night in some friendly farmhouse.

After nearly everyone had arrived, they would assemble at an opportune moment and greet Don Bosco. He would welcome them warmly and enjoy listening to their adventuresome stories that were punctuated with much laughter and joy. Supper then followed, during which some boys would invariably fall asleep at the table. Then Don Bosco's brother, Joseph, would give each boy a bedsheet, and under an assistant's supervision all retired to their sleeping quarters in a large room on the top floor which was formerly used for wheat storage. A thick layer of straw on the floor had turned it into a dormitory. Other rooms also had been pressed into service so that all could be accommodated.

After night prayers there was absolute silence. No one stirred again until morning, except for a few of the more devout boys who knelt and prayed silently when they awakened.

On Sunday—the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary—a large crowd would flock from the neighboring villages, especially from

Castelnuovo. It was truly a popular celebration. In the morning there was Mass with general Communion, preceded and followed by other Masses said by priests who had come with Don Bosco. In the first few years a small reed organ was brought from Turin to accompany the singing. The solemn high Mass was at ten o'clock. This Mass was usually sung by Father Anthony Cinzano—the pastor of Castelnuovo—who then stayed for dinner. Most of the crowd, including the choirboys, had to follow the services from outside the little chapel. An inverted washtub served as a pulpit. After Benediction that same washtub became a podium from which [Charles] Gastini entertained the crowd with his tomfoolery until it was time for the stage play which climaxed the day. A makeshift stage was usually erected on one side of the yard facing Don Bosco's house. Then, when it got dark, balloons soared into the air and fireworks were set off, while the surrounding hilltops were ablaze with bonfires.

On the following day it was customary for Don Bosco and his boys to be guests of Father Cinzano. With some parishioners, Father Cinzano would set up a fireplace in his yard and cook an enormous pot of polenta for all. After receiving a warm welcome on their arrival, some boys would help to set up for the meal while the choir regaled Father Cinzano with classical selections. A must in their program was the inclusion of some compositions by Mercadante,[6] especially his well-known *Et unam sanctam*. Afterward, when the steaming polenta was ready, it was solemnly carried to the center of the yard while the band played a popular song as accompaniment. Then, after the boys had found a seat, they were served first with polenta, and then with a variety of cold cuts and fruits which they hungrily consumed.

Later, Don Bosco and his young clerics would sit down to a more comfortable table with Father Cinzano who on this occasion —to honor Don Bosco—also invited the neighboring pastors. Speaking of Don Bosco he used to tell them: "Wait and see! He will go very far!" Don Bosco was most respectful toward Father

[6] Saverio Mercadante (1795–1870) was a prolific Italian composer and the director of the Royal School of Music in Naples from 1840 to 1862 when he became blind. [Editor]

Cinzano, and both here and elsewhere he paid him the customary homage of kissing his hand. This act of respect always deeply impressed the boys.

Finally the time would come to leave. A few boys who were in poor health would stay on at Becchi, while the rest, well supplied with provisions by the pastor, would set out for Turin which they would reach about nine in the evening, after a brief stop at Chieri. They were tired but happy because they had brought a precious relic for their parents—a little piece of plaster or brick from the small room where Don Bosco had lived as a boy.

This year when Don Bosco returned to Turin he found a letter from Duchess [Laval] Montmorency. This letter causes us to recall Don Bosco's interest in the spiritual welfare of wealthy boys, as shown by the fact that he visited them in their palatial homes and counseled them, either orally during their visits to him or through short, effective letters. Some of these have come into our hands, such as the following:

Turin, June 28, 1855

My dear Octavius:

Exams are coming, and you tell me that you are praying to St. Aloysius. Well and good! Try to develop a lively faith in the protection of this saint, and you'll certainly do well. I'll join you in praying.

Don't fret about not having a more retentive memory; just use what memory you've got and you'll improve it. Should a better memory be necessary for your spiritual welfare, God will give it to you.

I would like to talk to you about some other things, too, and I hope to have an opportunity to do so after your examinations. Tomorrow a plenary indulgence may be gained here at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. You should try to gain one too. Give my respects to your mother and to the whole family. Love me in the Lord.

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

The parents of these boys were grateful to Don Bosco for his help in their sons' education, and in a certain sense they willingly delegated their own authority to him. Some regularly brought their

sons to him for confession—notably the Provana family. They most willingly allowed him to be on familiar terms with their sons —a thing they would never permit to tutors or anyone else not of noble lineage. Don Bosco also welcomed some of these boys as guests at the Oratory for weeks and even months on end. Their parents entrusted them to him for various reasons: preparation for First Holy Communion, tutoring in school work, spiritual improvement through the example of the Oratory boys, amendment of their conduct, and other reasons. They were never disappointed in the results. Throughout the years boys of noble families constantly lived under the same roof with Don Bosco's poor boys.

Duchess Montmorency had entrusted two of her protégés to Don Bosco; they were brothers who belonged to an impoverished French noble family. During that summer she had allowed them to vacation at Borgo Cornalese, after they had boarded for over a year at the Oratory. Grateful for their progress, she wrote the following letter to Don Bosco which we reproduce here:

October 22, 1855

Dear Don Bosco:

I wanted to be the first to write and thank you for the excellent care you have taken of my two youngsters during my prolonged absence, but you anticipated me. Both boys look wonderfully healthy, chubbier, and taller! One has made progress in drawing, the other in Latin; but more important than anything else, both have matured—Louis especially. They no longer squabble and fight.

Henry has made wonderful progress in drawing, and I am grateful to Mr. Tommasini and Mr. Peire for their efforts. My footman, the bearer of this note, will pick up the boys' belongings, except for the trunks, desks, and other small pieces of furniture which you had to buy for them. He will also settle any outstanding bills.

Before you pay me the visit to which I am so looking forward, I will call on you this coming Monday, weather permitting. I do not like to travel when it's raining. Everyone here is well and will joyously welcome your "appearance." I'm using the right word; your visits don't last longer than a flash!

Very respectfully yours,

Duchess Laval Montmorency

By now the boys—including new ones—were beginning to return from their summer vacation. Among the latter were Dominic Bongiovanni (the brother of Joseph whom we have previously mentioned [7]) and John Bonetti of Caramagna. Many years later Dominic Bongiovanni built the church of St. Alphonse in Turin; John Bonetti became a distinguished member of the Salesian Society.[8] At that time he was seventeen; his sedate manners promptly earned him the nickname "papa."

Toward the end of October, another boarder was enrolled at the Oratory. His talent in painting and sculpturing had earned him a scholarship from his native town to continue his studies in Turin. He was just recovering from a serious illness. Whatever the reason —whether he was still weak or homesick or just lonesome because he had not yet made any friends—he kept completely to himself, just watching the others play. Dominic Savio saw this and tried to cheer him up. Their conversation ran more or less as follows:

"You don't know anyone here, do you?" Dominic said.

"No, but I like to watch everybody play."

"What's your name?"

"Camillo Gavio. I'm from Tortona."

"How old are you?"

"Fifteen."

"You don't look very happy. Have you been sick?"

"Very sick. I had an attack of rheumatic fever and haven't gotten over it."

"I guess you wish you were strong again."

"Not really. I wish to do God's will."

Dominic immediately recognized the exceptional piety and goodness of Gavio. "Do you mean that you want to be a saint?" he continued.

"Yes, very much."

"Good! Then let me tell you how to go about it. Here at the Oratory we make holiness consist in being very cheerful. Our only worry is sin, the great enemy of our souls that can rob us of God's

[7] *See* p. 82. [Editor]

[8] Father John Bonetti (1838–1891) was elected Catechist General (spiritual director) of the Salesian Society in 1886 at its Fourth General Chapter. He also wrote a history of the first twenty-five years of the Oratory—one of the sources of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco. See* p. x. [Editor]

peace and grace. We try to carry out duties diligently and to pray willingly. You can start right now and take as your motto: 'Serve the Lord in gladness.' "

Dominic's words were like balm and greatly comforted Gavio. From that day on, he became Dominic's faithful friend and perseveringly imitated his virtues.

CHAPTER 30

Watchful Solicitude

As the boys streamed back to the Oratory from vacation, Don Bosco once again resumed his post in the confessional or in his room, as Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi told us. Seated on an uncomfortable chair, he would hear confessions for hours on end. As always, Father Dadesso, an Oblate of Mary, and Father John Giacomelli helped him in this task, as also on occasion did Father [John] Borel and Father [Francis] Marengo, but most boys went to Don Bosco and these visibly improved their conduct.

Father Marengo thought so highly of Don Bosco's spiritual counseling that, after hearing a certain boy's confessions for two or three years, he told him: "Now you need a better spiritual guide. I suggest that from now on you go to Don Bosco for confession." By word and by letter mothers urged their sons to talk to Don Bosco and make their confessions to him. "He is a saint and will help you!" they claimed. Many parents enrolled their boys at the Oratory because they believed that a saint lived there. The boys themselves confirmed this impression in their letters home, thus further spreading Don Bosco's fame. Even well-educated people regarded his deeds as extraordinary. Parents would write to their sons and ask them to seek Don Bosco's prayers for the conversion of some member of the family, the solution of some business problem, or the recovery of some relative. They also exhorted them to tell him about their problems and to seek his advice about their vocation.

Needless to say, the boys followed their advice, for they knew that Don Bosco was a prudent father to them. In fact, he would give as much attention to them as he did to important people. "Whenever we sought his advice," Peter Enria reports, "he would always think carefully before replying, and he would even delay

his answer if he were not sure of his advice. But when he did give it, we felt certain that it was correct."

What convinced the boys more than anything else of his sanctity was his supernatural love, impartially shown to both students and artisans. Equally solicitous for the latter, he saw to it that their evening classes made them proficient in the three R's, while he kept studying ways and means to keep them out of the city workshops.

It was probably during this year that he made an important decision for the students. As they returned to school he took steps to prevent their bringing along with them the worst enemies of a Christian education. He directed that, at the start of the school year, each pupil should hand in and sign a detailed list of all the books he had in his possession. This precaution was necessary if he was to make sure that unwholesome books did not find their way into the Oratory. Sometimes he would request a second list a few months later.

Don Bosco felt that he could never be too vigilant in this regard because some boys' parents unwittingly sent in anticlerical newspapers by using them as protective wrapping when sending packages to their sons. Besides, evil friends often tried to smuggle unseemly publications to the boarders. For this reason there was strict control of visitors, and all trunks and packages were carefully checked.

Any boy who received books or other publications during the school year had to hand them in at once for approval—unless it had been previously granted—and then update the list he had handed in. Any attempt to cheat on this score resulted in the material being confiscated. Moreover, if that material was of an immoral nature, the pupil was charged with grave disobedience; at times this brought very serious consequences for the culprit because Don Bosco was very severe with faults of this kind. Perhaps this rule was formulated during 1855 because the earliest dates on the lists in our archives are from that year. We also have the list submitted by Dominic Savio. This custom has been maintained ever since because unwholesome reading does inestimable harm to morals and priestly vocations.

At the beginning of November, after having checked and approved the boys' book lists and having seen to it that the workshops

and classes were operating smoothly, Don Bosco started classes in Gregorian chant. Father [John Baptist] Piano stated to us: "He was anxious to have all the boys learn Gregorian chant, and he personally supervised our evening classes."

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had decided to establish a resident secondary school at the Oratory. The secondary schools privately conducted by Professor Joseph Bonzanino and Father Matthew Picco were excellent in every respect, but the trip to and from those schools was morally dangerous for the Oratory boys. Prudently making haste slowly, early in November Don Bosco converted the former little chapel [1] into a classroom for the third year students and assigned as their teacher the cleric John [Baptist] Francesia. Although only seventeen, Francesia had earned top honors in Latin. While teaching, he was expected to continue his study of philosophy, theology, and literature. Don Bosco had sized up Francesia morally and intellectually and knew that this young cleric was equal to the task; the same can be said of the other clerics whom he later appointed as teachers. As was his custom, he first tested them at different tasks simultaneously. Jokingly he used to comment that the great Roman orators, historians, and poets had spent a great deal of time on the battlefields or in the hubbub of the forum, and that their success was due to the varied experiences in such places that had sharpened their talents.

As for teaching and studying at the same time, Don Bosco reminded the clerics of the saying of St. Francis de Sales: "Do you want to learn? Study in earnest. Do you want to learn much more? Get yourself a teacher. Do you want to do even better? Then teach what you are learning." The magnificent results achieved by Don Bosco's teachers who wholeheartedly followed this advice proved that St. Francis de Sales was right. Besides, [in Don Bosco's case] it had to be done because Divine Providence had so disposed.

Bravely trusting in God's help, Francesia began teaching. He did a wonderful job because one who has learned to obey knows how to command. Modeling himself after Don Bosco, the young cleric was kind and patient, and he learned to love his students and to make himself loved by them. He was also privileged to have Dominic Savio as a pupil that year; his diligence made him one

[1] *See* Vol. IV, p. 327. [Editor]

of the top students in his class. The boys in the first and second years of high school and those studying the humanities and rhetoric continued to attend the two above-mentioned private schools in town.

Since the clerics at the Oratory were considered part of the diocesan clergy, they regularly attended the seminary classes. Therefore, Don Bosco asked the chancery to excuse the cleric Francesia from them because they conflicted with his teaching schedule; however, he also promised that the young teacher would still take the diocesan examinations. The chancery answered that it did not feel empowered to authorize such an exemption, and that therefore the cleric Francesia should either attend lectures regularly or give up being a seminarian.

Don Bosco's reply was: "In that case, I'll appeal to the archbishop. But please be so kind as to let me be the first to inform him of this problem." The chancery complied with his request and Archbishop Louis Fransoni [in exile at Lyons] granted the desired permission.

Meanwhile, the Ribotta Press was printing the December and January issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. Entitled *Talks on the Most Blessed Sacrament* by Father Charles Filippo, O.F.M.C. of Poirino, they also gave some examples of the impiety, disloyalty, and ingratitude of Protestants toward Our Lord.

At about this time Don Bosco was also preparing another small work entitled *A Children's Catechism for the Diocese of Turin.* The Introduction contained morning and night prayers; in the latter, children were asked to say three times the invocation "Dear Mother Mary, ever Virgin, help me to save my soul!" which had not appeared in the first edition of *The Companion of Youth* in 1847.[2] The prayers were followed by a summary of bible history in question-and-answer form in fourteen short chapters, the last of which was entitled *Church Government and the Reasonableness of the Christian Faith.* The last item in the Introduction was a compendium of Christian doctrine for those who were about to receive First Communion and Confirmation. In the diocesan catechism itself Don Bosco added this phrase to the Fourth Commandment: ". . . so that you may live long on this earth." In submitting his

[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 7–18. [Editor]

manuscript to Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, who was the rector of the seminary and the diocesan pro-vicar, Don Bosco enclosed this letter:

Very Reverend Father Rector:

The cleric [Felix] Reviglio and another cleric will serve tomorrow at the cathedral. Always feel free to ask. I shall ever do my best to oblige.

I have received an offering of twenty-four lire for young Cumino. I would very much like to have the expert opinion of both you and Canon Fantolini on my catechism.

The boy Ellena would willingly go to the seminary at Chieri rather than at Genoa. However, there is a problem—tuition fees. He is a good boy, and his steady good conduct justifies my belief that he will do well. If you could condone his fees for at least the next two years while his brother attends the seminary, he would don the cassock and immediately go wherever you might send him.

Respectfully and gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

Canon Vogliotti, the diocesan censor, gave the imprimatur to Don Bosco's catechism on December 3, 1855 with only a few minor alterations to the text. This time, too, he had not allowed the change of the word "woman" to "person" in the Ninth Commandment because it departed from the terminology previously used in diocesan catechism. Along with the catechism, Don Bosco also had the De Agostini Press print eight thousand copies of a leaflet in honor of the Immaculate Conception and one thousand holy pictures. This leaflet was later inserted into *The Companion of Youth.*

The feast of the Immaculate Conception was observed with as much solemnity as his heart could have desired. Christmas was now quite near and it reminded him of the gratitude he owed to the Oratory benefactors. Among others, he wrote to the good Marchioness Mary Fassati who was then at Borgo:

Turin, December 22, 1855

My dear Marchioness:

On behalf of the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, I thank you for the sustenance that you have so generously afforded them. May you receive abundant blessings for the coming feast of Christmas.

As a token of our common gratitude I shall celebrate Midnight Mass for your intentions, and our boys will assist with the same thought in mind. It will be up to you to parcel out the fruits of this solemn high Mass attended by our four hundred or more boys. Share them with Marquis Fassati, as well as with Count De Maistre and his family, or any others, as you see fit.

I am recommending all of you to the Child Jesus and His Immaculate Mother. Do not fail to pray for me that I may do God's will in all things. Amen.

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Unfortunately, the joy of the Christmas holidays was beclouded this year by new dangers facing Christian education. On December 27, 1855, the city authorities dismissed the Christian Brothers from the municipal schools, although acknowledging that they had faithfully fulfilled their duties. Perhaps one of the pretexts that led to this affront was an incident at Racconigi,[3] where the Christian Brothers staffed a boarding school. Apparently they had distributed copies of that issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Stealing Church Property and Its Consequences.*[4] Because of this offense, the Minister of Education immediately ordered the mayor of Racconigi either to dismiss the Brothers or to have the school closed.

As a result, the Christian Brothers were no longer allowed to teach in the public schools. The only reason why they were able to continue educating boys of the working class was because the administrative board of the *Mendicità Istruita* continued to employ them in the institutions that it conducted.

Meanwhile, unfrocked priests and friars and priests who refused to obey their bishops were being appointed as deans and rectors of boarding schools and given teaching positions.

[3] A town 24 miles south of Turin. [Editor]

[4] *See* p. 149. [Editor]

CHAPTER 31

Triumphs of Grace

EVERY year during November and December Don Bosco devoted his time to carefully preparing his boys' hearts to receive the seeds of virtues that he hoped would blossom during the school year. He welcomed the new boys himself and strove to win their affection and confidence. He knew that if he could get them to make a good confession, their souls would burst open like flowers in the morning sun. During these months he solicitously spent as much time as he could with his beloved boys in order to strengthen them in their good resolutions.

Wonderful were the triumphs of Divine grace! Many virtuous, innocent boys received Communion frequently and seemed to emulate St. Aloysius by the purity of their lives. Others who had fallen into sin at home now turned over a new leaf and ranked with the best in conduct and piety. This was obviously due to the sacrament of Penance. After their first confession at the Oratory, boys with bad habits felt spiritually reborn and freed—even for years—from temptation. Woe to them, however, if they became overconfident and placed themselves in the occasion of sin. Many a boy has admitted as much to us. There were also worldly-minded boys whom Don Bosco had accepted on a trial basis or as a result of dishonest recommendations—boys who at times were precociously bad. What did Don Bosco do in such cases? He made no hasty decisions, but steeling himself for the task, he prudently set about trying to win their souls to God. Often his efforts were successful. His reasoning could be summed up as follows: Just as there is no barren or sterile land which cannot be made fertile through patient effort, so it is with a man's heart. No matter how barren and restive at first, it will sooner or later bring forth good fruit. It will begin by loving what is *naturally* good and ultimately advance to what is *super-*

naturally good, provided that a zealous spiritual director will cooperate with God's grace by prayer and effort. Even the most callous boys have a soft spot. The first duty of the educator is to locate that sensitive spot, that responsive chord in the boy's heart, and take advantage of it.

In these memoirs we have already mentioned [1] Don Bosco's sharp perceptiveness and his remarkable and cautious forbearance. We shall now further substantiate this through the following incident.

One morning as Don Bosco was returning to his room from church, he found a gentleman waiting for him on the balcony in front of his room. Beside him was a handsome, bright-looking, well-dressed youth. The gentleman followed Don Bosco into the room while the boy remained outside and watched the boys at play below. The gentleman said to Don Bosco, "Did you notice the boy I brought with me?"

"Yes. He looks quite bright!"

"He's my son, and he has been giving me plenty of trouble."

"In what way?"

"He has been dismissed from two boarding schools. I have no idea how he became so bad and I don't know how I can get him to change his ways. He has read everything and seen everything; he is quite free in his speech and he has gotten into all kinds of trouble. Furthermore, he is dead set against religion. I really don't understand it because our family has always been very religious. When he came home for the summer vacation, he stalked into the house without a word to his mother or to me. A few minutes later he walked out and headed straight for a poolroom where he stayed until a very late hour. He won't take a reprimand, talks back, flatly refuses to obey, shows the utmost disdain for prayer, and has no use whatever for church. Both his mother and I are at our wit's end. We don't know where to turn. Harsh measures only make him more resentful. Don Bosco, what can we do with a boy like this? Please help us! If there is anyone who can do something with him, it's you. Please try. Be good enough to take him. Perhaps your words or the example of the other boys might do him some good. Will you take him?"

Don Bosco remained silent and thoughtful for a moment while

[1] *See* Vol. II, p. 140; Vol. IV, p. 202. [Editor]

the gentleman anxiously waited, and then he asked: "How old is the boy?"

"He just turned fourteen," the father replied. Again Don Bosco pondered the matter, and then he smiled and said: "Why not?"

"That's splendid! Yes, Don Bosco, just give him a chance! I'll pay anything. That's the least of my worries! This act of charity on your part will make two heartsick parents happier than you can imagine."

"I'll be glad to do it. But will the boy agree?"

"I'll see to that. Let me bring him in. Question him, make him talk, and then I'll suggest that he stay here."

The boy came in and greeted Don Bosco stiffly, but he soon warmed up to him. Don Bosco bided his time and did not say a word about what was uppermost in his mind—the boy's soul. He chatted about things that he knew would please the boy, and by his charming personal manner he managed to win him over completely. The youth laughed, asked questions, talked with great gusto, and became quite fond of Don Bosco.

Afterward, on their way downstairs the father asked his son: "Well, how did you like Don Bosco?"

"He's great! I've met very few people like him. He's so different from the other priests at school! And did you notice? He didn't say a single word about religion. It was really nice talking to him."

Seizing the opportunity, the father made his move. "Your school has informed me that they no longer have room for you there. As you know, there are no suitable schools in our town and it is very important that you do not interrupt your studies. How about staying here with Don Bosco? Would you like that?"

"I'd have no objection!"

"Do you really mean it?"

"Yes, but on three conditions."

"What are they?"

"I don't want to hear a word about confession, I want to be excused from going to church, and—if I don't like it—I must be free to leave."

The father swallowed hard, but he knew better than to argue. They retraced their steps. The man went in again and told Don Bosco about his son's conditions. He spoke rather hesitantly, fear-

ing a refusal, but Don Bosco listened calmly and then answered with a smile: "Tell your son it's a deal!" The father was overjoyed and the boy was satisfied and agreed to stay. Don Bosco was as kind to him as to his best pupils, but—realizing the futility of doing so—he carefully refrained from saying anything about religion. Nevertheless, the hapless youth could not help seeing what his schoolmates were doing or hearing the short talks that Don Bosco gave after night prayers and at other times. During the first week, whenever the church bell summoned the boys to prayer, the youth would wander along the porticoes, sometimes humming popular songs. No one reproved him for doing so or tried to coax him to join the others. This apparent indifference annoyed him, and he began to feel a little bored at this self-inflicted isolation. Curiosity finally got the best of him and he decided to peek into the church. With no reverence for the sacred place, he walked to a corner and stood looking around. Some boys were praying; others were crowding around a confessional; still others were receiving Holy Communion. "Idiots!" he muttered to himself, but loud enough to be heard by at least a few near him. He just wanted to assert himself, and perhaps he may also have been trying to stifle a new feeling that he definitely wanted to resist. Things went on in this way for a while; he continued to go to church, but always in a manner showing indifference and contempt. By now several of the older and better boys belonging to the St. Aloysius Sodality had made friends with him and coaxed him to play with them in order to keep him away from those boys on whom he might have a bad influence. Meanwhile, Don Bosco prayed and had others pray for this new boy.

The good example and suggestions of his new friends, and particularly some words of Don Bosco that deeply impressed him, gradually reawakened in him his better self. He had become so fond of Don Bosco that he felt he could not live without him. He began to reflect: "How is it? The other boys go to church, to confession and to Communion, yet they're always cheerful and having a good time, while I. . . ." He thought the matter over seriously, made up his mind, and finally knelt with his classmates in church.

Then one day he approached Don Bosco's confessional and took his turn. When he came out, he seemed transfigured; his very hand-

some features appeared to reflect his soul's beauty. He returned to his place, knelt down, and prayed for some time. He went twice more to confession and then very fervently received Holy Communion. From then on he became one of the most exemplary boys at the Oratory.

A similar case occurred about the end of December. One of the students had returned from his summer vacation much the worse for the experience; indeed, he was a changed lad. After trying everything that his zeal could suggest, Don Bosco was obliged to give the boy's father some sad news:

Turin, December 17, 1855

Dear Sir:

During the last few years I've always sent you good news about Johnny, but now, unfortunately, I must do the opposite. Ever since his return, I've been unable to get him to settle down to his duties.

He no longer has any use for prayer or church; he doesn't want to get up in the morning and refuses to go to church with the others; he leaves the grounds without permission and does very poorly in class; worse still, he no longer listens to my advice. Briefly, I fear he has reached the point where he will greatly displease me and gravely disappoint you.

The papers and magazines that he read during his vacation have filled his mind with wrong ideas and perhaps—God forbid—have even ruined his heart. Please write to him and scold him for his bad conduct; if that doesn't work, I shall be forced to take the unpleasant step of dismissing him. I feel that I should warn you before things get any worse.

Dear sir, if you only knew how harmful evil literature can be for young people! I shall do whatever little I can for your son. Let us entrust this matter to Our Lord. Believe me to be,

Respectfully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

In due course the boy received a warning letter from his father that laid down the law in no uncertain terms, but he did not pay the slightest attention. Moreover, even worse, he had omitted from his book list some titles that were extremely dangerous for someone of his inexperienced years. When Don Bosco became aware of this lack of sincerity, he wrote to the boy's father once again:

Turin, December 23, 1855

Dear Sir:

Neither your letter nor my words have made the slightest impression on Johnny. I have just spoken with him and told him what I have discovered. He either remains silent, or else he tells me a pack of lies. He has read some very bad books—so bad that reading them [without permission] calls for excommunication; furthermore, he has read them during Mass or during the sermon.

He tells me that he is going home tomorrow, the 24th. I am not going to stop him because I cannot keep him here any longer. His teacher has informed me that he will no longer have him in class unless he brings in a written request [from me]. He has taken this action because the boy doesn't study and often skips classes.

I am very sorry to have to write this to you, but there is no point in not letting you know. If there is any way I can be of help, please count on my assistance and believe me to be always,

Your devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The boy's case seemed hopeless, but things turned out otherwise. The Oratory existed in a supernatural climate as everyone was well aware. About two years before, Don Bosco had made a prediction. As usual, the boys were excitedly awaiting its fulfillment, and on that very day—December 24—it came true. No one could deny the evidence of facts. We shall discuss this prediction in the next chapter. In any event, when this problem child saw the prediction fulfilled, he was quite shaken. He asked Don Bosco to forgive him and to allow him to remain at the Oratory. He then turned over a new leaf and was exemplary in every respect from that time on.

CHAPTER 32

First Death at the Oratory

THE Oratory boys were firmly convinced that God had given Don Bosco extraordinary spiritual gifts because, among other things, he had predicted several deaths and other events that were totally unforeseeable. In 1854, however, they were even more impressed when Don Bosco began telling them of certain dreams that really should be called "visions" because through them God revealed what He wanted from Don Bosco and from his boys and, especially, what was best for the spiritual welfare of the Oratory.

Although Don Bosco attached great significance to these dreams, he always spoke of them with sincere humility. It was obvious that he was not in any way trying to glorify himself. In fact, before narrating one of these dreams, he would always preface his talk with some words designed to banish any semblance of merit or privilege on his part. Often he would even adopt a witty tone and play down the extraordinary elements so as to make them appear quite natural and matter-of-fact to his listeners; however, they knew better. Nevertheless, what he did showed how important he believed them to be. He did not spare himself in preaching, hearing confessions, or listening to the boys who came to him privately, anxious to know what he had learned about their present or future state. Unfailingly, his dreams instilled a healthy horror of sin far more effectively than a spiritual retreat. All the boys would go to confession with genuine sorrow, and many would make a general confession. A greater number than usual would also receive Communion, to their own spiritual benefit. It could not have been otherwise, because the boys realized that the predictions of one who could read their innermost thoughts would unfailingly come true. Nevertheless, Don Bosco once confided to us: "At first I was hesitant about giving these dreams the importance that they deserved. I often regarded

them as mere flights of fancy. As I was narrating these dreams and predicting deaths and other future events, several times I wondered if I had rightly understood things, and I became fearful that what I said might actually be untrue. Occasionally, after narrating a dream, I could no longer remember what I had said. Therefore, in confessing to Father Cafasso, I sometimes accused myself of having spoken perhaps rashly. The saintly priest would listen to me, think the matter over, and then say: 'Since your predictions come true, you need not worry. You may continue to make them.' It was only a few years later, though, that I firmly came to believe that those dreams were from God. That was when the young boy [Bernard] Casalegno died and—exactly as I had seen in my dream—his coffin was placed on two chairs on the portico, notwithstanding Father Cagliero's efforts to have it moved to the usual place." We shall relate the details of this dream in due time.[1] Let us now resume our story.

One day in March, 1854, after Vespers, Don Bosco gathered all the boarders in a room behind the sacristy and told them that he wanted to tell them a dream. [John] Cagliero, [John] Turchi, [John Baptist] Anfossi, and the clerics [Felix] Reviglio and [Joseph] Buzzetti were among those present; our narration is based on their accounts. All of them believed that Don Bosco's dreams were true supernatural revelations. Don Bosco spoke as follows:

I was with you in the playground, delighted to see all of you so lively and happy, jumping, shouting, and running about. Suddenly, however, one of you came out of the building wearing some sort of top hat and began strolling around in the playground. The transparent headgear was lit from the inside and revealed the picture of a moon with the number '22' in its center. Amazed, I was about to walk up to the boy and tell him to cut off that nonsense when suddenly all of you stopped playing as if the bell had rung and lined up as usual on the porch by classes. It was now semidark. While all of you looked frightened, nearly a dozen of you were deathly pale. I passed in front of these pale ones for a closer look, and among them I saw the boy with the top hat. He was even paler than the rest, and a black drape—like those used at funerals —was hanging from his shoulders. I was about to ask him what his strange garb meant when a grave and dignified-looking stranger stopped

[1] This dream will be narrated in Vol. VII. [Editor]

me and said: "Wait! Know that this boy has only twenty-two moons to live. Before these are over, he will die. Take care of him and prepare him!" I wanted some explanation of this message and his sudden appearance, but the stranger had already vanished. My dear boys, I know who that lad is. He is right here among you.

Terror gripped all of the boys. This was the very first time that Don Bosco had ever predicted the death of anyone in the house publicly and so solemnly. He could not help noticing their fear, and so he continued: "Don't be afraid! True, I know that boy, and he is here now, but this is a dream, as I have said, and you know that dreams are only dreams. One thing is certain, though—we must always be prepared, just as Our Divine Savior has warned us in the Gospel, and never commit sin. If we follow this rule, death will not frighten us. Put your conscience in order, therefore, and resolve not to offend God anymore. On my part, I shall look after the boy of the twenty-two moons. These moons signify twenty-two months. I hope that he will die a good death."

Understandably, this announcement frightened the boys, but in the long run it did them good because their attention was focused on death as they kept themselves in God's grace and counted the months. Now and then when Don Bosco would ask: "How many more moons?" they would reply "Twenty" or "Eighteen" or "Fifteen" and so on. Sometimes those who paid the closest attention to everything he said would tell him that so many moons had already gone by, attempting at the same time to make their own predictions or guesses, but Don Bosco would say nothing. When [John Baptist] Piano entered the Oratory as a young student in November, 1854, he heard his companions say that nine moons had already passed. He then found out about Don Bosco's prediction and he too began keeping track of the moons.

The year 1854 went by, and so did many months of 1855, and then came October, the twentieth month. At this time the cleric [John] Cagliero was in charge of three adjoining rooms in the old Pinardi house. They served as a dormitory for several boys, including Secundus Gurgo a handsome, healthy, seventeen-year-old from Pettinengo (Biella) who seemed destined to live to a ripe old age. His father had asked Don Bosco to take him in as a boarder.

The youth, an excellent pianist and organist, studied music assiduously and earned good money by giving lessons in town. From time to time during the course of the year Don Bosco had asked Cagliero about the conduct of his charges with more than routine interest. In October he called him and asked: "Where do you sleep?"

"In the last room," Cagliero answered. "From there I can keep an eye on the other two."

"Wouldn't it be better if you moved your bed into the middle room?"

"If you say so, but I think I'd better tell you that it is rather damp because one of its walls is actually the wall of the church tower, which is still very porous. Winter is coming and I might get sick. Besides, I can watch all the boys in the dormitory quite well from where I am!"

"I know you can," Don Bosco replied, "but it would be better if you moved into the middle room." Cagliero complied, but after a while he asked Don Bosco's permission to move his bed back to the last room. Don Bosco did not let him do so. "Stay where you are and don't worry," he told him. "You won't get sick!"

Cagliero felt at ease again. A few days later Don Bosco summoned him again. "How many sleep in your room?"

"There are three of us: Gurgo, Garovaglia, and myself—four, if you include the piano!"

"Good," Don Bosco said. "You are all musicians and Gurgo can teach you to play the piano. Make sure that you look after him well." That was all he said, but Cagliero's curiosity was aroused. Suspecting something, he tried to question Don Bosco, but he cut him short, saying: "You'll know in due time." The secret, of course, was that the boy of the twenty-two moons was in that room.

One evening, at the beginning of December, after night prayers, Don Bosco mounted the podium as usual to give the Good Night and announced that one of the boys would die before Christmas. We must note that no one at the Oratory was sick at that time. Naturally this announcement, coupled with the fact that the twenty-two moons would soon be over, made everyone jittery. There was much talk about what he had said as well as fear that it would come true.

During these days Don Bosco once more sent for the cleric Cagliero. He asked him how Gurgo was behaving and whether he returned to the Oratory punctually after giving his music lessons in town. Cagliero replied that the boy was doing fine, as were the other boys. "Good," Don Bosco said. "See that they keep it up, and let me know if anything goes wrong."

About the middle of December Gurgo had a sudden attack of abdominal pains so violent that the doctor, who had been summoned at once, recommended that the boy receive the Last Sacraments. The pains continued for eight days, but, thanks to Dr. Debernardi's care, they at last began to subside and Gurgo was able to get up again. The trouble apparently vanished, but—in the doctor's opinion—the boy had had a narrow escape. Meanwhile, his father had been informed. No one had, as yet, died at the Oratory, and Don Bosco wanted to spare the boys the sight of a funeral. The Christmas novena had begun and Gurgo—now almost completely recovered—was planning to go home for Christmas. Nevertheless, Don Bosco seemed to doubt the good news of the boy's recovery. His father arrived and, finding his son in good condition, asked permission to take him home for some further convalescence. He then went to book two seats on the stagecoach, intending to leave on the next day for Novara and Pettinengo. It was Sunday, December 23 [1855]. That evening Gurgo felt a craving for meat, although the doctor had forbidden it. Thinking that it would help to build his strength, his father went out to buy some and cooked it in a little pot. The boy drank the broth and ate the half-cooked meat—perhaps to excess. At bedtime his father retired for the night while Cagliero and the infirmarian remained with the boy. Sometime during the night Gurgo suffered another very severe attack of colic. "Cagliero, Cagliero!" he gasped. "I'm through giving you piano lessons."

"Come now, don't say that!" Cagliero protested.

"I'll never see home again. Pray for me. Oh, what pains. . . . Pray to Our Lady for me."

"Of course I'll pray, and you do likewise."

Cagliero began praying but, overcome by fatigue, he soon fell asleep. He was suddenly awakened by the infirmarian who pointed to Gurgo and ran out to call Father Alasonatti whose room was

next door. He came immediately, but within minutes Gurgo was dead. That morning Cagliero met Don Bosco as he was coming down the stairs on his way to say Mass. He had been informed of the death and looked very, very sad.

The whole Oratory was stunned. The twenty-second moon was not yet over. By dying shortly before dawn on December 24 Gurgo had also fulfilled Don Bosco's second prediction—namely that one of the boys would die before Christmas.

After lunch, the boys and the clerics silently gathered around Don Bosco. The cleric John Turchi asked him point-blank whether Gurgo had been the boy of the moons. "Yes," Don Bosco replied, "it was he; he was the one I saw in my dream." Then he added: "You may have noticed that some time ago I had him sleep in a special room. Into that same room I also moved one of the best clerics, John Cagliero, so that he could look after him constantly." As he said this, he turned to Cagliero and said: "The next time you'll know better than object to Don Bosco's arrangements. Do you understand now why I did not allow you to leave that room? I did not let you have your way because I wanted Gurgo to have someone to look after him. If he were still alive, he could tell you how often I spoke to him of death in a roundabout way and prepared him for it."

"I understood then," Bishop Cagliero later wrote, "why Don Bosco had given me those instructions. I learned to appreciate more and more his words and fatherly advice."

"I still remember," Peter Enria stated, "that on the evening of that day—Christmas Eve—at the Good Night Don Bosco was looking about as though searching for someone. After a while he said: 'Gurgo is the first boy to die here at the Oratory. He was well prepared and we hope he is now in heaven. I exhort you to be ever ready. . . .' He could say no more, so great was his grief at the loss of one of his boys."

Since Gurgo was the first pupil ever to die at the Oratory, Don Bosco wanted to give him a fitting—though modest—funeral.[2] He therefore made the necessary arrangements with Father [Augustine] Gattino, the pastor [of SS. Simon and Jude] in Borgo Dora, with whom he also settled the matter of parochial rights in the event

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

of future deaths at the Oratory. Of these he was certain. The dream of the twenty-two moons seemed clearly to hint at them, but we do not know whether or not he forewarned the boys each time. The pastor generously established modest fees and eased the expenses which would have burdened Don Bosco rather than the boys' parents. In keeping with his deeply felt devotion to the souls in purgatory, Don Bosco urged all of the Oratory boys to offer up their Communions during the Christmas season for the repose of Gurgo's soul. Likewise, whenever any boy, benefactor, or friend of the Oratory died, he would immediately order public prayers, a general Communion, and the recitation of five decades of the rosary. He also would have the community Mass and a more solemn funeral Mass offered for the repose of that soul. At the Oratory, besides the daily prayers for the dead, the boys recited special prayers for their repose at the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death and also on the last day of the carnival season. On the eve of All Souls' Day, Don Bosco would join the boys in saying fifteen decades of the rosary in church, often leading it himself; then on All Souls' Day he himself said the Mass for all the faithful departed. He also suggested the Heroic Act of Charity to his boys. He never failed to inform them when plenary indulgences could be obtained on behalf of the souls in purgatory. For them he offered up his own afflictions and prayers, and he encouraged the sick and suffering to do likewise. When someone sought spiritual advice, he would say: "Receive Holy Communion, or say five decades of the rosary, or hear Mass for that soul in purgatory who needs only the merit of this good act to satisfy Divine justice and fly to heaven." He would suggest these and other similar acts of devotion even if not asked, for he firmly believed in the existence of purgatory. Often in his catechetical instructions or informal talks, he strove to make the boys understand how excruciating the sufferings of purgatory were by describing them so realistically that his listeners were moved to pity and inspired to pray and suffer on behalf of the poor souls. Father [Michael] Rua, Father [John] Turchi, Father [John Baptist] Francesia, and Father [John] Cagliero all can testify to this from the early days of the Oratory.

A few days after Gurgo's death, another boy, Camillo Gavio, was called to eternity. In only two months his deep and sincere

piety had made a lasting impression on all his schoolmates. The illness that had once brought him to the brink of the grave again flared up, and despite the care of doctors and friends he rapidly declined. Dominic Savio often visited him during his illness, and he even volunteered to spend the night watching him, but he was not allowed to do so. Gavio's condition soon became critical, and a few days later, after devoutly receiving the Last Sacraments, he passed away on December 29, 1855, with Don Bosco at his bedside.

When Dominic Savio heard of Gavio's death, he wanted to see his body for the last time. Looking at his mortal remains, he was deeply moved. "Good-bye, Gavio," he murmured. "I'm sure you're in heaven. Prepare a place for me too. I will always be your friend, and as long as I live I will pray for your eternal rest." Later he returned to recite the Office of the Dead with several of Gavio's schoolmates, and other prayers were said for him during the rest of the day. Moreover, Dominic Savio offered several Communions for his departed friend and invited a few of the more devout boys to do likewise.

In the boys' register, next to Gavio's name, Don Bosco made the following entry: "A boy of outstanding virtue." From dependable —but not documented—sources we gather that Don Bosco perhaps predicted this death too. Gavio's funeral was more modest than Gurgo's.[3]

In the course of time Don Bosco made similar predictions. "Several times between 1854 and 1860," declared Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, "Don Bosco, when giving the Good Night, said: 'Soon (and sometimes he specified the length of time—as, for example, within a month) one of you present will leave us to give an account to God of his life.' You cannot imagine what effect these words had on us! We had no idea who it would be because nobody was sick, but we knew for a fact that previous similar announcements had come true. Father Dominic Morra, a canon of the cathedral of Pinerolo and my schoolmate at the Oratory, fully confirmed these prophecies when I asked him about them."

From 1860 to 1880 and beyond, one might say that almost every month Don Bosco made similar predictions on the occasion

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

of the Exercise for a Happy Death, giving such precise details that those who saw them fulfilled were astounded. The names of several of these boys who died have been forgotten; the names of others and the circumstances of their predicted deaths either were never written down—inasmuch as they became common occurrences—or were lost over the years. But we have this written testimony of Father Joachim Berto: "He predicted, long before they came, the time and circumstances of the deaths of almost all the Oratory boys. Once or twice he gave a clear warning to the boy concerned; often he had some good companions watch over him; occasionally he would publicly reveal the boy's initials. As far as I can remember, such predictions invariably came true. There were some very rare exceptions, but they were of such a nature as to further confirm Don Bosco's gift of prophecy. I, Father Berto, declare that I was a witness to what I have described."

CHAPTER 33

Don Bosco and Priestly Vocations

THE year of 1855 ended, leaving a trail of seemingly incurable evils. Particularly deplorable was the problem of vocations in Piedmont. Hundreds of seminarians had abandoned their calling, and the seminaries were closed or almost deserted. Irreligion, moral laxity, a materialistic education, a press-incited hatred for ecclesiastical authority, public contempt for priests—some of whom were in jail and others under house arrest—a widespread sense of discouragement among the faithful, and a certain uneasiness that made parents reluctant to allow their sons to follow a priestly vocation had brought things to such a pass that now hardly any boy aspired to become a priest.

Already in 1852, when Michael Rua donned the cassock, there were only seventeen seminarians in Turin. In his first year philosophy class he had two clasmates; the following year he had only one.

To climax these ills, several of the more important dioceses were without a bishop, and elsewhere the bishops simply could not afford to maintain a large number of boys, a substantial percentage of whom either would not respond to God's call or would be found wanting.

With his customary remarkable farsightedness, Don Bosco had foreseen from the very beginning of the revolutionary stirrings [in Piedmont] the inevitability of a rapid decline in diocesan priestly vocations. Moreover, the law of suppression of monasteries had also inflicted a mortal blow on priestly vocations in the religious orders. Humanly speaking, any attempt to meet this shortage seemed like

a hopeless task, but, feeling that God wanted him to provide for this most urgent need of the Church, Don Bosco did not hesitate.

We have already seen[1] how in the past few years he had not spared himself in order to preserve and foster vocations. However, he realized the need for episcopal and pastoral cooperation. In October 1852 he recommended to the bishop of Biella a promising boy from that diocese for entrance into the junior seminary, but at that particular moment the bishop could not oblige. Expressing regret at his inability to accept the boy, the bishop added: "I want you to know, however, that I am always very much interested in your and my little rascals. I would certainly like to help you in your saintly task of starting them on the right path of life and enabling them to choose an honorable career, especially if it would benefit Holy Mother Church."

In 1853 Don Bosco asked Bishop Clement [Manzino] of Cuneo to allow an Oratory boy named Luciano—whose family lived in that diocese—to don the clerical habit at the Oratory. The bishop replied as follows on October 1: "Although somewhat reluctantly, since I am short of priests and vocations are scarce, for your sake and for the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls, I'll let you keep the cleric-to-be Luciano, on condition that he don the cassock and continue his studies as a seminarian for this diocese. I authorize you to bless the clerical habit and invest him with it after you have come to an understanding with [his] pastor at Bernezzo, whom I am notifying about this arrangement."

Toward the end of 1854, Bishop Lawrence Renaldi of Pinerolo sent two of his needy seminarians to Don Bosco: the cleric John Baptist Cavalleris and the student Joseph Gora, with authorization for the latter to don the clerical habit at the Oratory. "The shortage of funds for our seminary," the bishop wrote on October 14, "and other obligations of mine do not allow me to keep these boys at the seminary entirely at my expense; I am very grateful to you, dear Father, for taking them in." Finally, in 1855 Don Bosco appealed to several pastors for financial assistance on behalf of certain parishioners of theirs who wanted to become priests. We here record his letter to Father [John Baptist] Appendini, the pastor at Caramagna:

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 428ff. [Editor]

Turin, June 8, 1855

Very Reverend and dear Father:

For several days I had been meaning to write to you about Bartholomew Fusero, a young parishioner of yours. What finally made me do it was Father Valfré's timely visit and his telling me of your interest in the boy.

I can assure you of his seriousness about the priesthood. His good behavior, aloofness from worldly concerns, piety, and intelligence justify our expectations and are a clear indication of his success. However, he has no means of his own. I have supported him for the last three years. Will Providence now open some other door for him? Fusero and I pin our hopes on you. Whether he takes the examination prior to donning the clerical habit or will have to postpone it for a while will depend on your reply.

I gladly take this occasion to express my esteem for and my gratitude toward you. I am at your service for anything I may be able to do.

Yours gratefully,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please help spread *Letture Cattoliche* in your parish.

In October [1855], at the age of seventeen, Bartholomew Fusero was vested in the cassock at the hands of his pastor, and then he returned to the Oratory.

From Don Bosco's letters to Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, rector of the Turin seminary and diocesan pro-vicar, we gather that the number of seminarians living at the Oratory was steadily increasing:

Turin, August 16, 1855

Dear Father Rector:

I enclose a list of boys who wish to don the clerical habit. Several are still waiting to receive the needed documents from their parishes. We will have to discuss some of them orally, but meanwhile we could let them take their examination. Later on we shall see what is to be done.

At the moment their conduct and qualifications leave nothing to be desired. I commend them to your well-known kindness.

Please excuse me for joining the stragglers in submitting the required applications.

Yours gratefully,

Fr. John Bosco

While Don Bosco's efforts to increase the number of vocations had thus far borne good fruit, even if rather slowly, they gained momentum when he began resorting to a new expedient that was no doubt divinely inspired. Speaking to the Salesian cooperators in 1875 about the early years of his congregation, Don Bosco said: "Where was I to find boys to respond to the Lord's call? Man is but a mere instrument in the hands of God who guides and helps him to do all he must. But God then clearly revealed to me how and where I should find recruits for His service. It would not be from noble or wealthy families, for they are usually too worldly-minded, and unfortunately their children are similarly infected. Once they go to public schools or to plush boarding schools, they soon abandon any idea or inclination for the priestly vocation that God may have planted in their hearts. Consequently, to replace those who pay God no heed, we must seek the ones He has chosen among the working class, without excluding, however, any middle-class boys who give signs of a priestly vocation."

With this idea in mind, Don Bosco now looked for someone to help him with his plan. The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and the Little House of Divine Providence[2]—two institutions inspired by God for the relief of suffering and the social and moral welfare of souls—had always been and still were close friends. Several times Don Bosco had urged—and by his holy insistence almost forced—Canon [Louis] Anglesio, its rector, to increase the number of the so called "Tommasini"—boys aspiring to the priesthood—a project started by Canon Joseph Benedict Cottolengo[3] to increase priestly vocations. At this time [1855] there were only ten boys enrolled, with a diocesan priest as their teacher. It was imperative that this work be expanded; moreover, there was need for a school that would provide priests for the spiritual care of the patients and personnel of the Little House of Divine Providence. Convinced that

[2] *See* Vol. II, pp. 51ff. [Editor]

[3] Now St. Joseph Benedict Cottolengo. [Editor]

Don Bosco's plan was inspired by God, the canon followed Don Bosco's example and advice.

As he had already been doing for some years, Don Bosco zealously toured the countryside of the dioceses of Turin, Biella, Ivrea and Casale—especially in the districts of Saluzzo and Mondovì—soliciting from the local pastors information about boys whose moral and intellectual qualities seemed to indicate a priestly vocation. He would then interview the boys in question, and if their parents consented, he would accept them as students for little or no tuition charge, as previously agreed upon with Canon Anglesio. He then took the boys with him to Turin and, after carefully questioning them about their preferences, he would send some to the Little House of Divine Providence and keep the rest at the Oratory.

Joseph Buzzetti often told us: "Rarely did Don Bosco return from these apostolic tours without bringing along some orphan or some prospective vocation. A number of excellent boys came to the Oratory in this way from Cardè, Vigone, Revello, Sanfront, Paesana, Bagnolo, Cavour, Fenestrelle, and other little towns [of Piedmont]. One day his mother told him: 'If you keep accepting new boys, you won't have anything left to take care of yourself!' But he replied tranquilly: 'There'll always be a place for me in the Cottolengo Hospital!' Nevertheless, Mamma Margaret warmly welcomed the boys and constantly looked after them even to the point of neglecting herself."

The boys who had chosen to join the Little House of Divine Providence received the warmest possible welcome there too, and thus the number of students in both places steadily increased, until it reached several hundred by 1858–59. Canon Anglesio spared no effort to see that his "Tommasini" would become worthy priests. His admirable institution housed a seminary that not only provided vocations for the archdiocese of Turin in those disastrous years, but still does to this very day [1905] for both Turin and many other Italian dioceses.

Besides scouting for vocations himself, Don Bosco also asked his friends to direct potential candidates to him. Once when Mr. George Moglia[4] came to see him while the Pinardi house was still

[4] The son of Dorothy Moglia, through whose intervention John Bosco was accepted as a farmhand at the Moglia farm when he was only twelve. *See* Vol. I, pp. 144ff. [Editor]

standing,[5] he told him that if he knew of any orphan boys at Moncucco, he should bring them to the Oratory. Mr. Moglia complied and returned with three boys, whom Don Bosco warmly welcomed.

Furthermore, some time later Don Bosco began writing to the pastors of Piedmont and of Lombardy, asking them to look for prospective priestly vocations among their young parishioners and to send them to him in Turin for their Latin courses.

He was so absorbed in his task of seeking vocations that whenever he met some unspoiled boy who seemed receptive, he would give him a medal of Our Lady. Then he would ask him whether he received the sacraments frequently, gave good example, went to school, and wanted to continue his studies. Sometimes he would end up by suggesting that he devote himself to the service of God, pointing out the dignity and happiness of such a choice. If the boy was interested but his parents were poor, Don Bosco would add that he would take care of everything. Several times such boys who were chosen by Don Bosco in this way followed him to the Oratory, and we know of some who did become priests.

We must add that occasionally, for some good reason, Don Bosco could not immediately accept a boy who had been recommended to him. However, in such a case he would not forget him, and even years later he would try to locate him. This we gather from one of his letters to Professor Joseph Bonzanino in which he expressed his satisfaction at having obtained the chancery's permission for some of his boys to don the cassock:

[No date]

My dear Professor:

Several years ago you introduced to me a boy from the diocese of Vercelli who seemed quite serious about studying for the priesthood.

If you can locate him and if he still feels the same way, I am now in a position to help him achieve his goal.

Last Thursday I saw Father [Matthew] Picco and his family in their summer home; they are all in good health.

If everything goes well, I shall visit you at Castagnetto. Seven of my boys passed the diocesan examination prior to donning the clerical habit. Among your pupils were Francesia, Cagliero, Morra, and Fusero.

[5] It was torn down in 1856 to make room for a new wing. [Editor]

I trust that you and your family are well. May God keep you all in good health.

With great esteem and gratitude, I remain,

Your devoted friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Every successful priestly vocation caused Don Bosco to rejoice. He left these thoughts in writing: "We must remember that in securing a genuine vocation we are giving the Church a treasure. It is unimportant whether this vocation be for a diocese, the foreign missions, or a religious order. What matters is the gift made to the whole Church. Never turn down a promising boy because of lack of means. Spend all you have; if necessary, beg. If you are still hard pressed, don't be afraid, for the Blessed Virgin will come to your aid somehow, even miraculously."

Don Bosco practiced what he preached, for his heart, like Solomon's, was "as the sands on the seashore." [Gen. 22, 17] He had to find means to house and feed his boys, to teach them, to get them the necessary ecclesiastical patrimony, and to pay for their military exemption. Somehow he always managed, thoroughly convinced that he could not have better spent the funds entrusted to him by Divine Providence. To the end of his days his one great desire was to train more and more saintly priests for the Church. At his own expense he supported hundreds of them for nearly ten years—that is, until ordination—and likewise—gratis or nearly so—thousands of other boys for four or five years before they entered a seminary. While these boys lived at the Oratory he took special care of them, thus revealing his great gifts as an educator and effectively promoting the study of sacred subjects.

In the early years of the Oratory, Don Bosco had to send these boys to the private schools conducted by Father [Matthew] Picco and Professor [Joseph] Bonzanino, but he saw to it that at the Oratory—either in the morning or the evening—they had instruction in Italian, Latin, arithmetic, and history according to their needs. Occasionally several classes followed one after another. He did not fail to boost their morale if they met with a difficulty, scholastic or otherwise. He would encourage them by saying: "If you only knew what a hard time I had in trying to enter the seminary! I al-

ways needed help to continue and to succeed." Through his exhortations their love of study became and ever remained—as we shall see in the course of these Memoirs—a genuine passion for learning. Yet Don Bosco knew how to moderate their zeal, just as he struck a happy balance between relaxation and prayer: not too much of the former lest it dissipate the mind; not too much of the latter lest it render piety odious. Thus, the Oratory boys were generally superior to others both intellectually and spiritually.

Moreover, these boys acted as a powerful magnet in attracting others to the priesthood. When they were home for a few days of vacation, their excellent deportment not only exposed as unfounded the widespread prejudices against what the anticlerical newspapers contemptuously referred to as "sacristy education," but also led many families to send their boys to the Oratory, confident that under Don Bosco's guidance they would be a success in life, and leaving it to him to decide what path they should follow. When these aspirants to the priesthood finished their high school education at the Oratory and returned to their villages and towns to receive the clerical habit from the hands of their pastors, the occasion always awakened in other boys the desire to imitate them.

Since we are on this subject, we must mention another factor that indirectly contributed to dissipate prejudices against a priestly vocation. The large number of factory workers, technicians, teachers, civil servants, army officers, and businessmen who studied at the Oratory or attended it on Sundays and holy days in their boyhood spread respect and esteem for the priesthood wherever they went. They did this not only because they loved and respected Don Bosco personally, but also because his sermons and talks had shown them how the Church had merited the regard of mankind; furthermore, they themselves had benefited by the goodness and self-sacrifice of Don Bosco's co-workers. This attachment to Don Bosco induced even the enemies of the Church to look upon her with good will and respect. Several of Don Bosco's former pupils, when presenting their sons to him, would say: "We ourselves did not become priests, but we now bring you replacements. Here, take our sons. We would be glad to have you make good priests of them if that's their vocation."

While Don Bosco was anxious to recruit and train boys in God's

service, his zeal was truly extraordinary when the time came to help them discover their vocation. After striving to imbue them with a love of virtue and of Jesus and Mary, he would discuss this all-important matter with them. Not just once, but again and again he would interview them to discover their inclinations, their spirit of piety, and their morals. He generally warned them at the very outset that if they were not truly called to the priesthood, they would do better to become simple workmen rather than take a wrong path in life. He urged all to choose a regular confessor and willingly made himself available.

He was very prudent in giving advice about one's vocation. Before coming to a final decision he would ponder all the facts, watch for telltale signs of a true vocation, and pray for enlightenment. He never gave an affirmative reply unless he was morally certain that the vocation would succeed, and then he spoke out unhesitatingly with the certainty of one who knew that he was manifesting God's holy will. Father Francis Dalmazzo—with Bishop John Cagliero and Father Michael Rua concurring—declared: "Several of my Oratory schoolmates who did not follow Don Bosco's advice candidly admitted afterward that they had made a mistake and had paid dearly for it. At times his advice may not have seemed right from a human standpoint, but once accepted and acted upon, it brought peace where there had been turmoil, made possible what had seemed impossible, and caused to become certain what had been doubtful. Thus he helped boys to follow their true calling. It soon became known outside the Oratory how adept Don Bosco was at discovering, protecting, and guiding priestly vocations. For this reason, bishops and superiors of religious orders—as, for example, the superior general of the Servants of Mary—started calling on him for advice. However, if advice on such a crucial matter was requested by mail or if he was uncertain as to God's will, Don Bosco would refer his correspondents to their spiritual directors or pastors.

When seminarians of various dioceses sought his encouragement and help in their problems, revealed their doubts to him, or asked him to suggest various ways by which they might achieve spiritual progress, he always hastened to their aid. If some cleric would write to him about his indecision as the time for ordination approached, Don Bosco, who followed the norms of the more severe theologians

in keeping from the priesthood those who were not morally sound, would answer candidly but so charitably as to clearly reveal that he was a man of God. Here are a few illustrations:

Turin, December 7, 1855

Most beloved son:

I received your letter and was particularly pleased with your frankness. Let us thank God for the good will He has inspired in you. Confidently follow your confessor's advice. "He who hears you, hears Me," says the Lord. [Luke 10, 16] Strive to cooperate with Divine grace which is knocking at your heart. Perhaps the Lord is calling you to a higher degree of spirituality.

But let us not deceive ourselves. Do not go on unless you fully overcome that difficulty. Do not seek major orders unless *for at least one year* you have had no relapses. My recommendations are: pray, avoid idleness and occasions of sin, receive the sacraments frequently, be devoted to the Blessed Mother (wear a medal about your neck) and to St. Aloysius, read spiritual books, and be brave. Keep in mind what St. Paul says: "I can do all things in Him who strengthens me." [Phil. 4, 13]

Let us love each other in the Lord by praying that we may be saved and fulfill God's holy will. Believe me to be,

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

St. Ambrose, pray for us!

Turin, April 16, 1856

Most beloved in Christ:

If matters are as you say in your letter, I agree that you should proceed very slowly before taking major orders. But prior to reaching a decision, I'd like to have a talk with you, as you seem to suggest, after your exams, around the feast of St. John the Baptist.

Meanwhile, study hard for your exams. Every night, before falling asleep, search your conscience for any fault for which you might have to answer should you have to face God's tribunal that night.

During the day, often repeat: "Lord, hand not over to infernal beasts the souls that trust in Thee."

Pray for me.

Your most devoted friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

Turin, April 28, 1857

Dearly beloved in the Lord:

To give an adequate answer to your query, I would need to know how long it has been since your last relapse. *Coram Domino,* I would be inclined to say that you should not receive any major order until after at least six months of victorious struggle. However, I do not forbid you from following the advice of those who have encouraged you to go on. May God help you. Pray for me and I shall do likewise.

I remain with fatherly affection,

Your friend,

Fr. John Bosco

But let us now return to the subject of the Oratory. We must mention that Don Bosco never fully trusted his own judgment in matters of vocation, in spite of his learning, perception, prudence, intimate knowledge of his pupils, and even charisms. In such a case, if he was not a boy's ordinary confessor, he first had him seek his own confessor's advice. Frequently—in fact, invariably—he sent boys to Father Cafasso for a final answer. He did not in the least regard it as an affront if anyone sought the advice of other prudent priests. "I recall," Father Francis Cerruti said, "that when I was in my junior year of high school, I told him that I had a certain inclination to join the Capuchins. 'Very well!' he told me. 'Some day or other we shall go to the monastery of Our Lady of the Countryside to talk to the Father Guardian.' When that day came, he himself introduced me to him so that I could freely discuss my vocation." Other boys, too, either were advised by him or received his permission to consult with local superiors of the Jesuits, Dominicans, Franciscans, Oblates of Mary, and other orders.

A revered old priest, a former pupil of the Oratory, testified—as could all our schoolmates—to Don Bosco's solicitude in speaking personally at two distinct times to those who had decided on a priestly vocation.

The first time would be when one was about to don the clerical habit. I will tell what happened in my case. Just as I was about to finish high school, he talked to me several times. I recall that one day he took me for a walk and thoroughly examined my inclinations and intentions. All that he was concerned about was the glory of God and the salvation of

souls, to which, he insisted, I was to devote myself unreservedly. All human motives were ruled out. He visibly rejoiced at the good that he hoped I could do. The second time that he would call the clerics was when they were about to receive major orders. He would tell them to examine themselves carefully and to make it clear to him whether, as priests, they preferred pastoral work to teaching, and also whether they would like to remain with him so that they might help him in his work.

The last point, of course, reflected not only a fond hope of his, but also the need of personnel for the festive oratories. This was indispensable if the work of recruiting vocations was to continue. However, Don Bosco never suggested to a cleric that he stay with him unless he was morally certain that it was God's will for the cleric to join the Salesian Congregation. He abided by St. Vincent de Paul's maxim: "God alone has the right to choose His ministers and determine their duties. Vocations that are inspired and supported by human motives end up disgracing the Church."

Don Bosco expected generous obedience and self-sacrifice from those whom he invited to join him, but they frequently failed him. It was his lot to carry this heavy cross year after year without faltering. Of the many clerics and priests he was training, he had difficulty in retaining even a few to help him in his work. Parental opposition and the fickleness of youth often rendered almost fruitless his heroic efforts and sacrifices, as we have already mentioned.[6] What follows we ourselves heard Don Bosco say:

No one can realize what hardships I went through in the first twenty years or so of the Oratory because of rebuffs, antagonism, discouragement, apprehensions, disappointments, aggravation, and ingratitude.

Sometimes boys promised to stay and help me only so that they would be able to continue their studies comfortably. Later they had a thousand reasons for not keeping their promises. After many other fruitless attempts, we finally had eight boys don the cassock; shortly afterward they all left the Oratory. There were even some who, on the very day of their ordination or on the evening of their first Mass, told me frankly that life in the Oratory was not for them, and then left. What they were looking for was a more tranquil and comfortable life in a parish, diocesan seminary, or religious institute, even if it were outside of Piedmont. Others laid aside the cassock during their theology studies.

[6] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 342ff. [Editor]

Probably a great many of these desertions were prompted by doubts and unrest provoked by the "prince of darkness" who never ceased placing obstacles in Don Bosco's path. As a matter of fact, the clerics or priests who left the Oratory always continued in their strong love and respect for Don Bosco and proved it splendidly on several occasions.

We must also add that while Don Bosco tried to attract some boys in order to prepare them gradually for the religious life and have them as co-workers, he never pressed the point and never imposed his view. Neither he nor anyone else at the Oratory ever brought pressure on the boys who were always left fully free to make their own choice, as we know from the testimony of Canon Berrone [who in the years 1865 through 1869 was a pupil at the Oratory].

Father [Felix] Reviglio adds: "Although Don Bosco was aware that some clerics were having second thoughts [about staying with him], he nevertheless continued to help them reach the priesthood if they had a genuine vocation. He took consolation in being able to provide the Church with badly needed priests. I, in particular, had been among the first ones chosen to stay with him, but I did not feel that this was my vocation. Nevertheless, he helped me in my studies and left me perfectly free to become a diocesan priest. He even gave me a special recommendation to Archbishop Fransoni, and through this I obtained an ecclesiastical benefice."

Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi assures us that Don Bosco never took offense at these desertions. He gave his blessing to those who left him so that they could persevere in holiness of life and succeed in helping souls. Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio adds:

From my contacts with Don Bosco even after my departure from the Oratory, I can safely say that he was quite sure he had achieved his goal when he saw his boys entering a diocesan seminary or serving God in a parish. To the latter he not only gave wise and practical advice but also showed affection and pleasure at their choice.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that many defections were a very bitter disappointment to him. He had been particularly generous to these boys and had made unusual financial sacrifices through the years to help them get their degrees, with a more or less tacit understanding that they would stay with him. Some owed him literally everything: education, comfortable livelihood, position, and even exemption from military

service. Don Bosco regretted such ingratitude because it was reprehensible in itself, but he did not complain. If he sometimes revealed his hurt, he always did so with generous resignation to God's will and as a warning to those who were prone to be fickle. Even in such cases, however, he never lessened his sincere love for them; he invited them to the Oratory and still helped them when necessary.

Don Bosco often reminisced about former pupils who were then diocesan priests, remarking: "I wish those boys of mine would visit me sometimes so that I could be sure they have been faithful to their vocation!" When they came, he welcomed them warmly and, if necessary, reminded them of the advice he had given them when they were young boys. He would also point out to them the need of living in poverty, in accordance with their calling. Occasionally some former pupils would show up wearing stylish clerical attire. Don Bosco would just look at them and smile. Sometimes, however, when this and other hints proved ineffective, regretting such vanity in priests, he would poke fun at their worldliness, remarking, for example: "Your parishioners must admire your way of dressing. Oh, yes, such a style must make you look very important and swell your ego!" Thus he would induce them to change their ways. On one occasion, when he heard that a rectory was outfitted luxuriously, he let the pastor understand that it was a priest's duty to look after the poor rather than his own comfort.

The fruits of the eminently priestly formation that he imparted at the Oratory are undeniable. If the archdiocese of Turin—whose seminary was closed [from 1848 through 1864]—and other dioceses still had a sufficient number of priests, it is undoubtedly due for the most part to the zeal and generosity of Don Bosco who was training them. The hundreds of boys who studied under him for the priesthood every year were yet another proof of this.

Once the seminaries reopened, they were filled with Don Bosco's pupils. Reporting to their bishops who joyfully and gratefully received them, they could rightly say: "Don Bosco sent us to help you save souls." In the major seminary of Turin in 1865, 38 of the 46 clerics were former pupils of the Oratory; in 1873 this was true of 120 out of 150, as verified by Father Joseph Bertello. Year by year the number increased; some are now canons, six are pastors in

Turin, and there are forty or more in the neighboring towns, not to mention all those engaged in pastoral work or working in the foreign missions. In 1870, Bishop [John] Cagliero, while visiting the seminary of Casale with Bishop [Peter] Ferrè, found that 38 of the 40 clerics were former pupils of Don Bosco. We may add that presently [1905]—according to figures compiled by Father Cassetta, the pastor of Costigliole d'Asti—seventy-five percent of the priests in that diocese and two thirds of the pastors in the diocese of Asti are former Salesian pupils, and the same could be said of other dioceses in Piedmont.

Each year Don Bosco also gave many clerics to the archdiocese of Milan, while presently in Liguria over three hundred priests are former Salesian pupils. There have also been some in Rome who have attained honors and positions of dignity. Six bishops lived at Don Bosco's side for years when they were boys.

Don Bosco showed the same care for all these lads as he did for those who joined his congregation. When some boy was about to leave the Oratory to enter the diocesan seminary, Don Bosco would repeatedly call him in to give him whatever advice he needed to be a good seminarian and, in due course, a good priest. He especially reminded them to guard their chastity, lest otherwise their ministry become sterile and their life unhappy.

Thus Don Bosco always worked indefatigably for the Church. Father Felix Giordano of the Oblates of Mary, an old friend of Don Bosco and an unimpeachable witness, has given a vivid description of Don Bosco's work for vocations and paid him a magnificent tribute in his letter to Father Celestine Durando, written from Nice in 1888:

> Starting in the turbulent days of 1848, religious sentiment [in Italy] was shaken by ever increasing repercussions that were detrimental to both Church and State. From that time on, there was a steady decrease in priestly and religious vocations. Consequently, as older priests died and only a fraction could be replaced, there were soon not enough priests to minister to the faithful. Cockle and wheat abundantly grew side by side but there were not enough laborers for the harvest. Remembering Our Lord's command, devout souls prayed with faith to the Lord of the harvest to graciously send workers into His vineyard. But these good souls, with the best of intentions, overlooked the fact that

while the Lord is ready to send laborers—if need be He could turn stones into sons of Abraham—He nevertheless expects men—even as regards vocations—to make positive contributions as His privileged instruments. It so happened, instead, that these good souls contented themselves with praying for hours on end while doing nothing about this problem; their eyes were lifted up to heaven but their hands were idle. Let me illustrate by depicting one such person in the process of discussing this matter with a group of friends:

"Welcome, my dear friend! We were just debating a very timely topic, and we need your expert opinion."

"About what?"

"Vocations."

"That is a problem, and a serious one. Nevertheless, since you do me this honor, I will tell you what I think. First, we should look for vocations among farm boys, because they are used to a life of hardship and are therefore better suited to the priestly life. With this in mind, we should establish centers for these boys—if not in every diocese, at least in the larger provinces and cities. These lads will come from all parts by the hundreds and the thousands. Naturally we would give them all a sound Christian education, while carefully scrutinizing their character and their physical, intellectual, and moral qualifications. Then we would make a selection, as a gardener does with his plants, putting them in the best location: in the valleys or in the mountains. Some boy may have no aptitude for studying; we shall teach him only the essentials for salvation. Another boy may lack will power or the inclination to study; we shall steer him toward the arts and crafts, whichever he likes best. But if a third boy is unspoiled, open, intelligent, and innocent—the cream of the crop—ah, in that case we shall cultivate him with greater care and see that he grows tall and strong. We shall plan for him a regular course of studies: first an elementary education, then a good training in Latin, and finally the very best in rhetoric. With all this background I wager that when he reaches the proper age, he will hear the call of the Master of the vineyard and will belong to the Church. That is my opinion. Do you agree?"

"Why, you astound us! What you have said is wonderful, but what are you trying to do—make us see stars in broad daylight? Don't you realize that theory and practice are quite different? What you suggest might have been possible in better times, but not now! Those are dreams and nothing but dreams."

And indeed so they seemed, considering the vastness of the undertaking and the troubled times in which we live! Yet Don Bosco turned

these dreams into a reality. He really did gather countless boys in widely scattered centers to train them for heaven. He carefully sorted them out, assigning some to the arts and crafts, and others to higher education, just as a gardener selects some plants for the valleys and others for the mountains. Do you know how many centers he established all over the world? One hundred and fifty. Do you want to know how many religious or priestly vocations have come out of his schools? I cannot tell you, because there have been too many in the course of forty years. Ask the rectors of seminaries and monasteries; ask those in charge of the foreign missions!

In 1883, in the presence of Father [Francis] Dalmazzo and others, Don Bosco exclaimed: "I'm happy now! I have had careful statistics drawn up, and we have found that more than two thousand diocesan priests have come from our schools. Let us thank the Lord and His Most Holy Mother for having given us the means to do all this good."

However, his figures were not final; before his death an additional five hundred boys had entered diocesan seminaries. There were also others whose vocation he had encouraged who began studying for the priesthood after his death. We should also mention the many who joined religious orders. There is hardly an order in Italy that does not have some of Don Bosco's sons among its priests. Another merit of his is that he indirectly helped to strengthen the Church. We could say that it was his example and sometimes his insistence and cooperation that led to the opening of many minor seminaries. It is from him that a few rectors of minor and major seminaries learned how to look after their charges with loving and fatherly care, and to stress piety—especially Eucharistic piety—that is so indispensable for persevering in one's priestly vocation. All this greatly benefited the diocesan clergy in their respective dioceses. The system followed before 1848 had been quite different. We shall say more on this topic in other volumes. From what we have already said and will say, we can infer that it is no exaggeration to state that in his lifetime Don Bosco formed some six thousand priests.

Father Michael Rua was not only a witness to all that we have related here but also Don Bosco's partner, for he was at his side from 1850 through 1888. What he most admired was Don Bosco's

fortitude in his confrontations with powerful adversaries who systematically attacked his work in the hope of destroying it. Several outstanding politicians of the day—among them Commendatore Morena, the king's commissioner for the liquidation of church property in Rome—admitted to Father Francis Dalmazzo: "While we are trying to rid ourselves of religious orders and hinder vocations, Don Bosco is manufacturing priests at top speed under our very noses with a diligence worthy of a better cause."

We have here portrayed a great tableau. In 1856, however, it was just a sketch!

CHAPTER 34

Parish Mission

IN January 1856 the Lord gave Don Bosco the task of weeding out the cockle that was cluttering and choking a spiritual field. Neither the sentencing of Father Anthony Grignaschi[1] and his chief accomplices, nor the fruitful preaching of the bishops of Casale and Asti had succeeded in eradicating Father Grignaschi's perverse sect which had taken firm root in Viarigi.[2] Rather, a zealous core of dyed-in-the-wool fanatics and ignorant, selfish hangers-on made it stronger, more obstinate, and deafer than ever before to the warnings of local pastors and missionaries. The sincere conversions of Father Lacchelli, the pastor of St. Peter's, and of Father Ferraris—both of whom died a holy death—made no impression whatever on the so-called "Grignaschini." They would not hear a word about religion unless they could twist it to their own ends. The new pastor, Father John Baptist Melino, held spiritual retreats and missions, but to no avail. Two Capuchin Fathers who attempted to preach a mission were obliged to beat a hasty retreat. In 1854 Father Melino came to the Oratory to seek Don Bosco's aid, but after careful consideration they both decided to let matters rest for the moment. Two years went by and then the hour mercifully appointed by God struck. The outpouring of His grace was so bountiful that it surpassed their fondest hopes. At Father Melino's invitation, Don Bosco and Father Borsarelli, a canon of the Turin cathedral, agreed to preach a mission. As Bishop [John] Cagliero told us, Don Bosco fully realized its difficulties and importance; therefore, he prayed a great deal beforehand and urged his boys and

[1] On March 21, 1850 he was declared guilty of contempt of religion and of fraud and sentenced to seven years in prison. *See* Vol. IV, pp. 69ff. [Editor]

[2] A small town about fifty miles from Turin. [Editor]

the members of several religious institutes to do likewise. The two missionaries arrived at Viarigi during the second week of January. The whole population [about three thousand] lined both sides of the road, and several people openly showed their hostility by remarking loudly enough to be heard by the two missionaries: "Maybe they are good preachers, but what can they tell us? They haven't seen the light yet." In addition there were other remarks such as "They're just freeloaders; they should go back where they came from" and "They'll be preaching to empty pews."

No sooner had the news of the impending mission reached the village than the leaders of the sect held a strategy meeting. They called for all "Grignaschini" and their dependents to boycott the church, and they also decided to hold a dance or social affair during the mission. Accordingly, they hired musicians and made the necessary preparations. Moreover, some of the wealthier members agreed to throw a series of parties for the poorer members in order to keep them from attending church.

At the start of the mission the attendance was quite meager, but the two missionaries learned that Father Grignaschi's notorious housekeeper, Lana, known as the "Red Madonna," [3] was present, most likely out of curiosity. After serving her jail sentence, she had returned to the village. When Don Bosco mounted the pulpit to start the mission and noticed the scanty attendance, he did not lose heart; rather, he put his whole trust more firmly than ever in Him who rules the hearts of men. He commended the congregation for their good will and encouraged them to persevere and to bring along as many people as they could. He then touched on the all-important matter of taking advantage of the Lord's mercy when offered, lest He deprive them of another opportunity. He told them that they had all the more reason to fear this possibility because several villagers were showing a determined opposition to the mission, and he added that the Lord might even punish them by "sudden deaths." News of this threat spread rapidly through the village, but it produced no noticeable effect. Father Grignaschi's housekeeper kept saying: "He's a good preacher, but he hasn't seen the light yet."

A few more people came the following day, but, all told, there

[3] *See* Vol. IV, p. 69. [Editor]

were not more than a hundred and fifty. Unabashed, the missionaries calmly continued giving their four daily sermons. Don Bosco preached the first sermon early in the morning and the last one late in the evening.

On the third day of the mission, Don Bosco told the congregation to warn their fellow villagers that if they did not come to the sermons of their free will, God would make them come despite themselves. He then asked them to join him in reciting a *Pater* and *Ave* for the one in the village who would be the first to die. The word came like the threat of imminent punishment and spread like wildfire. One of the wealthier villagers had scheduled a dance for that very evening. Apparently he was not a bad fellow, but his ignorance, his ties to a sect whose evil doctrines he perhaps did not fully understand, his weak character, and his fear of what others might say conspired to push him to the fore in opposing the mission.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco received a visit on that same day from several leading "Grignaschini" who were anxious to size him up and see if he really intended to go on with the mission. While they were engaged in a long, heated conversation, several pranksters dropped in.

"There's someone to see you," they told Don Bosco.

"Let him in," Don Bosco said.

"But he's a very important personage."

"I'll receive him with all due respect."

"It's the Eternal Father himself."

"Indeed!"

"But don't let that worry you. You'll have nothing to fear."

"Fine!"

"Shall we bring him in now?"

"By all means!"

Along with the "Red Madonna," the "Eternal Father" enjoyed the veneration of these poor fools. The blasphemy of it all would have aroused horror and indignation were it not for the pity one felt for ignorant people who were so grossly taken in by an impostor. The "Eternal Father" dressed and spoke the part earnestly, determined to convince his followers that this was no masquerade.

He showed up shortly thereafter. He was a tall, vigorous old man, with a long black beard reaching to his chest. Wearing wooden

clogs and a hat two feet high, he carried a book under his arm and showed a surprising self-assurance and lordliness. It would certainly have been very unsettling to meet him suddenly at night. His manner of talking was also very peculiar, for he always spoke in rhymes. Introducing himself to Don Bosco he said:

"Behold, to you I came,
And no one prevented same."

"So, you are the Eternal Father?"

"Yes, I'm the Father Eternal
Who's not afraid of things infernal."

"And do you know who I am?"

"In our midst, of course, I know
Stands the famous Don Bosco."

It was indeed farcical!

"Show me your book," Don Bosco said. The man obliged. On every page there were illustrations of priests fighting devils, devils beating priests, devils sitting astride men, and vice versa. There were also devils dressed up as priests, bishops, and popes. Every picture had a caption. The man continued to turn the pages, but when Don Bosco had seen the first of these coarse pictures he said: "I've seen enough. Now let's talk about important matters. You look like an intelligent man, a thinker. If I should ask who created you, I'm sure you'd answer that God did."

"If who created me was God
To think of it is not my job."

"Let's drop this nonsense," Don Bosco interrupted. "Remember that time is passing and death is approaching. God's mercy has its limits if a sinner is obstinate."

But no matter what he said, the other fellow always had the last word, declaiming two lines of doggerel whether they made sense or not.

"You'd better give some thought to the fact that soon everything will be over for you," Don Bosco continued.

"Everything's finished and done
If with wounds it's overrun."

"Take care, this may be the last chance God gives you."

"Yes, sir, and I'm inviting you
To attend tonight a big to-do!"

"Well, that's enough! Good-bye until tomorrow, if the Lord will mercifully allow you that much."

"Tonight be at our house;
There'll be a big carouse."

With this parting shot, the old man turned stiffly on his heel as on a pivot, and he stalked out of the room with great dignity. Don Bosco could not tell whether the man was insane, bewitched, or possessed.

In the afternoon, several "Grignaschini" stood outside the church door telling the people laughingly: "Come to our party tonight! You'll hear some fine sermons there. We have the truth." Among them was the party's host. He kept repeating that the mission was just a waste of time. "Come," he bragged, "come and hear me. I can preach much better than these missionaries."

Evening came and the party soon got under way. The dinner and dancing were held in a house near the rectory. Shortly after midnight, after quiet had returned, there was an insistent knocking at the rectory door. The messenger asked the pastor to hurry to the house where the dance had been held because a man was dying. Fearing an ambush, Father Melino was hesitant, but the man insisted: "This man has had a heart attack. Hurry!" The pastor did, but it was too late. When the grim news spread throughout the village the next morning, everyone recalled Don Bosco's words and regarded this death as God's punishment. From then on, the entire village flocked to the sermons; even the neighboring villages were deeply impressed by the event. The unfortunate man who had boasted that he could preach better than the missionaries had indeed done so, but not in the way he had thought! The "Red Madonna," however, did not return to the church for several days. Speaking of Don Bosco, she would remark: "That priest is a devil." Nevertheless, the merciful Lord did not forget her.

The morning after this death Don Bosco made no reference to it in his sermon, but in the evening he dwelt on Christ's words: "Be

ready, because at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming." [Luke 12, 40] He emphasized that he who is not on guard is in danger of being lost forever because either the opportunity, the will, or God's grace will be wanting. He concluded by saying: "Let us say a *Pater, Ave* and *Requiem* for that poor neighbor of ours who died last night." Then slowly he recited the prayers.

Two nights later, the church was crowded. Don Bosco's topic was the remorse, horror, and anguish of an unrepentant sinner at death. He described a dying man's last harrowing hours, his final gasp, and the repulsive, motionless corpse on the bed. Then he suddenly dramatized the scene:

"Here comes the body of one who died in mortal sin! Enclosed in a coffin, this sinner is carried processionally to the church as the members of confraternities recite the *Miserere*. The coffin is now at the church door; the men are carrying it in. 'Yes, come forward, up to the front. Place it right here on this stand, right in front of me.' " The congregation was spellbound, staring at the spot as if the coffin were really there.

Don Bosco went on: "I've already said enough. Another should speak in my place. Who will it be? My fellow missionary? No, he will give his sermon later. Your pastor? No, it is not his turn. Whom shall I ask then to speak to you? The crucifix? This is not the time for mercy! The Most Blessed Sacrament? This is not the moment for Our Lord to show His love! Our Lady? No, no, dearest Mother, this is not Your time for intercession. To whom shall I turn?" He was silent a few moments, and then, in a tone vibrant with emotion, he said: "I call on you, corpse! Rise up and tell me: 'When did death strike you? What did you need to save your soul? Sermons? The sacraments? Advice? Grace?' " To each of the questions Don Bosco gave an answer in a pitiable tone, as though the dead man himself were speaking. His dialogue lasted for a considerable time. The congregation was in a state of shock. Twice the pastor sent him word to stop, for the entire church was tense with emotion. Finally, Don Bosco—still addressing the corpse—concluded: "What did you need then?" He paused again. Everyone was sobbing aloud. He resumed: "I hear his mournful voice replying: 'I didn't have the time. . . .' " Then addressing the congregation, he asked: "And

what do you need, my listeners? We shall speak about that tomorrow."

There were some other deaths in that village and the neighboring villages during the mission, and therefore it was necessary to recommend them to the prayers of the faithful. At every sermon Don Bosco had to announce: "Let us say a *Pater* and *Ave* for this person who is about to appear before God's tribunal. Let us say a *Pater,* an *Ave,* and a *Requiem* for this person who was called into eternity last night." People were so shaken by these sermons that they could not hold out any longer and rushed to confession. God's grace was so abundant that of the three thousand or so people in that village there was not an adult who did not go to the sacraments. God's mercy extended also to the "Red Madonna" and the "Eternal Father."

A warm feeling arose between the missionaries and the congregation and soon gave rise to an amusing incident. One day, in the course of his sermon, Don Bosco—without intending to allude to any particular person—was merely going over the various categories of people—children, adolescents, spinsters, mothers, and fathers—and putting his thoughts in the form of a question. And so, he happened to say: "Someone should ask that old white-haired man: 'When will you make up your mind to do your Easter duty and amend your life? Don't you see that you already have one foot in the grave?' "

At that, several whispers were heard: "There he is: that's the one he's talking about!"

Don Bosco was somewhat taken aback, for an old man was indeed standing before the pulpit and several people were pointing at him.

"All right, he means me," the old man said out loud. "I'll go to confession this evening, and that'll put an end to it all!" Don Bosco could not help laughing, and he said to the old man: "Good, I'll be waiting for you, as one waits for a friend." Then he went on with his sermon.

Meanwhile the "Grignaschini" were resigning their membership in the sect and recanting all their errors, thus proving that their conversion was really the work of God. On their part, the two

missionaries, though exhausted by the extraordinary demands on their ministry, found strength and abundant reward in seeing those good people set free from the evil spell of the sect, which now totally disintegrated. As the Psalmist said: "They went away weeping carrying the seed; they came back singing, carrying their sheaves." [Ps. 125, 6]

Father Michael Rua heard of this mission from the pastor himself, Father [John Baptist] Melino, and also from Mr. Beta and several others who had been bewitched by Grignaschi.

In its issue of Friday, February 1, 1856, *L'Armonia* concluded its brief account of this mission as follows:

> We might better gauge the importance of this event if the missionaries could say what their modesty and the seal of confession forbid them to say, or if we, at least, could feel free to tell what our prudence dictates should not be disclosed. Nevertheless, those who know of the enormous harm done to the villagers by Father Grignaschi and his followers, of the blindness of those poor people in being so easily duped by fake sanctity and mysticism, and of the several years of unsuccessful efforts to open their eyes will have good reason to bless God for this mercy.
>
> Let us hope that He who began this work will Himself perfect, strengthen, and bring it to completion. In any event, the faithful should help those people by praying for their perseverance in view of the fact that Father Grignaschi will soon be released from prison. Far from showing any sign of repentance, he seems more obstinate and fanatical than ever. Undoubtedly, as soon as he is released, he will run back to his old stumping ground to plant his evil seeds. May the prayers of the just assist the good folks of Viarigi to persevere along the path of virtue. This is all the more important to us because we know that if they went astray it was in good faith. The wolf gained access to the fold only through deceit by putting on lamb's clothing—nay more, by assuming the role of a good shepherd.

When Don Bosco returned to Turin, the boys gave him a triumphant welcome. To celebrate the event an excellent dinner was served to all.

We also find mention of this mission in a letter of Father Victor Alasonatti to Father Rosaz, a canon of the Susa cathedral, where Father [John] Borel was a guest at that time:

Turin, the night of January 19–20, 1856

Reverend and dear Canon:

I hope you have received the one hundred attendance records I sent you so that you may keep track of your boys at your Sunday instructions which are so beneficial to them.

In reply to your inquiry about the well-deserving St. Vincent de Paul Society, I can tell you that this society has several chapters here in Turin and is mainly responsible for the sound intellectual and religious education of the working class. This society takes a personal interest in the living and working conditions of its protégés, and it truly does an incredible amount of good.

Please tell Father Borel that his orders will be executed promptly. At least, that was what the boy to whom I gave written instructions promised me. Give my regards, as well as those of Don Bosco, to him and to Canons Marzolino and Gey. Don Bosco just returned from a village where his mission met with astounding success. Twice in the recent past, attempts had been made to start a mission, but in vain. This time the attendance was so heavy—even outside the church—that the preachers had to go over ditches to get to the church. This happened at Viarigi, the headquarters of the notorious Father Grignaschi.

May the Lord bless you and your zealous efforts. With the greatest esteem and respect I give you a brotherly embrace.

Your devoted servant,

Father Alasonatti
(For Don Bosco)

Don Bosco, however, would not be fully satisfied unless he succeeded in having Father Grignaschi sincerely repent, or at least rendered him harmless. Inspired by charity, he worked so hard that finally, when he visited Father Grignaschi in December 1856 or January 1857, he was able to persuade him to sign a recantation of his errors. This he immediately sent to the bishop of Novara, who in turn forwarded it to the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. The Holy Office, however, found it inadequate and drafted a more explicit one which Father Grignaschi accepted. Bishop [James] Gentile, delegate of the Holy See, came to the Castello of Ivrea[4] on April 2, 1857. Kneeling, Father Grignaschi read the formula of retraction. He acknowledged his serious errors, promised under oath

[4] *See* Vol. IV, p. 72. [Editor]

to reject his impious doctrines, fully assented to the authoritative teachings of the Church, and accepted all the penances which the Holy Office had already imposed or might impose upon him. The bishop then absolved him of the excommunication reserved to the Pope. The document was signed by Father Grignaschi, the bishop, and two witnesses, one of whom was Father Anthony Belasio, a missionary from whom we came to know of Don Bosco's efforts on behalf of that unfortunate priest.

In an attempt to effectively repair the harm done, Father Grignaschi then—in obedience to the Holy See—published his retraction in the July 3 [1857] issue of *L'Armonia.*

However, it may well be that Father Grignaschi's conversion was not sincere. After serving his sentence, he called on Don Bosco at the Oratory. He was dressed in civilian clothes, and he never again donned the cassock. Don Bosco embraced him warmly, as if he were a most dear friend, and seemed loath to break the embrace. Grignaschi accepted his admonitions with good grace and promised not to return to Viarigi, as was generally feared. Thanks to Don Bosco's exhortations, Grignaschi no longer sought to make converts, and he withdrew to a lonely farm in the province of Asti. He had found such great comfort in speaking with Don Bosco that he visited him several times. Some time later, he bought a little house at Villafranca on the Italian Riviera near Nice and was never heard from again.

Our archives contain a few letters of his to Don Bosco who never abandoned him. Don Bosco again tried to approach him and also to give him material assistance, besides sending to him their mutual friend, John Tamietti of Cambiano, to explore his intentions and to give him some good advice. Father Grignaschi often recalled the warm welcome that Don Bosco had given him, exclaiming sincerely: "What charity, what charity that man has!" The Jesuit, Father Protasi, a schoolmate of his, had also done his best to aid in Father Grignaschi's conversion. During the last few years of his life, Grignaschi often claimed to be a good Catholic, but in his heart he always remained the same. What bitter fruit results from the blindness brought on by bad habits and diabolical connections! He died in 1883 without receiving the Last Sacraments.

CHAPTER 35

Contacts with Government Officials

EACH year an ever increasing number of poor boys were recommended to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales by relatives or pastors; others were so obviously destitute that they required no further recommendation. Nearly every Sunday Don Bosco would notice among the festive oratory boys—old-timers or newcomers—some who were so indigent that they would undoubtedly turn to evil pursuits if someone did not care for them. The same thing was true of many other boys who frequented the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel festive oratories at Porta Nuova and Borgo Vanchiglia respectively. Every now and then their directors would send Don Bosco some boys who truly deserved the greatest compassion. In addition, other boys were often recommended by municipal authorities and cabinet ministers, particularly by the Minister of the Interior. As long as there was some nook or cranny in which to squeeze a bed, Don Bosco never said no; for example, in the summer of 1855 he set up a bed even in the belltower.

We still have several such recommendations from civil authorities, dated 1856.[1] These letters also show Don Bosco's prudence in accepting such boys. Many parents—not only in Turin but elsewhere in Piedmont—in order to have their sons more readily received into the Oratory would appeal to the civil authorities, and these, in turn, would recommend them to Don Bosco. In such cases he replied immediately and courteously. If he had room and considered it advisable to accept the boy, he would tell the authorities that he was always happy to accommodate them and that he considered it a privilege to be of service to them. However, he would also ask them to inform the boy's parents or guardians that they

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

must first report in person to the Oratory to discuss the boy's admission. He would then receive them graciously and state his conditions; these generally included the financial cooperation of the boy's relatives, friends, and benefactors.

Don Bosco followed this policy because most people who came to the Oratory brandishing a recommendation from the civil authorities acted as if they were automatically entitled to favorable consideration without any corresponding obligation. By obliging them to deal with him personally, Don Bosco made them realize that he alone had the right to accept or refuse their boy. On hearing this, they naturally abandoned their haughty pretensions and began to plead. According to the circumstances, Don Bosco would either postpone his decision or suggest a modest annual fee. Sometimes he limited himself to the request that the boy at least bring along some clothes with him; more often than not, he accepted boys entirely gratis, but he wanted people to realize to whom they were indebted. He recommended this same policy to his co-workers, stressing to them that this was a sound course of action for anyone who wished to remain the master of his own house.

In some cases Don Bosco even wisely prompted recommendations from civil authorities in order to win subsequent benefits for the Oratory. For example, when parents, acting on their own, brought their sons to him, pleading their inability to keep or educate them, Don Bosco would ask about their social and economic conditions and then would advise them to approach an official—a cabinet minister, their senator or representative, the prefect of their province, or their mayor—for a recommendation to have their son accepted into an educational institution, preferably Don Bosco's Oratory. On receiving such petitions accompanied by the required certificates, the officials would forward them to the Oratory with a letter of recommendation. This gave Don Bosco an opening to come into contact with them, thus starting a far-reaching chain of correspondence: letters originating from a municipal office or other agencies would pass through various departments and offices, before ultimately reaching the prefect of the province or the Minister of the Interior. Thus, prudently and artfully, Don Bosco made the existence and importance of his institute better known in official circles. An official recommendation for a boy unavoidably—if in-

directly—gave praise and recognition to the Oratory and constituted approval of what Don Bosco was doing. Besides, on finding Don Bosco willing to honor their recommendations, the authorities were naturally disposed to reciprocate. Finally, by accepting a boy through such a recommendation, Don Bosco in a certain sense made the authorities guarantors of the conditions governing the boy's admittance. At the right time he knew how to seek their help —private or official—in order to obtain subsidies or the cessation of anticlerical harassment.

Of course, accepting more boys required the expansion of facilities. To meet this need, at the beginning of 1856 Don Bosco sought a government loan in order to add a wing that would complete the building erected in 1853.[2] Such a request was unheard of in those days, and Don Bosco was actually blazing a new trail by showing to the civil authorities an easy way to meet urgent public needs. In fact, twenty years later, without impairing the financial stability of government, low-interest government loans to communes for school construction or to private citizens who had been victims of earthquakes were established by law on condition that a modest amount be paid yearly for the amortization of the debt. Wisely, Don Bosco requested a large sum so that he would be sure of receiving a little. The reply to his request was as follows:

Ministry of the Interior
Department 3, No. 283

Turin, January 14, 1856

The proposal of the Reverend Don Bosco, as outlined in the memorandum attached to his letter of January 8, is most praiseworthy. Enlarging the existing hospice to offer a greater number of destitute boys the shelter that so humanely has been provided in the Valdocco district of this capital is a most laudable endeavor, and it is to be wished that his hopes may be realized in view of the great benefits that their fulfillment would afford to this category of boys.

Although favorably disposed toward this project, the undersigned regrets his inability to grant a loan, owing to the present state of the treasury. Nevertheless, he hopes and feels confident that the Reverend John Bosco will gradually be able to accumulate the necessary funds

[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 328f. [Editor]

from private sources. Meanwhile, the undersigned, in order to contribute to the ordinary needs of this institution, has authorized a subsidy of three hundred lire to be drawn from the funds of this ministry, regretting that present conditions do not permit greater generosity.

An order for payment has been issued to the treasurer of the Ministry of the Interior.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

As this letter shows, Rattazzi continued to take a keen interest in Don Bosco and his work. He used to say that the government had an obligation to protect the Oratory because the latter effectively cut down juvenile delinquency by forming good citizens. Regardless of the type of business, all of Rattazzi's letters or recommendations to Don Bosco were signed by him personally. He also personally answered all of Don Bosco's requests for help rather than through his secretary.

Rattazzi always encouraged Don Bosco to continue his noble work, and whenever he returned to the cabinet he graciously let Don Bosco know that he could count on his support. Moreover, he kept his word. Genuinely fond of Don Bosco, he constantly used his influence in high government circles on Don Bosco's behalf. He had such a high opinion of him that he customarily referred to Don Bosco as "a great man." He often called on him at the Oratory, and occasionally he summoned him to the ministry to recommend some abandoned boy to him in person, or to advise him on some harassment or other business.

But while Don Bosco was genuinely grateful to the minister, he was careful not to lose his independence by becoming obligated to him. In fact, when Rattazzi offered him a large sum of money on condition that he have the Oratory officially recognized by the government as a charitable institution, Don Bosco declined, giving his reasons for doing so, and the minister did not insist.

Rattazzi was also extremely courteous toward Don Bosco whenever the latter came for an audience and found the waiting room crowded with noblemen, ministerial secretaries, department heads, and other high officials. Normally, Don Bosco would have been ushered in last, but when Rattazzi would scan the list and spot his name, he would summon him first. To the surprise of all, the re-

ceptionist would call out loudly: "Don Bosco!" As Don Bosco went in, Rattazzi would tell him: "You have no time to waste!"

There were some who criticized Don Bosco for seeing too much of Rattazzi and other people who were hostile to the Church and for being on friendlier terms with them than was strictly necessary. Don Bosco was not so naive that he did not foresee such gossip, but since his intent was to advance God's cause, to do good, and to prevent evil, he was not disturbed in the least. His conduct showed the uprightness of his principles and intentions. He was absolutely frank in stating the truth. Unreservedly loyal to the Church, his Faith was the Faith of Peter; never did he hide his firm and unshakable beliefs. He was never afraid of what others might say about him, and while he was always mild-mannered and indulgent with people, he was adamant when it came to principles and doctrine. He never sided with—or feigned to side with—God's enemies for some vile pretext and it was because of this that even the worst enemies of the Church treated him with respect.

Bishop Cagliero told us that on one occasion, after granting an audience to Don Bosco at the ministry, Rattazzi took advantage of their intimate friendship to ask him if he had really incurred excommunication because of his steps against the Church as a cabinet minister. Don Bosco deemed it wiser not to reply at once to this unexpected question, and he asked for three days to study the matter. "On serious questions like this," he remarked, "I like to think things over." Three days later he returned to the minister hoping that Rattazzi had forgotten the matter. However, no sooner had he entered than Rattazzi blurted out: "Well, am I excommunicated?" Don Bosco promptly replied: "Your Excellency, I have considered the matter and done my best to discover some reason that would justify my telling you that you have not incurred excommunication, but regretfully I was not successful. I could find no sound theological reason to excuse you." Rattazzi appreciated Don Bosco's frank manner of speaking, and he remarked: "Thank you, Don Bosco! I knew that you wouldn't deceive me, and that is why I asked you. Up to now no one has been honest enough to tell me this. I'm glad that you were so frank, and I repeat what I have already told you: come to me any time that you need anything for your boys."

Sometimes he would jokingly say to Don Bosco: "Pray for me so that I won't end up too deep down in hell." Obviously, Don Bosco had found some occasion to speak of eternal life, a subject that he was in the habit of bringing up directly or indirectly in all his conversations.

One day as he entered Rattazzi's office, Don Bosco remarked: "Your Excellency, there is such a crowd in the waiting room that your office looks like a confessional at Easter time."

Rattazzi smiled and said: "With just this difference, my dear Father: those who leave the confessional go with their hearts at peace, blessing their spiritual father, whereas those who leave this office without getting what they wanted go away with ill will in their hearts and a curse on their lips for the minister who could not please them."

Rattazzi still had some shreds of the Faith in his heart, but unfortunately he tried to still its voice. On one occasion, Father Francis Cerruti, in speaking with Don Bosco about Rattazzi, asked him: "Was Rattazzi a hypocrite in his conversations with you?"

"No," replied Don Bosco. "He was a hypocrite when he spoke in the Chamber of Deputies in accordance with his party line. He had his share of noble and ignoble qualities. Had he lived at another time and without the ties which fettered him, he would have been a great man instead of a pernicious one."

The same thing was true of other members of his party who always connived to further curtail the influence of the Church in the schools. One such case occurred at the beginning of 1856 when Giovanni Lanza, the Minister of Education, submitted a bill to the Senate to place all seminaries and diocesan schools under government jurisdiction. The bill was passed over the bishops' protests. Although this law—and others either already in force or about to be enacted—were causing great anxiety to ecclesiastical institutions, Don Bosco went ahead with a resident academic school at the Oratory. Mulling over his vast plans for the education of youth, he foresaw many obstacles, but he forged ahead anyway, telling his co-workers: "Don't be afraid! The storm will pass, and peace and calm will return. Time will prove right those who will not misjudge me. I have the promise of One who cannot be deceived. The

Oratory is not my own doing; if it were, I would ask the Lord to undo it at once."

This is why Don Bosco entrusted his first regular Latin teacher to the special protection of Mary. In 1856, the cleric John Francesia, following the example of [Michael] Rua the year before, took his vows for one year without any external solemnity and placed himself at Don Bosco's service. He then recorded in Latin his thoughts on this, his first consecration to God and the date that was so important to him. One day Don Bosco chanced upon him as Francesia was reading this personal record. "Good!" he remarked to him. "I'm glad that you remember that day." But when he noticed the date, also in Latin, he added: "The date is wrong! That day was sacred to Our Lady and your date doesn't tally." In rechecking, Francesia found that instead of the fifth day before the calends it should have been the fourth, which coincided with a feast of the Blessed Virgin. Don Bosco's parting words were: "Remember: nothing, absolutely nothing, must ever be done at the Oratory except in the holy name of Mary!"

CHAPTER 36

Letture Cattoliche

MEANWHILE, Don Bosco continued to publish his popular *Letture Cattoliche*. The issue for the latter half of January was announced by *L'Armonia* on February 4, 1856: "The Paravia Press has just printed another issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *An Easy Way To Learn Bible History* by Father John Bosco. The author is well known not only for his indefatigable zeal but also for his practical, intelligent approach to popular instruction, and his name is sufficient guarantee that the book is what it purports to be."

The February issues—also printed by the Paravia Press—formed one booklet entitled *A Commentary on the Lord's Prayer* by St. Cyprian (c. 252 A.D.); it was edited by Count Coriolano Malingri of Bagnolo. The Introduction contained a biographical sketch of the saint. This booklet, authored by an early Father of the Latin Church who was martyred, testified to the Faith of the Christians of that time when, as even the Protestants admit, the teachings of the Catholic Church were uncorrupt. Here one can see clearly that the early Christians believed in the Sacrifice of the Mass, in the real presence of Our Lord in the Eucharist, and in the necessity and value of good works and prayer.

Folded into the booklet was this circular written by Don Bosco:

To Our Subscribers and Distributors:

As we close the third year of *Letture Cattoliche,* we feel that we must address a few words to our subscribers and distributors.

First, we wish to extend our sincere and grateful thanks for your support which has strengthened us in our difficulties and enabled us to continue making sacrifices so that God's people would not be deprived

of the instruction and comfort which it was our intention to provide.

We fully realize that our efforts do not always satisfy the needs of working people who are so very dear to us. Nevertheless, confident of the loyalty of our subscribers and distributors, as well as of God's help, we now bravely start our fourth year of publication with plans for improvements in contents, publication schedules and delivery.

Anonymous individuals—who for the sake of money are not above inciting passions, corrupting faith and morals, and causing great harm to families and society—are cunningly spreading everywhere with impunity, books and periodicals that are expressly intended to corrupt the minds and hearts of uneducated people. It is therefore most necessary —indeed it is our vital duty—to counteract such evil effects to the greatest possible extent with books that will instill sound moral principles —books short enough not to be tedious and inexpensive enough to be within reach of all.

This has always been the aim of *Letture Cattoliche.* Sponsoring it will be a truly Catholic, civic-minded, and meritorious endeavor. The father of every family should contribute to the civil and religious foundations of society by subscribing to this publication; pastors should endorse and promote it in their parishes; the wealthy could make no wiser investment than to offer free subscriptions to all who cannot afford the price. We feel that we have done our share: at considerable sacrifice, in only three years we have distributed six hundred thousand copies of *Letture Cattoliche.* We would have done more if we had had some help in spreading it through villages and towns where, unfortunately, it is still practically unknown. We therefore warmly exhort and beg our worthy distributors to do their utmost to increase our subscriptions. Their efforts will render an inestimable service to the Church and to society.

We are confident that our appeal will not fall on deaf ears, for we well know the goodness of our people, the zeal of our clergy, and the generosity of the wealthy; in all of them, after God, we put our trust. The headquarters of *Letture Cattoliche* are located in Turin, Via San Domenico, 11. The issues for the past three years are available at the same address.[1]

The Editor

The time Don Bosco spent on *Letture Cattoliche* did not affect in the least the many hours he devoted to catechism classes and to confession, especially now that Lent had started and would last

[1] A footnote quoting a short news release by *L'Armonia* has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

until March 23. Don Bosco paid not the slightest heed to personal inconvenience, to the large number of penitents, to the bitter cold or sultry heat, or to the fleas that seem to abound whenever crowds gather. He took everything in stride, and instead of complaining he would laugh at the situation. Afterward, in his room he would wash up and ready himself for another slow and long martyrdom the next day. Then from the confessional he would shuttle back to his desk to correct galley proofs.

This year he reduced the number of issues of *Letture Cattoliche* to twelve, without however cutting down on the total number of pages promised. The March issue, entitled *The Lord's Day* and printed by the Ribotta Press, dealt with these topics: 1. The sinfulness of not keeping the Lord's Day. 2. Recreation and family life on Sundays and holy days. 3. Excessive drinking and other afflictions. The March 28 issue of *L'Armonia* carried this release:

In past issues we have recommended *Letture Cattoliche,* and now we find it advisable to do so again as it enters its fourth year of publication. We can think of no better way to promote it than to quote from the Lenten pastoral letter of the Most Reverend Bishop of Biella:

"One of the most praiseworthy works of charity today, when the Church's enemies are striving so boldly and with such determination to undermine her, is to enlighten the mind of the faithful. Hence, we cannot urge too strongly that the clergy and the laity who really care for God's honor, public morals, and the triumph of the Church do their utmost to spread *Letture Cattoliche* as an effective antidote to the poison which the press dispenses daily to deceive people and pervert the faithful. All must spare no pains—in a true spirit of Christian charity—to have *Letture Cattoliche* circulate from person to person and from family to family. This is a most timely and spiritually fruitful work of charity."

Meanwhile, to Don Bosco's great delight, the Holy See granted him a triennium faculty to bless crucifixes and medals with attached plenary indulgences at the point of death, and to bless rosaries with the indulgences known as St. Bridget's.[2]

The April issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* printed by the Paravia Press, was an anonymous booklet entitled *A Warning about Blas-*

[2] The Latin rescript granting these faculties has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

pheming. Don Bosco interspersed a few edifying stories, as well as the Regulations of the Pious Archconfraternity of the Atonement for Blasphemies and Profanation of the Sabbath. Founded in France in 1847 by Father Peter Marche, the association had spread very rapidly, and this year [1856], with a membership running into several thousands, chapters had been established at the Church of Orphan Girls in Turin, at the Shrine of Our Lady of Oropa near Biella, and in many parishes throughout both dioceses with the approval of their respective bishops. The staff of *Letture Cattoliche* offered to secure membership in the archconfraternity for those who were unable to write directly to the headquarters at Saint-Dizier, thus extending to its readers the opportunity to enjoy the benefits and privileges granted by the Holy See. To promote this praiseworthy association as much as possible, the management of *Letture Cattoliche* also offered copies of the regulations at thirty centesimi a dozen.

As the April issue was going to press, Don Bosco was preparing one for May, entitled *St. Pancratius, Martyr,* with an Appendix on the shrine dedicated to the saint near Pianezza which Don Bosco occasionally visited either alone or accompanied by his boys. The glorious episodes of the saint's life which he narrated aimed at refuting Waldensian errors. As in all his writings, Don Bosco took advantage of the encounter between St. Pancratius and Pope St. Caius to highlight papal supremacy over the whole Church; then, through the astounding miracles of the saint throughout the centuries, he confirmed the dogma of the veneration of relics and the intercessory power of the saints. The booklet had this Introduction:

Important Notice

As you prepare to read the biography of St. Pancratius, martyr, you may possibly be somewhat curious about our sources before you decide how much credence you should give to those who gathered and preserved these facts for posterity. Therefore, we shall most willingly satisfy this legitimate curiosity.

Before compiling this booklet, we read and carefully pondered a great deal of pertinent material in the most reliable collections of legends of the saints. We also read the works of Surius[3] and of the Bollandists

[3] Laurentius Surius (1522–1578). His most important work was his collection of the lives of the saints. [Editor]

(May 12 and Appendix, p. 650), Volume V of Tillemont's church history,[4] and the three-volume work *Miracles of St. Pancratius* by Father Juvenal, a Discalced Augustinian, published in 1655.

We also drew information from the homilies of St. Gregory the Great and St. Gregory, bishop of Tours, from the book *The Glory of the Martyrs,* and from several authentic manuscripts. The above authors gathered from ancient sources whatever was reliable about the life, martyrdom, and veneration of St. Pancratius, martyr, and from them we have compiled this short biography, limiting ourselves mainly to translating or simplifying concepts that might be too difficult for those with a limited education. I must remark that the marvels performed by this Christian hero are so numerous and so stupendous that I had to restrict myself to a few to keep the book small. From these few I finally selected only the most plausible, omitting details that might be open to question or ridicule.

In this booklet you will read about a youth who was wondrously led to the Faith of Christ and who shortly thereafter sealed it with his blood. This is a further proof of the divine origin and holiness of our Faith, for God alone can breathe such courage and fortitude into a noble youth. Young though he was, he spurned a promising future, honors, pleasure, and all the world can offer, braved the ire of a tyrant and his cruelest tortures, and fearlessly went to his death, true to his Faith, in the sole hope of an eternal reward.

Our readers should bear in mind that only our Church can produce such genuine martyrs. The countless numbers who are her glory and whom she proposes to the veneration of the faithful stand forth as witnesses to the truthfulness of this same Church. At all times and in all places they recognized her as holy and Divine, and they proclaimed and confirmed this with the sacrifice of their lives.

Other bodies who claim to be Christian cannot produce a single genuine martyr in support of their creed, nor a saint who worked any miracle, nor a shrine that perpetuates the memory of any of their members. It is no wonder, therefore, that these Christian bodies feel such an aversion to God's heroes, to their relics, and to the shrines where they are venerated and where God generously grants His blessings at their intercession. May God, who is infinitely good and unfathomable in His saints, inspire us all to bravely follow the path trodden by millions of martyrs, saints, confessors, virgins, and penitents who have gone before us. Finally, may He grant to all those outside the true Church

[4] *Mémoires pour Servir à l'Histoire Ecclésiastique des Six Premiers Siècles* by Sébastien Le Nain de Tillemont (1637–1698). [Editor]

the light to see the truth, the strength to recognize error, and the courage to reject it in order to belong to the fold of Jesus Christ, to be with Him, and to praise Him for His mercy one day in heaven.

Thus Don Bosco continued to combat Waldensian errors. This booklet enjoyed similar success to all his other works which went through as many as eight or ten reprints. The Waldensians, by now quite bold, enjoyed absolute freedom in running their own schools. If any State official would have dared to inspect their boarding school at Pinerolo or asked to see the teaching certificates of any member of the faculty, he would have lost his job immediately. Besides, they enjoyed the support of the anticlerical press, particularly *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* which used to refer to Don Bosco as "Don Bosio" in order to be able to smear him with impunity.

On the other hand, the Waldensians strove to rebut and silence Don Bosco through the press, through debates, and through correspondence that they themselves initiated between apostates and Don Bosco. We have saved many such letters as documents of ignorance, bad grammar, and conceit. The Waldensians' efforts, however, were totally unsuccessful because Don Bosco remained undaunted. Armed with the charity of Christ and the gentleness of St. Francis de Sales, he faced all their charges without acrimony, pretending not to notice their insults and showing regard for them as persons. He even asked friends to approach some fallen-away Catholics and get them to visit him. He was truly engaged in spiritual combat with a whole army of apostates, while skirmishing individually with many of them, as shown in the following letter:

Turin, April 18, 1856

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

The one who has the honor of addressing you is John Prina-Carpani, an evangelist employed in the record office. My colleague, Mr. Pina, has spoken to you about me. I have already called on you twice with the aforesaid Mr. Pina, and yesterday evening I came alone, but unfortunately you were out on those occasions. I have therefore decided to write you and tell you what I have in mind.

Let me first say that I consider Mr. Pina to be an exceptionally good young man and a devout Christian, considering the times we live in. Regretfully, through ignorance and prejudice instilled into him by an

insidious education, he is utterly unable to discuss religion intelligently or even to understand a reasoned presentation of it. In view of your excellent reputation for fairness, I have therefore thought it best to ask Your Reverence to be his adviser and to allow me—in your presence—to explain to Mr. Pina my faith and my expectations and the foundations on which these are based. My purpose in so doing is to teach the aforesaid Mr. Pina in a Christian way not to think or judge with somebody else's head, but rather to increase his knowledge lest he look like a presumptuous medieval fanatic. Since Your Reverence will be Mr. Pina's adviser, I would like to be assisted by my brother in Jesus Christ, Charles Davite, whom you know. Finally, in order that our discussion may be fruitful, if it is agreeable to you, I would like to invite two colleagues of mine to join us, but only as observers. They are very discreet, well-educated, and upright. The cogency of our respective positions might lead them to give glory to God by acknowledging that Holy Scripture is truth and everything else is error.

In the hope of a favorable reply I thank you in advance.

Your most devoted servant,

John Prina-Carpani

Don Bosco's reply shows us how he dealt with those who had swerved from the truth:

Turin, April 19, 1856

Dear Sir:

I am sorry not to have been at home when you so kindly called on me; my many tasks frequently require me to be out unless I know in advance that someone will call.

Ever ready to help my neighbor, I am quite willing to welcome you and your friends. But first you must be so good as to clarify a few points that I consider indispensable when two Christians meet to discuss religious matters:

1. Is your purpose to debate or to seek the truth and follow it despite any obstacle? A debate is spiritually fruitless if it is not accompanied by a desire to know and follow the truth. Therefore, it is necessary for us to humbly pray that God will enlighten us and make us see things as we shall see them one day when we stand before the judgment seat of Jesus Christ.

2. Is the Bible the only authority you recognize, or will you accept

arguments from Tradition as well? In the former case, what Bible will you use: Greek, Hebrew, Latin, Italian, or French?

3. If in the course of our discussion there should be some point on which we cannot reach agreement, to whom shall we appeal to settle the matter?

After your kind reply to the above points, I shall set a time at our mutual convenience for an open discussion with you and any friends you may care to bring along.

Meanwhile, I hope you will accept my friendship. I assure you that I love you in Christ with all my heart and that I beg Him for light that all may see the truth and have the courage and grace to follow it, so that we may all form one fold here on earth and together enjoy Him eternally in heaven.

In great esteem believe me to be,

Your devoted servant in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's letter was promptly acknowledged:

Turin, April 24, 1856

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

Your letter of the 19th did not reach me at my office until the morning of the 21st. I am most grateful for your cordial Christian reply. Perhaps this letter will not reach you immediately because nearly all my time too is taken up with my job, my family, and the temporal needs of the Evangelical Society I belong to, and above all with my own unending spiritual needs since, by the grace of God, I am a recent convert. Let this also explain why our meeting may be somewhat delayed.

Answering your questions one by one, I would like to point out that I have already manifested my purpose in my previous letter. I intend to explain my faith and my expectations and the foundations on which they are based.

Please God, the aftereffects of my exposition will concern the others rather than myself, for they are the ones who will have to make a decision. I know in whom I trust. May the Holy Spirit be in our midst and speak to the hearts of those who think they are doing His will, whereas in reality they are being taken in by the deceits of men. This notwithstanding, I declare that I have an open mind, and should I

be bested in argument, I shall frankly admit it. As for adopting the views of the victor in this kind of argument, I must point out that this is a matter to be left to the discretion of the defeated; forceful arguments on the one hand, and ignorance or lack of skill in using them on the other, may well win a verbal battle without, however, satisfying the mind and still less the heart, which cannot declare itself sincerely convinced unless it feels the influence of the Holy Spirit. I say this because I shall always consider as faithless to himself and to others, and indeed as a hypocrite, anyone who—to please others—claims to follow a religion without being convinced of its truthfulness. This will also show you that, even after our discussions, I shall continue to respect my opponents.

With regard to expressing our own opinions sincerely, as though in the presence of Him who cannot be deceived, I have no doubts at all about you, because if I did have any, I would not have chosen you; as for myself and my brother in the faith, we shall rely exclusively on the Bible and the explanations contained therein. This brings me to your second question, regarding which I must say that I cannot accept Tradition in anything relating to the Bible. As the need will arise, I shall prove my point from the Bible and from history. As regards versions, it is immaterial to me whether we use the Vulgate (without the books added to it by the Council of Trent), or Diodati's, or Martin's. We could use the Greek text of the New Testament for those passages on which translators notably differ. Should anything come up in our discussion upon which we cannot agree: if the matter is philological, let dictionaries and language experts decide; if it is dogmatic, let the Bible alone be the authority.

In closing, I wish to inform you that Mr. Pina too will not be able to meet with us immediately as he is now out of town on office business. This does not mean, however, that we have lost our desire for a meeting, but only that we will have to postpone it. God willing, I look forward to making your personal acquaintance during this coming week. If it is agreeable to you, we shall talk about the kingdom of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall soon come to console His Church and win the final victory over Satan who day and night accuses us before God. (Cf. Apoc. 12, 10)

In deepest esteem and love for you in Our Divine Savior and King Jesus Christ, I am honored to remain,

Your devoted servant,

John Prina-Carpani

How many absurdities, inconsistencies, and examples of blind obstinacy are evident in just this one letter! This alone should suffice to show how irrational Protestantism is. Anyone embracing it must be either insane or corrupt, or else unbelievably swayed by pride against Jesus the Lawgiver. This explains why heretics are so obstinate. Debates will seldom lead to their conversion, although their errors are obvious to a sound mind. The March 1838 issue of the *Annals of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith,* No. 52, has an account on page 281 of a public debate between Bishop [John Baptist] Purcell of Cincinnati and a Protestant minister. The bishop concluded as follows: "I can think of no better way to close this debate than to cite an incident which in my opinion effectively disposes of many doubts and charges. A Catholic priest and a Protestant minister were walking together when they happened to meet a Jewish rabbi. 'Here are three of us, all belonging to different faiths,' the Protestant said. 'Who is right?' 'I can tell you at once,' the rabbi answered. 'If the Messiah has not yet come, I am right; if He has already come, the Catholic is right. As for you, whether He has already come or not, you're still wrong.' "

The meeting between Don Bosco and the evangelical Protestant eventually did take place, but we do not know the outcome.

Don Bosco's way of debating was similar to that used in all the issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* particularly in these three: *Louis, or a Debate between a Lawyer and a Waldensian Minister; Maximinus, or the Encounter of a Boy with a Protestant Minister; Severinus, or the Adventures of a Young Mountaineer.*

CHAPTER 37

A New Wing at the Oratory

IN view of the ever increasing need to shelter destitute boys, Don Bosco had decided—as we have already stated [1]—to start construction on the wing that presently [1905] extends from the carriage way [giving access to the strip of land behind the house] to the [side] entrance of St. Francis de Sales Church.[2] He therefore sent for a man named Juvenal Delponte, who was an architect and contractor of sorts, and asked him whether he had enough funds to meet initial expenses.

"No," the contractor replied, "I don't."

"Neither do I," Don Bosco said.

"Then what are we going to do?"

"Let's begin all the same," Don Bosco said decisively. "By the time we have to pay the men, the Lord will send us something."

This phrase became routine with Don Bosco whenever he started new construction. He would tell the contractors: "I need this new building. I have no money, but let's start anyway, and quickly!"

The estimate for the wing ran to forty thousand lire. Several times John Villa heard Don Bosco say: "Don Bosco is poor, but with God's help we can do anything. Providence will take care of everything. Let us avoid sin. If God looks after the birds of the air, He will provide for us." He also used to remark: "How consoling is the Our Father we recite every morning and evening! How reassuring to think that we have a Father in heaven who cares for us!"

Nor did Don Bosco's hopes vanish or diminish when money for his undertakings was lacking or when difficulties and opposition arose even from well-intentioned people. He always hoped against

[1] *See* p. 281. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 327f. [Editor]

all hope, so sure was he of his Divine mission. Even in the midst of misfortune he stood unshaken because he had faith in the promise of the Blessed Virgin. Father Rua left us this written statement:

Don Bosco had the gift of prophecy to a remarkable degree. His predictions—fully realized—were so varied and numerous as to lead us to believe that this charism was habitual in him. He often told us of his dreams concerning the Oratory and the Salesian Society. Among others, I recall this in particular, around the year 1856. Don Bosco said: "I dreamed that I was in a square where I saw a fortune wheel of some kind symbolizing the Oratory. A man was holding its handle. He called me over and said: 'Watch!' He then gave the wheel a turn and I heard a slight click, hardly audible beyond where I stood. The man asked me: 'Did you see what I did? Did you hear anything?'

'Yes, I saw you spin the wheel and I heard a click.'

'Do you know what a turn of the wheel means?'

'No.

'It means a decade of your Oratory.'

"Four more times he spinned the wheel and asked the same questions, but every time the click was louder. I thought that at the second spinning it could be heard all over Piedmont; at the third, all over Italy; at the fourth, all over Europe; at the fifth, all over the world. The man then said: 'You have seen the future of your Oratory.'" Now, as I consider the growth of Don Bosco's work—Father Rua continued—I see it limited in the first decade to the city of Turin; in the second, it spreads throughout Piedmont; in the third, its fame and influence grow throughout Italy; in the fourth, throughout Europe; in the fifth, finally, Don Bosco's work is known and sought in all parts of the world.

Sure of his course, Don Bosco began to solicit help from his benefactors. This letter to Count Pio Galleano Agliano will suffice as a sample:

[No Date]

My dearly beloved Count:

I have many projects afoot that I belive necessary for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, but I have no means to realize them. If you can possibly come to my assistance "with mortar and bricks," I assure you that you would be literally building a shelter for God's

homeless; the wing now under construction will be a dormitory for the poorest and most destitue boys.

Most thankfully, I pray that heaven will bestow countless blessings upon you and your family

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also wrote to the Society of St. Paul and received the following reply:

Turin, March 19, 1856

Dear Reverend Father:

This board has assigned the sum of 150 lire from our funds to the institute for poor boys which you so worthily direct.

The undersigned regrets that available funds do not permit a larger donation. The order for payment has already been issued and you may collect said amount at the treasurer's office.

With the greatest esteem, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

[Louis] Capello of San Franco
On Behalf of the Board Chairman

Work began in March 1856. The humble old Pinardi house, still standing as a relic of the pioneer days,[3] was now demolished to make room for a wing, completing the plans drawn up in 1852.[4] To save time and money, the boys lent a hand taking down walls and carrying bricks during their recreation period. Among the bricklayers there were also the two Buzzetti brothers—Charles and Joshua. As boys they had been among the first to attend the Valdocco festive oratory; from now on we shall see them doing construction work for Don Bosco. Their uprightness and skill soon earned them an excellent reputation, and in a short time their work was considererd the equal of that of the leading construction firms in Turin. Since the new wing was needed by the fall, work was so

[3] *See* Vol. II, pp. 331f. *See also* Vol. IV, p. 328. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 327f. [Editor]

rushed that by the end of July the four-story building was roofed and it seemed reasonable to assume that it would be ready for occupancy as scheduled.

During the construction, one day Don Bosco chanced on a train of mules standing on a narrow, nearby dirt road. He drew near and stopped. "Don't be afraid!" the mule drivers reassured him. "They won't kick!"

"I believe you," Don Bosco replied with a smile, "but my mother used to tell me: 'Johnny, never trust anyone who doesn't go to confession.' " The mule drivers took the hint and smiled in return.

Another time, as he was walking along the road now known as Corso Regina Margherita, he passed too close to a large horse hitched to a wagon. The driver warned him that the animal might kick. "I've always known that I must be wary of those who don't make their Easter duty," Don Bosco remarked. One might say that he never missed a chance to recommend confession.

As soon as work started, Minister Urbano Rattazzi promptly responded to Don Bosco's appeal by contributing one thousand lire toward the initial expenses, as shown in the following letter:

May 9, 1856

The undersigned heartily approves of the plans of the Rev. Don Bosco, director of the boys' Oratory at Valdocco, for enlarging the existing premises in order to accommodate a greater number of destitute boys.

The undersigned informs him that, to help him meet initial expenses, he has thought fit to assign him one thousand lire from the funds provided in the budget of this ministry, regretting that the present state of the treasury does not permit a more generous donation. He is pleased to inform the Rev. Don Bosco that half of that sum may be collected at the cashier's office at this ministry, while the other half will be paid by the provincial treasurer of this capital.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

Despite these various contributions, Don Bosco was still facing great financial difficulties. Weekly wages and routine Oratory expenses had caused his debts to soar. From some letters to benefactors in Turin, we gather that food bills went unpaid for months:

Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, May 7, 1856

Dear Sir:

Your benevolent interest in the work being done at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales encourages me to appeal to you in a regard to a particular need of mine.

The baker's bill for March is overdue and I do not know where to turn for money. If you could help me, you would be truly "feeding the hungry."

The bill comes to nine hundred lire, but whatever you can give—no matter how little—will be gratefully received.

I trust that you will forgive me for taking this liberty. Unable to express my gratitude in any other way, I pray that God will grant you His blessings. With the greatest esteem, I am

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

To add to his financial difficulties, Don Bosco had to pay an annual rate of 4% interest on twenty thousand lire that had been loaned to him by Father Rosmini toward the purchase of the Pinardi house, besides meeting other obligations, some of which concerned the land he had purchased for the planned printshop.[5] Don Bosco enclosed a memorandum on this point in a letter to Father Charles Gilardi at Stresa:

Turin, May 9, 1856

Dear Father Charles:

Sweeping problems under the rug does not solve them. Eastertide is almost over and I must settle my accounts. Last year you looked over my report and found credits in my favor which I didn't know about. Who knows? Perhaps the same thing may happen again this year.

There have already been several inquiries about that piece of land,[6] but the offer is unsatisfactory—the highest was for two hundred lire per three thousand square feet. Father Pagani[7] came by to look at

[5] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 479f. [Editor]

[6] *See* p. 30. [Editor]

[7] Father John Baptist Pagani was at this time the superior general of the Rosminians. [Editor]

it. He liked the location but remarked that now was not the time to sell unless we had a particularly good offer. This may come about in the spring.

My mother, the clerics, and our many little rascals who still remember you send you their fond regards. I commend myself to your prayers and put myself at your service for anything I may be able to do.

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

As we can see, the field that Don Bosco had seen in his dream[8] —one third of which still belonged to him—for one reason or another remained the property of the Rosminians, but, as we shall later discover, it was Divine Providence that kept it from being sold.

Meanwhile, the month of Mary at the Oratory was marked by three memorable happenings: the boys' fervor in honoring their heavenly Mother, the festivities celebrating the anniversary of the State Constitution, and the excursion of the choirboys to Susa. We shall treat each one in detail.

Many at the Oratory strove to emulate Dominic Savio, who by word and example inflamed his schoolmates with a lively desire for spiritual progress. They seemed to be a living illustration of the words of Holy Scripture: "Send up the sweet odor of incense, break forth in blossoms like the lily. Send up the sweet odor of your hymn of praise, bless the Lord for all He has done." [Sir. 39, 14] The spectacle of so many boys striving for holiness of life was a great tonic to Don Bosco and gave him the courage to continue treading the thorny path that God had laid out for him.

Toward the end of April Dominic had called on him to ask how he could fruitfully keep the month of Mary.

"Carry out your duties as perfectly as possible," Don Bosco told him. "Each day relate some story about Our Blessed Mother and strive to keep your soul free from sin."

"I'll do my best, Father, but what grace should I ask for?"

"Ask Mary to obtain for you from God good health and the help of His grace to become a saint."

"Yes! I'll pray to Her to help me to become a saint and to die

[8] *See* Vol. II, pp. 232ff. [Editor]

a holy death. I'll especially ask Her to assist me in my last moments and to lead me to heaven."

Young Dominic displayed such fervor during that month that he seemed like an angel in human form. If he wrote, it was about Mary; if he studied, sang, or attended classes, he did it all for love of his heavenly Mother. Every day during recreation period he had a story to tell in Her honor. His health, however, had been steadily deteriorating for quite some time, and therefore Don Bosco had a team of doctors examine Dominic to see if they could do something for this highly esteemed and most diligent boy. The doctors were amazed at Dominic's cheerfulness, readiness of wit, and maturity of mind. Dr. Francis Vallauri (God rest his soul), one of the examining physicians, admiringly remarked: "What a jewel this boy is!"

When Don Bosco asked him about the cause of Dominic's poor health, the doctor replied: "His frail constitution, superior intelligence, and continual spiritual tension are the things that imperceptibly keep sapping his vitality."

"What can we do for him?"

"The best thing would be to let him go to heaven; in my opinion he is quite ready. The only thing that can prolong his life is absolute mental rest for a time, with manual tasks suited to his strength."

Dr. Vallauri had indeed made an accurate evaluation. God had endowed this saintly youth with those heavenly gifts that are so evident in the lives of saints. On several occasions, after Communion or while praying before the Blessed Sacrament, he fell into a rapture that lasted for several hours. "I recall," Father John Bonetti declared, "that one day he was missing from breakfast, class, and lunch. No one knew where he was. He was not in the study hall or in the dormitory. It was already two o'clock in the afternoon when a friend of his—concerned at Dominic's disappearance—told Don Bosco about it. Don Bosco immediately guessed that Dominic was in church—as had been the case other times—and he was right. Without saying a word to anybody he went there and found Dominic in the choir behind the main altar; he was standing motionless, one foot over the other, one hand resting on a bookstand, the other pressed against his heart. His face was turned toward the tabernacle and had such an angelic expression as to defy

description. Don Bosco called to him, but when he received no answer, he shook him. The saintly young boy looked at him and asked: "Is Mass over already?"

"Look, Dominic," Don Bosco answered, showing him his watch. "It's two o'clock." Dominic's face clouded. He apologized for this involuntary transgression and turned to go to class, but Don Bosco sent him to lunch, and lest Dominic be embarrassed by questions from his classmates, he added: "If anybody asks where you were, say that you were carrying out an order of mine."

The schools that have such boys are truly fortunate. At the Oratory, there were other boys like Savio.

Another memorable event that month was Constitution Day. John Villa reports:

> On this occasion, in order to keep the hundreds of day boys from roaming the city looking for fun and perhaps thereby suffering spiritual harm, Don Bosco bought a great quantity of small salamis, buns, and tiny bottles of wine, and hung them from clotheslines all over the playground. The sight of these unusual decorations naturally delighted everyone. On the previous Sunday Don Bosco had asked all the boys to be punctual at the church services. Now he stated: "A benefactor gave me some money to decorate our playground with lights on this holiday, but I got a better idea. Rather than please the eye, I thought of filling your stomach by buying all these goodies for you. Did I do the right thing?" A surge of applause drowned out his words. He then went on: "Now each of you will draw a number from this bag, and Lady Luck will team you up groups of three for a snack of bread, salami, and wine." The drawing then began and kept us amused for quite a time. After that in groups of three, including the boarders, we all enjoyed our snack.

The third and last event that added joy to this month's celebration was an outing at Susa. We find mention of it in a letter of Don Bosco to Canon Rosaz:

Turin, May 26, 1856

My dear Canon:

Within a few days you will receive a visit from the organist whom we discussed. I think he will meet your expectations.

At present I regretfully cannot accept the young shoemaker because part of a building has been demolished to make room for a new one. I can perhaps be more helpful to the young student. Meanwhile, let him finish his Latin course. If he should happen to come to Turin, tell him to see me. Then during the summer vacation, with God's help, we may be able to fix him up.

Have no scruples about hearing confessions during the choir recitation of the Divine Office if someone asks you, or if penitents are waiting near the confessional. Father Cafasso is also of this same opinion.

Our little rascals will play some musical selections for you when they come to bother you at the solemn closing of the month of Mary.

I hope to be in Susa soon. We shall then discuss all our business.

Give my best to the vicar general and to Canon Gey.

Your sincere friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The Oratory boys went to Susa on the first Sunday in June. On June 8, *L'Armonia,* after stating that it was impossible to adequately describe the solemn closing of the month of May, went on as follows:

Leaving everything else to a better writer, we only want to tell you about the exquisitely devout singing by the young pupils of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, founded by that apostolic man, Don Bosco. Both the selections and the singing were superb. By their modest and devout behavior, these good boys showed that they inwardly felt what they so harmoniously expressed by their voices. We all know what a rare thing it is to see a choir attending church services respectfully and devoutly. However, for once, we were edified in watching the devout behavior of these young singers as they sang from their hearts.

It is unfortunate that this aspect of educating the young is not more known and practiced, so that we can free our churches from the desecration brought on by profane music and by even more profane singers.

CHAPTER 38

A Spur to Charity

WE have not yet mentioned an association which was founded by Don Bosco around 1854 to benefit the festive oratory boys and which was accorded proper recognition on May 11, 1856.

We have already seen[1] that as early as 1850, in an effort to promote the practice of Christian virtues, especially the spiritual and corporal works of mercy as exemplified by St. Vincent de Paul, Don Bosco had supported the establishment of a chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Turin where it was still unknown. By the end of 1853, to his great delight, the number of such chapters had increased to four. In 1854 a special committee was set up to look after the indigents whose number had increased in the wake of the cholera epidemic, especially in Borgo Dora. From August 27 to November 30 of that year this committee assisted 430 families in that area at a cost of some three thousand lire.

While rendering assistance, the committee discovered that a large number of its charges came from Savoy and France. Therefore, it was thought advisable to set up a chapter exclusively for them under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales. Since Father [Gaspard] Mermillod—who later became the bishop of Geneva and then a cardinal—happened to be in Turin at the time, he formally established the new chapter. Undoubtedly, Don Bosco must have had a hand in this too, just as he did in bringing relief to the people of Borgo Dora. In fact, both he and Count Charles Cays of Giletta were of the same mind on this point. The count, a truly indefatigable father of the poor, was the first chairman of the special council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He often met with Don Bosco when teaching catechism in the festive oratories of Valdocco,

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 47ff. [Editor]

Porta Nuova, and Borgo Vanchiglia and also in the homes of cholera victims while bringing them help and comfort. As regards the young immigrants from Savoy and France, Don Bosco was acquainted with quite a few of them, since they had frequented the Valdocco festive oratory. He knew where they lived as well as their favorite hangouts, their employers, and their working conditions. Even after the St. Francis de Sales chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society ceased its activities in 1860, he kept in touch with these boys for a number of years, helping them spiritually and—as much as his limited resources would allow—also materially.

But before the end of 1854, not fully satisfied with the help then being given to the poor, Don Bosco established within the Oratory a small chapter similar to the St. Vincent de Paul chapters, under the patronage of this saint and St. Francis de Sales. In this undertaking he had the full approval and support of those members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society who for many years, attracted by his zeal, had continued to come to the Oratory to teach catechism —namely, Marquis Dominic Fassati, Count [Casimir] Radicati of Bròzolo and Marquis [Ludwig] Scarampi, in addition to university professors and wealthy merchants. He started the chapter after carefully studying the regulations of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and the means suggested to achieve its purpose. His primary aim, however, was to train these boys to do good rather than to give help to their relatives. Therefore, with this in mind, one day he announced his intention to establish a chapter. He also exhorted the boys to join, and a goodly number of the older ones—both day and boarders —did. A president, secretary, and treasurer were elected at the opening session. Among the first presidents was Serra, who later became bursar of the Collegio Nazionale in Turin. In the course of years Father Michael Rua, Father Julius Barberis, and Father Dominic Bongiovanni served as secretaries. Among the members, we may mention Peter Enria, Father John Anfossi, Father John Turchi, and John Villa, all of whom can vouch for the authenticity of our account.

"Whenever new members were admitted," John Villa stated to us, "Don Bosco would say a few encouraging words. For example, when John Garino was admitted some years later, Don Bosco—taking his cue from a sculptor in marble whose studio was located

in Via della Consolata and whose name also was Garino—remarked: 'As that sculptor carves beautiful images in marble, you, Garino, should carve salutary maxims, holy resolutions, and good example in those with whom you come into contact.' He also stressed that while the society aimed at doing good to others, the members should first aim at improving themselves." Every Sunday, in teams of two, the twenty or so members carried out their assignments; each team had to visit one or more poor families, bringing them material and moral assistance. In particular, they had to remind the parents of their obligation to provide for the Christian education of their children and to urge them to send their children to catechism class and to the festive oratory.

These teams were warmly welcomed not only for the help they brought but also because their frequent visits were permeated with the charity and respect that Don Bosco had suggested. The visitors, on the other hand, profited greatly by learning firsthand the needs of the poor and the best way to alleviate them. Later on, when they left the Oratory, they were ready to join the regular chapters of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul where they once again found means to achieve greater personal sanctification and also had the opportunity to meet new friends, many of whom were of a higher social status.

The meetings of the Oratory chapter were held in the superiors' dining room at about one-thirty in the afternoon. Don Bosco was usually present. Occasionally, distinguished members of the Turin chapters, such as Count [Pio Galleani] Agliano, Commendatore [Joseph] Cotta, and Count Charles Cays would also attend.

The meetings would open with a prayer and the reading of the minutes. Then, after a report on the home visits, merit points were awarded to the boys in those families whose conduct had been good, as far as the visitors could ascertain. The boys with the highest number of merits received clothing, footwear, or wholesome books at the end of the month. At the end of the meeting a collection was taken up among the members, and even the poorest of them would find some way to contribute their mite in response to Don Bosco's wish that they develop a spirit of generosity. Naturally the amount collected was not too substantial unless Count Cays, Count Provana of Collegno, or one of the other wealthy gentlemen added

their contributions. Don Bosco also gave his donation. Thus a small relief fund was always available.

The most suitable hour for the Sunday visits to poor families was between ten and ten-thirty in the morning when their boys—mostly under fifteen years of age—were at the festive Oratory. The visitors then could feel quite free to ask about their conduct. Sometimes the parents would be somewhat less than truthful, praising their sons just to help them get a prize. However, the visitors would doublecheck by calling on the boys' employers. Upon their return to the Oratory the visitors would admonish their young charges, if necessary, or kindly exhort them to say their morning and night prayers, to receive the sacraments more regularly, and to be more respectful and obedient to their parents or more diligent at their jobs. To make such advice more palatable, a small lottery was arranged each month just for these boys.

The St. Aloysius Oratory had a similar chapter, and both of them eventually initiated and maintained contacts with the St. Vincent de Paul Society which in 1856 had seven chapters in Turin and ten in other cities of Piedmont. This growth had led to the formation of a superior council in the capital and to the election of Count Charles Cays as its president. Eager to help Don Bosco with the chapters established at his festive oratories, Count Cays took them under his wing and declared them to be "affiliated," a status they retained ever afterward. This affiliation was solemnized in the St. Francis de Sales and St. Aloysius oratories on the feast of Pentecost in 1856. Among the members were John Villa and the clerics [Michael] Rua and [John Baptist] Francesia. From then on, the St. Vincent de Paul Society included, in some measure, its two "affiliates" in the fund distribution.

Don Bosco derived another important advantage from this association: the start of a most cordial relationship with the presidents of superior councils and local chapters and with members of various Italian and French chapters. Canon John Anfossi gave us the following information about one of the meetings at which he was present:

Sometime between 1854 and 1856, on a Sunday, four illustrious noblemen—Duke [Thomas] Scotti of Milan, Marquis [Francis] Patrizi

of Rome, Marquis [Dominic] Fassati of Turin, and Count [Charles] Cays—came to the Oratory to attend the meeting of the "affiliated" chapter whose members made home visits to the poor accompanied by members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Don Bosco welcomed them courteously, but in order not to leave his boys unsupervised during recreation, he invited them with all simplicity to sit on a wooden bench in the middle of the playground and excused himself. Then, when the games were over, he handed each one a catechism and asked them to take over a class, and they graciously obliged.

They were also very pleased with the meeting which took place after church services. After observing the fine attendance, sensing its spirit, and listening to Don Bosco's instructions to prepare them for his work of charity, they were fully convinced of the great amount of good they were doing.

John Villa also recalls that the president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Rome presided at another meeting. He addressed such moving words to the Oratory chapter that when he had finished, Don Bosco paid him the following compliment: "You talk like an apostle."

We shall recount other episodes on this subject at the proper time. However, we cannot refrain from anticipating a bit by giving our readers a bird's-eye view that will enable them to have some idea of how Don Bosco's affiliated chapters began, grew, and ended. They prospered until the time that the St. Vincent de Paul Society had grown sufficiently to take over the relief work in all the places where it had been established. [We shall now give a brief chronology.]

1859: "Affiliated" chapters established at the oratories of the Guardian Angel in Borgo Vanchiglia and of St. Joseph at Borgo San Salvatore in Turin. This latter was the property of Mr. Charles Occelletti.

1860: Termination of the affiliated chapter at the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova.

1864: Termination of the affiliated chapters at the oratories of the Guardian Angel at Borgo Vanchiglia and of St. Joseph at Borgo San Salvatore.

The only affiliated chapter that still continued to function for

many years was the original one founded at Valdocco. Among the members were Paul Albera, James Costamagna, Costanzo Rinaudo, Louis Jarach, Joseph Lazzero, and Francis Provera. A statement, apparently written in 1872, describes the work still being done, corroborating what we have said and shedding some light on its closing phase. Composed as an official introduction to the minutes of a meeting, it anticipates some important events, but we shall present it without interpolation, leaving the treatment of those events to the proper time:

Society of St. Vincent de Paul
Affiliated Chapter of St. Francis de Sales

The principal purpose of this chapter is to give spiritual and material assistance to poor boys of Borgo Dora and Valdocco who attend services in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.

Spiritual program for Sundays and holy days: catechism from three to four P.M., singing of the *Ave Maris Stella* and *Magnificat,* a sermon especially suited for boys, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

About two hundred boys attend these meetings each Sunday and are taught catechism by the members of this chapter. To attract youngsters the members give them medals, copies of *Letture Cattoliche,* and devotional books such as *The Companion of Youth* and the *Key of Heaven.*

Every month some boys are admitted to First Communion. On these occasions Don Bosco treats them to breakfast. Unfortunately many of the older boys have to work on Sundays and so can rarely approach the sacraments. An average of one hundred boys go to confession each month.

Material assistance is given to the more destitute boys who regularly attend catechism class and are entitled to special help and home visits. Twenty attendance stamps will entitle them to a suitable prize, usually some clothing.

About fifty boys are looked after by this chapter, whose membership numbers about thirty; all belong to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Since the members themselves cannot collect enough money for the prizes, lotteries, and small gifts that are given from time to time to the boys in order to attract them to church services, Don Bosco, our common father, makes up the difference.

The chapter meets every Sunday at two in the summer and at half-past one in the winter at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

Several generous townspeople occasionally attend our meetings and contribute to the collection, which normally does not exceed thirty or forty centesimi per week, since the members are poor boys who are in great need of help themselves.

Don Bosco founded this chapter for his own boys in 1854. Count [Charles] Cays, president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Piedmont, always protected this chapter, and by affiliating it with his own, he provided it with vouchers for the families of the boys attending the festive oratory. He also allotted it unusually substantial donations from time to time. Many noblemen occasionally attended our meetings. This chapter was not strictly fashioned after the St. Vincent chapters in Paris, since it was exclusively concerned with boys. Things went on like this for many years, with the Oratory boys—members of this chapter—visiting the families under their care.

When Count Cays' term of office expired, his successor, Mr. Ferrante, abiding strictly by the rules, no longer recognized the Oratory chapter and stopped the vouchers. Then, little by little, the noblemen and gentlemen who used to come to our meetings also withdrew, and by 1871 only Count Provana of Collegno and Chevalier Pulciani still attended. Finally our chapter stood alone. Nevertheless, the successor of Count Cays and his two other successors, Baron Ricci and Falcone, were always favorably disposed to Don Bosco and to his Oratory.

CHAPTER 39

The Immaculate Conception Sodality

IN 1856 a new sodality was founded at the Oratory to exist side by side with the "affiliated" chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. For some time there had been a noticeable decrease in the degree of fervor and diligence at the Oratory and as a result things did not always run as smoothly as before. This was mainly due to an influx of new boys with a great variety of temperaments and backgrounds. One weekday morning, something most unusual occurred at Mass: not one boy went to Holy Communion. (We must note, however, that on Sundays nearly everyone received.) Don Bosco, the celebrant, had uncovered the ciborium only to cover it again and replace it in the tabernacle.

One of those present was Celestine Durando. He had arrived at the Oratory on April 30, but went to school at the Collegio Nazionale. On his way there with Joseph Bongiovanni—who also attended a private school in town—Durando remarked to him as they reached Valdocco Circle: "Did you notice? Don Bosco must have felt quite sad."

That same afternoon, after they had returned from school, they called together some schoolmates—[John] Bonetti, [Louis] Marcellino, [Joseph] Rocchietti, [Victor] Vaschetti, and Michael Rua—and decided to form a group whose members would go to Communion on different days so that no day would go by without someone receiving. This initiative of theirs greatly consoled Don Bosco.

Needless to say, Dominic Savio had eagerly joined this group. However, acting upon a suggestion of Don Bosco, he planned to make it permanent. With his usual zeal, therefore, he selected several most trusted friends and asked them to join him in founding a sodality to be called the Immaculate Conception Sodality. Its

purpose was to seek the protection of the Mother of God in life and especially at the hour of death by promoting practices of piety in honor of Mary Immaculate as well as frequent Communion. After consultation with his friends, and with the assistance of Joseph Bongiovanni, Dominic drafted a set of regulations. Then, after much thought, on June 8, 1856, nine months before his death, he read them aloud as the sodality members knelt before Our Lady's altar. We report them here as a possible source of inspiration to others:

To obtain the protection of the Blessed Virgin in life and in death and to dedicate ourselves entirely to Her service, we (*names followed*) on this eighth day of June, after receiving the sacraments, promise to practice a filial and unfailing devotion to Our Lady. With our superior's permission, we, kneeling at Her altar, promise to imitate, as far as possible, the virtues of Louis Comollo, and we resolve:

I. To keep all school rules faithfully.

II. To help our fellow students by charitably admonishing them and by urging them to be good, especially by our good example.

III. To make good use of our time. In order to more easily follow this program to which we want to bind ourselves, we submit the following rules for our director's approval:

1. Our first rule will be perfect obedience to our superiors in whom we place full confidence.

2. Our first responsibility will be to carry out our duties.

3. Mutual charity will bind us together, causing us to love all our schoolmates impartially and to admonish them when we see that it will help.

4. Every week we will hold a half-hour meeting. After a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a brief spiritual reading, we will discuss the sodality's progress in virtue and piety.

5. We will correct each other's faults privately.

6. We will strive to avoid even the slightest unpleasantness among ourselves, and we will patiently endure those who bother us.

7. No special prayers are prescribed. Each one, after finishing his duties, will use his time as he thinks best for the welfare of his soul.

8. The following practices are suggested: reception of the sacraments as often as permitted; Communion on Sundays and holy days, during novenas, on Our Lady's feasts, on the feasts of the Oratory patron saints, and on Thursdays, unless otherwise prevented.

9. Every day, especially during the rosary, we will pray for our sodality and ask Mary for the grace of perseverance.

10. We will consecrate each Saturday to the Blessed Virgin by some act of devotion in honor of Her Immaculate Conception.

11. We shall strive to always be exemplary during prayers, spiritual readings, and Divine services, as well as in the classroom and study hall.

12. We will treasure sermons and meditate upon their truths.

13. We will not waste time, so that we will be able to avoid temptations that result from idleness and the like.

14. After doing our work, we will devote our free time to useful pursuits, such as reading devout and instructive books on prayer.

15. Recreation is prescribed, or at least permitted, after meals, classes, and study periods.

16. We will bring to our superiors' attention whatever can help our moral welfare.

17. We will not take advantage of our superiors' goodness by asking for too many privileges. We seek to keep the school rules perfectly, and we realize that all too often they are broken by the abuse of such privileges.

18. We will not complain about food and will try to keep others from doing so.

19. All applicants must first purify their souls in confession and receive Holy Communion. Then they must prove their resolve by their conduct for a week. They must also read these regulations carefully and promise God and Our Lady Immaculate that they will obey them.

20. On the day that a new member is admitted, all the sodalists will receive Holy Communion and pray to Our Lord to grant perseverance, obedience, and Divine love to their new member.

21. This sodality is under the protection of the Immaculate Conception, whose title we take and whose medal we wear. A sincere, childlike, and unlimited confidence in Mary, a tender love, and a constant devotion to Her will help us to overcome all obstacles and make us firm in our resolves, kind toward others, and exact in all things.

Lastly, we advise all members to imprint the holy names of Jesus and Mary first on their hearts and minds, and then in their books and other things that they use each day.

We ask our director to read these rules and to give us his opinion about them. We assure him of our complete willingness to accept whatever amendments he will consider suitable.

Our Blessed Mother inspired this sodality. May She bless our efforts, smile on our hopes, and grant our desires. Shielded by Her mantle and

strengthened by Her power, we shall brave the storms of this perilous sea and overcome our infernal enemy. With Her help we hope to edify our companions and to be a source of joy to our superiors and loving children of Our Heavenly Mother. If God will grant us the grace to serve Him as priests, we will strive to do so with all our strength. Distrustful of ourselves but relying completely on God's aid, we hope that after this exile on earth, consoled by Mary in our last hour, we may reach that reward prepared by God for those who serve Him in spirit and in truth.

Don Bosco carefully studied this program and then approved it under the following conditions:

1. These promises do not have the binding force of vows.
2. They do not bind under pain of sin.
3. At the meetings, works of charity will be proposed, such as cleaning the church, helping some particularly backward boy, or teaching him catechism.
4. Weekdays shall be so parceled out that there shall be some who receive Communion each morning.
5. No other practices of piety are to be added without the superiors' permission.
6. Promoting devotion to Mary Immaculate and to the Blessed Sacrament should be the basic purpose of this sodality.
7. Before being accepted, each candidate must read the life of Louis Comollo.

Dominic Savio was the ideal boy to found such a sodality. He was friendly to all, respected even by those who did not particularly like him, and endowed with the knack of getting on well with everybody. He was so genuinely virtuous that his superiors suggested that he mix in with some rather unruly companions in order to lead them to God. He knew how to use games and casual conversations to make spiritual conquests. However, he chose his best friends from among the members of the Immaculate Conception Sodality. With them he planned and carried out works of charity. The sodality meetings were authorized by the superiors, but they were conducted and controlled by the boys themselves, even when some cleric or priest attended. The members were picked from among the most level-headed and pious boarders in every grade. By unan-

imous consent the cleric Rua was elected president. Even then he was considered the most trusted and exemplary of Don Bosco's spiritual sons.

The weekly sodality meetings (which began during the novena of Our Lady of Consolation[1]) opened with a short spiritual reading; a secretary took down the minutes. At these meetings the boys discussed the manner of celebrating novenas of the more solemn feasts, designated the specific weekdays on which the members were to receive Communion, and assigned to each member those of their schoolmates who needed greater moral assistance.

In this matter they acted with wise concern. First they made a list of boys who were frivolous, remiss in their duties, negligent in receiving the sacraments or in carrying out their practices of piety, or under suspicion of reprehensible conduct. They studied their temperaments and then assigned them to the sodality members who seemed the most likely to succeed in helping them. These young apostles then went about their tasks, employing every device that a sincere Christian concern would suggest to put a boy on the right path. At the next meeting they reported on the result of their efforts, received advice on how to achieve better results, and discussed other matters that they considered conducive to the Oratory's well-being. The sodality members were like guardian angels—unseen but active—each watching over his charge, hovering about him, and seeking to gain his friendship, without, however, attracting their schoolmates' attention or, for that matter, even the attention of the boy directly concerned. If he seemed to associate with questionable schoolmates, the sodality member would promptly go over to him, find out what he read, lend or give him good books, and join him at games. After winning his friendship through kindness and, if necessary, through most generous and ingenious self-sacrifices, he would advise, exhort, and urge him to be good; finally, at the right moment, he would induce him to go to confession.

Many souls were saved by such zeal! The sodality members were not informers, but protectors of their trouble-prone charges and even of potential troublemakers—if there were any—by keeping them out of trouble. They played down the faults of their charges when talking about them to their superiors and assumed responsi-

[1] This feast fell on June 20. [Editor]

bility, before God, for their future conduct. At times they offered to accept punishments in their stead and even tried to intercede when any of their charges were threatened with expulsion. In brief, their apostolate was a most sublime one, demanding solid and prudent virtue. If the boy entrusted to them became sick or needed help in school or shop, or if he was disappointed by some setback or misfortune, he could always rely on the wise assistance of a sincere friend who loved him for Christ's sake. The Immaculate Conception Sodality was like a sacred legion charged by Don Bosco with watching lest "the enemy" gain entrance to the Oratory. His watchword to them was: "Let us safeguard morality! This is what really matters!" Father Michael Rua stated: "The amount of good done by the Immaculate Conception Sodality in the course of many years in setting boys on the right path defies description. Recently, in 1895, several alumni confided to me that if they were able to remain at the Oratory and apply themselves successfully to their studies, it was due to the charitable concern of this or that companion, boys who I know were members of this sodality."

Inspired by Don Bosco's spirit, these boys did not content themselves simply with looking after their charges. They became the soul and guiding spirit of the Oratory. Scattered in a crowd of noisy, cheerful boys, by word and example they promoted obedience, peace, and order. The boys ran around and played in groups, but in their midst there was always a member of this sodality around whom all the others gathered and who so unobtrusively managed the group that as a result there was no grumbling, no swearing, no foul talk, and no quarreling. Everybody liked him, and whenever he told some edifying story all listened attentively. In those days the boys did not line up in going from one place to another. Nevertheless, as soon as the bell rang for class, shop, church, or study, all noise and games immediately ceased and the various groups moved like a unit, clustering around one of their number whom they obeyed almost without being aware of it.

The sodality members also paid special attention to new boys arriving at the Oratory. Sometimes these youngsters were homesick or lonesome, especially if this was their first time away from home. Whenever a sodality member spotted one of them, he would quickly approach him and engage him in conversation. Then he would

invite him to play, or would brief him about the house and its customs, while at the same time artfully instilling some wholesome thought. He would lead him to the chapel to say a Hail Mary before Our Lady's altar, explain to him what a loving father Don Bosco was, and finally exhort him to receive the sacraments. Thus evil was warded off and the good boys strengthened, and the sodality members themselves also derived spiritual benefit.

As in previous years, Don Bosco suggested that they choose from among their more virtuous companions a secret monitor who would charitably point out their faults. "I myself experienced," Father Rua stated, "how good our father's advice was. In my boyhood I learned from my secret monitor the value of time and began to use it more fruitfully."

The Immaculate Conception Sodality—the nursery of the first members of the Salesian Society—was founded in the same year that Pius IX extended the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus to the whole Church with its proper office and Mass, and in the same month that is dedicated to the Sacred Heart. Thus the month of June also brought joy to Don Bosco, just as the month of May had done. During this month Don Bosco received a letter from Dominic Ruffino, a deeply religious student of rhetoric at the Giaveno seminary. Don Bosco felt certain that one day he would be among his most efficient co-workers at the Oratory. He replied as follows:

Turin, June 13, 1856

Beloved son:

You did well to write. If you will open your heart to me, you will find that I am a friend ready to do all I can for your welfare.

Offer up your work to God and be devoted to Mary. We shall talk at greater length when you come to Turin. May the Lord bless you. Pray for me. Wholeheartedly I am,

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco also received other joyful news from Rome. On June 10, the Pope granted a plenary indulgence to all who visited St. Francis de Sales Church at the Oratory on the principal feasts of the Blessed Virgin and also on the feasts of St. Francis de Sales

and of St. Joseph's death. On June 13, two other rescripts[2] granted seven years and seven quarantines once a month to those making the Exercise for a Happy Death in the aforesaid church, and an identical indulgence to all the faithful attending the Christmas Midnight Mass at the Oratory. Don Bosco received these priceless favors with deep reverence and heartfelt joy.

To add to the joy, on June 15, 1856, the Piedmontese troops that had gone to the Crimea[3] arrived back in Turin. They attended Mass celebrated on the parade grounds by Archbishop [Alexander] d'Angennes of Vercelli and sang a *Te Deum* amid the salvos of cannons. Afterward, several of these veterans—former pupils of the festive oratory for whom prayers had been offered—came to Valdocco to see Don Bosco and were warmly welcomed. Joseph Morello was one of them.[4]

Warm enthusiasm was displayed on the feasts of St. John the Baptist and of St. Aloysius. For the latter occasion Don Bosco had the Paravia Press print 7,500 holy pictures of this saint.

On June 28, *L'Armonia* carried the following notice about this celebration:

Tomorrow, June 29, the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga will be celebrated with the customary solemnity and devotion at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. We believe that the faithful will not find a more edifying sight than the one they will see on this day when crowds of boys reverently and devoutly fill their church. The day's program is as follows:

Morning

Holy Masses, Confessions and Communion
9—Recreation
10—Solemn High Mass

Afternoon

3—Solemn Vespers, Sermon, Procession, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament
5—Lottery for Adults
6—Lottery for All
7—Concert and Other Entertainment

[2] These have been omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[3] *See* pp. 185f, 188f. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 329ff. [Editor]

A plenary indulgence may be gained by those who, having gone to confession and received Holy Communion, will visit this church and pray for the intention of the Holy Father (*Decree of Pius IX, Sept. 28, 1850*).

The devil must have trembled with rage at seeing the peace reigning at the Oratory and the good work done by the Immaculate Conception Sodality. In those days the playground had not yet been entirely walled in to keep out strangers. Consequently, for several years the devil's agents occasionally showed up among the boys, especially when Don Bosco was away. Judging by their appearance, they most probably were Waldensians—or, to speak more accurately, disciples of Judas. With a smirk on their faces, they usually approached a group to start off some devious conversation. One such messenger of evil was a morally corrupt but astute young man whose looks, suave manners, and entrancing words seemed to charm the boys. His mere presence acted like a magnet in drawing to him crowds of unwary youngsters, but the Immaculate Conception Sodality members were on guard and discreetly steered them away from this serpent and others like him.

Once, during recreation, a man mingled with the boys in their games and loudly began to talk to one of them. Cunningly, he first told amusing tales. Egged on by curiosity, other boys soon crowded around him, listening eagerly to what he was saying. As soon as he had a sizable audience, he switched the topic to religion, and as such people do, he uttered gross absurdities, ridiculed the most sacred things, and cast aspersions on priests and religious. Several boys, sickened by such godless talk but too timid to speak up, walked away, but many thoughtlessly stayed on. Then Savio happened to come along. No sooner did he realize what was afoot than he fearlessly turned to his schoolmates and said: "Let's go! Let's leave this wretch alone. He's trying to ruin our souls." All promptly obeyed him, and the man went off and was seen no more.

On another occasion a youngster who was not an Oratory boy brought in a newspaper with indecent and irreligious illustrations that would have made a pagan blush. Other youngsters gathered about him to look at them. Savio also ran up, thinking that there was something inspiring to look at, but when he saw the pictures he

smiled scornfully, took the paper, and tore it to shreds. A hush settled over the crowd as the boys stood speechless.

"God help us!" exclaimed Dominic. "Have you forgotten everything that you've been taught? Our Lord says that a single glance can soil our souls, and you go ahead and gloat over things like this!"

"We were only looking at them for fun," one replied.

"Sure, it was fun, laughing yourselves right into hell. Do you think that you'll still be laughing if you land there?"

No one dared to reply.

Meanwhile, the June-July issue of *Letture Cattoliche* had been published. Entitled *Brief Reflections on Conforming to God's Holy Will,* it had been printed at Ivrea by the Tea Press. This anonymous booklet, full of sound doctrine, spiritual comfort, tenderness, and love, was very helpful to souls in showing that God's will is always for our own good and that peace and perfection can be attained only by following it.

CHAPTER 40

Don Bosco's History of Italy

IN 1856 not only the Oratory boys, but all Italian children benefited from a handsome gift—*Storia d'Italia*—which was an imperishable proof of Don Bosco's sincere love for youth, the hope of both Church and country. Readers may perhaps wonder how Don Bosco, burdened by his many endeavors and the responsibility of managing his vast family, could still find time to compile and publish *The History of Italy,* one of his finest and most important writings.

Father Joseph Cafasso had been instrumental in speeding up this work. Don Bosco had called on him one day for advice. After showing him two large composition books, one of which was entitled *The History of Italy* and the other *Handbook for Confessions of Youth,* Don Bosco asked him: "Which should I work on?"

Personally he leaned toward the latter because some priests were belittling this ministry. The prejudiced belief that it was a waste of time, the impatience and annoyance caused by the thoughtlessness and ignorance of most children, and the priests' lack of experience in dealing with them had brought about the sad result that very few priests really understood the value of, or cared to hear, children's confessions. As a result, most children received the sacrament only at Easter.

Nevertheless, Father Cafasso replied without hesitation: "Write the history of Italy," and Don Bosco heeded his advice. However, there were other reasons for doing so. In those days anticlerical authors shamelessly kept distorting Italian history with handbooks, compendiums, and summaries. With no regard for truth they resurrected malicious falsehoods against the Church and portrayed the popes as the enemies of Italy by distorting, misrepresenting, and

altogether ignoring their most glorious achievements. Furthermore, they presented complete fabrications—products of a sick imagination—as historic truths, and these contributed to put the papacy in a bad light. The very popes who had most deserved the gratitude of Italy were blamed for its reverses. To make matters worse, these handbooks or summaries were beginning to be adopted as textbooks in elementary and secondary schools. Moreover, three Protestant periodicals were openly and virulently attacking the papacy, while the anticlerical press continued to hammer away at the temporal power of the popes, falsifying its origins and purpose and impugning their juridical rights.

These betrayals of the truth and this poisoning of youngsters' minds deeply disturbed Don Bosco, and so he set out to provide an antidote. He dictated the entire text of *The History of Italy* to the cleric Michael Rua. Then, when the manuscript became hopelessly marked up with corrections, young Melchior Voli—later an attorney, a mayor of Turin, and a senator—helped Don Bosco to recopy the whole manuscript while the two were guests of Count Roasenda. The manuscript was given to the Paravia Press in 1855. Its pages present a defense of the Church by stressing the popes' great services to civilization and to Italy in particular, and they convincingly prove that the temporal power of the popes was necessary for the free exercise of their spiritual authority.

Don Bosco divided the history of Italy into four periods:

1. From the earliest inhabitants to the beginning of the Christian era when the Roman Empire was unified under Augustus.

2. From Augustus to the fall of the Roman Empire in 476, the period when Christianity became firmly established all over Italy.

3. From the fall of the Roman Empire to the discovery of America.

4. From the discovery of America to the present, the period commonly called "Modern History."

While other authors split Roman history into three parts—the Kings, the Republic, and the Empire—Don Bosco divided it into two parts—pagan Italy and Christian Italy—thus again revealing the subjects that he most cherished: Jesus Christ, His Vicar, and His Church. Characteristically, nearly all the chapters ended with a quotation from the Book of Proverbs.

As the work of composition progressed, Don Bosco regularly sent the galleys to Father Amadeus Peyron[1] for his opinion. Trying to be helpful, the professor generously corrected them, but when he read them over he realized that Don Bosco's version was better, and so he erased all his corrections. Father [John] Garino is our authority for this.

On this occasion, however, Father Peyron did give Don Bosco a good piece of advice that he never forgot. Among the biographical sketches of illustrious Italians, Don Bosco had included one of Vittorio Alfieri. This prompted Father Peyron to ask: "Why did you mention Alfieri in a book intended for children? This writer has led an immoral life, spawned pernicious ideas, and done a great deal of harm. Take him out. The sooner he is forgotten, the better. If you mention or condemn him—or, worse still, praise him for anything—you will only arouse curiosity and the desire to read his works to the boys' great harm. Take him out." Don Bosco did so, and in later years he would make a point to warn his co-workers never to mention or to cite unprincipled authors and, still less, to praise them for their style or any other reason.

Another person whom Don Bosco consulted was his former professor, Father Peter Banaudi.[2] Perhaps he sought his opinion mainly in regard to the evaluation of certain events of church history, as we gather from the following letter:

Turin, December 5, 1855

My dear Professor:

I am sending you some more pages of *The History of Italy,* trusting that you will be as helpful as in the past. The work is about ready to go to press. I expect that I will be able to send you the rest of the pages soon.

My grateful thanks to you. Love me in the Lord and believe me to be,

Your most grateful pupil,

Fr. John Bosco

The History of Italy was published about the middle of 1856, with a first printing of 2,500 copies. Don Bosco's explanation of

[1] A renowned professor at the University of Turin. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. I, p. 244. [Editor]

the purpose of this book is worth repeating here, since it reveals how the proper education of youth was foremost in his mind and the main objective of all his efforts:

> It is universally recognized that just as food should be suitable to the person taking it, books should likewise be adapted to the intelligence of the readers for whom they are intended.
>
> Following this principle, I decided to write a history of Italy for young people along the lines I have followed in other works for the same age group regarding subject matter, style, and size. I limited myself only to events which are historical and morally constructive; I left out doubtful incidents, private opinions, excessive quotations, and complicated political matters which are useless and sometimes harmful to youth.
>
> Nevertheless, I can assure the reader that I have not written a single paragraph without checking the most reliable authorities and, as far as possible, authors who are contemporary or at least close to the period in question. Nor have I neglected modern authors of Italian history, taking from each what best seemed to serve my purpose. I have done my utmost to make my work useful to youth—that portion of society which constitutes our great hope for the future. Every page was written for one purpose: to present historical truth that will kindle love for virtue, horror for sin, and respect for authority and religion. The favorable reception accorded several other booklets of mine encourages me to hope that this, too, will be well received. Should it benefit anyone, let him thank the Dispenser of all good things, to whom I consecrate my humble efforts.

The book was warmly praised by critics. A former Salesian pupil, Father Trusso, now a teacher, told us that an eminent Sicilian professor exclaimed after reading it: "The man who wrote this is a saint!"

The learned writers of the Jesuit periodical *La Civiltà Cattolica* praised the work to the skies, declaring that perhaps no other book of its kind in Italy could compare with it. They praised it again in another issue of their periodical in the following words: "In the hands of that excellent author, Don Bosco, history is not something to be twisted for the sake of airing dubious political opinions or hypocritical claims to freedom of expression. Unfortunately, this has too often been the case with the many handbooks, compendiums, and summaries that have flooded Italy lately and wormed

their way into many schools of presumably good repute. The author's concern for truth, thorough treatment of the subject, clear style, and balanced presentation are matched by his orthodoxy of doctrine and principles, whether moral, religious, or political."

L'Armonia, in its issue of October 21 [1856] (Year 13, Series 5, Vol. 3, p. 474) carried this article:

Simpletons posing as educators are presently engaged in promoting books that are hastily put together and, worse yet, often tainted with teachings harmful to youth. For this reason, all the more do we appreciate books that indeed meet the educational needs of youth, our most precious possession, since it is a well-known fact that the history of our unfortunate Italy has been grossly twisted to serve the most unbridled political and anticlerical passions.

Father John Bosco, the well-known indefatigable and zealous educator, turned his attention to this field and has just published a 600-page *Storia d'Italia,* with a map of Italy. We will not now speak of its literary or scientific merits, since one cannot digest a book of this size in one sitting, especially if one is to render sound judgment. Yet, rather than keep this book from the attention of teachers and parents, we will simply say that the author, already known for his many educational works, is ample guarantee for the excellence of the material and of its presentation.

We feel certain that teachers, parents, and all who are sincerely concerned with the education of the young will be grateful to the author for having taken on the heavy and thankless task of writing a history of our country which children can read with great benefit rather than with the danger of harm. Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* has already been adopted as a textbook in many schools and minor seminaries. We do not doubt that it will soon be the favorite history textbook of all our schools.

Some envious person resented this praise and started a rumor that Don Bosco had stumbled on a Jesuit manuscript in some library or other and published it under his own name. Don Bosco ignored the charge, but Father [Matthew] Picco quickly came to his defense. "A Jesuit indeed!" he cried to those who brought him the news. "I myself saw Don Bosco write it page by page. It's obvious that you do not know Don Bosco."

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had hastened to present a deluxe-bound

copy to the Holy Father, and he was delighted when the Pope acknowledged the gift through James Cardinal Antonelli:

Rome, September 18, 1856

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

As you requested in your letter of September 7, I promptly presented the copy of your *Storia d'Italia* to the Holy Father. I hasten to inform you that the Holy Father was pleased to accept this homage addressed to his holy and august person, and he has asked me to convey to you his apostolic benediction.

I, too, am grateful for the copy you so kindly sent to me. I thank you most heartily and beg to remain,

Your true servant,

James Cardinal Antonelli

Don Bosco sent other complimentary copies to various friends and benefactors. Among his replies we report the following:

Milan, October 29, 1856

Very Reverend and dear Don John:

I have delayed thanking you for the precious gift of your carefully compiled compendium of Italian history from its earliest beginnings to our own times because until now I have not had the time to read and appraise the work. Now that I am enjoying the peace of the countryside, away from the many preoccupations of city life, I am happy to do so and have nothing but gratitude and admiration for your work. A compendium of the varied history of our beloved country—so renowned in arts and sciences—must indeed have required a tremendous amount of your time and effort. I admire the way you have condensed your material without distorting historical accuracy and without neglecting any of the more ill-fated events that have afflicted our country or the glories that have made her excel. You deserve the gratitude of the youth of Turin to whom you have lovingly dedicated your work—and, I might add, the gratitude of all Italians who will certainly be happy to find so convenient a summary of the history of our country from its beginnings down to the present time.

I take this opportunity to also thank you for having had your good pupils sing my modest musical compositions which have enjoyed such an undeserved success.

Please forgive the length of this letter. Remember me and believe me when I say that I am at your service in order to be able to show you my gratitude.

Your grateful servant,

Caesar of Castelbarco

Subsequent editions contained an additional chapter on the conquest of Lombardy (1859) and, later, a chronological summary of the principal events from the peace at Villafranca (1859) to the death of Napoleon III (1873). Don Bosco also added biographical sketches of other illustrious Italians such as [Father] Carlo Denina,[3] Joseph De Maistre,[4] Antonio Canova,[5] Antonio Cesari,[6] Vincenzo Monti,[7] Giuseppe Cardinal Mezzofanti,[8] Silvio Pellico,[9] Antonio Rosmini,[10] Carlo Boucheron,[11] Pier Alessandro Paravia,[12] Amedeo Peyron, and Alessandro Manzoni.[13]

After praising the works of Alessandro Manzoni—especially *I Promessi Sposi*—Don Bosco had some remarks on this novel: "Our appreciation of this novel does not deter us, however, from criticizing severely the characterizations of Father Abbondio and the unfortunate Gertrude. Surely, in his intent to give us a truly moral novel inspired by Catholic principles, Manzoni could have given us more acceptable characters; even foreign authors have given us a better picture of a Catholic parish priest. Any youth who has

[3] An historian (1731–1813) known particularly for his *Storia delle Rivoluzioni d'Italia.* [Editor]

[4] A writer and the ambassador of Victor Emmanuel I to Russia (1753–1821). [Editor]

[5] A sculptor and the founder of the modern classic school of sculpture (1757–1821). [Editor]

[6] A lexicographer who championed Renaissance purity in language (1760–1828). [Editor]

[7] A poet and professor of oratory at University of Pavia who served as historiographer of the kingdom of Italy under Napoleon (1754–1828). [Editor]

[8] A linguist who was in charge of the Vatican library (1774–1849). [Editor]

[9] A writer and patriot, especially known for *Le Mie Prigioni,* the memoirs of his imprisonment (1789–1854). [Editor]

[10] A philosopher and writer who founded the Institute of Charity and served as an adviser to Pius IX (1797–1855). [Editor]

[11] An outstanding Latin scholar and jurist (1773–1838). [Editor]

[12] A professor of literature at the University of Turin. [Editor]

[13] A novelist and poet who was the leader of the Italian Romantic school (1785–1873). [Editor]

been taught from his earliest years to love his parents and revere his pastor cannot help but being unfavorably impressed in reading this book."

Consequently he did not recommend this book to young readers because of their inexperience and immaturity. He tolerated it only when educational authorities made it required reading. From this we may gather what Don Bosco thought of other novels. He always maintained that frivolous, romantic novels, although not bad in themselves, were morally dangerous.

Don Bosco's history of Italy was a godsend both then and later; it was appreciated both by good Catholics and by those who were not particularly friendly to the Church. God alone is aware of the amount of good it did to young people and the evil from which they were saved. Once they discovered how excellent this history was, all fathers, teachers, and tutors who were interested in having their sons or pupils versed in that subject, without having their minds poisoned, hastened to purchase the book. Over seventy thousand copies were sold in the course of thirty years.

When it was first published, the Minister of Education, Giovanni Lanza, had the book examined, liked it very much, honored it with an award of a thousand lire, and expressed the desire to have it adopted in public schools. Subsequently, a government representative called on Don Bosco to inform him that his *Storia d'Italia* would be designated as the official textbook in all public schools if he would agree to eliminate certain paragraphs. Don Bosco firmly refused this offer, despite the fact that it would have netted him large profits. Instead, he willingly faced the prospect of enduring the increased wrath of the anticlericals who now looked upon him as a reactionary and a leader of the cause favoring the Pope.

Meanwhile, the Oratory boys were assiduously reading the book; occasionally they could even recite whole chapters by heart. To encourage them in the study of this subject, Don Bosco praised and gave prizes to the best ones, a wise custom he had adopted with those who knew by heart their catechism or the most stirring passages of bible or church history.

Another important good effect of Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* was that it served as a model and inspiration to quite a few authors to

write other histories of Italy and thus remove from the reach of youngsters many of the biased—and also morally dangerous—history books then in vogue.

One final thing worth mentioning in this connection is that through this work Don Bosco—while still living and without his knowledge—became known in England where his book was translated and adapted for classroom use. Some of our Salesian confreres found a handsome copy of it in a used-book stall. Entitled *Compendium of Italian History by Giovanni Bosco,* it was translated from the Italian by I. D. Morell, LL.D., a former school inspector and published by Longmans and Green in 1881.

The translator's Preface read as follows:

During the several winters I spent in Italy, I naturally devoted my attention to the history of that country. I often thought that a good, condensed history of Italy in English, especially adapted for young people, would fill a great need.

We have several works on the ancient history of Italy—that is, on the Roman republic and empire. Some treat the subject in great detail, while shorter histories cater to the elementary and secondary schools. There is, however, a great dearth of suitable books about the fall of the Roman Empire in the West and the beginning of the Middle Ages. Indeed, it is by no means easy to write about this intricate period of history in a concise and clear way and produce a satisfactory compendium of Italian history. Such a task is anything but simple.

The present compendium is mostly a translation from the work of John Bosco (a learned Italian priest), entitled *La Storia d'Italia raccontata alla gioventù* [A Children's History of Italy]. Bosco's compendium of Italian history begins with the foundation of Rome. The first part (which includes the period generally known as Roman history) did not warrant translation, since it only contains material readily available in English textbooks.

As for the translation itself, I must say first of all that the book was originally written (as the title itself suggests) for the secondary school students of Italy. It has already gone through five editions and is widely used as an approved textbook.

The style is extremely simple, and the author has woven many explanations in his text which would not be necessary in books intended for more advanced readers. My translation attempts to retain the engaging simplicity of the author's style. As for the above-mentioned ex-

planations, I have kept a few but discarded others as unnecessary. I must also point out that since the author is a very zealous Catholic priest, one may find in this book many opinions which would certainly conflict with British thinking, particularly Protestant thinking. I thus felt justified in modifying or in eliminating these passages, as the case might be. . . .[14]

[14] Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* fills Volume IV of *The History of Nations*, P. F. Collier & Son Co., New York, N.Y., 1932. We shall briefly quote from the Preface by the editor of that volume, J. Higginson Cabot, Ph.D.

"It is believed that this single book, which contains the essence of the best that has been written on Italian history, will supply a long-felt want. . . .

"For Italian history since 476 A.D., Don Bosco's 'Italian History' has been the foundation. It is one of the most satisfactory digests of the very complicated history of the peninsula during the centuries of disunion down to the present time." [Editor]

CHAPTER 41

Life at the Oratory in 1855–56

NOW that the success of Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia* has been recorded, we think it fitting to dwell awhile on the Oratory's internal routine, particularly since we have in our possession a very important document written entirely by Don Bosco himself.

This document is a journal for the years 1855–56. It is crammed with notes, records of accounts due and receivable, and the names of 153 boarders—63 students and 90 artisans. However, these figures are incomplete—as former boarders have testified—because several categories of boys were not mentioned, such as those attending other schools in Turin and transients. The few marginal remarks indirectly disclose that certain boys who were incorrigible, seriously suspected of theft, or stubbornly insubordinate were dismissed. From this journal we also gather that some boys left of their own accord. One such boy was Charles Gastini,[1] next to whose name we read: "Left in May to live by himself."

A few boys—mostly orphaned artisans—died in the early months of that year. They had come to the Oratory already weakened by poverty, undernourishment and other causes and they could not recover. John Picena of Cremolina, 17, and Louis Pesciallo of Vacarezza, 15, died at the Cottolengo Hospital. Bernard Raggi, 16, passed away in the SS. Maurice and Lazarus Hospital. Another Picena, the younger brother of Louis, died at home. With fatherly love, Don Bosco visited these boys at the hospital and prepared them for a holy death.

After the close of the school year, some of the students left for their summer vacation, but Don Bosco made sure that there, too,

[1] He began attending the festive oratory in 1848 when he was eleven. *See* Vol. III, pp. 243ff. [Editor]

they had some supervision. To each he gave the following form letter for his pastor:

Very Reverend Father:

We respectfully entrust this pupil of ours to your kind care during his vacation. At its close, please give him a letter to present to us, certifying whether or not: 1. He went to confession and Holy Communion. 2. He attended church services and was available to serve Mass. 3. He associated with bad companions or gave other reason for complaint.

Trusting that the report will be good, we thank you most sincerely.

Your grateful servant,

Rev. John Bosco

Don Bosco could not bear to see vacancies at the Oratory. So concerned was he about boys in moral danger that whenever he encountered any he waived the usual admission requirements and took them in at once as sons sent to him by Divine Providence. John Villa told us of one such case:

One day Don Bosco dropped into a barber shop and there met a young apprentice. He struck up a friendly conversation with him and soon found out that the boy came from Cavour and had run away from home. After looking around Turin for a job, he had chanced upon this barber who paid him thirty centesimi a day. Without further ado Don Bosco invited the lad to the Oratory. His fatherly ways won the youth's heart; taking leave of the barber, he followed Don Bosco, who without delay informed the boy's father that his son was at the Oratory and requested his permission to keep him there. Relieved to learn that his boy was safe, the father willingly consented.

I personally knew this boy. He remained at the Oratory until he was drafted for military service. He is an upright man and has a good job in Turin. Whenever we meet, he always speaks gratefully of Don Bosco and credits him with the good education he received at the Oratory.

Equally dear to Don Bosco were the festive oratory boys. Even when they moved, he continued to take a genuine interest in their welfare, as John Villa again told us:

After attending Don Bosco's festive oratory in Turin for one year, I had to return to Biella with my father. Then, in July 1856, my pastor

informed me that Don Bosco had written, asking him to tell me and my brother that on a certain day we were to be at St. Philip's Oratory because he would be coming to Biella and was anxious to see us.

We were deeply touched by such interest, and of course we kept the appointment. In a most friendly manner he asked us if we were diligently carrying out the practices of piety we had learned at the Oratory. He then invited me to Turin. My father was reluctant at first, but finally he consented. There I immediately found work in my former trade, and I continued to frequent Don Bosco's festive oratory regularly. I am deeply grateful for his kindness and the help he gave me. He kept in touch with me while I was in military service in central Italy for several years, giving me good advice. He also recommended me to the bishop of Osimo. I owe my present success in business to the good education Don Bosco gave me, and to his help in introducing me to the right people. What he did for me he also did for all who sought his help.

Meanwhile, as he was about to leave for Lanzo, Don Bosco wrote the following letter to the cleric James Delprato at Savigliano Monasterolo. A seminarian of the archdiocese of Turin, he had sought Don Bosco's advice, as other seminarians had done:

Turin, July 13, 1856

My dear son:

I delayed writing to you because I was sure that you would make your spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius'. Yesterday I learned that this may not be so, and therefore I am letting you know that tomorrow I am going there and will remain through the week. I'll be back in Turin after July 25. If I can be helpful in any way during my absence from Turin, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

At that very time, Don Bosco held a meeting of the "affiliated" chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society at the Oratory. Among other things, he stressed prayer. He told the members that he was going on retreat to St. Ignatius' and he promised to pray for them. He stressed that the prayers of the faithful could do a great deal of good and be so extraordinarily effective as even to reach such far-away places as America, the reason being that when the faithful

pray for those not in communion with the Church, either because of their intention or because of the communion of saints, God listens to them as solicitously as a father hearkens to his own children. He added that prayer was sterile outside the Church; sometimes it was not heard by God and at other times it might even be an insult to Him. Don Bosco concluded by warmly and humbly recommending the salvation of his own soul to their prayers. At that very moment, Father [Amadeus] Peyron walked in. He nodded respectfully to Don Bosco, and upon hearing his last words, he told him with deep respect: "Please, Don Bosco! Forget about 'conversion.' Just stay the way you are!" We are indebted for this tidbit to Joseph Reano who was present.

On July 14 [1856], Don Bosco went up to St. Ignatius' accompanied by the clerics [Michael] Rua, [Joseph] Rocchietti, [Joseph] Bongiovanni, [Secundus] Pettiva, and [Gabriel] Momo. While carrying out his priestly ministry, he still found time to call together some members of the Turin chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society who were among the retreatants—Count [Charles] Cays, Chevalier [Mark] Gonella, and other distinguished laymen. During the meeting they took up a collection of twenty-two lire for the families of the needier boys attending the festive oratory. The "affiliated" chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society at the Oratory was informed of this through a letter of Joseph Bongiovanni, its secretary, which was read at the meeting held at the Oratory on the third Sunday in July under the chairmanship of Father [Victor] Alasonatti.

Always concerned about his boys, Don Bosco also wrote to Father Alasonatti, addressing two questions to everyone in the house and promising a handsome reward for the correct answer. The questions were: 1. God gave us only one soul. What does this imply? 2. What kind of person does not strive to save his soul?

Don Bosco wrote other letters while on retreat, but we have only the following:

St. Ignatius' Shrine, July 23, 1856

My dear Cagliero:

I, too, want you to take time for piano and organ practice, but since the course of methodology mostly fits in with your philosophy course

and since it will only last a couple of months, I wish you would take it and devote only what free time remains to music. You can make up for lost time after examinations.

Always strive to have fewer enemies and more friends, and make them all friends of Jesus Christ. Love me in the Lord, and may heaven always be open to you.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

A word of explanation is necessary here. Don Bosco had planned to have the clerics take the state examinations for teacher certification. To prepare them he had mapped out summer courses in methodology to be taught by Father Rossio.

While at St. Ignatius' Don Bosco also consulted Father Cafasso about the many plans which constantly occupied his mind. Soon the time came to return to the Oratory. He was planning to leave on the very same day that the retreat ended, July 25, but it seemed as if an evil spirit now and then would try to snuff out a life dedicated to the service of the Church. Don Bosco's quarters were in the chaplain's house. At three o'clock in the morning of the last day, Don Bosco was standing in the corridor near a French door opening onto the balcony. The door was closed and bolted with a wooden bar. The sky was cloudy, and suddenly there came a frightening clap of thunder. The French door was blown open by a tremendous gust of wind that ripped the bar from its place and flung it at Don Bosco, striking him on the hip, while a downpour flooded the corridor. Next, lightning struck just where Don Bosco was standing, completely enveloping him and even ripping a floor tile from under his feet. He remained standing, though stunned and dazed, but he quickly regained his composure. The occupants of that floor rushed out of their rooms, but they could not close the door because of the violence of the wind. Don Bosco had to return to his room and wait until the fury of the elements subsided.

The retreatants who occupied the rooms near the shrine had slept through the storm undisturbed. When they came down for Mass, they were surprised to see Don Bosco limping to the altar.

Marquis Berzetti of Mulazzano, an expert on rubrics, could not understand why Don Bosco omitted the usual genuflections. "Since when," he grumbled after Mass, "have the ceremonies of the Mass changed?" When the reason became known, everyone realized that Don Bosco had been saved by a special intervention of Divine Providence. He had been virtually unharmed, yet for several days he suffered from pains in his head, back, and legs, while his side ached for several months. The spot at St. Ignatius' where the lightning struck him can still be seen today.

On reaching the Oratory that evening, he received a noisy welcome. Two days later, Sunday, July 27, Msgr. Foux, chaplain of the duchess of Genoa, gave the sermon. We must add that for over a year Msgr. Foux had been preaching the evening sermon on Sundays and holy days to the festive oratory boys in perfect Piedmontese, holding their attention for a good hour. That evening he described to the boys what had happened at St. Ignatius' and urged them to thank God and the Blessed Virgin for having so miraculously saved their beloved father. The *Te Deum* was then intoned and the boys sang with indescribable enthusiasm. There followed the *Tantum Ergo* and solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Afterward, the band, directed by Joseph Buzzetti, played for two hours to solemnize the occasion. We learned of this through Father Rua and Joseph Reano. In connection with the episode, Bishop John Cagliero recalled another strange incident. About a year later, as a storm was brewing, Don Bosco seemed to be completely enveloped in a thin vapor, and his hands, especially, smelled of sulphur. In 1884 some people also noticed that when lightning was about to strike, Don Bosco's hands would swell up, and after it had struck, the swelling would instantly abate and vanish.

After his return Don Bosco immediately resumed work on *Letture Cattoliche*. The August issue, printed by the Ribotta Press, was entitled *The Conversion of Herman Cohen, a Jew, Now Father Augustine of the Blessed Sacrament, Discalced Carmelite*. The topic was a new miracle—one of many—proving the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The September issue, printed at Ivrea by the Tea Press, was entitled *Andrew, or Happiness through Piety, as Narrated by Cesaria Fazzene and Edited by Count G.*

Birago. It was a story for boys and told of a youth who, disregarding his religious education, gave himself up to a life of vice and crime, until the horror of it all caused him to repent and make his peace with God. Particular stress was laid on the following points:

1. What will make a young man virtuous and honest, a truly upright man, is the fulfillment of his duties to God, himself, and his neighbor.

2. The only way to learn such duties is to listen to the Church's teachings embodied in the catechism.

The readers were then queried on whether or not they frequented their parish church and knew their catechism. If they did, they were indeed fortunate, for even if they were totally uneducated and did not know how to read and write, they still knew enough to lead a virtuous and honest life here on earth. By so doing they were useful to themselves and to others much more than many highly educated people who knew everything but that which really mattered.

The Paravia Press printed the October and November issues in one booklet, entitled *Reflections on the Rites and Ceremonies of Holy Mass,* by Father Charles Filippo of Poirino, a Capuchin priest. It was a beautiful piece of work that also refuted Protestant errors and calumnies, and proved that temples, sacrifices, rites, and sacred vestments had been divinely instituted. It also showed that the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and its principal rites and prayers dated back to the early Christians and that the use of Latin in the liturgy was well advised. As practiced by St. Leonard of Port Maurice, it taught the faithful to praise and adore the infinite majesty of God from the beginning of the Mass to the Gospel; to beg for forgiveness of sin and to make atonement to Divine justice from the Gospel to the Elevation; to thank God for all His benefits from the Elevation until Communion; and to manifest our needs to our Creator, who is the font of all graces, from the Communion to the last Gospel.

We should not pass over in silence the fact that during this time Don Bosco kept various preaching engagements and that, as far as possible, he willingly accepted such invitations. When he absolutely could not do so, he left the door open for some future occasion, as this letter indicates:

Turin, August 11, 1856

To the Cleric James Delprato
Gassino

My dear friend:

On the [day you keep the] feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, I'll be at Castelnuovo d'Asti for the novena of Our Lady of the Rosary, and so I cannot accept your kind invitation. Perhaps I can oblige you on another occasion.

I am glad to hear you are well; may the Lord keep you so. Give my regards to your brother, to the vicar forane, to Father Gilio, and to Father Bertoldo. Please pray for me. I recommend you with all my heart to Jesus and Mary.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

This year, Don Bosco had a little more free time to himself, thanks to the steady help Father Victor Alasonatti gave him in the management of the festive oratory and the hospice. Although it was vacation time, the number of people boarding at the Oratory was considerable. There were diocesan priests and clerics whom the bishop of Ivrea had sent there to prepare for the state teacher certification exams. They took lessons from experienced professors of methodology who came to the city. There were also some one hundred and fifty boys, because some of the students returned after a month's vacation to spend about thirty days taking remedial or preparatory courses. Then there were several boys who had been sent there for tutoring in the arts and sciences. The following letter of Don Bosco to Duchess Laval Montmorency of Villastellone concerns one of these boys who belonged to a noble family:

Turin, August 12, 1856

Dear Duchess:

On returning from my retreat at St. Ignatius' I found your letter and met your little Henry. I followed your instructions as regards his art and catechism classes and as regards his room. [Charles] Tomatis[2] tells me

[2] The art teacher. [Editor]

that the boy has already made very good progress. As for piety, Henry is doing well too; last Sunday he went to the sacraments. I am delighted to notice that whenever he sees the better boys do something virtuous, he immediately tries to imitate them. You will certainly be amazed to see how much he has grown in this short time. Both he and I have been at the *Fruttiera.*[3]

Countess De Maistre, Madame Philomena, Frances, and Emmanuel are all well; Father Chiatellino had a fever. He is better now but still weak. Severina is still about the same. She is out of bed during the day and hobbles around, but she must use crutches. She is always cheerful as though really enjoying herself. Let us pray that that Lord will grant her whatever is best for the good of her soul.

Divine Providence has carried off two of our distinguished benefactors: Dr. [Francis] Vallauri, who died a holy death on July 13, and Chevalier Moreno, the bishop's brother. You see how the Lord is testing me in so many ways. The last few years have been critical; the present times are just as bad, and God is taking unto Himself a great many benefactors of mine. But He is the Master and must rule as He pleases; whatever He does is always better than anything we could desire. Nevertheless, I recommend myself to your well-known charity. Please continue to help me meet the daily expenses of the festive oratories, of the boarders, and of a day school I plan to open on All Saints' Day. All this is for the sole purpose of winning souls for Christ, especially in these times when the devil is making every effort to lure them to their damnation.

I shall not fail on my part to pray to the Lord God to grant you perseverance in good works and to prepare a place of honor for you in heaven.

I recommend myself to your prayers. My colleague, Father Alasonatti, and Charles Tomatis send you their regards.

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

In the midst of his many activities, Don Bosco felt the need, from time to time, of a special blessing from the Pope, both for himself and for the boys in his three festive oratories, as is evidenced by this letter:

[3] A summer home of the De Maistre family. [Editor]

August 13, 1856

Most Holy Father:

Father John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales for needy boys of the city and diocese of Turin, humbly begs you to bestow your apostolic blessing and a plenary indulgence both on himself and on his boys, now numbering about nine hundred and still increasing.

For which, etc.

[The favor was granted on August 17, 1856.] [4] The Pope's special blessing served to increase the joy of the feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin which Don Bosco always celebrated with great solemnity. We shall recall this event by simply transcribing the handwritten program which Don Bosco himself had drawn up, as he usually did for all religious, scholastic, or recreational assemblies:

Friday, August 15

Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into Heaven

His Holiness Pius IX, in order to foster devotion to the Queen of Heaven and our Mother, grants a plenary indulgence to all who on the above feast will visit this church, besides going to confession and Communion.

(Decree of September 28, 1851)

Timetable

Morning

Masses, Confessions and Communions
8:30—High Mass, Recreation

Afternoon

3:30—Vespers, Sermon, Procession, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament
5:30—Lottery, Sack Race, Recreation

Praised Forever Be the Most Holy Names of Jesus and Mary

[4] The Latin rescript granting Don Bosco's request has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

CHAPTER 42

A Sudden Setback

THE new wing of the Oratory was up, with its roof tiled and its windows and doors nearly installed, when disaster suddenly struck! At about ten o'clock on the morning of August 22, a workman was busy dismantling the scaffolding under the ceiling of the last floor on the north side of the building. A few days before, he had done the same job on the lower floors. He was almost through, when a small beam slipped from his grasp and crashed end first through the floor, causing each of the floors below to collapse one after the other into the cellar. Within a few moments the interior of the building was a heap of ruins.

Financially, this mishap represented a staggering loss, but again the protecting hand of Divine Providence was evident. We shall just mention two very consoling instances. During the recreation period, the main floor—the largest and coolest spot indoors—was generally crowded with boys and with the young clerics and priests from Ivrea who were staying at the Oratory while preparing for their teacher certification exams. There they played games, read, and studied, while others chatted or supervised the rest. That morning, when the bell rang as usual at half past nine, they all left promptly for their classrooms or study hall. No sooner had they reached their places, when the floors caved in on each other with a frightful thud. Had it occurred a few minutes earlier, many boys would have been crushed by the masonry. Celestine Durando, a bright and studious boy, was at that moment tutoring Joseph Reano, Dominic Bongiovanni, and Duvina in Latin in the choir of the church. The hollow thunder of falling masonry made such a terrifying impression on them that it haunted them for several months whenever they heard any sudden noise.

The second instance, no less surprising, involved the man working on the last floor. As the floor caved in, he tried to leap toward the wall, but as he did so the pavement gave way. Instinctively he flung himself on a remaining strip of floor. Notwithstanding his weight, that part of the pavement held on and supported his dangling body while his worn-out shoes fell on the debris. Likewise, with so many men working at the time around the building no one was hurt. God's protection was evident.

Don Bosco was out that day. When he returned at night and saw what had happened, quite naturally he was deeply grieved, and he feared that there were casualties. But when he heard that no one was hurt, he exclaimed: "Thank God! The rest doesn't matter." Then as the boys were crowding around him, he continued in a light mood: "With so many of you around, why didn't you hold up the ceiling with your hands? Must I think that you are good for nothing? . . . But I know; old Nick gave us another kick.[1] This is the second time that he has knocked our house down, but don't worry. He will have to settle accounts with God and Our Lady and he won't win. The floors caved in but we shall put them up again and they won't fall anymore. Almighty God has permitted this ordeal but He will not forsake us. . . . Let nothing dismay us."

However, Joseph Buzzetti could not take the disaster so lightly, especially since several frauds had been discovered involving a person who supposedly was friendly toward the Oratory. He could not understand how anyone could be so selfish as to take advantage of Don Bosco's goodness. He fumed as Don Bosco sought to calm him. "Buzzetti, let's not get upset over this! The Lord will help us; you'll see!"

"Yes, He'll help us! But meanwhile you slave night and day to scrape together a few hundred lire and others rob you to the tune of thousands. They mustn't get away with it!"

"Don't worry! The Lord will take care of it!"

Don Bosco's words were prophetic. He limited himself to dismissing that person and even tried to help him in various ways, but that wretch never was successful, and he ended up in total bankruptcy.

Buzzetti was justified in raising his voice. Out of humility and

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 353ff. [Editor]

because of an accident to his left index finger while loading a pistol,[2] he was no longer studying for the priesthood, but he continued to sacrifice himself daily for the Oratory. He did all the necessary repairs around the house, assisted the boys in the dining room, set tables, saw to the cleanliness of the house, taught catechism as well as vocal and instrumental music, and regularly mailed out *Letture Cattoliche*. Intelligent and efficient, he organized lotteries, secured work for the shops, and ordered food supplies. Sometimes he would hand Don Bosco bills amounting to several hundred lire. "How can I pay them without a single centesimo?" Don Bosco would exclaim. Then Buzzetti would show him a receipt. On his own, showing varied forms of initiative, he had managed to put that amount together. He also acted as Don Bosco's bodyguard, escorting him when danger threatened, or meeting him in the evening on his return from town. The mere sight of his thick red beard was enough to keep evil-minded people at a distance.

His brothers, who were in the construction business, had more than once asked him: "What are you doing at the Oratory if you're not going to be a priest? How would you earn your living if Don Bosco were to die? You have no trade."

Joseph would reply: "Thanks for your concern, but I have Don Bosco's word that even after his death I'll be provided for, if I'm faithful to him."

Several years later Buzzetti, too, went through a crisis of depression and discouragement. He sensed that the family life of the Oratory as he had known it would unavoidably give way to rules; he could see even now that, little by little, young clerics were taking over the dormitories and classrooms and other duties that were formerly his own, and so he decided to leave the Oratory. He found a good job in Turin and then went to Don Bosco. He told him frankly that, as a layman, he was now the least important person in the house, even though he had been one of Don Bosco's first boys; he stated that his authority had been reduced to nil and that he was now obliged to obey those whom he had known as children. He went on to say that he had made up his mind, and with a heavy heart—because he deeply loved Don Bosco—found himself forced to leave a house which he had seen rise from its foundations.

[2] *See* Vol. IV, p. 253. [Editor]

Don Bosco did not comment on Buzzetti's grievances, but solicitously asked him about his new job and salary. Then he said: "I know you have no money to start with. Tell me what you need, and I'll give it to you. You are a dear friend of mine and I don't want you to face hard times. We have always been very close to each other. And I hope you'll never forget Don Bosco. . . ." At these words, noting Don Bosco's intent look and the fatherly and moving tone of his voice, Buzzetti broke down. "Oh, Don Bosco, I don't want to leave you! I want to stay with you always!" And so he did, continuing to be the Oratory's pillar of strength for many years. Whenever Don Bosco was at his wit's end to get something done, he would say: "Send Buzzetti to me!" With a smile he would listen to what Don Bosco had to say, and then he would instantly carry out the job regardless of difficulties.

Buzzetti had many companions who also greatly loved Don Bosco. In August 1856, these boys, realizing that the recent mishap had vastly increased Don Bosco's financial burdens, gave him the only help they could—their fervent prayers and Communions, which doubtlessly obtained the necessary means for him from God. Don Bosco's benefactors, hearing of this misfortune, felt sorry for him; far from losing their enthusiasm, they resolved to keep doing more on his behalf, as we gather from a letter of thanks from Don Bosco to Marchioness [Mary] Fassati:

Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, August 30, 1856

Dear Marchioness:

Your welcome letter and the five hundred lire bill arrived this morning. I did not even put the money away, but sent it at once to the baker. *Deo gratias.*

Today I'll be at the Convitto Ecclesiastico from four to five, and then I shall be your guest at dinner. Meanwhile, I wish to thank you personally for all you are doing, with God's inspiration, for our poor boys.

My best wishes to you, to Lady Frances, and to the marquis. May the Lord bless you all.

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

That Don Bosco was not dismayed by the recent mishap, we can see from the following lighthearted letter [in dialogue form] to Count Pio Galleani Agliano.

Turin, September 3, 1856

Dear Count:

Don Bosco: Good morning, Count. May I drop in for a little chat with you?

Count: Hello, Don Bosco! How are you? This is a surprise!

Don Bosco: I didn't let you know in advance because this will be a very short visit.

Count: If only you could have come on St. Philomena's feast. What a wonderful celebration we had!

Don Bosco: I really had intended to come. In fact, I'd already begun to write to you about it, when several things came up and forced me to change my plans. But please tell me: How is the countess? Is the family well? And Joseph?

Count: They are all well, thank God, but this heat is killing me.

Don Bosco: How was the harvest?

Count: Not bad, except for the wheat which yielded less than last year on account of the hail. The cocoons have also been disappointing; I didn't get even a third of what I expected, and to think that this year they are in great demand.

Don Bosco: How is Joseph doing? Is he helpful?

Count: Yes. He's beginning to give a hand. Our good Broschiero looks after him kindly and patiently. But tell me, what's on your mind? Your unexpected visit must have some purpose.

Don Bosco: I brought you a complimentary copy of my *Storia d'Italia.*

Count: Good. It'll be inspirational reading for my girls and for Joseph too. I thank you.

Don Bosco: Please don't talk about thanks to me. I am the one who should write a whole book of thanks to you.

Count: How are your boys? How are you doing about money? Frankly, I'll wager you're in a pinch and that's why you are here.

Don Bosco: You're quite right, and if you'll give me something, I won't refuse it, but, really, my visit is purely social. I just wanted to hear about your family and present my book to you. I also wanted to thank you for all you've done and—hopefully—will continue to do for our boys.

Count: I'll certainly do whatever I can for your little scamps. But

please pray and have them pray for me and my family that the Lord may spare our crops and give me peace of mind and heart.

Don Bosco: I'll certainly do so, and I'll pray especially that you may raise your family in a truly Christian way.

Count: Won't you pay us a longer visit soon? Let me know the day and I'll send somebody to meet you at Cuneo.

Don Bosco: I hope I can, and in that case I'll let you know in advance. Thanks for your kind invitation. Oh, my! I almost forgot something. If you need a steady carpenter, I have just the man.

Well, my dear Count, take care of yourself. I hope the crops will be plentiful for you and your family. Remember me to the countess.

Your grateful servant

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's gratitude to his benefactors was not confined to sterile words, as we see in this release in the September 12 issue of *L'Armonia:*

Yesterday, Thursday, September 11, a solemn requiem Mass was offered for the repose of the soul of the late Dr. Francis Vallauri at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco.

The coffin in the middle of the church, the singing of the boys, the many Communions, and the prayers before and after Mass were all deeply moving. The following notice was displayed above the church door:

To the Soul of
the Late Francis Vallauri
Doctor in Medicine and Surgery
Prior Emeritus
of the St. Aloysius Sodality
and Eminent Benefactor
of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales
the Boys of This Oratory
with Deep Gratitude
Invoke from the Lord
Peace and Eternal Rest

Thus our Faith, while teaching us to honor the memory of those who have benefited us, offers relief and consolation to them even after death.

Don Bosco's charity and gratitude were well known to all classes of people, and also to government officials who, therefore, were not averse to helping him. While hastening to rebuild, Don Bosco was also taking steps to protect the Oratory boys from the approaching winter cold. We have already mentioned the gift of army surplus overcoats.[3] We shall now report a letter of Don Bosco to General [Alfonso] La Marmora [Minister of War]:

Turin, September 30, 1856

My dear General:

I have appealed to Your Excellency on other occasions—and not in vain—on behalf of destitute young orphans sent to me by Divine Providence. A considerable increase in the number of my charges and heavy expenses for various necessities again force me to trustfully appeal to your generosity.

Over and above the one hundred and thirty-seven boarders, I have a great many more day boys who look to me for clothing to protect themselves from the cold or make themselves presentable when applying for a job.

I am not asking for luxury items. Anything in the line of shoes, clothing, and bedding, no matter how worn and patched, will be gratefully accepted. I'll even put rags to good use to clothe the sons of the poor.

Generous as you are, I trust that you will kindly consider this grave need. I thank you again wholeheartedly for all you have done for me in the past, and I invoke God's blessings upon you. I am honored to remain,

Your grateful servant,

Rev. John Bosco, *Director*

That same day Don Bosco wrote a note to Chevalier Genova of Pettinengo:

Turin, September 30, 1856

Dear Sir:

Mindful of the many favors you have done for me in previous years, I again appeal to you to use your good offices on my behalf with the Minister of War. I have written to him, seeking clothes, blankets, and similar items for the poor boys who board here. Their number and needs

[3] *See* Vol. IV, p. 466. [Editor]

have increased during the past year owing to the many calamities that have occurred. I know that it will be up to you to grant that request, and so I respectfully appeal to you. Full of trust in your well-known generosity, I wish you abundant blessings from God on behalf of those who will benefit from it.

Your grateful servant,

Rev. John Bosco, *Director*

Don Bosco was sure that the Minister of War would grant his request, as in fact he did, and that the poorer boys frequenting the festive oratory would also benefit by it. Yet, not completely satisfied with what he was doing on their behalf, he conceived a new project which he described in a circular to his benefactors:

Turin, October 1, 1856

Dear Sir:

In view of the constantly increasing need to educate boys of the working class, I have decided to open a day school for at least some of the many lads who now roam the streets, either because their parents do not look after them, or because they live too far from public schools. The districts of Borgo Dora, Borgo Santa Barbara, Piazza Paesana, Borgo San Donato, Collegno, and Madonna di Compagna hold as many as thirty thousand people with neither a church nor a public school.

It is for this reason that I have started construction of classrooms to accommodate about one hundred and fifty pupils. Money is needed for construction, furnishings, school supplies, and teachers. Therefore, I appeal to your well-known generosity, begging you to help me—or, rather, these youngsters who, left to themselves, could fall into trouble or cause trouble to others.

Your proven generosity leads me to hope that you will take this grave need into consideration. Very gratefully, I wish you abundant blessings from heaven.

Your devoted servant,

Rev. John Bosco

As we can see, Don Bosco had started work even before sending out his appeal. Access to the Oratory playground from Via della Giardiniera was through a green double door about twelve feet wide. Into it a small doorway had been cut which rang a bell when

opened. The classrooms mentioned above were being built in the area between this double door and St. Francis de Sales Church. One unit was very large. Its southeastern corner had a small room for a doorkeeper with an outside door; the smaller unit would accommodate about twenty pupils.

While construction was going on, Don Bosco sent out another circular:

Turin, October 1, 1856

Dear Sir:

I respectfully wish to bring your attention to the fact that as the work now in progress at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales—already recommended to your charity on other occasions—nears completion, I find myself in dire financial straits.

I trustfully appeal to your proven generosity and beg you to come once more to my assistance—or, rather, to the assistance of many poor and abandoned boys who, thanks to your help, have found shelter in this house where they will forever bless their benefactors.

Gratefully and hopefully I thank you with all my heart, and also on behalf of my charges.

Your grateful servant,

Rev. John Bosco

After the collapse of the new wing's interior, Don Bosco had also appealed to Minister Rattazzi who granted him a government subsidy:

Turin, October 3, 1856

Ministry of the Interior

In consideration of the financial straits of the boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco as described by the Rev. John Bosco in his letter of October 1, the undersigned grants the said Oratory another exceptional subsidy of one thousand lire from the treasury of this department and has given orders for payment to be made by the provincial treasurer.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

The day after he received this letter, Don Bosco had the pleasant surprise of receiving another from the same person:

Turin, October 4, 1856

Dear Reverend Father:

As a proof of the special interest of His Majesty's government in the growth of the charitable boys' institute that you have founded at Valdocco and so ably direct, the undersigned, realizing this same institute's financial difficulties and the utter inadequacy of the thousand lire just granted, has today directed that a grant of an additional thousand lire be made available to you from the emergency funds of this Ministry.

As a follow-up to his note of yesterday, the undersigned informs you of the above decision and of the issuance of an order for payment of the aforesaid sum.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

In his *History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales,* Father John Bonetti commented on this letter as follows:

I have thought it advisable to publish this letter so that all may see the government's appreciation of our Oratory's work. Those who manned the helm of state in those days believed in principles very much at variance with Don Bosco's, yet they had enough common sense to realize that the education he was giving was undeniably beneficial to the family and to society. Since they therefore wanted his institute to prosper and grow, they favored it to the extent that their influence permitted—and deservedly so, for anyone devoting his talents and sacrificing himself on behalf of boys of the working class is entitled to both the praise and assistance of all established authority. As Urbano Rattazzi himself said: "It should be the government's policy to subsidize as best it can any institute of any denomination that undertakes to educate people and help them get the moral formation which they could not otherwise obtain."

On his part, Don Bosco willingly dealt with civil authorities and so benefited both his boys and the government: the former, by passing on to them whatever the civil authorities gave him for the Oratory; the latter, by relieving those authorities of the burden of finding homes for so many destitute boys. Indeed, civil officials often had trouble finding a place for boys not bad enough to rate as delinquents but prone to become so unless sheltered in some institution. None was better suited than Don Bosco's Oratory.

A worthwhile thought to consider is that despite the ups and downs

caused by troublesome times and people ill-disposed toward him, Don Bosco was still able to make headway in his work. Undoubtedly God was on his side, but we must add that in pursuing his sole goal—helping poor boys—he also strove to practice Our Lord's precept: "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." [Matt. 22, 21]

Nevertheless, we must also assert that with a deplorable inconsistency of principles, Rattazzi refused to recognize the great amount of good being done by religious orders and heedlessly persecuted them.

CHAPTER 43

Educational Insights

TOWARD the end of September [1856] Don Bosco set out with the first contingent of boys for Becchi where the novena for the feast of the Holy Rosary was about to start. From there, on [Sunday] September 28, he went to Castelnuovo to preach on Our Lady of Sorrows.

Father Anthony Cinzano [the pastor] was always very happy to see him. "One evening during supper," Joseph Reano told us, "he began to praise Don Bosco. 'You have a memory like an elephant,' he told him. 'I remember that you used to recite whole sections of theology books by heart! And you kept at it, on and on. You're a marvel! What you're doing in Turin is simply wondrous. I bet that it won't be long before you'll be known halfway around the world!' Don Bosco listened to these words and then blithely and placidly commented: 'Some tailors specialize in custom-made clothes, and others just mend them. I'm a mender.' "

This year, about thirty boys went to Becchi, among them [John Baptist] Piano, now pastor of the Great Mother of God Church in Turin. He remarked to us that although these outings lasted two weeks, there were never any serious problems, thanks to Don Bosco's alertness and foresight. The brass band—always so effective in arousing the villagers' enthusiasm—arrived on the eve of the feast to add to their joy. Music, however, was not a novelty at this celebration; a small orchestra, made up of a violin, guitar, reed organ, and flute, had enhanced the church services, stage plays, or shows in past years. [Charles] Tomatis, [Callixtus] Cerutti, and Bersano were accomplished musicians, and they improvised songs or provided accompaniment; at times they themselves sang choice operatic selections.

Whenever Don Bosco's farmhouse could not accommodate all the boys, neighbors would house the rest. For the first few years of this celebration quite a few Oratory pupils would come to Becchi from Asti, Chieri, Buttigliera, Castelnuovo, Capriglio, Mondonio, and other nearby villages to join in the festivities. They stayed at neighboring farms, and when this was no longer possible, they sought lodging in Castelnuovo, hiking to and from Becchi every day. Don Bosco always had a huge bowl of polenta with all the trimmings ready for them. They surely deserved it because joining Don Bosco in these festivities meant going to confession and fasting before Holy Communion.

Among the many letters Don Bosco received while at Becchi, there was one from Joseph Roggeri, the son of a lawyer and a third-year Latin student at Sanfront [Cuneo]. Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, October 8, 1856

My dear Joseph:

You were very good to write; your letter was quite welcome. When your little altar is ready, I'll come and give a little sermon as I promised, and we can then continue our talk about our friendship and interests. Do you remember the agreement we made? We must continue to be friends, and be united, heart and soul, in loving God.

You say that you like to handle holy objects, and that is good, for it means that God loves you; on your part, strive in earnest to love Him. It means something else, too, but I shall tell you that privately when you come to Turin.

Please give my best to Papa and Mama; greet your pastor in my name, and pat your little brother for me.

May God keep you all in good health and in His holy grace. If you are truly my friend, say a Hail Holy Queen to the Blessed Virgin for me.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco left Becchi with his boys shortly after the feast of the Holy Rosary and returned to the Oratory through Chieri. When traveling this route, he frequently detoured to Moncucco—only

two miles away—to visit the Moglia family whose farmhand he had once been,[1] and for whom he always felt a lively gratitude.

By this time—the early part of October—the new wing was ready. Don Bosco himself had supervised its partitioning, stressing that in buildings of this sort not even the smallest details were to be neglected if they contributed to the boys' moral welfare. For example, as Father Charles Ghivarello stated to us, he never permitted private rooms to have an inside latch or bolt that would prevent its being opened with a key from the outside.

It is the same building that today [1905] surrounds the courtyard named in honor of Don Bosco on three sides, minus the porticoes alongside St. Francis de Sales Church and the last two rooms at the east end of the building. It was just as Don Bosco had wanted it to be—extremely simple, with no space wasted for wide staircases or corridors. The passageways were so narrow that only one person at a time could walk through them. When Bishop Alexander Ottaviano of Savona came to see this new wing and noticed the corridor leading to the various offices, he jokingly remarked to the person accompanying him: "Look, how imposing! I doubt if we could find monasteries with stairs or corridors as narrow as these!" Father Michael Rua was among those who heard this remark.

Don Bosco himself determined the use to which the rooms were to be put.[2] They were all badly needed because winter was approaching, but they were still too damp for occupancy. However, this problem did not disconcert Don Bosco. Completely determined not to allow many boys whom he had already accepted to remain in their wretched state, he set about achieving in other ways what he could not obtain through natural causes. He obtained large braziers and kept coal fires burning in the new rooms day and night to hasten the drying of the walls. He succeeded, but serious consequences were avoided only through the clearly discernible protection of the Blessed Virgin. One large brazier had burned continuously for two weeks in a room near the bell tower; its only window

[1] *See* Vol. I, pp. 144ff. [Editor]

[2] A description of these rooms and of their purpose has been omitted in this edition because it would not be sufficiently clear to the reader unfamiliar with the physical setup of the Oratory. [Editor]

was tightly sealed and the door was hardly ever kept open. On cold mornings, thoughtless youngsters, unmindful of their superiors' warnings, used to steal into the room for shelter from the bitter cold outside, and a few even sneaked in mattresses and slept there quite peacefully for several nights. It is nothing short of a miracle that they did not get even a slight headache from the poisonous fumes that could have brought death in a matter of minutes.

Because of this near tragedy and for other prudent reasons, Don Bosco reiterated the order that classrooms, dormitories, workshops, and the study hall were to be kept locked when not in use—especially during recreation periods—and that the keys were to be kept by those in charge.

Once space had been properly allotted, Father [Victor] Alasonatti was put in charge of the new building by Don Bosco, and in concert with him established the guidelines for its internal management in whatever concerned the boys. As a first step, he posted the following notice on the porticoes—the first document of its kind in our possession:

> Beginning October 1, a room on the first floor of the new building will be set aside as a parlor.
>
> On Saturday evenings after supper and on Sundays after lunch, there will be someone in this parlor to handle all matters concerning artisans and their employers. He will also handle requests for clothing or other articles.
>
> In this room, stationery supplies will be available to students half an hour before breakfast and half an hour before afternoon classes.
>
> Here, too, accounts will be kept, including deposits and charges for incidentals.

To put a finishing touch to this new building, Don Bosco had the porticoes whitewashed and painted and then asked Peter Enria to inscribe scriptural quotations in large capital letters on the walls where the arches met and at the top of the pillars supporting them. He wanted the very walls of his new building to spell out the need of saving one's soul. He used to say: "Now and then the boys rest for a while or stroll about these porticoes when they are tired of playing. Also, outsiders who come here on business matters stand outside waiting to be received. Seeing these inscriptions, all will be

curious enough to read them, if only to while away the time. Thus an inspiring thought will be etched into their minds and perhaps bear fruit."

There were nine inscriptions, in Latin and Italian, on the walls that stretched from the small door at the foot of the stairs to the bell tower leading into the sacristy of the church of St. Francis de Sales.

I. *In ea omnis qui petit accipit, qui quaerit invenit et pulsanti aperietur.*

The one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. (Matt. 7, 8)

II. *Unus autem ex illis qui erat primus sic ait: Quid quaeris et quid vis discere a nobis? Parati sumus mori, magis quam patrias Dei leges praevaricari.*

One of them, acting as spokesman for the others, said: What are you trying to find out from us? We are prepared to die rather than break the laws of God received from our ancestors. (2 Mach. 7, 2)

III. *Quorum remiseritis peccata remittuntur eis et quorum retinueritis retenta sunt.*

Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. (John 20, 23)

IV. *Confitemini ergo alterutrum peccata vestra et orate pro invicem ut salvemini: multum enim valet deprecatio justi assidua.*

Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, and this will cure you; the heartfelt prayer of a good man works very powerfully. (Jas. 5, 16)

V. *Si confiteamur peccata nostra fidelis est et justus Deus, ut remittat nobis peccata nostra et emundet nos ab omni iniquitate.*

If we acknowledge our sins, then God who is faithful and just will forgive our sins and purify us from everything that is wrong. (1 John 1, 9)

VI. *Et tibi dabo claves regni coelorum et quodcumque ligaveris super terram erit ligatum et in coelis, et quodcumque solveris super terram erit solutum et in coelis.*

And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. (Matt. 16, 19)

VII. *Donec confiteantur iniquitates suas et majorum suorum quibus praevaricati sunt in me et ambulaverunt ex adverso mihi.*

Then they shall confess their sins and the sins of their fathers, sins by which they betrayed Me—worse, by which they set themselves against Me. (Lev. 26, 40)

VIII. *Delictum meum cognitum tibi feci et injustitiam meam non abscondi. Dixi: Confitebor adversum me injustitiam meam Domino; et tu remisisti impietatem peccati mei.*

Then I acknowledged my sin to You, my guilt I covered not. I said, "I confess my faults to the Lord," and You took away the guilt of my sin. (Ps. 31, 5)

IX. *Et steterunt et confitebantur peccata sua et iniquitates patrum suorum.*

They stood confessing their sins and the transgressions of their ancestors. (2 Esd. 9, 2)

The inscriptions are a treatise on confession. The first is on prayer, the second on determination to keep in God's grace, the third on the sacrament of Penance and the power to forgive sins given to the Apostles by Our Lord, the fourth on the precept of confessing one's sins, the fifth on the certainty of pardon, the sixth on the full power of Peter to bind and loose, the seventh and eighth on sincerity in confession, and the ninth on the Hebrew practice of confessing sins.

A niche at the far end of the porticoes near the church housed a beautiful statue of the Blessed Virgin before which the students said their night prayers in good weather. All through May, lights and drapes adorned the statue; just below it, a small frame enclosed a suggested daily practice and an invocation to Mary to recite during that month, taken from the principal novenas. Actually, the statue which had kept watch over the Pinardi house for ten years—from 1846 to 1856—should have been in that niche, but it had disappeared during the demolition. Father [John] Giacomelli,[3] wanting to keep for himself what he considered the most significant monument of the founding of the Oratory—that is to say, the memorial of the favors granted by the Blessed Virgin—had managed to carry it off to his home in Avigliana. There it was honored by him and his family, and to this very day it receives the homage of prayers, votive lights, and flowers.

[3] A fellow seminarian of Don Bosco and his staunch helper from the very beginning of the Oratory. [Editor]

On the wall opposite the statue of Her, who is purity itself, was the inscription:

Qui faciunt peccatum et iniquitatem hostes sunt animae suae.
They who commit sin and iniquity are enemies to their own soul. (Tob. 12, 10)

Each of the eleven square pillars also carried an inscription on the side facing the walls:

I. *Dominum Deum tuum adorabis et illi soli servies.*
You must worship the Lord your God and serve Him alone. (Matt. 4, 10)
II. *Non assumes nomen Dei tui in vanum.*
You should not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain. (Ex. 20, 7)
III. *Qui blasphemaverit nomen Domini morte morietur.*
Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death. (Lev. 24, 16)
IV. *Memento ut diem Sabbati sanctifices.*
Remember to keep holy the Sabbath day. (Ex. 20, 8)
Qui polluerit illud (Sabbatum) morte morietur.
Whoever desecrates it (the Sabbath) shall be put to death. (Ex. 31, 14)
V. *Honora patrem et matrem tuam et longaevus eris super terram.*
Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life on earth. (Ex. 20, 12)
Qui maledixerit patri vel matri aut eos percusserit morte morietur.
Whoever strikes his father or mother shall be put to death. (Ex. 21, 15)
VI. *Non occides.*
You shall not kill. (Ex. 20, 13)
Omnis homicida non intrabit in regnum coelorum.
No murderer shall enter the kingdom of heaven.
VII. *Non moechaberis.*
You shall not commit adultery. (Ex. 20, 14)
Impudici non intrabunt in regnum Dei.
The immodest shall not enter the kingdom of God.
VIII. *Non furtum facies.*
You shall not steal. (Ex. 20, 5)

Neque fures neque avari regnum Dei possidebunt.
Neither thiefs nor misers shall gain the kingdom of God.
IX. *Non loqueris contra proximum tuum falsum testimonium.*
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. (Ex. 20, 16)
Os quod mentitur occidit animam.
A lying mouth slays the soul. (Wis. 1, 11)
X. *Non desiderabis uxorem proximi tui.*
You shall not covet your neighbor's person [*sic*]. (Ex. 20, 17)
Qui viderit mulierem ad concupiscendam eam, iam moechatus est eam in corde suo.
Anyone who so much as looks with lust at a person has already committed sin in his heart. (Matt. 5, 28)
XI. *Non concupisces domum aut servum proximi tui.*
You shall not covet what belongs to others. (Ex. 20, 17)
Qui volunt divites fieri incidunt in tentationem et in laqueum diaboli.
Those who seek to become rich fall into temptation and a snare. (1 Tim. 6, 9)

To the left of the main staircase was an offering box recessed into the wall with the following inscription:

ALMS FOR THE ORATORY
Eleemosyna a morte liberat et purgat peccata et facit invenire misericordiam et vitam aeternam.
Alms deliver from death, purge away sins, and make us find mercy and life everlasting. (Tob. 12, 9)

Don Bosco, very pleased with Enria's work, began giving a brief explanation of each inscription at the Good Nights. Occasionally, while strolling through the porticoes with visitors, he enjoyed reading them aloud, referring to them as his private code of life, the secret for leading a good life and dying a good death.

Father [John] Borel, too, was very pleased with the new building, and when he came to see it one day, he remarked to the cleric Rua: "I see that Don Bosco's predictions—made at a time when he was considered a lunatic—have come true. He used to tell me that he could foresee what his Oratory would look like, and I see it exactly as he described it to me. Do you remember that mound

of earth where he said the main altar of the church of St. Francis de Sales would one day stand? [4] For seven years we looked at that mound. Now it's gone, and in its place stands the altar, just as he predicted!"

[4] *See* Vol. II, p. 342. [Editor]

CHAPTER 44

Steady Growth

BY the middle of October 1856 the number of boarders at the Oratory had risen to one hundred and fifty. During that school year, 1856–57, the cleric [John Baptist] Francesia continued to teach the third-year high school classes, while a certified lay teacher, Mr. Blanchi, who contributed his services free of charge, taught the first- and second-year classes combined. (He had been discovered by Don Bosco in July at Foglizzo where he had been invited to preach by the pastor, Father Matthew Alberti. Forty years later, those villagers still vividly remembered his preaching.) At this time, only the students of rhetoric and the humanities continued to attend Father Matthew Picco's school in town. Dominic Savio, whose health seemed better, was one of them. Impressed by his reputation, Father Picco had willingly accepted him as a student free of charge.

Among the new boys entering the Oratory that year were Charles Ghivarello, Nicholas Cibrario, Francis Cerruti, Dominic Bongiovanni, and John Boggero. Two of them [later on] wrote down their impressions of the Oratory. We shall first quote Francis Cerruti:

When I came to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales as a sophomore student on November 11, 1856, I was one of a hundred and sixty-nine boarders. I vividly recall that Don Bosco made a deep impression on me. I felt there was something different about him, something over and above what I had seen in other priests. Most of my schoolmates shared my belief that Don Bosco was an extraordinary and holy man. This belief became stronger when I was able to get close to him, to enjoy his conversation, and to listen to his advice, public and private, especially in the confessional where his words always aimed at the greater glory of God and the welfare of my soul through frequent Communion. I

admired his self-abasement in lavishing special care on the poorest of the festive oratory boys—ragged, uncouth, and often indescribably dirty and lice-ridden. I cannot forget how I felt when I first joined a line of day boys by Don Bosco's confessional. One of them smelled terribly but Don Bosco seemed not to mind it at all. He appeared to be delighted to be with them. On Sundays—and sometimes on weekdays—I saw him with hundreds of mischievous, undisciplined urchins whom, little by little, he would turn into fine, religious-minded boys. He particularly loved to call himself "the leader of the little scamps of Turin." Wherever he happened to find them, he attracted them to the Oratory with his friendly ways, evening classes, games, music, dramatics, snacks, and sweets. With his sleight-of-hand tricks—at which he was an expert—he kept them away from sin, helped them to form good moral habits, and encouraged them to receive the sacraments frequently, untiringly putting himself at their disposal. He never displayed fatigue or annoyance; rather, he constantly showed himself joyful and cheerful to the boys Divine Providence sent him. He was so little concerned about himself that he often carried on his usual tasks, taught catechism, and preached even when running a fever.

Dominic Bongiovanni's impressions were as follows:

I started going to the festive oratory in 1852. I had become acquainted with some of the boarders in 1855, and I asked to become one myself in 1856. At that particular time Don Bosco could not take me in because he had no room, but he let me enroll as a day student. Meanwhile, he urged me to make a novena to prepare for a general confession and, especially, to discover my vocation. Several months later I was accepted as a boarder, and in due course I entered my second year of high school. Before the school year ended, the boarders—students and artisans—numbered over two hundred. I greatly admired Don Bosco for being so even-tempered, patient, and cheerful. People said that Don Bosco was naturally hot-tempered and haughty, but I thought he had such a pleasant and mild disposition that he would have to make an effort to look impatient.

Let us now resume our narrative. At the Oratory things were going smoothly, mostly because Don Bosco's mere presence was a very effective sermon and a steady spur to do what was right. Nevertheless, the students received an added incentive during that year. Canon [Louis] Anglesio, the rector of Cottolengo's Little House of

Divine Providence, being short of teachers and unwilling to send his students to the city schools, asked Don Bosco to accept them as day students. Don Bosco obliged, and so from 1856 to 1859 a good many of the Cottolengo boys—some of whom were very intelligent, as we all remember—walked every day to their classes at the Oratory and vied in diligence and conduct with the boys there. At the commencement exercises—enlivened by vocal and instrumental music—awards were given to both groups in the presence of distinguished guests, the directors of both institutes, and their benefactors.

Many of the Cottolengo students succeeded splendidly in life; several were consecrated bishops, others became exemplary priests in the diocese or in the foreign missions—thus further enhancing Don Bosco's reputation in this field—and still others made their mark in the civil service or in the armed forces. We have in our possession a cherished document from these first Cottolengo students—a written "thank you" to their teacher:

To the Reverend Cleric John [Baptist] Francesia, Third-Year High School Teacher, on Our Last Day of School, July 10, 1857

If, lightheartedly, we almost leap for joy on this longed-for and happy day, and if we eagerly anticipate success in our forthcoming examinations, to whom should we be grateful but you, our kind teacher? Thanks to you and your patience—undeserved on our part, but nevertheless very much appreciated—we were able to enrich our minds with the treasures of knowledge; thanks to you, we learned Latin and other subjects. To sum it up, from you we have received benefits, great and small, which we shall never be able to repay here on earth, although we can pray that Almighty God will give you eternal recompense. Is it not fitting, therefore, that we should be joyous and happy?

Dear teacher, the last day of school is the prelude to a long separation, but we banish all sad thoughts by hoping that in your kindness you will be merciful to us. We realize that we do not deserve your benevolent indulgence, but you have been so patient with us and have worked so diligently for our betterment that you will surely forgive our shortcomings. Instead of well-deserved punishment, give us further proofs of your love. We are sure that you will show yourself good-hearted, especially since our success depends entirely upon you. May your goodness therefore shine forth like a blossom unfolding its petals on a spring morning.

To conclude, we wish you a pleasant and fruitful vacation, trusting that even here on earth the Lord will reward your ardent zeal on our behalf.

Your Pupils of the Cottolengo Institute

Meanwhile, by November, 1856, the classrooms for the day elementary school—near the main entrance—were ready, and shortly afterward classes were started for a large number of neighborhood boys. Their teacher was James Rossi of Foglizzo, whose services Don Bosco had secured when he had gone there to preach. Among other things, Rossi was also a good singer and trombone player.

Under the circumstances, both day and resident students were becoming ever more numerous at the Oratory. Don Bosco was delighted to see his family increase, with new boys rescued from a potentially dangerous environment and placed in a wholesome one. The older boys, like firstborn sons, were happy to see younger brothers swell their ranks, while the latter rejoiced at having found a safe refuge and food for their bodies and minds. Moreover, parents were pleased and grateful for their children's good intellectual and moral education, while Don Bosco's benefactors and benfactresses were delighted at the results of their generosity. Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, who returned to Italy for a few weeks in 1856, as he did from time to time, admiringly congratulated Don Bosco and urged him to continue his wonderful work.

Love of souls was at all times Don Bosco's strongest driving force. During that month [November 1856] at his Good Nights Don Bosco tried to stir in the hearts of the new boys a desire for virtue. Joseph Reano jotted down several talks that were devised to encourage the boys to work for their eternal salvation in accordance with God's will. Reano's report follows:

Every evening during the novena for the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady in the Temple, Don Bosco, in order to make the Good Nights more impressive, would put questions to the older boys, and after receiving the correct answer, he would add a brief comment of his own.

On the first evening of the novena he called on the cleric [Victor] Vaschetti—as he had often done before. "Why must we firmly believe that God wants us to go to heaven?" he asked.

The cleric gave the correct answer, and Don Bosco went on: "Yes, by God's will we were born in the Catholic Church, thus being favored over many others who were not. On our part, however, we must believe what He taught the Church and observe His commandments." He then exhorted each boy to go over his past life during that novena and ask himself whether he had lived it well and whether the good outdid the evil.

The second evening he repeated the question and again offered a comment. "Not only did God create us and allow us to be born in the Catholic Church," he said, "but He also adopted us as His sons through Baptism. This should remind us that, through our godparents and our baptismal vows, we renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil and solemnly promised loyalty to Jesus Christ and His Church."

For seven consecutive evenings Don Bosco asked the same question, proving to them that God willed our eternal salvation. "He not only allowed us to be born in the Catholic Church and to be baptized," he said, "but even more importantly, He had His Divine Son institute the sacrament of Penance to restore His grace to us, if lost through sin, not simply once or twice or a hundred times, but a thousand times or more. But remember: we cannot expect pardon unless we sincerely confess our sins, are truly sorry for them, and genuinely resolve not to offend God again. Furthermore, Christ has wondrously favored us with the institution of the Holy Eucharist, wherein He gives us His body for our food and His Blood for our drink. He Himself said: 'He who shall eat of My Body and drink of My Blood shall have life everlasting.' But for heaven's sake, never forget that he who receives Communion sacrilegiously eats and drinks his own damnation. Let us also keep in mind that the Second Person of the Holy Trinity became man to save us from eternal damnation. In return, let us never cease to thank Our Divine Redeemer; let us practice Christian mortification and renounce the pleasures of the world for Our Lord's sake. Jesus died on the cross for us, shed His Blood to take away the old sentence of condemnation, and gave us the Most Holy Virgin Mary as our Mother. God also loved us from all eternity, and He enjoined us to love Him above all else, proclaiming this as the first of His Commandments, revealing to us that love of our neighbor is the same thing as love of God, and that the glory of heaven is the consummation of grace." Don Bosco concluded by saying: "Not all of us can fast or undertake arduous journeys in God's service or give generous alms, but we can all love. All it takes is the sincere desire to do so."

Don Bosco followed the same method in preaching to the day boys, adapting the reasons why God wants us to go to heaven to their level of intelligence. On November 16, 1856, since the Waldensians had continued to spread dangerous literature among the people, Don Bosco told his boys in a talk on St. Paul that this Apostle had the faithful in Ephesus set fire to a heap of books dealing with magic and full of false and immoral teachings. At the end of his talk, he asked the cleric Vaschetti: "Why did St. Paul burn so many books that were worth perhaps a hundred thousand lire instead of selling them and giving the money to the poor? Or why didn't he just lock them up?"

Vaschetti replied: "If those books had fallen into the hands of other people, many more souls would have been poisoned, and so St. Paul considered it his duty to destroy them. He did not even trust himself to read such poisonous literature."

"Correct," Don Bosco said. "If a poisoned drink can harm me, it can also harm others, and material gain can never compensate for even a single instance of moral harm."

Moved by his words, the festive oratory boys later turned over to him unwholesome books or magazines that they had found in their own homes or had received as gifts. Thus Don Bosco was able to destroy a great quantity of evil literature while indefatigably working for the publication of good books. The December issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* printed at Ivrea by the Tea Press, was entitled *The Guardian Angel of Young Children; Gleanings from a Book by Canon Claude Arvisenet, Vicar General of Troyes.* This booklet contained teachings and examples intended to guide a child in his daily activities and in his spiritual life. It also briefly summarized in dialogue form the scriptural proofs that the Catholic Church is the true Church. In addition, it offered a number of very short prayers for various occasions. Don Bosco was also working on other books, entrusting their printing to four different shops as we have already stated. Bishop [John Baptist] Bertagna described Don Bosco's hard work as follows:

The way Don Bosco undertook one task after another was a brilliant show of strength. No sooner did he complete one task than he took up

another. Not a moment was lost. His nightly rest, if he took it at all, was very short. He was no less admirable in putting up with frequent interruptions from people who bothered him about trifles. He never betrayed fatigue, even after spending the whole night at work, but went on with whatever tasks were called for with astonishing tranquility.

"When we love what we are doing, there is no toil, or if there is, it is a toil of love," says a great saint. Yet, into the midst of so many tasks and happy events came deep sorrow. On November 5 [1856], Father Paul Rossi,[1] who had been the director of the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova for the previous three years, died prematurely at the age of twenty-eight. Very much alert and witty, he combined deep piety with learning in the fields of literature, philosophy, and theology, while always remaining cheerful, friendly, respectful, considerate, and compassionate with all. Untiringly concerned with boys who needed a helping hand to keep from falling, he preached, taught catechism, heard confessions, counseled, and corrected. He gave himself totally to the boys of his oratory. He found jobs for them and he urged employers to be understanding and apprentices to be diligent. Unobtrusively he provided food or clothing lest the needy be forced into crime. Furthermore, he was always ready to speak at retreats, triduums, missions, or novenas. Prisons, hospitals, religious institutes, schools, and even army bases benefited from his zeal and charity. He was Don Bosco's true coworker and follower.

Finally, however, the work began to tell on him. When friends begged him to take care of himself, his reply was: "A good worker never puts off until tomorrow what he can do today." He eventually succumbed. After a long and painful illness borne with heroic patience, he received the comforts of our Faith and went to his reward. The boys of the St. Aloysius Oratory escorted his body to the grave.

In suffrage of his soul, Don Bosco had a sung requiem Mass offered on the eighth day of his passing, November 13, at the St.

[1] Through some oversight, the author calls this priest successively "Felix," "Francis," and "Paul" in Vols. III, IV, and V. The obituary in the *Liturgical Calendar of the Archdiocese of Turin* (1857), two local periodicals: *L'Armonia* (November 20, 1856) and *La Buona Settimana* (November 16, 1856), and other reliable sources give Father Rossi's first name as "Paul." [Editor]

Aloysius Oratory with the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales also participating. All offered prayers and Communions for the repose of his soul. The November 20 issue of *L'Armonia* carried a moving obituary about him that was probably written by Don Bosco.

Father Rossi's passing was a great loss to Don Bosco, particularly since he could find no one to replace him. For a year the St. Aloysius Oratory lacked a permanent director and was managed by a cleric whom Don Bosco sent every Sunday. During the week the same cleric tried to get one or more priests of the city to come to hear confessions, celebrate Mass, and preach; occasionally, he would also try to secure another priest for the afternoon catechetical instructions and services. Sometimes Father Cafasso sent a a student priest from the Convitto Ecclesiastico. Among the diocesan priests who more regularly helped at this time, Father [Ignatius] De Monte deserves special mention. Because of his age and a speech defect he could not preach or hear confessions, but he compensated by saying Mass, teaching catechism, and providing prizes, games, and church appurtenances at his own expense. He was a saintly priest. He was also a wealthy man, but later he lost everything in becoming guarantor for relatives. But whether rich or poor, he never lost his peace of mind, his love of God, his attachment to the St. Aloysius Oratory, or his desire to help his fellow man.

CHAPTER 45

A Heartrending Loss

SHORTLY after Father Rossi's death, Don Bosco had to endure another sorrow that was even more heartrending. Toward the middle of November 1856, the beloved Mamma Margaret was stricken with pneumonia. She was a veritable mother to all the boys, so good, attentive, and solicitous as to make them forget that their own mothers were either dead or far away. Her illness brought out their deep appreciation of her qualities and of her love for them. They prayed at length, watched the course of her illness with deep concern, and steadily came to her door for the latest news of her progress. In the evening, after night prayers, they anxiously waited for Don Bosco or Father Alasonatti to tell them about her; no one could fall asleep without first praying to Our Lady of Consolation for her recovery.

Dr. Celsus Bellingeri, a devout Catholic and extremely capable physician, took good care of her. He was the Oratory's house doctor and the natural science teacher of the first clerics preparing for a university degree. Don Bosco felt very close to him and was very grateful for what he was doing, but he himself looked after his mother most solicitously and spent a considerable amount of time by her bedside, providing whatever could help her and comforting her with pious thoughts and short invocations. His brother Joseph, who had hurried over from Castelnuovo, Marianne, his mother's sister, and Joan Mary Rua, the cleric's mother, also took turns at Mamma Margaret's bedside.

Despite all their loving care, however, her illness continued to grow more serious. The boys were deeply distraught to hear that Father [John] Borel, her spiritual director, had come to hear her

confession, and they were overwhelmed with grief when she received Holy Viaticum.

Margaret, realizing how ill she really was, wanted to leave her last counsels to her sons. When she was alone with Don Bosco, she said to him: "What I am going to tell you now, I'll say as sincerely as if I were in confession in order that you may know better how things stand at the Oratory. Freely trust those who are working with you in the Lord's vineyard, but only in regard to those matters that you are sure are for the glory of God. Keep in mind that many are seeking their own interests rather than God's glory. I must depart and leave my chores to others. This may cause some difficulties, but Our Lady will not fail to assist you. Do not seek pomp or splendor in your work. Seek only the glory of God and let the foundation of your work be true poverty. Some people here preach poverty to others but do not practice it themselves. The best way to teach is to practice what one says. Let your relatives stay as they are—poor; they will get along best that way." She then went on to speak of many confidential matters concerning the Oratory with such deep insight that Don Bosco was astounded. She told him that the clerics Rua, Cagliero, Durando, and Francesia would be staunch and faithful helpers, but she cautioned him about some others. In mentioning two brothers whose name began with "Fer," she said: "Watch out! All they want is to take advantage of your charity—nothing else." She then commended herself to the prayers of all the priests, clerics, and boys in the house, and concluded by saying that if God would be merciful to her, she would pray incessantly for the good of the Oratory. Then her mind seemed to wander. Looking into Don Bosco's eyes, she said: "You are now doing what you neither know nor see, but you'll see and you'll know when the Star enlightens you."

She also spoke privately to her son Joseph. "My dear Joseph," she said to him, "I must leave you and your family. I've always done my best, and I think everyone has cooperated with me. Watch over your children and see that they continue to follow that state of life in which God has placed them, unless they aspire to the religious life or the priesthood. True, they will only be simple farmers, but they will earn an honest living. If they aspire to something else, they may perhaps squander what they have earned by the sweat of

their brow. Reflect on what I tell you now, and it will serve you as a rule in many things which I am too weak to talk about at the moment. Keep doing all you can for the Oratory. May the Blessed Virgin bless you and make both you and your family happy."

When she was about to receive the Anointing of the Sick, she repeated to Don Bosco what she had already told him. "When you were little," she said, "I prepared you for confession and Communion. Now it's your turn to help your mother receive the Last Sacraments worthily. Help me by reciting the prayers. I can hardly say the words myself, but as you say them aloud, I'll try to repeat them in my heart."

Finally her last evening arrived. Overcome by sorrow, Don Bosco had prolonged his vigil by her bedside until very late into the night, and he was suffering the deepest anguish. On the other side of the bed stood Joseph who, although equally devoted to his mother, was more successful in concealing his grief. Suddenly the good mother turned to Don Bosco and said: "God knows how much I have loved you all my life long. I hope I can love you even more in heaven. My conscience is at peace. I did my duty as best I could. I may have seemed too strict in some matters, but I really wasn't. It was my duty. Tell our dear boys that I worked for them and loved them like a mother. Please ask them to pray often for me and to receive Holy Communion at least once for the repose of my soul." At this point both mother and son were so moved that she had to pause.

Regaining her breath a bit, she went on; "Go now, my dear son. I cannot bear to see you so distressed, and you, too, cannot bear to see me in these last moments. Good-bye, dear John. Remember that in this life we have to suffer, but we shall enjoy true happiness in heaven. Go to your room and pray for me."

When Don Bosco seemed hesitant to leave his mother's bedside, Margaret looked at him; then she raised her eyes to heaven as if she wanted to tell him, "You are suffering. This makes me suffer all the more. Please go and pray. We shall meet again in heaven. Father Alasonatti is here; that is enough."

After bidding her a loving farewell, Don Bosco went to his room believing that she was in no imminent danger. Three times he tried to light his lamp, and three times it went out. The thought of his

beloved mother, for whose life he feared, flashed across his mind. He finally managed to get the lamp lit and went over to his bed to lie down. For no reason, his mother's picture, which hung beside his bed, had its face turned to the wall. Don Bosco had not turned it around, nor could anyone in the house have done such a thing. The affectionate respect everyone felt for Don Bosco would have precluded such an irreverent act. What could it mean? An intense fear chilled him, and he no longer dared to sleep. "I'm afraid," he thought, "that this is a warning from heaven that my poor mother is about to be called into eternity." He then returned to her bedside. It was about midnight.

As Mamma Margaret became aware of his presence, she motioned him away, but Don Bosco would not move. She insisted: "This is too much for you. . . ."

Choked by sobs, Don Bosco answered: "No loving son would leave you now!"

Margaret was silent a few seconds; then she continued: "John, please do me a favor. It's the last I'll ever ask of you. I suffer doubly in seeing you suffer. I am well cared for. Please go. Just pray for me; that's all I ask. . . . Good-bye." It was her last farewell.

In obedience to his mother's explicit request, Don Bosco went back to his room, but he did not retire. It was November 25. Some moments later, she entered into her agony. At three in the morning Don Bosco heard Joseph coming toward his room. His mother had gone to heaven. The two brothers looked at each other silently and then burst into tears that were heartrending to a few clerics and others who had followed Joseph.

What about the boys? No words could describe their sorrow, their sobs, and their tears when they received the sad news that Don Bosco's mother—their own mother—was no longer with them. Don Bosco called them all together to console them and then said: "We have lost our mother, but I am certain that she will help us from heaven. She was a saint!"

Everyone who knew Mamma Margaret was of the same opinion in this regard, especially because of her charitable concern for others. She had never turned away the poor who sought her help, and she had constantly tried to make everyone understand how necessary and important were the works of mercy commanded by

Our Lord. For this reason she had undergone many privations. After her death, nothing was found in her room to suggest personal comfort, nor was there any indication that, in concession to her advanced years, she had treated herself to comforts or anything of that sort. Some good women who came to prepare her body for burial were disappointed in their expectations. They had asked for—and received—Don Bosco's permission to take her clothes, but there were none. She had used all her linen for the needs of the Oratory and given away her wardrobe to the poor. Her one dress was used for her burial. In its pockets there were twelve lire which Don Bosco had given her to buy a kerchief a few days before she fell sick. Most likely, at least a part of that small sum would have ended up in the hands of the poor.

On the very morning of her death, Don Bosco took along young Joseph Buzzetti and went to celebrate Mass in the lower chapel of the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. Here, after he had sacrificed the Divine Lamb and offered it to the Eternal Father for the repose of his mother's soul, he prayed for a long time before the statue of Our Lady of Consolation. Among other things, he said to Her: "Most Compassionate Virgin, my sons and I are without a mother! Please be our mother from now on." Judging by the prodigious development of the Oratory, it would seem that the Blessed Virgin fully answered his prayer.

Margaret's funeral was simple, but deeply moving. A solemn requiem Mass was celebrated at the Oratory and all the boys offered their Communions for the repose of the soul of their great benefactress and mother. Then they all escorted the coffin to the parish church, while the Oratory band played the mournful strains of the *Miserere*. The funeral procession was so devout and edifying that Mrs. Margaret Gastaldi, the mother of Father [Lawrence] Gastaldi,[1] declared that she had never attended such a moving funeral.

After the funeral, Don Bosco, weighed down by sorrow, went to stay with his friend, Canon Rosaz, at Susa for some respite, but he remained there for only one day. On his return to Turin he continued to pray fervently, asked others to pray for his mother's soul, and made arrangements for anniversary Masses. He always spoke of her with filial affection, and he delighted in telling of her re-

[1] The future archbishop of Turin. [Editor]

markable virtues both publicly and privately. He also had one of his priests research edifying episodes of her life and publish them as a memorial to her so that they might be a source of edification for all.[2]

Don Bosco's love for his mother did not abate with time. Even in his last days, when he was about to die, he could hardly hold back his tears in reminiscing about her, and at night, in a state of semiconsciousness, he would call her, as those who assisted him have testified. He saw her several times in dreams which remained indelible in his mind and which he at times narrated to us.

In August 1860, for example, he dreamed that he met her near the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation, along the wall surrounding St. Anne's Monastery at the corner of the road as he was on his way back to the Oratory from the Convitto Ecclesiastico. She looked beautiful. "What? Are you really here?" Don Bosco asked. "Aren't you dead?"

"I died, but I'm alive," Margaret replied.

"And are you happy?"

"Very happy." After several other questions, Don Bosco asked her if she had gone straight to heaven. Margaret answered negatively. He then inquired if several boys—whose names he mentioned—were in heaven, and he received an affirmative reply.

"Now tell me," Don Bosco went on, "what is it that you enjoy in heaven?"

"I cannot explain that to you."

"Give me at least an idea of your happiness; let me see a glimmer of it!"

Mamma Margaret then appeared radiant with majesty and clothed in a magnificent robe. As a large choir stood in the background, she began to sing a song of love to God that was indescribably sweet and went straight to the heart, filling it and carrying it away with love. It sounded as if a thousand voices and a thousand tones—from the deepest bass to the highest soprano—had all been blended together masterfully, delicately, and harmoniously to form one single voice, notwithstanding the variety of tones and the pitch of the voices ranging from loud to the barely perceptible. Don

[2] The author of these volumes himself wrote her biography and published it in 1886. He presented it to Don Bosco as a gift on his name day. [Editor]

Bosco was so enchanted by this most melodious singing that he thought he was out of his senses, and he was no longer able to tell or ask his mother anything. When Mamma Margaret had finished singing, she turned to him and said: "I'll be waiting for you. The two of us must always be together." After speaking these words, she vanished.

After his mother's death, Father Rua told us that Don Bosco began to see dimly the need of a congregation of nuns to look after the clothing and linen of such a large family, but he decided to defer a decision in this regard until Divine Providence should clearly manifest its will. In the meantime, however—perhaps to sound out the general feelings on the matter—one evening after night prayers he asked the boys: "Shall we bring in some nuns to look after the washing and mending of clothing, or shall we pay a woman to do this work during the day?" The boys sensed that the presence of nuns would involve some restriction of their freedom, and with one voice they opted for the latter choice.

Thus a woman came to the Oratory, but not for a salary. She was Mrs. Joan Mary Rua, the mother of the cleric. For some years now she had been helping Mamma Margaret with whom she got along famously, and she was well known to all the boys. At Margaret's death she felt it would be only natural for her to take over the position vacated by her devout friend. Therefore, forsaking the comforts of her own home, she came to live at the Oratory which was extremely poor in those days. Although somewhat elderly, she was very robust and endowed with sound common sense and inexhaustible patience. She eagerly practiced self-denial, stood ready to perform any task, and was very fervent and devout; she also had a very delicate conscience, although untroubled by scruples. All the boys were very fond of her, for she was as good as an angel. She was particularly solicitous for the young artisans, because they were poorer and less educated than the rest, as Joseph Reano has testified. In caring for the linen she was assisted by Mamma Margaret's sister, Marianne, by the widow Lucy Cagliero, and—for five or six years—by Father Bellìa's mother who came to the Oratory every day to sew. A young lady from the De Maistre household also insisted on joining this group, and she became the fifth

member engaged in this work of charity, until the Lord called her to the religious life.

After the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Don Bosco started getting ready for Christmas by addressing a petition to the Holy Father through Francis Cardinal Gaude:

[No date]

Most Holy Father:

On December 16, 1852, the Reverend John Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, obtained the faculty for three years to administer Holy Communion to the boys attending the Christmas Midnight Mass in the above-mentioned Oratory. This faculty has now expired, and the undersigned therefore humbly seeks a renewal.

For which grace, etc. . . .

[Rev. John Bosco]

The cardinal forwarded the rescript granting this request to Don Bosco with the following note:

Rome, December 20, 1856

Very Reverend Father:

I did not delay a moment, although I did not have a chance to see His Holiness and thus had to go through the usual channels, I nevertheless received the new rescript quickly.[3] May God grant that you receive it in time. The total cost is about four lire. Please pay it to my father at Cambiano, or else celebrate four Masses for my intention. I am in a hurry.

Your affectionate friend,

Francis Cardinal Gaude

After passing a devout Christmas, Don Bosco closed the year by writing to Duchess Laval Montmorency at Villastellone:

Turin, December 31, 1856

My dear Duchess:

The recent sorrowful events at the Oratory have kept me from answering the charming and cordial letter which in your goodness you gra-

[3] This Latin rescript has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

ciously sent me on the occasion of my dear mother's death. I now wish to thank you for the Christian sentiments expressed therein and for all you did in connection with Marchioness Fassati's handiwork which we converted into a *marengo*[4] and, as usual, spent on behalf of our boarders.

This is the last day of the year, and this evening we shall gather together to sing the *Te Deum* to thank God for all His benefits of the past year. On this occasion we also offer up special prayers for our benefactors. Before the Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament we shall all recite an Our Father, Hail Mary, and Hail Holy Queen for you, our distinguished benefactress. We shall fervently invoke God's blessing upon you, so that He may grant you peace of mind and bodily health, help you to do His most holy will in all things, and later—in as distant a time as it may please God, when you will conclude your mortal life in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary—grant you an eternal reward in heaven.

These are my hopes this day, and I know that these are also your own wishes. Please pray for me, too, that I may do God's holy will, now and in the coming year as well as throughout the time which the Lord, in His mercy, may permit me to remain in this world.

I am glad to tell you that all our boys are in good health. Not one of them—they number one hundred and fifty—has complained even of a slight headache during the last three months. My aunt and brother are feeling better.

In deep esteem and gratitude, I beg you to call upon me for anything I may be able to do for you in the Lord.

Your grateful servant,

Rev. John Bosco

Holy Virgin, St. Sylvester, pray for us. Under your protection may our times be peaceful.

This letter alludes to a very serious illness of his brother Joseph, of which we shall speak later. Adding to his distress, too, was the illness and death of the cleric John Massaglia. In the fall of 1855, after successfully completing his course in rhetoric, this boy had donned the cassock and stayed on at the Oratory. Don Bosco had great hopes for him because of his success in his studies and because of his work at the Oratory. He was in good health, but one

[4] The *marengo* was a gold coin used in Italy up to the 19th century and approximately equivalent to the contemporary American dollar. [Editor]

day he caught a very bad cold. His parents took him home to take better care of him, but he there died a saintly death. Dominic Savio, although resigned to the Divine will, wept for several days at his death. According to the sworn testimony of Peter Enria, Don Bosco also predicted Massaglia's death while narrating a dream.

CHAPTER 46

Loyalty to the Pope

IN Don Bosco's opinion, no one in the whole world was greater and worthier of respect and veneration than the Pope, St. Peter's successor. For him the Vicar of Christ was second only to Christ in the Blessed Sacrament! He waxed enthusiastic in talking to his boys about him: "We must love the popes," he used to say, "regardless of when or where they lived. Their counsels and even their wishes must be a command for us."

Often Don Bosco would also remark: "My sons, regard as enemies of our Faith those who belittle the Pope's authority or who try to minimize the obedience and respect due to his teachings and directives." If difficulties beset the Pope, he would exhort his pupils to pray and receive Holy Communion. We here quote briefly from the funeral oration of Bishop Emilian Manacorda [of Fossano] which he delivered at Don Bosco's solemn requiem Mass of Trigesima. The bishop commented:

> Don Bosco, the founder of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, was the living model of a humble man. Everything about him—thoughts, words, inclinations, undertakings—evinced humility, but this humility would turn into elation at the mere utterance of the words "Roman Pontiff." Then, in a sense, he would catch fire, become alive, and wax enthusiastic. No one who came in contact with him ever heard him say anything that could reflect a less than perfect obedience and childlike docility to the Pope.

In Don Bosco's opinion, the honor paid to the popes could never be overdone. On one occasion, he remarked to the cleric [Michael] Rua that he would be very happy if the feasts of sainted popes—then semi-double—were raised to the rank of double, and

he wanted the feast of St. Peter to be solemnized every year at the Oratory.

Proof of his overflowing zeal for the Pope was the fact that the Vicar of Christ was his main preoccupation throughout his life—a result of his vast knowledge of church history, to which he gave the greatest importance, as we have already seen.[1] He began to study church history in 1834 while still a cleric, and from 1851 to 1861 Father [John] Turchi saw him constantly reading authoritative works—both old and new—on the subject. Above all, he never tired of poring over his favorite work—that of the Bollandists. He read their lives of the saints with rapt attention so that he might be imbued with their spirit. As soon as he could afford it—sometime before 1860—he enriched the Oratory library with these volumes to have them handy for consultation. On the whole, the saints' heroic accomplishments are also the most authoritative corroboration of the dogma of papal authority and show it in its full light. This authority Don Bosco fully acknowledged.

Whenever the works—unabridged or summarized—of Henrion, Rohrbacher, Audisio, Schmid, or other authors were read aloud at meals, he often lamented that many of these works were "national" church histories, or that they treated at length of the Church at large, of the councils, and of the lives of the saints, but dwelt too briefly on the supreme pontiffs who, to his great regret, nearly always seemed to play a secondary—and one might even say—accessory role. Don Bosco's contention was that the popes were the pivots around which a church history should revolve, and that a history of the Church, to be such, had to be a history of the popes. "Are not the popes the leaders, the princes, the supreme shepherds?" he argued. "In national histories a king always plays the leading part. Must not we say, therefore, that honor, glory, and obedience are due to the Pope as the center of unity, without which the Church would no longer be the Church? It is a serious mistake to write a history of the Church and record long periods of history with no mention of her ruler."

Therefore, as early as 1849 he had begun to compile a universal history of the Catholic Church along these lines in order to refute

[1] *See* Vol. I, pp. 330f; Vol. II, pp. 27, 68, 160, 257ff; Vol. III, pp. 215–21. [Editor]

the slanderous statements of heretics and to correct the methods and errors of some Catholic authors. His work described the constant influence that the Roman pontiffs exerted on the Church, their intervention in world events of the greatest importance, and the acknowledgment of their supreme jurisdiction. He also proposed to rectify the inaccuracies, omissions, and misinterpretations that unfortunately were all too common even in the most famous works. Don Bosco's [unpublished] work in four volumes covered up to the beginning of the nineteenth century. As soon as he filled a composition book, he passed it on to the cleric James Bellìa to copy it in a clear hand. This cleric declared himself ready to swear upon oath that he had transcribed Don Bosco's entire work. Then, in 1903, writing to Father Michael Rua, he added: "Several of our older priests doubt that Don Bosco compiled such a work because they have no idea how much he labored over it outside the Oratory, while traveling or giving missions in villages and towns."

Don Bosco was in no hurry to publish his history of the Church because he wanted it to be as perfect as possible. To this end he always carried along his manuscripts and spent every free moment in revising, annotating, and correcting them. However, this habit cost him the loss of the fruit of his labors.

In 1862, while touring villages with his pupils, he forgot part of his manuscript at the rectory where he had spent the night, and he did not realize it until they were six miles away. Father Angelo Savio went back and was lucky enough to find it. The same was not true in 1870 when Don Bosco, hurrying out of a train, left behind the last volume and did not become aware of it until some days later, when all efforts to trace it proved fruitless. Thus, a work which was almost completed remained unfinished because Don Bosco's incessant tasks kept him from rewriting the lost volume.

There is no doubt that this loss wiped out years of toil and pained him considerably, but he patiently resigned himself and began to tell his clerics of his wish that some of them might one day write a history of the Church and thus attain the goal he had cherished for himself. His suggested guidelines were a simple style that would be easily comprehended by the average reader and a profound veneration for the Apostolic See. He entrusted this task particularly to Father John Bonetti. The latter, together with

Father Francis Cerruti, often heard Don Bosco exclaim: "I am really very put out at the little attention some writers pay to the Pope. Keep in mind that we must stand closely allied to him. Only when we are with the Pope and for the Pope are we safe." He also told them repeatedly: "It grieves me to see church historians write about so many things, but so scantily and poorly about the popes. The popes should shine in all their splendor for the whole world to see. Some historians give as a reason that hardly anything at all is known about the first popes, but this isn't true! Let these people read the Bollandists and other very important works that they know only by title; then they will see. . . . What's lacking is the will to work! No effort should be spared when the Church and the Pope are at stake!"

Don Bosco practiced what he preached by starting the publication of the lives of the popes of the first three centuries, a work on which he had labored since 1854. He wanted people to become acquainted with the more ancient popes, and therefore he spent a great deal of time researching precious information on each of them in public and private libraries. His findings later appeared in various issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. The compilation of these booklets is also something to marvel at. Often—especially when it was almost press time—he would go with one of his clerics to the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and there in the library, without consulting his notes or other references, he would dictate to him. For lack of time, the manuscript went straight to the printer without further polishing. Yet many scholarly people held these pamphlets in great esteem—as, for example, Msgr. [Louis] Tripepi, the domestic prelate of Pius IX, now a cardinal, who, in his own biography of St. Pius I, several times quoted the issue of *Letture Cattoliche* on the same subject and referred to Don Bosco as "a man both learned and pious."

The little time it took Don Bosco to compile his booklets left no doubts about his knowledge. Sometimes he needed to consult books or to quote passages, but could not absent himself from the Oratory. In such cases, drawing on his prodigious memory, he would jot down the title, author, volume, chapter, and page of a book he had read and then send a boy or a cleric to the university library to copy down the passage he needed. Occasionally the first

messenger had barely left when a second and a third one would follow with similar instructions. Father [Amadeus] Peyron was most helpful in locating the books and marking the passages that the boys were to copy.

As regards Don Bosco's dedication to this work, Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi had this to say:

> Several times I wrote the lives of the popes and contemporary martyrs under his dictation, and I recall that he went about his work so reverently as to seem rapt in prayer. He always began with a prayer to the Holy Spirit and ended with one of thanks. This great work of his evinces his zeal for the welfare of his neighbor and the glory of God, and the holy courage with which he tried to set up defenses against heretics. Moreover, his pamphlets confirmed his widespread reputation for holiness. Catholics and non-Catholics alike sought to receive instruction in the Faith from him because of his learning.

Some of Don Bosco's booklets carried completely new material, while others were taken wholly from his unpublished universal history of the Church, to which he added marginal notes and quotations from other authors. Years later, Father James Bellìa, saw some of Don Bosco's manuscripts and recognized his own handwriting. He became convinced that Don Bosco had taken passages from his previous work and published them in order to get the reactions of historians and profit from their criticism.

While compiling these booklets on the popes, Don Bosco used the same material for his Sunday sermons to the Oratory boarders after the second Mass.[2] "The subject matter," Father Paul Albera wrote, "was drawn mainly from the Bollandists. Therefore, it is not surprising that his pupils listened most attentively and with great delight. They never tired of his sermons, even though they lasted nearly an hour and a half. He was unsurpassed in his ability to reconstruct dialogues between martyrs and their persecutors. He always won the boys' respect and love for the Holy See which the popes had enhanced by their exemplary actions and sanctified by their blood. He never ended a sermon without questioning some

[2] On Sundays and holy days they attended two Masses; the second Mass was either sung or marked by the recitation of the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. [Editor]

boy or other in order to draw a moral. For several years the one most called upon was the cleric Roetti. Generally, whenever Don Bosco finished narrating the life of a Pope or of a saint whose life threw light on the papacy, it would appear in an issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* and we had the pleasure of reading what we had heard him say in his sermons."

The January 1857 issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* printed by the Paravia Press, was entitled *Life of St. Peter, the Prince of Apostles, First Pope after Jesus Christ,* by the Rev. John Bosco. Each chapter ended with a striking maxim that effectively aroused love for the Church. The booklet itself closed with an appeal to Protestants to return to the fold of Jesus Christ. Don Bosco followed the same format in subsequent booklets on the popes. As an appendix he included *St. Peter's Journey to Rome* by Father [Francis] Marengo, professor of theology. This little work was a scholarly proof of the historicity of St. Peter's residence in Rome.

We shall now quote Don Bosco's Preface to the *Life of St. Peter*:

Many times I have thought of ways and means to allay the aversion and hatred which people in these unhappy times display toward the popes and their authority. I concluded that if I could but present factually the lives of those whom Our Lord chose as supreme shepherds of His flock and His vicars on earth, fair-minded people could not be hostile to those who did so much for the temporal and spiritual welfare of mankind. The popes led holy and work-filled lives that made them revered by all good people throughout the centuries, and sometimes they even shed their blood in witness of their Faith and their Divine mandate in order to promote God's glory and the welfare of their fellow human beings.

With this thought in mind, I decided to undertake the narration of the accomplishments of the supreme pontiffs from the time of Our Lord to our own day. Starting from the first Pope, St. Peter, appointed by Jesus Christ Himself, we shall go on to his successors, making only such comments as the narrative seems to require.

St. Peter is the Apostle whom the Savior Himself called "blessed" and who received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, with authority so to bind and loose that, as a rule, his verdicts would precede those of God. He is the Apostle whom Jesus commanded to keep his brothers steadfast in the Faith, ordering him to give to his sheep—the Church shepherds —and to his lambs—the faithful—the pasture they needed for their

spiritual and eternal welfare. He is, in short, the Apostle whom Jesus Christ delegated to govern the Church, and who in fact did govern her after Our Savior's glorious ascension into heaven.

According to Our Lord's words, Peter's authority was to remain visible to mankind until the end of the world, and since St. Peter was mortal, it followed that he had to transmit that same Christ-given authority to his successors, the supreme pontiffs, whose lives we shall also present.

Just as a son should naturally love to hear of his father's glorious deeds, so we too, spiritual sons of St. Peter and of his successors, should delight in reading of the glorious deeds of those peerless men who for eighteen centuries have governed the Church of Jesus Christ.

I wish to make it clear from the very outset that I am writing for ordinary people, and that, therefore, disregarding the niceties of style and any dubious or superfluous arguments, I shall strive for simplicity both in style and subject matter, without, however, compromising historical truth, theology, and proper grammar. As for my sources, I can assure my readers that every word or fact has been checked, when possible, with sources contemporary or quasi-contemporary to the events herein described. Rather than insert a bibliography of all authors consulted, I shall cite the more important ones in the course of my narration, as the need will arise.

I have also tried to edit the material in such a way that each booklet is a unit by itself independent of the others. Furthermore, for the sake of those who may want to keep the issues on the popes apart from the others, we shall mark them progressively with a letter of the alphabet.

On my part I agree to spare no effort to ensure the authenticity of what I am about to write; on the other hand, however, I cannot help appealing to the clergy and to all influential people to come to my assistance in spreading these booklets, especially where they can do the most good.

The present times are disastrous for our holy Faith. Our enemies are spending huge sums of money, undertaking long journeys, and working hard to spread immoral and irreligious publications. Should we not at least match the efforts of those who so eagerly sacrifice themselves to lead souls to perdition?

May our merciful God kindle a fervent desire for the welfare of souls in every heart and keep us steadfast in the Faith of Peter, which is the Faith of Jesus Christ, and so keep us on the road which will certainly lead us to heaven. Amen.

On February 1, *L'Armonia* printed the following review of this booklet:

We believe that no books are more timely or necessary nowadays than those on the authority of the Supreme Pontiff. The enemies of the Catholic Church everywhere are united in attacking and tearing down the papacy. Since they spare no effort in spreading their subversive teachings among the people, an antidote must be found. For this reason Father John Bosco, an indefatigable man of God, conceived the timely idea of publishing popular lives of the popes to counteract the ill effects of evil publications. He appropriately began with the *Life of St. Peter the Apostle* in the No. 11 issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* now in its fourth year of publication. This 180-page booklet, in addition to its twenty-nine chapters on the Prince of Apostles, also has an appendix on St. Peter's journey to Rome. It is a compendium of all that the Fathers of the Church and Catholic and non-Catholic authors have said about this all-important topic. It would be sheer nonsense today to doubt the fact that St. Peter *did come to Rome.* The author has wisely written the booklet in such a way that subsequent issues may be read independently of it and of each other for the benefit of those who do not subscribe to *Letture Cattoliche.*

Don Bosco's work needs no recommendation. Rather, we appeal to wealthy good Catholics to order these booklets in bulk for free distribution to offset or prevent the evil effects of venomous Protestant books and of, worse still, so-called Catholic publications.

CHAPTER 47

Zeal for Orthodoxy

DON Bosco also authored the February issue of *Letture Cattoliche*. The topic of this issue requires a little background information.

Don Bosco untiringly upheld orthodoxy not only through the press, but even more often through debates with the Waldensians who never tired of challenging him. Seemingly, their strategy was to have some ordinary member open up a discussion with him, and then to send in one of their ministers to take over. At about this time [in early 1857] some Waldensians called on Don Bosco to discuss religion. By this they meant loudly stating their position and then switching from one topic to another without ever reaching one logical conclusion. When bested on some point, they would seek a way out by saying: "We can't rebut your objection because we are not competent enough, but our minister, a man of vast erudition, could easily refute you."

"Tell him to come, then," Don Bosco would reply. "If he can rebut my arguments about the truth of the Catholic Faith and convincingly vindicate the errors of the reformers, he is indeed a learned man. But I doubt that he will come."

"If it weren't for fear that he might be insulted, we'd be sure of it."

"Don't worry about that! Tell him he has nothing to fear. I'll be delighted to meet him. Assure him that I'll receive him cordially. Though I may not accept his arguments, I shall treat him with all respect."

After making—and breaking—several appointments, the Waldensian minister eventually showed up with two friends and was

ushered into Don Bosco's room. Following a few pleasantries, the minister started: "Dear Father, some members of our church have called on you several times and discussed matters that, quite frankly, were beyond their competence. They told me that you wished to discuss these same matters with their minister, so here I am."

Don Bosco invited them to take a seat and start the discussion. The topic was "purgatory." Courtesy marked the exchange of views, and in the end truth seemed to have made some headway into the minds of the dissenters.

The Waldensians, however, were not the only sect Don Bosco had to contend with. There was another which unobtrusively tried to entice Catholics into its ranks. Its founder was Andrzej Towianski [the major figure of Polish messianism] who, after first studying magnetism and the occult sciences under some rabbis, declared himself to be a heaven-sent prophet and exercised an almost magical spell over all who came into contact with him. He denied the creation of the world, Divine grace, original sin, free will, the merits of good works, the divinity of Jesus Christ, the sacraments, and the priesthood; he taught heresies such as metempsychosis or the passing of the soul at death into another body, human or animal. In order to entice simple souls who would have been repelled by such irreligious and immoral teachings, he made them palatable by cloaking them with a popular, catchy mysticism that was generously interspersed with praises for Jesus Christ.

Towianski came to Turin in 1840 and managed to win over a number of well-educated, devout people. The Holy See condemned his teachings in 1850, and the ecclesiastical tribunal of the Turin archdiocese instituted a process against him in 1854, reproving his errors. Several of his deluded disciples recanted, but others persisted in their obstinacy and occasionally visited him in Switzerland where he had taken up residence.

Several priests and lay people in Turin had embraced Towianski's errors, which included the denial of the existence of purgatory. Concerned at this turn of events, Don Bosco sought to remedy such scandal and halt the spread of this sect by refuting its tenets. We learned of this zealous enterprise of his through Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, who in turn heard of it from Father Maurice Arpino,

pastor of SS. Peter and Paul Church. It was carried out so discreetly as to go unnoticed. After gathering information on the growth of the sect, Don Bosco called upon several of its more influential members, hoping to correct their beliefs. Then, following Father Arpino's advice, he used the press to strengthen the Faith of those who doubted the existence of purgatory—the dogma openly attacked at this time. Don Bosco recorded whatever he had said to the Waldensian ministers on this same subject, and thus with one little booklet—the February issue of *Letture Cattoliche*—he was able to rebut the objections of both sects. It was entitled *Two Debates on Purgatory between Two Protestant Ministers and a Catholic Priest* by the Reverend John Bosco. Also included was an appendix on the liturgy. Printed by the Paravia Press, this issue completed the fourth year of publication of *Letture Cattoliche*. Its Preface read as follows:

In publishing these two debates we must ask our readers not to seek clues as to the location where the debates were held or the identity of the debaters. One reason, among others, for keeping their names secret is that they themselves requested it, and we promised to oblige. As for the rest, the contents of this booklet are true to fact, although in presenting them we thought it best: first, to expunge crude, unseemly, and possibly offensive expressions concerning sacred things; second, to modify some of our adversaries' remarks to bring them into conformity with what other Protestants have written on the same topic, without, however, affecting their substance. As the discussions were lengthy and the same things were often rehashed, we saw fit to leave out all repetitious statements.

The arguments advanced here perhaps do not do full justice to the existence of purgatory, but we trust that they will at least clearly present and soundly prove Catholic doctrine on this point.

We realize that some topics may be beyond our readers' comprehension, but we have tried to make up for this by the clarity and simplicity with which, hopefully, we have rebutted our opponents' objections. Everyone should know what the enemies of our Faith say against purgatory and how weak are the objections of even the most learned Protestants.

We beg our readers to inform themselves by reading this booklet and to unite their prayers to our own that our merciful God will give us the

strength and grace to live in such a way that we will be spared the great sufferings of purgatory and go at once to enjoy the beatific vision of heaven.

A circular accompanied this issue.[1]

[1] *See* Appendix 8. [Editor]

CHAPTER 48

Apostolate of the Press

BEFORE embarking on the events of 1857, we must first take note of the great amount of good Don Bosco accomplished in 1856 through the publication of some leaflets and books that we have not previously mentioned. Among these were reprints by the Paravia Press of *An Easy Way To Learn Bible History* (6,000 copies), a second edition of his *Life of St. Pancratius, Martyr* (3,000 copies), and, in July, the leaflet *Advice to Catholic Girls* (4,000 copies). Don Bosco usually gave this leaflet out when preaching missions in rural areas or retreats at institutions. Probably it is the very one incorporated into *The Christian's Vademecum* in 1858. In 1856 Don Bosco also published a new work, *The Key to Heaven for the Practicing Catholic.* Its first printing of six thousand copies carried the following Introduction:

This booklet is entitled *The Key to Heaven* because any Catholic who knows, believes, and practices what is suggested herein may be sure of his eternal salvation. It contains a summary of Catholic truths as well as a selection of sacred hymns and an outline of the most essential practices of piety.

We have drawn everything from the most reliable authors and have added and adapted only when necessary or opportune.

Let us together beg our merciful God to lead mankind to the knowledge of the Catholic Faith and the one and only true Church, outside of which there is no salvation.

We who were fortunate enough to have been born within the true Church should be most anxious to learn, believe, and practice what this loving mother of ours commands in God's name. If we do so, many others will follow our example, abandon their evil ways, and continue on the path to eternal salvation, and great will be our recompense in heaven!

We have cited this Introduction to show how Don Bosco, on this and other occasions, out of humility—rare in other authors—often credited his work to others, frankly admitting having drawn or practically lifted entire pages from their writings. This admission was occasionally justified, but at other times it was exaggerated and often inadmissible, because even when he borrowed other people's ideas he assimilated them and gave them a new form.

The Key to Heaven was patterned after the second edition of *The Companion of Youth,*[1] but since it was intended for adults, it omitted material for young people, a few historical notes, and some prayers. Patiently and carefully Don Bosco also abridged various prayers. In the first part, he followed the order of the catechism and presented a summary of what every Christian ought to know, believe, and practice, and he also splendidly portrayed what a true Christian should be. His reflections on eternal truths are most suitable for meditation. From the second and third parts he eliminated the Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows, the Devotions to the Guardian Angel, the Vespers of the Dead, and the parts to be sung at Masses whether of the living or of the dead. In their place he substituted a prayer for preserving the gift of Faith and many short indulgenced prayers. However, he did not eliminate the Sunday Vespers or those of the Blessed Virgin. He also included an Appendix, *The Catholic Religion: Some Basic Points,*[2] in the expanded version he had prepared for the forthcoming third edition of *The Companion of Youth.* This Appendix was identical to the version we have now in *The Companion of Youth. The Key to Heaven* (a 496-page book in a popular, fairly large type) was a great success, with over forty reprints totaling about eight hundred thousand copies.

Don Bosco also had the De Agostini Press print the 1857 almanac *Il Galantuomo,* a New Year's gift to subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche.* It described the wholesome influence of religion on the French army and navy during the Crimean War, whose outcome Napoleon III had entrusted to the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It brought out that chaplains had again been assigned to regiments, ships, and field hospitals and had distinguished themselves by their priestly heroism. There were also other news items

[1] *See* Vol. III, pp. 7–18. [Editor]
[2] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 155f. [Editor]

on Empress Eugenie's gift of Our Lady's miraculous medal to the generals and how this gift saved General Canrobert's life in battle. In addition, it told of dying soldiers calling for the chaplain to reconcile them with God, of the superlative work of the Sisters of Charity, and of the vivid Faith, Christian sentiments, and courage of the French soldiers. The almanac also devoted a page to the Sardinian army, reporting that most of the soldiers received the sacraments and wore Our Lady's medal before leaving for the Crimea. Furthermore, it recalled their heroic deeds and the glorious deaths of General Ansaldi, General [Alexandro] La Marmora, General Montevecchi, and Captain San Marzano. However, the almanac expressed regret that no genuine reports had as yet been released on "particularly enlightening episodes which would better enhance the reputation of the House of Savoy, which we proudly serve, and which would also reveal the deeply religious sentiments of officers and soldiers. As they fell in battle, they exclaimed: 'If we must die, let it be for king and country, and let us die in the Faith of our birth and upbringing, spiritually comforted by its sacraments and protected by the Most Holy Virgin in whom the Piedmontese soldiers have such great trust.' "

As a matter of fact, the government had arranged to have six Vincentian priests and seventy Sisters of Charity accompany the troops to the Crimea. One priest and ten sisters died of cholera while heroically nursing the wounded and sick.

Another interesting item in the almanac was a long article on popular superstitions. It told how a pastor, whiling away a winter's evening in a stable with some peasants, was asked about certain beliefs, myths, and notions allegedly supported by facts which the peasants proceeded to narrate. Among them was the unfailing healing power of certain prayers, spilling salt on the table, the owl's hoot, the number 13 and Friday, divining the future by observing the first person one meets on leaving the house on New Year's Day, dreams about lottery numbers, witches foretelling the future, will-o'-the-wisps being souls from purgatory pursuing people, and so on. The good pastor, by common sense arguments, witty remarks, good-natured chidings, and appeals to the catechism, disproved and brought out the evil of such superstitious beliefs and showed that they are contrary to Divine laws.

This article was an eye-opener to the common people, although in Italy—thanks to the efforts of the clergy—there was less superstition than in other countries. *Il Galantuomo* closed with a Piedmontese poem, *Master Thomas the Pastrycook.*

However, Don Bosco was determined to give his young artisans —day students and boarders—another gift besides *Il Galantuomo,* and so in November he bought a thousand copies of *The Artisans' Almanac* published by the De Agostini Press.

That same month he commissioned Joseph Cattaneo to print the fifteen mysteries of the rosary on a double sheet. Don Bosco had carefully weighed the wording of each mystery. One day, while going over this work at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, as he reached the third joyful mystery, "Let us contemplate how the Blessed Virgin Mary . . ." he paused and then, turning to Father Felix Golzio, queried, "gave birth to . . . ?"

"That's acceptable," the priest replied. Don Bosco mulled over it, then came up with, "was born of the Virgin Mary." Again he pondered it and told the young cleric who was with him: "Write: Let us contemplate the birth of Jesus in the town of Bethlehem."

Another task which cost him much time and effort was the revised and enlarged edition of *The Companion of Youth.* To meet the needs that the growth of the Oratory demanded, he added a novena and act of consecration to Mary Immaculate, a short reading on purity as the most beautiful virtue, St. Aloysius' prayer of consecration to the Blessed Virgin, more detailed instructions on confession and Communion, the formula for spiritual Communion, a boy's choice of his vocation and the means to discover it, reflections on fidelity to one's vocation, a prayer to the Blessed Virgin for light on one's vocation, practices in honor of St. Francis de Sales—daily, monthly, and during the novena—the Office of the Dead and the Heroic Act of Charity for the Souls in Purgatory, the way to gain many indulgences, and, finally, the words to be sung at the blessing of the church bells.

Since he intended to start the St. Joseph Sodality for artisans, he also printed the Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows and Seven Joys of St. Joseph and a prayer to this saint for the virtue of purity. Later, in 1868, Don Bosco definitively edited this prayer book, adding the novena in honor of Mary, Help of Christians, and a selection of

sacred hymns in honor of Jesus, Mary, and the patron saints of the Oratory. Here and there he also inserted a brief history of certain devotions.

The good this prayer book has done is incalculable. No one could ever count the boys it led to the Oratory, the self-reformations it brought about, the priestly and religious vocations it fostered, strengthened, and made unshakable, and the many boys it guided along the path of Christian perfection.

But this is no surprise, for every page of *The Companion of Youth* breathes such charity, sweetness, and persuasiveness that the reader cannot help loving it. We would almost say that this prayer book has the function of the Holy Gospel itself. Father Louis Albera, a Vincentian and the superior [of a house of his order] at Finale, saw to it that every year Don Bosco's meditations for each day of the week were read aloud to the boys of the boarding school at Scarnafigi [Cuneo]. He used to exclaim: "How beautiful and fruitful these meditations are! Why didn't Don Bosco write more? What a blessing it would be if there were seventy-seven instead of only seven!"

CHAPTER 49

Plans for a Lottery

SHORTLY before Christmas, Don Bosco, who was planning to go to Genoa, sent his greetings to that city's scholarly and gentle shepherd, Archbishop [Andrew] Charvaz, and received the following acknowledgment:

Genoa, January 1, 1857

Dear Don Bosco:

My sincere thanks for your *Storia d'Italia* which you so kindly sent me. I haven't the slightest doubt that it will achieve your aim and not disappoint your devoted readers. I shall have it examined and introduced in my seminaries.

As soon as possible I shall recommend your excellent *Letture Cattoliche.* I have high regard for this publication's usefulness and importance.

Many thanks indeed for your welcome Christmas greetings. I heartily reciprocate them and include a prayer that God will bless you abundantly and keep you in good health for His glory and the good of the Church. I pray, too, that He will continue to bless your lively and holy zeal to educate and sanctify youth.

Please accept my good wishes, esteem, and veneration.

Your humble and grateful servant,
✠ Andrew, *Archbishop of Genoa*

Don Bosco had several important reasons for his trip to Liguria. Father Francis Montebruno had founded an institution in Genoa for young artisans, using the top floor of an apartment building in Via Canneto Lungo to shelter some forty homeless waifs. Similarity of goals, attitudes, and charitable undertakings had drawn Don Bosco and Father Montebruno together. Don Bosco admired his

brother-priest and often spoke about him to the Oratory boys. The two men of God had corresponded and agreed to help each other; they planned to eventually merge their two institutions and ensure that the good work they had undertaken would continue after their deaths.

Another reason for Don Bosco's trip was to promote *Letture Cattoliche* in that area and perhaps also to distribute lottery tickets, since he had already made the necessary application to the civil authorities for a lottery that was designed on a more ambitious scale than the previous ones.[1] His primary aim was to offer to a greater number of people an excellent opportunity to perform a work of charity, reap a richer heavenly reward, and promote God's greater glory. Secondly, he hoped to ease the burden of his regular benefactors and enable them to support numerous other charities in Turin and Piedmont. Lastly, he hoped to raise funds in order to wipe out his building debts, despite the opposition of the infernal enemy who stood to lose so much as a result of the spread of charitable undertakings and the increase of acts of love toward God and neighbor.

On January 4 [1857], Don Bosco conferred with several prominent laymen for the purpose of forming a committee to organize and run the lottery. Then, on January 8, he wrote to Count Pio Galleani Agliano: "Though you were not able to join us at Count Cays' last Sunday, I am not counting you out as a sponsor of our lottery. Let me just say that it is a charity affair. I know you need no other explanation. I shall call on you at five in the evening some day soon. May the Lord bless you and your family. Believe me to be, *in nomine Domini,* ever gratefully yours."

Count Agliano gladly accepted Don Bosco's invitation. Other gentlemen also graciously obliged and a committee was formed, composed of the following members:

Count Charles Cays of Giletta, *Chairman*
Baron Hyacinth Bianco of Barbania, *Vice-Chairman*
Chevalier Lawrence Galleani Agliano, *Secretary*
Marquis Ludwig Scarampi of Pruney, *Director of the Lottery*
Senator Joseph Cotta, *Treasurer*

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 225ff. [Editor]

Attorney Cajetan Bellingeri
Rev. John Bosco, *Director of the Oratories*
Count Aleramo Bosco of Ruffino
Paul Cerruti
Count Charles De Maistre
Chevalier Joseph Duprè, *Alderman*
Marquis Dominic Fassati
Count Pio Galleani Agliano
Chevalier Michael Galleani Agliano
Chevalier Mark Gonella, *Director of the Lottery*
Charles Grosso, *Director of the Lottery*
Achilles Prever
Count Alexander Provana of Collegno
Chevalier Joseph Roasenda of Roasenda
Count Francis Viancino of Viancino

In the midst of these undertakings, Don Bosco sent this letter to Chevalier Xavier Provana of Collegno:

Valdocco, January 9, 1857

My dear friend in the Lord:

Please forgive my belated reply. Several family worries have interfered with my duties and delayed my reply.

Send me the boy you mentioned. If he is out of work, he can benefit from schooling. If he is in earnest about working, I think I can arrange matters to agree with the terms spelled out in your letter.

May God's blessings be bountiful on you, your excellent father, and your whole family. I remain, *in nomine Domini,*

Your most grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

What were the family worries that had interfered with Don Bosco's routine? Undoubtedly, they must have been connected with the serious illness of his brother Joseph.

We have already mentioned how much Don Bosco loved Joseph, a sincere, warm-hearted, and lovable man. At first sight he seemed stern, almost gruff, but that was because he tried to appear so. A nod or word immediately elicited a courteous and friendly reply.

He used to come to the Oratory occasionally and stay for several days. The older boys—among them Charles Tomatis—would visit him and spend some time in friendly conversation with him. The kind Joseph always warmly welcomed them and so entertained them that they were always reluctant to leave. He possessed many of Don Bosco's traits, especially his friendliness and familiarity.

The house was very saddened, therefore, when Joseph came down with pneumonia on a visit to the Oratory toward the end of 1856. He took to bed in a room opening onto the balcony of the second floor of the boarders' building, but his condition deteriorated day by day. Dr. Musso looked after him, but to no avail. The patient grew steadily worse, and his good wife had to be summoned from Castelnuovo so that she might see him for the last time.

However, Don Bosco trusted in God, and he was convinced that his brother would survive and live on to look after his very young children. Often during the day, and every evening before retiring, he spent considerable time at his bedside.

One evening, Don Bosco found several visitors there: [Joseph] Buzzetti, James Rossi, [Joseph] Davitto, [Joseph] Reano, and the patient's wife. The poor lady had been weeping all day, afraid to lose her husband. Don Bosco went over to his brother, felt his pulse and forehead, and asked him about his condition. Joseph was feeling worse and could hardly reply.

Don Bosco stayed a considerable time. It seemed as if he could not leave his brother's bedside that night. He talked to him so affectionately and tenderly that all present were moved to tears. At last he said: "Listen, my dear Giuseppino! We are going to pester Our Lady so much that She will have to make you well. How about that? We'll start right now. As we pray, you need only follow with your mind, so you won't get tired." When the prayer was over, Don Bosco again felt his brother's forehead; he told him to be tranquil and trust in the Blessed Virgin, and then he retired. The following day Joseph was much better, and he continued to improve so that in a few days he was able to get up. After a successful convalescence, he went back to Becchi in perfect health. Those who had nursed him during his illness saw in his recovery a signal grace of Our Lady to Don Bosco.

As soon as Joseph was out of danger, Don Bosco left for Genoa

to honor an invitation he had received. Mrs. Rosina Ferrerati gave us an account of this trip:

> Toward the end of 1856 or at the beginning of January, 1857, I went to Genoa by train and found myself in the same coach with Father John Bosco. He was telling his fellow passengers about the dangers boys might encounter roaming the streets, especially on weekends, and how at the moment he was particularly worried about those who lived near the Protestant church in Turin. In explaining his difficulties and his hopes for saving those boys, he spoke with such charity, simplicity, zeal, and selflessness that all were greatly edified. When we arrived at Genoa and he took leave of us, they all remarked: "That priest is filled with love for God. If he isn't a saint, we don't believe there are any."

In Genoa Don Bosco was a guest of Marquis Anthony Brignole-Sale. After first paying his respects to the archbishop, Don Bosco met and talked at great length with Father Montebruno about ways and means to pool their material interests, overcome provincialisms, allay the possible apprehensions of benefactors, and obtain greater spiritual advantages from their combined efforts. On that occasion they came to no concrete agreement, mainly because one of the two institutes would have to yield its autonomy, at least partially. The plan was not abandoned, however, and for some years a satisfactory settlement seemed likely. However, the merger of these two institutions was not in the plans of Divine Providence.

Don Bosco also called on Father Angelo Fulle, the procurator of the diocesan seminary. Together with Father Bartholomew Mariconi, he undertook the task of soliciting further subscriptions to *Letture Cattoliche*. In addition, Don Bosco became friends with the prior of St. Sabina, Father Joseph Frassinetti, a saintly and learned moralist whom he asked to write for *Letture Cattoliche,* with Mr. Joseph Canale, a café owner who was active in various charities, and with his brother, Father John Baptist Canale, a highly respected canon of the collegiate church of Our Lady of the Vineyards. Don Bosco also conversed with Canon Melchior Fantini, whom he had already met some time previously at Chieri, with Father Jerome Campanella, pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and with other members of the clergy, the aristocracy, and the middle class, arousing the admiration of all by his manner and

virtues. Nor did he forget Count Rocco Bianchi and the Genoese chapters of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Father Pirotti, a Vincentian, esteemed Don Bosco very highly. Meeting him by chance on the street and eager to talk to him privately, he invited him to visit their foreign missions seminary at Fassalo which Marquis Brignole-Sale had built near the Vincentian church and rectory and had endowed with sufficient revenue to maintain the professors and twenty-four seminarians. Since Don Bosco had a great interest in anything that concerned the missions, he willingly promised to do so and set a date. Eager to meet him, Father Pirotti went to the doorkeeper's lodge several times that morning to inquire if Don Bosco had arrived or was on his way. However, when the lunch bell rang at noon, he had to go to the dining room. Just about that time Don Bosco arrived. He had been detained by many matters and perhaps had also underestimated the distance between Genoa and Fassolo, which lay on the far western outskirts of the city. When he inquired about Father Pirotti, he was told that the priest was at lunch. Don Bosco asked if he could see him.

"Sorry, but it's against the rules."

"Well, how about getting the superior's permission? Please do me this favor. Father Pirotti himself asked me to come."

"Sorry, but you'll have to wait."

"I can't, because I have many appointments in town. At least tell him I'm here. I'm Don Bosco."

The doorkeeper was adamant, either out of stubbornness or indolence or perhaps because Don Bosco's humble appearance did not sufficiently impress him. Reluctantly, Don Bosco went away. After lunch, Father Pirotti ran again to the doorkeeper's lodge and was very upset to hear that Don Bosco had indeed come but had not even been announced. He was so disappointed that years later, as superior of a house in Sarzano, he manifested his regret to Father Paul Albera, lamenting the fact that a doorkeeper's rudeness had deprived him of the precious opportunity of talking to Don Bosco. The good servant of God, however, did not forget him, and from time to time he reminisced about him with great affection.

When Don Bosco returned to Turin after an absence of three or four days, there was a surprise awaiting him—a type of surprise

that his benefactors occasionally prepared for him. We learned of it in this letter of his to Count Pio Galleani Agliano:

Turin, January 22, 1857

Dear Count:

The poor boys living at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales wish to thank Count Agliano for giving them more bread. They heartily beseech God to bless ever more the count and his esteemed family.

On behalf of these and my own, I am,

Most gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I have received the coupon for twenty kilograms of bread a month on behalf of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

Meanwhile, again assuming the major burden of the lottery preparations, Don Bosco sent a circular to people whom he knew to be well-disposed toward his work.

Turin, January 22, 1857

Dear Friend:

Several indispensable projects in the [festive] oratories of St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco, of St. Aloysius at Porta Nuova, and of the Guardian Angel at Borgo Vanchiglia, as well as the need to feed some hundred and fifty boys sheltered in this house, compel me again to run a lottery in order to meet these expenses and those incurred during the last few years.

I would appreciate your help in promoting this lottery. Your task would be to canvass friends and acquaintances for objects to serve as prizes and also to sell tickets as soon as the prizes go on display.

This lottery is a charity affair, and I am sure that my invitation will be well received. Unless I hear to the contrary, I shall shortly send you circulars with detailed information on the lottery for distribution.

Our Lord promised a great reward for even the smallest act of charity. With all my heart I beg Him to keep you in good health and to bless you abundantly. Respectfully and gratefully yours,

Rev. John Bosco

No sooner did Don Bosco make his plans known than the laity and clergy in Turin and elsewhere indicated how honored they

would be to volunteer as promoters of this lottery. We would like to mention the many deserving persons who were listed in a special register, but we shall limit ourselves to mentioning the fact that there were over four hundred.

This large number is an indication of the many letters Don Bosco had to write and keep writing in connection with the lottery and a host of other matters. This work, too, was for the greater glory of God, and, naturally, Don Bosco's great love of God was clearly evident in it. In all his letters there is mention of God, of Our Lord, or of our heavenly Mother. We may say of him what St. Bernard said of himself: "Any conversation or book seemed insipid unless seasoned with the holy name of Jesus or Mary." Don Bosco wrote these names with the same love with which he uttered them. He silently invoked them with his heart in order not to attract attention, because ostentation was alien to him.

Don Bosco habitually jotted down some spiritual thought on holy pictures. Sometimes he would give these pictures to visitors; at other times he would mail them with no other enclosure. This year [1857] he purchased five hundred gold-bordered holy pictures of the Immaculate Conception from the Paravia Press. The few words he wrote on them were exhortations to perform some act of charity, acknowledgments or thanks for a donation, or even just mere greetings or good wishes. For example, on the feast of St. Francis de Sales, the principal patron of the Oratory, he sent a holy picture of this saint to a nobleman who was working hard for the lottery. On the back he wrote: "May St. Francis de Sales bring God's blessings this day upon you and all your undertakings. Amen. Fr. John Bosco."

Seasoned by such spiritual thoughts, his letters—simple in form —obtained truly admirable results. For instance, one day he revealed his straitened financial situation to a lady who was not overly generous, and she promptly sent a donation that was certainly in keeping with her income.

Another remarkable trait of Don Bosco was his speedy writing. In the course of several years, the cleric [Celestine] Durando often accompanied Don Bosco to the Convitto Ecclesiastico to help him with his mail. Don Bosco's usual routine was to write a letter and then pass it on to the cleric for folding, inserting into the envelope,

sealing, and addressing. Before the cleric could complete this operation, a second letter would be ready. The cleric worked as fast as he could, but he could never match Don Bosco's speed. Thus it would go for hours on end. When at last it was time to return to the Oratory, Don Bosco would thank God and smilingly exclaim, with no sign of weariness: "That's the way to get things done!" The number of letters he wrote would truly be beyond belief, were it not for the fact that many did witness this marvel.

CHAPTER 50

Plans for a Lottery (Continued)

MEANWHILE, the lottery committee mailed out a circular which we consider sufficiently important to include in these memoirs:

Lottery for the Benefit
of the Festive Oratories of St. Aloysius at
Porta Nuova, St. Francis de Sales at Valdocco,
and the Guardian Angel in Borgo Vanchiglia

Love of God inspires man to perform the finest works of charity, but it also makes him reluctant to appear in the limelight. Yet, when God's glory and the welfare of his neighbor are at stake, that love compels him to suppress his personal inclinations; he will stretch out his hand to beg and even tell of accomplishments in order to invite and encourage charitably-minded persons to help the needy. These considerations have prompted this lottery committee to inform people about the main activities of these oratories and the purpose to which the proceeds of this lottery will be devoted.

It is common knowledge that Father John Bosco has opened three oratories in three important sectors of this city to provide for the moral care of abandoned youth, where on Sundays and holy days a large number of boys who might get into trouble are welcome to gather. Some of these boys live in the city; others come from the provinces. Each Oratory has a chapel, classrooms, and a playground. The boys are drawn to these oratories by prizes and other attractions. After attending church services, they engage in recreational games and drills. At times more than three thousand attend. During the school year, classes are held in penmanship, reading, and vocal and instrumental music. Many zealous laymen generously devote their time and effort to teach the boys catechism, find suitable employment for them, and, in general, look after them with fatherly care.

The Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco also conducts day and evening classes for boys who, because of their poverty or emotional problems, have been refused admittance to public schools.

The evening classes—in reading, penmanship, and vocal and instrumental music—are very well attended. The aim of all this activity is to protect the boys from bad companionship which would certainly endanger their meager wages, morals, and Faith.

A few of the boys from the towns and provinces, mainly orphans, are so poor and abandoned that they cannot possibly learn a trade unless they are given lodging, food, and clothing. To provide for just such a need, a hospice has been established at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales where over a hundred and fifty boys receive everything they need to become good Christians and upright citizens.

This brief description of the work of the oratories clearly shows the worthy purpose to which the lottery proceeds will be devoted—covering the costs of rental fees, the maintenance of buildings, and food for a hundred and fifty boarders.

Furthermore, three years ago, during the fatal cholera epidemic, accommodations had to be set up for forty orphans, several of whom are still living there. In addition, this year a new wing was finally completed after several years of construction. Notwithstanding every possible effort to trim expenses, the cost has risen beyond forty thousand lire. Thanks to the assistance of charitable persons, most of this sum has been paid, but a balance of twelve thousand lire still remains.

We could think of no better way to wipe out this debt and ensure the continuation of such good work than to hold a lottery—the easiest way for all categories of people to help according to their means and generosity.

The required authorization has been obtained from the civil authorities, and a decree of February 2 has sanctioned the lottery, granting all the necessary permissions.

We are firmly convinced that our fellow citizens and other charitable persons in the provinces—who also benefit from the oratories and the hospice—will generously respond to this invitation by sending prizes and purchasing tickets. A select group has graciously agreed to promote this lottery by soliciting prizes and selling tickets according to the rules herewith enclosed.

We have merely outlined the goal of these oratories and their principal means to attain it. We think that the undertaking is meritorious enough in itself to require no further comment. We would only stress that by participating in this charitable work, you will promote both the public

and the private good and be blessed by God and man. God will unfailingly reward you, men will express their gratitude, and a large group of boys will bless you forever for having saved them from the perils of the streets and guided them to the right path, to a useful trade, and to their spiritual salvation.

The regulations for the lottery were enclosed with the above circular.[1] Both the appeal and the regulations were sent to the promoters together with this letter written by Don Bosco:

Turin, February 23, 1857

"As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me," says the Savior. (Matt. 25, 40)

Dear Sir:

I am pleased to inform you that all necessary steps in regard to the lottery commended to your charity have been taken with the civil authorities. I therefore enclose copies of the regulations for this lottery and ask you to bring them to the attention of those you consider to be well-disposed toward undertakings of this type. Should prizes for the lottery be given to you, please accept them and, at your convenience, forward them to the display room in the Gonella Building, Via Porta Nuova 23. Within a few days I shall send you a display schedule and tickets for distribution.

In the meantime, let me thank you for your participation in this charitable work. I beg you to continue your gracious help, and I assure you that a great number of boys will call down the abundant blessings of heaven upon you.

Very gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

The faithful responded generously to Don Bosco's appeal, and in a short space of time he had more than twenty-nine hundred prizes, for which an acknowledgment was sent to the donors.[2] Among the gifts received was one from the prince of Carignano. There was also an oil painting depicting a scene from Torquato Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata,* donated by Urbano Rattazzi, Minister of the Interior, who also enclosed this letter:

[1] *See* Appendix 9. [Editor]
[2] *See* Appendix 10. [Editor]

Ministry of the Interior, No. 1447

Turin, March 20, 1857

The Minister of the Interior, wishing to manifest to the Rev. John Bosco his unceasing interest in the development of the boys' oratory at Valdocco, is happy to inform him that this letter accompanies an oil painting depicting Erminia; valued at four hundred lire, it was purchased at the last fine arts exhibit held in this city. The minister donates it as a prize for the forthcoming lottery on behalf of the festive oratories of Porta Nuova, Valdocco, and Borgo Vanchiglia.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

On March 7, *L'Armonia,* the voice of the clergy and Catholic laity of Piedmont, urged its readers to support the lottery:

Our readers know the value of the work of Father John Bosco who zealously gathers boys of the working class in order to instruct them, form their character, and prepare them for their temporal and spiritual life.

It is likewise well known that this undertaking is not self-supporting and depends entirely on Divine Providence, through the charity and generosity of good Christians. This good priest is now holding a lottery to help meet his heavy expenses.

The paper then reprinted the lottery regulations. The times did not seem very favorable to undertakings of this kind, but the outcome was very gratifying. Valuable prizes of all kinds filled six display rooms. People flocked to see the exhibit, and the ticket sales were satisfactory. Moreover, neighboring towns cooperated actively, both in offering gifts and in purchasing tickets. Tickets were also sent to bishops and pastors, mayors, senators, deputies, cabinet ministers, and even to King Victor Emmanuel II himself.

In the midst of this lottery, Don Bosco had to face another—perhaps unforeseen—problem concerning teaching and administrative personnel at the Oratory. Although it started as a minor problem, it was soon destined to become very serious and add other heavy burdens to the many he already carried. In January 1857 he received the following letter from the mayor of Turin:

CITY OF TURIN

Military Service, Circular No. 86-2

Paragraph 14 of the regulations for exemption from the law of March 20, 1854 on military service stipulates that:

a. Youths residing in institutions must register in the municipality where the aforesaid institution is located.

b. In December the directors of the aforesaid institutions must send the mayor a list of youths who will celebrate their nineteenth birthday during the coming year.

c. Directors shall also forward to the mayor the death certificates of youths registered but not yet called to military service so that their names may be stricken from the registers.

In calling your attention to these regulations, the undersigned requests that this office be informed at your earliest convenience of youths at the Oratory who were born in 1839. Please send the following data: 1. Family name; 2. First name; 3. Father's name, and whether he is alive or dead; 4. Father's social status; 5. Mother's maiden and Christian name, likewise specifying if she is alive or dead; 6. Place and province of birth; 7. Trade and, lastly, any other information referring to the individual's physical disabilities and family conditions which might render him eligible for exemption.

Thanking you in advance, I remain,

A. Colla, *Mayor*

Don Bosco hastened to comply with this directive. Meanwhile, letters were exchanged between the mayors of Turin and Castelnuovo d'Asti. Since each municipality claimed the right to register John Cagliero and John Turco as draftees of their districts, Mr. Beltramo, mayor of Castelnuovo, turned to Don Bosco for information on the Oratory and asked him to find out whether the two clerics wished to be registered in Castelnuovo or in Turin.

Father Alasonatti's reply on Don Bosco's behalf, sent in the latter part of February, gives us some facts about the Oratory during that period:

Dear Sir:

In compliance with your request for information on the St. Francis de Sales Oratory, I wish to state that this institution, opened by Don Bosco in Valdocco, cares for destitute orphans, twelve to seventeen years old.

They receive board, lodging, and a suitable intellectual and moral education. A small percentage of these boys have parents or relatives in the provinces, to whom they return for vacation. These boys are free to leave the Oratory and follow a calling of their choice whenever they wish to do so.

Other youths, mostly students pursuing higher studies, supervise and teach these boys. Among these students, John Cagliero and John Turco, both natives of Castelnuovo d'Asti, deserve special mention.

For draft purposes they wish to be registered at Castelnuovo and formally request that you strongly endorse their choice. They ask me to thank you and to assure you that they fully trust your prudent and generous zeal.

Respectfully yours,

Rev. Victor Alasonatti

From this time on, until 1864, Don Bosco had to submit to the civil authorities every December an exact list—of which he kept copies—of all his young charges who came under this law. Moreover, he had to investigate all possible exemptions. Where clerics were concerned, he wrote to their bishops urging them to avail themselves of their right to claim exemption for them. There was also additional correspondence with parents or relatives, diocesan chanceries, mayors, and military authorities. Moreover, he had to seek out large sums of money with which to pay exemption fees or obtain substitutes or register a youth as a volunteer for one year. All of this extra work he generously took upon himself in order to protect a very large number of priestly and religious vocations.

CHAPTER 51

Vision of Eternity

LENT in 1857 began on February 25 and ended on April 11. For Lenten reading Don Bosco had the Paravia Press print the March issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *The Christian Easter,* an anonymous pamphlet which described its origins, explained the grave Catholic obligation to receive the sacraments, and gave salutary teachings and advice. A few weeks later, *L'Armonia* highlighted the need of greater promotion for periodicals of this kind:

The March issue of Don Bosco's *Letture Cattoliche* marks the beginning of this publication's fifth year. By now we need no longer dwell on how greatly *Letture Cattoliche* deserves the support of the Church and the faithful. Everyone knows of the diligence and zeal involved in the writing and spreading of these booklets that instruct, educate, and enlighten the faithful on their religious and civic duties, forearming them against ever present religious and moral perils.

In its first four years, *Letture Cattoliche* has reached over seven hundred thousand readers. Considering the rabid ardor of the Waldensians in giving out adulterated bibles and libelous anti-Catholic pamphlets, we should be filled with veneration and gratitude for Don Bosco. Zealously—with no means other than those of Christian charity—he manages to publish *Letture Cattoliche* and increase its circulation, besides caring for other worthy undertakings. Bemoaning an evil press is a vain undertaking if those who can support a good one are reluctant to do so. Whenever such people become disturbed over a godless press, someone should tap them on the shoulder and say: "Friend, you preach well, but what else do you do? What do you spend in a year to support a good press?"

How many persons would blush and be silenced by such a question! *Letture Cattoliche* costs but a lira and eighty centesimi a year. How much good could be done and evil prevented if these booklets were

spread among people who either do not know of them or cannot afford to buy them!

Subscriptions may be entered either at the editorial office in Via San Domenico 11, Turin, or through distributors in the provinces. We cannot give their names and addresses here, but these may be obtained from pastors or diocesan chanceries.

The article in *L'Armonia* had been very opportune because the Waldensians were now boldly attempting to gain a foothold in Don Bosco's own native town after making forays into Settimo Torinese, Crea, and other parts of Piedmont with anti-Catholic literature and proselytizing efforts. At Chieri,[1] the Waldensian minister Amadeus Bert gave a lecture in a hall loaned for the occasion by a Jew, but he had to request police protection after a very unfavorable reception. However, the heretics continued to be bold because the police had orders to suppress the legitimate protests of those people who were opposed to the desecration of their Faith and the betrayal of simple souls. More than once, the courts had issued decisions in favor of the Church's enemies. One day, some Waldensians went to Castelnuovo d'Asti with the sanction of its mayor, who was neither a native of the town nor a churchgoer. There they preached their evil doctrines in the cafés and public squares, largely ignored by the faithful Catholic population. By no means discouraged, however, they rented a large room in the house of a newcomer in town, a Waldensian basket weaver named John Baptist Modini. They then invited an evangelical minister named Gai to come from Turin and lecture. News of this plan spread all over town. The people were infuriated at the mayor for allowing such a thing, and several leading villagers consulted their pastor—Father [Anthony] Cinzano—their assistant pastor, and Don Bosco. They received a guarded reply with no specific directives; the gist was that they could demonstrate as long as they did not injure people or damage property.

A word to the wise was sufficient. Around six o'clock on Sunday evening, March 1 [1857], the minister arrived at the basket weaver's house to lecture to about thirty people, most of whom were curious or hoping for a handout rather than hostile to the

[1] A small town about eight miles southeast of Turin. [Editor]

Church. At the same time an imposing public protest was in the making. Some six hundred people, mainly youngsters, spurred on by those who could not endure such a scandal in their town, marched to the door of the assembly room. Whistling, catcalling, clapping hands, shouting "Down with Waldensians!" and making all the racket they could, they drowned out the speaker. The din went on until ten o'clock, although the mayor tried to stop it by appeals that the people considered offensive. In the meantime the Waldensian crowd had made itself scarce. The next morning their minister, shamed and crestfallen, left town as quickly as he could.

However, Modini, the basket weaver, was still there. On March 4 a noisy, lengthy demonstration was staged to force him out of town. The mayor then called in thirty carabinieri. Meanwhile, the Waldensians—in no mood to give up because they planned to make Castelnuovo the hub of their proselytizing campaign for the Asti and Monferrato regions—sought and obtained a warrant for the arrest of four of the demonstration leaders, alleging the threat of violence against the exercise of their right of assembly. They also tried to discover if the clergy had instigated or directed the demonstrations, but they could find no substantial evidence against them or against Don Bosco, whose guardian angel always watched over him unceasingly.

The whole town was in an uproar. Two of the leaders, Joseph Savio and Peter Cafasso—Father Cafasso's brother—were arrested; the other two, Joseph Turco and Matilda Bertagna—mother of Monsignor John Baptist Bertagna—managed to hide in the villa of Duchess [Laval] Montmorency at Borgo Cornalese. At this point Father [Joseph] Cafasso took action on behalf of these champions of the Faith by using his own money to post the bail of four thousand lire. He then personally accompanied them back to their families at Castelnuovo where he received a triumphal reception. He responded by congratulating them for their stand and exhorting them to remain vigilant. This was Father Cafasso's last visit to Castelnuovo.[2] When he had returned to Turin, he managed to interest several highly influential friends of his in the successful outcome of the trial. It was held in Asti and the four defendants won a full acquittal. Father Cafasso insisted on paying all legal

[2] He died in Turin on June 23, 1860. [Editor]

expenses, declining the defendants' offer to reimburse him. "I, too," he said, "want to share in your merits for having been persecuted for the sake of our Faith."

Meanwhile, the basket weaver had to leave town, since no one would do business with him. The mayor was forced to resign, and he also was defeated when he ran for alderman. Shunned by all, he, too, was forced to leave. The Waldensians never again attempted to proselytize in that Christian town.

This victory over the Waldensians was perhaps also due to the prayers of Dominic Savio who never lost his yearning for the triumph of religion. He often spoke of the Pope as a son would of his own father. He prayed fervently for him, and expressed an ardent desire to see him before dying, repeatedly stating that he had something very important to tell him. Since he continued to make this remark, Don Bosco once asked him about this important message he had for the Pope.

"If I could talk to him," he answered, "I would tell him that in the midst of all the troubles awaiting him, he should continue his special care for England. God is preparing a great triumph for the Catholic Church there."

"How do you know?"

"I'll tell you, but don't repeat it to others; it's meant for the Pope alone. One morning as I was praying after Communion, a strong distraction overcame me. I thought I saw an endless plain, crowded with people blanketed in heavy fog. They kept blundering about as if they had lost their way and no longer knew where to turn. 'This is England,' someone nearby told me. I was about to ask some questions when I saw Pope Pius IX, just as I have seen him in pictures, majestically dressed, bearing a bright torch in his hands. He strode toward that immense throng. As he approached, the fog yielded to the light of his torch, and the people seemed to bask in daylight. 'This torch,' the same voice told me, 'is the Catholic Faith which must bring light to the English people.' "

This lovable youth, young though he was, was a true prophet. We all know of the strides made by Catholicism in the United Kingdom during the last forty years: the hierarchy has been restored, Catholics enjoy freedom of worship and may preach and teach, churches rise in towns and villages, conversions among all classes

have increased, and anti-Catholic prejudices are vanishing. These and other developments, in addition to an extraordinary interest in the Catholic Church, furnish clear proof that this young boy, enlightened by God, foresaw the future many years ago.

Dominic Savio also foretold his own impending death, remarking: "I must run or night will overtake me." At the beginning of the year the boys made the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death, concluding, as usual, with a *Pater* and *Ave* for the one among them who would be the first to die. Playfully, Savio kept remarking: "Instead of saying, 'For him who will be the first to die,' say, 'For Dominic Savio, who will be the first among us to die.' "

Some time before this, Don Bosco had sent Savio home in the hope that his native country air might benefit him. Dominic had not been happy about it, but he had obeyed. Something unusual happened to him on the way, for which our source is Father Joseph Gamba.[3] He heard it from his mother, who in turn had been told about it by Savio's mother herself in the presence of Marianne Marchisio, who testified to it only a few years ago.

Dominic got off the coach at Castelnuovo and then had to continue on foot to Mondonio because his parents had not yet received his letter about his arrival. He arrived home exhausted by the long walk. His mother was surprised. "What happened?" she asked. "Did you come all by yourself?"

"No," he replied. "As soon as I got out of the coach, I met a beautiful noble lady. She walked with me all the way."

"Why didn't you ask her in?"

"As soon as we got near the village, she just vanished. I couldn't see her anymore."

The good woman went into the street to look around, but in vain. For the rest of her life she harbored a fond suspicion that the lady perhaps was the Most Blessed Virgin Mary.

After only a few days, Dominic, unhappy because his studies and his customary practices of piety had been interrupted, went back to the Oratory. Don Bosco would have gladly kept him there, but for the sake of Dominic's health he followed the doctor's advice, particularly because for some days now a persistent cough

[3] He entered the Oratory in the summer of 1872, joined the Salesian Congregation, and became provincial of the Salesians in Uruguay. [Editor]

had racked Dominic's slight frame. Dominic's father was informed that his son would return home on March 1, 1857.

Dominic bowed to the decision, but only as a sacrifice to God. "Why are you so sorry to go home?" his friends asked him. "You should be glad!"

"I want to end my days at the Oratory," he replied.

"You will go home for a while, and when you are better, you can come back."

"It won't turn out that way! I know it! I'm going, but I'll never come back."

The evening before he left, he clung to Don Bosco with endless questions: "Father, how can a sick person gain merits before God?"

"By repeatedly offering his sufferings to God."

"What else?"

"He can offer his life to God."

"Can I be sure that my sins have been forgiven?"

"I assure you in God's name—they have."

"Can I be sure of my salvation?"

"Yes—with God's grace. It will not be lacking."

"If the devil tempts me, what shall I answer?"

"Tell him that you have already sold your soul to Jesus, and that He has bought it with His Precious Blood to save it from hell and take it with Him to heaven."

"Will I be able to see my parents and Oratory friends from heaven?"

"Yes, you will be able to see your parents and all that goes on at the Oratory. You will know everything that concerns them and many other wonderful things besides."

"Will I be able to visit them sometimes?"

"If such visits are for God's glory, yes."

He kept asking many other similar questions. One would think that he already had one foot in heaven and wanted to make sure he knew what was in there before stepping in all the way.

On the morning of his departure from the Oratory, Dominic again joined his companions in making the Exercise for a Happy Death with great devotion. Afterward, he talked privately with them, giving each one a word of advice. He spoke to the members of the Immaculate Conception Sodality, warmly exhorting them to

keep their promises to Mary and to place their utmost confidence in Her. When it was time to go, he told Don Bosco: "Since you don't want this poor body of mine, I'll have to take it back to Mondonio. It would have burdened you for only a few days, and then all would soon be over. But God's will be done. If you go to Rome, remember to tell the Pope about England. Pray for my good death. Good-bye until we meet in heaven."

They had gone out into the street, and he was still holding on to Don Bosco's hand. Turning to his friends around him, he said: "Good-bye. Pray for me. We'll see each other again where we will always be with God." He had one further request for Don Bosco: to be numbered among those who could gain a plenary indulgence at the hour of death, a favor Don Bosco had obtained from the Pope. Dominic kissed Don Bosco's hand for the last time and then, with his father, left the Oratory at two in the afternoon of March 1, 1857. When he arrived home, his doctor examined him and, diagnosing some kind of inflammation, bled him. He then seemed to improve. At least that was what the doctor said and what his parents thought. However, Dominic believed otherwise. Realizing that it is better to receive the sacraments too soon rather than not at all, he called his father. "Dad," he said, "let's call in the heavenly doctor now. I want to go to confession and Communion." His wish was fulfilled. He received Holy Viaticum with the fervor of a seraph, and during both his preparation and thanksgiving he uttered prayers of such sincerity and love that he already seemed to be one of the blessed in conversation with God. A few days later, although the doctor declared him to be out of danger, Dominic asked for the Anointing of the Sick. His parents agreed, but only to please him because neither they nor the pastor could see any need, believing the diagnosis of the doctor who had been misled by Dominic's serenity and cheerfulness. After receiving the Anointing of the Sick with the utmost devotion, he asked for the papal blessing. Fortified by the comforts of our holy religion, he felt a celestial joy that no pen can describe.

It was now the evening of March 9. Anyone who heard him speak or saw his peaceful countenance would have thought he was resting. He looked happy, his eyes sparkled brightly, and he was fully aware of everything. No one but the boy himself could have

suspected he was so close to death. An hour and a half before he died, the pastor dropped in for a visit and was amazed and edified to hear him recommend his soul to God. He held a crucifix, kissed it, and uttered fervent invocations that showed his anxiety to go swiftly to heaven.

The pastor left with the hope of seeing him again. Dominic fell asleep and rested for a half hour. Then he opened his eyes, looked at his parents, and said: "Dad, it's time!"

"Here I am, son. What do you want?"

"Dad, it's time! Take *The Companion of Youth* and read the prayers for a happy death for me."

At these words his mother burst into tears and left the room. Brokenhearted and choked by sobs, his father forced himself to read the prayers. Dominic repeated each word clearly and distinctly. At the end of each verse of the litany of the dying, he insisted on saying all by himself: "Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me." When his father came to the words: "When at length my soul, admitted to Thy presence, shall first behold the immortal splendor of Thy Majesty, reject it not but receive me into the loving bosom of Thy mercy, where I may ever sing Thy praises," Dominic gasped: "Oh yes, that is all I want. Yes, Dad! To sing the praises of God forever!" For a while he seemed to be resting, lost in thought, as though in earnest reflection. Moments later he opened his eyes and, smiling, said distinctly: "Good-bye, Dad, good-bye! Oh! what a beautiful thing I see. . . ." With these words and a pleasant smile, Dominic breathed his last, his hands crossed on his breast. On the evening of March 9, 1857, there was one angel less on earth and one more in heaven.

That was the thought of Don Bosco when he received the sad news from Dominic's father. Such was the unanimous opinion of his companions who mourned his loss in tears and prayers. Such, too, were the sentiments voiced by his teacher, Father Matthew Picco, in the eulogy he delivered to the students' assembly.

Dominic's most virtuous life, his heavenly charisms, his holy death, and the many favors obtained through his intercession justify our belief that he is in heaven.

His father told us a remarkable story and was ready to confirm it anytime and anywhere.

"The death of my son," he said, "distressed me very deeply. Increasingly I felt a desire to know what had become of him in the afterlife. God consoled me. One night—about a month after his death—I lay tossing about sleeplessly for a long time, when the ceiling of my room seemed to burst open with a flash of light. In its midst I saw Dominic, his face radiant with joy. He bore himself majestically. I was quite beside myself at this amazing vision. "Dominic," I exclaimed. "My dear Dominic! How are you? Are you already in heaven?"

"Yes, Dad," he answered, "I am in heaven."

"If God has so rewarded you, pray for your brothers and sister that they, too, may one day join you!"

"Yes, yes, Dad," he answered. "I shall pray to God for them."

"Pray for me, too," I said. "Pray for your mother, that all of us may be saved and be together again!"

"Yes, yes, I will pray." After that he vanished and the room was again in darkness.[4]

[4] The archdiocesan preparatory process for Dominic Savio's beatification and canonization was started in Turin on April 4, 1908. His cause was formally opened in Rome on February 10, 1914 and led to his being declared "venerable" on July 9, 1933, "blessed" on March 5, 1950, and "saint" on June 12, 1954. [Editor]

CHAPTER 52

Sound Christian Formation

BY March 2 [1857], Lenten catechism classes, which until then had been held only on Sundays and holy days, began to be scheduled on a daily basis in all three oratories. By example and encouragement, Don Bosco turned this new burden into a light task. He urged his young catechists to imitate St. Francis de Sales and become "all things to all men"—a saying of St. Paul embodied in the liturgical prayer to the Oratory patron saint which they often recited. Frequently Don Bosco would say to them: "Help me to save souls. The devil works overtime to lead souls to hell; let us do as much to save them."

One day Father Angelo Savio remarked: "Slow down a little! Rest a little longer in the morning; retire earlier at night. Things have eased up a bit." Don Bosco would reply: "I'll rest when I'm a few miles above the moon." Faced with such an example, the catechists did not spare themselves. Since most of them lived at the Oratory, they anticipated their lunch hour, and everyone—superiors and subjects—would grab a quick bite to eat and give up the afternoon recreation period in order to be on time for their classes. All displayed admirable zeal, especially those who had to go to the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories—a three or four mile walk each way, often in inclement weather. However, they gladly endured these inconveniences because it was a labor of love.

Every day after catechism classes, Don Bosco would take a cleric and shut himself up in the library of the Convitto Ecclesiastico to work on *Letture Cattoliche*. At about this time, a charming incident took place, revealing Don Bosco's solicitous regard for his spiritual director and benefactor. It was the eve of the feast of St. Joseph, Father Cafasso's name day. Don Bosco, after calling on him to present his greetings—as he unfailingly did every year—sent in the

cleric he had taken along. Father Cafasso was reading his breviary. Interrupting his prayer, he graciously acknowledged the young cleric's good wishes and then asked him: "Who are you?"

"I am. . . ."

"What day did you receive the cassock?"

"To be perfectly honest, I'm not too sure," the cleric answered after a moment's reflection.

"Do you remember the date of your First Holy Communion?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Well, some dates should never be forgotten. When their anniversaries come around, we should celebrate them joyously and devoutly." Then, with an added word of thanks, he let him go.

The cleric returned to the library, finished his work, and then brought the galleys of the April issue of *Letture Cattoliche* to the printer. It was entitled *Life of St. Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles* by the Rev. John Bosco. In this pamphlet, too, each chapter ended with a terse statement that a reader would long remember.

The May 19 issue of *L'Armonia* carried this review:

The Reverend John Bosco has decided to publish the lives of the Apostles and of the popes to offer factual proof of those truths which the enemies of our Faith would like to becloud with misleading arguments. We, too, believe that this is the best way to forearm our people. Most of them have neither the schooling nor the time for abstract reasoning, but they willingly accept truths presented in the form of a story. This 168-page booklet, apart from its moral message, brings out facts that convincingly refute errors spread by heretics in ignorance or bad faith. For example, Protestants deny the primacy of St. Peter and bestow it on St. Paul. This booklet proves them wrong by pointing out that the Apostles always recognized St. Peter as their leader and judge in matters of Faith and that St. Paul himself went to Jerusalem to see St. Peter and give him an account of his missions, thus honoring him as the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Protestants accuse the Catholic Church of intolerance because of her severity toward those who stubbornly cling to error. In rebuttal, the author quotes St. Paul calling Elymas an "utter fraud, impostor, and son of the devil." [Cf. Acts 13, 10] He also recalls the incident of the incestuous man of Corinth whom the Apostle first excommunicated and then, after repentance, again received into the communion of the faithful. These facts prove that the so-called intolerance of the Catholic Church

is identical to that of St. Paul who rejected any alliance between Christ and Belial.

It is a constant contention of Protestants that there is no mention of confession in apostolic times. A ready answer is seen in the fact that the Ephesians flocked to St. Paul's sermons, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, "and many of them that believed came confessing and declaring their deeds." [Acts 19, 18]

Protestants repudiate Tradition. The author answers them by quoting St. Paul's words to the Corinthians:[1] "So then, brethren, stand firm, and hold the teachings that you have learned, whether by word or letter of ours." [2 Thess. 2, 14] He says much the same thing in his epistle to Timothy, written in prison, exhorting him to strive to teach other devout men the truths he had learned so that they in turn might hand them on to others after his death. Briefly, the author's aim is to disprove errors by facts. We believe he has succeeded admirably.

Therefore, we warmly recommend *Letture Cattoliche* as the best antidote against the errors of our day. We hope that pastors, in particular, and all who have the welfare of religion at heart will do their utmost to spread these booklets.

Easter Sunday, April 12, was observed with great solemnity in all three festive oratories and filled young hearts with spiritual, long-lasting joy. How often Don Bosco had lovingly reminded them that it was better to die than to sin! He and his co-workers had made the boys understand that all their sacrifices, toil, and burdens, past and future, stemmed from a single desire to save the boys' souls. The youngsters were so convinced of this that they said: "Don Bosco wouldn't hesitate to die for us!"

For this reason, they always looked upon Don Bosco as a loving father. Years later, if they met him by chance, they would greet him and tell him about themselves, their families, and other temporal matters; then they would assure him that they were not neglecting their own spiritual welfare and that they were still going to confession. This would please him greatly. "Good! Good!" he would say. "I am very glad to hear that. Always try to be a good son of Don Bosco!" If they did not happen to bring up the subject themselves, Don Bosco, with a word or a kind, knowing look that was so meaningful to them, would hint at his desire to know how they

[1] An oversight. Read "Thessalonians." [Editor]

were faring spiritually. "What about your soul? Are you still good? Is it a long time since your last confession? Did you fulfill your Easter duty this year? When will you come to see me? Come any day, any time! We'll straighten out the condition of your soul." They would answer him lovingly, sincerely, and obligingly, as we ourselves witnessed on many occasions—a proof of the real worth of the catechism classes in their boyhood days.

Often, because of their sound religious formation, they felt the need to look out for the spiritual welfare of their friends, as the following episode will bear out. After a few years' absence because of his job, a young man—a former Oratory pupil—returned to Turin. He had not been to confession for ten years and felt a repugnance for it. A relative of his—also a former pupil—invited him to accompany him on a visit to Don Bosco. They found him in the sacristy hearing the confessions of the last few penitents. As he stood waiting for Don Bosco to finish, his friend playfully shoved the bewildered young man straight into Don Bosco's arms. "Feel at ease," Don Bosco told him. "We're still friends, aren't we? If you want to make your confession, it's easier than you think. I'll do it for you." Moved by Don Bosco's words, the young man made a good confession and resumed the practice of his Faith. He could never get over the trick his friend had played on him, and what Don Bosco had told him on that occasion.

After Easter, the three festive oratories resumed their routine. Ever since Father [Paul] Rossi's death, the St. Aloysius Oratory had been supervised by Attorney Cajetan Bellingeri, a layman with the heart of an apostle. This makeshift arrangement, however, could not go on much longer, and Don Bosco was anxious to find a priest after his own heart.

A few months later he chanced upon Father Leonard Murialdo in Via Dora Grossa. "How about treating me to a cup of coffee?" he asked him. In the coffee shop, while engaging in small talk, Don Bosco told Father Murialdo that he was looking for a priest like him to direct the St. Aloysius Oratory and urged him to accept. Father Murialdo—who had already helped at the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel oratories to the boys' great benefit—quickly agreed. From that time on the St. Aloysius Oratory became the center of his interest and love. He directed it until September 1865 when he

went to St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris for a year of retirement, prayer, and study. He was a saintly priest whose zeal for the boys' spiritual welfare cannot adequately be described. He left no stone unturned to make the St. Aloysius Oratory a faithful copy of the one at Valdocco. He succeeded marvelously and did immeasurable good for souls. He spared neither effort nor money. He was another Don Bosco, and Don Bosco fully trusted him. No longer concerned about the St. Aloysius Oratory, Don Bosco could now devote more time to the Guardian Angel Oratory. However, he continued to provide the St. Aloysius Oratory with young clerics and distinguished laymen.

Don Bosco continued to direct the festive oratory of St. Francis de Sales in person for several years more, and boys kept flocking to it in large numbers until 1862. He himself always taught catechism in church to the older boys, delighting them with interesting moral stories after a period of questioning. He had the assistance of Father [Francis] Marengo who for many years proved to be a diligent, self-sacrificing catechist. During this year, 1857, Father Marengo was helped by the diocesan cleric Re who taught catechism every Sunday in the apse behind the main altar. He later became a cathedral canon.

CHAPTER 53

Reverence for the Priesthood

AT the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales there was never any letup in physical, intellectual, and spiritual activities. We shall not dwell on the countless details that kept Don Bosco, Father Alasonatti, and many zealous laymen—including Chevalier Lawrence Agliano, Attorney Cajetan Bellingeri, and [Michael] Scanagatti, a landlord—working night after night in readying the lottery tickets. We shall only recall that, thanks to the efforts of the committee, tickets were sold by the thousands to all sorts of people who were interested mainly in helping a worthy cause. The magnificent display of prizes in the Gonella building drew very large crowds.

Government officials, too, had been asked to contribute, and they replied courteously.[1] The Minister of Education praised Don Bosco's initiative, but he returned the tickets with an expression of regret.[2] However, he showed his good will toward the Oratory by allowing Don Bosco full freedom in regard to its teachers. Previously he had granted subsidies to the Oratory, and this year he sent a one thousand lire award, as we gather from a memorandum of Don Bosco.

The reply of the Minister of the Interior also showed his high regard for Don Bosco, on whose behalf he was issuing a decree that deserves to be known both for the subsidy therein authorized and for the reasons motivating it.[3]

Meanwhile, Don Bosco, taking advantage of the civil authorities' good will toward him, strove to obtain the maximum possible benefits from his lottery, as we gather from the following letter he received:

[1] *See* Appendix 11. [Editor]
[2] *See* Appendix 12. [Editor]
[3] *See* Appendix 13. [Editor]

Turin, April 28, 1857

Secretariat of the City of Turin
Department I, Section 2, Record 199

To: *The Rev. John Bosco, Director of the Boys' Oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, etc., Turin*

In accordance with instructions from the Finance Office of this department, the undersigned is honored to return the enclosed papers regarding the lottery for the oratories under your direction, together with the decree of the aforesaid Finance Office authorizing the issuing of 24,492 additional tickets and the postponing of the date of the drawing from May 4 to June 15.

The Finance Office also wishes to inform you that no further authorizations will be granted, either as regards tickets—whose total value of 3,178 lire seems high enough—or as regards the date for the drawing. This decision has also been prompted by the fact that other applications for lotteries have already been submitted to the Minister of Finance, and these may not be considered until your own lottery has taken place.

[Peter] Baricco, *Deputy Mayor*

A few weeks later, two reigning monarchs gave donations to the Oratory. The widowed czarina of Russia had made a stopover in Turin on her way to Rome and had received a warm and befitting welcome. While declaring that she would have nothing to do with political exiles, she bestowed decorations on many Piedmontese notables—pointedly ignoring [Giovanni] Lanza and [Umberto] Rattazzi. She also made donations to various charities, including the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales which received the following notification:

Imperial Foreign Affairs Office
Russian Legation

The Imperial Russian Legation has been instructed to assign the sum of three hundred lire to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales from the funds of Her Majesty the Empress for the needy of the city of Turin.

In forwarding the enclosed sum, the Imperial Legation asks that the aforesaid institute kindly acknowledge receipt.

Rsehitcherene, *Undersecretary*

The second gift came from King Victor Emmanuel II who had not forgotten what Don Bosco had written to him in 1855.[4] He accepted five hundred lottery tickets and had his aide, Count [Alexander Lucerna of] Angrogna, send Don Bosco the corresponding donation.

One day while conversing with the king, the count happened to mention Don Bosco and his work. "By the way," said the king, forgetting that he had already bought lottery tickets, "isn't Don Bosco holding a lottery?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Well, get me five hundred tickets! Let's help this poor devil of a priest. Make sure, though, that he doesn't write me any more of those letters!" Count Angrogna thought it best not to remind the king of the tickets that he had already purchased, and so he obtained another five hundred. He had now become one of Don Bosco's best friends and had also caused him to be favorably regarded by the king. The latter wished to meet him, and on several occasions he tried to contact him, but unsuccessfully. Once he sent him one of his aides, but Don Bosco was not at home. Later, in Florence, he missed him again because Don Bosco had already left town by the time the king became aware that he was in the city.

Victor Emmanuel II greatly esteemed Don Bosco, as he clearly showed when visiting Archbishop [Andrew] Charvaz of Genoa around 1867. As the archbishop was ushering him into his office, the king remarked: "Your Excellency, I want to tell you something: Don Bosco is really a saint!" Father Angelo Fulle—the seminary procurator—was among those who heard the remark. The archbishop's reply could not be heard, since the door had already been closed. However, he undoubtedly shared the same opinion, for he was well acquainted with Don Bosco's enterprising, ardent zeal for the salvation of souls.

The anonymous May issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* printed by the Paravia Press, was entitled *A Thought a Day in Honor of Mary, and the Story of the Conversion of Maria Alphonse Ratisbonne to the Catholic Faith.* Each thought consisted of two rhymed verses for each day of the year. It was a timely publication, especially for the Oratory boys who loved Our Lady very dearly. On his part, Don

[4] *See* pp. 113f, 153f. [Editor]

Bosco strove to increase this love by suggesting virtuous practices in Her honor. Joseph Reano, after describing the students' very fervent spiritual retreat, went on to say:

To foster greater devotion to Mary, Don Bosco invited the boys to jot down on a slip of paper a virtuous practice of their choice and hand it to him. One evening, his hands full of slips, he read some that were very inspiring, as, for example, those of [Michael] Rua, [Victor] Vaschetti, [John] Bonetti, [John Baptist] Francesia, [John] Cagliero, Bongiovanni, and others. I recall particularly that of [Joseph] Rocchietti: "I, too, dearest Mother, would like to make You a promise. I know I'll find it hard to keep it because I am weak, but since everything is possible with God's help, I hope to be faithful. I have five senses and there are thirty days of the month dedicated to You. I promise to mortify one of my senses every day. This will be repeated every five days, so that by the end of the month I will have mortified each of my senses six times."

Another evening during the same month of May, Don Bosco said: "The best spiritual flowers we can offer up to Mary are such ordinary daily practices as kissing the ground or Mary's medal three times, kissing the crucifix before going to bed, giving good advice each day to some companion, reading a few pages about the Blessed Virgin and then telling others about their content, devoutly saying the prayers before and after meals, work, or study, making the Sign of the Cross reverently, and so on."

On May 16, a boy publicly asked Don Bosco how Dominic Savio managed to become so good and holy and a true child of Mary. Don Bosco replied: "The means Dominic Savio used to put himself on the road to heaven and beyond reach of the devil were obedience to and great confidence in his spiritual director."

On June 6 of this year [1857], a very important event took place at the Oratory—the priestly ordination of Father Felix Reviglio, to whom, through Don Bosco's recommendation, Archbishop Fransoni had granted the required ecclesiastical patrimony. Father Reviglio thus became the first priest Don Bosco gave to the Church. The following day, Trinity Sunday, he celebrated his first Mass, assisted by Don Bosco. Later there was a dinner in his honor, with music and poetry. That same evening, however, for justifiable reasons he took leave of Don Bosco to join the diocesan clergy. He

became a learned and highly esteemed professor of pastoral theology and a greatly beloved pastor both at Volpiano and at St. Augustine's Church in Turin. He always maintained his strong attachment for Don Bosco, since through his efforts God had raised him to the dignity of the priesthood. Don Bosco reciprocated with similar feelings, not only because he saw in him the crowning of so much labor and sacrifice on his part, but especially because he revered his priestly dignity. He felt the same way toward the large number of priests of various dioceses with whom he came in contact and whom he benefited in innumerable ways in their needs and difficulties. Very often he went through a great deal of trouble in order to obtain favors for them from government officials, bishops, and the Holy See. More than once he undertook the task of finding suitable positions for them, and he often gave them generous financial assistance. "One day a needy priest came to Don Bosco for help," Father John Turchi told us. "Don Bosco—who had just received a new cassock from some friends and had worn it but once for the fitting—had the priest try it on and then gave it to him."

We could mention many more such episodes, but we shall be content with what we have already said and what we are about to relate, leaving the rest for later.

In the diocese of Ivrea there had been a series of church burglaries. Affected were not only churches and altars but even tabernacles and sacred vessels containing the consecrated hosts, and the burglars were very seldom apprehended. Under these circumstances, on July 3, 1857, Bishop Louis Moreno issued a pastoral letter sadly lamenting seven sacrilegious thefts or burglary attempts in his diocese, and urging the faithful to make amends for these sacrileges. He also ordered the pastors to sell all sacred vessels that were made of solid gold or silver and to replace them with others that were simply silver- or gold-plated. Furthermore, he placed an interdict over the churches where the consecrated hosts had been violated. Considering these measures to be offensive to the municipal authorities, Minister [Urbano] Rattazzi urged Bishop Moreno to revoke them. When the bishop stood firm, the minister ordered the mayors to prevent the sale of the sacred vessels and—should any take place—to report the fact without delay to the judicial authorities. As for

the interdict, their duty was to maintain order and to inform him immediately.

The pastors read the bishop's letter from the pulpit as instructed. In commenting on it, Father Thea, the pastor of San Salvatore in Ivrea, made some statements that were construed to be offensive to the government. The rumor immediately spread that he would be arrested. Father Riccardini, a teacher who frequented the same club as the town officials, asked the clerk to alert him immediately if any warrant were issued for Father Thea's arrest. One evening, around midnight, the clerk came to the rectory where Father Riccardini lived and informed him that Father Thea's arrest was set for noon of the following day. Father Riccardini spent a sleepless night. At five in the morning he went to the church, and when the pastor had finished Mass, he told him the news. Afterward, he informed the bishop. The latter ordered the seminary coach readied and instructed the driver to wait near the bridge just outside the town. He then wrote a letter to Don Bosco and gave it to Father Thea. The priest, in order to avoid arousing suspicion, strolled to the bridge and then quickly climbed into the carriage which swiftly took off for Turin. There Father Thea immediately called on Don Bosco who, after reading the bishop's message, took the priest to some trusted friends in a building facing the city jail where he stayed for several months. When Father Riccardini came to the Oratory, Don Bosco accompanied him to Father Thea. Then, acting on Don Bosco's advice, Father Riccardini called on Count Corsi, the attorney general, and told him the whole story. The count advised Father Thea to remain in hiding until a verdict had been reached. If he were sentenced *in absentia,* Father Thea was to give himself up and appeal the sentence. Whatever the outcome, this course of action would save him many months of imprisonment. His suggestion was followed. After being sentenced *in absentia* to four years of prison, Father Thea crossed the street, gave himself up, and filed an appeal. Ultimately, through the efforts of some of Don Bosco's friends, he was acquitted.

From the moment of his first meeting with Don Bosco in connection with the above incident, Father Riccardini became Don Bosco's staunch friend. After his transfer to a school at Vigevano, he came

to Turin for the summer, and since Don Bosco and Father Alasonatti were the only priests at the Oratory, he offered his priestly services. Later he taught philosophy to the two clerics, [Francis] Provera and [Francis] Cerruti.

Don Bosco treated Father Riccardini so graciously and with such consideration that he was both edified and enchanted. Don Bosco acted the same way with all priests, not out of courtesy but from a spirit of reverence and faith for the exalted dignity of the priesthood. He was particularly deferential toward canons and pastors. We often saw him humbly kissing their hands, an act of homage that he also paid to Father [Anthony] Belasio who was a missionary. He instilled the same respect and veneration into his boys who formed the habit of greeting on the street any priest who held a position of authority.

Don Bosco also fondly remembered his fellow seminarians and greeted them warmly whenever they met. If they called on him, he welcomed them joyfully and made them feel at home. For this reason they even came great distances to see him. They knew he would be delighted, and for their part they looked forward to enjoying his company and receiving good example. He was always very hospitable toward them, as he was toward all priests, who were always welcome guests for days at a time.

In view of the esteem in which Don Bosco was now held, some fellow seminarians of his no longer dared treat him with their former familiarity, but rather looked up to him. However, Don Bosco would soon make them feel at ease with some humorous remark and remind them that their friendship was as strong as ever. One priest, whose name we do not recall, once remarked to Don Bosco: "How can I possibly be on familiar terms with you when you often deal with cardinals and even the Pope? You are not a monsignor yet, but you soon will be!" His answer was: "I'm just plain Don Bosco!"

When talking to priests, after some friendly banter he would usually manage to insert a Gospel maxim into the conversation. One we frequently heard was: "We are the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Let us so act as to make Our Savior's words ring true, that men may see our good works and glorify our heavenly Father."

Priests often came to Don Bosco for advice, and they never went away disappointed. "I, too, benefited from Don Bosco's good judgment," Father [John Baptist] Piano said. "Once I confided some doubts to him. He gave me sound advice and then, on a holy picture which also had a prayer to Mary Help of Christians, at my request he penned this exhortation: 'Be humble and patient and the Lord Jesus will give you the will and the means. Constantly love the needy and the poor.' I treasure this holy picture and keep it always with me so that it may inspire me in my difficult pastoral work. I made his exhortation the theme of my funeral oration for his Requiem Mass of Trigesima in the parish church of St. Benigno Canavese."

Whenever Don Bosco noticed some priest acting unbecomingly, he was deeply grieved, even to the point of tears. Had he been able to have his way, he would have hidden that unfortunate priest from sight. Several were recommended to him by their bishops or vicars-general. With true love and respect for them, he strove to rehabilitate them; he talked to them at great length, exhorted them, and sometimes even helped them financially. His zealous efforts were nearly always rewarded, and he succeeded in restoring them to their priestly dignity and good reputation. Once they were back on the right path, they persevered. He even converted some who had fallen into heresy and persuaded them to make an edifying retraction. We shall not mention any names out of consideration for those involved. His most difficult task, however, was to keep away from dangerous occasions those priests who had incurred ecclesiastical penalties for their intemperate drinking. In dealing with them after a lapse, Don Bosco never tried to humiliate them, but rather showed them such kindness and compassion that the hearts of these poor men were deeply touched. Never did he let a word slip that might reflect on their sacred dignity.

When talking with these unfortunate priests, who sometimes tried to excuse themselves by blaming it on a variety of causes, he knew how to convince them that with God's grace they could readily overcome all obstacles. He encouraged them to banish all fear with the thought of Mary's goodness and protection, quoting to them Father Cafasso's words: "Even if someone should be ordained a priest without having been called by God, he can be sure that his heavenly Mother will obtain for him through Her Son's goodness and mercy

all the necessary qualifications and graces if he sincerely strives to become a good son of Mary."

If he saw them discouraged about their eternal salvation or their reputation, he would say: "Love, honor, and serve Mary and strive to make others do likewise. A son who has rendered homage to this heavenly Mother not only will not be lost but may also aspire to a shining crown."

No one could possibly say how much Don Bosco had the salvation of priests at heart. One summer day, after hiking with us for two hours through the mountains overlooking the village where he was staying, he arrived at a rectory. Overcome by the heat, dripping with perspiration, and tormented by a severe toothache that had plagued him all week, he made a brief halt. The lonely rectory seemed to be deserted. Just then a peasant came up the trail and Don Bosco inquired about the health of the priest.

"He's been sick a long time," the peasant replied, "and there is no chance of recovery."

"Has he received the sacraments?"

"Not yet."

"Did any priest visit him?"

"I don't know. I never saw any."

"Who is taking care of him?"

"His tenant's son, the only one he has allowed in for a month."

Don Bosco stood there for a moment in deep thought. Then he turned to us. "Wait for me," he said and went in. After more than an hour he came out and we resumed our journey. We asked no questions and he volunteered no information. However, we could easily surmise that charity had guided his steps.

CHAPTER 54

Concern for Souls

FROM the private chronicle of one of our confreres, we record the following entries of June 1857:

June 21: The students attending the private schools of Father [Matthew] Picco and Professor [Joseph] Bonzanino solemnized the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga by attending Mass in the SS. Maurice and Lazarus Basilica with the Oratory students of humanities and rhetoric. Don Bosco saved the poems written for that occasion. At the Oratory the feast of St. Aloysius was observed on the 29th.

June 22: After a long illness, Marianne Occhiena, Mamma Margaret's sister, died a saintly death at the Oratory [at eleven o'clock in the evening]. She had looked after the house linen with great dedication. Because of her death the celebration of Don Bosco's name day was postponed to the end of the school year.

June 26: This evening Francis Cardinal Gaude, an illustrious son of St. Dominic and of Piedmont (he was born at Cambiano), paid a visit to Don Bosco. He was returning after assisting his father in his last moments and attending his funeral. In addressing the whole community solemnly and joyously from an impromptu throne set up on the porticoes, he highly praised Don Bosco, the Oratory, and the boys.

Let us also mention the fact that during this month Don Bosco rescued an unfortunate soul from apostasy and eternal damnation, as we heard from Don Bosco himself and from Father Leonard Murialdo.

A former pupil of the Oratory who had been recruited by the Waldensians was studying for the ministry in Geneva. However, at heart he was still a Catholic, and occasionally this fact would be clearly evident. Seeking to destroy his Faith completely, his evil associates wickedly led him into all sorts of excesses that eventually wrecked his health and made him the victim of an incurable disease.

His condition finally reached such a point that his doctors thought it best to send him back to Turin to his mother in the hope of a cure. Since his mother was poor, the Waldensians at once offered to help her generously, and she unwisely accepted. They also volunteered to nurse the sick boy in order to prevent any priest from getting to see him.

On the very evening he arrived home, the unfortunate boy, tormented by remorse, said to his mother: "I'd like to see a Catholic priest because I am very ill." To comfort him, she assured him that she would summon one, and on the following morning she went to the rectory. The Waldensians, however, were a step ahead of her. Day and night they posted one of their own men at the patient's bedside or in the adjoining room. The pastor of the neighboring Catholic church and other priests tried to see the young man, but they were always denied admission for one reason or another.

The young man now realized that he was a prisoner, and he was grieved not to have a priest to help him die as a Christian. Knowing that his end was near and disgusted with the barren words of comfort offered by his jailers, he prayed—and the Lord heard him.

After consulting the pastor, a priest came to Don Bosco and related the whole story. Unhesitatingly, he decided to visit the poor lad at any cost. One afternoon at two o'clock, accompanied by two husky young men, Don Bosco called at the patient's house, not far from St. Augustine's Church. In answer to his ring, Amadeus Bert himself, the Waldensian minister, came to the door.

"What can I do for you, Father?"

"I'd like to speak to the patient."

"Impossible! He cannot have visitors. Doctor's orders!"

"Never mind. I have no time to argue. I'll speak to his mother." At that very moment she emerged from another room. "Good afternoon," Don Bosco greeted her while stepping in. "I came for news of Peter." As he spoke those words, he opened the door to the patient's room. The minister objected, but by that time Don Bosco was already at his pupil's bedside.

"How are you, Peter," Don Bosco inquired.

"Oh, Father!" he exclaimed tearfully.

"Peter, how do you feel? Do you still remember me? Do you recognize me?"

"Of course I do! You were my friend when I was a boy and you gave me such good advice, but unfortunately I didn't heed it. I'm so ashamed of myself."

"I'm your friend, so don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid of you, because you're so good. I'm ashamed of my ingratitude and terrible sins."

The minister impatiently broke in: "Father, I must ask you to leave. The excitement may prove fatal to the boy. Your visit was totally unexpected. Peter wanted no visitors. He does not need anything from you."

"Peter," Don Bosco went on, ignoring the minister, "rest for a while. Do not wear yourself out talking. Take your time. I'll stay a little longer." He drew up a stool and sat by the bed.

"I said you'll have to go," the minister remonstrated quite resentfully. "You have no business here."

"I certainly do," replied Don Bosco. "I have something very important to discuss with this pupil of mine."

"Who do you think you are?"

"And who are you?" countered Don Bosco.

"I am Amadeus Bert, a Waldensian minister. We have met on other occasions."

"I am Don Bosco, director of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco."

"Well, what do you want from Peter?"

"I want to help him save his soul."

"He no longer has anything to do with you!"

"Why not?"

"Because he has joined the Waldensian Church and broken all ties with yours."

"My claims on him are prior to yours. Long before you knew him, I numbered him among my sons. He belonged to me and he still belongs to me, and for these reasons he no longer has any ties with Waldensians."

"You are only confusing his conscience and exposing yourself to regrettable consequences."

"I have no fear of that when a soul is at stake."

"Enough! You must leave this room immediately."

"After you."

"Do you realize whom you're talking to?"

"Of course I do. May I ask you the same question?"

"You should understand that I have authority. . . ."

"You do not impress me. I fear no one, much less you, because I know that the patient regrets having ever joined your sect and wants to die a Catholic."

"That's an outright lie. Isn't it true, Peter, that you want to remain in the Waldensian Church?"

Propping himself up as best he could, the boy looked at Don Bosco, as if to draw strength from him, and replied: "I want to remain a Catholic."

"Easy now, Peter," the minister interrupted; "mind what you say."

"Sir," Don Bosco said, "calm down. Just let me put one question to the patient. His answer should settle the matter."

The minister grew quiet and, staring at Don Bosco, sat down. Don Bosco turned to the boy and said gently: "Peter, listen carefully. This gentleman has written a book in which he states repeatedly that a good Catholic may save himself within his own Faith. Therefore, no Catholic needs to embrace another Faith in order to be saved. The Catholic Church likewise maintains that within herself there is salvation. However, she also holds that those who obstinately cling to Protestantism [knowing it to be false] will certainly be lost. Now tell me: do you want to trade the certainty of salvation for a doubtful chance or even for eternal damnation, as the Catholic Church teaches?"

"No, no," the youth replied, "never! I was born a Catholic and I want to die a Catholic. . . . I am sorry for what I did."

Upon hearing such a firm reply, the minister rose, took his hat and, turning to Don Bosco, said: "There is no point in staying any longer. Eventually reason will prevail." Then, turning to the patient, he continued: "Peter, you're making a terrible mistake! They're trying to make you go to confession, but remember that confession, instead of prolonging your life, will hasten your death." Then he indignantly stalked out.

By now Peter was exhausted, and fearing that he might die that very night, he asked Don Bosco to hear his confession at once. He had never preached or written against the Catholic Church; there-

fore no public recantation was necessary. After receiving absolution, Peter felt as if Don Bosco had lifted a crushing weight from him, and he again enjoyed the peace of mind he had lost for several years. He pressed Don Bosco's hand and kissed it again and again, happy despite his pain.

Don Bosco realized that the Waldensians would unfailingly return to the attack. He therefore had the youth taken immediately to SS. Maurice and Lazarus Hospital, where he received the Last Sacraments. Some twenty-four hours later he died peacefully and, please God, went to his eternal happiness.

This conversion greatly comforted Don Bosco in the midst of his preoccupations for the lottery and *Letture Cattoliche*. The June issue, printed by the Paravia Press and authored by Don Bosco, was entitled *The Lives of Popes St. Linus, St. Cletus, and St. Clement,* by the Rev. John Bosco. The booklet, which also contained several chapters on the lives of the Apostles, was reviewed by *L'Armonia* on July 24, 1857:

This is the third booklet in Don Bosco's popular series on the lives of the popes. The opening pages contain a glossary that should prove useful to everyone, particularly to the common people for whom this publication was written.

The author enumerates the achievements of St. Linus, St. Cletus, and St. Clement, drawing from acknowledged authorities on the early Christian Church but omitting complex questions foreign to his purpose. The booklet encompasses a thirty-year period of Church history, from about the year 70 to 103 A.D. It clearly narrates not only the achievements of St. Peter's first three successors, but also the spirit of the primitive Church, showing that the government, discipline, doctrines, and moral teachings of the ancient Church were no different from ours today. This disproves the assertion of those heretics who accuse the Church of introducing doctrinal and structural innovations.

For example, the author states that St. Linus ordered women to cover their heads in church, but he immediately adds that this precept dates back to St. Paul and is still observed nowadays by Catholics (pages 36–37).

He also tells us that St. Cletus appointed twenty-five elders in Rome to look after the spiritual welfare of the faithful just as our pastors do, and that these elders were later called "priests." This clearly shows that

it is not the Catholic Church which made changes as regards pastors or priests, but the Protestants who, in rejecting the sacrament of Holy Orders, have no priesthood and hence no priests.

We warmly recommend *Letture Cattoliche* to all, especially to those who lack time or sufficient instruction to work their way through thick volumes. We believe that this publication is especially necessary nowadays, when the enemies of the Church unscrupulously use contempt and lies to misrepresent our beliefs and institutions and to defame past vicars of Jesus Christ.

Those who wish to further enhance their knowledge of the first three successors of St. Peter may consult its bibliography.

The July issue, also printed by the Paravia Press, was entitled *Life of Blessed Oringa Toscana, Known as Christiana of the Holy Cross.* A humble shepherdess, housemaid, and foundress of a convent, her life was remarkable for her heroic virtues as well as for apparitions of St. Michael the Archangel and the assistance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who taught her to read.

The August issue, again printed by the Paravia Press and entitled *The Lives of Popes St. Anacletus, St. Evaristus, and St. Alexander I,* was authored by Don Bosco.

Meanwhile, work on the lottery had not slackened, and Don Bosco sent out another circular:

Turin, May 6, 1857

Dear Sir:

Trusting in your well-known kindness, I enclose 50 lottery tickets along with pertinent information. Please be so good as to forward them to the enclosed addresses and keep an account of tickets sold or returned. In due time, please return the money and tickets to me.

Most gratefully, I assure you that your active participation in this good cause will not only gain you merit in God's sight, but will also give you the satisfaction of benefiting many boys who are either from your own parish or your city. While in this capital, they attend religious services and classes at our festive oratories.

Very respectfully yours,

Rev. John Bosco

P.S. The date for the drawing will be announced shortly in the newspapers or by mail.

On May 12 *L'Armonia* announced that the drawing would be held on June 15, and once again it reminded its readers that by contributing prizes or buying tickets, they would be helping to safeguard a boy from going bad. On June 13, however, the same paper informed the public that the date of the drawing had been postponed to July 6, and that this date was final. Again it urged them to buy tickets, of which there were still a considerable number unsold. "Everyone should bear in mind," it said, "that by buying even a single ticket he helps to clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, shelter the homeless, and give food to the hungry, for such is the purpose of these festive oratories."

At the same time Don Bosco continued to send out several thousand copies of a folder listing the lottery regulations and prizes. The frontispiece carried this scriptural quotation: "Almsgiving . . . purges every kind of sin." (Tob. 12, 9) A circular accompanied the folder.[1]

On July 6 the drawing took place at City Hall at noon in the presence of the mayor with all due legal formalities. The proceeds (at least sixty thousand lire) relieved Don Bosco of a great many financial problems. He had good reason to thank God with all his heart. Another circular marked the end of the work for the lottery.[2]

[1] *See* Appendix 14. [Editor]
[2] *See* Appendix 15. [Editor]

CHAPTER 55

Evangelical Poverty

DON Bosco trusted in Divine Providence, and—faithful to His promises—God never failed him. "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? What are we to put on?' . . . Your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be given you besides." (Matt. 6, 31) If Don Bosco at times found himself in difficulties, he regarded them as trials sent by Providence to test his Faith. He found comfort in Jesus' words: "Do not worry about tomorrow: tomorrow will take care of itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." [Matt. 6, 34]

From this trust he drew his unshakably serene confidence in the future as well as his heroic love of voluntary poverty and the joy he felt in lacking even essentials. To the very end of his life he was as poor as he had been during the early years of the Oratory. It was obvious that he was completely detached from the things of this world. Never did he move a finger to obtain something that would give him personal comfort. He was in the habit of saying: "You cannot practice poverty unless you love it." And God rewarded him generously. Don Bosco succeeded in undertakings which powerful people would have hesitated to start.

He constantly needed money for various projects. Yet he thought little of money and sought it only when necessary to promote God's glory and the welfare of souls. Most of the time he was penniless, for as soon as he obtained some money, that same day he would hurry out to buy provisions or pay off part of his debts. Insisting on trust in Divine Providence, he never allowed the prefect to put money aside for accounts that were payable at a later date. He never worried about tomorrow, because this would seem to indicate a lack of confidence in God's fatherly goodness.

Whenever Don Bosco received sizable donations, he would call the prefect and hand them over, saying: "See how good Providence has been to us!" He rarely kept any money for personal use, unless he needed it for alms. His maxim was: "Spend money only when it is strictly necessary." He appreciated its value because he knew what it had cost his benefactors to earn it, and he also realized the spiritual and material benefits it could produce. He did not hesitate to spend money freely when it was necessary, but he could not tolerate wasting it on trivial or unnecessary things. "As long as we are poor," he would say, "Providence will never fail us." Another frequent comment of his was: "If we do not waste even a centesimo, Divine Providence will always be lavish with us."

Joseph Brosio gave us the following report in writing:

One day Don Bosco and I were in the courtyard of an apartment building in Via Alfieri on a visit to a certain nobleman. Don Bosco was dressed in his best: a very old cassock and cloak and a hat that had lost all its nap. I also noticed that his shoes, shined but mended, had inked string for laces. "Father," I said, "when other priests go visiting, they wear shoes with silver buckles. Your shoelaces don't look good; you can't hide them because your cassock is rather short. Let me go and buy you some decent ones!"

"Wait," Don Bosco said, rummaging in his pockets. "Let me give you the money. I must have some change with me." As he was about to hand me a coin, a beggar woman came up to us. Don Bosco immediately gave the coin to her. I then wanted to pay for the shoelaces myself, but Don Bosco wouldn't allow me to do so, and there was no way of getting him to consent to a purchase which he considered unnecessary. He went right on wearing those miserable shoelaces.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco always looked neat, and like St. Bernard he could rightfully boast: *"Paupertas mihi semper placuit, sordes numquam!"* ["Poverty, yes! Dirt, never!"] He kept a strict watch over household economy. Unavoidably, for the sake of those living with him, he had had to provide [less Spartan] meals, but he would not tolerate dainty foods or fancy china, even when there were solemn dinners—as was customary several times a year—or when he had important guests. For many years his tableware consisted of iron forks and spoons and tin bowls and plates. On several occasions

he inherited silver cutlery and other dinnerware, but he always sold them at once to provide for household needs.

At meals he would eat leftover scraps of bread; in his last years he carefully gathered up even the most minute crumbs, claiming that this was the true meaning of poverty. Nor would he use oil or salt on dishes that generally required such condiments. He would also become very upset if he occasionally saw a boy waste even the smallest crust of bread. To impress its seriousness on them, he would admonish them, saying: "Divine Providence looks after us. You know that we have never lacked essentials. But if you waste the bread that the Lord gives us, you abuse His goodness. You should fear that He may punish you in the future by allowing you to go hungry." He then would point out to them how Our Divine Savior, after feeding the multitudes miraculously, had ordered the Apostles to collect the leftovers so that they would not be wasted.

He saved even half sheets of writing paper and asked everyone else in the house to do likewise. He diligently cut the unused portions from letters and then used them as scrap paper. He was grieved when he found things discarded or damaged, and he would insist that they be stored away for future use. He followed the same policy with waste paper and even with pieces of string that were lying around, remarking that they would come in handy sooner or later. He was also seen to lower lamp wicks when he went through the house late at night, if the one in charge had neglected to do so. Both Father [John] Turchi and Father [John Baptist] Francesia testified that Don Bosco often cut his own hair as an economy measure.

This stress on thrift did not stem from niggardliness or from the fear of lacking essentials, for he never complained of privations. In fact, he frequently expressed the fervent wish that he would own nothing at death but his cassock. The poorer he was, the happier he appeared to be. Occasionally, when he only had a few cents in his pocket, he would show them to others, saying: "This is all my money!" Sometimes he would add: "Don Bosco is as poor as the poorest of his sons!"

A young workman attending the Valdocco festive oratory related to us the following episode:

One day I went to see Don Bosco in his room. After discussing various matters, we began to speak of finances, and he remarked that he

was penniless and burdened with debts. I pretended not to believe him, and—with the respectful familiarity which he allowed his sons—I playfully claimed that he was a miser hoarding gold coins in his safe (he never had one) until there would be a nice pile to admire. We both laughed. He then invited me to search for them. I diligently inspected his little desk and unearthed his hoard—the magnificent sum of 40 centesimi, half of which he pressed into my hand as a gift. This struck me, for no matter how much money he occasionally possessed, he never had enough for the ever increasing number of boys whose upkeep required a fortune. His needs were so great that donations could never catch up with expenses; it was like throwing money into a bottomless sack.

Don Bosco's outlook on worldly goods was described by Joseph Brosio in the following report that he prepared for Father [John] Bonetti:

One afternoon, as I was walking with Don Bosco along Via Dora Grossa, he stopped at a store window displaying a large globe. He pointed out the different parts of the world to me, and when he got to the Western Hemisphere he said: "Look, Brosio, see how huge America is and how sparsely populated!"

"But it has lots of gold!" I answered.

"Yes, that's true, but it's not owned by Catholics and put to good use." He then continued: "How much suffering this gold could relieve! How many merits one could gain with it. What a wonderful opportunity to spread the Faith! And yet, Our Lord redeemed mankind with poverty and the Cross. Holy poverty has always been the treasure of His apostles and of His true ministers!"

This was the basis of his love of evangelical poverty. We have already[1] described his room, pointing out that he never sought the slightest personal comfort. He would not have drapes on his windows, or even a strip of carpet beside his bed in winter, or a coverlet. He was very sparing in his use of the stove in order to save wood, despite the fact that his room was drafty and cold. For furniture, the only piece he allowed was an old, straw-filled, battered sofa which served visitors for over twenty years. During the last few years of his life the furniture improved slightly, but only because

[1] *See* Vol. III, p. 19. [Editor]

it was donated. The floor of his room was made up of dusty, wobbling brick tiles. Several attempts to get him to have the floor relaid always met with a stern refusal, which he justified by saying: "Don't forget that we are poor. Not only must we love poverty and be detached from material things, but we must also show it!"

If, for example, some inexpensive clothing material looked elegant, he rejected it as contrary to the spirit of poverty. He followed the same policy in regard to buildings, remarking that this, too, was an exercise in humility.

Once—while he was away—his room was spruced up a bit. There was nothing extravagant, just some decorative trimmings. However, Don Bosco was displeased, and he immediately had the walls and ceiling whitewashed. Moreover, his room was uncomfortable because of its location at the top of several flights of stairs and a long, unprotected balcony that was exposed to the sun, rain, snow, or freezing cold. Yet he never would allow a canopy to be placed over it or permit it to be closed in with windows or a tarpaulin.

Don Bosco's poverty was also manifest in his clothing. Monsignor [John Baptist] Bertagna [later a bishop] declared that Don Bosco chose to dress as the poorest of men. A coarse cassock served him for all seasons. When his friend, Father [Felix] Golzio, would occasionally bring to him for his young clerics some used cassocks that either he or other priests at the Convitto Ecclesiastico had discarded, Don Bosco would use one of them himself. His linen, too, was coarse. He used to remark humorously that what kept out the cold was also good to keep out the heat. He steadfastly refused to wear fine, soft linen shirts. His shoes were the cheap ones worn by peasants, and his handkerchiefs were also of very ordinary quality.

Never did he wear fine clothes, elegant footwear, silver buckles, a gold watch, chain, or other trinkets. He abhorred wearing a short cassock, as was the fashion then with quite a number of priests, because, among other reasons, he considered it to be a mark of affectation. If he received a handsome, costly present, he did not keep it for himself. "We are poor," he would say, "and we must live as the poor do." Very often his former pupils would express the desire to give him some fine present on his name day for his personal use, but he would always suggest that they buy vestments for the church instead.

The person who tidied up his room told us the following episode:

Once, when mending Don Bosco's summer cloak, the tailor replaced the worn-out collar ribbons with silk ones. "They are too fancy for Don Bosco," he remarked, and he had them replaced with ordinary woolen ones.

On another occasion, a benefactor brought me some very fine dress shirts for Don Bosco to wear. On a Saturday evening, therefore, I laid one out on his bed. I found it in the same place next morning. Later, on meeting me, he said: "John, is that the kind of shirt a poor priest should wear?"

"If I don't give them to you, to whom shall I give them?" I replied.

"To those who like to show off."

Don Bosco's heart was completely detached from material possessions. One day in August, around 1860, Father Boetti of Mondovì came to see him; he was dressed in civilian clothes and asked for clerical garments. Don Bosco gave him his hat, cloak, shoes, and the summer cassock he was wearing—a gift he had received only a few days before. Despite the scorching weather, he then put on his old, heavy cassock. As a result of his generosity, he himself had to go about in frayed clothes until the charitable Father Golzio came to his rescue.

Don Bosco was very forgetful when it came to replacing his worn-out clothes, and others had to take over responsibility in this regard. Joseph Rossi declared that several times he had to take it upon himself to dispose of Don Bosco's worn-out shoes and replace them with new ones. On many occasions, when he needed a cassock or cloak, his co-workers had to argue at length with him before he could be persuaded to accept one.

Sometimes he did not have adequate winter clothing and would remark: "Our poverty will be generously and abundantly rewarded by the possession of the kingdom of heaven." If an intimate friend expressed regret when he saw him lacking even the bare necessities, he would remark: "Look, this is the best way to practice poverty. Let's not be like those religious whom St. Bernard referred to when he said: 'They want poverty, but not its inconveniences. They want to be poor, provided that they lack nothing!' " Then he would add: "St. Paul stated very clearly that the Lord's disciples—wherever

they might go and whatever they do—should be satisfied with whatever food and clothing was strictly necessary for their livelihood." [Cf. 1 Tim. 6, 8]

When Don Bosco unexpectedly had to go on a trip or call on a distinguished person and lacked suitable clothes, his co-workers frequently would vie with each other to lend him whatever he needed, lest he should be embarrassed or seem to lack respect for his host. On such occasions, some of his spiritual sons would also lovingly brush his clothes and hat for him, for he either would not think of it or would lack the time to do so.

Bishop [John] Cagliero told us:

One evening in 1853 Don Bosco came home dripping wet from a torrential downpour. When he got to his room he wanted to change, but his mother could not find him another cassock. He was disappointed because the boys were in church waiting for him to lead the devotions in honor of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, and he did not want to let them down. Then his eye chanced on a used, long overcoat and a pair of white trousers which I believe Marquis [Dominic] Fassati had brought for some boy. Without any hesitation Don Bosco donned them, put on a pair of clogs, and trudged downstairs to church. It was dark in the church, but the boys could not help noticing his strange garb. They smiled sympathetically because they knew that he was poor for their sake.

Another year, during the month of May, he was again caught in a downpour. Since he had no other cassock to change into, he had to wear a long overcoat that a fellow priest had given him. It did not reach to his heels, and that is why—as he preached the May sermonette from the pulpit—we could see to what extent his socks had been darned.

A humorous episode occurred around 1854 or 1855. One day Don Bosco had to send [the cleric Joseph] Rocchietti to town on a very important errand. Noticing that the boy's shoes were worn and bursting at the seams, Don Bosco took off his own and gave them to him without further thought. On his way out, Rocchietti said laughingly to his companions: "I wonder how Don Bosco will manage today. He has no other shoes." That was quite true! Worse yet, when he tried to borrow a pair from Buzzetti, Rua, and others, he found that they, too, had only the shoes they were wearing, and

none were Don Bosco's size. Finally someone managed to find a pair of clogs. It should be remembered that it was the height of summer. When dinner time arrived and Don Bosco came down the stairs, the strange clatter and unusual footwear attracted the boys' attention, exciting their laughter. The amusing aspect of the incident was that around three o'clock a servant came from Count [Louis] Giriodi to ask Don Bosco if he would go to assist a sick member of his family at once. Don Bosco wanted to take a coach so that no one would notice his clogs, but it would have taken too long to find one, since they were rather scarce in addition to being expensive. He therefore asked the servant to accompany him. As they trudged along Via Dora Grossa and across Piazza Castello to Via Po, No. 53, Don Bosco kept close to the buildings, hoping that his cassock would hide his unusual footwear. After administering to the patient, he was about to leave when the servant hinted that Don Bosco might not need to be escorted back.

"I'm afraid I do," said Don Bosco.

"But why, if I may ask?"

"Because I need someone to block out the view of my clogs."

"Good heavens," the servant exclaimed, and went straight to Count Giriodi to tell him about it. The count hastily dressed and accompanied Don Bosco himself through the narrow, deserted alleys. On reaching Via Corte d'Appello, he took Don Bosco to a shoe store at No. 8, run by Mrs. Zanone, a widow who was well known to both of them, and whispered to her that Don Bosco was wearing clogs because he had no shoes. The lady, who had warmly greeted Don Bosco, was greatly surprised, and she instantly fitted him with the finest shoes she had in exchange for his clogs, which she kept as a precious souvenir of the event.

Don Bosco seemed to have a special liking for old clothes that had been donated to the Oratory, and he used them like everyone else there. Bishop Cagliero stated:

> I remember the examples Don Bosco gave us in regard to used clothing or footwear, factory rejects, moth-eaten warehouse leftovers, or even army horse blankets. He would wear those clothes or shoes as if he were one of his poor orphans, and he did so not only around the house but occasionally even outside, especially at night, even though they were

by no means comfortable or well-fitting. Many a winter we saw him wearing a black military overcoat over his cassock, both in church and outside. In 1866 and the years following, he would often ask John Bisio to alter some used military trousers for him, claiming that they were just what he needed. In addition, his bed was covered by a gray horse blanket.

Don Bosco recommended—often pointedly—the practice of holy poverty with great fervor to all his spiritual children in his talks and sermons and on other suitable occasions. He also inculcated the practice on those in administrative positions, stressing that all possessions should be regarded as belonging to Divine Providence. He often emphasized to his young clerics that it was unbecoming for a priest to seek worldly comforts or to follow fads. To those who felt that they had to maintain a certain decorum, he would reply that poverty and cleanliness were the decorum of a priest or religious. His obvious distress at breaches of poverty despite his many exhortations showed clearly how much he loved this virtue. He used to state that the decline of several religious orders could be directly attributed to the fact that they had abandoned the common life and their original poverty. He also used to exclaim: "I earnestly beg you never to waste anything. Always remember that what we have is not our own, but belongs to the poor. Woe to us if we do not make good use of it!"

When traveling (and this happened very frequently), Don Bosco always went third class if he had a choice and there was no grave reason for doing otherwise. He assured his co-workers that if they would simply practice poverty, they would always enjoy the good will of all and at least the forbearance of the enemies of religion. He also assured them that God would shed abundant spiritual and material blessings upon them if they faithfully kept this virtue.

In speaking of Our Savior, Don Bosco would often portray Him as one having no place to lay His head, adding: "How can we be His disciples if we are not like our Master? Jesus Christ was born poor, lived even more poorly, and died in the most dire poverty." He would then exhort them not to seek comforts, to take good care of their personal belongings, and to avoid wasting paper or forming habits which would in the long run violate the practice of

poverty, saying: "All the savings we shall thus accumulate will enable us to shelter still another boy."

Don Bosco's spiritual children readily accepted their father's precepts, willingly dispensing with comforts and even with necessities. The rooms of the first priests—the Oratory superiors—were located in the attic; they were small and furnished with only a small desk, a chair or wooden stool, and a basin. They did their studying in the boys' common study hall. Even the boys practiced poverty so austerely that those years deserve to be called the "heroic years." This heroism sprang from the acceptance of St. Teresa's maxim: "The more we give to the body, the less we give to the soul."

Let us now conclude with some remarks of Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio who spent eight years with Don Bosco:

> Poverty was everywhere in evidence at the Oratory in Don Bosco's daily routine and in our own as well. Many a time I thought that Don Bosco and his spiritual family were leading such poor and laborious lives that they truly looked like Capuchins. As is the case with the saints—who admirably exemplify the golden mean—Don Bosco's love of poverty was matched by his anxious concern for personal cleanliness. I believe that this harmony was the result of his spiritual life—especially his self-denial, hard work, and most sensitive chastity—for he always appeared as the embodiment of cleanliness and godliness.

CHAPTER 56

Preparations for a New Religious Congregation

DON Bosco loved evangelical poverty in the same way that a devoted son loves his mother. It was his treasure. For this reason God willed that he found a religious congregation in keeping with the needs of the times, one that would again bear out St. Paul's precept about "having nothing, yet possessing all things." [2 Cor. 6, 10] The fulfilling of this commission was no easy task, for it involved not only gathering the first members of his future society but also molding them. This was the task that God expected of his unfailingly loyal and humble servant.

We have previously stated [1] that Don Bosco used to invite some of his young clerics and boys to stay at the Oratory and help him with his work, only to find out later that rarely would they stay on permanently. Father Ascanio Savio wrote to us: "In 1850 I suggested to Don Bosco: 'Found a religious order.' He replied: 'All in good time.' I therefore surmised that he had some kind of plan in mind, as indeed he had. Years later I learned that, at his urging, some clerics had begun taking short-term vows. However, he did not insist that these vows be renewed, and in point of fact, they were not."

Father Joseph Cafasso, too, after listening to Don Bosco's problems concerning the stability of his festive oratories, used to tell him: "What you absolutely need is a religious congregation."

"I'm all in favor of it, but would that solve my problem if, for example, the local ordinary or the members themselves should request a transfer or change of duties? I doubt it."

"You're right! What you need is a society with vows approved by the Holy See. Only then could you have control of its members."

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 294ff. [Editor]

Don Bosco was well aware of this fact, but he had consulted Father Cafasso simply because he wanted the approval of his learned spiritual director. Likewise, he had not forgotten the repeated exhortations of Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni.[2] However, with his usual prudence, Don Bosco considered it premature to think of formal vows, and he realized that, as a first step, he would have to seek diocesan approval of his proposed rules.

He found support in Father [John] Borel and a few other priests who—though not residing at the Oratory—fully deserve to be recognized as cornerstones of the Salesian Society because of their constant assistance in a variety of ways. Fully aware of the good being done through the oratories, these priests were anxious to see them firmly established, and they frequently urged Don Bosco to start the congregation he had confidentially mentioned to them. But Don Bosco usually replied: "Let's go on as we have done so far and leave everything in God's hands. He will let us know when to change course."

Meanwhile, Don Bosco was still faced with the problem of where he would get his recruits. For some years now he had called together after night prayers a few students and young clerics who seemed to have imbued his spirit in order to prepare them for the priesthood. To strengthen their vocation, he brought out the advantages of common life and convinced them in his usual kind way of the advantages to be gained by spending their summer vacation, or at least the greatest part of it, at the Oratory. Often he would, little by little, disclose his vast plans and kindle their enthusiasm. This he did also in other friendly conversations, with the result that, almost imperceptibly and unconsciously, these chosen few, looking upon the Oratory as their own home, became the nucleus of a nascent congregation. These sentiments, however, although deeply rooted in several of them, were not yet apparent to the rest of the boys. Until 1860 and even later, these meetings seemed to be nothing but a spontaneous gathering of elder sons around their father to hear what he thought best for the smooth running of the Oratory.

Don Bosco had very grave reasons for not disclosing his true intentions. He dared speak of them only to one or two of the most trustworthy for fear of frightening away those who were willing to

[2] *See* Vol. IV, p. 21. [Editor]

help him. If he ever invited anyone to live permanently with him, he never revealed that it meant joining a religious order or congregation, nor did he ever utter the words "novice," "novitiate," "profession," or "vows." To do so would have been his undoing, for they all would have fled. Prejudice, errors, lies, and mockery cast such aspersions on religious everywhere that even brave applicants would have been disheartened—and all the more so at a time when government suppression of religious orders made their future very uncertain. Furthermore, the Oratory boys and clerics were very young and inexperienced. As a matter of fact, almost all the first Oratory priests and the more outstanding coadjutors often remarked afterward: "Had Don Bosco asked us: 'Do you want to join the Salesian Congregation?' and explained what 'congregation' meant, not one of us would be here. Don Bosco drew us by his sincere love, and we, like little lambs enticed by green pastures, entered his fold. Moreover, we have never regretted it! In those days his approach was: 'Do you like Don Bosco? Would you care to pursue your seminary studies here at the Oratory? Would you like to help Don Bosco later on? There is so much to do. I wish I had a great number of priests and clerics here with me. There is work for everybody.' We just couldn't refuse him."

"I recall," one of these first Salesians said, "that one day I asked him what I should write to my parents, who were already looking for a seminary for me. He said: 'Tell them that you are grateful to Don Bosco for his help, and that you would like to stay with him to give him a hand in supervising the boys, teaching, or doing whatever else is needed.' At that time I really was not looking too far into the future, had no worries about it, and was satisfied."

Another difficulty Don Bosco faced was that his little pioneer group did not yet have a spirit of voluntary submission leading to that total renunciation of one's will demanded by religious life. His need for them, the traditional Oratory family life so attractive in itself, their fiery and difficult disposition, and their selfless hard work compelled Don Bosco to be very patient in demanding a strict routine. He followed the example of his Divine Master. When the Pharisees reproached Him because His disciples did not fast, He replied with the parables of a new patch sewn on an old garment, new wine poured into old wineskins, and the drinker accustomed to

old wine. His message was that one cannot possibly change one's manner of life at one stroke and that He had to lead His disciples a step at a time, infusing a new spirit into them by teachings, examples, and grace. The Gospel tells us all that this cost Him. (Luke 5, 33ff) Their exclamation, "This is a hard saying," and the fact that many of them turned their backs on Him clearly reveal this. [John 6, 61–67]

In 1875 Don Bosco reminisced as follows:

How many of you still recall the early days of the Oratory? Well, many things have slowly changed since then and have gradually taken root! It's obvious that we are making progress. In the beginning Don Bosco was alone; then Father Alasonatti came to help him. Yet, very often, Don Bosco still had to teach day and night, write books, preach, supervise, and search for funds. Under these circumstances it was unavoidable that small disorders should occur—squabbles among the clerics as to the manner of doing good, heated philosophical and theological polemics at the wrong time and place, disturbances in the study hall when the boys were not present, lying in bed longer because of the cold, and justifiable but unreported absenteeism from classes. On the other hand, the clerics were faithful to their practices of piety with the boys. We had not as yet introduced the custom of spiritual reading and meditation in our religious houses. I was aware of all these shortcomings, spoke to those concerned when I thought it necessary, but put up with the situation because it was not a matter of sin. If I had wanted to eliminate all these disorders at one stroke, I would have had to dismiss all the boys and close the Oratory, because the clerics would not have accepted this new regime. I had to be very cautious. The Oratory climate had always been marked by a certain spirit of freedom that was averse to restrictions, and the comfortable life of a diocesan priest offered too many enticements to clerics who already had to contend with parents trying to convince them to return home after their ordination. On the other hand, I could see that these clerics, even though frivolous, were hard-working, good-hearted, and morally sound. I knew that once their youthful ardor would wear off, they would be most valuable to me. I must say that the priests who belonged to that group are our hardest workers and the ones most imbued with priestly and religious spirit. In those days, however, they would certainly have left me rather than submit to certain restrictions. If I had limited myself to a small circle in my desire for perfect adherence to a definite set of rules, I would have

accomplished very little, and the Oratory would now be a sort of boarding school with some fifty to a hundred boys—nothing more!

A trait of which those first co-workers of Don Bosco can be justifiably proud is the veneration and affection that they showed to their superior. In turn, he especially enjoyed the freedom of speech that rightfully belongs to the father of a family. Even at the Good Night, Don Bosco would occasionally give a public reprimand to anyone who deserved it without causing resentment. He could say and do what others would be unwise to attempt.

We recall one incident that occurred in 1857. For some time there had been a strict rule that when the boys and clerics received candles as remuneration for their services at parish funerals—a rather frequent occurrence—they were to hand them over to the prefect of the Oratory. This represented a considerable saving for the Oratory. Four clerics were once sent to a funeral at Superga, and each was given a dozen candles. Two of them did as the rule prescribed, while the other two sold them and kept the money. This was not the first time that anyone had taken such a liberty, but it was the first time that Don Bosco had witnessed it. Then and there he limited himself to shaking his head because a stranger was present and also, perhaps, because he thought they needed money to buy books or some such necessary item. Later that day, however, when the incident became public knowledge, he decided to speak out lest the abuse become general.

Therefore, that evening, after prayers, calm and smiling as always, he publicly addressed Father [Victor] Alasonatti [the prefect]. "I understand that some clerics served at a funeral this morning. Is that correct?"

"Yes, Father!"

"Who were they?"

Father Alasonatti called out the four names.

"Good! Did they give you the candles?"

"Two did, two didn't," Father Alasonatti replied, giving their names.

"That wasn't right!" Don Bosco said. Then, speaking of one of those two clerics, he continued: "There is some excuse for him in thinking that by serving at parish funerals he brings some gain to

the house, but there is no such excuse for . . . . . ." (and he gave the other cleric's name). "You," he continued, "are boarding here completely free of charge. Only the other day you asked me to condone your incidental expenses because your parents could not afford to pay for them. I granted your request. What excuse do you have for your conduct? Good night."

Since most boys boarded gratis as did the cleric, they felt that the reprimand was well deserved and necessary. Nor did the cleric resent Don Bosco's remarks or feel that he had been uncharitable. He always remained filially attached to him, and in 1894 he declared to us: "I never noticed anything in Don Bosco which even remotely could belie the sanctity of his life."

For many years Don Bosco had looked upon a religious congregation of his own as a very remote possibility, but now at last, in 1857, it was beginning to take shape. After ten years of unshakable steadfastness, unremitting work, expenses, and worries, and after putting several young artisans through a course of studies with splendid results, he now had the consolation of having with him a select group of some eight clerics and boys on whom he felt he could rely, for they seemed to have a decided inclination to share his labors for the rest of their lives.

It was necessary, therefore, to give them a set of rules, and these were in readiness. As Canon John Baptist Anfossi told us, Don Bosco had already drafted with great care the constitutions of the Salesian Society at the time he was requesting his young clerics to pray for Divine assistance in the important tasks he had undertaken. In a certain sense he had laid the basis of these constitutions [years before] when he had drawn up the Regulations for the Festive Oratory[3] and those for the hospice attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales,[4] because the positions therein mentioned were identical to those held by the future members of the Superior Chapter.[5] He had tried very hard to secure copies of the constitutions of important religious orders and congregations, but his efforts were in vain because, as a matter of policy, they did not loan copies to non-members even for a short time. Even the Oblates of Mary in Turin, with

[3] *See* Vol. III, pp. 441–453. [Editor]
[4] *See* Vol. IV, p. 542–559. [Editor]
[5] Now renamed "Superior Council." [Editor]

whom Don Bosco was on friendly terms, firmly refused him. A few years later, however, he succeeded in getting a copy. Yet in 1855, when he began drafting a set of rules, he had to base himself on whatever knowledge he had gleaned from the study of church history and from ideas that obviously had been communicated to him in certain dreams or visions. This preparatory work entailed many sleepless nights and much research, consultation, and correspondence with learned and experienced people. His task was even harder because he maintained that his congregation had to be different from the others in its externals, free of monastic practices which were alien to the secular clergy, unpopular, or ridiculed by the worldly-minded. "We must retain the substance of the religious life," he asserted, "not its externals. In my opinion, a congregation like the one I am thinking of will inspire greater confidence and support, and will in due course attract many members who will be drawn—so to speak—by its up-to-date look." For this reason, too, he did not want his new religious congregation named after him. He also conferred with Father John Baptist Pagani, Father Rosmini's immediate successor, for advice in trying to realize a project that the times had apparently made impossible.

During this period, however, Don Bosco seemed to be troubled by the enemy of mankind who, naturally, could not look favorably upon his plans. "We noticed," Canon John Baptist Anfossi declared, "that Don Bosco, as a rule, was harassed by the devil whenever he was about to start some important work for the greater glory of God. One morning when I asked Don Bosco how he had slept, he replied: "Not very well, because I was tormented by a hideous beast, something like a bear that tried to smother me in bed." This occurred repeatedly, and Don Bosco admitted quite frankly that these were diabolical vexations. Others who lived at the Oratory said the same thing, convinced by several indications that there was really something preternatural in these occurrences.

On the night that he finished the first constitutions of the Salesian Society—the result of much prayer, meditation and effort—the infernal enemy made his appearance as Don Bosco was writing the closing words "Ad maiorem Dei gloriam." The table shook, overturning the inkwell and smearing the manuscript, which was suddenly wafted into the air, as by a gust of wind, and then fell in a

scatter of sheets to the accompaniment of frightful screams. The papers were so blotted and illegible that Don Bosco had to start all over again. He himself revealed this incident to several people, including Father Evasius Rabagliati, a missionary.

After rewriting the whole manuscript, Don Bosco prayed at length, as he himself told us, that God would enlighten him as to whether or not the time had come to start his congregation. As a first step he personally called together those of his pupils who clearly seemed to be called to help him. He confidentially disclosed to them the outline of the society he planned to form and the advantages that youth would certainly derive from it; now and then he also read sections of the constitutions he had drafted. Of course, these constitutions were not definitive, since they had not yet been approved by the Church, but they were so clearly and logically drawn up that Don Bosco's choice pupils readily grasped his aims and the nature of the obligations they would assume if they joined the society. We shall present these constitutions in the Appendix.[6] They are an important historical document revealing Don Bosco's concept of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

The news that Don Bosco had drafted a set of rules soon leaked out of the Oratory, and several prominent priests who were favorably disposed toward him advised him against going through with his plan. In their opinion, the times were not propitious, candidates were scarce, and the government was uncompromisingly hostile to religious orders; all these things, they claimed, would smother his society at its very inception. Don Bosco's reply was that nothing was impossible to God, and that if it were God's will that he should found this society, it would prosper despite any and all difficulties. However, he did concede that the cunning of a serpent was needed in trying to found a new order while existing ones were being suppressed, but at the same time he declared it imperative to safeguard the moral welfare of youth at all costs.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco could not help fearing the government's opposition. At this point, an unexpected development showed him the way. Divine Wisdom, who "is ever at play in the world" [cf. Prov. 8, 31], chose Urbano Rattazzi as its instrument to banish all hesitation from Don Bosco's mind.

[6] *See* Appendix 27. [Editor]

In 1857, the Minister of the Interior was beginning to have misgivings about the notions of liberty entertained by the masses. One day he sent for Don Bosco—to whom he had recently written[7]—and, after some small talk about the lottery, the festive oratories, and the benefits the government could expect from the latter, he went on more or less as follows:

"I hope, Don Bosco, that you will live for many years to come and educate countless poor boys, but you are mortal like everyone else. If anything should happen to you, what would become of your work? Have you thought of that? How do you intend to ensure its continuation?"

To this unexpected inquiry, Don Bosco replied half in jest and half in earnest:

"To tell you the truth, Your Excellency, I do not plan on dying so soon. I have secured some help for the present, but that's all. Since you have mentioned the matter, may I ask what you would suggest for the future existence of my institutions?"

"I know you do not care to have your work officially recognized by the government as a charitable institution," Rattazzi replied. "Therefore, my advice is that you select a certain number of trustworthy laymen and priests, form a society, imbue them with your spirit, and teach them your system, so that they may not only help you now but also carry on your work when you are gone."

At this suggestion, a slight smile played across Don Bosco's face. This was the very minister who had successfully contrived the ratification of the first law suppressing century-old religious orders in Piedmont. How strange that this very man should now suggest founding a new religious congregation! Don Bosco replied: "Does Your Excellency believe it possible nowadays to found such a society and ensure its permanence without at the same time binding its members with some religious bond?"

"Some bond is necessary, I agree, but it should be such that the society's goods do not belong to the community as a moral entity."

"Just two years ago the government suppressed several religious communities. Perhaps it is now getting ready to do away with the rest. Do you think it would permit the establishment of another of like nature?"

[7] *See* Appendix 16. [Editor]

"I am fully acquainted with the law of suppression and its scope," Rattazzi replied. "The law is not an obstacle to you at all, provided that you found a society which meets the needs of the times and respects the laws now in force."

"What would that entail?"

"This society should not be a moral body that owns goods, but one in which each member retains his civil rights, submits to the laws of the land, pays taxes, and so on. In a word, this new society, in the eyes of the government, would be nothing more than an association of free citizens living together and sharing the same charitable goals."

"Can Your Excellency assure me that the government would permit the establishment of such a society and its subsequent existence?"

"No lawful constitutional government can oppose the establishment and development of such a society, just as it does not oppose but rather favors commercial, industrial, stock, mutual, and other such societies. Any association of free citizens is permitted as long as its purpose and activities do not conflict with the laws and institutions of the State. Don't worry about that. But please give the matter some thought. Both the government and the king will support you because your work is eminently humanitarian."

"Well," Don Bosco concluded, "I shall think the matter over, and since Your Excellency has been so kind to me and my boys, I shall gladly have recourse to your wisdom and authority, if necessary."

To Don Bosco, Rattazzi's words came as a flash of light that revealed the government's intentions and dispelled all his fears. The type of society suggested by Rattazzi was purely humanitarian in nature, but Don Bosco did not think it advisable at that time to discuss the spiritual aspect. He warmly thanked Rattazzi for his suggestion, without mentioning in any way that he had already incorporated those ideas in his proposed constitutions—particularly those regarding the practice of the vow of poverty. Don Bosco felt that to have Rattazzi as an ally, he had to let the minister believe that the suggestion had originated with him. Don Bosco acted accordingly. When occasionally he called on Rattazzi, the latter would strongly urge him to commence with his project. On January 1, 1876, Don Bosco remarked in our presence: "Rattazzi was anxious

to work with me in drafting several articles of our constitutions touching on the relation of our society to civil laws and the State. It is quite accurate to say that certain safeguards which protect us from government harassment were entirely his own contribution."

Now that he was assured of Rattazzi's support, Don Bosco discussed the matter at length with Father Cafasso and consulted several bishops and other devout and learned persons before turning to the Holy See. Since it was a question of founding a congregation which differed from all contemporary or previous ones, he questioned them on two points: 1. Could a society be at one and the same time a civil society in the eyes of the State and a religious society before God and the Church if its aim was the glory of God? 2. Could its members be at one and the same time free citizens as well as religious?"

"Yes," Don Bosco replied to his own questions. "I think that just as a Catholic who is subject to both Church and State can faithfully observe their separate laws, so, too, can a religious." The bishops and theologians whom he consulted concurred with him, but then another problem arose which, though not as serious, was potentially the source of grave difficulties.

Bishop [John Peter] Losana—who had also been consulted—pointed out to Don Bosco that the dioceses were in urgent need of priests, and that if Don Bosco kept the more promising prospects for himself in order to establish his society, the dioceses would be shorthanded. This was tantamount to saying that the future of vocations [in Piedmont] rested in Don Bosco's hands. He replied that the delay would cause no harm, for he foresaw that with co-workers firmly bound to his congregation, he could in a few years offer much greater assistance to the Piedmontese dioceses. He buttressed his argument with the saying *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur* [In unity there is strength]; this meant that fostering vocations would henceforth be the work of a team instead of just an individual, and therefore it would be a permanent, constant, and forward-moving endeavor that would succeed, thanks to the vow of obedience firmly uniting the workers in the evangelical vineyard. Bishop Losana, who repeated this conversation to Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi, concurred with Don Bosco, whose prediction came true in a very short

time with astounding accuracy. The aforementioned canon stated to us in writing: "In 1862 I taught a class at the Oratory. That year, out of roughly one hundred pupils, seventy-four decided to study for the priesthood and entered various diocesan seminaries."

After also obtaining the approval of the bishop of Biella, Don Bosco was anxious to inform his revered archbishop about the decision he had made. Since he was unable to call in person on that indomitable hero of the Church who was still in exile at Lyons, he wrote to him asking for his opinion. Archbishop Fransoni was highly pleased with Don Bosco's plans—which for years had also been his own—and he encouraged him to go through with them. To ensure their success, he urged him to go to Rome to receive the advice and instructions of Pius IX. Don Bosco willingly accepted the archbishop's suggestion and resolved to undertake the journey which he had long been considering.

Meanwhile, deplorable events were still unfolding. At the very time that Don Bosco was about to form his society, the government continued to seize religious houses, evicting their peaceful, industrious occupants and herding members of different congregations into one single monastery. Don Bosco grieved over this situation, particularly when the law was applied very rigorously against the Oblates of Mary whom he greatly esteemed and loved. In November 1855 the government's Bureau of Ecclesiastical Affairs had leased part of their monastery to a hotel owner; then in 1857 it evicted the Oblates from the remainder to give it to the Franciscans who were in the good graces of the government. Since the Franciscans had taken possession of their new abode without notifying the chancery, the vicar-general refused them permission to administer the shrine, and he appointed first an Oblate, then a diocesan priest, as rector. Naturally, devotion to Our Lady of Consolation suffered as a result. To help promote such devotion during these sad years, Don Bosco sent his choir and altar boys for solemn novenas and feasts and whenever else they were requested. Meanwhile, realizing that the chancery intended to stand firm, the Franciscans at first played for time, and then they secured a rescript from the Pope. Since they had made unfounded assertions in order to obtain this rescript, Archbishop Fransoni protested to Rome, and word came back

ordering the Franciscans to apologize to the archbishop. They did so, and finally they were given official permission to administer the shrine.

While this dispute was being settled, an article appeared in a Catholic newspaper that was overcritical of the Franciscans. Despite his affection for the Oblates, Don Bosco regretted the publication of this article, for he thought it quite unnecessarily publicized something that was strictly a church matter. "If the Franciscans were at fault," he remarked, "why not cover it with the mantle of charity, since the Oblates had no chance to vindicate their rights? Then, too, in such a large community, the fault may easily be attributable to only one individual or to a few, so why blame all the Franciscans?" He concluded: "As long as priests and religious work and do good in their respective ministries, they should not be slurred and placed in a bad light." Father John Turchi is our source for the above remarks, since he personally heard Don Bosco speak those words.

CHAPTER 57

Spiritual Guidance

OUR narrative has now brought us to the end of the school year 1856–57. The Oratory register shows that as of November 1, 1856, there were 85 resident students and 78 artisans. Each of the 163 boys has his rating next to his name. It was at this time of year that the students made decisions for their future: some returned permanently to their families; others went off on their own. Since these decisions concerned their vocations, Don Bosco was prudent to the utmost in giving advice, as we can see from the following episode.

In 1857 a boy of excellent conduct was about to finish his studies at the Oratory. During his five years' stay the subject of vocation had not once been broached to him. Several times he had asked Don Bosco for suggestions on what he should do when he would leave the Oratory, only to be told: "Be good; study and pray. In due time God will let you know what is best for you."

"What must I do for God to enlighten me on my vocation?"

"St. Peter says that we can discover our vocation with certainty through our good deeds."

Since Easter was near and the annual spiritual retreat was about to start, the boy was anxious to discuss his vocation. For some time he had felt strongly drawn to the priesthood, but he feared that his conduct might not have been good enough. Therefore, he called on Don Bosco to talk things over. Don Bosco jotted down notes which we found among his papers. The dialogue between the priest and boy went as follows:

Boy: How can one tell if he has a vocation to the priesthood?

Don Bosco: Good morals, intelligence, and ecclesiastical spirit are signs of a priestly vocation.

Boy: How can one know if he has good morals?

Don Bosco: A good rule of thumb is the observance of the sixth commandment. On this point a confessor is the best judge.

Boy: My confessor has already told me that on this score I should have no trouble. How about intelligence?

Don Bosco: Your superiors can tell you about that after suitable tests.

Boy: What does "ecclesiastical spirit" mean?

Don Bosco: It means the inclination and liking one experiences while taking part in those church services that are suitable to his age and obligations.

Boy: Is that all?

Don Bosco: No, there is a feature of the ecclesiastical spirit that is far more important—a leaning toward this state of life as preferable to any other, regarding it as even more profitable and glamorous.

Boy: I think I have these qualifications. Some years ago I thought of nothing else but the priesthood. Then for two years—as you know—I felt a strong dislike for it; now I am again all for it to the exclusion of everything else. My father will raise some objections because he wants me to follow a secular career, but with God's help I hope to succeed.

Don Bosco further mentioned to the boy that in becoming a priest he would have to renounce earthly pleasures, riches and honors, and even the desire for brilliant positions; he also said that he would have to be ready to face insults, do all, and suffer all in order to serve God, win souls for Him, and above all save his own.

"Those are just the things that make me want to become a priest," the boy replied. "There are far more spiritual dangers in other walks of life than in the priesthood."

As the boy expected, his wealthy father objected, since he was an only son. On first learning of the boy's intentions, he tried to dissuade him by letter, and then he came personally to the Oratory to take him home. The lad could offer no resistance. On parting, Don Bosco advised him: "Son, a great battle is shaping up. Keep away from bad friends and bad books. Always look upon Our Lady as your Mother and pray to Her often. Let me hear from you soon." Deeply moved, the boy promised to do all he was told, and he then left.

The young lad kept his word. In obedience to his father, he became a surveyor, but he steadfastly maintained his resolve to be-

come a priest. His heart was still at the Oratory, and he was ever mindful of Don Bosco's words: "If you lose your soul, you'll lose everything; if you save your soul, you'll save everything for all eternity!" The young man was very faithful in keeping the Lord's day sacred, and he refused to do business on Sundays or holy days, saying: "Sundays and holy days are for my religious duties and nothing else." He was exemplary in his conduct and very active in his parish. In 1871 he returned to Don Bosco, became a religious, and in due time was ordained.

Don Bosco also strove to secure morally safe and well-paying jobs for the young artisans who were leaving the Oratory after completing their training or for other reasons. In this he was assisted by Father [Joseph] Begliati, procurator of the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and by several members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. Furthermore, either he or one of these members solicited work for shop owners or storekeepers who employed Oratory boys. He also willingly obliged when called upon for any other form of assistance.

The Doyen brothers, who were lithographers, had taken into apprenticeship many boys recommended by Don Bosco. This relationship perhaps prompted him to request a favor of the president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, A. Baudon. This gentleman had visited the Oratory shortly before on a visit to Turin. Don Bosco received a favorable reply, and we shall report it [in the Appendix],[1] partly because the writer was a distinguished gentleman and partly because this incident marked the beginning of a long-lasting relationship.

While Don Bosco had to work to find suitable jobs for his pupils, some seemed favored by Lady Luck in the form of couples asking Don Bosco to find them some poor good boy to adopt. The Oratory boys' reaction was generally negative; neither students nor artisans were interested in the opportunity. Most of them flatly refused, no matter how titled or wealthy the people were. Their self-respect would not let them give up their own name, however obscure, for fear that they might be looked upon as foundlings. Their families also felt the same way. This attitude was particularly pronounced among the young artisans. They loved their craft and preferred it to anything else.

[1] *See* Appendix 17. [Editor]

Don Bosco would remark: "Troublesome boys would quickly accept adoption, but nobody wants them. As for the good ones, adoption could present grave problems if the adoptive parents would want a young artisan to give up his craft for an academic education. In such a case, the young boy would not be able to make a smooth transition to a different way of life, environment, and habits. He would swell with pride; in turn, pride would lead him to moral ruin. The boy who is to be adopted into a wealthy family should have certain qualifications, such as having been born himself of well-to-do parents and having lived in comfort before falling into poverty through misfortune; he should also have an excellent moral character firmly grounded in humility. Only then can one hope for a successful adoption."

This was the case with several Oratory boys for whom Divine Providence arranged adoption. We shall here relate the details of one such case.

A childless French gentleman, the owner of a sizable shoe factory, came to the Oratory in 1857 from Paris to ask Don Bosco for a boy to adopt and make his heir. Don Bosco immediately thought of a fine artisan who was fully deserving of such good fortune, but he kept his ideas to himself. He told the gentleman he would oblige, and he invited him to visit the workshops and make his own choice. He took him to the shoeshop himself and stopped by the boy he had in mind. The boy was sitting at the head of his workbench, monitoring a few others. Don Bosco said to him: "Please take this gentleman through the Oratory and then show him to my room." He then withdrew. The boy took over with great ease, and even though the visitor spoke French and the boy spoke Piedmontese, they hit it off splendidly. When the tour was over, the gentleman said to Don Bosco: "You would do me a great favor to let me have the boy who took me around the house."

Don Bosco smiled and said: "Do you think you will be pleased with him?"

"Very much so! I am sure that my wife will feel the same way."

Don Bosco then called the boy, a true orphan with no one to care for him, and put the matter up to him. After some hesitation, the boy accepted, but then added: "If something happens that I can't stay with this gentleman, would you take me back here?"

"I'm sure that you will be happy there. But don't worry. If you should ever have to leave their home through no fault of your own, I promise that I will gladly take you back again."

The boy was adopted. He was so good and obedient that the gentleman's wife loved him as if he were her own son. A short time later, first the man and then his wife passed away, leaving the boy all their possessions. He continued to ply his trade and manage the shoe factory that had been willed to him by his adoptive father, a still thriving concern valued at more than 400,000 lire. When Don Bosco was in Paris in 1883, this good-hearted son called on him several times to ask him to visit his family, but, notwithstanding Don Bosco's willingness, it could not be arranged.

Other proposed adoptions were declined for supernatural reasons. A rich lady of Turin once asked Don Bosco to find her a boy whose parents would be willing to renounce their rights over him so she could adopt him and make him her heir. Don Bosco promised to oblige. His choice was an orphan who, in his judgment, would not be spoiled by good fortune. After tactfully preparing the boy for the change but keeping him in the dark as to what it was all about, one day he called on the lady at her elegant residence and brought the boy for her to meet.

That evening the lady arranged a sumptuous dinner; to the boy —accustomed to the modest repasts at the Oratory—it was a banquet fit for a king. Quite unaware that he was being studied with great curiosity, he behaved so well that the lady in question was amazed. During the after-dinner conversation the boy stayed close to Don Bosco, modest and silent. Fearing that his silence might be misinterpreted, Don Bosco questioned him on an episode of Italian history which the dinner guests were then discussing. The boy gave his opinion and then cited facts, names, and dates to support it. He won the interest of all, and they gathered around him, plying him with questions about his name, place of birth, age, and studies. He replied with such self-assurance that the lady said to herself: "That's the boy I want!"

After the other guests had gone and only the lady, Don Bosco, and the boy were in the living room, Don Bosco asked the boy: "Would you like to remain here, son?"

"To do what?"

"To make this your home!"

"What do you mean?"

Don Bosco then explained what the lady had in mind as she affectionately awaited his reply.

"Does this mean that I'd have to give up the idea of becoming a priest?" the boy asked.

"Of course," the lady answered.

"I can't do that. I want to be a priest."

He did become a priest. He is now laboring in the Lord's vineyard and is still deeply attached to Don Bosco. Nor was he the only one to display such generosity; we know of another boy whom God raised to the highest honors in the Church as a reward for having followed his vocation.

While Don Bosco was solicitously providing for the future of his boys—some of whom were home on vacation—several middle-class boys and some diocesan seminarians accepted his invitation to spend a few weeks at the Oratory. Among these was Dominic Ruffino who had just completed his first year of philosophy in the Chieri seminary. He had made Don Bosco's acquaintance some years earlier and had been filially attached to him. When he was home on vacation at Giaveno, he wrote to Don Bosco for advice on some problems. Don Bosco replied as follows:

Turin, July 13, 1857

My beloved son in the Lord:

Cheer up and trust in the Lord. I do not believe that you will again be required to pay the registration fee of 24 lire for admission to the seminary. Should that happen, tell your superiors to contact me and I will take care of it. In view of the financial situation of your family, you are welcome to come and spend your vacation here with me if you wish. Just let me know a few days beforehand.

Always remember that our greatest treasure is the holy fear of God, and that "for those who love God all things work together unto good." [Rom. 8, 28] If you need anything badly, let me know.

Believe me to be in the Lord,

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

The cleric at once accepted his fatherly invitation. From the Oratory he wrote to a friend as follows:

[No date]

My dear friend:

I am writing to let you know that I am spending my vacation with Don Bosco in Turin in order to enjoy greater peace and quiet and to study French. I can truthfully say that I feel I'm in an earthly paradise. Here all love one another as brothers and everyone is happy, but with a truly heavenly happiness, especially when Don Bosco is with us. Then hours seem minutes as he charms us all by his words. He is like a magnet! As soon as he appears, everyone runs to him; the nearer they can get to him, the happier they are. Even when it is time for dinner or supper, no one wants to leave him; the assistant has to drag us away almost by force. . . .

As in previous years, Don Bosco again went to St. Ignatius' Shrine, taking along several young clerics—John Turchi and John Cagliero among them—so that they could join him in the annual spiritual retreat which Father Joseph Cafasso was going to preach. Since they missed Don Bosco greatly, the Oratory boys tried to console themselves by writing to him. Don Bosco usually replied promptly, but we have only one such answer in our possession:

St. Ignatius' Shrine, July 25, 1857

My dear Bonetti:

If you do everything you said in your letter, I'll help you to become a saint. But remember that I am saving your letter. I have prayed to the Lord for you, too, that He may enlighten you on your vocation.

God grant you the health and grace to do His holy will. Believe me to be,

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

These letters, of course, did great good at the Oratory, but just as effective were Father Cafasso's words at the shrine of St. Ignatius. During the retreat, the cleric Cagliero was thinking of consulting

Father Cafasso about his vocation when the latter came up to him and said: "I know you want to talk to me. Come along." In his room Father Cafasso talked to him at length about the loftiness and value of a priestly and religious vocation, exhorting him to persevere and to continue to love Don Bosco. He then added: "Don Bosco has great plans for youths."

Indeed he had, and he never stopped looking for ways to realize them. The memory of his dreams and visions was ever vivid and encouraging, and in his mind he saw not only the boys he already was caring for but also those who would come to him in the future, especially those who would form the nucleus of his congregation and contribute to its growth.

One day during recreation, Don Bosco was in the church square conversing with his young clerics and entertaining them with interesting stories. Among them were Cagliero and some laymen. Moving from subject to subject, Don Bosco gradually came to speak of his clerics and his hopes for them. Turning to the laymen, he said: "Gentlemen, the day will come when one of these clerics will be a bishop." John Turchi immediately wrote down these words.

Before the retreat was over, Don Bosco drafted a list of his published writings, prefacing it with the following statement:

Turin, July 26, 1857

Lest anyone wrongly attribute to me the authorship of certain writings, I hereby list the titles of the booklets I have written or compiled and copyrighted. Such rights I intend to keep and pass on to my heirs, for them to use as they see fit for the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls.

1. *Short Biography of Louis Comollo,* Second Edition.
2. *Devotion to the Guardian Angel.*
3. *Chaplet of the Seven Sorrows of Mary.*
4. *Devotion to the Mercy of God.*
5. *Bible History,* Second Edition.
6. *Church History,* Second Edition.
7. *The Companion of Youth,* Third Edition.
8. *The Christian Guided in the Practice of Virtue.*
9. *The Metric System,* Fifth Edition.
10. *The Well-Instructed Catholic,* Second Edition.
11. *Contemporary Events Described in Dialogue Form.*

12. *A Debate Between a Lawyer and a Waldensian Minister.*
13. *A Collection of Curious Contemporary Events.*
14. *The Six Sundays and a Novena in Honor of St. Aloysius.*
15. *A Factual Account of the Miracle of the Blessed Sacrament in Turin.*
16. *Dialogue Between a Lawyer and a Rural Pastor about the Sacrament of Penance.*
17. *The Conversion of a Waldensian Lady—A Contemporary Story.*
18. *An Easy Way to Understand the Bible,* Third Edition.
19. *The Power of a Good Upbringing—A Contemporary Tale.*
20. *St. Pancratius, Martyr.*
21. *History of Italy.*
22. *The Key to Heaven for the Practicing Catholic.*
23. *St. Peter and St. Paul.*
24. *Two Debates on Purgatory between Two Protestant Ministers and a Catholic Priest.*
25. *Lives of the Popes up to the Year 221 A.D.*

Rev. John Bosco

Fatigued by hearing so many retreat confessions, Don Bosco returned to the Oratory just as some of the pupils were coming back for the routine mid-summer refresher course.[2] One day in August, he was standing on the porticoes talking to some thirty boys who were crowding around him. Among them were Joseph Reano and Joseph Lazzero; the latter had arrived on August 3. Don Bosco remarked: "What I need is to take long walks with young and old. The exercise would do me good and give me the chance to talk of many things. To ease my mind, I'd love to spend all my recreation time with you, having fun and doing tricks and all that, but I have too much work to do. Besides, what I'd really love most of all would be to lead ten thousand of you to heaven." Truthfully, he had no leisure time. On his desk three issues of *Letture Cattoliche* needed proofreading.

The September issue was entitled *Lives of the Popes St. Sixtus, St. Telesphorus, St. Hyginus, and St. Pius I, with an Appendix on St. Justin, Apologist and Martyr* by Fr. John Bosco. It also contained a poem by Silvio Pellico on St. Justin.

The October issue contained a moving narrative of the heroic

[2] *See* pp. 178, 339. [Editor]

pursuit of truth, entitled *The Conversion of a Protestant Family,* by a canon of Saint Diez.

The title of the November issue was *Family Discussions on the Primacy of the Pope and on the Salvation To Be Found Only in the Catholic Church.* This anonymous booklet was written as a dialogue refuting a booklet by the Turinese Waldensian minister Amadeus Bert, entitled *The Waldensians, or Christian-Catholics in the Light of the Primitive Church.* This publication claimed to prove that the Roman Catholic Church had altered the teachings of the Apostles. Once again the words which Isaiah put into the mouths of the wicked were fulfilled: "We have made lies our refuge, and in falsehood we have found a hiding place." (Is. 28, 15)

Don Bosco's Foreword read as follows:

Our policy is to present truths of doctrine and not to enter into polemics. Yet, since efforts have been made for some time now to spread heresy among the common folk of towns and villages, we feel that we have to devote some issues to protecting the faithful against the poison which is being spread everywhere by people calling themselves Protestants, Waldensians, or Evangelicals (the terms being virtually identical). Their aim is to rob or corrupt our holy Faith, the precious heritage of our ancestors.

Since Protestant beliefs are plainly described in the booklet "The Waldensians" by their minister Amadeus Bert, we shall use it as our source. One of the issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* Vol. 1, lists a long series of historical errors contained in that booklet. This time we shall bring out its no less numerous doctrinal errors in the hope that this exposé will be an effective antidote against heresies.

Meanwhile, dear readers, be alert! The enemy, of whom the Gospel speaks [Matt. 13, 28], is trying to sneak into your homes in order to steal what you hold most dear—your religion. Drive him away courageously; make no compromise with him in matters of religion; should you encounter him on the street, do not even greet him, as Our Divine Savior has told us. [Cf. 2 John 1, 10] If you must talk business with him, do so sparingly and do not become friendly. Rather, be of one heart and one soul with the shepherds whom Divine Providence has given us as guides on the road to truth.

Let no promise, threat, or pretext lure you away from the doctrine taught by the supreme shepherd of the Church, the successor of St. Peter, the Vicar of Jesus Christ. He founded His Church when He said: "You

are Peter, and upon this rock I shall build My Church. *Tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam Meam.* [Matt. 16, 18]

In the midst of all these occupations, Don Bosco still was anxiously trying to buy back from the Rosminians the field he had seen in his dreams,[3] as we gather from a reply of his to Father [Charles] Gilardi [procurator general of the Rosminians]:

Turin, August 25, 1857

My dear Father Charles:

Please ask your Father General to forgive my belated reply. What with being away for my yearly spiritual retreat and not feeling well for some ten days, I was unable to see Chevalier Cotta about the lot we discussed. I admit my fault and ask forgiveness, being quite willing to accept the penance. Since your Father General has already made other arrangements for that piece of land, let us forget about our former project. However, should he decide to put it up for sale and should anyone make a definite offer, I would be very anxious to be informed of it. Perhaps Divine Providence might show me where to look for funds to buy it. That is my desire. At the moment, though, I cannot overstretch myself and tempt the Lord in things that are not really necessary. I must tell you, however, that this is the worst time to sell land. Very many construction workers who had previously been busy building monasteries and convents, churches and rectories, suddenly found themselves without work and were forced to migrate. Perhaps this explains the slump in business and in the building trades.

As for the offer made two or three years ago of 200 lire per 38 square meters, I believe I told you what happened: the offer was made; I promised to inform you of it, but then the bidder did not show up again to confirm it.

As for myself, my arms are still strong, but while my appetite is good, my digestion is poor. In any event, I am always ready to do all I can for the Institute of Charity.

Give my regards to your Very Reverend Father General, and please remember me in your prayers. I remain, in the Lord,

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

[3] *See* p. 30. *See also* Vol. II, pp. 191, 232ff, 268. [Editor]

CHAPTER 58

Heavenly Favors

DON Bosco's zeal for God's glory won the favor of the Queen of Angels. As we have already shown, She assisted him constantly not only in the growth of the Oratory, but also quite tangibly in the spiritual progress of his beloved pupils. It was She who obtained for him countless spiritual favors which, as we shall see, he dispensed so liberally to those who sought his prayers and blessings. We shall restrict this part of our story to the amazing events that occurred around this time, describing them in the actual words of reliable witnesses.

On the eve of the feast of Our Lady's Nativity [September 7, 1857], a young student named [Joseph] Zucca[1] was in bed with a fever in his dormitory. Suddenly the Blessed Virgin appeared at his side, looking indescribably loving and majestic. "This house is very dear to me," She said. "I have come to tell you what I want each boy to do. You shall then make it known privately to each of your companions, especially to those who sleep in this dormitory." After giving him some advice for himself, She went from bed to bed, lingering a few moments at each of them and leaving a message for each boy. When She came to the bed of a boy named [Lawrence] Gastaldi,[2] She said: "Tell him in My name to go to confession immediately because he has not received the sacraments since Easter."

Returning to Zucca's bedside, She added: "Give this message to Don Bosco and tell your teacher this from me." She then vanished.

Only this privileged boy could testify to what we have described up to this point, but the whole house—about two hundred people —witnessed what follows.

From that moment the sick boy felt perfectly well, but since it

[1] He had arrived at the Oratory on October 14, 1856. [Editor]
[2] He had entered the Oratory on October 30, 1854. [Editor]

was late in the evening, he did not get up. Instead, he sent for the boys of his dormitory who were then at recreation, saying that he had something important to tell them. They came and stood around his bed at a distance. One by one Zucca called them to his bed and whispered a message for each secretly. His manner was grave, and he had an air of authority that commanded respect in contrast to his boyish look. His schoolmates stood in silence, almost stunned into reverence in his presence. When he was finished, he said aloud: "Now I must speak to Gastaldi!"

The boy had not come with the others. One of his companions ran down and called him. Zucca then gave him Our Lady's message. At the moment Don Bosco was hearing confessions in the sacristy. After listening to Zucca, Gastaldi said aloud: "Very well, I'll go at once!" He left the dormitory ostensibly to go to confession, but on his way he changed his mind. "This is all nonsense!" he thought. Nevertheless, for the sake of appearances, he went through the motions: he went into the sacristy and out the other end into Our Lady's chapel where he knelt a while to give plausibility to the lie he intended to tell. He then returned to the dormitory. No one had followed him. Just as he was about to say "Now I feel happy," Zucca's expression changed. Sitting up in bed, he rebuked him aloud like a seer of old: "You liar! I saw what you did!" Then he described Gastaldi's movements, adding the warning: "Now go back and do what's right. Don't take chances with God's mercy. Go right away!"

Dumbfounded, Gastaldi promised to go to confession immediately. Zucca, with his eyes fixed on the door, described Gastaldi's movements, almost as though he saw everything that happened. "He's going downstairs . . . he's on the porticoes . . . now he's entering the sacristy . . . he's kneeling down . . . now he's going to Don Bosco . . . now he's making his confession. . . . Good!"

After a while Gastaldi returned, beaming. He had neither the time nor the need to speak. Zucca immediately said to him: "Now you can say that you're happy! But make sure you stay good because Our Lady told me that unless you change your ways you will be punished."

To everyone's amazement, the next morning Zucca was out of bed. At playtime during the day he called aside his companions one

by one, and with an inspiring demeanor he gave them Our Lady's message. When he was through, each boy remained pensive. No one dared to laugh. He also gave Don Bosco his message. Finally Zucca approached his teacher, a young cleric greatly respected and feared by his pupils, none of whom would ever have dared to make the least observation to him. He knew nothing as yet of what had happened, but when Zucca unexpectedly came up to him and with an air of authority spoke to him in Our Lady's name, he felt such reverence that he could not speak, as though he were in the presence of a superior. Besides, Zucca's message was so personal as to leave no room for doubt about its heavenly origin.[3] Gastaldi continued to be a good boy. Eventually he had to drop his academic courses and take on printing at the Oratory.[4] He died of apoplexy around 1886.

Don Bosco, too, was often favored with heavenly warnings and admonitions during the spiritual retreats or novenas in honor of Our Lady at the Oratory. We have the following report from Father Dominic Bongiovanni, Father [Michael] Rua, and Bishop [John] Cagliero:

One evening Don Bosco publicly said that in a dream he had seen all the Oratory boys divided into four groups, each holding a different kind of bread. One group had tasty rolls of the purest flour; another had ordinary white bread, the third had coarse bread, while the last group fed on stale, moldy bread. To the first group belonged those who had never committed a mortal sin; to the second, those who had regained God's grace; to the third, those in mortal sin at that moment; the last group represented those who lived in habitual mortal sin with no effort to change their lives. After explaining the dream, Don Bosco said that he remembered perfectly what kind of bread each of us was eating, and that he would tell us if we asked him. Many did. To each he revealed what he had seen and with such a wealth of details regarding the state of his conscience that all were convinced his dream could not be dismissed as a mere dream or an attempt at guessing. Their innermost secrets, unconfessed sins, dishonest intentions, moral blunders,

[3] Zucca died at a ripe old age on November 25, 1928 at Castelnuovo d'Asti, his native town. [Editor]

[4] The Oratory register states instead that Gastaldi was admitted to the Oratory as a bookbinder on October 30, 1854 and that he was assigned to academic courses as a student on February 25, 1855. [Editor]

virtuous deeds, state of grace, and vocation—in a word, whatever pertained to their spiritual lives—all was clearly exposed, described, or foretold. After talking to Don Bosco, the boys were dumbfounded and made their own the Samaritan woman's comment: "He told me all that I have ever done." [John 4, 39] We heard this story repeated over and over during the course of many years.

Sometimes the boys would confide what Don Bosco had told them to some trusted companions. On his part, Don Bosco never revealed these secrets to anyone except the individuals he had seen in his dreams. These dreams—like the one just mentioned which repeated itself in several other forms—while saddening him in part, also assured him that most of his boys lived habitually in the grace of God.

This is why Don Bosco had such great faith in his boys' prayers. At times, when someone asked him for a special grace, he would say: "I will have my boys pray!" Indeed, prayer made jointly and vocally is surprisingly powerful and becomes ever more so in proportion to the devotion and holiness of those who offer the prayer.

The Oratory always had a large number of boys who unquestionably rivaled St. Aloysius' candor of soul; in some cases even charisms marked their spiritual growth. For example, one day during this same year of 1857, Don Bosco prayed fervently during Mass for enlightenment on a certain project. Afterward, in the sacristy, the altar boy kissed his hand and then whispered: "Do as you have planned. It will be all right!" Don Bosco was amazed. "But how do you know? Who told you?" he asked him. The boy became uneasy and stammered evasively. Don Bosco did not insist. In the course of years he had several such experiences. He and his boys were one in heart; their combined prayers worked wonders.

It was to these prayers that Don Bosco attributed the effectiveness of his blessing, as Joseph Reano declared in writing:

One of the Oratory students, a boy from Ivrea, had a rupture. Occasionally the pains became so excruciating that he had to take to bed; once he was in such severe pain that he even lost consciousness. A doctor was hurriedly summoned, and he ordered an immediate operation. Don Bosco was informed of the decision. Coming to the patient's bedside, he called him by name, and then, after passing his hand lightly over the boy's forehead, he whispered into his ear, probably suggesting

that he invoke Our Lady and make Her some promise. Don Bosco then prayed briefly. At that moment, the boy opened his eyes and smiled. The pain had disappeared. That same day he was out of bed.

Father Ascanio Savio also testified as follows:

My brother Angelo, a Salesian, told me that one day he accompanied Don Bosco on a visit to a very sick boy. He blessed him and then said to the boy: "Get up and go down to dinner with your companions." This hardly seemed possible under the circumstances, and the boy was hesitant about doing so. But Don Bosco insisted: "Get your clothes on." Fully trusting Don Bosco, the boy did as he had been told.

My brother remarked: "I was stunned and could hardly believe my own eyes." I must add that my brother was far from gullible and would believe something only when faced with irrefutable evidence.

Mrs. Vallauri, the widow of the distinguished physician and a great benefactress of the Oratory, begged Don Bosco to obtain from Our Lady the grace of going through her purgatory here on earth. She was frightened at the thought of the torments awaiting the souls not yet pure enough to be admitted to God's presence, and nothing could allay her fears. Don Bosco promised his help. He then prayed that her request would be fulfilled, and he had all the boys do likewise. Within a short time the good lady was seized by atrocious pains that lasted well over two years. Afterward, she experienced an unalterable peace of mind that banished all her fears. She died a tranquil, painless death. We are indebted to Father Michael Rua for the above information.

These facts, along with those we have narrated in a previous volume,[5] and many others—even more outstanding—that we shall relate, remind us of what we read in the issue of *Letture Cattoliche* on the life of the Blessed Oringa Toscana:

Who is not overwhelmed by wonder at the spectacle of the glorious kingdom granted by God to His saints? As favorite children of their heavenly Father, they share in His power and reign with Him; they are a living proof of how much God cherishes virtue.

Miracles speak a language that reaches everyone and is intelligible to all. Miracles declare in ringing tones: "This is the way which leads to

[5] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 85f, 211. *See also* pp. 10ff, 31, 65f, 67ff. [Editor]

life. Follow, ye mortals, the glorious footsteps of the saints; theirs is the path of glory and happiness." Who would dare withstand so explicit a Divine summons?

Yet, unfortunately, there are those who ridicule the wondrous feats with which God crowns His saints. Poor blind fools! They love these heroes of God and admire their holy lives, and yet they have misgivings about their miracles! Why? Are not the saints themselves living miracles because of their heroic and steadfast practice of virtue so far beyond human endurance? Miracles are unacceptable to some as a matter of principle, and yet miracles are everywhere: man himself is a miracle; nature is full of inexplicable phenomena. Is it any wonder, therefore, that miracles should also be found in religion which is the heart of all miracles and mysteries?

"Why is it," Baron De Montreuil wrote, "that level-headed people, even Christians, dread the word 'miracle'? Do they not believe in a God in three Persons, in a God who became man and who was born of a Virgin in this world? Do they not believe that this Man-God died and rose again on the third day? Do they not adore this same God in our tabernacles and believe that He comes miraculously from heaven onto our altars at the word of the priest? Do they not know that we are reborn by water in Baptism, that the Holy Spirit strengthens us at Confirmation, that the Son of God made flesh, truly God and truly man, becomes one with us in Holy Communion, and that these and other truths form our creed? Yet these same Christians have misgivings about miracles and advise us to be cautious about believing and publicizing them. The saints readily believed in miracles, and that is why they, too, worked miracles. They believed in them as firmly as if they had witnessed them; for them no proof was necessary!"

CHAPTER 59

Yearly Visit to Becchi

DON Bosco took a group of his best pupils to Castelnuovo and Becchi every summer, and this year was no exception. Some time before the end of the school year he had privately said to several of them: "Why go home for the summer? Vacations at home are not the best thing. Look, your mother pays me a hundred lire a year for your upkeep. I would save money if you went home instead of staying here three extra months, but your spiritual welfare is more important to me. Don't go home for the summer!" The outing to Castelnuovo was a treat to reward their compliance. In this regard Father Francis Cerruti wrote:

> Don Bosco used these outings to give his boys some relaxation and keep them away from sin. I was privileged to take part in them for six years—from 1857 to 1862. I am convinced that they alone are proof enough of Don Bosco's anxiety for the spiritual and physical welfare of his boys.
>
> He went to great lengths to keep us happy and content, and he took the greatest care to keep us from ever offending God. No matter where we went, we never omitted our daily prayers and Mass; likewise, our confessions and Communions were as frequent as at the Oratory. "My dear sons," he often told us, "we have but one soul; if we save it, everything else will be saved too."

Once they were all settled at Becchi, Don Bosco busied himself with his priestly ministry, *Letture Cattoliche,* and letter writing. He broke up his work by leading his happy brigade on hikes to the ancient abbey of Vezzolano, to the sulphur springs of Albugnano, or to Capriglio and other neighboring villages. During these months, he also sought out competent tutors of good moral character for sons of well-to-do families who fully relied on him to handle this

time-consuming, important matter. This charitable activity of his was the rule rather than the exception, but its importance could easily go unnoticed by a casual observer, notwithstanding its beneficial social character. The following letter of Don Bosco to Baron Feliciano Ricci des Ferres on the eve of the feast of the Holy Rosary is an example of Don Bosco's solicitude in this matter:

October 3, 1857

Dear Baron:

As a follow-up to our discussion on a tutor for your sons, I mentally reviewed the qualifications of the priests I know. I recommend Father Joseph Pesce, the former curate at Monbaruzzo, in the diocese of Acqui. I believe he is quite competent, although he is not certified because he never aimed at a teaching career. He is about thirty years old and in good standing.

If you find him acceptable, write either to me or to Father Cafasso who knows all about this.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to you, and I pray that the Lord will grant you and your dear family health and grace. Please remember me in your prayers.

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Meanwhile, the Oratory band and choir had also arrived at Becchi for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Dominic Bongiovanni, the Oratory minstrel, had come too. The countryfolk, of course, were delighted, but their joy could not match Don Bosco's at receiving a letter sent to him on behalf of the Holy Father, to whom he had mailed a deluxe complimentary copy of his *Storia d'Italia*. The Pope's grateful acknowledgment was a treasure to Don Bosco:

Rome, October 3, 1857

Very Reverend Father:

Your gracious letter was presented to the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX together with your *Storia d'Italia*—an aid to the young in learning the history of their country without prejudice to their Faith and morals. His Holiness has asked me to thank you, although his many occupations

have so far prevented him from reading it. As a token of his fatherly affection and a symbol of heavenly grace, His Holiness bestows his apostolic benediction upon Your Reverence and all the boys entrusted to your care.

Permit me also to express my own profound esteem while invoking God's blessings upon you and your spiritual family.

Respectfully yours,

Dominic Fieramonti,

Secretary to His Holiness for Latin Letters

On [Monday] October 5, Don Bosco hiked with his boys to Mondonio. They did not want to return to Turin without first saying a prayer at Dominic Savio's grave. While Savio's father prepared some refreshments for them, they went to the cemetery to lay a wreath of evergreens on the humble cross over Dominic's remains. They had brought the wreath from Turin; it carried this inscription: "To Dominic Savio, a pupil of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, from his friends." Then they knelt and prayed a long time; several had tears in their eyes. They all would have stayed longer at that blessed spot, but they had to be back at Becchi before nightfall.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had asked Charles Tomatis—a young artist studying at the Accademia Albertina—to paint a portrait of Dominic Savio either from memory or from a description supplied by Savio's brothers. Tomatis executed the task with great talent and affection.

The following morning [Tuesday, October 6, 1857], after Mass and breakfast, the chapel furnishings were packed, and at nine the boys set out with Don Bosco on their [eighteen-mile] march back to the Oratory. They made a stopover at Buttigliera d'Asti, where the pastor, Father [Joseph] Vaccarino, always arranged for Don Bosco and his boys to be his guests. Countess Miglino was also looking forward to his visit, and she had prepared a sumptuous repast for all on a spacious portico of her villa. Since the good countess was very fond of music, the choir always sang some selections for her. It was here that Mr. Demetrio, the cook, and a host of kitchen helpers first presented a delightful skit written and set to music by Charles Tomatis, who was the life of the party.

At two in the afternoon the boys moved on toward Andezzeno

where occasionally Don Bosco was a guest of the De Maistre family at their chateau called "La Fruttiera." These distinguished benefactors had promised him a donation on the condition that he come to get it personally. At Andezzeno, therefore, Don Bosco parted company with his boys. They were not happy about it, but he promised to rejoin them in Turin on the following day. At their request, he blessed them as they knelt along the roadside. Then, after kissing his hand, they pushed on toward Turin, while he made his way to the chateau. The noble family came out to greet him with great warmth and joy.

The following day they walked part of the way with him toward Chieri. From there, together with a few pupils who had stayed with him, he resumed his journey, still on foot, to Turin, arriving at the Oratory toward evening where he was received with much joy and cheering. Before going up to his room, he congratulated the boys on their safe return and told them how proud he was of their good behavior on the return trip, during which they acted like true sons of the Oratory. He also urged them to thank their Heavenly Mother on Her forthcoming feast—the Divine Maternity—[October 11] for the graces She had bestowed on them.

He then resumed his ordinary occupations while preparing to preach and hear confessions in various places. On October 13, he wrote a note to Count Pio Galleani Agliano:

October 13, 1857

Dear Count:

I have just returned from preaching the novena of the Holy Rosary at Castelnuovo. As I was reading your letter, a second arrived. You acted wisely.

I hope that next year I'll be able to come and preach on the feast of All Souls. I am greatly concerned about Father Chiansello's illness; I shall pray and have others pray that he will be spared to us. At all events, let us always adore God's will.

May God grant you and your family health and grace.

Respectfully and gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

CHAPTER 60

A Providential Meeting

WITH the end of the summer vacation, the newly accepted boys started arriving at the Oratory. We shall tell of a few in order to better show Don Bosco's love of his neighbor. We shall first mention Hyacinth Ballesio who is now a doctor of theology, the canon provost of the renowned collegiate church of Santa Maria della Scala, and the vicar forane at Moncalieri. We have already cited his witness several times.[1] He declared:

I first met Don Bosco in the fall of 1857 when I went to see him to request admission to the Oratory. It marked the beginning of a spiritual friendship and filial trust that grew ever stronger during my eight years at the Oratory and thereafter. That first, unforgettable contact so impressed me that I regard it as a turning point in my life. Don Bosco, too, often recalled it with me, even during the last few years of his life.

One of Don Bosco's main characteristics was an ability to win the hearts of us boys. Our love was a blend of filial affection, gratitude, and trust for the one who for us personified authority, goodness, and Christian perfection.

During those years, from 1857 to 1860, when Don Bosco was constantly at the Oratory—because as yet there were no other Salesian houses—we lived a family life. Our love for him, our desire to please him, and the hold he exercised over us—unforgettable but indescribable—caused us to vie with one another in the practice of virtue.

In his [published] funeral oration entitled *The Innermost Life of Don Bosco,* Canon Ballesio wrote:

Don Bosco's life and work belong to history, and history will eloquently make clear to coming generations that for half a century he was

[1] *See* Vol. IV, pp. 233, 398. *See also* pp. 108f, 263. [Editor]

the apostle of good. What history will neither be able to tell in full nor make us fully understand is his innermost life: his constant, quiet, sympathetic, invincible, and heroic self-sacrifice; his deep love for us, his sons; the confidence, esteem, reverence, and affection he inspired in us; the way we looked up to him and the regard we had for his authority, saintliness, and learning. To us he was the symbol of moral perfection. History can hardly portrary or describe the soothing comfort that a word, glance, or even a nod of his could bring to our hearts! One would have to have seen or experienced it! The spell exercised by a saint over his contemporaries or intimates cannot be described even in the best written biography. The fragrance of his words and virtuous deeds wanes as the years go by. But we have seen and heard Don Bosco. In those years, when his works were concentrated in the Oratory, the impact of his personality was even more striking. His powerful energy, talents, and love were entirely at our disposal from early morning to late at night. I can still see him hearing confessions, saying Mass, and giving us Communion. He was never alone, never with a minute to himself; he was constantly besieged by boys or visitors seeking advice in the sacristy, on the porticoes, in the playground or the refectory, on the stairs, and in his room. This went on, morning, noon, and night; it is so today, and it will be thus tomorrow and always. He looked after everything and knew each of the hundreds of boys by name. He kept in touch with everything and gave advice and orders. Without the help of secretaries he maintained a correspondence that would have kept several people busy full-time. Single-handedly he planned and provided for the material and moral needs of the Oratory.

We shall now introduce another new boy, using Don Bosco's own words:

One evening in the fall of 1857, on my way back from Sommariva del Bosco, I had to wait an hour at Carmagnola for the train to Turin. It was past seven, and a fine steady drizzle was breaking through a thick mist, limiting visibility to about three feet. The dim light of the railroad station barely pierced the darkness and lost itself in the shadows a few feet away. The only diversion for the travelers was provided by a group of boys with their deafening shouts of "Come on! Get him! Run; don't let him get away!" One voice topped all others; it was the voice of a leader whose orders were repeated and carried out. I was soon quite eager to meet the boy who ran so lively a game with such self-assurance and alertness. Taking advantage of a moment when they

were all gathered around him, I stepped into their midst. Instinctively, they all scattered, except one. With his hands planted firmly on his hips he asked:

"Who do you think you are, breaking up our game like that?"

"I'm a friend of yours."

"A friend, huh? What do you want with us?"

"If you don't mind, I'd like to join your game. May I?"

"Who are you? What's your name?"

"I've already told you. I'm a friend. All I want is to join your game. By the way, what's *your* name?"

"I'm Michael Magone. I'm the leader!" He said the latter with strong emphasis.

As we were talking, the other boys trickled back and gathered around us. After a few casual words to some of them, I again turned to Magone.

"How old are you, Michael?"

"Thirteen."

"Have you been to confession yet?"

"Yes," he replied, laughing.

"How about your First Holy Communion?"

"I made it already."

"Have you learned any trade yet?"

"Sure! I'm an expert at doing nothing!"

"Did you go to school?"

"Yes."

"How far did you get?"

"The third grade!"

"Is your father still living?"

"No, my dad is dead."

"And your mother?"

"She has to work to take care of us kids. We drive her crazy all the time."

"What do you want to do when you grow up?"

"I guess I'll have to do something, but I don't know what."

The boy's frank and sensible answers alerted me to the danger he would be in if left to his own devices. I thought that if his liveliness and leadership were properly guided, he would be a great success. I went on:

"Listen, Michael! Are you willing to quit the streets and start learning a trade or continuing your schooling?"

"You bet I am," he replied with a quiver in his voice. "I'm tired of this life. Some of my friends are already behind bars; I'm afraid I'll

end up the same way. But what can I do? I don't have a father, and my mother is poor."

"Look, this evening say a fervent prayer. Pray with all your heart to God, your Father. He will provide for me, for you, and for all."

At this moment the train pulled into the station. "Take this," I said to him, pressing a medal into his hand. "Tomorrow, see Father Ariccio, the curate, and tell him that the priest who gave you this medal wants to know more about you."

He took the medal with respect. "But what's your name? Where are you from? Does Father Ariccio know you?" I could not answer these and other questions of his because I had to hurry aboard the train.

Excitedly Michael went immediately to Father Ariccio. The priest grasped the situation, and the next day he sent me the desired information. Magone, he wrote, was very intelligent, flighty, careless, and talkative both in church and at school; he was hard to manage, but good-hearted and guileless. On the basis of this, Magone was notified by mail that he had been accepted into the Oratory.

He arrived a few days later. "Here I am," he said, running up to me. "I'm Michael Magone. You met me at the railroad station in Carmagnola."

"Yes, I know. Are you glad you came?"

"You bet I am."

"Good! I hope you'll enjoy your stay. Just do me a favor: don't tear the roof down."

"Don't worry, I won't. I wasn't very good back home—two of my pals are behind bars now—but I promise I'll behave."

"Good! Now, would you rather study or learn a trade?"

"It's up to you, Father. But I'd rather study if I could."

"Supposing I let you do that, what are your plans for the future?"

"Well, if. . . ." He hesitated, and then hung his head and grimaced.

"If what, Michael?"

"If a wild, little good-for-nothing like me can ever become good enough to be a priest, I'd very much like to try."

"Then let's see what a little scamp can do. We'll give you a chance. Your school grades, conduct, and other things will show whether you have a vocation or not."

"If efforts to be good will count for something, you can be sure that you won't be disappointed in me."

Magone was then introduced to Father Alasonatti [the prefect]. Quietly, one of the older boys, a fine lad, was assigned to act as his "guardian angel" and never to let him out of his sight. This was the

usual procedure with new boys who were of dubious character or not sufficiently known, so that they could be observed and corrected as the occasion demanded. Magone's friend had plenty of work to do, telling him at every turn: "Don't talk about that; it's bad. Don't use that word; don't swear; don't get so worked up!" Often a tinge of impatience would flash across Magone's face, but he would promptly control himself and simply say: "You're right. I shouldn't have said that!" And indeed he was trying hard, being punctual when going to his classes, study hall, and chapel. For a whole month he flung himself heart and soul into his games, especially those calling for personal skill; then suddenly he lost interest in them and his laughter died away. He became pensive and would withdraw to some corner, at times with tears in his eyes. The sight of his companions joyfully receiving the sacraments and the remembrance of what he had heard in sermons and talks deeply stirred him. He felt uneasy and wanted to go to confession, but he could not make up his mind to do so.

I was watching him very closely. One day I sent for him.

"Michael," I said to him, "I'd like you to do me a favor. It's something very important. What do you say?"

"Sure! I'll do anything you want."

"Michael, I'd like to have you open your heart to me so that I can find out what's making you so miserable these days."

"Yes, I am miserable. I'm in an awful mess. I don't know what to do." Sobs choked him and I let him cry for a while. Then, to cheer him up, I said: "What's happened to the leader of the Carmagnola gang? What a sorry looking general he turned out to be! He can't even tell me what's bothering him!"

"I'd like to tell you, but I don't know where to begin . . . what to say!"

"Just give me a hint and I'll take it from there."

"My conscience bothers me!"

"That's enough! I know just what you mean. I needed that hint so that I could help you with the rest. Right now I won't ask you any questions. I'll only tell you how to straighten things out. If your past confessions were good, then all you have to do is to tell what happened since your last one. If something went wrong with past confessions because of fear or for other reasons, then start from the last good confession."

"That's just it. How can I remember that far back?"

"It's easier than you think. Just tell your confessor of your trouble. He'll ask you questions, and all you have to do is answer yes or no."

The boy was so heartened that he didn't want to go to bed that night without making his confession. When the priest assured him that God had forgiven him all his sins, he cried with joy, exclaiming: "I feel completely happy." From that moment Michael was a new boy. As he continued to receive the sacraments, grace triumphed in him. His greatest problem was to check his temper which occasionally broke out in involuntary outbursts of anger. However, he soon succeeded in gaining control of himself, and he even became a peacemaker among his schoolmates.

Thus reads the testimony of Don Bosco. Now we want to give the reader a glimpse of Michael's fiery temper. One day he went to town with Don Bosco. As they were crossing Piazza Castello, Michael heard an urchin blaspheme. Forgetting himself, he jumped at the culprit and swung at him with all his might. After that he lectured him. The other fellow was not impressed by Michael's words. Goaded on by the taunts of his pals, his loss of face, and the blood trickling down his nose, he hurled himself at Michael. Breathlessly they both exchanged blows until Don Bosco succeeded in pulling them apart. On calming down, Michael realized his mistake. In his remorse he promised to restrain himself and limit his correction to friendly advice.

We possess some written information on a third new boy from Peter Enria:

Don Bosco was very patient with his spiritual sons, especially the underprivileged. In 1857 he admitted a boy to the Oratory whose name I can't remember. The police had found him in a corner of Piazza Castello, huddled up and shivering. A few days later, Don Bosco got him a job with a good blacksmith in town and personally took him there. The boy did well for a couple of weeks, but then he became so unruly that the blacksmith fired him. With his customary patience, Don Bosco found him another job. Within a week, he had been fired again. Don Bosco continued to find jobs for him at various shops for some two years. It is no exaggeration to say that this boy made the rounds of all the shops in town, wearing out everybody's patience.

When his last employer dismissed him, the boy came back to the Oratory. It so happened that it was lunch time. Therefore, he went straight to the dining room and told Don Bosco to find him another job. "How about some lunch?" Don Bosco asked him.

"I've already eaten," the boy answered.

"Well then, let me finish and then we'll take care of it."

"I can't wait. Come right away." Despite the boy's rudeness, Don Bosco replied calmly: "Don't you realize that you can't hold a job because you drive everybody crazy? Do you know how many times you've been fired? You'd better change your ways or you'll never be able to earn a living!"

The boy stalked out of the dining room in a huff, and a few days later he left the Oratory for good without a word to anyone. He then tried to make a living as best he could, drifting from job to job, even abroad. Finally he returned to Turin and fell ill. One day, during a temporary improvement in his health, he called on Don Bosco and begged his pardon for all the trouble he had caused him. Delighted to see him after so many years, Don Bosco comforted the young man and assured him that he still cared for him and that he had always prayed for him. He then added: "Remember that the Oratory is still your home. If you wish to return when you feel better, Don Bosco is always your friend. All he seeks is the salvation of your soul!" The young man was greatly moved at Don Bosco's words and tearfully thanked him, saying: "Now I have to go back to the hospital. If, God willing, I recover, I'll return to make up for all my misdoings." Don Bosco blessed him. It was the last blessing that the young man received from Don Bosco; he died a few weeks later, resigned and repentant. The boy himself told me this story when he first visited the Oratory while on leave from the hospital.

While Don Bosco was busy receiving new boys, the government —for reasons of its own—was making a survey of all charitable institutions, demanding exact information on their foundation, purpose, income, endowments, and the number of recipients of their services. One such circular from the Finance Office reached Don Bosco at the end of August.[2]

Don Bosco put off replying because he first wanted to find out what was in the offing; past experience pointed to taxation. Besides, he had another good reason: the Oratory was not legally recognized as a charitable institution.[3]

When a second notice[4] reached him at the end of October 1857,

[2] *See* Appendix 18. [Editor]
[3] *See* p. 282. [Editor]
[4] *See* Appendix 19. [Editor]

Don Bosco asked Father Victor Alasonatti to draft a reply.[5] On one of the forms that had to be returned, Father Alasonatti added the following remarks:

1. This is a private institution with neither endowments nor burdens, except taxes.
2. The number of boys sheltered here varies but at present there are approximately one hundred and eighty.
3. This institute has no fixed income; it depends entirely on donations sent by Divine Providence. For this reason, specific details are not available.

This was but the beginning of an unending correspondence with government officials which brought Don Bosco a constant series of annoying problems. Father Alasonatti had written on one of the forms that the Oratory had no burdens except taxes. That was quite true: Don Bosco had been exempted from only one tax. One day a tax collector showed up at the Oratory with an income tax form for Don Bosco to fill out and return with payment within the prescribed time. Undismayed, Don Bosco called at the tax collector's office for an explanation. "The reason is quite simple," the agent replied. "You have an income from the board and tuition fees of all those boys in your school, and that is taxable. There can be no exceptions! If you don't pay, you'll be fined, and the amount will be all the greater since you neglected to declare your income."

"Listen," Don Bosco replied, "I have a better idea. I'll hand over my income to the government and let *it* pay the tax." He then explained how things stood at the Oratory. After an investigation into the matter, nothing further was ever said about Don Bosco's income tax. Joseph Brosio, the "bersagliere," [6] was present during this scene.

However, Don Bosco had not fared so well in trying to be exempted from several other taxes, although, to be truthful, the various government agencies were lenient with him on several occasions. Nevertheless, this burden gradually became unbearable. Let us just consider the five large schools Don Bosco opened in Turin alone.

[5] *See* Appendix 20. [Editor]

[6] As a young man he began helping Don Bosco in 1841, and he continued to do so until Don Bosco's death. He was called the "bersagliere" because he had been in the Bersaglieri Corps of the Piedmontese army. *See* Vol. IV, pp. 8, 58, 320. [Editor]

Every new building he erected automatically meant a new tax, even though nearly all the boys paid no fees at all. Soon these taxes totaled several thousand lire each year—a heavy burden for one who had no savings account or reserve. Consequently, he was faced with a constant struggle to obtain help from benefactors, part of which had to be diverted to the inexorable tax collector.[7]

But there were other nuisances Don Bosco had to put up with that were even worse than taxes: summons, inspections, arbitrary tax increases, requests for proof of transfer of property, disputes over receipted invoices and long-expired credits, rebuttal of false charges, threats of confiscation, troubles stemming from the disregard of certain legal formalities, complaints about past contracts, fines that were sometimes exorbitant, and so on. All these things caused Don Bosco no end of trouble, since he was always burdened with the responsibility of defending his rights. Father [Michael] Rua commented: "We have to defend ourselves from the tax collector just as the Israelites of old had to defend themselves from their hostile neighbors. While rebuilding Jerusalem and the temple after the Babylonian exile, the Israelites had to carry both shovel and sword. In the same way, while striving to give an intellectual and moral education to our boys, we have to be constantly on guard against tax collectors." However, Don Bosco's love of God and neighbor was strong enough to overcome even this difficulty.

[7] A scriptural reference has been omitted in this edition because it is no longer apropos in the new versions. [Editor]

CHAPTER 61

Educational Improvements at the Oratory

ON July 18, 1857, shortly before the start of the new school year, the Minister of Education issued a decree. Article 46 read as follows:

> Authorization to teach in public or private elementary schools will be granted by the kingdom's superintendent of education to schools approved by provincial commissions.
>
> In accordance with existing regulations, the said superintendent of schools is also empowered to license elementary schools approved by a provincial commission. The superintendent of schools is to forward to the Minister of Education applications for the opening of private secondary day schools—academic, technical, etc.—and of boarding schools of any kind, and to add to such applications his personal remarks.

Now that Don Bosco's Oratory had also become a school, it could hardly exempt itself from the above regulations. However, for a while at least, it was left in peace. Its scholastic aspect was not generally known, and the authorities were often inclined to wink an eye. But Don Bosco foresaw that sooner or later his enemies would object that his teachers were not duly accredited, so he wisely decided to have several of his young clerics take courses for teacher certification. Complying with the law seemed to be the wiser way to ensure the continuation of God's work. For this reason, the cleric John Baptist Francesia began his literature courses at the royal university that same year [1857]. Meanwhile, James Rossi[1] continued to teach the upper grades of the elementary day school. A few months later, the lower grades were entrusted to another lay teacher, James Miglietti, who later, with Don Bosco's help, opened a type of boarding school in the Bellezza building for boys who could not

[1] *See* p. 365. [Editor]

be accepted as resident students at the Oratory. Don Bosco saw to it that the day boys could go to confession frequently, and he designated Tuesday in Holy Week as the day of First Holy Communion for those who had been admitted.

As for resident students, the cleric [John Baptist] Francesia taught first year Latin, while the second year course was handled by the cleric [John] Turchi and that for the third year by Father Ramello. A certified teacher and school inspector, Father Ramello had been suspended by his bishop—though not for moral reasons—and rehabilitated by Don Bosco. Intelligent and well-educated, he had placed himself entirely at the service of Don Bosco, to whom he gave perfect obedience and deep reverence and love. He remained at the Oratory for over a year until he found an apartment in town. He was all set to resume teaching in the public schools when God called him to eternity.

To divert attention of potential troublemakers from his boarding school section and to reaffirm publicly that the purpose of the hospice attached to the Oratory had not changed, Don Bosco published the following notice in the November 7, 1857 issue of *L'Armonia*:

A daily flow of applications for admission to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco prompts us to publicize the entrance requirements for the information of all. They are as follows:

1. Boys must be at least twelve and not over eighteen.
2. They must be orphaned of both father and mother and have no relatives able to care for them.
3. They must be completely destitute and homeless. If a boy fulfills the first two conditions but still has some goods of his own, he must bring them along for his own use, since it would be unfair in this case to live off the charity of others.
4. A boy must be in good health and not physically deformed.
5. Priority will be given to totally destitute and homeless boys who already frequent the festive oratories of St. Aloysius, of the Guardian Angel, or of St. Francis de Sales, because this hospice has been opened especially for them.

All newspapers interested in public welfare are asked to print this notice as a public service.

Rev. John Bosco, Director

While providing for the academic education of resident students, Don Bosco did not neglect the intellectual and technical formation of the artisans. In his funeral oration entitled *The Innermost Life of Don Bosco,* Father Hyacinth Ballesio had the following to say in this respect:

[At the Oratory] students and artisans studied and worked diligently under the powerful force of religion and love. As an example of this, I still remember the gallant competitive spirit prevailing among the third year Latin students of Father Ramello. We felt a little ashamed if we only got a ninety; a high percentage of that large class consistently received a grade of one hundred. Don Bosco used emulation as a powerful instrument for good. For this reason he introduced annual awards of prizes, and on Sunday evenings he would come into the study hall to publicly read the grades each boy had received during the past week. There were over two hundred students, yet only a few received a rating of "fair." If anyone was rated "unsatisfactory"—and this happened very rarely—he was looked upon as a black sheep, a thing everybody dreaded. The vast majority always got "good" or "excellent." Such earnestness of purpose, strengthened by deep religious convictions, later helped these students to win honors at universities and seminaries and accounted for the steady expansion and improvement of the Oratory workshops.

Don Bosco gave particular encouragement to his young artisans by holding out well-founded hopes of a splendid future. He promised that the small rooms which now housed their shops would one day grow into spacious halls, like the ones in the finest factories. As early as 1856 he began talking about exhibits of all their handicrafts. Father [Michael] Rua was present for a number of years when Don Bosco spoke of such things. At that time his promises sounded like idle fantasies and fairy tales, but later—through Don Bosco's untold efforts and sacrifices, as he himself explained to us —they became a reality.

Ever since he had started the workshops, Don Bosco had tried to determine the best way to manage them and to interest the craftsmasters in the progress of their young apprentices. He tried several experiments. At first he hired craftsmasters on a weekly salary. These men centered their attention on filling orders conscientiously

and collecting their wages regardless of their pupils' progress. Don Bosco then asked them to run the shops as though they owned them, allowing them to find their own work and to pocket their earnings after paying token wages to each pupil according to his skill. The drawback of this plan was that the pupils became hired apprentices and the superior's authority over them was thereby greatly lessened; he could no longer exercise direct supervision over them since they would obey only their craftsmaster. Moreover, the timetable itself was often disregarded when urgent orders had to be filled. The third plan Don Bosco tried was a form of partnership with the craftsmasters. This did not work either, since all they cared about was their own profit. For example, on accepting contracts they made private deals with customers to their own advantage.

In regard to tools, Don Bosco at first insisted that craftsmasters were to bring their own, while the Oratory was to provide them for the boys. In practice, however, they borrowed the boy's tools to save wear and tear on their own. Then an agreement was reached by which Don Bosco was to supply only certain tools to the craftsmasters and they would bring the rest. That did not work either. Finally, he told them to provide all necessary tools for both boys and themselves at his expense. This resulted in unnecessary purchases becoming routine while, in many cases, boys still lacked tools. Then there were arguments about damage, disappearance, or misuse of tools, as well as disputes on procedures in filling orders and squabbles over profits, especially when the craftsmaster had a particular interest at stake. It was simply one annoyance after another.

Of course, Don Bosco did not continue with these experiments for very long. After a short while, he personally took over the entire management of the shops and left the craftsmasters the single task of teaching their craft. But even this arrangement did not entirely eliminate trouble because some craftsmasters deliberately neglected the more gifted boys for fear that these might one day take over their jobs.

At the same time Don Bosco had to guard against possible conflicts with local craftsmen or those of nearby towns. While envisioning huge workshops of all sorts, Don Bosco was well aware that dangerous professional jealousy was likely to arise not only in small

towns but even in such a large capital as Turin. Events proved him right. Several years later a number of printers did everything they could to force the municipal authorities to close down the newly-opened Oratory printshop because they feared competitive prices. Don Bosco solved the problem simply by establishing a *de facto* policy—for future boarding schools as well—that shops were to get work from the student section. As the student enrollment increased, their need of shoes and clothing prompted the opening of tailor and shoemaker shops; their need of books brought about the establishment of a bookbinding shop; construction work called for carpenters and blacksmiths. Every new need was matched by a new shop. The printshop itself was established for our own various publications, particularly *Letture Cattoliche*. No printshop or any shop in Turin ever had to complain that business lagged because of competition from the Oratory.

In those days factories were much less numerous in Turin than nowadays [1905]. Nevertheless, even at that time Don Bosco's intention was that no factory worker should fear that the boys trained in the Oratory shops would eventually pose a threat to their jobs. He cherished the hope that most of them would return to their home towns or villages, start shops of their own, and help their pastors with church singing, teaching catechism, and giving good example in word and deed. As things turned out, those fears were groundless because the growth of industry, inventions, and manual crafts provided work for everybody in the larger towns.

Meanwhile the Oratory's vigorous spiritual climate continued to bear fruit. Toward the end of 1857, a new sodality came into being —the Blessed Sacrament Sodality, which aimed at promoting the frequent and regular reception of the sacraments and the worship of the Holy Eucharist. Don Bosco suggested the idea to the cleric Joseph Bongiovanni and he put it into effect. Many of the finest boys joined this sodality and distinguished themselves by receiving Communion frequently and regularly and by leading others through their example.

Don Bosco himself wrote the regulations of this sodality.[2] The cleric Joseph Bongiovanni was its first director. Humble, indefatigable, selfless, patient, cheerful, irreproachable, and zealous in teach-

[2] *See* Appendix 21. [Editor]

ing catechism, he took this task to heart unreservedly. He called weekly meetings in order to imbue the members with the spirit of the sodality; moreover, he associated with them during recreation periods and kept them entertained with jokes and stories. "With the same solicitude," Father Angelo Savio told us, "Don Bosco did not neglect anything that might boost their morale. He did the same for the members of the St. Aloysius and Immaculate Conception sodalities. Periodically he would call a meeting of one of the sodalities, have the regulations read in his presence, and then comment on them, urging all its members to give each other good example. Thus, as they gave better signs of a vocation, he prepared them gradually and imperceptibly for the priesthood.

In September [1857] John Bonetti donned the clerical habit; in November it was the turn of Celestine Durando.[3] That same month, Father Francis Montebruno[4] was a guest at the Oratory. This was not his first visit, but on this occasion he stayed about two weeks. He studied Don Bosco's system of education at close range, conferred with him at length on the spiritual direction of boys, and thoroughly acquainted himself with Don Bosco's methods of giving a sound religious formation, particularly to young apprentices. Tentatively they agreed that Father Montebruno would retain the ownership and material management of his institution for young artisans in Genoa while following Don Bosco's spiritual direction.

In the midst of these activities, Don Bosco did not diminish his concern for Church and State. In October [1857] the Chamber of Deputies was dissolved, preparatory to the general elections scheduled for November 15. Archbishop [Louis] Fransoni and his suffragan bishops urged the faithful to offer public prayers and to meet their obligation to vote for upright, non-partisan, God-fearing candidates.

To this effect, Don Bosco took steps to secure the documents he needed to prove his right to vote in Castelnuovo, since Mr. Carano,

[3] He was a classmate and friend of Dominic Savio with whom he founded the Immaculate Conception Sodality. In 1859 he and some other young clerics joined together with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. He was ordained a priest in 1864. The following year he became a member of the Superior Chapter—now renamed "Superior Council"—and held that office for over forty years until his death in 1907. [Editor]

[4] *See* pp. 397, 401. [Editor]

the town clerk, had some doubts about his eligibility. Don Bosco wrote as follows:

Turin, November 1857

Dear Sir:

I have informed Count [Caesar] Arnaud of your doubts regarding my domicile, and he sent me the enclosed statement. I am also forwarding receipts for real estate taxes which I have duly paid.

I wish to vote in both the administrative and political elections at Castelnuovo d'Asti, my native town.

If other documents are necessary, please be kind enough to inform me. May God bless you and your family, and please believe me to be,

Your servant,

Rev. John Bosco

The tax receipts revealed that Don Bosco had paid the sum of 6.94 lire for land and 32.14 lire for buildings. Such wealth!

Meanwhile, Don Bosco very discreetly sought to promote the election of good Catholics, as we can see from this letter of his to Canon Rosaz of Susa:

Turin, November 1, 1857

My dear Canon:

Only yesterday I heard from Chevalier [Mark] Gonella regarding the matter we discussed. The delay was caused by his absence. Here is his answer:

"If things have not changed since you wrote your letter, please let me know, and I shall soon give a fitting answer. I'd like to say, though, that my limitations may not match the expectations of those who were kind enough to think of me, etc., etc."

If this matter is to be discussed further, please let me know. It would certainly be difficult to find a more steadfast, God-fearing, non-partisan, and charitable candidate. God bless you.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

On election day, Catholics hastened to the polls with high hopes and succeeded in electing a considerable number of honest candi-

dates, including several distinguished priests. However, the elections of the latter were voided under the pretext that moral pressure had been exerted by the clergy. It then became evident that priests were to be denied the freedom granted to all other citizens. This explains why later on it became a policy that Catholics would neither vote nor accept office. Count Charles Cays, Count [Clement] Solaro della Margarita, Count [Vincent Emmanuel] Camburzano, Count [Francis] Costa della Torre, Count [Edward] Crotti of Costigliole, and a few other intrepid Catholic deputies—most of them good friends of Don Bosco—were elected, and they remained in office until 1860. They frequently and courageously raised their voices on behalf of sound political principles and the rights of the Church.

Occasionally, when important decisions were at stake, these men sought the advice of Don Bosco who was well known in Turin for his prudence. Once Count Camburzano came to the Oratory with six other right-wing deputies to ask Don Bosco's advice about how they should vote on a bill that was intended to improve the economic conditions of the lower clergy [by passing on to them the proceeds from the confiscation of monasteries].[5] After thinking it over for a while, Don Bosco replied: "Abstain from voting." The law suppressing religious orders and confiscating their possessions was unjust, and therefore no one could lawfully dispose of property to which he had no right. While Don Bosco was talking, Count Camburzano winked at his colleagues. Then, when Don Bosco was through, he exclaimed: "We have just talked to Father Cafasso. His disciple has given us the very same answer."

[5] *See* pp. 111f, 117. [Editor]

CHAPTER 62

Another Parish Mission

DON Bosco's reputation for learning and saintliness was such that very many pastors in Piedmont, eager to enjoy his warm, fraternal companionship, invited him to preach in their churches, and whenever possible he obliged.

It would take many volumes to describe in detail the numerous missions that Don Bosco preached and the serious or comic adventures that befell him on the way. These he related to his boys for their amusement. One such mission in 1857, of which we have accurate information, will give us an idea of the others. Father John Baptist Fenoglio, the pastor of Salicetto-Langhe in the diocese of Mondovì, had asked Don Bosco to give a ten-day mission. At the present time [1905] the trip from Turin can be made in about four hours, but in 1857, especially in winter, it took two days. The route was from Turin to Mondovì, then to Ceva, and from Ceva through knee-high snow across the Apennines to Salicetto.

After the feast of St. Cecilia [November 22], Don Bosco took the train for Fossano, where he transferred to the Mondovì stagecoach, arriving there at one-thirty. He got off the coach at the Three Lemons Inn, intending to visit Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi in between coaches, but he found out from the innkeeper that the bishop was out of town. He also learned that the coach for Ceva would not leave until eight that evening. Thus stranded, he asked for some ink and paper, sat down at a table, and began to write, much to the amazement of the guests who kept whispering: "Look, that priest must be writing his Sunday sermon!"

For a while Don Bosco ignored them, but since their curiosity did not seem to abate and most of them seemed friendly, he stopped and said: "I was preparing my sermon for Sunday, but if you'd like, I'll deliver it to you now."

Taken aback, they exchanged glances and some light banter. "It's been some time since we heard a sermon," they commented. "We might as well listen to one now." Without further ado, Don Bosco began telling them in plain language of the importance of living in the state of grace, of saving one's soul, and of going to confession. He held their attention with similes, dialogues, and examples. Little by little the crowd grew larger and larger until the dining room was full. Kitchen hands, the cook, and the innkeeper himself, along with his wife and family, joined the group, whispering: "Who is this priest? What's his name?" The employees were especially pressing their boss to inquire. "I heard he's from Turin," he answered.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco kept talking. It was now about seven o'clock. The lady of the house came up to him and asked: "Would you like something to eat?"

"No, thank you. I can't afford to eat out."

"It's on the house," she replied. "It will be our pleasure!"

"Then, if you insist, I'll take a bowl of soup, but only that!"

Instead, they served him a sumptuous dinner. Before eating, Don Bosco made the Sign of the Cross and said grace, to the amazement of the onlookers who apparently had never seen that practice before.

Noticing their surprise, Don Bosco promptly remarked: "What's so strange about my making the Sign of the Cross and saying grace? I'm a priest, and I'm on my way to give a retreat. It's only right that I should start setting a good example. Besides, you're Christians, aren't you? You, too, learned the Sign of the Cross when you were small, and now you teach it to your own children, don't you?" Unintentionally he had started another sermon. Those present and others who came in—a total of a hundred—listened intently, and nobody made a move to leave.

Later, Don Bosco introduced himself to his hosts, who from that time kept up friendly relations with him. It was now eight o'clock, and so he left for Ceva, passing by the shrine of Vicoforte.

We must recall that on such journeys Don Bosco always sat beside the coachman in order to engage him in conversation and coax him into making his confession. This time was no exception, and he happily succeeded in his intent. Afterward they continued chatting all the way to Ceva, where they arrived at ten that night.

As he did not know where to spend the night and the coachman had no suggestions, Don Bosco told him to drive on to the rectory.

"The pastor is old and sick," the coachman replied, "and he won't get up. But I know another priest—Father Testanera. He's probably still up."

"Good. Let's go to him then," Don Bosco said.

They knocked two or three times until the priest opened the door and somewhat suspiciously asked the nature of their business.

"I'm passing through Ceva," Don Bosco said, "and I'd appreciate your putting me up until five in the morning. Of course, I intend to pay for the trouble."

"We don't have any spare beds, and the rooms aren't heated."

"I'll have to make the best of it. It's a lot better than staying out in the cold."

The priest asked Don Bosco his name and then remarked: "I know a Don Bosco in Turin but only by correspondence. Maybe you know him too. But please, come in and make yourself comfortable. I'll go and tell my landlord of your arrival. He's bedridden."

No sooner did the latter hear that a priest had arrived than he gave orders to take good care of him.

Father Testanera returned and told Don Bosco: "I'll have some supper fixed up for you."

"No, thank you," Don Bosco replied. "I've already had my supper. I am quite grateful to you for taking me in."

When Father Testanera offered him an issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Souls on Sale* to while away the time, Don Bosco playfully asked him: "Have you read this booklet?"

"Why? Don't you like it?"

"I surely do! I wrote it."

"Do you mean you're the Don Bosco who conducts the Oratory?"

"Precisely!"

Delighted by this unexpected disclosure, Father Testanera—a giant of a priest—sat down, and soon both were absorbed in a conversation that lasted until morning when Don Bosco had to leave. They met again on other occasions. Once, in the fall of 1884, Father Testanera called on Don Bosco at the Oratory after a long lapse since their last meeting.

"Do you still remember me," he asked.

Don Bosco looked at him closely. "Father Testanera!" he exclaimed.

"What a memory! How can you remember me after all these years?"

"It's that height of yours!"

Let us now resume our story. Don Bosco continued on the same coach to Montezemolo where there was a change of horses. Here Don Bosco parted company with the coachman—now a good friend of his—because the latter's route took him to Savona by way of Milesimo.

Don Bosco covered the rest of the way partly on foot and partly on a hired donkey. The road had become a steep, narrow trail, and to make matters worse, a twenty-inch snowfall during the night had completely covered the trail. Don Bosco had to hire a young guide.

After a while, however, the guide also got lost, resulting in many a tumble for Don Bosco, his guide, and the donkey. Don Bosco alternately rode, pulled, and pushed the meek animal. Occasionally he himself became the guide. The descent was just as bad. By this time, drenched with perspiration and soaked by wet snow, Don Bosco was a bedraggled mess. And as if that weren't bad enough, he slipped and fell into a frozen ditch, hurting his leg. The injury wasn't serious, but during the mission he had to be helped into the pulpit. The pastor of Salicetto had sent someone to meet and escort him, but unfortunately the man missed Don Bosco and went on as far as Mondovì. Then he had to retrace his steps, but by the time he caught up with Don Bosco the latter had nearly reached his destination. Don Bosco's fame had preceded him, and the people were very excited. Several had received graces from the Blessed Virgin through his prayers, and they understandably anticipated other heavenly favors.

A priest met Don Bosco at the outskirts of the village. As they reached the village square, Don Bosco noticed some boys playing, and he immediately called to them. Unaccustomed to talking with priests, they were surprised and undecided as to what to do; as a result they just stood there, none daring to make a move. Don Bosco walked up to them with a smile and treated them to caramels which they accepted somewhat hesitatingly. Since they had not opened up

yet, Don Bosco told them some jokes to put them at ease. He then asked them about their parents, their names, and similar things. Once the villagers saw how friendly this priest was to their children and learned that he was Don Bosco, the mission preacher, they flocked to him, while many others looked on from their windows. At this point, the priest who had escorted Don Bosco made his way through the crowd and went straight to the rectory to tell the pastor that it was a crime to keep a man standing in the cold after an exhausting trip, not to mention the fact that it hardly befitted the dignity of a priest to stoop to joke with children. But the pastor, who knew Don Bosco well, replied: "Don't worry. Don Bosco knows what he's doing."

Meanwhile, to put everybody at ease, Don Bosco began talking about the crops and similar matters with those nearest to him, and he then went on with amusing stories. Before excusing himself, he raised his voice and exhorted them to attend the mission in the best possible manner so as to put themselves on the right path and never again stray from it. He then walked to the rectory, followed by an ever increasing crowd. After a short rest, he went to the window. The villagers were still there, waiting to escort him to the church for his first sermon. However, Don Bosco was completely exhausted. He therefore opened the window and told them that since he was very tired and since they were perhaps not sufficiently prepared in their hearts, he would start the mission the next morning. In dismissing them, he asked them to drop into church for a short prayer and then to go home.

On the first day of the mission Don Bosco had to manage by himself because, due to the weather, his mission partner had not yet arrived. Nearly all the villagers flocked to his sermons, never tiring of them. At times, after preaching for an hour and a half, Don Bosco would say: "I'm tired now. I can't talk anymore."

"Rest for a while," they told him. "We'll wait."

Once he preached from ten until past noon, but even so, no one wanted to leave since, as was their custom in winter, they had had their main meal at nine in the morning. Then, too, there was no place to go. The whole village was snowed in.

Each time he seemed about to conclude, the congregation told him to go on. Finally, at one o'clock he came down from the pulpit.

The church, choir loft, and sacristy were packed. With difficulty Don Bosco managed to reach the vesting table in the sacristy and take off his surplice and stole. With a smile he asked the men standing there: "What are you waiting for? Aren't you going home?"

"We want to hear you some more."

"I'm tired. I can't do it. I've been preaching for over two and a half hours!"

"Well, rest for a while. We'll wait."

"What will the pastor say?"

"Don't worry! We'll tell him we like it."

Meanwhile the pastor had come in and heard the conversation. "Don Bosco," he said, "do whatever you think best. These good people love listening to you."

After a light repast, Don Bosco returned to the crowded church. After thanking them for their attention and congratulating them on their good will and fervor, he took up his sermon again, interspersing it with some of the adventures that had befallen him on his way to their village, particularly the donkey ride and his tumbles. Skillfully, he drew a moral lesson from each of these episodes.

That day, except for a few breaks, his sermon went beyond six hours—not an incredible feat if we consider his well-known ability in preaching. Delightful parables, examples, and allegories formed the bulk of his sermons. When speaking of slander, for example, he invited his listeners to follow him on an imaginary tour of the village into stores, cafés, stables, and homes, where he had them listen to the gossip of women, servants, employers, and idlers. Then he portrayed the people who had been the targets of such gossip and slander, showing how, more often than not, even their most innocent actions had been misinterpreted, the sinful ones maliciously or thoughtlessly exaggerated on several occasions, and the most insignificant seized upon and distorted by uncharitable gossip. As a result, the slanderer in his sermon emerged in odious, frightful colors, while his victim appeared worthy of compassion and support. He then gave examples to show the fatal and deplorable consequences of slander and, Bible in hand, proved how much God abhorred it. He also brought his audience alternately to tears and laughter with his portrayal of different people.

His most stirring and unforgettable sermon, however, was the one

the villagers later called "the procession sermon." The church was so packed that, had anyone thrown a handful of wheat over the congregation, not one grain would have reached the floor. Don Bosco announced that he was going to take them all with him on a procession without their taking a step. He then told them that he had seen the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem and read the large inscription on its gate: "There shall not enter anything defiled." [Apoc. 21, 27] The path leading to it was nearly deserted. Below, in a deep valley, he had seen a grotesque figure holding aloft a black banner emblazoned with the words: "Fornicators, adulterers, sodomites, thieves, usurers, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers will never inherit the kingdom of God." [1 Cor. 6, 10] A masked monster with strangely ingratiating ways led an endless mob of foul-mouthed individuals, blasphemers, slanderers, staggering drunkards, men, and women bent under the weight of stolen chestnuts, grapes, wheat, and corn. These were followed by a crowd of women and children carrying goods they had stolen from their own homes and sold. Then came tailors bent double under the weight of stolen cloth, millers groaning under sacks of stolen flour, storekeepers with false scales, receivers of stolen goods, usurers, and others.

The procession went through a gate in the blackened walls of a frightful-looking prison at the far end of the valley. Beyond its threshold, one could glimpse dark, fearsome tunnels burrowing deep into the earth. As soon as all had entered, the gates clanged shut, displaying an inscription which could now be seen: *Periisse semel aeternum est* [Once damned, forever damned]. As this dreadful description went on, a chill gripped his audience.

Don Bosco then began to apostrophize various categories of sinners: "You blasphemers, who now rise defiantly before God, do you know where you are headed? What about you scandalmongers, you tailors and millers? Do you know what your end will be?" Momentary pauses punctuated his apostrophes and scattered, stifled sobs could be clearly heard. He concluded by saying: "You weep, and so do I, but not for myself. I mourn for you. Where you are heading I shall tell you tomorrow."

Men went to confession in droves, packing the church, sacristy, and rectory. Don Bosco's words caused many in those few days to make restitution of tens of thousands of lire, to the pastor's great

consolation. In the words of Isaiah, restitution had become the "ransom of sin." [Is. 27, 9] The hand of God was obvious; no sermon had ever produced such astounding results.

While Don Bosco was preaching at Salicetto, his two latest issues of *Letture Cattoliche* were coming off the press. One was publicized in the December 15 [1857] issue of *L'Armonia*:

> *Il Galantuomo,* a complimentary national almanac for subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche,* is off the presses. We are happy to note that, besides other instructive and entertaining articles, it carries one on hygiene with timely, important, and down-to-earth information.

The almanac was a supplement to the December issue, printed by the Paravia Press, entitled *The Life of St. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna and Martyr, and of His Disciple, St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons and Martyr.* Although Don Bosco was its author, it was published anonymously. In these two short biographies, Don Bosco showed that at the end of the first and second centuries Christians believed the very same doctrines as present-day Catholics, including that concerning the veneration of relics. He also described the horrible profanation of the relics of St. Hilary in Lyons by both Calvinists and Waldensians, and their ferocious massacres of Catholics. He ended with a solemn truth to be borne in mind during those very days: "Emperor Lucius Septimius Severus ordered all his subjects to deny Jesus Christ under penalty of death. Knowing that the laws of earthly kings not only do not bind when in conflict with Divine and church laws but are to be resisted, the Christians of Lyons chose to cling firmly to their Faith at any price. They allowed themselves to be slaughtered by the thousands rather than bow to such an iniquitous command."

At Salicetto, meanwhile, Don Bosco's fellow preacher and other zealous priests were hearing confessions from early morning until late in the evening. Besides, the rectory was jammed with people trying to see Don Bosco in his rare free moments and obtain a blessing for some sick member of their families. At times the sick were brought along. Though he had not a moment to himself, he managed at night to answer the letters that he had brought with him or that Father Alasonatti had forwarded to him. Here is one that he

wrote to Count Pio Galleani Agliano about some matters which had certainly been approved by Father Cafasso:

Salicetto, November 29, 1857

My dear Count:

I am writing from Salicetto, where I am preaching a mission. Among the many letters to be answered I see one of yours. I have a vague idea that I have already sent you a reply, but I'm not sure. Anyway, please forgive me if I already did answer, and still more if I did not.

The boy Chiansello is back with us. His conduct is good, but his health is poor. As for the fees which his brother, a priest, agreed to pay, I shall do whatever you say on my return to Turin.

Regarding a chaplain, if one has not yet been found, we can still count on the highly-recommended curate at Verzuolo whom we discussed last year. There is also another priest—Father John Grassino, the rector of the mental hospital at Collegno—whom I have known personally for some years. He is a very zealous priest, enjoys an excellent reputation, and would like to give up that position only because he wants to do priestly work. I think it would be very advisable for us to get together to discuss this matter further, if needed, upon your return to Turin.

I use this opportunity to wish you and your esteemed family abundant blessings from heaven. During the novena, may the Immaculate Virgin obtain for you from Her Divine Son peace, tranquility, grace, fear of God, and perseverance in doing good. Amen.

Very respectfully and gratefully yours,

Fr. John Bosco

The Oratory boys also received a note from Don Bosco—suggestions on how to honor the Blessed Virgin during the novena to Her Immaculate Conception.

Immaculate Conception Novena

1. *First Day*—Rise promptly and tidy up.
2. *Second Day*—Go to church on time. Do not laugh as you enter; do not look around but go straight to your place.
3. *Third Day*—Kneel upright with hands clasped over your chest.
4. *Fourth Day*—Say your prayers clearly, distinctly, and in unison. Do not look around, smile, or talk with anyone.

5. *Fifth Day*—Make the Sign of the Cross devoutly and do not slur over the words.

6. *Sixth Day*—Renew your sorrow for past sins and resolve never to sin again.

7. *Seventh Day*—Consider a general confession if you have never made one or if your conscience is bothering you.

8. *Eighth Day*—Resolve to make a good confession if you did not confess some sins properly in the past or were silent about them.

9. *Ninth Day*—Fast or practice some mortification in preparation for Holy Communion.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

1. Take part in church services with the utmost possible devotion.

2. Resolve to wear a medal of the Immaculate Conception. Kiss it and invoke Mary when tempted.

As Don Bosco's thoughts went to his beloved boys, the mission at Salicetto came to an end. We can truthfully say that Don Bosco preached right up to the very last moment he was in the village. A number of people accompanied him to a coach of sorts that was waiting for him on the highway. Standing on it, he had a few parting words for the onlookers: "Remember such or such a thing. Don't forget the promises you made to Our Lord!"

"Yes, yes!" they all chorused back, some of them even assuring him that they would not forget what he had told them in confession. He then went back to the Oratory for the closing of the novena of the Immaculate Conception and the beginning of the Christmas novena.

Later, in commenting on the mission at Salicetto, Don Bosco had this to say: "So many things happened that on more than one occasion I decided to write them down as soon as I could find time because the whole story would make a fine novel. Of course, in conversation I can mention some incidents, but no one could ever really imagine all the things that occurred. It would take me a whole month to describe the trip, sermons, conversions, acts of restitution, and all the graces obtained from the Blessed Virgin. I am truly very satisfied with the results of that mission."

Nor did the good villagers forget it either, as we found out from one of our confreres who sent us this report:

In 1887 I went to Salicetto (Mondovì) on personal business and was very warmly welcomed by a family of Salesian cooperators. The head of the family spared no effort to make me feel at home. As we conversed, I mentioned Don Bosco. He broke in: "I knew him, I knew him. He was here in 1857 to give a mission. You should have seen the crowds flocking to his sermons. We listened as if under a spell. When he left, I accompanied him part of the way. It had been snowing, and it was very cold and windy. Suddenly, a gust of wind swept off his hat. I ran and retrieved it. How grateful he was! That man was a saint! It's enough to say that he was Don Bosco. If you go to Turin, tell him that you stayed at my house."

When I did go to Turin, I mentioned the incident to Don Bosco. He smiled and seemed to enjoy what I was telling him. Then he said: "Yes, I do remember those days. Did they complain about the length of my sermons?"

"Quite the contrary!"

"Well, let me tell you that I was brave enough to give them three-hour sermons." Then he asked me: "Are you tired? Have you eaten yet?"

"Yes, thank you."

"Have you met Father Rua?"

Father Rua, who was there, replied: "Yes, we have already met."

"Well," Don Bosco concluded, "from now on he is the man to see." Those were the last words I ever heard from his beloved lips.

Something else worth mentioning took place shortly after the close of the mission at Salicetto. On several occasions Don Bosco engaged in lengthy discussions with Father [Leonard] Murialdo concerning the advisability of opening an elementary day school for the boys of the St. Aloysius festive oratory. On weekdays they were left to themselves, and thus they were in danger of being proselytized by the Waldensians who had their church in that neighborhood. This urgent need had to be filled or the efforts of zealous catechists would be greatly undermined. As Don Bosco pondered some solution, he received an invitation to the general meeting of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, to be held in Turin at its headquarters in Via Stampatori on the evening of December 8 [1857]. He decided to attend, and, as was his custom, he took along with him some of the older boys belonging to the affiliated chapter of the society, among whom was John Villa. On the way he said to them: "This evening you'll hear laymen talking like apostles."

During this impressive meeting, one of the members discussed the measures to be taken to offset Protestant inroads. The free elementary and agricultural schools that they had recently opened in Borgo Nuovo, near the Valentino Park, and in Viale dei Platani, now Corso Vittorio Emanuele, posed a serious danger to the boys' Faith. The speaker also mentioned the fact that the Waldensians had opened a kindergarten next to their church and were offering free lunches to all the Catholic children who went there. Several speakers suggested countermeasures, but because of financial difficulties or disagreement on methods, no decisions seemed likely to be forthcoming as the discussion dragged on. Don Bosco, who had listened very attentively, asked for the floor and said resolutely: "This matter is very serious and urgent. We should not adjourn without approving some practical and effective countermeasures—specifically, the opening of at least one school. In the locality that is threatened with the most serious danger, we already have the St. Aloysius Oratory, where we can make room for a classroom. In other places, with God's help we shall open schools, and we shall call them 'Catholic Schools.' It is up to you, under the inspiration of St. Vincent de Paul, to see that they come into being. I will always be ready to help. We shall need certified teachers, and we shall find them. We shall also need nuns with teacher certification for the girls, and we shall get them from some congregation. We shall need money, but we can count on Divine Providence. We shall also need a board to undertake wholeheartedly the administration, supervision, and direction of this project. You have to appoint that board. The longer we dillydally, the harder we'll have to work to stem this evil. Let us begin immediately with a classroom at the St. Aloysius Oratory." He went on with such sound and convincing arguments that the assembly agreed to expand the evening classes being held at the St. Aloysius Oratory, to add day classes, and to provide free classroom material.

With the support of such staunch champions of the Faith as Chevalier Michelotti, Count [Charles] Cays, Senator Castagnetto, and Attorney [Cajetan] Bellingeri—all of whom were always ready to work for God's cause—Don Bosco began working to establish an elementary day school at the St. Aloysius Oratory. He rented a strip of land and had a small structure erected on it. This building con-

sisted of a large room partitioned into two classrooms for two grades. The movable wooden partition doubled as a platform when it was taken down to allow the whole room to serve as a makeshift auditorium. The structure also provided accommodations for a custodian. Since Don Bosco had no certified teachers of his own at this time, he had to scout for them and make sure that they were also good Catholics. He paid their salaries at a great sacrifice on his part and also provided prizes needed to arouse interest and enthusiasm among the pupils. He was able to do all this thanks to the generous financial backing of Father Leonard Murialdo.

As soon as the new school opened, a large number of Catholic boys left the Protestant school and flocked to it; thus they were rescued from the danger of falling victims to heresy under the guise of an elementary education.

The [civil] year was now ending. As he had done in the past on the same occasion, Don Bosco announced that he had a special keepsake for everybody. This custom offered him the opportunity of giving a personal piece of advice to each boy. One by one they approached him. Usually Don Bosco whispered a maxim or admonition taken from the lives of the saints, but occasionally he gave it on a slip of paper lest they forget it. These written mementos became a precious possession jealously guarded for years.

He also gave keepsakes to the clerics, in Latin, that were drawn from Holy Scripture or the Fathers of the Church. Surprisingly, even when the Oratory priests and clerics numbered over fifty, he still gave each one a message, without notes and without repeating himself. The keepsake was so unerringly personal that all were amazed and said to themselves: "This is really for me!" At times, he wrote them down with great fatherliness. Some have come into our possession. The one we shall report here was given to the cleric [John Baptist] Anfossi:

1. *Sicut misit me Pater et ego mitto vos. Filius amatur a Patre et tamen ad passionem mittitur; ita et discipuli a Domino amantur, qui tamen ad passionem mittuntur in mundo.* (St. Gregory—Low Sunday homily.)

As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. The Father loves the Son and yet sends Him to His passion. Likewise, the Lord loves His disciples and yet sends them to their passion in the world.

2. *Qui aestimaverunt lusum esse vitam nostram, et conversationem vitae compositam ad lucrum, omnes insipientes et infelices.* (St. Gregory the Great)

How foolish and unhappy those who looked upon life as a pastime and upon money as its goal.

3. *Nullum Deo gratius sacrificium offerri potest quam zelus animarum.* (St. Gregory the Great)

No sacrifice is more acceptable to God than zeal for souls.

4. *Curare ut quisquis sacerdoti iungitur, quasi ex salis tactu, aeternae vitae sapore condiatur.* (St. Gregory)

Whoever comes in contact with a priest should endeavor, as if seasoned with salt, to savor of things eternal.

5. *Salus est animae et corporis sobrius potus.* (Sir. 31, 37)

Moderation in drinking is good for body and soul.

But the most solemn keepsake Don Bosco gave at the close of this year was the remembrance of their deceased schoolmates: in March, Dominic Savio, the cleric Garigliano,[1] and Dominic Lupo who died at home; in August, Alexander Re of Caselle who died at SS. Maurice and Lazarus Hospital; and in November, Marcellus Bordoni who died at Camerano, his home town.

[1] *See* p. 139. [Editor]

CHAPTER 63

A New Sodality at the Oratory

THE January 1858 issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *Reflections on the Epistles and Gospels of Sundays and Feasts of Our Lord,* factually proved that the Church, far from hiding the Holy Scriptures—as alleged by Protestants—constantly offered them to the faithful for their meditation. The gospel reflections were taken from the Appendix of the incomparable *Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* by Father Charles Massini; those on the epistles—in the same style—were the work of a devout and scholarly priest.

While this booklet aimed at furthering the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy of the Mass, a new sodality—the Knights of the Altar—was being started at the Oratory to promote the same goal. It was the brainchild of the cleric Joseph Bongiovanni, founder of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality, of which the Knights of the Altar Sodality was to serve as auxiliary. Besides promoting the decorum of God's house, its primary purpose was to foster priestly vocations, especially among the more devout students of the upper grades. After adequate training, the Knights of the Altar were allowed to serve Sunday Mass in cassock and surplice and to assist in a body inside the sanctuary at the sacred services on the principal feasts of the year. They were also trained to be torchbearers, acolytes, thurifers, cross-bearers, and masters of ceremonies at solemn high Mass, Vespers, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, processions, Holy Week services, and funerals.

The Knights of the Altar were to be under the direction of a liturgically-minded, zealous, and devout priest—usually the catechist of the house who, in turn, could delegate the care of cassocks and surplices and the duties of master of ceremonies to senior altar boys.

The first president of this sodality was the cleric Joseph Bongiovanni himself. This was an exception to the rule and a tribute to his

uncommon qualities. Both then as a young cleric and later as a priest, he was extremely zealous in forearming the Oratory boys and the faithful against Protestant errors, and even more so in convincingly presenting the Catholic doctrine on the real presence of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

Bongiovanni also made his Knights of the Altar so conscious of the dignity of their office that people, upon seeing their devout and modest bearing at church services and processions, could not believe they were ordinary school boys. We shall report [in the Appendix] the regulations of this sodality as amended and approved by Don Bosco.[1]

To these regulations Don Bosco added a practical norm to aid the sodality president in maintaining fervor and efficaciously amending thoughtless breaches of propriety while serving at the altar. He formulated it as follows: "Should any Knight of the Altar fail to perform his duties in an edifying manner, the president may either dismiss or suspend him as the case demands. In the latter instance, the director may allow the member to attend the weekly meetings so that his conduct may improve."

From this time on, the Knights of the Altar added a greatly appreciated luster not only to the more solemn liturgical feasts at the Oratory but also in several churches and religious institutes in Turin that were entirely dependent upon them. Especially during Holy Week, those Knights of the Altar who were not needed at the Oratory went out to help in the parishes, at times serving successively in several of them. This practice still continues today [1905].

This sodality gave the Church many priests, but what it cost the cleric Bongiovanni is known only to his guardian angel. The members, too, shared his joys and sorrows and the petty persecutions of young scoffers present in every school, but this was only a fraction of the difficulties he encountered in encouraging the good and in putting up with occasional taunts from those who did not understand or appreciate his aims and the excellent results he achieved.

Don Bosco watched, encouraged, and backed the cleric and his Knights of the Altar, even though he frequently seemed to tolerate some good-natured criticism and teasing. He was pleased to notice that the sodality members were better able than others to endure

[1] *See* Appendix 22. [Editor]

such harassment with a smile; ignoring human respect, they were proud to serve the Lord.

Don Bosco's interest in their deep and manly religious formation also had another aim. He insisted that, as far as possible, the choirboys should belong to the Knights of the Altar Sodality, although singing was to still remain their primary duty. He made it clear that the catechist was not to make them serve at the altar when they were needed for singing. "They should serve at the altar," he said, "on the less solemn feasts when the Mass is in Gregorian chant." A prudent and wise norm!

The choirboys [at the Oratory] formed the largest group. Inescapably they were not as supervised as the rest on the way to and from rehearsals and in the choir loft. Sometimes, on solemn feasts, they were called out of town, and so their conduct and devotion had to be exemplary. Nothing is more edifying to a congregation than the sight of choirboys receiving Communion very devoutly at an early Mass and then singing with heartfelt Faith at a solemn high Mass. Another aspect for consideration when these boys were invited to other towns was that they had to board with various families, as arranged by the pastor or chairman of the festivities. In such circumstances a less virtuous boy could be tempted to offend God, whereas a more virtuous one would know how to cope with the situation. As a matter of fact, one of these choirboys once silenced a dinner guest of the family that was boarding them when that guest started an unbecoming conversation. On another occasion, a choirboy effectively refuted someone who had begun to slander religion and priests. Several times, on the eve of feasts, when these choristers went to the homes where they were to spend the night, some families served them meat [even though these were days of fast and abstinence]. "Don't worry," they told them. "Don Bosco will never know it!" However, the boys would answer bravely: "We know that, but God will!" and they would not touch the meat.

Clearly, Don Bosco wanted his choirboys to be a living sermon wherever they went, and that is why he wanted them to belong to the Knights of the Altar Sodality. By their demeanor they won love and admiration for the Oratory. On several occasions they were praised for their brave stand, even by those who thoughtlessly had failed to respect the innocence of their age.

On the feast of the Purification of Our Lady [February 2, 1858], the Knights of the Altar, wearing cassocks and surplices, made their solemn dedication to Divine worship by assisting in the sanctuary at the Community Mass said by Don Bosco and served by two of them. It was not their first appearance, however; this had taken place a few days before on the feast of St. Francis de Sales [which had been solemnly observed on Sunday], January 31. Serving as acolytes on these occasions was still a privilege of the clerics, and they did not relinquish it for many years. *L'Armonia* described the festivities in honor of St. Francis de Sales in its issue of Thursday, February 4, 1858.[2]

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had hastened to give the Paravia Press two other issues of *Letture Cattoliche* in order to be free to journey to Rome to discuss with the Vicar of Christ the ways and means to give his newly formed society a permanent basis.

The February issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *The Lenten Season,* was printed anonymously. It contained brief but important historical and moral pointers on the Lenten fast whose origin dates to apostolic times, on the obligation to observe it, on dispensations and indults granted by the motherly goodness of the Church, and on ways and means to sanctify the Lenten season.

A review of this booklet appeared in the March 11 issue of *L'Armonia.*[3] The March issue was entitled *The Lives of the Popes St. Anicetus, St. Soter, St. Eleutherius, St. Victor I, and St. Zephyrinus.* Though anonymous, it was undoubtedly authored by Don Bosco. The booklet covered the following topics: the general practice of sacramental confession at the times of these popes, the heresies and violent deaths of heresiarchs, the Eucharistic fast, the Friday abstinence, the Easter duty, the martyrs of Lyons, and Saints Felicitas and Perpetua.

Since the March issue marked the beginning of the sixth year of publication of *Letture Cattoliche,* Don Bosco sent out a circular in February.[4] During that month he also met a need of *Letture Cattoliche*—which was now well known in Lombardy, Tuscany, Sardinia, the province of Nice, and the Trento area—in that he finally found

[2] *See* Appendix 23. [Editor]
[3] *See* Appendix 24. [Editor]
[4] *See* Appendix 25. [Editor]

some help in a good young man, Caesar Chiala, a former pupil during the early days of the St. Francis de Sales Festive Oratory. Intelligent, good-natured, and well instructed in his Faith, he was a postal employee when Don Bosco invited him to work with him on the booklets. He accepted and continued to do so for many years. He proofread and translated pamphlets from the French, and many anonymous issues of *Letture Cattoliche* were authored by him, although Don Bosco carefully edited them. He lived in Turin with his mother, and after supper he would regularly come to Valdocco to work late into the night. Very often he stayed overnight, and at such times he would devoutly hear Mass with the boys on the following morning, thus giving a fine example. For breakfast he, too, munched on day-old bread with the young clerics, and then went to his job at the post office. Sometimes he accompanied Don Bosco to Becchi to continue working with him on some issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* and there, too, he was satisfied with a piece of bread for breakfast.

Now that he could count on the steady preparation of new issues even during his absence, Don Bosco set about winding up some matters he had initiated with government officials on behalf of priests who sought his influence to vindicate their rights, obtain favors, or be relieved of an unfair burden. The letter we shall quote here—one of many—was written during this period by the wife of Count Ponza of San Martino. This noble lady assured Don Bosco of her good offices to help Canon [Peter] De Gaudenzi, the archpriest of the Vercelli cathedral:

[No date]

Very Reverend Father:

Please forgive me if I inconvenience you by enclosing a letter for the archpriest of Vercelli. I am afraid I did not write his address correctly, since I passed his letter on to my husband for his information. I hope that things will turn out well, especially because of your interest. This I owe you because I deeply esteem and sincerely admire you as a model of true Christian charity.

You have greatly comforted me by the assurance that you will remember my children in your prayers. This is my guarantee of special heavenly favors. My little boy Coriolano is preparing for his First Com-

munion this Easter. Perhaps his entire religious outlook in life may hinge on this solemn event. You can imagine a mother's anxiety as I look forward to this occasion. If you could increase his fervor by some holy exhortation, I shall bless you for the rest of my days. My children are my worry and my delight. If the Lord grants that they grow as truly good Christians, he will have given me a superabundant share of joy upon this earth. May Your Reverence forgive me for this digression. I remain, with the most profound esteem,

Minervina of San Martino, née De Bagnola

Meanwhile, on the advice of Father Cafasso and Father Borel, Don Bosco again wrote to Archbishop Fransoni, detailing his plans to found a religious society with simple vows whose members would retain all civil rights as free citizens, even after profession. In the same letter Don Bosco also informed his archbishop that he would follow his suggestion and journey to Rome. The archbishop was very pleased, and from his home in exile he sent Don Bosco a warm letter of recommendation that clearly indicated his good will toward him. The letter praised Don Bosco's charity and zeal for the education of boys and brought out the good religious and moral results already obtained in Turin through his festive oratories. Then, respectfully but most earnestly, he implored the Holy Father to generously help Don Bosco with his enlightened advice and to support him with his supreme authority.

CHAPTER 64

Don Bosco's First Journey to Rome

ON February 9 [1858], Canon Celestine Fissore, provicar-general [of the archdiocese of Turin] formally granted Don Bosco a two-month leave of absence. Meanwhile, the cleric John Turchi had neatly copied out the constitutions of the future Salesian Society at Don Bosco's request so that he might submit them to the Pope for his approval. His passport ready, Don Bosco planned to go to Rome by sea and then to return through Tuscany, Parma, Piacenza, Modena, and the Lombard-Venetian kingdom. Shortly before his departure he received letters and visits from friends wishing him a safe journey and entrusting various errands to him. Count Xavier Provano of Collegno, one of the oldest Oratory catechists, sent him this note:

Turin, February 15, 1858

If it is not too much trouble, I beg the Very Reverend Don Bosco to celebrate a Mass for my intention at the altar of St. Francis Xavier in the Church of the Gesù in Rome on March 12, or at least during the special novena to that saint, March 4th to 12th.

Count Xavier Provana of Collegno

At the Oratory, both the clerics and the boys were visibly saddened by the thought of being without their good father for two months. To cheer them up, Don Bosco spoke to them one evening as follows: "If you're afraid that you'll be deserted should something happen to Don Bosco, don't worry! God always knows best. There are other excellent priests who are ready to be fathers to you. Only a few days ago, Canon [Lawrence] Gastaldi, whom you know, told me that he would have no difficulty in obtaining permission to come here and take my place. Thus you can see that your future welfare

is assured. However, if you are sad simply because I am going away, I must tell you that I feel the same way too. But I must go for your own good. One reason for my journey to Rome is to obtain special favors from the Pope for several of our most generous benefactors who have promised to continue their support."

He then went on to speak with great warmth of the Pope, ending with several recommendations for the smooth functioning of the house; then he sent them off to bed. Among those present were John Baptist Anfossi and James Costamagna of Caramagna,[1] who had arrived at the Oratory on February 12 [1858], only a few days before.

With the preparations for his departure completed, Don Bosco called on Father Cafasso, who gave him a petition to the Holy Father, the contents of which they had already discussed together at great length. What Father Cafasso had in mind is well described in the passage we shall quote from his biography by Canon James Colombero.[2]

After promising Father Cafasso to do his best on his behalf, Don Bosco asked him to hear his confession—a precaution he always took before a long journey, even if he had gone to confession only a few days before.

The following day, February 18, was one to be long remembered. Don Bosco said a very early Mass. During the night nearly eight inches of snow had fallen on top of the foot and a half already covering the ground, but this did not deter him from leaving. As all prudent people did in those days before setting out on a rather hazardous journey, he decided to make out his will in order to avoid complications for the Oratory in the event—as he jokingly remarked —that he might end up as food for the fish of the Mediterranean. The notary was late, but Don Bosco waited for him, even though he was anxious not to miss the train. The formalities took only a short time; Joseph Buzzetti and James Rossi, the elementary day school teacher, signed as witnesses.

At eight-thirty in the morning, while it was still snowing, Don

[1] He became a Salesian and was ordained a priest in 1868. In 1887 he led the third group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina. In 1895 he was consecrated bishop and appointed first Vicar Apostolic of Mendez and Gualaquiza in Ecuador. He died in 1921. [Editor]

[2] *See* Appendix 26. [Editor]

Bosco tore himself away from his pupils with the emotion of a father leaving his sons. Many wept unashamedly, as if they were afraid that they would never see him again. On leaving the house, Don Bosco made his customary Sign of the Cross, saying: "Let us go *in nomine Domine,*" and then he hurriedly trudged to the railroad station through the snow.

The cleric Michael Rua accompanied him on the journey in his role as secretary, but all the Oratory boys followed him like loving sons in their hearts, thoughts, and most fervent wishes. Thereafter, to obtain his safe journey from God, every morning a select group of devout lads went to Communion, many more made visits to the Blessed Sacrament during recreation, and quite a few practiced acts of self-denial. The prayers and sacrifices of so many loving sons found favor with the Lord.

When Don Bosco arrived at the station, he looked for the cleric Angelo Savio who had planned to board the same train, but he could not find him. Savio had been the first Oratory cleric to receive an elementary school teacher's certificate, and Don Bosco had loaned him for a year to a boy's orphanage in the province of Alessandria. He had made this sacrifice in answer to the persistent requests of the superiors of that orphanage who had probably also enlisted the support of Father Charles Braggione, a dear friend of his. Father Mentasti, a distinguished painter, joined Don Bosco and the cleric Rua as a traveling companion.

The train left at ten o'clock. Don Bosco sat down beside a well-mannered, bright-looking ten-year-old boy, and he soon struck up a conversation with him. From a few words said by the child's father sitting next to him, and from the boy himself, Don Bosco learned that they were Jews and that the boy was attending the fourth grade of a Jewish private school, although the level of instruction afforded him there was comparable to that offered in our own second grade. The boy, however, was very bright, and since his father was pleased by Don Bosco's interest, he urged him to test the boy's knowledge of the Bible. Don Bosco questioned him on the creation of the world and of man, on the earthly paradise, and on the fall of our first parents. The boy did pretty well in his answers, but Don Bosco was very surprised to see that he knew nothing of original sin or the promise of a Redeemer.

"Doesn't your Bible tell you," Don Bosco asked, "what God promised to Adam when He sent him out of Eden?"

"No," the boy answered. "What was it?"

"Well, God told the serpent that since it had deceived the woman, a man born of another woman would crush its head."

"Who would that man be?"

"The one who was to come and free mankind from the devil's bondage."

"When will He come?"

"He has already come! He is the one we call. . . ."

At this point the father intervened, saying: "We do not study these things because they do not concern our law."

"I think you would be wise to study them," Don Bosco replied, "because they are found in the books of Moses and of the prophets in whom you believe."

"Very well, I'll give it some thought," the father said. "Now ask him something about arithmetic."

Don Bosco realized that the man did not want him to discuss religion with his son, so he changed the subject and entertained the people in that compartment with interesting and humorous stories.

At Asti the boy had to get off, but he could hardly bear to part from Don Bosco. Tearfully he clutched his hand and between sobs managed to say: "I'm Leon Sacerdote of Moncalvo. Please remember me. I hope to see you again in Turin." His father—perhaps not too pleased by his boy's fondness for a priest—in order to distract him, told Don Bosco that at his son's insistence he had looked all over Turin for a history of Italy, but unsuccessfully. He then asked Don Bosco if he would try to find him such a book. Don Bosco promised that he would do so on his return from Rome, and he assured him that it would be one written especially for youngsters.

At Alessandria, Don Bosco saw the cleric Angelo Savio getting off the train, and he was able to say good-bye to him and give him some parting advice. He was glad that Savio had not missed the train.

After a stop at Serravalle, the train cruised through ravines, tunnels, and viaducts in the steep and lofty Apennines until it reached Busalla. Here two mountaineers got into Don Bosco's com-

partment and sat beside him. One of them was pale and sickly, and he looked quite pitiful in contrast to his healthy partner who, though nearly seventy, seemed as vigorous as a twenty-year-old. He was in his shirt sleeves with only an undershirt, aside from a coarse jacket that he draped over his shoulders as a concession to custom. He wore short pants and leggings that were almost entirely unfastened; his knees were bare and weather-bitten. Don Bosco, who was always eager to chat with ordinary people, started a conversation and then asked: "Why don't you put your jacket on to keep warm?"

"Look, Father," he replied, "we mountaineers are used to wind, rain, snow, and ice. We hardly know when it's winter. Even at this time of year, our children go barefoot in the snow. It's fun for them; they mind neither heat nor cold."

Later on Don Bosco commented: "To me this was further proof that the body is able to adapt itself to any situation. Those who overprotect it are only exposing themselves to serious discomforts which do not in the least bother someone who has been accustomed to hardships."

Meanwhile, the snow was gradually vanishing as the train continued toward the coast of Genoa. They began to see green banks and flowers, and then almonds in full blossom, and even budding peach trees; finally Genoa and the sea came into view.

When the train steamed into the station, Father Montebruno's brother-in-law and several boys greeted Don Bosco and Michael Rua and helped them with their luggage. Then they all went to Father Montebruno's hospice for young artisans at Carignano where Father Montebruno himself warmly welcomed them. It was already three-thirty in the afternoon. Except for a cup of coffee before leaving, Don Bosco and Rua had eaten nothing all day. They sat down for a repast and then visited the classrooms, workshops, and dormitories. Don Bosco felt as though he were back in Pinardi's house, for it was very similar to that building. The hospice housed thirty boys, while another twenty had their sleeping quarters in Canneto. Their daily fare was a large bowl of soup at dinner and a bun at breakfast and supper which they ate while playing.

After completing a tour of the house, Don Bosco had a brief talk with Father Montebruno about merging their institutes, and then he took a walk into town with the cleric Rua. After a short

while a strong wind arose, and he therefore decided to go to the Dominican monastery at Santa Maria di Castello. Father Cottolengo, the brother of the founder of the Little House of Divine Providence in Turin and the pastor of this very ancient church, received the two welcome visitors very warmly and served refreshments. He also prevailed upon them to stay overnight. They had an extremely pleasant evening. After Rua had retired, Don Bosco and Father Cottolengo continued to converse until one in the morning.

Later that morning Don Bosco said Mass at the altar of Blessed Sebastian Maggi, a Dominican monk who had died over three centuries before. His body is a permanent source of wonder, since it is still intact and pliant, thus giving one the impression that he had just died. Many votive offerings and other tokens of graces received hung about his altar—a much revered destination of devoted pilgrims.

Don Bosco had hoped to leave Genoa on the morning of the 19th, but he was in for a disappointment. Unfavorable winds delayed his boat's arrival, obliging him to wait until the evening. One might well say that those twenty-four hours in Genoa were an exercise in bilocation, for though his body was there, his mind and heart were in Turin. Had he known of this unexpected delay, he would have been able to spend one more day with his boys.

He also had to get a visa. Chevalier Scorza, the papal consul at Genoa, received him very courteously and insisted on sending the necessary documents to the police himself. He also tried to obtain reduced passage fares for him, but he did not succeed. As a last show of consideration, he gave him a letter of recommendation to the papal delegate in Civitavecchia, and he entrusted him with a few errands to take care of in Civitavecchia and Rome.

After booking passage for two on the steamship "Aventino," Don Bosco and the cleric Rua had dinner with the Dominican Fathers, who were extremely cordial and begged Don Bosco to deliver several letters in Civitavecchia and Rome. Then he and Rua went to say good-bye to Father Montebruno at Carignano. At six-thirty that evening they bade a fond farewell to several distinguished priests who had gathered to wish them bon voyage; among them was that holy priest and most zealous apostle of boys, Father Louis Sturla, who had recently returned from his mission in Aden, Arabia.

The boys, entranced by Don Bosco's kind words and a treat he had given them at dinner that day, had taken a great liking to him, and they were sorry to see him leave. Several escorted him to the waterfront; then, jumping nimbly into a rowboat, they insisted on taking him to the ship. There was a strong wind blowing, and our two travelers, unaccustomed to boat rides, were afraid that the boat might capsize at every wave, whereas their young friends seemed to enjoy the fun.

Twenty minutes later they reached the ship. Don Bosco and the cleric Rua climbed aboard; then, after depositing their baggage in one of the public rooms, they sat down to rest for a while and to take a look at their new surroundings. The rest period, however, caused them some inconvenience, since they had boarded the ship just at dinner time and, being unfamiliar with the routine, had not gone down to the dining room. When they inquired about dinner, they found out that it was over and that meals were no longer served. For supper that evening, Rua had an apple, a bun, and a glass of wine, while Don Bosco ate a piece of bread and sipped a little wine.

After this frugal meal they went on deck to take a look at their ship. It was one of the largest in port. Its run was between Marseille and Malta, with stopovers at Genoa, Leghorn, Civitavecchia, Naples, and Messina.

Our two travelers were assigned berths. At ten o'clock the ship weighed anchor and under favorable winds put out to sea at full speed. Don Bosco became seasick and had a miserable time for the next two days. He found some relief only by lying on his berth stretched out full-length whenever his stomach permitted him to do so.

The first night he suffered so much that he found comfort neither in nor out of bed. He got up and took a look at Rua to see if the young cleric were seasick too. Luckily, Rua felt all right except for some fatigue. However, upon seeing Don Bosco in such bad shape, he got up at once to do whatever he could for him.

At dawn on February 21, the ship arrived at Leghorn. The passengers were allowed to disembark and stay ashore from seven until five in the evening if they obtained a visa. This entailed a fee, gratuities, and other nuisances.

Although Don Bosco wanted to go ashore to say Mass and visit some friends, he did not feel well enough and had to forego the opportunity. In fact, after only a few minutes on deck, he had to return to his berth, totally abstain from food, and hope for the best. A young steward named Charles felt sorry for him, and every once in a while he would come around to help. Since the young man was so kind and courteous, Don Bosco began talking with him. Among other things, he asked him if he did not feel uneasy at visiting a priest so often with so many people looking on who might ridicule him. "No," the steward replied in French. "Besides, nobody minds. Everyone likes you and would like to help you. Also, my mother taught me to be very respectful to priests, because in that way God will bless us."

He then went for the ship's doctor whose friendliness somewhat comforted Don Bosco.

"Do you understand French?" the doctor asked him.

"I understand all languages," Don Bosco replied, making an effort to jest, "especially sign language." The doctor smiled appreciatively and, after examining him, said that he was running a temperature and that some tea would do him good. Don Bosco thanked him and asked his name. "I am Dr. Jobert, of Marseille," he replied.

Charles immediately brought in a hot cup of tea, and then a second and a third one at short intervals. The treatment really helped Don Bosco; he broke out into a slight sweat and was then able to sleep for a while. At about five in the evening the ship weighed anchor and took to sea. Don Bosco again got seasick, and for the next few hours he had a very miserable time. Then, either because his stomach was empty or because he was utterly exhausted, or perhaps because he was getting used to the rolling of the ship, he fell asleep and rested until six in the morning, when they reached Civitavecchia.

This rest somewhat restored his strength, although he was still weak from hunger. While the passengers packed their suitcases, the captain gave their passports to the police and secured a landing pass for each.

After his return to Turin Don Bosco described the scene to his boys:

I stepped into a boat. From then on all I did was pay out money: a lira per person for the ride plus half a lira for each piece of luggage; a half-lira tip to the customs inspector, a half-lira to the porter for leading us to the coach, a half-lira more for loading our luggage, another half-lira for the short ride to the visa office, two lire for the police stamp on the passport, and finally one and a half lire to the papal consul for the visa. It was simply a matter of having one's wallet ready and sufficiently full. Unfortunately, my wallet was not a fat one. Then, too, we had to change currency and trust the money changers. The customs inspectors, however, did respect a package bearing the papal seal, addressed to Cardinal Antonelli, in which I had my more important documents and belongings. On the whole, the customs officials, trusting my honesty, were courteous, and they let me through without inspecting my luggage.

Since it was a Sunday and Don Bosco had not said Mass aboard because of his seasickness, he hastened to inquire where he could hear Mass. Then, since time permitted, he called on the papal delegate who warmly welcomed him and offered his services. Noticing Don Bosco's name in the letter of recommendation written by the papal consul at Genoa, he remarked that he had often heard of a priest by that name in Turin, and he wondered if Don Bosco knew him. With a laugh, Don Bosco replied: "I'm that priest." When he left, the papal delegate invited him to call again on his way back.

Don Bosco and Rua then went to the Dominican monastery to hear Mass, arriving just as high Mass was about to start. He admired the behavior of the congregation and enjoyed the devout, melodious singing. Both the chant and the music were simple and inspiring.

In the meantime, their traveling companion, Father Mentasti, was furious because the mail coach for Rome was about to leave and his two friends were nowhere in sight. Informed of this, Don Bosco and Rua hurried to the coach which left immediately, drawn by six strong horses, on a scenic thirty-nine mile trip through green meadows and hedges bright with flowers. The delight that Don Bosco felt was clearly indicated by his humorous and pleasant remarks.

After an eighteen-mile ride along the coast, the travelers took

an hour stopover at a small village called Palo while the horses were being changed. Don Bosco, Rua, and Father Mentasti took advantage of the delay to have lunch at a nearby inn. The seasickness, the disembarking formalities, and Father Mentasti's hurry to leave Civitavecchia had made Don Bosco and Rua forget about food, but now they were hungry. They were served quickly, and since they were famished, they swiftly disposed of the food put before them.

As they ate, their waiter stood huddled in a corner wrapped in a cloak. He looked emaciated, pale, and trembling—a picture of death. Halfway through their meal, he came over to Don Bosco and asked: "Father, you were seasick, weren't you?"

"I surely was," replied Don Bosco, "and now I'm quite hungry."

"I know, but take my advice, Father; don't eat anything more, or you'll have a recurrence of your trouble. I've had experience in these things."

Don Bosco thanked him, and in their conversation he learned that the man was the innkeeper and that for several months a terrible fever had been sapping away his life.

"Do you know of any medicine to help me?" the innkeeper asked.

"Yes, I do," Don Bosco answered.

"What is it? Please tell me! I shall be most grateful, I assure you."

"First I must know if you're a good Catholic."

"I'm a Catholic."

"Then from today on, for three months, say daily an Our Father and Hail Mary in honor of St. Aloysius and a Hail, Holy Queen to the Blessed Virgin. If you have faith, you can be sure that the fever will leave you."

"For some time now I haven't been going to church too regularly."

"That's all the more reason to do so now and put your trust in God," Don Bosco said. "I'll write you a prescription that will cure you forever of this fever." The innkeeper was overjoyed. Not knowing how else he might show his gratitude, he kissed Don Bosco's hand again and again.

Don Bosco also had an amusing experience with a papal carabiniere named Pedrocchi. Both Don Bosco and the man thought they

knew each other and exchanged cordial greetings. When they realized their mistake, they considered it a happy error and struck up a friendship. The carabiniere treated Don Bosco to coffee and he reciprocated with rum. Then when the man asked for a keepsake, Don Bosco gave him a medal of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Ever serene and cordial, he gained new friends everywhere among all sorts of people.

The travelers again boarded the coach. Their longings bore them closer to Rome even faster than the horses did, so that at every moment they thought they were already there. The jolting of the vehicle did not bother Don Bosco at all. Meanwhile, it grew dark. Finally, at ten-thirty in the evening they reached the gates of Rome.

As the coach moved on to its terminal, the travelers were thrilled by the sight of the Holy City. It was February 21 [1858]. Since this was Don Bosco's first visit to the city of the popes and he had no idea of its layout, he gave a guide twelve *baiocchi* [3] to take them to the house of Count De Maistre, at 49 Via del Quirinale, Le Quattro Fontane. Don Bosco and his two companions arrived there at eleven o'clock and were cordially received by the count and countess; the other members of the family were already in bed. They had refreshments and then retired to their rooms.

[3] A copper coin worth five centesimi, it was used in the Papal States until 1866. [Editor]

CHAPTER 65

Don Bosco in Rome

DURING his stay in Rome, Don Bosco lodged at Le Quattro Fontane on the Quirinale, so named because each of the square's four streets is crowned by a perennially spouting fountain. Count and Countess Rudolf De Maistre, their daughters, and their sons Francis, Charles, and Eugene (the latter a papal army officer), treated him with the utmost consideration and affection—the result of many years of friendship and esteem. They did not have a private chapel, but there was a convent of Belgian nuns in the same building and Don Bosco was welcome to say Mass there.

The cleric Rua also stayed with the De Maistres for a few days, and then he moved in with the Rosminians in Via Alessandrina 7, where he received a cordial welcome from Father Pagani, the superior general. Canon [James] Colli of Novara—who later became the bishop of Alessandria—was also staying there.

The next morning, February 22, Don Bosco, accompanied by Rua and Count Rudolf De Maistre, went to say Mass at the nearby church of San Carlo which was served by the Mercedarians. Then, since it was Lent and he was always eager to hear the Word of God, Don Bosco went to the Church of the Gesù to hear Father Rossi, a Jesuit, deliver a sermon on "Temptations." The gravity of the speaker, his warm persuasive voice, the purity of his style, his charming manner, and, above all, his sincere dedication to the care of souls deeply impressed Don Bosco. He was glad that he had heard that sermon.

On his return to his room, he straightened out his papers, sent Rua to deliver a few letters personally, and then set out for the Dominican monastery at Santa Maria sopra Minerva to call on [Francis] Cardinal Gaude. Since the cardinal was not in and there

was still an hour until sunset, he decided to visit the Pantheon, an ancient and famous monument of pagan Rome. Boniface IV had diverted it to the worship of the true God and the veneration of the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the saints by having twenty-eight cart-loads of relics brought from the catacombs and buried near the main altar. The temple was renamed *Sancta Maria ad Martyres* [St. Mary of the Martyrs] on May 13 in the year 609 or 610.

After this visit, Don Bosco returned to his room to organize his agenda: contacting prominent people and, under their guidance, visiting the most important places, shrines, basilicas and churches, of which there were so many everywhere. His devotion needed an outlet, his inquiring mind sought the great monuments erected by the popes, and his soul longed to recall, amid the empire's majestic ruins, the wonderful and glorious deeds of the martyrs. He was anxious to enrich his knowledge so that he would be better equipped to write on church history and the lives of the popes in *Letture Cattoliche*. In his desire to be very thorough and see all he could, including masterpieces of ancient or modern art, he decided to spend an entire month on this project.

He counted on the cleric Rua to help him, as indeed he did. Although he lodged with the Rosminian Fathers, Rua went almost daily to the De Maistres to take Don Bosco's dictation on what he had learned of the history and traditions of the Eternal City. These notes are very informative, and we shall draw upon them in closely following Don Bosco, omitting descriptions that might cause us to digress. The cleric Rua often went with him on sightseeing trips and helped with his correspondence. There was also another task with which Don Bosco entrusted him. On rainy days or whenever he had some free time, Don Bosco would work on compiling a new booklet of May devotions entitled *Mary's Month*. Rua would take the marked up, corrected manuscript and recopy it in his own neat handwriting so that it could be forwarded to the printers in Turin.

On the morning of February 23, Don Bosco was thrilled by his visit to the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains, which was served by the Augustinian Canons in the southern part of the city. According to tradition, St. Peter himself built the first Christian chapel on this spot. It was a memorable visit because St. Peter's chains were exhibited that day—a rare occurrence. Don Bosco and Rua felt priv-

ileged to touch them, kiss them, and put them about their necks and on their foreheads.

On leaving the church, Don Bosco made his first move toward enlisting vital help in the arduous task of having the constitutions of his society approved. Around nine o'clock he and Rua went to the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, so called because it is built on the ruins of a temple dedicated to that goddess. They were cordially welcomed at the adjacent monastery by [Francis] Cardinal Gaude who was expecting them. The cardinal was on excellent terms with Don Bosco, and he conversed with him privately for some ninety minutes. Delighted with a chance to speak his native Piedmontese dialect, he questioned Don Bosco on the oratories and sounded him out on more important matters, such as the state of the Church in Piedmont. He also listened favorably to everything Don Bosco told him of the proposed constitutions he had brought along. The cardinal's words and demeanor showed that his high position had in no way altered his humility or lessened his love for his native Piedmont and old friends. Both during this visit and in all his dealings with the cardinal, Don Bosco was greatly helped by Father Marchi, a Dominican, who had the deepest regard for him and offered to help him in every way during his stay in Rome.

In the afternoon, Don Bosco called on Marquis John Patrizi, the nephew of the cardinal vicar, who lived at Piazza San Luigi dei Francesi. Don Bosco handed him a letter from Count [Charles] Cays and then talked at great length about the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Rome, of which the marquis was a most zealous president. Don Bosco learned that there were fifteen chapters in the city, all with ample financial means, and he was delighted to hear that their charities included homeless boys, on whose behalf two thousand lire had been allocated the previous year.

Opposite the Patrizi Palace was the magnificent Church of San Luigi dei Francesi. Don Bosco went in, and then, feeling tired, decided to go home. (Among other things he had also attended to a few of the many errands entrusted to him by his friends in Turin.) As he turned to leave, he heard a friendly voice. It was Father [Anthony] Bresciani, a Jesuit, inviting him to visit the editorial office of *La Civiltà Cattolica* where other Jesuit priests were eager to see him. Don Bosco promised to do so within the next few days.

On February 24 he visited Santa Maria Maggiore, the famous basilica erected at the request of Our Lady on the Esquiline; it stood on the spot marked by an abundant snowfall that miraculously fell on August 5, 352 A.D. In this church he venerated the holy manger of Our Savior, the skull of the apostle St. Matthias—which was being exhibited on that particular day, a "station day," [1] in the chapel beneath the papal altar—and, finally, a painting of the Blessed Virgin attributed to St. Luke.

In the evening, after a very frugal supper as was prescribed in Rome on all Wednesdays in Lent, his hosts mentioned in the course of the conversation that this prescription was so rigorously observed in Rome that stores or open-air markets would not even carry meat, eggs, and butter on those days. This led to a reflection on the loathing which Protestants have of Christian mortifications, of the relics of saints—a constant reminder of heroic suffering—and of anything connected with penance and the supernatural.[2]

On February 25 Don Bosco visited the Church of Santa Pudenziana at the foot of the Viminal; on that spot there once stood the palace of the Roman senator, Pudens, where St. Peter lodged when he came to Rome. There is a well in this church where, according to tradition, the bodies of three thousand martyrs were hidden while awaiting burial. Don Bosco very devoutly said Mass there at an altar believed to have been used by St. Peter himself. It is located in a side chapel next to the main altar. Another chapel commemorates a miracle of the Blessed Sacrament. A priest was experiencing some doubts about the real presence of Our Lord in the consecrated Host while celebrating Mass. Somehow the Host slipped from his hands and bounced twice on the marble steps, breaking through the first one and making a deep circular impression on the second. These two marble steps are kept in this chapel behind iron gates.

From Santa Pudenziana Don Bosco went up the Esquiline to the Church of Santa Prassede, only a short distance away from

[1] It was an ancient Roman custom to meet in one of the churches called "the station" on certain days, especially during Lent, for the celebration of Mass and other services. [Editor]

[2] The narration by Countess De Maistre of a rather incredible episode about the centuries-old uncorrupt body of St. Galganus, a soldier, has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Santa Maria Maggiore. Here, in times of persecution, the early Christians hid in the baths of Novatus, the brother of Praxides. St. Praxides did all she could to keep them supplied with essentials; she also smuggled out the bodies of martyrs for burial, hiding the bloodsoaked sponges and cloths in the well inside the church. In one of the chapels is a jasper pillar to which it is believed Our Divine Savior was tied during His scourging.

From the Esquiline Don Bosco pushed on to the Caelian Hill. Here he visited Constantine's baptistry, a large basin of precious marble located in the middle of the Church of San Giovanni in fonte. After crossing the wide square and admiring the Egyptian obelisk surmounted by a cross, Don Bosco entered the first and most famous church of the Catholic world—the Basilica of St. John Lateran. This is the cathedral of the Pope as Bishop of Rome, and he takes solemn possession of it soon after his coronation. Beneath the main altar are the heads of the two Princes of the Apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul. Another important relic in this basilica is the table used by Our Lord at His Last Supper.

Emerging from the immense basilica with its five aisles, Don Bosco again crossed the piazza and entered the building erected by Pope Sixtus V to house the Scala Santa. This staircase consists of twenty-eight white marble steps, the very ones that were in Pilate's praetorium in Jerusalem. Our Divine Savior climbed and descended these steps several times during His passion, leaving upon the marble the imprint of His bleeding feet. These imprints can still be seen through holes in the thick wooden planks that were placed there as a protective measure after they were worn thin by the knees of countless Christians ascending them. At the top of the Scala Santa is the Chapel of the Popes which is filled with precious relics. Four side staircases lead downstairs.

On February 26 Don Bosco, accompanied by Charles De Maistre and the cleric Rua, went to the Vatican where one can admire what is most memorable and most magnificent from both a religious and an artistic point of view. On crossing the Sant'Angelo Bridge, they recited the Creed to gain a fifty days' indulgence; then they bowed to St. Michael's statue which dominates the massive structure of Hadrian's Tomb—now a fortress—and finally reached the immense piazza in front of St. Peter's Basilica. It was in this piazza that

Christians were burned alive by Nero's order. Two enormous four-tiered semi-circles totaling 284 columns and 88 pillars encircle the piazza. Two carriages abreast can fit in the space between each of the four tiers. Above the colonnade are 96 statues of saints. At the far end of the square, a magnificent flight of steps leads to the vestibule of the vast basilica. The vestibule itself is heavily adorned with marble, paintings, and statues. Above is the large balcony where the Pope gives his solemn blessing. This imposing and majestic façade supports thirteen colossal statues representing Our Divine Savior, with St. John the Baptist on His right, and all the Apostles, except St. Peter, ranged on both sides. In the middle of the piazza stands an Egyptian obelisk surmounted by a cross containing a relic of the true Cross. The obelisk is flanked by two spectacular fountains unceasingly spouting jets of water into the air. Don Bosco and his companions uncovered their heads and bowed to the relic of the true Cross to gain another fifty days' indulgence.

Five doors give entrance to the basilica. A plenary indulgence may be gained on any day of the year by visiting it, provided one has gone to confession and Communion.

As soon as Don Bosco went in, he was so awed by its magnificence and vastness that he stood rapt in silent contemplation for a considerable time. The marble statues of the founders of religious orders around the pillars of the central nave were the first to catch his attention. He seemed to see before him the heavenly Jerusalem. From the bronze doors at the entrance to the Altar of the Cathedra the basilica measures 600 feet; the height between the floor and the ceiling of the nave is over 150 feet. This is the largest church in Christendom; St. Paul's Cathedral in London is the next largest. "If we were to add the length of our church at the Oratory to that of St. Paul's," Don Bosco said laughing, "it would match the length of St. Peter's." Each chapel in the basilica is as large as an ordinary church.

Don Bosco started his tour of the basilica on the right aisle, minutely inspecting each chapel, altar, and picture. He studied each statue, bas-relief, and mosaic and stood in contemplation before the splendid tombs of various popes. He also took particular notice of the tombs of the famous Countess Matilda of Canossa who defended papal authority against Henry IV, emperor of Germany, and

of Christina Alexandra, queen of Sweden, a Lutheran who, once she became aware of the falsity of her creed, relinquished the throne in order to become a Catholic. She died in Rome in 1689.

Don Bosco took down notes concerning the history of everything he saw, but above all he satisfied his piety. He entered the Chapel of the Holy Column, so called because of a column taken from the Temple in Jerusalem. It is believed that Our Lord leaned on it while addressing the crowds. Surprisingly, the portion of the column touched by Our Savior's shoulders is always free of dust.

He then knelt in adoration in the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament. There the altar is dedicated to the martyrs St. Maurice and Saints Adventor, Solutor, and Octavius, his companions, the principal patron saints of Piedmont. Near this altar is a wide staircase leading up to the papal apartments. In the Gregorian Chapel he noticed above the altar an ancient image of the Blessed Virgin Mary, dating to the pontificate of Pascal II, who became Pope in the year 1099.

He made his last stop at the Altar of the Cathedra at the very end of the basilica. Four gigantic bronze statues stand above this altar, supporting a stately pontifical throne made of the same metal. The two front figures represent St. Ambrose [left] and St. Augustine [right], and the two at the rear depict St. Athanasius and St. John Chrysostom. The bronze throne encases a precious relic—a wooden, ivory-paneled chair ornamented with bas-reliefs. It belonged to Pudens, the senator, and was used by St. Peter and many of his successors.

After revering this symbol of the infallible magisterium of the Church, Don Bosco knelt at the Confession of St. Peter;[3] then he went to pay homage to the bronze statue of the Prince of Apostles that stood beside a pilaster on the right. He respectfully kissed the slightly projecting foot of the statue that was already partially worn away by the kisses of millions of the faithful. St. Leo the Great had this statue cast with the bronze of Jupiter's statue that once stood on the Capitol as a memorial of his peace treaty with Attila.

Don Bosco had begun his tour of the basilica at eleven in the morning, and now, at five in the afternoon, he felt exhausted. Accordingly, he returned to the Quattro Fontane.

[3] The crypt in front of the papal altar.

On Saturday, February 27, the rain prevented him from resuming his visit to the Vatican which was quite some distance away. He kept Rua busy writing for a great part of the day. In the afternoon he called on the diocesan vicar to obtain a *celebret,* which was needed by visiting priests in Rome. He then decided to visit several institutions for boys, hoping to find inspiration and encouragement for greater efforts toward the spiritual and material welfare of the Oratory.

He went first to the hospice of "Tata Giovanni" in Via Sant'Anna dei Falegnami. He was truly pleased by its history, purpose, and management. The hospice dates back to the end of the 18th century when a poor bricklayer named Giovanni Burgi, moved to pity by the great number of orphaned boys roaming the streets, started to take in a few in a small rented house. God blessed his efforts, for as the number of boys increased, more room was provided. Gratefully and lovingly, the boys began to call their benefactor "Tata," which in the Roman dialect means "Father"—hence the name "Tata Giovanni" by which the hospice is still known. Burgi had little money but a big heart, and he was not ashamed to beg for his adopted sons. Pope Pius VI, during whose pontificate [1775–1799] this home was founded, gave him a house and continued to help him, and his successors followed his example.

The superior has the title of director, and he is assisted by a vicar of his own choosing with the right of succession. The age-limit for admission is from nine to fourteen. The boys remain there until the age of twenty. The older and more dependable boys monitor the dormitories, while the more educated teach elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic to the younger ones. A few clerics and laymen give lessons in the evening. Most boys learn a craft of their own choosing. Since there are no workshops on the premises, they learn their trade in town, just as the custom was in our Oratory during its early years. A few are given a liberal arts education, but only after unquestionable and long-standing proof of excellent moral character and keen intelligence. The hospice subsists on a monthly grant of one hundred and fifty lire from Pius IX, donations, and part of the boy's earnings: fifteen *baiocchi* went for their support while the balance was deposited to their accounts.

The hospice, a papal institution, is under the patronage of the

Blessed Virgin of the Assumption and of St. Francis de Sales. The hours for rising and retiring, the system observed in the dormitories and in the supervision of the boys, the custom of naming each dormitory after a patron saint—in a word, the whole setup—reminds us of our own Oratory in Turin. Don Bosco was delighted to learn that in Turin, unknowingly, he had duplicated Tata Giovanni's work. All charitable undertakings more or less resemble one another because ultimately God is their unchangeable prime mover and the Church is their unalterable inspirer.

As a priest, Pius IX himself had directed the hospice for seven years and had always regarded it in a personal way. At the time of Don Bosco's visit, his room could still be seen. That year [1858] the boys numbered about one hundred and fifty.

"Sunday, February 28, was also a rainy day," Don Bosco wrote, "so we were not able to get out of doors much. In the afternoon we went to hear Father [Charles] Curci, S.J., at the Church of the Gesù; his topic was Joseph before the pharaoh. His popular and clear style accounted for his large audience.

"We went home at five because we had a six o'clock appointment with James Cardinal Antonelli, the Secretary of State. Count Rudolf De Maistre graciously provided a carriage and escorted me to the Vatican. Wearing the customary mantelletta, I alighted from the coach and walked up the majestic stairs to the Secretary of State's office on the third floor, one floor above the Pope's apartment. I was ushered in at once. To appreciate Cardinal Antonelli's kindness, prudence, learning, and warm regard for our part of the country, one must meet him. Just dealing with him makes a person extremely fond of him. It was one of the most wonderful experiences of my whole life."

The cardinal felt the same way from the first moment he met Don Bosco, who always was at ease with any class of people. His poise was such that he could freely speak with princes, ministers, prelates, kings, and even the Pope himself, without, however, disregarding the homage and respect due to their rank and authority. Always courteous, simple, and humble in word and deed with the great and the small, he was the same playful, tranquil, and friendly Don Bosco that the Oratory boys so loved.

After receiving the confidential letters which Don Bosco had

brought from Turin, the cardinal conferred with him for almost two hours on *Letture Cattoliche, Storia d'Italia,* the festive oratories, and the students and artisans at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. He then went on to speak of the Holy Father, the latter's flight from Rome in 1848, his stay at Gaeta, the Oratory boys' offering of 33 lire, and the rosaries which Pius IX had blessed and sent them as a token of his appreciation. Finally, Don Bosco stated his main reason for coming to Rome—the need to explain his plans to Pope Pius IX and receive his advice. The cardinal promised to mention the matter to the Pope and to obtain a private audience for him.

A little way from Strada Porta Pia[4] stands the Church of Santa Maria Vittoria. A miraculous picture of Our Lady is venerated above the main altar. Don Bosco visited it in the morning of March 1, drawn by the title "Our Lady of Victory" which is so similar to the one he was to make known throughout the world—Mary, Help of Christians. How moved he must have been to see all the trophies testifying to Mary's powerful protection! Arrayed along the cornices are many flags wrested from the enemies [of the Faith] by Duke Maximilian I of Bavaria in his great victory [at Prague in 1620] against a coalition of Protestant princes. There were also flags seized from the Turks during the liberation of Vienna and at the battle of Lepanto.

In the afternoon Don Bosco decided to go with Count Rudolf De Maistre to St. Michael's Hospice across the Tiber in order to pay his respects to Antonio Cardinal Tosti, its president. The cardinal had been in Turin as chargé d'affairs to the Piedmontese government from 1822 to 1829, winning the affectionate regard of the intelligentsia and the cream of the nobility.

After crossing the river, Don Bosco and the count visited the Church of San Bartolomeo on the tiny island in the Tiber. The bones of this apostle are preserved under the main altar. They also visited the Church of Santa Cecilia which had been erected on the spot where her house stood, and they venerated her still uncorrupted body. Finally, they arrived at St. Michael's Hospice.

The main building is over 1,100 feet long, 260 feet wide, and 75 feet high; its perimeter is slightly over half a mile. It houses more than 800 persons, mostly boys.

[4] It is now called Via Venti Settembre. [Editor]

The cardinal warmly welcomed Don Bosco and Count Rudolf and entertained them by describing his experiences during the period of the Roman Republic when he had to find lodging elsewhere for fear of assassination. As they were about to leave, he invited them to return for a tour of the hospice at their convenience, asking them to let him know the day and the hour.

On their way back to the Quirinal, Don Bosco and Count Rudolf went up to the Campidoglio where they saw the Senate, the conservatory, the museums, and the picture gallery. Then they entered the majestic Church of Santa Maria in Ara Coeli, on the spot where the famous temple of Jupiter once stood. A picture of Our Lady attributed to St. Luke is venerated above the main altar, while in a room beside the sacristy there is a wonder-working statue of the Infant Jesus in rich silks adorned by many jewels. As they came out of the church they saw the Tarpeian Rock on the west side of the Capitol Hill, from which many martyrs were hurled to their death.

CHAPTER 66

Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)

ON Monday, March 2, Don Bosco went with the De Maistre family to the Mamertine prison at the western base of the Campidoglio. The prison consists of two [vaulted] dungeons, one below the other. In the lower dungeon, next to a stone column to which both St. Peter and St. Paul were bound, is a small altar. Here Don Bosco said Mass for his noble guests and other visitors. They all drank some water from the spring which is said to have gushed forth miraculously at St. Peter's command for the baptism of his prison guards, Saints Processus and Martinian, together with forty-seven other fellow guards who later were martyred. The spring gushes forth from a small basin hewn in the floor where the water remains at a constant level no matter how much is drawn.

In the afternoon, Duke Scipione Salviati took Don Bosco to Santa Maria dei Monti to visit the St. Vincent de Paul Society's school for boys. About sixty boys attended the school, all on free tuition. Their teacher had them read aloud, answer catechism questions, and do some problems in arithmetic. The pupils were unabashed, alert, and sure of themselves. Curious to know if they understood what they were reading, Don Bosco questioned a few of them and found that they had not grasped very much. He then courteously gave the teacher some suggestions which he accepted gratefully. The curriculum consisted of grammar, arithmetic, catechism, and bible history. *Massime Eterne* was one of the books they used. Don Bosco surmised that this school had substantially the same goals as all free schools: to keep boys off the streets and to teach them religion and the subjects best suited to their position in life. No attempt was made to start them on a liberal education which they could not later pursue; such training would perhaps be useless to them, and in addition

it could make them unreasonably ambitious and possibly even harmful to society. All in all, the Oratory's day, evening, and Sunday classes and those for the young artisans had much in common with the ones conducted at that school.

At 4:15 that afternoon, Don Bosco attended a meeting of the St. Nicholas Chapter of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, presided over by Marquis [John] Patrizi. At their request, Don Bosco delivered a brief address, exhorting them to carry out zealously the aims of their society and especially to help poor, homeless boys. He told them that for some time now chapters had been established among the older boys at the Turin festive oratories and affiliated with the St. Vincent de Paul Society through the good offices of Count Charles Cays.[1] He explained that the purpose of these chapters was to train young people in works of charity on behalf of needy families, and thus to more easily persuade parents to send their children to catechism classes.

The members listened eagerly and promised to try the same experiment with the boys attending evening schools in Rome. They even invited him to visit those schools and try to pick a few young men as a nucleus of an "affiliated chapter."

This exchange of ideas was followed by a discussion on the visits that had been made, new requests for help, and the sums or coupons to be distributed. Don Bosco thought that the society gave very generously, but not with that regularity and well-apportioned allocation of funds that would have made it possible to reach a greater number of needy families—the first goal of the society. However, he also readily realized that the traditional generosity of the popes and the hundreds of charitable institutions operating in Rome did not allow the society to fragment its donations lest it invite odious comparisons.

Since the meeting was still going strong and darkness was setting in over the city, Don Bosco excused himself, quite satisfied with what he had heard. The meeting was being held some distance from the Quirinal, but Don Bosco, being in a hurry, did not want to ask anyone to accompany him since they were still engaged in lively discussion. After wandering patiently through the city, he realized that he was lost. Luckily, he spotted a coach which took him home.

[1] *See* p. 308. [Editor]

As previously planned, at 6:30 on the following morning, March 3, he went to St. Peter's with Rua and Count Charles De Maistre for a more thorough visit of the Confession of St. Peter.[2] They first admired the papal altar which was set majestically on seven white marble steps [not counting the predella] under the center of the dome. In front of the altar there is a large rectangular crypt, enclosed on the top by a rich balustrade around which 112 lamps set on gilded metal cornucopias burn unceasingly. A double marble staircase leads to the Altar of the Confession located beneath the papal altar. The crypt is adorned with precious marble, gilded stuccoes, and twenty-four bronze bas-reliefs representing the main events of St. Peter's life. Here Don Bosco was privileged to offer Holy Mass. The crypt is also adorned with two very ancient images of Saints Peter and Paul on sheets of silver. St. Peter's tomb rests below the crypt.

After a long prayer, Don Bosco went back upstairs for a look at the 450-foot-wide transept. Above the papal altar is the majestic dome, whose internal diameter measures 137½ feet. Its height and size and its elaborate mosaics—the work of the most famous artists —are truly breathtaking. The dome is supported by four massive piers, each measuring about 235 feet in circumference. Each pier is dedicated to a saint and has a loggia housing his relics. The four relics are: Veronica's Veil, a portion of the Holy Cross, the Holy Lance, and the skull of St. Andrew. Veronica's Veil is believed to be the cloth with which Our Divine Savior wiped His blood-smeared Face on his way to Calvary, leaving upon it the imprint of His features before giving it back to St. Veronica. Reliable persons say that in 1849 this Holy Face was seen to exude blood several times and even to change color, thus altering the original facial features. Canons of the basilica testified to the accuracy of these reports.

Absorbed in such thoughts that were so soul-stirring for the faithful, Don Bosco approached the Altar of the Cathedra and, after again paying homage to it, turned to the southern part of the basilica to look at the tombs of other popes and the sumptuous chapels and altars, especially that of the Virgin of the Column, so called

[2] The term "confession" is often used to designate the tomb of a martyr or the altar built over it and also the crypt in which his relics are kept. [Editor]

because of the image of the Blessed Virgin painted on a [marble] column [transferred here in 1607] from the ancient Constantine basilica. He also paid his respects to the tombs of several saints: the Apostles Simon and Jude, St. Leo the Great, SS. Leo II, III, and IV, St. Boniface IV, St. Leo IX, St. Gregory the Great, and St. John Chrysostom. His last stop was at the Baptistry, the last chapel of the side aisle, whose font is made of a shell of [red] porphyry. It was already 12:30, and Count Charles De Maistre suggested that they postpone their visit to the dome to another day.

After lunch and a few hours' rest, Don Bosco went to take a look at the Quirinal Palace and the Church of Sant'Andrea with its marble-rich chapel of St. Stanislaus Kostka, whose relics rest under the altar. Adjacent to the church is the Jesuit novitiate.

On March 4, Don Bosco and Rua visited the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme and the adjoining Cistercian monastery. Caught in a downpour, they arrived there soaked from head to foot, but Don Bosco considered it worthwhile because of the inner joy that he experienced during his visit.

This basilica is one of seven to be visited to gain certain indulgences. According to some, it was built by Constantine the Great to commemorate the recovery of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem by his mother, St. Helena. A rather large portion of the Holy Cross and its inscription are preserved here.

Don Bosco went down to the Chapel of St. Helena, known as the "holy chapel" because of the soil brought here by the empress from Mount Calvary. Opposite that edifice is the Gregorian Chapel where one may gain a plenary indulgence for the souls in purgatory either by celebrating or attending Mass there. Don Bosco offered the Holy Sacrifice at this altar. The abbot, Father Marchini, a Piedmontese, went out of his way to please him, taking him through their library which had a wealth of ancient manuscripts.

Since it rained almost uninterruptedly the next day, March 5, Don Bosco took care of his correspondence. Also on that day, Count Charles De Maistre brought him the sad news that Father Lolli, the rector of the Jesuit novitiate at the Church of Sant'Andrea a Monte Cavallo, had passed away at ten in the morning after a short illness and the devout reception of the Last Sacraments. Don Bosco had known him for quite some time. Father Lolli, himself

a Piedmontese, had spent many years in Turin where, besides being confessor to the late queen of Sardinia, Maria Teresa, he had been in great demand as a preacher and confessor. Don Bosco joined in the general mourning and prayers for the repose of his soul.

Count Rudolf De Maistre also warned Don Bosco of an epidemic in Rome, as a result of which deaths in January and February had numbered four times above the average. However, this did not keep Don Bosco from his devotional and cultural trips.

On the morning of March 6 he went with Rua and the whole De Maistre family to see the imposing St. Michael's Hospice. Cardinal Tosti had a generous lunch ready for them, but neither Don Bosco nor his friends ate, since they had already had a light meal before leaving and wanted to observe the Lenten fast.

The cardinal and one of the directors graciously took them through each floor and hall where boys were being taught trades and crafts. The hospice had shops for shoemakers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, dyers, hatters, saddlers, and cabinet-makers. There were also a printshop and a bookbinding shop that manufactured all the textbooks for the schools of the Papal States. This was a monopoly that Pius IX had granted to the hospice as a source of income. These two shops employed many boys.

The greater number of boys were taught by skilled teachers how to make carpets and tapestries in the Gobelin tradition, as well as woodcarving, painting, sculpture, and etching.

Don Bosco visited each shop. Count De Maistre and other Roman noblemen and priests had already briefed him on the hospice and its organization. They mostly lamented a considerable deviation from its original purpose. Instead of taking in only poor boys, it now also admitted boys of wealthy families and relatives of government employees and important people; thus they were enjoying what should have gone to the poor. Unavoidably this led to favoritism and envy.

The daily fare was rich in meat and wine, and level-headed people remarked that most pupils could not afford such lavish fare once they left the hospice. The trades—which were supposed to support most of the boys—were neglected as commonplace, and preference was given to crafts, especially carpet and tapestry weaving. Some of these art works adorned many a princely home and

brought renown to the hospice. Another complaint concerned the repressive system in force there with its antiquated corporal punishments which were humiliating even though not very severe.

That very morning Don Bosco's friends had asked him at least to try to end such abuses by alerting Cardinal Tosti, its president, of what was being said in Rome against some hospice officials, but Don Bosco preferred not to become involved in matters of this sort.

Nevertheless, he took in everything: boys, craftsmasters, teachers, and assistants. He examined the boys' workmanship and tried to ascertain the prevalent spirit by questioning several boys at random with that kindly discretion that was his alone. He also made mental notes of more important things; he took note of shiny walls and floors, the healthy flush of the boys' faces, the constant supervision, the diligent teaching of catechism, and the regular schedule for the reception of the sacraments. He also found out that all the boys received a suitable and adequate academic education. All in all, he decided that despite the more or less serious flaws that were unavoidable in any human undertaking, a great amount of good was being done for the boys of the working class, though not as much as could have been done. For example, he noticed many boys became ill at ease and visibly apprehensive when their superiors showed up or when they had to report to them. Don Bosco was disturbed at this attitude because these boys were naturally open-hearted and affectionate. He wondered how could he give an object lesson to the superiors of the house about the value of his own system of education.

An opportunity soon presented itself. As he was going through the vast establishment with the cardinal and some superiors, they heard a boy whistling and singing. He came bouncing down the stairs, and suddenly at a bend in the staircase he found himself face to face with the cardinal, his shop director, and Don Bosco. The song died abruptly on his lips, and he stopped, head down, his cap gripped tightly in his hand.

"Is this the way to act after so many warnings and instructions?" the director asked. "How ill-mannered can you be? Go to your shop at once and wait for your punishment." Then, turning to Don Bosco, he added: "Please, don't mind."

"Mind what?" asked Don Bosco after the boy had gone away. "Did the boy do anything wrong?"

"Don't you think that such loutish whistling was uncivil?"

"But it was not a deliberate infraction. You know very well what St. Philip Neri used to tell the boys of his oratories: 'Keep still if you can, but if you can't, shout and jump all you want, as long as you do not commit sin!' I expect silence at certain hours of the day too, but I ignore minor, thoughtless slips. Besides, I let my boys shout and sing in the playground and on the stairways. All I ask is that they do not tear the place down. A little noise is a lot better than an angry, sullen silence. But now what bothers me is that the poor lad is worrying about what's going to happen to him. He may even be resentful. Don't you think we ought to go and cheer him up?"

The director courteously agreed. In the shop Don Bosco called the boy over to him; bitter and dejected he shuffled over. "Come here, my friend," Don Bosco said to him. "I want to tell you something. Don't be afraid. Your superior has kindly given me permission to talk to you."

The boy approached, and Don Bosco continued: "Cheer up! Everything is all right, provided that you be a good boy from now on and we remain friends. Take this medal and say a Hail Mary for me."

Deeply touched, the boy kissed his hand and said: "I'll always wear it as a remembrance from you."

His companions, who had already gotten word of what had happened, smiled and greeted Don Bosco as he walked through the huge shop, while the director, admiring Don Bosco's winning ways, resolved never again to make so much fuss over such trivial offenses. Count De Maistre narrated this episode on several occasions.

After visiting the entire institute, the cardinal, Don Bosco, and their party stepped out onto the terrace that surmounted the entire building. The Tiber flows quite close to the southern wall of the building. Several boats were moored at this spot which could well be called the port of call of small freighters plying the river between Rome and Ostia. While taking a bird's-eye view of the whole vast edifice, Don Bosco was quite happy that so many boys were being so well prepared for life. We surmise that he then conceived the

holy desire and prayed to God that his boys in Turin might eventually total the same number. A few years later, that wish was fulfilled.

It was 12:30 when they came down from the terrace. Since the cardinal was quite tired and the boys had gone to lunch, the count, Don Bosco, and Rua took their leave. The cardinal had given to him and his companions a drawing of the hospice and an etching of St. Jerome that had been made by the boys.

They crossed the Tiber by way of the Ponte Rotto. A sudden downpour forced them to seek shelter in the vestibule of the Church of Santa Maria in Cosmedin,[3] where the podium from which St. Augustine taught rhetoric is preserved. While waiting out the violent storm, they noticed in the square in front of them, called Bocca della Verità [mouth of truth], several yokes of oxen resting in the mud, heedless of the wind and rain. The men in charge of them had also taken refuge in the same place, and with enviable zest they were eating their lunch of rye or cornbread and a chunk of raw cod which they tore off piece by piece, washing it all down with water.

Attracted by their simple, good-natured ways, Don Bosco went up to them and said: "You're hungry, I see."

"Very!" one of them answered.

"Is bread and fish enough to keep you going?"

"Yes, and we're thankful to God for it. We're poor and can't expect more."

"Why don't you put your oxen into the stable?"

"We have no stables."

"Do you always leave them out in the weather day and night, just like that?"

"Always."

"Even when you're home in your own villages?"

"Yes, because we have very few stables. Rain or shine, day or night, we leave them out."

"Do you also keep cows and young calves outside?"

"Right. We think that if an animal has started off in a stable, it

[3] This designation appeared for the first time at the end of the 8th century under Pope Adrian I. Possibly it may have been prompted by the beauty of the church (Kosmidion—well-adorned) or by some similarity with the "Kosmidion," a monastery in Constantinople. [Editor]

should stay in a stable, but if it has been brought up outdoors, outdoors it should remain."

"Do you live far from here?"

"Forty miles."

"Can you go to church on Sundays and holy days?"

"Sure! We have our own little church. A priest comes, says Mass, gives a sermon, and teaches catechism. All the people try their best to come, even those who live far away."

"Do you sometimes go to confession?"

"Certainly! Do you mean that there are Christians who neglect this sacred duty? Now it's the jubilee year, and we'll do our best to gain the indulgences."

Such talk revealed the innate goodness of these peasants who, though poor, were satisfied with their scanty lot and happy with their station in life as long as they could perform their religious duties as good Christians and attend to their humble calling. While they were talking, Don Bosco thought of the great good that regular missions could do in the plains around Rome. This thought lingered in his mind the rest of his life.

He had set aside the next day, Sunday, March 7, for a visit to the magnificent Church of Santa Maria del Popolo where he was to say Mass and give Communion to several distinguished persons. Above the main altar is a miraculous painting of Our Lady, attributed to St. Luke. Next to the church there is an Augustinian monastery. At 9 o'clock, Philip Foccardi, a very devout man who was a manufacturer of rosary beads and the owner of a religious articles store, came to pick up Don Bosco in his own carriage. After Mass and thanksgiving, Don Bosco toured Villa Borghese and the magnificent Piazza del Popolo, as well as the two churches flanking both sides of the start of Via del Corso—Santa Maria dei Miracoli and Santa Maria di Monte Santo. Then he was driven to the mansion of Princess Potocka, a descendant of the Sobieskis, former kings of Poland. He stayed for lunch and thoroughly enjoyed the edifying and lively conversation of the lady guests of the princess. He spent the rest of the day calling on several other devout persons who deeply impressed him by their demeanor and conversation.

Stories about Don Bosco's goodness were being rapidly reported

and spread by those who had met him during those few days. Father Rua declares that many Romans already knew that in Turin in 1849 Don Bosco had brought a boy back to life so that he could make his confession.[4] In fact, they described the episode to him. From what they said, it was obvious that they were very well informed. Most probably they themselves had heard it from one of the several Piedmontese prelates, diocesan priests, and Jesuit Fathers who were in Rome and knew Don Bosco well. His greatest admirer was Count De Maistre who never ceased telling people about Don Bosco, whether he found himself in aristocratic homes or the palaces of cardinals. He was so devout and so highly-respected that everybody fully believed him.

Although a few people sought Don Bosco's blessing, it does not appear that he did anything extraordinary on this first visit to Rome, unless we consider in this category the following episode which was witnessed by the cleric Rua.

Don Bosco called on a gentleman who was suffering from a tumor on his knee, blessed him, and said a few encouraging words before leaving the room. His wife followed Don Bosco out into the hall and asked whether her husband would recover. Don Bosco replied that we are in God's hands and that our good Father would do whatever was best for the sick man. However, the lady insisted on knowing whether her husband would die of the ailment. Don Bosco's response was an evasive one: "Let us fully and prayerfully entrust ourselves to God's care and everything will be all right. In the meantime, we must be ready to accept whatever He may will." Far from satisfied, the woman kept pestering him to the point that finally, as tactfully as he could, he told her to resign herself to her husband's death.

She was speechless, since her husband was not even bedridden. A few months later, however, when he was back in Turin, Don Bosco received the news of his death.

On March 8, a beautiful day, Don Bosco went up to St. Peter's great dome. Canon Lantiesi had procured the necessary passes for him and his friends. That morning Don Bosco said Mass at St. Francis Xavier's altar in the Church of the Gesù as he had promised Count Xavier Provano of Collegno, and by 9 o'clock he was at St.

[4] *See* Vol. III, pp. 349ff. [Editor]

Peter's with Count Charles De Maistre and the cleric Rua. They showed their passes and were ushered up a beautiful staircase. At the roof level of the basilica they read the names of all the famous people, including kings and princes, who had made the ascent to the very ball atop the dome. They were delighted to see the names of several kings of Piedmont and of many members of the House of Savoy. Before proceeding further up, they strolled over the roof of the huge basilica. It seemed to be a vast, paved piazza with a perennially spouting fountain. They also visited the larger bell which is about ten feet in diameter.

Afterward they went up a narrow spiral staircase that opened into the first and second interior balustrades of the dome; they walked around both of them. Here Don Bosco studied each mosaic individually, and he noticed that although they had appeared to be small from below, they were really enormous. When he looked down to the floor of the basilica, the people moving about seemed to be no bigger than pigmies, and the papal altar itself, crowned by its hundred-foot-high bronze canopy, looked no larger than an oversized chair.

They continued their climb and reached the top of the lantern above the dome. They were now over 360 feet above the ground. All about them, the immense horizon faded off into the distance.

There still remained the ball atop the lantern, and to reach it one had to climb some twenty feet up a vertical ladder as though through a tunnel. Undaunted, Don Bosco and his two companions made the ascent. The ball has circular openings all around and is large enough to accommodate sixteen people comfortably. Here, at a height of some 400 feet, Don Bosco began to talk about the Oratory, lovingly reminiscing about his boys. Again he reaffirmed his determination to work for their eternal salvation. After a while, he began the descent with his friends and did not stop until they reached the floor of the basilica. Then, feeling a bit tired, he sat down and listened to a sermon that was being preached just then. He liked the preacher's refinement of speech and graceful gestures as he spoke on the observance of civil laws. When the sermon was over, seeing that he still had some time before lunch, Don Bosco walked into the sacristy, which is truly magnificent and worthy of the basilica.

It was now 11:30 and he was still fasting, so he had some lunch with his companions. Afterward, the cleric Rua returned to his room at the Rosminians' house to do a great deal of writing for Don Bosco, while the latter went with Count Charles De Maistre to visit Monsignor Borromeo, the papal majordomo. He received them graciously, and after a long conversation about the situation in Piedmont and Milan—the prelate's native city—the monsignor took their names and Rua's as well, and he listed them among those who wished to receive a blessed palm from the Holy Father himself.

The Vatican museums are located around the courtyards of the papal palace where the monsignor had his office. Don Bosco visited them and saw some truly magnificent exhibits, but he lingered particularly in the vast, oblong Christian museum to see a display of the various instruments of torture used on the martyrs by the enemies of the Church. He also admired many paintings of Our Savior, Our Lady and the saints—among others, the picture of the Good Shepherd bearing a little lamb on His shoulder. All the paintings had been found in the catacombs. "This fact," Don Bosco remarked, "should silence Protestant arguments that the earliest Christians had neither statues nor paintings."

From the Vatican they returned to the heart of Rome and crossed Piazza Scossacavalli, where the editorial office of the renowned *Civiltà Cattolica* was located. He called on them, as he had promised Father [Anthony] Bresciani he would, and was delighted to see that the more important staff writers were Piedmontese.

By now Don Bosco felt the need to call it a day and go home, and so, without further ado, he headed that way. He had barely reached the Quirinal when Mr. Foccardi saw him pass in front of his store with Count De Maistre. He immediately invited them in, and after showing them around he offered to drive them home. Although Don Bosco disliked traveling in a coach, he accepted the offer with good grace. By a patient daily tolerance of both the rudeness of opponents and the importunate attention of friends, Don Bosco practiced virtue throughout his life. Wishing to enjoy his company longer, Foccardi had the coach take a long, rambling course that ended at nightfall.

"As soon as I arrived home," Don Bosco wrote, "a letter was handed to me. It said: 'The Reverend Don Bosco is informed that

His Holiness graciously grants him an audience tomorrow, March 9, at 11:45 A.M.' Although I had eagerly been waiting for this summons, it filled me with excitement. For the rest of the evening I could speak of nothing but the Pope and the audience."

Cardinal Antonelli had kept his word.

CHAPTER 67

First Audience with Pius IX

ON March 9 [1858]—the day scheduled for his papal audience—Don Bosco said Mass in the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva, one of the most beautiful and magnificent churches in Rome. Beneath its main altar [in a glass coffin] lies the body of St. Catherine of Siena. After Mass, Don Bosco called on [Francis] Cardinal Gaude whom he had to consult before seeing the Pope. He was given immediate attention and received the desired advice and information; then he rushed home and hastened to draft the petitions he intended to present to the Holy Father.

It was not quite eleven o'clock when Don Bosco and the cleric Rua—dressed in mantellettas—arrived at the Vatican with a thousand things on their minds. Thus preoccupied, they walked up the stairs to the papal apartment which was guarded by Swiss and Noble Guards. The guards bowed to them, took the letter that Don Bosco presented, and led them through several halls to the Pope's antechamber.

Since there were others ahead of them, they had to wait some ninety minutes. "We spent the time looking about us," Don Bosco wrote. "The halls were huge, imposing, and carpeted, but not extravagant. The antechamber floor was covered with a plain green carpet, the brocade on the walls was plain red silk, and the chairs were unupholstered. A single oversized chair on a somewhat elaborate dais marked this as a papal hall. We were pleased to note all this, remembering the unjust caustic accusations that some people level at the pomp and splendor of the papal court."

Suddenly a bell rang and the papal majordomo beckoned to Don Bosco and Rua. The summons came as a shock to Don Bosco, and he had to get a grip on himself so as not to falter. "This is it!" he

said. "Let's go." Rua followed him, carrying a deluxe edition of all the issues of *Letture Cattoliche*. At last they stood in Pius IX's presence and approached him with the ritual triple genuflection—at the entrance, halfway, and at his feet. Their apprehension almost completely vanished when they saw that Pius IX was the most friendly, venerable, and gentle person they could imagine. Unable to kiss his foot since he was seated at his desk, they kissed his hand. Rua, remembering a promise that he had made to his companions, kissed it twice: once for himself and once for them. The Holy Father then motioned to them to rise and come in front of him. They did so, but Don Bosco, wishing to abide by protocol when speaking to the Pope, again knelt down.

"Don't bother," the Pope said. "Remain standing."

We must note here that the majordomo had introduced Don Bosco to the Pope as "Bosser."

"Are you Piedmontese?" the Pope asked Don Bosco.

"Yes, Your Holiness. Being in the presence of the Vicar of Christ is the most wonderful thing that could ever have happened to me."

"What work do you do?"

"Your Holiness, I am occupied in educating the young and publishing *Letture Cattoliche*."

"The education of youth has always been an important mission, but today it is more essential than ever. There is another priest in Turin who works with boys."

At this point Don Bosco realized that his name had been mispronounced, while at the same time the Pope became aware that this priest was Don Bosco, director of the St. Francis de Sales Oratory. He now became much more cordial. "What exactly do you do in your hospice?" he continued.

"A little of everything, Holy Father. I say Mass, preach, hear confessions, and teach. Occasionally I go to the kitchen to give the cook suggestions. Sometimes I also sweep the church."

The Holy Father smiled and asked about the boys and the clerics, as well as about the oratories with which he was already acquainted. He also inquired how many priests were helping him, what their names were, and who collaborated with him in the publication of *Letture Cattoliche*. Then, turning to the cleric Rua, he asked him if he were already a priest.

"Not yet, Holy Father," Rua replied. "I'm now in my third year of theology."

"What treatises are you studying now?"

"We're taking Baptism, Confirmation, and. . . ."

The Pope interrupted him, remarking: "Those are the easiest." He then again smilingly turned to Don Bosco and said: "I still remember the boys' contribution that you sent to me at Gaeta and the fine sentiments accompanying it."

Don Bosco took advantage of this remark to tell him of the warm attachment his boys had for the Pope and begged him to accept, as a token of this, a copy of *Letture Cattoliche.*

"Holy Father," he said, "on behalf of the management of *Letture Cattoliche* I wish to offer you a bound copy of all the issues that have been published up to now. The binding was done by our boys.

"How many boys do you care for?"

"About two hundred, Holy Father; fifteen are bookbinders."

"Good," he answered. "I want to send each one of them a medal." He went into an adjoining room and soon returned with fifteen small medals of the Immaculate Conception. "These are for your bookbinders," he said to Don Bosco. Then he added: "This medal is for your companion." He turned to the cleric Rua and gave him a larger medal. Then he handed Don Bosco a small box which contained a still larger medal and said: "This is for you." Since they had knelt to receive these valued gifts, the Holy Father again told them to rise.

Thinking that they were ready to leave, Pius IX was about to dismiss them when Don Bosco said: "Your Holiness, I have something special to tell you."

"Very well," the Pope replied.

Rua made the ritual genuflection in the middle of the room and withdrew.

The Holy Father spoke some more with Don Bosco about the oratories and their good influence, and he praised *Letture Cattoliche,* telling him to encourage his collaborators whom he cordially blessed. Among other things, he repeated with particular pleasure: "When I think of these boys, I am still moved by the thirty-three lire they

sent to me at Gaeta. Poor lads! How generous of them to give up the little they had! It was indeed a great sacrifice for them!"

Don Bosco replied: "We would like to have done more, but we were very happy to hear that Your Holiness was pleased with our humble offering. I wish to assure Your Holiness that large crowds of boys in Turin love you tenderly. Whenever they have a chance to speak of the Vicar of Jesus Christ, they do so most gladly."

The Holy Father was quite happy to hear this. Returning to the topic of the oratories, he himself proposed the question:

"My dear Father, you have set many things in motion, but what would happen to all of them if you were to die?"

Don Bosco, who was about to broach this subject, seized the opportunity and replied that he had come to Rome expressly for the purpose of providing for the future of the oratories. Handing him Archbishop Fransoni's letter of recommendation, he added: "I have come to implore Your Holiness to tell me on what basis an institute could be founded that would be suitable to our times."

The Pope read the recommendation of the dauntless exiled archbishop and then questioned Don Bosco on his plans and aims. Very satisfied with the answers, he said: "I see that we are of one mind." He then exhorted Don Bosco to draw up the constitutions of his society, and he made several important suggestions in this regard. Among other things, he told him: "Set up your society in such a way that the government cannot interfere with it. Yet, don't be content to bind its members only with simple promises, for in that case the link between members, or between superiors and subjects, would not be adequate. You could never be sure of them, nor could you count on them for any length of time. Formulate your constitutions according to these principles, and then we shall examine them. It is no easy matter to be in the world and go unnoticed. Nevertheless, if this is God's will, He will enlighten you. Pray. Then come back in a few days, and I shall tell you what I think."

Pius IX had the ability to grasp things quickly, and he was swift in his replies. In five minutes one could discuss matters with him that would have required an hour with others. Thanks to this, they not only discussed a new kind of religious congregation but several other things as well. Don Bosco also asked and obtained various

favors—among them the privilege of a private chapel for the Oratory and for the hospice of Father Francis Montebruno in Genoa.[1]

Don Bosco also presented Father Cafasso's petition concerning an extraordinary indulgence at the point of death.[2] He begged the Holy Father to grant it and to extend the same favor to him personally, to all those residing at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, and to an unspecified number of benefactors. Pius IX generously consented and promised a rescript for Father Cafasso.

Lastly, Don Bosco asked his blessing for all who were in any way connected with him and his work. The cleric Rua was then called back in and both knelt. "I'll bless you with all my heart," the Holy Father said in a quivering voice, while they, too, were deeply moved: *"Benedictio Dei Omnipotentis, Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti descendat super te, super socium tuum, super tuos in sortem Domini vocatos, super adiutores et benefactores tuos et super omnes pueros tuos, et super omnia opera tua, et maneat nunc et semper et semper et semper"* ["May the blessing of Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—descend upon you, your companion, those called to serve the Lord with you, your co-workers and benefactors, all your boys, and all your works, and may it remain now and forever, forever, forever"].

The effectiveness of this unusual blessing of Pius IX is eloquently proven by the success of the cleric Michael Rua and the subsequent growth of the Oratory.

Toward the end of the audience, Pius IX asked Don Bosco if he had already visited St. Peter's, and he gave him full permission to see every monument and outstanding thing in the Holy City, instructing the papal majordomo to open every door to him. "Try to see all that can be seen," he told him.

"The goodness of the Holy Father," Don Bosco wrote, "and my own delight in talking to him had protracted the audience beyond the half hour—in itself a notable time, considering the person granting the audience—and had even delayed his lunch. We left the Vatican full of esteem and veneration for the Holy Father, and on the way home we felt overwhelmed by the numerous proofs of his benevolence. The memory of this audience will certainly be in-

[1] The routine petition and grant have been omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[2] *See* Appendix 26. [Editor]

delibly impressed on our hearts. Through personal experience we can say that one need only approach the Pope to find in him a father concerned, above all, with the welfare of his sons, the faithful all over the world. Anyone who hears him speak cannot help saying to himself: 'There is something in this man that one does not find in others!' "

Don Bosco availed himself of the Pope's permission to visit the Vatican grottoes. St. Peter's was built over the Constantine Basilica in order to protect the new structure from dampness. The pavement of the old basilica is still intact, as is also its lower level, about eleven feet high, with its piers lopped off at the junction with the vaults [supporting the floor of the present crypt]. In this crypt almost all the monuments of the Constantine Basilica were stored—mostly very valuable paintings and sculptures, mosaics, tombs of the popes and of famous people, statues, stone tablets, and altars. Don Bosco later remarked to his boys: "It would take a book to tell all the wonderful things I saw. I'll just mention one, a picture of Mary, known as "La Bocciata"—a very ancient image on an altar of the crypt. It got its name from the following episode. Deliberately or accidentally, a young man hit the eye of Mary in this picture with a *boccia*.[3] Tradition has it that blood streamed from the forehead and eye, staining the cheek which is still visibly blood-red. Two drops of blood spurted sideways over a stone, and this stone is now carefully preserved behind an iron gate."

Don Bosco found most fascinating the memory of the Prince of Apostles. He spent the greater part of the day exploring the "Confession of St. Peter" [4] in the company of Monsignor Borromeo. The area where St. Peter's tomb is located was opened for him. He minutely inspected every corner, the walls, the ceiling, and the floor. He asked if there was anything else to see. "Nothing," he was told.

"But precisely where is St. Peter's tomb?"

"Underneath here, deep down in the very spot it occupied when the old basilica was still standing. It has not been opened for centuries, for fear that someone might try to break off pieces for relics."

"I'd like to get to it."

"Impossible!"

[3] A heavy round wooden ball used in Italy for lawn bowling. [Editor]
[4] The tomb of St. Peter. [Editor]

"I've been told that there is a way of seeing it, though."

"I've shown you everything to be seen; anything more is strictly forbidden."

"But the Pope has ordered that nothing be kept from me. Should he ask me about it when I see him again, regretfully I'll have to tell him the truth."

Monsignor sent for some keys and opened what looked like the door of a closet. It disclosed an opening on the floor. Don Bosco looked into it, but it was pitch-black.

"Are you satisfied now?" Monsignor asked.

"Not yet; I'd like to see what's below."

"How?"

"Send for a candlelighter."

It was brought and lowered into the hole, but the flame of the wick instantly died out. Besides, the candlelighter was far too short. Another one with a much longer handle and an iron hook at the end made it possible to touch the lid covering St. Peter's sarcophagus, some twenty-five feet below. Tapping upon it lightly with the iron hook, one could tell from the sound that it had struck first iron and then marble. This confirmed what ancient historians had written.

Don Bosco diligently checked everything so as to be able to correct accordingly his biography of St. Peter based [so far] on the writings of Sartorio, Cuccagni, and the Bollandists.

CHAPTER 68

Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)

AT one-thirty on the afternoon of March 10, Father Hyacinth, a Discalced Carmelite, came in a carriage to take Don Bosco and the cleric Rua to the Basilica of San Pancrazio and to the Church of San Pietro in Montorio on the Janiculum across the Tiber. The Discalced Carmelite monastery, near the basilica, was then almost in ruins from the revolution of 1849. We have an account of the day written in Don Bosco's own hand:

We went into St. Pancratius' Basilica and knelt at the martyr's altar until Father Hyacinth, after giving each of us a candle, told us to follow him and a guide into the catacombs through a trap door. This was located just about in the center of the church and opened into a dark, deep hole.

Over the entrance were the words *In hoc aditu decollatus est Sanctus Pancratius, martyr Christi* [At this entrance St. Pancratius, Christ's martyr, was beheaded]. Inside, the catacomb was a succession of long, narrow corridors varying in width and height, now straight, now winding, at times slanting up or down, intersecting other passages no more than three feet wide, vanishing into the darkness. We were told that these corridors are spread over four or five floors and are interconnected by very narrow, hazardous staircases. On either side of the corridors are tombs dug out of the tufa in parallel tiers. Here, in ancient times, Christians—especially those who had been martyred—were buried. The tombs of the martyrs had appropriate emblems: a palm symbolized their victory over tyrants; an ampulla signified the shedding of their blood for their Faith; the symbol ☧ was an abbreviation of *Pax Christi* [the peace of Christ] or stood for *pro Christo passus* [suffered for Christ]. At times a sketch of the instruments of their martyrdom was engraved on their tombs; in some instances the instruments themselves had been entombed with the martyr. When the persecutions endured by the martyr had not been too cruel, his full name was inscribed with a few

words relating some outstanding episode of his life. Generally, martyrs' symbols did not mark the tombs of Christians who had died a natural death. Occasionally a short Greek or Latin text identified the buried person. The most customary symbol for Christians was the fish, inasmuch as the letters of the Greek word formed the acronym "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior."

Our guide led us into a small chamber on whose walls were ancient inscriptions which we could not read. "This," he told us, "is the spot of St. Pancratius' grave. Next to him lie his uncle St. Dionysius and another relative." In the center of the ceiling was a painting of a youth—undoubtedly St. Pancratius. It was not a work of art but quite valuable in proving that effigies of saints were venerated in the first centuries of the Church.

"Look at this crypt," the guide said. (Crypt is a Greek word meaning an underground chamber.) Here the Christians used to gather in times of persecutions to attend the Divine Mysteries. The original altar still stands on one side. Generally the tomb of a martyr was used as an altar. A bit further on, the guide showed us the chapel which Pope St. Felix used as a place to rest and say Mass. His tomb stands near this chapel. Here and there we saw remnants of human skeletons. Our guide assured us that further up could be seen tombs of martyrs and tablets with intact inscriptions, but we were already exhausted due to the stuffy, sultry air and the continual strain of trying to avoid tripping or bumping our heads and shoulders. We felt no better when our guide added that still more underground corridors were being discovered that were fifteen or twenty miles long. Therefore, we retraced our steps. On leaving the church square we noticed this inscription to the left of the main door of the church: *Coemeterium Sancti Calipodii presbyteri et martyris Christi* [Cemetery of St. Calepodius, priest and martyr of Christ]. Perhaps this cemetery was named after St. Calepodius because this sainted priest had it dug out or because he himself is buried there. We wanted to visit this one, too, but we changed our minds when we were told it would be very hazardous.

We got into the carriage again with Father Hyacinth and rode down the Janiculum toward the city and the Church of San Pietro in Montorio. This church also dates back to the time of Constantine the Great and is richly endowed with statues, paintings, and marble. It also possesses a miraculous effigy of the Blessed Virgin, known as "Our Lady of the Letter." Between the church and the nearby monastery stands a small, round temple, one of Bramante's finest works. We were assured that it was built over the spot where St. Peter had been martyred. At its rear,

a small staircase leads down into a round crypt; in the center a perennially burning lamp marks the spot where the cross on which St. Peter was crucified was embedded upside down.

We returned to our carriage and Father Hyacinth graciously took us home. On the way we admired the lovely fountain of Paul V and, across the Tiber, the huge Ponte Sisto fountain and Porta S. Pancrazio, formerly known as the Janiculum Gate. However, we were glad to get back home so that we could rest a little, say the breviary, and jot down a few notes on what we had seen.

On March 11, Don Bosco spent the day writing and attending to some special errands. Among other things, he called on Monsignor Pacca, a domestic prelate, and while there he met Father [Anthony] Bresciani, S.J. This led to his sending the cleric Rua to Ponte Sisto to find Father Botaudi, a Piedmontese from Nizza Monferrato with whom he had already discussed the spreading of *Letture Cattoliche* in Rome.

On March 12, Don Bosco said Mass in the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle on the site of St. Sebastian's martyrdom. Then at one-thirty that afternoon he went with Count Francis De Maistre to see the Church of St. Gregory the Great which had been built on the slope of the Caelian Hill, on the spot where this Pope's residence had once stood and which he himself had converted into a monastery. The church is now [1905] served by the Camaldolese. Don Bosco left us this description:

This church is one of the most beautiful in all Rome. At the right there is the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament where St. Gregory the Great used to say Mass. An ancient table on the side of the altar bears the inscription *Deo Optimo Maximo* [To God, Most Good and Great]. This altar, dedicated to St. Gregory, has become famous throughout the world for the privileges bestowed on it by many popes. According to tradition, after a monk, on instructions from St. Gregory, had offered up the Holy Sacrifice for thirty consecutive days for the soul of his deceased brother, another monk saw that soul liberated from the flames of purgatory.

On the right of this chapel is a small room where St. Gregory used to sleep. The spot where his bed stood is marked. In addition there is a marble chair on which he used to sit when writing or preaching. On the other side of the church, to the left of the main altar, another

chapel enshrines a very ancient and remarkable image of Our Lady, believed to be the same one which the Saint kept in his own home, and which he would greet with the words *"Ave, Maria"* on passing before it. One day, being in a hurry, he forgot his usual greeting, and his heavenly Mother gently reminded him of it by telling him: *"Ave, Gregori."*

Outside the church, but near it, is another chapel with a statue of St. Gregory on a throne, designed by Michelangelo, who also supervised its execution. The Saint is shown with a dove at his ear, an allusion to what the deacon Peter, one of his familiars, said—namely that whenever the Saint preached to the people or wrote commentaries on the Scriptures he could see a dove whispering to him. In the center of this chapel stands a large marble table where St. Gregory himself used to serve dinner daily to twelve paupers. One day an angel, in the form of a young boy, sat at the table with the others, only to disappear suddenly. From then on, the Saint added one more pauper. This gave rise to the custom of seating thirteen pilgrims at the table which the Pope himself serves on Holy Thursday.

Leaving St. Gregory's, Don Bosco went to the majestic Church of Saints John and Paul, brothers and martyrs, erected on the site of their own house. The spot of their martyrdom is surrounded by an iron railing, while relics rest in a [red porphyry] urn beneath the main altar. Here, too, Don Bosco jotted down a few notes:

Near the main altar is the Chapel of Blessed [1] Paul of the Cross, the founder of the Passionists, to whom the church is entrusted. His relics lie beneath the main altar. He was born at Castellazzo, Piedmont, in the diocese and province of Alessandria [in 1694] and died at the age of 82 in Rome in the year 1775. Very many miracles wrought in his name, both in Rome and elsewhere, have contributed to the rapid growth of his congregation. Its members are called "Passionists" because of the fourth vow they take to further the veneration of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

One of them, Brother Andrew, a Genoese, showed us the most interesting features of the church and took us into the monastery, a fine building housing some eighty religious, many of them Piedmontese. He also took us into the room where his holy founder died. Silently and devoutly we stood where that blessed soul departed for heaven. His

[1] He was declared a saint in 1867. [Editor]

chair, clothes, books, and other objects, properly sealed, are kept as relics. Today this room is used as a chapel.

It was at the top of this hill, known as the Caelian Hill, that Bishop [Philip] Artico resided. He was now in exile.[2] After a long series of bitter events and ten years of confinement in his villa at Camerano, this bishop had renounced his diocese and left Piedmont in 1857. A visit from Don Bosco—a dear friend of his—must have been a real comfort, since he only had short time to live. In 1859 he passed away, grieving but undaunted, and was buried in the neighboring church.

After taking his leave of the courteous Brother Andrew, Don Bosco headed for the Church of San Lorenzo in Lucina. After a short walk he came to the triumphal Arch of Constantine, commemorating the victory of the Cross over paganism, and the Arch of Titus whose bas-reliefs depict the fulfillment of Christ's prophecy about Jerusalem.

When at last he reached San Lorenzo in Lucina—one of the largest Roman parish churches—he was anxious to gain the indulgence and admire the famous crucifix painted by Guido Reni, but the church was closed for restoration.

On March 13 at twelve-thirty, Don Bosco attended another meeting of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in the home of Marquis Patrizi. Its purpose was to discuss ways and means of setting up "affiliated" chapters among boys of the oratories [in Rome]. Don Bosco's suggestions were recorded because the members were anxious to implement their plans.

Toward two in the afternoon, Don Bosco went to Ponte Sisto with Rua to call on Father Botaudi, a zealous and apostolic priest. The meeting was a very gratifying one. Since Father Botaudi was completely earnest in his desire to spread *Letture Cattoliche,* agreement was reached on steps to be taken and on other related matters.

On their way back from Ponte Sisto, Don Bosco and Rua called on Archbishop San Marzano, the titular of Ephesus. This noble Piedmontese prelate resided in the small Sciarra Palace in the piazza of the same name. He warmly welcomed Don Bosco, who gave him several messages from people in Turin. After a lengthy conversation

[2] *See* Vol. III, pp. 168f; Vol. IV, pp. 19, 418ff. [Editor]

about the Vatican library and its rich collection of codices, the archbishop promised to introduce Don Bosco to Giovanni Battista De Rossi, a leading authority in Christian archeology.

That day's "station" was at the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli at Diocletian's Baths, so called because it was erected on the site of those ancient baths built by the slave labor of thousands of Christians. Part of this splendid structure was converted into a church by Michelangelo at the request of Pope Pius IV.

Don Bosco visited this church not only to gain the plenary indulgence but also to pray for his boys and his Oratory in Turin. It was a "station" day. The church was appropriately adorned and its outstanding relics were on display in a chapel beside the main altar. Among the many relics were the bodies of St. Prosperus, St. Fortunatus, and St. Cyril, as well as the heads of the martyrs St. Justin, St. Maximus, and many others.

Don Bosco also visited some festive oratories, setting aside a full day for them—Sunday, March 14. He described his visits as follows:

Today, Sunday, after Mass at home, we went with Marquis Patrizi to visit a festive oratory. The boys were gathered in the sacristy of the Church of Santa Maria della Quercia. We were delighted to see some forty boys, whose lively conduct reminded us very much of our own little scamps at Valdocco. All the boys' church services—Mass, confessions, catechism, and a brief sermon—take place in the morning. There are two priests in attendance—one to hear confessions and the other to supervise. The members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society teach catechism and lead the prayers; Marquis Patrizi himself signs the boys' attendance cards which they take home. It would certainly benefit the boys more if they were to receive catechetical instruction in the afternoon as well.

For lack of facilities at the church, the boys spend the afternoon at another oratory known as "St. John of the Florentines." All they do here is play; there are no church services at all. We went there and saw about one hundred boys playing to their heart's content, safe from physical or moral dangers.

We thought it quite regrettable that they were given no other religious instruction. Rather than an oratory, this should have been called a recreation center. If a priest were available, he could do a great deal for

them; the need is unquestionable. It's really a pity because we found those boys so well-disposed. Several enjoyed talking with us, and they kissed my hand as well as Rua's several times. Rua did not like it, but he had to let them do it.

After some time, Marquis Patrizi said: "Now, let's visit an oratory for older boys across the Tiber." Since it was an oratory, we agreed at once and took a boat across the river to the Assumption Oratory. We liked this one very much; it looked like a little park fully equipped for all kinds of games. The church which was close by, the grown boys, the sacred singing, and the services brought our thoughts back to our own Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. We were also very glad to hear the director of this oratory, Father Biondi, give a Sunday instruction and question the more knowledgeable boys, just as we do after narrating some bible story. But here, too, something was missing—Mass and Benediction. There were only about eighty boys in a place large enough for four hundred. Still, we were happy with our visit, and we made friends with some boys, two of whom insisted on accompanying us home, although it meant over an hour's walk for them.

When we returned home, I received a visit from Monsignor Merode, the papal chamberlain. After a few formalities, he said: "The Holy Father would like you to give a retreat for women in the prison near the Church of Santa Maria degli Angeli."

"The Pope's request is my command," I replied, delighted to accept.

"It is understood," the monsignor added, "that you'll also give a retreat to the men at St. Michael's." Since this second invitation did not seem to have come from the Pope and since I was not sure that this arrangement would be agreeable to the prison authorities, I reserved the right to reply after I had received news from our Oratory.

Meanwhile, on the next day, March 15, at two in the afternoon, I called on the sister superior of the women's prison to arrange for the retreat. "If it is all right with you, you could start in a few minutes, since the women are now in church and there is no other priest for the sermon," the sister said. Therefore, I began the retreat at once, and this kept me busy almost the entire week. The prison housed 260 women; of this total 224 had been convicted of serious crimes, while the rest had their cases pending. The retreat went very satisfactorily. The simple, popular style of preaching we use at the Oratory proved highly successful. After the last sermon on Saturday, the sister superior told me with deep pleasure that not a single inmate had failed to receive the sacraments. The retreat lasted from March 15 to March 20.

Don Bosco humbly recorded the details of this retreat in a few words, but the prison chaplain was much more eloquent. He had attentively watched these poor women listening intently to Don Bosco with tears in their eyes and compunction in their hearts. He had been impressed by the visible fervor of Don Bosco and his zeal for souls. By the second day, many of these women had asked Don Bosco to hear their confessions and free them of the pangs of remorse, and during the succeeding days all approached his confessional with perfect disposition of soul.

One morning Don Bosco preached on mortal sin. Words cannot describe the scene. After enumerating God's unceasing acts of generosity and mercy toward His creatures and the insults with which ungrateful Christians daily repay Him, he asked his listeners with vivid emotion, almost sobbing: "Are we then to continue offending this good God?"

A deep murmur ran through the congregation: "No, no."

Turning to the crucifix, Don Bosco went on: "Lord, You have heard them. Help them to persevere. They want to love You. They did not know what they were doing when they offended You."

The chaplain enthusiastically told Nicholas Cardinal Clarelli Paracciani, the president of that penal institution, of the good results of Don Bosco's preaching. In turn, the cardinal mentioned it to the Pope, thanking him for having provided so well for the spiritual needs of the women prisoners in the person of Don Bosco, whose holy zeal had succeeded in healing even gangrenous wounds. The Pope, too, was very gratified, for he had purposely entrusted this mission to Don Bosco to see whether he really was the man he was reported to be and he himself had thought him to be at their first meeting. This was the true beginning of his great respect and love for him.

Meanwhile, at the Oratory in Turin, everything was proceeding regularly—the Sunday church services, the feast of St. Joseph, the novenas to Our Lady, and the Lenten catechism classes. Father Borel was always ready to step in, if no other priest was available for sermons. The time limit for fulfilling the Easter duty was close at hand, and the boys were well prepared. Father Alasonatti watched over the boarders and kept Don Bosco informed on everything that went on.

Something had gone amiss, however, during the first weeks of Don Bosco's absence. The boarders and some of the day boys did not want to go to confession to other priests; as a result, Father Dadesso, the Oblate of Mary, and Father Giacomelli had very few penitents. Only after many exhortations and a note from Don Bosco did the boys agree to accept, for a while, their spiritual guidance—evident and heartening proof of the boundless confidence they had in Don Bosco.

One would think they could not live without him. Unaccustomed to a long absence of their spiritual father, they kept in touch with him by mail individually or collectively. They all wrote to him several times on very thin paper, so that occasionally fifty letters would be sent in one envelope. Don Bosco was very happy to hear from them; in turn, he would write back to each boy individually, either on separate sheets or on one single sheet, prefacing each brief answer with the boy's name. The cleric Celestine Durando would then cut his letter into as many different pieces as there were answers and hand them to the specified boys. When Don Bosco could not write himself, he had Rua answer for him. Occasionally some Latin students would write to him in Latin, and he would show their letters to Cardinal Marini who read them with warm interest. The cardinal had become a good friend of his from their very first meeting.

All the Oratory clerics also wrote to Don Bosco, as we gather from the following letter:

Rome, March 17, 1858

My dear Father Alasonatti:

Just a few words, because it is time for me to give a sermon and the mail is about to leave. We are well and were given a very warm, fatherly welcome from the Holy Father. Rua will send you the blessing he gave us. I have already answered some of the clerics' letters; others will follow. Please distribute them.

May God grant you health and grace. *Vale in Domino.*

Your friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Only one of Don Bosco's answers is in our possession:

Rome, March 18, 1858

My dear Anfossi:

Any news about Anfossi? No doubt, he is always busy at his tasks. So *perge* [keep it up]. But remember that *Dominus promisit coronam vigilantibus* [the Lord has promised a crown to those who watch], and that *momentaneum est quod delectat, aeternum est quod cruciat* [pleasures last but a moment while torments will last forever], and that *non sunt condignae passiones huius temporis ad futuram gloriam quae revelabitur in nobis* [the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that will be revealed in us—Rom. 8, 18].

Love me in the Lord and may Mary bless you.

Affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

There were other letters addressed to the entire community. The cleric Anfossi and many others recall having heard these letters read in public. In reference to them Anfossi has testified: "They spoke enthusiastically about the Pope and many high prelates. Thus Don Bosco strove to instill great reverence for papal authority in us."

CHAPTER 69

Second Audience with Pius IX

ON Sunday, March 21, the feast of the Seven Sorrows of Mary, Don Bosco visited the Church of Santa Maria in Via Lata. By tradition, this church marks the site where St. Paul stayed in the home of the centurion who had brought him to Rome at Festus' order. Here, it is believed, the Apostle baptized the first Roman converts with water that sprang up miraculously.

Don Bosco next went to admire Trajan's Column which stands some 140 feet high amid the ruins of Trajan's Forum. The column is covered from base to capital with bas-reliefs of 2,500 human figures; one of the bas-reliefs portrays the astounding victory of a Christian legion over the Dacians, a triumph which earned the legion its name, "The Lightning Legion." After a look at the very ancient tomb of Publicius Bibulus, which dates from the times of the Republic, Don Bosco went on to the Roman Forum, passing by the triumphal arch of Septimius Severus. In the midst of so many imposing ruins of temples, arches, basilicas, and halls from which Rome once governed the entire world, he noticed the Church of Saints Cosmas and Damian and went in. With its atrium and sacristy behind the apse, this church—the first built in the Forum—occupies the site of three pagan temples. Everything he saw bespoke the triumph of Christianity over idolatry.

Toward evening, after his return to the Quirinal, Don Bosco received a note summoning him to the Vatican, where the Pope wished to discuss some matters with him at leisure. Pius IX welcomed him in a most warm and fatherly way, and without further ado he spoke to him [substantially] as follows: "I have been thinking about your project, and I am convinced that it will do a great deal of good for the young. Go ahead with it. How else can your oratories survive and their spiritual needs be attended to? I think

that in these sad times we need a new type of religious congregation, one based on these two premises: it must have vows, for without them unity of spirit and purpose could not be maintained, but these vows must be 'simple' so that they may be easily dispensed from, lest the ill will of some members cause unrest and discord. Its rules must be gentle and easy to observe. The garb and practices of piety must be such as not to draw attention. Perhaps to this end, it would be better to call it a 'society' rather than a 'congregation.' Briefly, find a way to make each member a religious in the eyes of the Church but a free citizen in the eyes of the world."

Pius IX then mentioned some congregations whose rules could offer guidelines in drafting those of this new congregation. At this point, Don Bosco humbly presented the manuscript of his constitutions to Pius IX, more or less in these terms: "Holy Father, here you will find the spirit and the norms that for twenty years have guided those who devoted themselves to the work of the oratories. Even before coming to Rome, I did my best to give the various articles a systematized form, and during these last few days I have made corrections and additions to meet the suggestions Your Holiness graciously gave me the first time I had the honor to come into your presence. In drafting the various chapters and in attempting to implement your suggestions, I most probably blundered. Therefore, I now entrust this whole matter to Your Holiness and to anyone you will delegate to read, correct, add, or delete for the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls."

Taking the manuscript, the Pope leafed through some pages. Then he again approved the purpose that had inspired them and placed the manuscript aside on a small table. Thus the Vicar of Jesus Christ himself decided that Don Bosco should found a new religious society. The Pope then had Don Bosco narrate in detail the beginnings of the Turin oratories and the reasons that had prompted him to start them. He wanted to know what was being done, the manner in which it was done, and what obstacles he had had to overcome. When he heard of the many difficulties, threats, persecutions, and enticements with which Don Bosco had had to contend, seeing some similarity with his own tribulations during the revolution, he exclaimed: "Yes, how true indeed! *Ambulavimus per vias difficiles* [We have gone through a hard journey]." With a

smile, Don Bosco replied: "But with God's grace, *non lassati sumus in via iniquitatis* [we did not bog down in the way of iniquity]." Then he went on to tell of the great good that had been accomplished through God's infinite mercy and of the many very virtuous boys who had lived and were still living at the Oratory. As the talk then passed on to Dominic Savio, Don Bosco told the Pope about the boy's vision concerning England. Pius IX listened to his report with great interest and delight, and he then said: "I am very much interested in England. This confirms my resolve to keep striving for its conversion. I shall regard this account at the very least as the advice of a good soul."

This disclosure regarding Savio brought another thought to the Pope's mind. Looking fixedly at Don Bosco, he asked if he, too, had ever had any supernatural revelation about his undertakings. Then, seeing that Don Bosco was apparently ill at ease, Pius IX insisted that he be told of any event, no matter how slight, which might have even the appearance of the supernatural. In filial trust, Don Bosco told him everything he had seen in his extraordinary dreams—which had already been verified in part—beginning with his dream at the age of nine.[1]

The Pope listened with great attention and emotion, and he did not try to conceal the fact that he attached great importance to what Don Bosco had told him. He then said to him, more or less in these words: "When you get back to Turin, write down these dreams and everything else you have told me, minutely and in their natural sense. Save all this as a legacy for your congregation, so that it may serve as an encouragement and norm for your sons."

The Pope took this occasion to praise very highly and warmly those engaged in the education of youth and to mention the good work being done in Rome by oratories and numerous other institutions, singling out St. Michael's Hospice. When Don Bosco remained silent, the Pope sensed that he was not entirely of the same opinion. "You must know something that I don't know," he remarked.

"I beg you to excuse me if I do not feel I should make a comment, but if you order me to do so, I shall speak," Don Bosco replied.

[1] *See* Vol. I, pp. 95f. [Editor]

"Then I order you to do so!"

Therefore, sparingly and in a prudent manner, Don Bosco informed the Holy Father of what prominent people thought—and wished that the Pope would learn—of St. Michael's Hospice. Pius IX was surprised, and he immediately promised to remedy the situation. This led him to inquire about the trades, crafts, and academic courses offered to the Oratory boys. Then he asked Don Bosco: "Of all the subjects you have studied, which did you like best?"

"Holy Father, my knowledge is not vast, but the one thing I love and wish is *scire Jesum Christum et hunc crucifixum*—to know Jesus Christ and Him crucified. [1 Cor. 2, 2] The Pope remained thoughtful for a while. Then, as though wishing to put him to the test, he said that he had been very pleased with the retreat Don Bosco had given to the women prisoners, and that, as a token of his esteem and affection, he had decided to make him a monsignor with the rank of domestic prelate. Don Bosco, who had never been interested in honors, humbly thanked him, but he declined the offer in his usual witty and friendly manner, saying: "Your Holiness, that would never do! My boys wouldn't recognize me any longer and I'd lose their trust. If they had to call me 'Monsignor,' they wouldn't dare come near me and pull me this way and that as they do now. Besides, everybody would think that the title had brought me wealth. How could I ever again muster enough courage to go begging for the Oratory and other projects? Holy Father, it is far better for me to always remain plain Don Bosco!"

The Pope admired his charming humility. Without further ado, Don Bosco went on to ask his permission to circulate *Letture Cattoliche* in the Papal States, and, if possible, with postal exemption. Pius IX promised to do so, but he advised him to see the cardinal vicar and inform him of the Pope's promise. He then remarked that he had glanced at his *Storia d'Italia* and *Letture Cattoliche*. He highly praised Don Bosco's lives of the popes of the first three centuries, and he encouraged him to continue the series as a valuable service to the Church, especially at that time. To his congratulations he added: "With your works you bring my predecessors back to life, especially those of whom the faithful have little knowledge." Then, after questioning him on his sources for

that series, he granted him the personal faculties he had requested —the lifetime faculty of hearing confessions *in omni loco Ecclesiae* [everywhere] and a dispensation from reciting the Divine Office. Finally, as if he had not been generous enough, Pius IX granted him every faculty he could think of, with these words: "I grant you all I have the power to grant." He then gave him his blessing.

Don Bosco left, deeply moved by the Pope's graciousness, and he told Rua what had taken place during the memorable audience. His dispensation from saying the breviary greatly eased his delicate conscience, because he was often busy from morning to night with confessions, audiences, and various other tasks. However, he continued to say his breviary in full as long as he was able, or at least in part, even after his sight dimmed and his health declined.

The Holy Father's affection for Don Bosco was truly striking! From then on, Pius IX was always his father and friend. He constantly held him in high regard, looked forward to conversing with him, sought his advice, and repeatedly offered him ecclesiastical honors in an attempt to keep him nearby. But Don Bosco, though always obedient to the Pope's wishes, did not feel that he could accept these offers. He sought honors for others but accepted none for himself.

On March 22 Don Bosco called on the cardinal vicar, Constantine Patrizi, to tell him what the Pope had said regarding *Letture Cattoliche* in the Papal States. Finding the cardinal quite friendly toward him, he explained his plan to open a distribution center in Rome. The cardinal approved, and he declared that he would support it with a circular to the bishops of the Papal States. Pleased with the favorable outcome of a plan so dear to his heart, Don Bosco went to visit the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls in order to pray at the tomb of the great Apostle of the Gentiles and to admire the wonders of that huge basilica. A mile further on is the famous spot called *Ad Aquas Salvias* where St. Paul shed his blood for Christ. On this site—San Paolo alle Tre Fontane—a church was built because [according to an ancient tradition] it was here that the Apostle was beheaded, and at three points where his head bounced there gushed forth three fountains. This church has two altars. From there Don Bosco went to pray in the nearby octagonal Church of Santa Maria Scala Coeli in the cemetery of St.

Zeno, a Roman tribune martyred under Diocletian with 10,203 other fellow legionnaires. Near these two churches stands a third dedicated to Saints Vincent and Anastasius. Gothic in style, it has three aisles lined by pillars. It is all that remains of a once famous abbey. Returning to the city, Don Bosco stopped at the tomb of Gaius Cestius, known as the Pyramid of Cestius. Near it is an ancient chapel marking the spot where Saints Peter and Paul were separated, the former to be taken to the Janiculum, the latter to *Aquas Salvias.* Don Bosco lovingly recalled these glorious, moving scenes and the striking miracles that had taken place on June 29, of the year 67. Later that evening, with profound emotion he shared the impressions of the day with his hosts, the De Maistre family.

On March 23 Don Bosco conferred at Ponte Sisto with several laymen about the proposed distribution center of *Letture Cattoliche* and other details of subscriptions, deliveries, and payments. He told them that the Holy Father had approved the center and that the cardinal vicar had promised his support. He then asked Father Botaudi to serve as distribution manager, and the good priest willingly obliged. The possibility of establishing several other distribution centers in various towns of the Papal States was also discussed.

After settling this rather important matter, Don Bosco wished to examine the triumphal arches of Titus and Constantine leisurely. As he passed under the cone-shaped ruin known as the "Mèta Sudante," [2] he contemplated with admiration the majestic ruins of the Flavian Amphitheatre or Colosseum, an ellipse 1,719 feet in circumference and 159 feet in height for a considerable part of the structure. At the time of its splendor, it was faced with marble and adorned with colonnades, hundreds of statues, obelisks, and bronze *quadrigae,* with sweeping flights of steps leading to the various tiers accommodating some 200,000 spectators.[3] Don Bosco walked into the oval arena—282 by 177 feet—recalling the gladiatorial contests and the martyrdoms of thousands of Christians. At its center —amid stone ruins, weeds, and shrubs—now rose a humble cross, and around it were set the fourteen Stations of the Cross, at which Don Bosco prayed to gain the indulgence. After these devotions, he

[2] A fountain between the Colosseum and the Arch of Constantine. [Editor]

[3] Fifty thousand would be a more realistic figure, according to other sources. [Editor]

went to the Vatican, where he had been invited to dinner by [James] Cardinal Antonelli.

In Rome Don Bosco was a welcome guest everywhere, including dinners and social gatherings, because his jovial and easy manner endeared him to people. On such occasions, however, especially during his first few weeks in the city, cardinals and prelates subtly tested his erudition and his quick thinking. Blandly or adroitly, they would steer the conversation to various ecclesiastical subjects, in order to ascertain his intellectual attainments. On several occasions they quizzed him especially on church history—dates, events, the reasons behind the summoning of certain councils and their decrees, the biographical details of certain popes and their social influence, and the birthplaces and activities of the saints. Don Bosco always acquitted himself quite well.

On this particular evening of March 23, Don Bosco was engaged in after-dinner conversation with Cardinal Antonelli, when several prelates and other distinguished visitors paid a visit. Among them were Cardinal Marini, Cardinal Patrizi, and Cardinal De Luca, secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. At a certain point, Cardinal Marini asked Don Bosco what sights he had taken in that morning.

"The Colosseum," Don Bosco replied.

"Did you notice nearby the tombs of Saints Perpetua and Felicity, martyrs?"

"I doubt that there are tombs around there. I have read that Perpetua and Felicity were martyred in Africa. I should imagine they are still there, unless their bodies were brought to Rome and the fact escaped my notice. Does the breviary perhaps say that they were martyred in Rome?"

All glanced at each other with a smile, while Cardinal Antonelli, turning to Cardinal Marini, exclaimed: "It serves you right!"

Don Bosco was also asked if he was acquainted with pre-Christian Vatican antiquities. He had carefully read several voluminous works on this subject; for him, reading meant memorizing. Therefore, he began to speak expertly about Pallas and his exploits, and of his being worshiped as a god by the Etruscans who dedicated a small forest to him on the Vatican Hill. He told them that the word "Vaticanum" was derived from "vagitanum" because Pallas was the

protective deity of whimpering babies. He then went on to speak of the Vatican Hill at the time of the Romans, the circus built on it by Nero, and St. Peter's burial place provided by Saints Linus, Marcellus, Apuleius, and Anacletus, and he also described the origin and history of the Constantine Basilica.

Cardinal De Luca then urged him to tell them of the history of the Mamertine prison, beginning with the time of Ancus Martius. Don Bosco obliged, and he delighted the guests with episodes and details which the cardinal himself had never heard before. He found the cardinals so attentive that at a certain point he said with a smile: "I thought that only my boys were interested in my stories, but I see that eminent cardinals like them, too."

Cardinal Antonelli later told the Pope how they had sounded out Don Bosco, reporting his replies and his charming, learned conversation. Pius IX was greatly delighted.

On other occasions, however, Don Bosco adroitly turned the tables on fellow priests and monsignori. On one occasion, spotting ulterior motives in questions thrown at him, he started answering with a precision that was his own, and then, as the matter became more intricate, he asked a string of questions of his own. His opponent, after giving one reply, could hardly refuse a second and third. Unsuspectingly, the original questioner, caught off guard, found himself enmeshed in unforeseen but unavoidable arguments for which he was not prepared. Caught in his own noose, he had to gulp and say with a smile: "I'm stumped. I'm out of my field. I never went into this."

Don Bosco then quickly changed the topic, saying: "Our throats are quite dry after all this talking—parched, I should say. How about some refreshments?"

"Certainly, certainly," the hapless opponent chimed in, glad to be let off so lightly.

The valet then served the refreshments, while Don Bosco, with some pleasantry addressed to the valet, managed to divert the guests' attention and provoke some laughter as a face-saving device for his defeated opponent. Thus the evening ended on a pleasant note. Don Bosco did the same thing on other occasions when he wanted to channel the conversation into some other outlet without offending anybody.

Meanwhile, these Roman circles, realizing that he would not easily be entrapped by their questions, gave up putting him through his paces, so to speak. To their love for him now they added esteem and regard for his newly discovered virtues. One evening, when he was a guest of Cardinal Gaude or Cardinal Altieri—which one, we are not sure—and there were other prelates present, at a certain point the cardinal said: "Don Bosco, give us a little talk like the ones you give your boys."

"What do you mean?" Don Bosco said. "Preach to Your Eminence and to all these most reverend prelates?"

"Exactly!"

"Would it not be more proper for you to preach and for me to listen?"

"No, no," the cardinal said. "Preach to us just as if we were your boys."

Calmly Don Bosco began in Piedmontese: "My dear boys," and then went on for some time narrating an episode of church history, interspersing it with lively dialogues, proverbs, witty remarks, admonitions, reprimands, promises, queries, and exhortations. Half understanding and half missing what he said, the prelates began to laugh heartily, until the overwhelmed cardinal interrupted him, gasping: "Enough! Enough!" They had all experienced the wondrous power his words had on the hearts of youngsters.

Cardinal Marini, a venerable oldster who greatly esteemed and loved Don Bosco, had him to dinner several times and invited fellow cardinals and friends to join them for the evening. On his part, Don Bosco did not gain any feeling of self-importance because of all these attentions or honors. He entertained these learned and virtuous churchmen by telling them with obvious relish of his childhood when he took the cows to graze or hunted for birds' nests, and of his life as a farmhand at the Moglia farm or as a student in Chieri, when he had to work hard on the side to support himself. He had also spoken of these things to the Holy Father, and everyone admired his honest simplicity and humility.

These two virtues were constantly noticeable wherever he went. Father Leonard Murialdo said of him: "In 1858 I happened to be in Rome with a Turinese attorney. Seeing Don Bosco walking down the street, I excused myself for a moment and went to greet him.

When I rejoined my companion, he asked me: 'Who is that priest?'

" 'Don Bosco,' I replied.

" 'Don Bosco?' the attorney echoed. 'The one who takes care of hundreds of boys? I recall having seen him in Turin, but not knowing him, I was led by his plain appearance and humble garb to wonder who this simpleton of a chaplain could be!' "

CHAPTER 70

Holy Week in Rome

ON March 24, Don Bosco visited the Basilica of St. Clement to venerate the relics of St. Peter's fourth successor and those of St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch and martyr. He also wished to admire the architecture of this very ancient three-nave church. The sanctuary is enclosed by low screen-walls of white marble; it has an ambo or pulpit on either side—one for the Gospel, with an adjacent small column for the paschal candle, the other for the Epistle. Next to the latter is a lectern used for other Scripture readings. Behind the main altar, set around the apse, are seats for the priests; in the center, on a three-step platform, stands the bishop's chair. All these articles were taken from the original basilica which now forms the crypt of the new one. The walls of this crypt bear 4th-century frescoes of saints, later frescoes dating up to the 11th century, and a Madonna with the Holy Child on Her knee from the 9th century. How many Protestant errors Don Bosco saw refuted here in the monuments of this double basilica!

Don Bosco then went to the Basilica dei Santi Quattro Coronati to see the tombs of Saints Severus, Severinus, Carpophorus, and Victorinus, who were martyred under Diocletian. Next, he visited the Church of San Giovanni a Porta Latina, beside which an [octagonal] chapel marks the site where the Apostle John was immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil; lastly, he took a look at the tiny *Quo Vadis* Church, so called because it was there that the Savior appeared to St. Peter as he was fleeing Rome in compliance with the wishes of the faithful to escape the fierce persecution. "Lord, where are You going?" the Apostle cried in amazement. And Jesus answered: "I am going to be crucified again." St. Peter then turned back to face his own martyrdom.

After a glance at the Via Appia with its countless pagan mausole-

ums—mute reminders of the emptiness of human greatness—Don Bosco returned to his lodgings.

On March 25, the feast of the Annunciation, Marquis Patrizi took him to celebrate Mass at the Church of the Madonna della Quercia for several members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He heard confessions and preached. After Mass he talked to the boys [of the attached festive oratory] about establishing and developing "affiliated" chapters of the St. Vincent de Paul Society and about the good they would do. On leaving, he promised to return to their oratory some day.

A charming incident took place that morning. After crossing the Tiber, Don Bosco spotted some thirty children playing in a small piazza. Immediately he walked up to them. They stopped their game in amazement. Holding a medal high in the air, he said in a friendly tone: "It's too bad that I can't give a medal to each one of you. I have only one."

No longer shy, the boys stretched out their hands, each one shouting: "Give it to me."

"Just a moment," Don Bosco interrupted. "I'll give the medal to the best boy! Now, who is the best boy here?"

"I am, I am!" they all shouted.

"That won't do!" replied Don Bosco. "I guess I'll have to give it to the *naughtiest* boy. Who is the naughtiest?"

"I am, I am!" they again yelled.

A little distance away, Marquis Patrizi and his friends watched and smiled, deeply impressed and surprised at his ease in dealing with youngsters whom he had never seen before. In him they saw another St. Philip Neri. Meanwhile, like an old friend, Don Bosco was asking the boys if they had been to Mass that morning, what church they usually attended, if they knew of any festive oratory in the neighborhood, and if they had ever met Father Biondi. A sparkling conversation followed. Finally he told them to be good, and he promised that he would come that way again and bring each one a medal or holy picture. They all said a hearty good-bye and he rejoined his friends.

He still had that medal. He had not given the boys anything, yet he had left them happy and content. On that occasion, Marquis Patrizi recalled what the Blessed Sebastian Valfrè used to say: "We

must be smart, as the saints were, and sometimes resort to seemingly silly, unusual ways to catch simple-hearted folks. Later we can easily take them to listen to the priest and encourage them to perform good deeds that will benefit their souls, help their fellow men, and promote God's glory. Certain approaches—seemingly unusual—are particularly effective with the young."

That same day the Pope was expected at the Church of Santa Maria sopra Minerva to preside at the presentation of dowries to needy girls given by the Confraternity of the Annunciation. As a guest of [Francis] Cardinal Gaude, Don Bosco witnessed the imposing cortege escorting the Pope's six-horse coach and the love and enthusiasm of the crowd for the Vicar of Christ. He was present at the impressive ceremony, and several times he received the papal blessing. Though we have no documentary proof, it is very likely that Cardinal Gaude presented Don Bosco to the angelic Pius IX on this occasion. That same evening, Marquis Fassati, who had come from Turin for the Holy Week ceremonies, was a dinner guest of the De Maistre family.

On March 26, Don Bosco returned to the Caelian Hill to see the Church of Santo Stefano Rotondo, so named because of its round shape. The high cylinder of the church is supported by 36 columns. Hanging on the walls are paintings of the atrocious tortures suffered by the martyrs. The church is decorated with 7th-century mosaics of the crucified Christ surrounded by several saints. There is also a chapel with the relics of the holy martyrs St. Primus and St. Felicianus.

From Santo Stefano he went to see the Church of Santa Maria Domnica, so called because it is built over the house of St. Cyriaca [a name which in its Latin translation would correspond to *Dominica,* contracted into *Domnica*]. This same church is also known as Santa Maria della Navicella after the little marble boat in the church square. It is adorned with 9th-century mosaics, and its nave and aisles are separated by eighteen columns. One mosaic represents the Virgin [with the Child on Her knee] enthroned among the angels, and Pope Paschal I kneeling at Her feet. Don Bosco took some notes and then returned to his lodgings. Later, he received a visit from Canon James Anthony Colli whom he had previously met at the Rosminian residence. He had dined several times with these

good religious, who were dear friends of his, and he was on familiar terms with their superiors. For example, since they always discussed philosophical matters during meals, Don Bosco one day took Father [John Baptist] Pagani aside and remarked: "Don't you think that it might be better occasionally to leave philosophy out and give a little more attention to theology?"

"But isn't philosophy the foundation of and gateway to theology?" retorted Father Pagani. Don Bosco kept his peace and said nothing further, because he knew that the priest was also well versed in theology. But Father Pagani was a little disturbed by his comment, and he mentioned it to Rua, explaining his viewpoint.

Rua had won his esteem and that of the other religious in the house by his edifying piety, and especially by his prudence; they all hoped that one day both he and Don Bosco would join their congregation. Word of this had also reached Rome, and prominent people congratulated the young cleric for his alleged intention. On his part, Rua always managed to bow out of the predicament gracefully with a pat answer: "I depend on Don Bosco, and I'll do what he says." Don Bosco certainly had no such thoughts. One evening, as a gesture of confidence in Father Pagani, he had Rua take the manuscript of the constitutions of the Salesian Society to the Rosminian superior general with a request that he kindly examine them and give an opinion. Father Pagani read the manuscript and returned it to Don Bosco with a letter, also by way of Rua, saying that he had been impressed by it and had found nothing amiss. So laconic a reaction showed how unpleasant and unexpected this revelation had been. A certain coolness soon made Rua aware of this fact although he still was received with the most gracious hospitality.

On Saturday, March 27, the day before Palm Sunday, Don Bosco, the De Maistre family, and their household went on pilgrimage to Our Lady's shrine in Genazzano. That morning Don Bosco had gone to the Church of Sant'Agostino to say Mass. The altarpiece is a Byzantine Madonna [allegedly] brought to Rome by Greeks from the Church of St. Sophia in Constantinople during the Turkish invasion. After venerating the relics of St. Monica and visiting the room—now a crypt—where St. Luke wrote his Gospel, Don Bosco was invited by the Augustinian Fathers of the adjacent monastery to visit their shrine at Genazzano, near Palestrina, re-

nowned for an effigy of Our Lady of Good Counsel which had appeared miraculously on the wall during the pontificate of Paul II. This effigy had disappeared from Scutari (Albania) at the time of the Mohammedan invasion, and for many years Albanians had been coming to venerate it, tearfully begging Our Lady to return to them.

Therefore, Don Bosco went to Genazzano. The superior general of the Augustinian Hermits saw to it that he and his party were received most courteously. After saying Mass and giving Holy Communion to his little group, Don Bosco spent a few happy hours there and then returned to Rome by nightfall.

The Holy Father wanted Don Bosco to have the opportunity of attending the solemn and impressive Holy Week services in St. Peter's. He therefore instructed Monsignor Borromeo to send him an invitation in the Pope's name and to reserve a proper place for him. The monsignor sought him throughout the city, but Don Bosco was out of town. Finally, very late at night, the Vatican messenger returned to the De Maistre apartment and was told that Don Bosco had already retired. When he said that he had a message from the Pope, he was ushered in and handed Don Bosco the invitation entitling him to receive a blessed palm from the hands of the Holy Father. Don Bosco read it immediately and exclaimed that he would certainly go with great pleasure. There was also an invitation for the cleric Rua.

On the following day, Sunday, March 28, Don Bosco and Rua got to St. Peter's hours before services began. Count Charles De Maistre escorted them to the diplomats' section where Don Bosco and Rua had reserved seats. Don Bosco paid strict attention, for he knew how important these rituals were. At his side was a Protestant English nobleman who seemed impressed by the solemn rites. At a certain moment a soprano of the Sistine Chapel Choir sang a solo so exquisitely that Don Bosco was moved to tears, while the Englishman became ecstatic. When it was over, the latter turned to Don Bosco, exclaiming: "*Post hoc, Paradisus* [After this, Paradise]." Not knowing what language Don Bosco spoke, he had used Latin. Not long afterward, this nobleman became a Catholic, was ordained a priest, and eventually was consecrated a bishop.

The celebrant of the Mass was Alexander Cardinal Bernabò,

Prefect of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith. After the Pope had blessed the palms, the diplomatic corps filed in turn toward his throne to receive them from his hands. Don Bosco and Rua also knelt at his feet and received their palm. This privilege had been Pius IX's idea. After all, was not Don Bosco an ambassador of the Most High? Later, when he was back at the home of the Rosminians, Rua offered his palm to Father Pagani, who was appreciative of the gesture and the gift.

To enable Don Bosco to have a close look at all the Holy Week services, even those in the Sistine Chapel, Cardinal Marini, one of the two cardinal assistant deacons at the throne, appointed him his trainbearer. Thus, vested in purple, Don Bosco stood quite close to the Pope throughout all the services and thoroughly enjoyed the Gregorian chant and the polyphony of Allegri and Palestrina. On Maundy Thursday the Mass was offered by Mario Cardinal Mattei, the oldest of the suburban bishops, rather than by the cardinal deacon of the Sacred College, because the latter was unable to officiate. Don Bosco followed the Pope as he carried the Blessed Sacrament processionally to the repository in the Cappella Paolina and again to the balcony from which all Rome awaited his solemn blessing. In addition, he was present at the Washing of Feet of thirteen priests, also done by the Pope, and at the commemorative supper that followed at which they were waited on by the Vicar of Jesus Christ himself. These two services were held in two spacious galleries of the Vatican.

As regards Good Friday, we found some information in a booklet published in Paris in 1883 under the title *Dom Bosco à Paris par un ancient Magistrat*. On page 66 we read:

> On Good Friday [April 2, 1858], a French magistrate was kneeling beside a priest in the Cappella Paolina in Rome in adoration of the Eucharistic Jesus in the repository. An Italian friend who was accompanying the magistrate said to him as they were leaving: "You had a saint beside you—Don Bosco. He is the St. Vincent de Paul of Turin."
>
> But not of Turin only. Of Italy, too, and, God willing, of the whole world!

After some time in adoration, Don Bosco resumed his office of trainbearer to Cardinal Marini. The celebrant on Good Friday was

Gabriel Cardinal Ferretti, Grand Penitentiary, and on Holy Saturday it was Francis Cardinal Gaude.

On April 4, artillery salvos announced the dawn of Easter from Castel Sant'Angelo. Around ten o'clock in the morning, Pius IX entered the basilica on the *sedia gestatoria* to sing the Mass and give the customary blessing *urbi et orbi* from St. Peter's balcony. After Mass the cortege of bishops and cardinals wound its way up to the central balcony.

Together with Cardinal Marini and a bishop, Don Bosco stood for a moment near the richly draped balcony railing on which three golden papal tiaras were displayed. The cardinal whispered to Don Bosco: "Just look!" Don Bosco was dumbfounded. A crowd of 200,000 people, eyes riveted on the balcony, thronged the piazza. The roofs, windows, and terraces of all nearby buildings were equally crowded. A French army contingent occupied part of the area between the obelisk and the basilica steps, while papal infantry battalions were lined up to the right and left. Behind them stood cavalry and artillery detachments. Thousands of carriages were packed in the two side wings of the piazza near Bernini's colonnades and in front of the buildings in the background. Groups of people stood up in the carriages—especially in those hired for the occasion —and they seemed to tower above the crowd. It was a spectacle beyond description.

When Don Bosco had started moving with the cortege, the Pope was still venerating the precious relics on display, and he thought that it would be some time before the Holy Father would reach the balcony. He was so completely absorbed in contemplating that immense crowd from all nations that he did not notice that both Cardinal Marini and the bishop had disappeared. When he turned, he found himself wedged between the shafts of the *sedia gestatoria* and the railing of the balcony—a fine predicament! Cardinals, bishops, masters of ceremonies, and chairbearers stood solidly about, making it impossible to slip through their ranks. It would have been improper to face the Pope or turn his back to him, but it was an absurdity to stand where he was! Having no other choice, he edged along sideways, only to realize that now the tip of the Pope's foot rested on his shoulder. At that moment a silence so solemn fell on the square that one could have heard the buzzing of a fly. Even the

horses stood still. Perfectly poised and attentive to everything, Don Bosco observed that only a single neigh and the striking of the clock were heard while the Pope, who was seated, read several ritual prayers. Seeing that the floor of the balcony was strewn with branches and flowers, Don Bosco stooped to pick a few blossoms and put them between the pages of the book he was holding. At last Pius IX stood up. He stretched out his arms and, raising his hands to heaven, reached out toward the bowing multitude and blessed them. As he sang the blessing, his booming voice rang out solemnly and sonorously and reached up to the very end of the piazza and across the adjacent Piazza Rusticucci up to the Civiltà Cattolica building.

The multitude responded to the Pope's blessing with an immense, fervent ovation. Then Joseph Cardinal Ugolini and Cardinal Marini read the brief granting a plenary indulgence in Latin and in Italian. Don Bosco had knelt down for the blessing, and when he got to his feet again, the Pope was gone. Bells were pealing joyously, cannons fired salvos from Castel San'Angelo, and military bands filled the air with the blast of trumpets.

Accompanied by his trainbearer, Cardinal Marini boarded his carriage, but as soon as they were on the way, Don Bosco got car-sick. He put up with his discomfort for a while, but finally he had to tell the cardinal that he felt ill. On his advice, he sat outside beside the coachman, but as this too proved useless, he got down to walk. He was still wearing a violet cassock, and this might have invited attention and snickers if he had walked all by himself. Graciously, the cardinal's secretary, a very kind and understanding priest, got out of the carriage and walked with him to the cardinal's palace.

His momentary indisposition, brought on also by the emotions of that morning, soon ceased, but not so the hilarity of his many Piedmontese friends—Father John Tamietti of Cambiano among them—all of whom had seen him on that balcony. As soon as they met him, they said: "You surely made a hit up there where everybody could see you!" Unperturbed, Don Bosco showed them the flowers he had picked up as keepsakes. He dried them and kept them ever afterward as a precious souvenir of the day.

Might there not be a meaning to the flowers which Don Bosco

picked up at the feet of the Pope, and in the fact that the Pope's foot rested on his shoulder? We shall understand it better as our story unfolds.

The Pope's blessing did not mark the end of the solemn rites. On Easter Monday, Ludwig Cardinal Altieri celebrated pontifical Mass in St. Peter's; on Tuesday it was the turn of Charles Cardinal Reisach. Don Bosco did not want to miss a single one of these inspiring services that gave him a foretaste of heaven. We have reported them also because most of the cardinals mentioned were friends and protectors of our good father.

It was also during these days that Count Rudolph De Maistre, in order to show his esteem for Don Bosco, gave a formal dinner and invited the ambassadors of various European courts accredited to the Holy See. Among such people the greatest distinction goes to the one who can speak the greatest number of languages. Count De Maistre did the honors, greeting various guests in French, German, and Spanish. Meanwhile, Don Bosco listened silently, while all around him a lively conversation went on in various languages. Count De Maistre then addressed Don Bosco, who was sitting in front of him, and asked in Piedmontese whether that morning he had heard the papal choir and what he thought of their singing, particularly the shrill tones of a certain soprano and the moans of a bass. Easily and audibly, Don Bosco replied in the same tongue, interspersing his remarks with proverbs, witty asides, and jokes. This went on for some time, as he deliberately chose some of the strangest sounding words.

The guests listened wide-eyed with attention. None of them could understand a thing. Finally, someone asked the count what language they were speaking.

"Sanskrit!" he replied solemnly.

At first they were all taken in, but when they found out what it really was, they had a good laugh and cheered the language that had made its debut in diplomatic circles!

CHAPTER 71

Third Audience with Pius IX

ON April 6 [1858], in answer to his request, Don Bosco returned to the Vatican for a private papal audience with Rua and Father [Leonard] Murialdo. They arrived at the waiting room at nine in the evening, and Don Bosco was ushered in at once. Looking somewhat severe, the Pope asked: "Don Bosco, where on earth did you thrust yourself during the papal blessing on Easter Sunday? Of all places, right in front of the Pope, your shoulder propping his feet as though he needed Don Bosco's support!"

"Holy Father," Don Bosco explained quietly and humbly, "I was caught unawares. I beg your pardon if I offended you in any way."

"Dare you add insult to injury by asking if you offended me?"

Don Bosco scanned his face; the Pope's severe expression was not genuine, and a smile was beginning to break through. "What on earth got into your head to pick up flowers at that moment?" the Pope went on. "It took all the seriousness a pope can muster not to burst into laughter." Pius IX smiled broadly. Without further ado he benevolently went on to say that he had carefully examined the constitutions from beginning to end. Picking up the manuscript from the table, he handed it to him, saying: "Give it to Cardinal Gaude. He will examine it and in due time will contact you." Don Bosco quickly leafed through it and noticed that Pius IX himself had graciously jotted down some remarks and corrections.

The Holy Father considered passing it on immediately to a commission for study, but Don Bosco asked permission to experiment with the constitutions and resubmit them to the Holy See. Pius IX agreed and took this occasion to brief Don Bosco on the procedure he should follow to have his society and constitutions approved.

Don Bosco then reminded him of his several requests for personal

indulgences on behalf of some benefactors and promoters of sacred music. The Pope kindly assured him that he would see to them.

Thereupon Don Bosco requested a plenary indulgence for all the festive oratory boys to be gained on a day of their choice, and a papal blessing for those working in the oratories, for the distributors of *Letture Cattoliche,* and for the boarders at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Lastly, he requested special faculties for Father Morizio and Father [Felix] Reviglio. Pius IX graciously obliged.

"And now, Holy Father," continued Don Bosco, "please be so good as to give me a special message for my boys, a thought for me to relay to them from the Vicar of Christ."

"The presence of God!" the Pope exclaimed. "Tell your boys, in my name, ever to be mindful of it. Now, are you sure you have nothing else to ask? Is there something you especially desire?"

"Holy Father," Don Bosco replied, "you have graciously granted all my requests. I have no further desire other than to thank you wholeheartedly."

"And yet, I know you still want something."

Don Bosco was at a loss.

"Well, now," the Pope added, "don't you want to make your boys happy when you go back to them?"

"Of course, Your Holiness."

"Then, wait a moment."

We must say that, just before this, Father Murialdo, the cleric Rua, and Father Cerutti of Varazze, chancellor of the Genoa archdiocese, had been ushered in. They were surprised at the Pope's familiarity with Don Bosco and by the Pope's action, as he scooped up with both hands a goodly number of gold coins from a little safe. Handing them to Don Bosco, he said: "Give your boys a nice treat."

The effect on Don Bosco of such unexpected and exquisite fatherly thoughtfulness can hardly be described. Then the Pope very graciously turned to Don Bosco's companions, and after blessing their rosaries, crucifixes, and religious articles, he gave all of them a souvenir medal. They were deeply moved. After catching his breath, Father Murialdo requested a special blessing for the St. Aloysius Oratory entrusted to him by Don Bosco. Pius IX replied: "Looking after boys is a praiseworthy task. There were Apostles

who would have kept children from Jesus, but Our Lord thought otherwise. 'Let the little children come to Me,' He said, and this we must do. God abundantly blesses those who take care of children. Saving oneself while saving others is most consoling; confining one's efforts to saving only oneself is a mark of laziness."

"There is indeed a crying need for such zeal in our neighborhood," remarked Father Murialdo.

"Indeed!" concurred the Pope. "Everywhere, and certainly also in your area, where an unbridled press wreaks havoc. Regardless of origin, publications are spread far and wide because we have no Great Wall of China to block them. Last year, when I journeyed to Florence and Bologna, I had to confiscate thousands of booklets published in Turin and Milan."

Needless to say, these words were a powerful boost to Father Murialdo. He must have made quite an impression on the Pope because Pius IX did not forget this zealous young Turinese priest; even years later, in 1867, he asked Don Bosco about him.

The audience was now over. All knelt for a final blessing and began to leave. The Pope lingered with Don Bosco, encouraging him to persevere in his undertaking and to try out his constitutions. Again he exhorted him to record in minute detail everything he had told him of a supernatural character, and even things of minor importance if they had a bearing on his initial inspiration of the oratories. He repeated that this would immeasurably boost the morale of future members of his new congregation.

The next day the Pope personally signed the rescripts and had them delivered to Don Bosco.[1] During his last few days in Rome, Don Bosco, enlightened and encouraged by the words of the Vicar of Christ, analyzed the constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, deleting and adding to bring them substantially in line with Pius IX's suggestions. After Rua had recopied them, he took them to Cardinal Gaude who graciously read them through, since the Pope had intimated that this matter was very close to his heart. Then, too, the cardinal was familiar with the Oratory, having visited it the year before, as we have already stated.[2] Don Bosco conferred with him several times on the constitutions and received his wise

[1] A footnote reporting one such rescript has been omitted in this edition. [Editor]
[2] *See* p. 435. [Editor]

comments and advice. They both agreed to put them into effect for a time and then return them to him for submittal to the Holy See's approval.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had hastened to send to Turin the rescript granting indulgences to the promoters of sacred music, as well as the announcement of the Holy Father's blessing to the distributors of *Letture Cattoliche*. Both news items were to appear in the April issue.

Don Bosco also wrote to Father Alasonatti. We must remember that the custom of allowing clerics and boys to go home for the Easter vacation—if they so wished—was still observed at the Oratory.

Rome, April 7, 1858

My dear Father Alasonatti:

I have received your last two letters and what you tell me is fine. I am glad that the Washing of Feet was held. I highly commend the clerics for their zeal and docility in spending their Easter vacation at the Oratory. This prompts me to bring them back something special.

I have written to Father Picco and Father Belasio, as suggested. The spiritual retreat should be scheduled for Monday of the third week after Easter. Yesterday I had an audience with the Holy Father; his graciousness was overwhelming. He fulfilled all requests, including yours. Among other things he granted a plenary indulgence to all the festive oratory boys; furthermore, he gave me forty gold *scudi* to give them a special treat. Father Morizio and Father Reviglio also got everything they wanted. The audience lasted beyond forty-five minutes. Father Murialdo and Rua were simply overjoyed. I shall have such a lot to tell and so many presents to give—all of them blessed or donated by the Pope! We could not have wished for more. Tell the clerics and all the boys, boarders and day, to say a hearty *Deo gratias et semper Deo gratias.*

I had planned to leave today for Loreto, but the coach was full and so I had to put it off to Sunday evening. I expect to be in Turin next week via Loreto-Ancona-Venice-Milan. I shall send you confirmation from Venice, *si Dominus dederit* [God willing].

Please have someone pick up from Father Picco a page of material and bring it to the Paravia Press at once.

Encourage all our boys and clerics to trust in the Lord and tell them of the most fatherly blessing bestowed on our Oratory by the Holy

Father yesterday. Please give the enclosed notes to those concerned. May God keep you in good health and help you to fulfill His holy will in all things. Amen.

Your ever affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Father Alasonatti gave the enclosed messages to the boys. Only one letter to a student has come down to us. The way Don Bosco prefixed the boy's name was a strong hint of his vocation. The note was addressed to "The *Cleric* Garbarino, Avigliana."

My dear Garbarino:

I was very glad to hear from you. Your desire to see me back soon makes me love you all the more in the Lord. Meanwhile, be cheerful, and think of adorning your heart as a gift to the Lord. This is exactly what you will be doing when you don the clerical habit. We will see to this as soon as I get back to Turin. Pray for this intention, and also say a prayer for me.

Affectionately yours,

Fr. John Bosco

The rescript had reached Turin as the Paravia Press was finishing the April issue of *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *Mary's Month* by Father John Bosco. The booklet explained the benefits of this pious practice, listed the annexed indulgences, and suggested daily pious practices and evening family devotions in Mary's honor. It contained thirty-three short readings on doctrinal and moral topics, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, the Church, the Vicar of Christ, and bishops. Each reading was followed by a brief invocation and a suitable story—often an example of Mary's motherly solicitude for sinners. One of them was taken from *L'Amico della Gioventù* [The Friend of Youth].[3] This shows that one of Don Bosco's aims in publishing that little journal was to extol the glories of Mary. In this booklet, on the 24th of the month,[4] Don Bosco mentioned the

[3] *See* Vol. III, pp. 339ff. [Editor]

[4] A Salesian monthly commemoration of the feast of Mary, Help of Christians which falls on the 24th of May. [Editor]

anniversary of Dominic Savio's holy death. The last item in this issue suggested the offering of one's heart to Mary.

As Don Bosco had ordered, enclosed with this issue were the announcements of the Pope's blessing and the text of the rescript granting the various indulgences.[5]

As a follow-up to the rescript, the May issue, entitled *Indulgences, a Treasure for the Faithful,* explained the nature of indulgences, their value to us and to the souls in purgatory, and the manner of gaining them. The doctrinal part refuted Protestant errors and gave a reasoned presentation of indulgenced prayers and devotions.

As Don Bosco was winding up his affairs at Rome and at the same time keeping things moving in Turin, the editorial staff of *La Civiltà Cattolica,* in Piazza Borgo Nuovo 66, sent him the following note:

Rome, April 8, 1858

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

The Fathers of *La Civiltà Cattolica* request the pleasure of your company at their humble table on Low Sunday. Yes, you must eat your last Easter egg with us!

Dear Don Bosco, please extend my apologies to the De Maistre family, and ask them in their charity to forgive my serious offense of not visiting them at Easter, not even Mary, my spiritual daughter whom I prepared for First Holy Communion.

I am really getting to be a doting old man. I have not been doing much walking. Coming to the Quirinal is like walking to the end of the earth, but I'll make it. Please also give my best wishes to the Countess and to Celina. Pray for your,

Affectionate and devoted servant,

Fr. Anthony Bresciani, S.J.

Don Bosco honored the invitation and spent a most enjoyable day. These learned priests milling about had the simplicity and friendliness of children. Their superior general was there, too.

Later that day, several Dominicans dropped in, and before long

[5] Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

the conversation strayed to an ancient feud between the two Orders. Don Bosco kept silent. Realizing that the discussion might climax in a hot dispute, the Jesuit superior general intervened. "Let's refer the matter to a judge. Don Bosco is here. Let him decide."

Don Bosco demurred, but everyone insisted that he give an opinion. After a brief preamble, he said: "My opinion is that it would be better to drop the subject altogether."

This was not really what the parties wanted to hear, but it ended the argument. Don Bosco was very well acquainted with the nature of the feud, but what other answer was he to give without stirring animosity?

Since he was about to return to Turin, he took this occasion to say good-bye to the Jesuit Fathers. The next few days he did the same with the many distinguished persons who had befriended him. He also called on Philip Foccardi, whose friendship he maintained after his return to Turin. In fact, when friends or acquaintances were bound for Rome, Don Bosco would give them a calling card with the address of Foccardi's religious articles store. On the back he would jot: "Best wishes from your friend, Don Bosco."

Nor did he forget the boys of the Oratory of Santa Maria della Quercia, or Father Biondi's boys at the Assunta Oratory. On Easter morning he went to prepare the latter for Holy Communion, while on Low Sunday he returned to Santa Maria della Quercia with Marquis Patrizi to say Mass, preach, and bid a final good-bye to the boys for the last time.

Among the cardinals he visited on his farewell tour was Cardinal Tosti who, on a previous occasion, had asked him to speak to the boys of St. Michael's Hospice. The cardinal was gratified by Don Bosco's parting visit, and since it was time for his daily ride, he asked Don Bosco to join him. On the way, they began to talk of the best educational system for boys. Don Bosco was more than ever convinced that the pupils in that hospice kept aloof from their superiors and actually feared them—a very regrettable situation since the superiors were priests. Their discussion went more or less as follows:

"Your Eminence, it is impossible to form boys well if they have no trust in their superiors."

"How is one to win this trust?" the cardinal asked.

"By trying to attract them and by eliminating whatever alienates them."

"How can we attract them to us?"

"By going to them first, by trying to adapt to their tastes, by becoming like them. Would you like a demonstration? Tell me: where are we likely to find a large crowd of boys?"

"In Piazza Termini, or Piazza del Popolo," the cardinal answered.

"Good; then let's go to Piazza del Popolo."

Once there, Don Bosco alighted from the carriage while the cardinal stayed to watch. Spotting a group of boys playing, Don Bosco went up to them, only to see them take to their heels. He called them back in a kindly voice. After a little hesitation, they came up to him. Don Bosco gave them some small things and asked them about their families and their game. He told them to go on with it while he watched or even joined in. Other boys who had been observing this at a distance came running over in great numbers from all sides. Don Bosco greeted them affectionately, and for them too he had a good word and some little gift. He asked them if they were good, if they said their prayers, and if they went to confession. When he turned to leave, they followed him and would only let him go when he got into the carriage again. The cardinal was amazed.

"Did you see?" Don Bosco asked him.

"You were right!" he exclaimed.

However, this demonstration did not seem to alter his belief that the system then in force at St. Michael's Hospice was necessary. The cardinal was the authoritarian type; he must have been firmly convinced that confidence and respect could not coexist. As a matter of fact, Pius IX, acting on Don Bosco's impressions of St. Michael's Hospice, had summoned several of its officers. Their reports further convinced him that some reform was called for in order to remedy at least the more serious troubles, but Cardinal Tosti, despite his loving and zealous management of that hospice, had been like a stone wall and nothing could be done.

Meanwhile, not a single day had gone by between March 28 and April 13 that Don Bosco had failed to visit some famous Marian shrines, relics of saints, or memorials of the triumphs of our Faith —the Basilicas of the Holy Apostles and of St. Agnes, and the

Church of St. Ignatius where he prayed before the magnificent altar holding the precious remains of St. Aloysius Gonzaga.

His last visits were to the Confession of St. Peter and to the catacombs of St. Sebastian and St. Callistus. After praying in St. Sebastian's Basilica and looking at two of the arrows which had pierced the saintly tribune and the pillar to which he had been tied, he went down into the catacombs guarding the bones of thousands upon thousands of martyrs. Here St. Philip Neri used to spend nights in vigilant prayer. Don Bosco next visited the catacombs of St. Callistus, where he was probably met by Giovanni Battista De Rossi, their discoverer, to whom he had already been introduced by Archbishop San Marzano.

Visiting the catacombs is an unforgettable, moving experience. Don Bosco was absorbed in holy thoughts as he walked through the narrow underground corridors where the early Christians attended Mass, prayed and sang, received Holy Communion, listened to bishops and popes, and drew strength to face martyrdom. It is impossible to view impassively the niches where the bleeding or burnt bodies of so many heroes of our Faith were laid to rest or to look unemotionally at the tombs of St. Cecilia and of fourteen popes who gave their lives in witness to what they taught. Don Bosco noticed the many ancient frescoes with their symbols of Christ and the Eucharist, the charming portrayals of Mary's betrothal to Joseph, Her assumption into heaven, or other representations of the Blessed Virgin holding the Child Jesus in Her arms or on Her knee. He was enthralled by the modesty shining through these effigies—resplendent examples of early Christian art, which had been able to capture the incomparable beauty of the soul and the supreme ideal of moral perfection that must be attributed to the Blessed Virgin. He also took notice of many engravings of saints and martyrs.

Don Bosco had entered the catacombs at eight in the morning. When he came out it was six in the evening. The only break had been a light lunch with the religious who were custodians of the catacombs.

CHAPTER 72

Return to Turin

AT long last, Don Bosco left Rome with Rua on April 14 [1858], delighted at having laid the foundations of the Society of St. Francis de Sales and having ensured the present and future welfare of countless homeless boys. He preferred to travel by land, but, due to the overwhelming number of Holy Week visitors, no seats were available on stagecoaches along his route. Therefore, he had no choice but to go by sea despite the ordeal he had endured on his trip to Rome. Accordingly he rented a carriage for the trip to Civitavecchia.

He made a brief halt at Palo and found the innkeeper completely recovered from his malaria. His cure had been instantaneous, and he never forgot this signal favor. Many years later—in 1875 or 1876—while on a business trip to Genoa, he continued on to Turin after ascertaining by telegram that Don Bosco was there. That day, however, Don Bosco was having dinner with Mr. Charles Occelletti.[1] The innkeeper went there at once and most warmly greeted Don Bosco. Mr. Occelletti always enjoyed recalling the innkeeper's narration of that cure.

At Civitavecchia Don Bosco paid a courtesy call on the papal delegate and then boarded his ship. A Piedmontese priest who met him aboard wrote to us on March 12, 1891, giving us some precious information:

I arrived at Civitavecchia from Constantinople on a French mail boat. That evening, among the many passengers who came aboard were several priests. By the shape of their hats I knew they were Piedmontese. Two of them seemed more approachable than the rest. Not daring to start a conversation with the elder of the two, I asked the younger one—

[1] The landowner of the St. Joseph's Oratory in Borgo San Salvatore. [Editor]

the cleric Rua—who his venerable and friendly looking companion was. I found out it was Don Bosco whom I knew only by reputation. I attempted to kiss his hand in homage but he withdrew it, refusing me this honor and pleasure. We talked of many things, as will happen when compatriots meet. Night came and the passengers began retiring to their cabins. Either because there was no room for him in the cabins or because he suffered from seasickness, Don Bosco stretched out on the bare deck along the railing to sleep. We were already out at sea. I felt so sorry for him that I offered him my own berth, but he would not accept it, though he thanked me warmly. Since I could not bear to think of that good priest lying on the deck in the open air, I went to my cabin, got my mattress, and brought it out to him. I had quite a time persuading him to use it.

This lucky meeting gained me Don Bosco's friendship. He was a model priest, and I saw with my own eyes why he was held in such high repute even in Constantinople—his admirable self-effacement and simplicity.

Father Matthew Abrate

Chaplain at Sesseno near Carignano

This time, thanks to a smooth sea and mild weather, Don Bosco was able to get off the boat at Leghorn and visit friends and churches. The ship weighed anchor again in the evening. Father Rua recalls that on reaching Genoa the next day, a splendid dawn illumined the magnificent panorama of that superb city. Don Bosco and Rua went straight to Father Montebruno's hospice where they met him and Mr. Joseph Canale; in the afternoon they boarded a train for Turin. In crossing the city Don Bosco experienced a pleasant surprise. When the church bells sounded the *Angelus,* many people, even railroad porters, doffed their hats or caps and stood to recite the *Angelus.* He mentioned this scene often to edify his pupils.

He arrived in Turin on April 16 and was greeted by his boys with such rejoicing and affection that no father could have wished for a better welcome from his sons.

The following day he busied himself with matters that Father Alasonatti had set aside for his decision. That evening and the following morning he heard the confessions of very many boys, both boarders and day students. Sunday, April 18, the second Sunday

after Easter, had been reserved for a "welcome back" celebration that took place in the church, the dining room, and the playground. There was music, poetry, and the singing of a hymn especially composed for the occasion.

The rejoicing among the boys reached new heights when Don Bosco gave them the presents he had brought from Rome. Each of them received a copy of a booklet entitled *The New "Think It Over Well"* and a small crucifix—a gift of the Pope—to which was attached a plenary indulgence obtainable at the moment of death by kissing it and invoking the name of Jesus. The bookbinders received the medals donated by Pius IX, and the choirboys were given some sheet music that Joseph Buzzetti had explicitly requested by mail.

Then, that evening and on successive ones, Don Bosco told them, in words of the most tender gratitude, how graciously Pius IX had received him and granted him signal spiritual favors. He gave them the Pope's special message about ever being mindful of God's presence, and he told them of the golden *scudi* that the Pope had given him for a special treat for all the boys of the three oratories. They naturally applauded wildly. He also told them what he thought they should know about his visit to Rome. With a few members of his tiny group of co-workers he was more explicit, and he showed them Pius IX's notations to the constitutions.

Meanwhile, he lost no time in giving Father Cafasso the rescript so dear to him. Signed by Pius IX on April 7 [1858], it granted Father Cafasso the faculty of extending that indulgence to a considerable, though definite, number of persons. Among them were the priests taking graduate courses in moral theology that year at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in Turin.

On April 19, Father Cafasso, overjoyed at obtaining such a favor, substituted his usual evening lecture with an explanation of the new indulgence, pointing out its difference from similar ones, and its advantages. Tightly clasping the rescript, with heartfelt conviction he urged his listeners to listen carefully to his words, take note of them, and resolve to prize highly this favor lest they render themselves unworthy of it at the moment of death.

Don Bosco also gave a similar talk to his young boarders. He himself penned the following lines which we still possess and which were dictated to the boys so that each would have a copy.

On March 9, 1858, I was included, as a boarding student, among those to whom our Holy Father Pius IX granted a papal blessing in advance—that is to say, a plenary indulgence to be earned only at the very moment when my soul shall go forth from my body, so that I may thus be certain of flying straight to the arms of my God and enjoying Him for all eternity.

Thus prepared, the students of the Oratory began their spiritual retreat on Monday, April 26 [1858]. They were joined for the first and only time by the students of humanities and rhetoric of Father Picco's private school, who for quite some time now had been going regularly to Don Bosco for confession.

Father Anthony Belasio of Sartirana, a missionary, whose skill at drawing comparisons and narrating parables and historic episodes may be judged from his published works, preached the retreat. Several clerics, anxious to imitate him, asked him for tips on fruitful preaching. His suggestions were: "Converse often with the Lord, study and meditate a great deal, and associate with pious and learned persons."

Don Bosco, too, was busy during this retreat. Joseph Reano gave us a written report on Don Bosco's Good Nights:

One evening he asked [Charles] Tomatis: "Who are the three enemies of man?" It was a difficult question, but Don Bosco had asked it deliberately to draw everybody's attention. Tomatis and others gave various unsatisfactory answers. Finally, Don Bosco said: "The three enemies of man are: Death, which overtakes him by surprise; Time, which keeps slipping by; the Devil, who seeks to ensnare him."

Another time he asked young Fiorio: "Do you know which blessing man should strive for in this world?" When he could not give a satisfactory answer, Don Bosco said: "Blessed is he who has no remorse of conscience."

At other times he spoke of heaven, the possession of God, the enjoyment of the Blessed in seeing the angels, the souls of the saints, God in His infinite majesty, and the Blessed Virgin Mary. When he spoke of such things he carried his whole audience toward eternal bliss.

The retreat was very successful. For some time Don Bosco continued to talk of his visit to Rome, the Church, and the Pope,

particularly his goodness, his love for youth, and the highlights of his life.

But if Don Bosco cherished the memory of his days in Rome, he, too, had left an affectionate void in the hearts of the Romans, as we see from this letter of Marquis Patrizi:

Jesus, Mary, Joseph

Rome, July 1, 1858

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco:

It seems strange to reply in July to a letter dated May 22, but what was I to do? I did not receive your welcome letter until yesterday. Mr. Philip Foccardi brought it to me after it reached him enclosed in a letter from Cardinal Marini.

So much for that. I hope you do not mind, and that you will forgive my involuntary delay.

Now let us come to our favorite subject—the "affiliated" chapters of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. It's too bad that the one who suggested them is not here now; I am sure that he would be delighted to see them already in operation. Though still on a minor scale, they are promising and augur well for the future. We already have eight members, and they look after eleven boys who come regularly for catechism and recreation. Some of them, according to what their employers say, are behaving, and this seems to be due to the careful supervision of their young guardians. The boys are delighted with the booklets on which we record their conduct and their attendance at recreation and catechism. We stamp an "R" for the former, while the pastor marks a "C" for the latter. We have decided to award prizes every two months. It seems that we are off to a good start. Father Biondi takes interest in this "affiliated" chapter and presides over our weekly meetings.

The members were thrilled to learn that you remember them, and they hope to see you again soon. They will also pray for their fellow members in Turin. If at all possible, I would like to enroll them officially on the feast of St. Vincent de Paul so that they may gain the indulgences granted to our society. They, too, are very eager to do so. Pray that this undertaking may prosper, for it does seem that it will bear good fruit.

As you must already know, *Letture Cattoliche* will probably be printed here, and more economically than in Turin. The shipping costs were simply impossible

We have some excellent collaborators and can offer twelve 100-page issues at 30 *baiocchi* a year. The Holy Father has had a circular sent out to deans, urging them to support this association. We shall start as soon as we have three thousand subscribers.

Our staff writers are Canon Audisio, Father Paria, and Count Tullio Dandolo; in short, we have high hopes. I hope to come and visit you in the fall. Meanwhile, pray for me and for all of us who love you so dearly.

Father Biondi, Catini, and all our members wish to be remembered to you.

Your affectionate and devoted servant,

John Patrizi

Cardinal Marini, too, sent Don Bosco some news and information which he had asked for by letter regarding the Holy Week services at the Vatican:

Rome, July 27, 1858

Very Reverend Father:

I hope that my delay in answering your very welcome letter has not made you think I had forgotten you. The books you so kindly sent me and, even more, your outstanding qualities which I admired during your stay in Rome keep you in my mind and heart. I take great delight in speaking about you frequently, not only to my friends, but to other people as well, because I want zealous and virtuous priests to be known to all.

I am enclosing answers to your various queries and am grateful for the recompense you promised: your boys are to say a Hail Mary for me and I shall do the same for them so that they may retain and make fruitful the seed of the holy fear of God which you have planted in their hearts.

Please count on my humble service in anything I can do. My best wishes and highest regard for you.

Devotedly yours in Christ Jesus,

P. Cardinal Marini

Meanwhile Don Bosco and his co-workers, on whom he lavished worries and sacrifices, began to put into practice *ad experimentum*

the constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales as submitted to the Pope. As he had told them, he would be on the lookout for possible necessary modifications. By force of circumstances, this testing was to go on uninterruptedly until 1874, as proven by the many revised manuscript editions of the constitutions.

But all this was nothing compared to the many obstacles he had to overcome, the oppositions that sorely afflicted him, and the hard work it cost him. Yet he had resolved to achieve his goal, and he did. Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi told us: "Many a time I heard members of other religious orders exclaim: 'How can Don Bosco manage to found a religious congregation when existing ones are declining?' Some even went so far as to say: 'Had Don Bosco not performed any other miracle, his congregation would itself be an astounding miracle.' "

Bishop [John Baptist] Bertagna used to remark: "The constancy and firmness—inspired, it must be assumed, by genuine Christian hope—with which Don Bosco overcame countless difficulties in order to found his congregation were truly heroic and sublime. One can only marvel at the whole thing."

We shall conclude by saying that Don Bosco's faith in God was unshakable. He lived the words of the Holy Spirit: *Exspecta Dominum, viriliter age, et confortetur cor tuum et sustine Dominum* [Put your hope in the Lord, be strong, let your heart be bold, put your hope in the Lord]. (Ps. 26, 14)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

FORTY HOURS AND OCTAVE IN THE BOYS' ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES AT VALDOCCO

(See Chapter 7, footnote 3)

An octave in honor of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary will be held at this Oratory from May 21 to May 28 in order to obtain God's blessing on our people and crops.

Services for the first three days are scheduled as follows: several low Masses and a solemn high Mass at 10 A.M., followed by the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament and the opening of the Forty Hours' devotion. At 6 P.M., Vespers, sermon, and Benediction.

After the closing of the Forty Hours' devotion, the evening services will start at 7 with the rosary, followed by a sermon and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

On Thursday, May 25, the feast of the Ascension, and on Sunday, May 28, the usual schedule will be followed.

All the faithful, but especially the boys frequenting this oratory are warmly invited to attend. A plenary indulgence may be gained by all who, besides going to confession and Communion, visit this church during the Forty Hours; through a special decree of His Holiness Pope Pius IX, the same indulgence may be gained on Sunday, May 28 to solemnize the closing of Mary's month.

Appendix 2

SOCIETÀ REALE PEL PATROCINIO DEI GIOVANI LIBERATI DALLA CASA DI EDUCAZIONE CORREZIONALE

(See Chapter 21, footnote 7)

Turin, April 15, 1854

Subject: Instructions for Guardians of Juveniles on Parole

In conformity with the statutes approved by royal decree on Novem-

ber 21, 1846, all members undertake to welcome, place, supervise, and assist youths released from reformatories whom this society will entrust to them at the said society's expense.

A guardian's duties are:

1. To find a job for his ward in accordance with his wishes or as specified in the letter of notification, or else as the guardian will judge best when considering the boy's talents and inclinations after visiting him prior to his release from the reformatory, to which the patron has free access. (See *Regulations for Reformatories,* June 5, 1853, Article 132.)

2. To stipulate conditions and length of apprenticeship (not to exceed three years) with the boy's prospective employer.

3. To arrange, if possible, for room and board with the said employer or with some other family, bearing in mind that the society's contribution will be limited to eighty centesimi per day.

4. To acquaint the secretary general of the society with the terms agreed upon, so that as soon as possible, and not later than within one month from the date of release (during which month the disposition and ability of the released boy may be duly assessed), a contract may be drawn up between the society, represented by the aforesaid secretary general, and the prospective employer in the presence of the aforesaid boy and his patron.

5. To visit his ward periodically at his place at work and inquire as to his moral conduct, religious duties, and diligence.

6. To submit a report on the moral and religious conduct and diligence of his ward to the chairman of the employment committee (and through that committee to the secretary general of this society) on the first Sunday of each month for possible observations or admonitions.

7. To immediately notify the secretary general and the chairman of the employment committee should the boy commit some serious fault or run away.

8. To bill this society (on forms supplied by the society) on behalf of the employer for the room and board fees of the previous month, as stipulated.

9. To request clothing for the boy from this society when needed. Such requests must be made on forms provided by the society. It should be borne in mind that this society will provide only what is strictly necessary, the total cost per year (both winter and summer) not to exceed sixty lire.

10. To submit the requests mentioned in Nos. 8 and 9 to the secretary general for endorsement as required by the society's statutes. Payment shall be made by the treasurer of the society, the Ceriana Brothers, at their private domicile in Via dei Conciatori 14, on the main floor.

11. To suggest to the chairman of the employment committee what-

ever he feels may benefit his ward intellectually or morally, and also to recommend rewards or punishments.

The Employment Committee
by Cagnone
Vice President, Senior Member of the Society

Appendix 3

HANDBILL ON A LOTTERY

(See Chapter 24, footnote 5)

1. Proceeds of this lottery will help to defray expenses for the boys sheltered at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco.
2. The prizes are several oil paintings that will be displayed in a room of the aforesaid Oratory up to the date of the drawing.
3. Tickets bearing the Oratory seal and the signatures of two committee members are priced at one lira each.
4. The drawing will be held on July 12 in a room of the Oratory in the presence of the mayor of this city and the committee members. The total of numbers drawn will be equal to the number of prizes. (List enclosed.) The first number drawn shall win the prize marked No. 1, and so on consecutively. The winning numbers will be published in the newspapers.
5. Tickets may be secured from the committee or from persons who will volunteer their services to this charitable organization.
6. Prizes may be claimed at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales eight days after the drawing. Failure to claim them within three months will result in their forfeiture to the said Oratory.

The prize list and the names of the committee members authorized to sign the tickets were then given, followed by two declarations that were undoubtedly intended to set minds at ease:

Turin, March 21, 1855

The undersigned agrees to act as treasurer of this lottery and see to it that the proceeds are applied as indicated.

Count Charles Cays

Turin, April 9, 1855

The undersigned declares that the above-described paintings were unconditionally donated to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, and that said paintings shall be on display in a room of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales until the drawing for this lottery.

Rev. John Bosco

Appendix 4

MINUTES OF THE LOTTERY DRAWING

(See Chapter 24, footnote 6)

The drawing of the lottery on behalf of the boys' Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was held on July 11[1] in this year of Our Lord 1855, in the presence of Chevalier Mark Gonella and Father John Bosco, committee members for the aforesaid lottery. Also present were Count Alexander Broglia, Canon Joseph Ariccio of Carmagnola, and Mr. Anthony Beglia, the contractor.

In a wheel with separate compartments, counters were placed, numbered from 0 to 9, representing single units, tens, hundreds, and thousands. Since the number of tickets came to less than seven thousand, only the first six numerals were put in the compartment for the thousands. After turning the wheel to mix the counters, the drawing of the winning numbers was held at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales according to law and as described in the lottery handbill.

Canon Joseph Ariccio
Anthony Beglia
Mark Gonella

[1] Inexplicably this date contradicts the one that had been previously announced. *See* Appendix 3, No. 4. [Editor]

Appendix 5

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR SECUNDUS GURGO

(See Chapter 32, footnote 2)

The funeral procession will march in this order:

1. The Children of Mary in uniform.
2. Two curates from the parish. (They will bring their own candles.)
3. Four Oratory altar boys with candles.
4. Four torchbearers from the parish alongside the bier.
5. Guard of honor from the Oratory boys with candles.
6. The brass band.
7. The officiating priests.
8. Clerics holding torches.
9. Black drapes at the gate.

P.S. The parish is to donate all the candles to the Oratory.

Expenses: 55 lire for the sung Requiem Mass
10 lire to the Bureau of Statistics
1 lira to the mortician

Appendix 6

FUNERAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR CAMILLO GAVIO

(See Chapter 32, footnote 3)

The funeral procession will march in this order:

1. The brass band.
2. Cross-bearer, acolytes, and two curates.
3. Four torchbearers from the parish alongside the bier.
4. Oratory boys with candles.

The Requiem Mass will be sung.

Expenses: 40 lire for the Mass
1 lira to the mortician

P.S. The 10-lire fee to the Bureau of Statistics is not required because we alone took part in the funeral.

Appendix 7

RECOMMENDATIONS OF BOYS BY CIVIL AUTHORITIES

(See Chapter 35, footnote 1)

Grand Master of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus

Turin, February 7, 1856

[Reverend Father:]

While I plan to find out whether the annual subsidy of the Mauritian Order to your institute can be raised this year, in the meantime, knowing your charitable sentiments and your incessant efforts on behalf of poor boys, I would beg you to consider accepting Lawrence Vindrola, aged twelve, into your hospice. His father, Anthony Vindrola—formerly a handyman for our Order—died in the Saints Maurice and Lazarus Hospital last January 28. He is survived by another son, aged 21, a porter barely able to support himself. Under the circumstances he cannot give any help to his twelve-year-old brother, an apprentice shoemaker. In view of this child's unfortunate and unusual situation, I think it my duty to appeal to your kindness in the hope that you may possibly accept him at your institute. With the other boarders he can be taken care of and learn a trade to let him earn a living.

I hope that you will favorably consider this recommendation. I shall be most grateful if you will let me hear from you so that I may inform the boy. With the greatest esteem, I am,

Respectfully yours,
[Louis] Cibrario
First Secretary to His Majesty

Ministry of the Interior
Private Cabinet

Turin, September 25, 1856

Reverend Father:

Lest lack of clothes deprive poor young Romani Chiri of the benefits of a sound education at your worthy institute—which I myself recommended—I wish to contribute one hundred lire with the request that Your Reverence purchase for him whatever may be necessary.

Meanwhile, I am glad of this opportunity to assure you of my esteem.

Your devoted servant,
Urbano Rattazzi

Ministry of the Interior

Turin, November 3, 1856

Joachim Fissore, the head usher of this ministry, died recently, leaving an indigent widow with young children, including a boy of nine. Since this elderly mother is ailing and cannot provide for the boy's support and education, the undersigned recommends him to Your Reverence. The undersigned is well aware of the charitable interest that the Rev. John Bosco, director of the boy's Oratory in Turin, has for poor and destitute boys, and he sincerely hopes that the Fissore boy may be accepted there. The boy will be brought by his mother, the bearer of this note.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

Appendix 8

CIRCULAR TO DISTRIBUTORS AND SUBSCRIBERS OF LETTURE CATTOLICHE

(See Chapter 47, footnote 1)

To Our Promoters

This issue completes the fourth year of publication of *Letture Cattoliche.* On this happy occasion we must address a few words to you whose help was no less needed this past year in order to survive and make headway in spite of the difficulties of these critical times.

Most gratefully we thank Divine Providence for blessing our feeble and humble efforts, but we feel it is also our duty to express publicly our deep gratitude to you. We are indebted to our distributors for their solicitous and unceasing help in spreading *Letture Cattoliche.* In doing this they were motivated solely by their desire to promote the welfare of the common people—that dear and beloved segment of society for which we write—and by the greater glory of our holy religion.

Secondly, we wish to thank our subscribers. By their offerings they supported this undertaking which, though humble, is no less important than other widely known publications. Ours is not a money-making publishing venture; it is a labor of zeal and of religious and social charity, a labor for the salvation of souls.

Our purpose is to instruct and strengthen the faithful in Catholic principles, and to enlighten and attract the wayward to the observance of their religious duties with that kindness and loving charity so characteristic of Our Divine Master. We ardently desire to do some good, or at least to prevent some evil. We believe that among the affluent faithful not a single one can refuse us his effective support and assistance. We are convinced that if during the last four years we were able to put more than seven hundred thousand copies of *Letture Cattoliche* into the hands of the people, we could with the support of generous donors double this number in less time, especially in view of the immense needs created by present-day conditions.

Protestant societies boast of spreading their irreligious and immoral pamphlets among Catholics by the millions. Shall we Catholics allow them to have the upper hand? Shall we allow our Faith to be adulterated and abused and our morals undermined without making every effort to erect a dam, a barrier, to ward off such evil? We put but little faith in ourselves, for we are weak, but we pin all our hopes—after God—on our admirable bishops, the splendor and glory of the Church in Piedmont. From the very beginning we have placed this publication under their protection. To them, therefore, we appeal, humbly begging them to graciously sustain us with their counsel and prayers.

We also earnestly entreat pastors to promote *Letture Cattoliche* among their parishioners. Its success is largely in their hands.

We beseech our distributors who have already gained our gratitude to continue making every effort to spread this publication so that it may become known where it is now unknown. Lastly, we appeal to our subscribers to renew their subscriptions and secure new ones among their relatives and friends, so that greater may be the good for which we all labor and more bountiful the reward that we hopefully expect from God.

NOTE—The management has carefully studied the advice and suggestions advanced by our subscribers, distributors, and friends in regard

to possible improvements in contents and format. We shall always gratefully accept their friendly suggestions.

We earnestly request those subscribers who do not read the issues of *Letture Cattoliche,* either because of lack of time or simplicity of contents, not to allow them to gather dust on a shelf, but to pass them on to those who either cannot or do not subscribe but could benefit from them, since it is extremely probable that a reader will be impressed and helped by such easily understandable reading material.

Meanwhile, we announce that no more double issues covering two months will be published. From now on, each month will have its own separate issue.

Subscriptions may be entered either at the office of *Letture Cattoliche,* Via S. Domenico No. 11 in Turin, or with any one of the promoters designated on the enclosed list.

Appendix 9

LOTTERY REGULATIONS

(See Chapter 50, footnote 1)

1. Artifacts and handicrafts (embroidery, knitted wear, pictures, books, draperies, linens, articles of clothing, and gold or silver objects) will be gratefully accepted.
2. A receipt will be issued with a description of each object and the donor's name unless anonymity is desired.
3. All committee members and promoters are authorized to receive lottery prizes. These prizes are to be forwarded to the Gonella Building, Via Porta Nuova 23, for display on the first floor.
4. Prizes for the lottery will be accepted daily from 10 A.M. to 4 P.M., starting on February 23.
5. The number of tickets issued will be in proportion to the value of the objects donated in accordance with the law. They will sell at fifty centesimi each. There will be one free ticket for every ten purchased.
6. Tickets will be detached from a corresponding stub and signed by two committee members.
7. Prizes will be on display for three months, beginning in March. The date of the public drawing will be announced in the papers.
8. Winning numbers will be drawn one at a time. Should two be accidentally drawn together, they will both be put back into the urn.

9. As many numbers will be drawn as there are prizes on display. The first number drawn will win the prize marked No. 1, and so on.

10. Winning numbers will be published in newspapers four days after the drawing; prizes may be claimed four days after such notice. Unclaimed prizes will be held for two months, after which date they will be considered as donated to the lottery.

Appendix 10

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF LOTTERY PRIZES

(See Chapter 50, footnote 2)

Display Hall, Gonella Building
Via Porta Nuova 23
Turin, ...

"Whoever gives you a cup of water to drink in my name . . . he shall not lose his reward." (Mark 9, 30)

Very gratefully we acknowledge receipt of the following items from . . . . . .

These objects will serve as prizes for the lottery to benefit the three festive oratories for boys, known as St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and the Guardian Angel.

May God generously reward the well-deserving donors.

On Behalf of the Committee
Matthew Pesce

Appendix 11

REPLY OF THE MINISTER OF WAR

(See Chapter 53, footnote 1)

I compliment you for organizing a lottery on behalf of the boys of the oratories of St. Aloysius, St. Francis de Sales, and the Guardian

Angel. I gladly contribute by taking forty of the two hundred tickets you sent me. Payment will be forwarded.

I wish you success in your generous undertaking.

Very respectfully yours,
Alfonso La Marmora, *Minister*

Appendix 12

REPLY OF THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

(See Chapter 53, footnote 2)

No. 1585

Turin, April 29, 1857

To The Rev. Bosco, Director of Oratories for Homeless Boys

I am pleased to see that the three oratories mentioned in your lottery notice are among the many works of charity that so honor our country and those who have zealously undertaken them. This ministry is prepared to further, as far as it can, the development of the schools at these oratories, but the distribution of lottery tickets is beyond its competence.

I hope that the lottery will meet your expectations. While returning the tickets, I wish to express my profound esteem.

Giovanni Lanza, *Minister*

Appendix 13

REPLY OF THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

(See Chapter 53, footnote 3)

April 30, 1857

Having examined the program of Don Bosco's fund-raising lottery for the oratories of St. Aloysius, St. Francis de Sales, and the Guardian Angel, recently opened and maintained by the well-deserving Father John Bosco at Porta Nuova, Valdocco, and Borgo Vanchiglia in order

to shelter and educate boys of this city and of the provinces who could fall into trouble if left alone;

Having read the letter of the aforesaid Don Bosco urging the acceptance of four hundred lottery tickets at fifty centesimi each in order to lighten the financial burdens of the said three oratories;

Considering that without substantial public help—such as Don Bosco expects and upon which he greatly depends to maintain his charitable institutions—he would be unable to continue his work on behalf of the poorer classes;

Considering that this ministry—knowing the critical financial straits which have beset the Oratory at Valdocco upon which the other two oratories depend—has in the past come to Don Bosco's assistance;

Considering also that it is this government's policy to subsidize, as best it can, institutes of any denomination that undertake to educate homeless youths and help them to receive the moral formation which they could not otherwise obtain.

It is decreed:

That the sum of 200 lire, corresponding to the cost of four hundred tickets at 50 centesimi each, shall be granted to the Reverend John Bosco, director of the boys' Oratory in Valdocco and chairman of the above-mentioned lottery. This sum shall be drawn from the emergency funds of this ministry for the current year, and said tickets shall be returned to the Reverend John Bosco for the benefit of the oratories of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and the Guardian Angel, on whose behalf the aforesaid Don Bosco organized this lottery with praiseworthy zeal. The cashier's office is herewith authorized to proceed with the payment of the aforesaid sum of 200 lire to the above-named Don Bosco.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

The minister sent a copy of this decree to Don Bosco with the following letter:

Ministry of the Interior

Turin, April 30, 1857

The Minister of the Interior gratefully acknowledges the receipt of four hundred lottery tickets sent to him by the Reverend John Bosco to help the oratories of Valdocco, Porta Nuova, and Borgo Vanchiglia. He has ordered the payment of 200 lire for these tickets, but realizing that this lottery is yet another outstanding charitable undertaking of the Rev. John Bosco, the undersigned begs him to take back the enclosed tickets as a gift which the Minister of the Interior offers on behalf of the aforesaid oratories, as yet another token of his interest in their development.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

Appendix 14

CIRCULAR ABOUT THE LOTTERY OF 1857

(See Chapter 54, footnote 1)

Turin, June 17, 1857

Dear Sir:

I am pleased to send you a list of the great number of prizes that have been donated to the lottery for the boys attending our festive oratories in this city. I have every reason to thank Divine Providence for the generosity of so many charitable people. I am also happy to inform you that the Finance Office has set July 6 as the irrevocable date of the drawing. After that date I shall send you the list of winning numbers.

Time is running out and we still have a sizable number of tickets on our hands. I am enclosing ..... of them and appeal to your ingenuity—already so well-proven—trusting that you will do your best to support this charitable enterprise. If you are unable to dispose of these tickets and do not wish to keep them yourself, kindly return them before the drawing.

Thanking you with all my heart for everything you have already done and—hopefully—will continue to do for these poor boys, I assure you of my own deep gratitude. I shall not fail to exhort the boys who have benefited by your charity to invoke God's blessings upon you as you so efficiently assist in their civic and religious formation.

God bless you.

Very respectfully yours,
Rev. John Bosco

Appendix 15

FINAL CIRCULAR ABOUT THE LOTTERY OF 1857

(See Chapter 54, footnote 2)

"Almsgiving saves from death, purges
every kind of sin, and wins mercy
and life eternal." (Cf. Tob. 12, 9)

Turin, July 20, 1857

Dear Sir:

The lottery so often commended to your charity is now ended. I am glad to inform you that nearly all the tickets were disposed of and we were able to pay off rent bills, construction expenses, and other necessary and urgent outlays. I herewith enclose for you and your friends a list of the winning numbers.

I also wish to thank you for your trouble on behalf of this charitable enterprise. I assure you that God will generously reward you, for He considers as done to Himself what we do for the poor.

Before winding up the final details of this lottery, I would like warmly to recommend two things: first, that you continue your kind generosity to our oratories; second, that you perform another spiritual act of mercy by praying for me, for my co-workers, and for these boys, so that we may be able to obtain for them that greatest of all riches—the fear of God.

For our part we shall not fail to pray—and have the boys who have benefited by your help join in those prayers—that God will grant both health and grace to our benefactors, and that He may help us all to be together in the land of the blessed.

Very respectfully and gratefully yours,
Rev. John Bosco

Appendix 16

LETTER OF THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR

(See Chapter 56, footnote 7)

Dear Father:

In your letter of June 13, you told me that you were willing to accept Claude Ardi, a homeless young orphan, into your hospice. Since then, he and his sister have expressed the wish to be together at the Cottolengo institute. Both children were admitted there by Father Anglesio, the rector, on July 3. The undersigned would now ask you to accept in

Claude Ardi's place another unfortunate boy, William James Bertello, who has already been recommended to you by this ministry last June 19. Please advise on this matter as soon as possible.

Urbano Rattazzi, *Minister*

Appendix 17

LETTER OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY TO DON BOSCO[2]

(See Chapter 57, footnote 1)

St. Vincent de Paul Society
Secretariat of the General Council
Rue de Furstemberg, 6
Paris, July 18, 1857, St. Thomas Aquinas

Dear Father:

We are very happy to offer our moral support for your good works; we only regret our inability to assist you more effectively. We hasten to inform you that we are sending you the plates you requested. As soon as our layouts are ready, we shall send you proofs to enable you to make your choice. We shall then go to press without delay. We shall also send you a proof of the text as soon as it is ready.

Very respectfully yours,
Ad. Baudon, *President*
Paul de Caux, *General Vice-President*

[2] Translated from the Italian version of the original French.

Appendix 18

CIRCULAR NO. 1534 FROM THE FINANCE OFFICE

(See Chapter 60, footnote 2)

Turin, August 28, 1857

In reference to the survey of charitable institutions ordered by the Minister of the Interior, the undersigned requests the Rev. John Bosco, director of this pious institute, to fill out accurately the enclosed forms and give additional information that he may consider relevant for the correct evaluation of this charitable institute during the years specified in said forms. Mention should also be made of the institute's means of support.

[Charles] Farcito, *Intendant General*

Appendix 19

NOTIFICATION NO. 2021 FROM THE FINANCE OFFICE

(See Chapter 60, footnote 4)

Turin, October 26, 1857

Some time ago, the undersigned asked the director of this charitable institution for some statistical information to be incorporated in a general survey of all the charitable institutions of this province.

Since no reply has yet been received, the said director is again requested to supply the desired information or to notify this office of the reasons for his failure to comply.

Thank you for your cooperation.

[Charles] Farcito, *Intendant General*

Appendix 20

A REPLY TO THE FINANCE OFFICE

(See Chapter 60, footnote 5)

Dear Sir:

I am returning the forms you so kindly sent to us with your letter of August 28 and about which you inquired on October 26. We delayed

returning them because some of the questions did not seem applicable to our institute. However, my superior, the Reverend John Bosco, has instructed me to assure you that he is willing to cooperate and make all the necessary clarifications.

Please accept the expression of our deepest respect and gratitude.

Your obedient servant,
Rev. Victor Alasonatti

Appendix 21

REGULATIONS OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT SODALITY

(See Chapter 61, footnote 2)

1. The main purpose of this sodality is to promote adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist and reparation to Jesus Christ for the offenses committed against this most august sacrament by infidels, heretics, and bad Christians.
2. To this end the members shall make arrangements for some of them to receive Holy Communion every day. Each member, with the consent of his confessor, shall strive to receive every Sunday and holy day and once again during the week.
3. Each member will promptly and eagerly offer himself for any service connected with the worship of the Most Holy Eucharist, such as serving Mass, assisting at Benediction, escorting the Holy Viaticum, and visiting the Blessed Sacrament when it is exposed during the Forty Hours' devotion.
4. Each member will strive to learn how to serve Mass well, performing the ceremonies exactly and giving the responses distinctly and devoutly.
5. All members will strive to be punctual at the weekly meetings and urge others to do likewise.
6. The topics of the meetings should deal with Eucharistic worship —for example, encouraging others to receive Communion with the utmost devotion, instructing and preparing first communicants, helping those who need assistance in their preparation and thanksgiving, and distributing pious books, holy pictures, and leaflets.
7. After the meeting, some particular spiritual exercise will be selected to be practiced during the week.

8. Membership applications are to be addressed to the director of the sodality who will also serve as the regular catechist.

9. At the official reception ceremony, each new member will receive a copy of the sodality regulations and a medal of the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady to wear about his neck.

10. A secretary, elected by majority vote and confirmed by the sodality director, will record and read the minutes of the weekly meetings, prepare a list of the spiritual exercises referred to in Article 7, and keep an attendance record of members and applicants. Recording the names of new members in the official sodality register constitutes the essential act of their enrollment.

11. If any member becomes sick, the sodality shall offer up special prayers for his recovery. Should he be called to eternity, all the members shall receive Holy Communion at least once and shall recite five decades of the rosary and the Litany of the Blessed Virgin for the repose of his soul.

Appendix 22

REGULATIONS OF THE KNIGHTS OF THE ALTAR SODALITY

(See Chapter 63, footnote 1)

1. The president of the Blessed Sacrament Sodality will admit its more exemplary senior members to the Knights of the Altar Sodality upon application.

2. The members will obey the bell promptly.

3. They shall avoid noise on stairways.

4. They shall observe strict silence in the vesting room and pay attention to the reading.

5. No one shall take anybody else's cassock, biretta, or collar, or rummage through lockers. When in need of something, they should ask the person in charge.

6. Everyone is to obey the person in charge of giving out surplices and refreshments.

7. No one shall enter the vesting room outside of scheduled times.

8. In the sacristy everyone should keep his place and be silent.

9. In proceeding to the altar, affectation and haste shall be avoided.

10. During services all should be alert to the master of ceremonies' directions.

11. No one is to leave the sanctuary during services.

12. After the services, there should be no rushing down the stairs to the vesting room. Each one should properly put away his cassock, biretta, and collar and hand his surplice to the person in charge.

13. Anyone unable to attend a service should notify the person in charge in advance.

14. When going out for services, all should be on their best behavior.

15. There is to be no grumbling when some breach of order occurs, but the president should be notified.

16. Each member should strive to be a credit to this sodality by his conduct and frequent reception of the sacraments.

17. At his discretion, the president may expel any member who proves himself unworthy through bad conduct or in any other way.

18. The observance of these rules will ensure the overall edifying conduct of the members and the flow of God's blessings upon this sodality.

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

Appendix 23

FEAST OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, 1858

(See Chapter 63, footnote 2)

Last Sunday the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales held a joyful, yet solemn celebration. Horace taught us that *omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci* [all votes go to him who can blend the useful with the agreeable]. Who would have thought that Christianity could produce men who, under the sweet impulse of Divine grace, or, as others might say, through native impulse, would apply that maxim in all their doings not for the sake of human applause but in order to lead the multitudes along the road to heaven? One such man is the well-known Don Bosco who is deserving of the highest praise.

Those who attended the Oratory last Sunday, the feast of St. Francis de Sales, can vouch for the truth of our statement. The celebration program was such a careful blend of spiritual and recreational activities that the day passed by in a flash for that multitude of boys. First they

attended the Community Mass at which more than four hundred of them received Communion, their faces reflecting holy joy. Then they assisted at a solemn high Mass, celebrated by Father Ramello, who for approximately a year has been helping Don Bosco with great devotion and joy in the work entrusted to him by Divine Providence. The choir was entirely made up of Oratory boys, both students and artisans; all are good singers, and some of them are truly superb. Considering the natural restlessness of boys, it was truly inspiring to see them so recollected and devout, particularly in view of the scant supervision. It is an undisputed fact that this is completely due to the moral presence of their director.

In the afternoon the boys' rousing band selections and varied games kept the whole crowd happy and content. After Vespers, Bishop Balma [a missionary] baptized an adult Negro. His godparents were Count and Countess Clavesana, to whom he is indebted for his material and spiritual assistance. The bishop then spoke briefly but movingly from the altar to the large and devout congregation before imparting Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Afterward he presided over the presentation of awards to both students and artisans. A remarkable aspect of this presentation was that the students thus honored had been conscientiously selected by the boys themselves. The band again entertained during the intermissions.

The award ceremony ended with the singing of a popular song describing the sorrow of the Romans at the departure of Pius VII. Charles Tomatis splendidly conducted the twenty-voice choir. The bishop then regretfully had to leave after giving his blessing. Undoubtedly he will long cherish the memory of this devout and joyous celebration; the boys, too, will never forget his wise exhortations and fatherliness.

The celebration was crowned with the presentation of a wholesome play entitled "Baldini"—the story of a good boy who, following the advice of evil companions, enters the path of crime and becomes a gang leader. At a crucial moment, the thought of his mother recalls him to honor and virtue. The long, spacious, gas-lighted study hall was quickly turned into an auditorium for the occasion. The young actors performed marvelously, the star being Mr. [Louis] Fumero, an alumnus. The play was followed by an epilogue. The scene portrayed a boy about to lay a wreath of flowers on a tomb. Slowly there materialized from behind the tomb a white figure, the ghost of Vinciguerra. Holding up a torch, Vinciguerra—impersonated by Charles Tomatis—lamented in throbbing, plaintive tones the sterile tribute of flowers and tears.

In this way, blending *utile dulci,* within the same day Don Bosco wisely and lovingly blended spirituality and joy for all these youths whom he loves as sons and who in turn love him as a father.

(*L'Armonia,* Thursday, February 4, 1858)

Appendix 24

REVIEW OF "THE LENTEN SEASON"

(See Chapter 63, footnote 3)

With this booklet, *The Lenten Season,* the author has succeeded in compiling the best material on this topic, after eliminating the abstruse or erudite. Those who know how difficult it is to present profound matters in simple language congratulate *Letture Cattoliche* for its timely topics and popular presentation, by means of which it combines instruction and relaxation.

Appendix 25

APPEAL ON BEHALF OF "LETTURE CATTOLICHE"

(See Chapter 63, footnote 4)

To Our Dear Distributors and Subscribers:

We dutifully thank our distributors for their interest in spreading *Letture Cattoliche* during this past year, and we are happy to announce that we shall continue this publication. Both orally and in letters, distinguished persons have encouraged us to keep this undertaking alive despite sacrifices of every kind. We trust that our good distributors and subscribers will continue their valuable assistance.

On our part, as we enter our sixth year, we shall try to improve both format and contents. For this reason we need the loyal support of our subscribers. Not only must they not desert us, but each must try to get one new subscriber. All it takes is good will and a little interest in our neighbor's welfare.

We are fully aware of the unfortunate fact that *Letture Cattoliche* is still practically unknown in many villages, whereas unwholesome and immoral publications have cleverly managed to penetrate those areas. We are deeply grieved that these brothers of ours are being fed poison and have no antidote. We therefore beg our brother priests to do their

utmost to publicize *Letture Cattoliche,* trusting that God will reward them and that society will be indebted to them.

Note: The management has taken into due account the always welcome advice and suggestions of our subscribers, distributors, and friends in regard to improvements in format and contents.

We earnestly request those subscribers who do not read our *Letture Cattoliche*—either because they lack the time or because the contents are too simply expressed for their taste—not to allow them to gather dust on a shelf, but to pass them on to those who either cannot or do not subscribe.

Previous issues may be ordered from our office in Via San Domenico 11, Turin. Bulk orders of fifty copies of a single issue will be awarded a bonus of ten more copies; orders of a hundred copies will merit twenty-five more. Postal fees will be charged to purchasers.

Appendix 26

EXTRACT FROM FATHER CAFASSO'S BIOGRAPHY

(See Chapter 64, footnote 2)

Father Cafasso's ardent desire to assure heaven both for himself and for others, without going through the flames of purgatory, led him to reflect that despite the many plenary indulgences that could be gained at the point of death, it nevertheless often happened that some died without them. The reasons were many—including lack of a priest for the necessary absolution, non-membership in a sodality enjoying the privilege, lack of indulgenced objects when death was imminent, and sudden death. Father Cafasso therefore conceived the idea of making a plenary indulgence possible at the point of death through an act which, once performed and not retracted, would remain operative until that last moment, eliminating the need of any further action on a person.

In his search for such an act which could intrinsically deserve such a privilege, he hit upon this one: "To accept whatever kind of death God would send in order to please Him and fulfill His holy will." Such a resolution would hold until revoked, according to the principle that an act of will is presumed to continue until retracted. Therefore, should death overtake a man in that frame of mind, it would be as if he voluntarily accepted that death then and there, thus performing the act to which this plenary indulgence was attached. That such an act is very

meritorious is clearly taught by St. Alphonsus: "Accepting death in order to please God and fulfill His holy will is a most excellent act of virtue." (*Vittorie dei martiri,* Vol. I, Reflection, No. 24) If merely accepting death to fulfill God's will is so meritorious, obviously much more meritorious will be the acceptance "of any kind of death" for that same purpose, since such a disposition must necessarily include any death, no matter how painful, ignominious, or revolting to human nature.

After having reflected at great length on these matters, Father Cafasso decided to petition the Holy Father to enrich with a plenary indulgence *in articulo mortis* "the act of accepting death under any and all circumstances ordained by the will of God, in order that His Divine will might be done" and that no other condition be required for gaining the indulgence except the making of such an act of acceptance once during the course of one's lifetime, and not revoking it before death.

Appendix 27

FIRST CONSTITUTION OF THE SOCIETY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES SUBMITTED BY DON BOSCO TO PIUS IX IN 1858

(See Chapter 56, footnote 6)

Throughout the centuries the ministers of the Church have solicitously endeavored to promote to the best of their ability the spiritual welfare of the young, well aware that the education imparted to them will in due time have either a beneficial or harmful effect upon society. Our Divine Savior Himself clearly attested to this truth during His earthly mission when, showing His predilection for children, He wanted them to come close to Him. "Let the little children come to Me." [Mark 10, 14] Following Our Divine Savior's example, bishops and—above all—popes have constantly promoted the sound education of youth by word and deed and have especially favored those institutions that dedicated themselves to this branch of the sacred ministry.

At the present time the need is greater than ever. Parental neglect, the distorted view of the news presented in the press, and heretical proselytizing demand that we unite in fighting the Lord's cause under the banner of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. We must preserve the faith and morals of

the young, particularly those who, because of their poverty, are exposed to greater spiritual dangers. This is the specific purpose of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales which was started in Turin in 1851.

Origin of This Society

In 1841, Father John Bosco, with the assistance of other priests and with the complete approval of the ecclesiastical authority, began to gather together the more derelict boys of the city of Turin in order to offer them some recreation and religious instruction. The Lord blessed these humble beginnings. In 1844, as the number of boys vastly increased, Archbishop Louis Fransoni authorized converting some rooms[3] into a chapel for the Sunday services. He himself came several times to administer the sacrament of Confirmation.

In 1846 the archbishop gave permission to admit to First Holy Communion any boy who attended the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, and he further declared that they could fulfill their Easter duty there. He also authorized high Masses, triduums, and novenas. This state of affairs continued until the year 1847 when, the existing chapel having become inadequate to handle the ever increasing number of boys, the St. Aloysius Oratory was opened with ecclesiastical permission in Viale dei Platani at Porta Nuova. Its purpose was the same as that of the first Oratory. When in 1849 even this proved insufficient, a third one—the Guardian Angel Oratory—was opened at Borgo Vanchiglia. Since the times were hostile to the Church, Archbishop Fransoni graciously approved the regulations of these oratories and appointed Father John Bosco as their director, granting him "the necessary and opportune faculties."

Many bishops adopted these same regulations and strove to open similar oratories in their respective dioceses. Soon a grave need was felt for day and evening schools for older boys, since the Sunday catechism instruction afforded them was inadequate. Furthermore, since many of these boys were homeless, it became necessary to shelter them in order to rescue them from moral dangers, give them a religious education, and teach them some trade. This is still done, especially in Turin, in the hospice attached to the aforementioned Oratory where the boys now number nearly two hundred. The same is being also done in Genoa in the Young Artisans' Institute directed by Father Francis Montebruno, which now houses fifty boys. The multitude of youngsters attending the festive oratories, the day and evening schools, and—in ever increasing numbers—our hospices have made the Lord's harvest plentiful.

[3] First at the Rifugio and then in 1845 at Valdocco in the Pinardi shed.

In order to safeguard the unity of spirit and direction so vital to the success of these oratories, a few priests banded together in 1844 in a sort of society or congregation, assisting each other by advice and example. They took no vows; they only promised to engage in those activities which seemed better suited to promote the greater glory of God and the welfare of their own souls under Father John Bosco as their superior. Nevertheless, the rules observed in practice were substantially as follows:

Purpose of This Society

1. The purpose of this society is to gather together priests, clerics, and laymen who wish to strive after perfection by imitating Our Divine Savior's virtues, especially through works of charity on behalf of destitute youths.

2. Jesus Christ began first by doing and then by teaching; so, too, shall the members begin by perfecting themselves in the practice of virtue, both interior and exterior, and by acquiring knowledge; then they shall devote themselves to the welfare of their neighbor.

3. The first work of charity shall be to gather poor, abandoned boys in order to instruct them in the holy Catholic Faith, especially on Sundays and holy days, as is now the practice in this city of Turin in the St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius, and Holy Guardian Angel oratories.

4. Since some boys are so neglected that, unless they are sheltered, every care would be expended on them in vain, to this end every effort shall be made to open houses in which, through the assistance of Divine Providence, they will be provided with lodging, food, and clothing. While receiving religious instruction, they will also be taught some trade or craft, as is presently being done in the hospice attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in this city.

5. Since young candidates for the ecclesiastic state are exposed to serious dangers, this congregation shall endeavor to foster the piety and vocation of those whose aptitude for the priesthood is especially manifest.

In admitting boys to study, preference shall be given to the poorest, since these would not be able to pursue their studies elsewhere.

6. Since there is now a need to also uphold the Catholic Faith among adults of the lower class, especially in rural localities, the members of this society shall endeavor to give spiritual retreats and spread good books, employing all the means which charity inspires in order to combat heresy and irreligion which under so many guises strive to influence the

less educated classes. At present this is done by holding spiritual retreats from time to time and by publishing *Letture Cattoliche.*

Form of This Society

1. All the members shall live together, bound only by the ties of fraternal charity and the simple vows which so unite them as to make them one in heart and soul in order to love and serve God.

2. Even after taking his vows, each member shall retain his civil rights —the ownership of his goods and the right to accept inheritances, legacies, and donations. However, as long as he remains a member, he may not administer his goods except in the manner and within the limitations imposed by the Rector [Major].

3. As long as the member shall remain in the congregation, the interest accruing on his goods shall devolve to the congregation. However, the superior may authorize the partial or total transfer of same to some relative or other person whose need thereof is acknowledged.

4. Even after taking their vows, clerics and priests shall retain their simple patrimonies or benefices, but they may not administer them or enjoy their fruits.

5. The administration of patrimonies, benefices, or anything else brought into the congregation is entrusted to the Superior General who shall administer them personally or through others and dispose of the annual interest as long as the member shall remain in the congregation.

6. Each priest shall hand over to the same superior the alms for Masses; all, whether clerics or laymen, shall likewise turn in for common use all moneys which may come into their possession.

7. The society shall provide each member with food and clothing and anything he may need in health or sickness. Moreover, for good reasons the superior is empowered to give money or whatever else is needed when he judges it to be for the greater glory of God.

8. The members are empowered to leave their property to whomsoever they choose.

9. Should somone fail to make a will, his property will devolve to those entitled by law.

10. The vows shall be binding as long as the member remains in the congregation. Those who, for justifiable reasons of their own or because so advised by their superiors, leave the congregation may be dispensed from their vows by the Superior General.

11. Let each member strive to persevere in his vocation until death.

Should anyone leave the congregation, he is not entitled to claim any sort of compensation for the time he has remained therein, nor may he take along anything except what the superior may allow. He is entitled, however, to take with him those things over which he retained ownership, but he may not demand any account of the fruits or the administration of the same for the time he has lived in the society.

12. Should it become necessary to open a new house, the Superior General shall first discuss its spiritual and material aspects with the bishop of the diocese in which the said house is contemplated. In opening new houses, the Superior General must abide by the rules that follow.

13. Every new house shall have at least two members, one of whom must be a priest. Each house shall be autonomous in the administration of its properties, but always within the limitations set by the Superior General.

14. The Superior General shall accept novices, admit them to profession, or dismiss them as he shall see fit in the Lord. But he shall observe that which is prescribed in the articles concerning admission and shall not dismiss anybody without first consulting the superior of the house to which the individual belongs.

The Vow of Obedience

1. The prophet David besought God that He would give him light to do His holy will. Our Divine Redeemer, moreover, has assured us that He came not to do His own will, but that of His heavenly Father. We make the vow of obedience in order to be sure of doing God's holy will.

2. This vow in general binds us to busy ourselves only in those things which the lawful superior will judge conducive to the greater glory of God and the welfare of the individual's soul.

3. In particular, this vow binds the member to observe the regulations of the hospice attached to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. These regulations, however, do not bind under penalty of sin, except in those things which are contrary to the commandments of God and of the Church and the orders of superiors commanding in virtue of the vow of obedience.

4. The virtue of obedience gives us the assurance that we are doing God's will. "He who hears you, hears Me; and he who rejects you, rejects Me," says the Lord. [Luke 10, 16]

5. Let each one then look to his superior as to a father, and obey him unreservedly, promptly, cheerfully, and humbly.

6. Let no one be anxious to ask for any particular thing, or to refuse it; but on perceiving that a particular thing is harmful or necessary, let him respectfully mention the fact to his superior and be ready to accept his decision.

7. Let everyone have full confidence in his superior and harbor no secrets from him, fully opening his heart to him whenever he should be asked to do so or he himself feels it necessary.

8. Let everyone obey without any sort of resistance, either in deed, or in word, or in mind. The more repugnant the thing commanded is to him who does it, the greater will be his merit before God for having obeyed.

9. No one may send out mail without the permission of his superior, or the superior's delegate. Likewise, incoming letters will be handed over to the superior who may read them if he so judges fit.

The Vow of Poverty

1. The essence of our vow of poverty consists in leading a common life as regards food and clothing, and keeping nothing for personal use without the superior's express permission.

2. This vow also requires that one keep his room in the simplest possible style, striving to adorn his heart with virtue rather than embellish himself or the walls of his room.

3. Let no one keep money in his possession or in the care of others, in the society or outside, for any reason whatsoever.

4. The superior shall make suitable provisions whenever a member has to travel, open or administer a new house, or perform priestly duties, and whenever other justifiable reasons exist.

5. Without the superior's permission, members are forbidden to seek or make loans, or to give away what belongs to them or to the house, not only to outsiders but even to other members of the house.

6. Should a member receive a donation, he must hasten to hand it over to the superior who will in turn give it to the procurator of the house for safekeeping.

The Vow of Chastity

1. He who devotes his life to the assistance of destitute youth should certainly strive to enrich himself with every kind of virtue. But the virtue

he should especially strive to acquire more than any other is the angelic virtue, the virtue so dear to the Son of God.

2. He who has not a well-grounded hope that he will be able to preserve this virtue in deed, work, and thought should not seek to join this congregation, for he would be exposed at every step to dangers. Youths who have already fallen victims to human passions often put a bad interpretation on words and looks, even when indifferent.

3. Great care should therefore be exercised when talking or dealing with boys, whatever their age or condition.

4. Conversation with women and even with seculars, whenever this virtue may be imperiled, must be avoided.

5. Let no one visit friends or acquaintances without the express permission of the superior who, whenever possible, will appoint a companion.

6. The means for guarding this virtue securely are the faithful observance of the advice of the confessor, the mortification and control of the senses, frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and frequent invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary, to St. Francis de Sales, and to St. Aloysius Gonzaga, who are the principal patrons of our congregation.

Government of the Congregation

1. The congregation shall be ruled by a chapter consisting of a Rector [Major], Prefect, Economist, Spiritual Director or Catechist, and three councilors.

2. The Rector [Major] shall be appointed for life. He has the right to propose or reject the admission of postulants and to assign duties to the members as regards both spiritual and temporal matters.

3. The Rector [Major] shall choose a Vicar among the members of the congregation, write his full name on a sheet of paper, seal it, and keep it under lock and key. On the sealed paper he shall write: "Temporary Rector [Major]."

4. The Vicar shall act for the Rector [Major] from the time of the latter's death until his successor shall have been elected.

5. In order to qualify for election as Rector [Major], besides having been exemplary in his conduct, one must have lived at least six years in the congregation and be at least thirty years old. Should the candidate be eminently qualified [except for his age], the ordinary of the place may lower the required age to twenty-six.

6. The election of the Rector [Major] shall not be considered final until approved by the ordinary of the place where the motherhouse is located.

7. The election of a successor to the deceased Rector [Major] shall take place as follows:

Eight days after the Rector [Major's] death, the Prefect, the Economist, the Spiritual Director, the three councilors, and the Vicar shall meet. If time and circumstances permit, the directors of the other houses shall also be invited to attend the meeting. After the recitation of the *De Profundis* for the repose of the soul of the deceased Rector [Major] and the invocation of the Holy Spirit with the *Veni, Creator Spiritus,* the voting shall begin. The one who receives two thirds of the votes shall become the new Rector [Major].

Other Superiors

1. The Rector [Major] shall determine the duties of the other superiors according to the need.

2. Nevertheless, the Spiritual Director shall have charge of the novices and will strive to his utmost to make them acquire and practice that charity and zeal which should inspire whoever wishes to dedicate his life to the welfare of homeless youth.

3. The [Spiritual] Director shall also respectfully admonish the Rector [Major] whenever he should notice neglect in his observance of the rules.

4. The [Spiritual] Director shall also watch over the moral conduct of all the members.

5. The Prefect and Spiritual Director shall be appointed by the Rector [Major]. The Economist and the three councilors shall be elected by majority vote.

6. The Prefect shall take the place of the Rector [Major] during his absence, and in all those things for which he was given special authority.

7. The Economist is responsible for the material administration of the house.

8. He should see to it that waste and unjustified expenses are avoided in the kitchen, workshops, dormitories, wine cellars, etc. When placing orders for work he should take care that it be done thriftily. For more important jobs and expenditures he must be in agreement with the Prefect.

9. The councilors shall participate in all deliberations concerning the

admission or dismissal of any member of the house as well as in all matters concerning the general well-being of the congregation.

10. When any member of the congregation is sent to direct another house, he shall take the title of Director, but his authority shall be limited to the house under his jurisdiction. At the death of the Rector [Major], he too shall be invited to participate in the election of his successor, and if the election has not taken place already, he too shall cast his vote.

11. Each superior—except the Rector [Major]—shall hold office for three years and may be reelected.

Admission

1. Upon receiving an application for admission [into the society], the Spiritual Director shall gather the necessary information regarding the applicant and pass it on to the Rector [Major].

2. The Rector [Major] has the option of presenting or not presenting such application to the chapter, as he shall see fit in the Lord. But if he does submit it to the chapter, a majority vote is necessary for the applicant's admission.

3. There shall be a probationary period of one year before a candidate is admitted to the vows, but no one may take vows before the age of sixteen.

4. The vows may be renewed twice for a period of three years each. After six years have elapsed, all members may either continue renewing their vows every three years or make perpetual vows—that is to say, bind themselves for their entire life.[4]

5. In order to be admitted into this society, applicants (besides other moral qualifications required by the rules) must give information about their previous conduct by submitting the following certificates: a. Birth and Baptism; b. Civil status; c. Solvency; d. Clean police record; e. Freedom from ecclesiastical impediments; f. Parental approval prior to taking vows.

6. The state of health of an applicant must be such as to enable him to observe all the rules without exception, at least during his probationary year.

[4] Articles 5 through 12 of this section already contain additions made by Don Bosco in 1858 and 1859. Probably some of these articles were suggested by Pius IX himself

7. Each applicant for the ecclesiastical state shall bring with him into the society: a. The same amount of clothing, at least, as required of the boys in the house; b. Five hundred lire to cover food and clothing expenses during his probationary period; c. Three hundred lire at the end of the probationary period before taking his vows.

8. Coadjutors need bring only clothing and 300 lire without any further obligations.

9. For reasonable motives the Rector [Major] may dispense applicants partially or in full from the conditions of Article 7.

10. Relying on Divine Providence which never fails to come to the aid of those who put their trust in it, our congregation will provide whatever is needed to each of its members in health and in sickness. But the congregation is bound to do so only for those who have already taken their vows.

11. All members are urgently exhorted to take great care not to form habits of any kind—not even the most insignificant. All should strive to keep their clothes and room clean and neat, and should earnestly avoid affectation and vanity. The garb most becoming a religious is his holy life and edifying conduct at all times.

12. Let everyone be ready to suffer, if necessary, heat, cold, thirst, hunger, hardships, and contempt whenever these may contribute to the greater glory of God, the welfare of souls, and the salvation of one's own soul.

Practices of Piety

1. The active life toward which our congregation tends makes it difficult for its members to perform many exercises of piety in common. They shall therefore supply for these by giving one another good example, and by fulfilling perfectly the general duties of a good Christian.

2. The weekly reception of the sacraments, a modest posture, a clear, devout, and distinct pronunciation of the words of the Divine Office, and modesty in speech, looks, and bearing, both inside and outside the house, ought to be the distinguishing traits of our members.

3. Each one shall make no less than a combined half-hour of prayer —mental and vocal—every day unless prevented from so doing by calls of the sacred ministry.

4. Every day the third part of the rosary shall be recited, and some time shall also be devoted to spiritual reading.

5. Friday of every week shall be kept as a fast day in honor of the passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. The last day of each month shall be a day of recollection. Each member shall make the Exercise for a Happy Death, disposing all his affairs, spiritual and temporal, as if he had to leave this world for eternity.

7. The Rector [Major] may dispense from these practices for such periods as he shall judge advisable in the Lord.

8. When Divine Providence calls away to eternal life any member—lay or priest—all the priests shall celebrate a Mass for him; the others will receive Holy Communion at least once to this end.

9. This same act of Christian piety shall be observed at the death of the father and mother of any member, but only in the house where the bereaved member resides.

Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam

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ABBREVIATIONS

D.B.	Don Bosco
D.S.	Dominic Savio
I.C.S.	Immaculate Conception Sodality
L.C.	Letture Cattoliche
M.M.	Mamma Margaret
M.H. of C.	Mary, Help of Christians
S.C.	Salesian Congregation

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