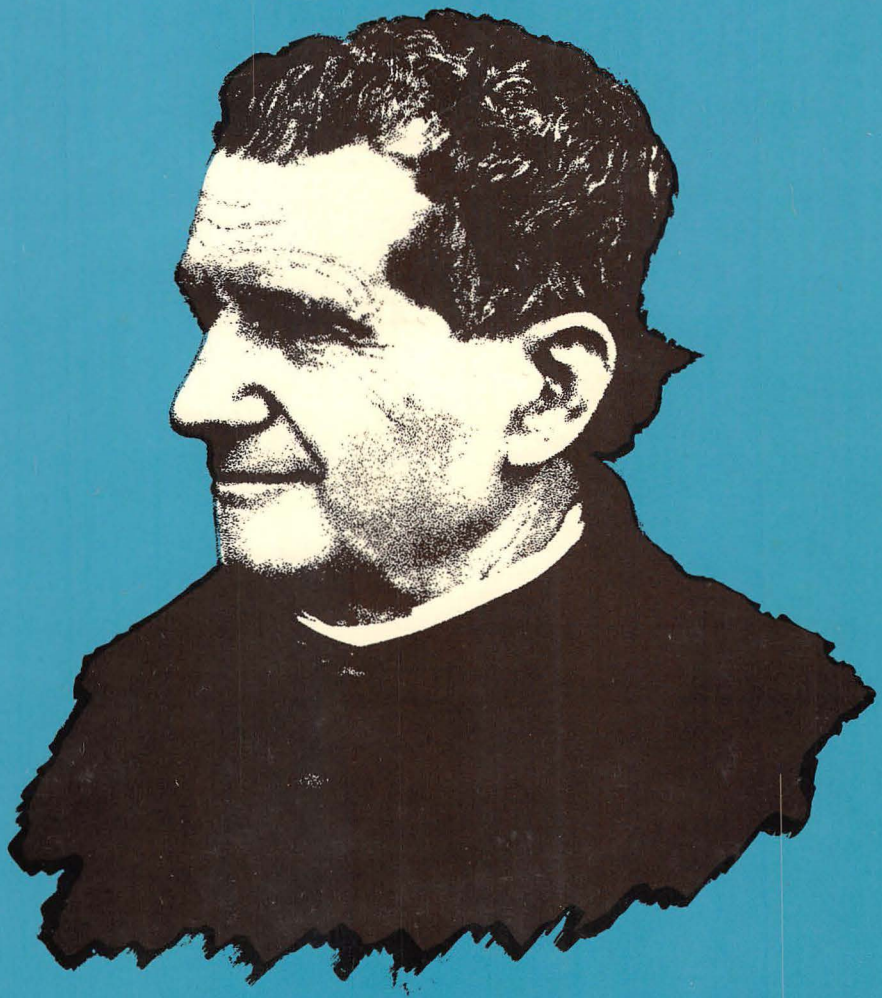
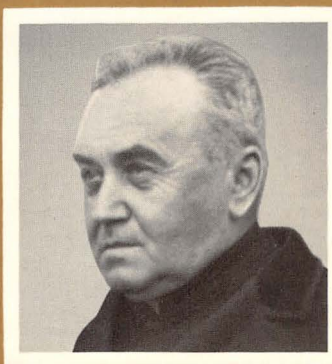


VOLUME XI - 1875

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



FATHER EUGENIO CERIA

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

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

The Salesian Society

	1875	1964
Membership	255	22,042
Countries	1	71
Provinces	1	72
Houses	8	1,348
Bishops	—	39
Archbishops	—	8
Cardinals	—	1

The Daughters Of Mary Help Of Christians

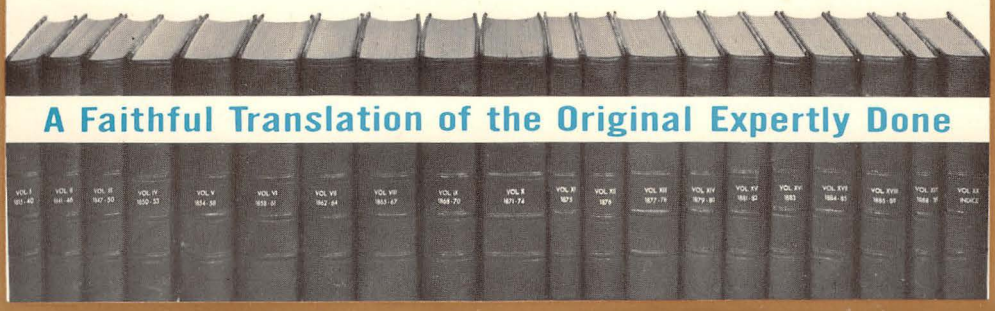
	1875	1964
Membership	20	17,929
Countries	1	54
Provinces	1	55
Houses	2	1,411

SALESIANA PUBLISHERS, INC.,
148 Main Street • New Rochelle, N. Y. 10802

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2. The Annual Conferences of Saint Francis de Sales
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6. Journeys to Rome
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9. Privileges and Dimissorials. The First Phase of the Proceedings
10. Life at the Oratory in 1875
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21. Further Steps Towards the Privileges
22. Don Bosco Suspended from Hearing Confessions
23. A Hostile Press
24. Extraordinary Events
25. The End of the Year

Don Bosco's life as you have never before enjoyed it.



A Faithful Translation of the Original Expertly Done

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THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS OF ST. JOHN BOSCO



SALESIANA PUBLISHERS

THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco

by

EUGENIO CERIA, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION

Volume XI
1875

SALESIANA PUBLISHERS, INC.
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FIRST EDITION

Dedicated

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE

TO

THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

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

(1904-1962)

TO WHOSE

WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OF

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

IS

A LASTING MONUMENT

Foreword

WITH the Salesian Family I rejoice at the publication of this volume of the *Biographical Memoirs* and I want to congratulate all those who have labored so hard to make this event possible.

It is in the *Biographical Memoirs* that Don Bosco lives once again. My fondest hope, therefore, is that through these pages describing the intimate and detailed life of Don Bosco day by day, our English-speaking Salesians—Priests, Brothers, Sisters—may come to appreciate ever more deeply Don Bosco's lively faith, firm hope, ardent love of God and souls. With this full understanding and appreciation of Don Bosco's spirit, may they be inspired to "put on Don Bosco" in their Salesian apostolate.

We shall eagerly await the appearance of the subsequent volumes, certain that they will maintain the same high standards set by the Editors.

May Saint John Bosco bless and follow their labors in the days to come.

FR. RENATO ZIGGIOTTI, S.D.B.
Superior General

Editor's Preface

THE English translation of the *Biographical Memoirs* was undertaken for two reasons: first, to make the primary source of knowledge about Don Bosco available to the Salesian Family in the English-speaking world; second, to offer writers, whether lay or religious, abundant material for research and future works on Don Bosco. Until now the English-speaking world has had little access to such information.

Volume XI, the first in Father Ceria's series, has been chosen as the first to be published because it seems important and urgent to us to present at this time Don Bosco in the full development and consolidation of his work. Neither Volume XI and those that follow it, nor the volumes by Father John Baptist Lemoyne and Father Angelo Amadei are a historical synthesis or a critical biography of Don Bosco. Such a work has not been written yet. Father Ceria's intent in writing volume XI is best expressed in his own words: *"I shall not forget for whom and for what purpose these pages are intended. They are written for the Salesians. . . . Most of them will want only to know what our . . . Founder said and did so that they may assimilate his spirit. Therefore, I have taken pains to relate facts suitably and candidly without worrying about style or any rigorous method, satisfied only with being understood by all and misunderstood by none."* (From Preface to Vol. XI)

Great pains were taken to make this translation accurate and readable. That was our task. It was not our intent to write a new book based on the *Memoirs*. That might have been easier, taken less time, cost less and have been more readable, no doubt, but such a work would no longer have been the *Memoirs*.

Much time and care has been expended on this book by many. Our acknowledgments are due in the first place to the Very Rev. August Bosio, S.D.B., Provincial of the Eastern Province, for con-

tinuing the monumental task undertaken by his predecessor, the late Very Rev. Felix J. Penna, S.D.B.

Then we offer grateful thanks to the members of the Editorial Board: Rev. Henry A. Sarnowski, S.D.B., Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Rev. Joseph S. Bajorek, S.D.B., Rev. Emil Fardellone, S.D.B., Rev. William Kelley, S.D.B., Rev. Peter M. Lappin, S.D.B., Rev. Hugh McGlinchey, S.D.B., Rev. Joseph Perozzi, S.D.B., Rev. Chester A. Wisniewski, S.D.B.; also to Edna B. Phelan, Ph.D., and Urban P. Intondi for their editorial help, and to all others who in various ways have generously given their assistance.

We feel honored and happy to present this volume of the first American edition. May it open new vistas on St. John Bosco not only to the worldwide Salesian Family, but also to the thousands of devotees and admirers throughout the English-speaking world.

FR. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-Chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.
August 16, 1964

Author's Preface

To my Salesian readers:

This latest volume of Don Bosco's *Biographical Memoirs* will surprise my readers for two reasons. First, because it will seem inexplicable to them that Volume XI should be published before Volume X, and secondly, that this long-awaited book should be so much slimmer than its elder brothers. Let me say first of all that Volume X is on its way and will not be appreciably late in making its appearance; besides, Volume XI stands so well on its own feet that it can be read quite independently of its predecessor.

As to its slimness, please note: If I had continued the story beyond 1875, the resulting avalanche of material would have required a volume of unprecedented size. Why sacrifice convenience to mere ponderosity? I have decided, therefore, to write a medium-sized book instead of a bulky volume. Let my readers then patiently suspend judgment until they have read to the end. It would not be fair to do so at the very start.

It is only right that, after this dutiful little preamble, I should state what criteria have guided me in this exacting task—all the more exacting, I would say, because of the responsibility it carries for both present and future generations. This responsibility weighs more heavily upon me now than it did when our most revered Rector Major, Father Philip Rinaldi, first requested that I undertake this task, for at that time I had only a remote perception of it.

In the first place, I have made no attempt to depict Don Bosco's life within the setting of his own times. His times cannot be considered past since events of which he was part are still in progress. For a correct estimate of his work and a comprehensive evaluation of his influence, for a proper perspective of his gigantic figure, we would have to recede to some vantage point far-off into the future.

[To corroborate this point] let me quote the remarks of a distinguished historian. They are apropos a situation similar to our own: "Those historians who judge an era from afar are the ones who bring out its sweeping characteristics. They dwell only on its most dominant features and discard the irrelevant thus presenting, with preciseness and simplicity, a picture that captivates the mind." [1]

In the second place, I shall use a chronological approach in the manner of Father Lemoyne, who not haphazardly entitled his work *Biographical Memoirs,* as if to inform us that his narrative presented the events of Don Bosco's life step-by-step, not only from year to year, but almost from day to day. He did not intend to write a concise historical synthesis. I shall differ from him in only one particular: instead of sectioning episodes, in order to give each event a proper chronological sequence, almost as if I stood there with clock in hand and thus make each chapter a conglomeration of artificially related details, I shall allow myself greater latitude, so that each chapter may have its own unity and its own individual title. In other words, I will take a well-defined period of time—a year or possibly more, whatever is most appropriate—and within that period I will develop the narrative either covering a series of events to the end, or presenting a partially completed phase of it.

This does not mean that just because this volume, for instance, covers the year 1875 I must break off my narrative at January 1, 1876, even when its epilogue or conclusion stretches beyond that date. Such brutal editing *non homines, non di, non concessere columnae"* [neither gods, nor men, nor booksellers have ever tolerated—Horace, *Epist.* ii, 3, 373]. And so common sense has sometimes counselled me to stretch the chronological point a little.

In the third place, I have made it a rule to quote Don Bosco's words *verbatim,* reporting them in a suitable manner and in the form in which they were passed on to us. The Rector Major was sure he was making the Salesian provinces a handsome gift when he presented each with a small portion of Don Bosco's brain, well-sealed in a transparent tube. Likewise, his words, oral and written,

[1] Boissier, *Mme de Sevigne,* p. 155. Paris, Hachette, 1896.

are the receptacles of the thoughts and ideas produced by that same brain. It would indeed be hard to say which of these two kinds of relics is of greater value.

Finally, I shall not forget for whom and for what purpose these pages are intended. They are written for the Salesians, and we all know that often some things are said within the family that would not impress strangers at all or that perhaps should not even be said. These pages are mostly for those confreres who want the life of Don Bosco so presented as to be understood without some special mental effort or, much less, preparatory studies. Most of them will want only to know what our blessed Founder said and did, so that they may assimilate his spirit. Therefore, I have taken pains to relate facts suitably and candidly without worrying about style or any rigorous method, satisfied with being understood by all and misunderstood by none.

So as not to impede smooth reading, I have placed in an appendix a series of documents which, though not essential to the text, will nevertheless provide greater details.

Here, too, I have found a convenient depository for a few letters of the Servant of God that had not a particular place in the narrative, but that our readers will certainly be happy to read. This section will satisfy those who wish to go more deeply into the subject.[2]

I could not properly begin this work without first expressing my gratitude to the memory of Father John Baptist Lemoyne and Father Joachim Berto, to whom our Congregation is indebted for nearly all the material preserved in our archives. As dedicated researchers and jealous guardians of Don Bosco's *Memoirs,* they left no stone unturned in order to hand over to us whatever could be known about him and his activities.

It is a coincidence that this preface was written on the great feast that falls on the date mentioned below: [3] the twenty-fifth [and last] chapter was completed only the day before. Such an unforeseen

[2] In this edition the *Appendix* has been omitted. Nevertheless, references to it will still be made since all documents are numbered and may be located in the original edition. The English translation of the *Appendix* is available in manuscript form upon request. [Editor]

[3] April 26, 1930, first anniversary of Don Bosco's beatification. [Editor]

circumstance was a surprise also to me. May such a coincidence be a happy omen just as it is certainly a cause of deep joy for me to be able, in my own small way, to honor our dear Blessed Father on his first liturgical feast day.

FR. EUGENIO CERIA, S.D.B.

Turin, April 26, 1930

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THE

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

CHAPTER 1

The Beginning of the New Year

THE Official Directory of the Society of St. Francis de Sales for 1875 listed the names of 64 perpetually professed, 107 with triennial vows, 84 novices, and 32 aspirants: a total of 287, fifty of whom were priests. They were stationed in eight Houses: the Oratory and the College of Valsalice in Turin; the schools at Borgo San Martino, Lanzo, Varazze, and Alassio; the hospice at Sampierdarena; the municipal schools and the convent of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese.

Among the aspirants the Servant of God, Father Louis Guanella, is worthy of note. The novices had reached a very sizable number which is indicative of the vigorous growth of a tree whose vitality year by year gives ever greater promise.

Since we have mentioned Father Guanella and his name will recur frequently during the next three years, we feel he should be duly introduced. He was granted permission to enter the Salesian Society by [his Ordinary] the bishop of Como, but only after three years of repeated requests. Finally he was able to submit his formal application to the Saint. Don Bosco replied:

Nice,[1] December 12, 1874

Dear Father Louis:

Your place is ready. You may come whenever you wish. When you get to Turin we shall arrange for a place and house most suitable to you. I say this because of your own words, "If I do not come or if I am not accepted by your Institute, I have decided to enter another."

[1] This is Nice, France. In the original it is referred to as Nizza Marittima to distinguish it from Nizza Monferrato. We shall always refer to Nice, France, simply as Nice. [Editor]

Just try not to leave your affairs so unsettled that they may require your presence at home.

Goodbye, dear Father Louis, have a pleasant journey and may God bless us all. Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. I shall be in Turin on Thursday.

Fr. Guanella arrived just as the Superiors were coming out of a conference at which it had been decided to accept the missions in [South] America. Meeting him at the door, Don Bosco asked him, "Shall we go to America?"

"I, too, would like to found a family of daughters,"—he meant to say nuns—answered Father Guanella. "Perhaps another family of sons, too, here in the diocese, as I have already agreed with some confreres of mine."

"We have all that here," said Don Bosco. "We have priests and we have Sisters too, and you will always be one of us."

"I kept silent," Father Guanella wrote in his memoirs, "and for the three years that I remained in the Salesian Society I felt an inner conflict. But the desire to found my own congregation won out.

"Whenever I was with Don Bosco I seemed to be in Heaven. With God's help and Don Bosco's prayers I corrected faults that otherwise I might have carried with me to the grave. I believe that I made progress especially in developing a spirit of mortification by following the rules as best I could."

The Directory contained a novel item this time: biographical sketches of the confreres who had died during the previous year. These were Father Francis Provera, Father Joseph Cagliero, Father Dominic Pestarino, and the cleric Louis Ghione.

An introductory letter from Don Bosco which presented these four obituaries also conveyed to his sons the sentiments of their father on New Year's day.[2]

[2] We have no reason to believe that Don Bosco also wrote these obituaries; the style seems to be that of Father Durando. They are very edifying in their eloquent simplicity. The personal acquaintance everyone had with the deceased cautioned

To the Salesian Confreres:

The year 1874 has been a memorable one for us, my beloved sons. On April 3, after granting great favors to us, His Holiness, Pius IX, deigned to approve definitively our humble Congregation. While this glorious event filled us with joy, we were also deeply grieved by a series of events. On the 13th of the same month, God called Father Provera to Himself and later Father Pestarino; then the cleric Ghione and Father Joseph Cagliero—all within the span of only four months.

In these dear confreres of ours we have lost four evangelical laborers: all of them perpetually professed and warmly attached to the Salesian Congregation, faithful observers of our Constitutions, truly zealous in working for the glory of God.

It is, therefore, not surprising if these losses are deeply felt by our Society. But God, who is infinitely good and who knows the things that are to our greater advantage, considered them already worthy of Him. One might say that they lived briefly but labored as much as if they had lived a long life: *Brevi vivens tempore, explevit tempora multa.* (Although his life was short, his accomplishments were many—Cf. Wis. 4, 13.) And we have well-founded reason to believe that these confreres, now no longer here with us on earth, will become our patrons before God in Heaven.

It is felt that it would be good to give you an outline of the life of each of them so that their memory may be cherished among us. We hope that what we do for them will, with the help of God, be done also for those confreres who have earlier been called to everlasting life and for those whom God may be pleased to summon in the future.

We shall do this for three specific reasons:

1. Because it is the custom in other religious Orders and ecclesiastical Congregations.

2. So that those who lived among us and observed the same rules in an exemplary way may inspire us and prompt us to follow them in doing good and preventing evil.

3. That by keeping their names and main accomplishments before us we may remember more readily to offer prayers to God for the eternal repose of their souls, if they have not already been received into the bosom of His Divine Mercy.

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against any excessive praise. Along with other documents they are proof of the sound religious piety that inspired the first sons of Don Bosco. Don Bosco himself usually edited whatever was written by his sons about the Oratory or the Congregation.

We must certainly not serve God in order that the memory of what we do may be cherished among men, but that our names, as the Savior says, may be written in the Book of Life. Nevertheless this must remind us that just as our bad deeds may give scandal to others even after our death, so our good actions may be edifying. Thus while we read the brief biographical sketches of these confreres, we shall not cease to offer special prayers to God for them and for all the confreres who have been called to eternity since the founding of the Congregation.

During the course of this year (1875) we must show our unfailing gratitude by offering ceaseless prayers to the Divine Majesty for the needs of Holy Church, particularly for the precious life of our illustrious benefactor, the Supreme Pontiff, who on many occasions has most generously lavished spiritual and temporal favors upon us. He deigned to grant definitive approval to our Constitutions so that we may be exact in their observance, and he has bestowed many benefits upon us. Let us strive to show ourselves worthy by making use of them for the greater glory of God and the good of souls.

God bless all of you, my dear sons, and pray for me who shall always be,

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

Another paternal New Year's message of Don Bosco, which was rescued from oblivion by Father Lemoyne's passion for preserving documents, was sent to his sons at Lanzo where Father Lemoyne was director. It is a long letter in answer to their Christmas greetings and it exhibits both the goodness of a Father and the zeal of a priest dedicated to the welfare of his beloved pupils.

Turin, Vigil of the Epiphany, 1875

To My Dearest Sons, the Director, Teachers, Assistants, Prefect, Catechist, Pupils, and Others in the Lanzo school:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. Amen.

Until now, my beloved sons, I have not been able to carry out a fervent longing in my heart, and that was to pay you a visit. An unbroken chain of complicated events as well as a slight indisposition prevented me from doing so.

However, I want to tell you something that you will hardly believe: I think of you many times a day and pray for you very particularly to the Lord during Mass every morning. You yourselves have shown me beyond doubt that you remember me. How happy I was when I read your good wishes; with what pleasure I read the name of every pupil in each class from the first to the last. I felt as though I were with all of you, and in my heart I kept repeating, *Long live my sons at Lanzo!*

So I shall begin by thanking you with all my heart for the Christian and filial good wishes you sent me, and I pray God to bless you, your relatives, and friends a hundredfold. May God grant all of you a long and happy life! I would now like to express a particular wish that Heaven grant all of you health, love of study and a good moral life.

Health: This is a precious gift from Heaven. Take good care of it. Beware of intemperance, excessive perspiration, overexertion, sudden changes of temperature, all of which commonly bring on illness.

Love of Study: You are in school to acquire knowledge so as to enable yourselves to earn a living in due time. Whatever your social standing, your vocation, or your future career may be, always act so that you will still be able to earn an honest living, even if you should lack family resources or an inheritance. Never let it be said of us that we live by the sweat of another's brow.

Moral Life: The bond uniting health and love of study, the foundation on which both are based, is morality. Believe me, my dear children, I am telling you a great truth: If your conduct is morally sound you will make progress in your studies and your health; you will be loved by your superiors, your companions, your relatives, your friends, and your fellow countrymen; and the truth of the matter is, even bad people will love and respect you! People will vie with one another to associate with you, to praise you, and to help you. But show me those who lack moral principles—oh, what a detestable state!—they are lazy and will be known only as good-for-nothings. They will indulge in bad talk and will have so evil a reputation that people will avoid them. If they are found in school, everyone will loathe them and a *Te Deum* will be sung the day they go home. And what will they find at home? The scorn of all. Their family and their friends will detest them, and no one will give them any help, everyone will shun them. And then what of their soul? While they live, they will be unhappy; and when they die, having sown nothing but evil, they can reap only evil fruit.

So courage, my dear sons, and strive to seek, study, preserve, and foster the three great treasures: health, love of study and a good moral life.

One thing more: I hear a voice coming from afar and crying, "Children, pupils at Lanzo, come and save us!" It is the cry of many a soul awaiting a helping hand to rescue it from the brink of perdition and lead it back to the path of salvation. I say this because many of you are called to the sacred career of winning the souls of others. Take courage, many souls await your help. Remember the words of St. Augustine: *Animam salasti, animam tuam praedestinasti.* [You have saved a soul, you have predestined your own.]

Lastly, my sons, I recommend to you your Director. I know that his health is not too good; pray for him and console him by your good conduct; love him, place unlimited confidence in him. All this will bring great consolation to him and be of great advantage to you.

I assure you of a daily remembrance in Holy Mass. I, too, beg you to remember me in your kind prayers, so that I may not have the misfortune of telling others how they may be saved and then losing my own poor soul. *Ne cum aliis praedicaverim ego reprobus efficiar.* [Lest after preaching to others, I myself should be rejected—1 *Cor.* 9, 27.]

God bless each of you, and believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. I ask Father Director kindly to explain whatever may not be fully understood.

Very fatherly and personal in tone are two other letters we include here, written at about the same time to two members of the Society. Fortunately, they did not go astray as so many other similar letters did. It was Don Bosco's practice to reply to all letters, but the time and manner were dependent upon circumstances. The mere reading of his entire correspondence—and he read it all—required a great deal of time. In 1875, for instance, 204 New Year's Day letters were heaped on his desk.

The first of these two personal letters was addressed to Father Joseph Ronchail, Prefect of the school at Alassio. It inspires confidence; it comes straight from the heart, and is addressed to the heart.

Turin, [January] 15, 1875

My dearest Father Ronchail:

I am glad that after taking your final vows you now feel greater peace. It is a sign that God has blessed you and that you are fulfilling His divine will in what you are doing. Therefore, *si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?* [If God is for us, who is against us?] Tell the cleric Vallega that I received his letter and thank him; I shall do as he asks and then shall talk to him in person.

I thank Father Director for his message and the presents he sent me. I divided them into smaller gifts that are very useful to us. Cheer him up. Both of you must take good care of your health. Let me know whether there are any difficulties so that I may take measures to remove them.

Accept the 400 lire from the Capuchin Fathers subject to the conditions mentioned in your letter.

If you can, call on Professor Agnesi and his sister and give them my regards. Ask them for news and then send word on to me.

God bless you, and pray also for your most affectionate friend, ever in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

In the second letter the good Father sent some valuable advice, seasoned with gentleness and charm, to the cleric Herminius Borio, a teacher at Borgo San Martino.

Turin, [January] 28, 1875

My dear Borio:

Your letter pleased me very much. It showed me that your heart is always open to Don Bosco. Continue that way, and you will always be *gaudium meum, corona mea* [my joy and my crown].

You asked for advice. Here it is:

1. When you have to correct someone in particular, never do so in the presence of others.
2. When you give advice or counsel always try to send the person away satisfied and still friendly to you.
3. Always thank those who admonish you and take their corrections in good part.
4. *Luceat lux tua coram hominibus, ut videant opera tua bona et glorificent Patrem nostrum qui in coelis est.* [Let your light shine before

men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to our Father in Heaven—Cf. Matt. 5, 16.]

Love me in the Lord. Pray to God for me, and may God bless you and make you a saint.

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

In another letter he thanked Mrs. Annetta Fava, a benefactress of Turin, for the gift she had sent him for the New Year.

Turin, [February] 9, 1875

Dear Madam:

I am rather late, but I feel it my duty to thank you most sincerely for your kindness. I received your very fine report and your letter prompted by Christian sentiments. The 500 francs that you enclosed were soon spent on my boys who, for the most part, are still wearing summer clothing. All the greater reason to thank you and always invoke the blessing of Heaven upon you and your respected husband.

Upon informing me of the Holy Father's blessing, Attorney Menghini used these very words, "During the audience that I was granted on October 12, (1874) I requested a special blessing for Mrs. Anna Fava of Turin who is sick. Please tell her that in my name. I shall also pray for her."

Furthermore we shall continue our private and community prayers to God that He may grant you and your kind husband lasting good health and a long and happy life. I am honored to be, with heartfelt gratitude.

Your grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco was deeply grateful to everyone who had been kind to him, and he never forgot anyone at Christmas or the New Year. We have been told by eyewitnesses that he wrote countless letters, each suited to the person he addressed, conveying his good wishes. Cardinal Patrizi, Cardinal Antonelli, and Archbishop Vitelleschi replied to these letters promptly at the beginning of January 1875.

Cardinal Patrizi, Vicar of His Holiness in Rome, cordially ex-

changed good wishes and informed him that he, and in general all the bishops, were delighted with the development of the Salesian Society. He then added, "It should not surprise you if some of them do not look upon your Society with a kind eye, but instead try to hinder some members in the exercise of their sacred ministry. This should rather be looked upon as a proof that this work is pleasing to God, who allows such trials to make it clear that, in overcoming them, it is He who is disposing all things for the good of the Society. So rejoice in your tribulations and draw ever greater courage from them."

The letter of thanks from Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State, was no less courteous. He said he was "moved by so much solicitude for him."

In writing about the opposition of the diocesan Ordinary to the Servant of God, the Most Rev. [Angelo] Vitelleschi, Archibishop of Seleucia and Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, was even more outspoken than Cardinal Patrizi. He wrote, "I gather from your letters how much opposition the Salesian Congregation is facing in the very place where the Motherhouse is located; but God, in His inscrutable ways, allows signs of contradiction to appear whenever some good is being done. You realize as well as I do that one should not lose heart because of such things. Meanwhile I want you to know in confidence that this Sacred Congregation has already drafted a letter to the Archbishop answering his queries about the Salesians. A copy will be sent to you confidentially for your information. When he comes to Rome, as you say he is about to, I and several others shall prevail upon him to cease his opposition, which appears to be rather systematic." We shall return to the matter of these queries later.

Cardinal Berardi, who had a deep affection for Don Bosco, could not help but join in these eminent testimonials of esteem. In a letter of January 9, which we shall refer to again, he began, "I am grateful for your cordial good wishes on the occasion of the present solemn festivities and wish to convey my sincerest thanks for them, assuring you in return that I, too, am praying to the Lord to shower His greatest blessings on you and your worthy Congregation. Having fulfilled this duty I now wish to say that I am very grieved to hear that the prelate in question has not yet ceased tormenting you."

Nor did the Cardinal limit his regrets to mere words; he acted accordingly. In what manner and with what effects, we shall see later.

Don Bosco was not dismayed by the difficulties facing him at the beginning of the New Year. He continued on his way calmly, placing complete trust in God and doing whatever his great prudence indicated.

CHAPTER 2

The Annual Conferences of St. Francis de Sales

AT the end of January 1875, the more prominent Salesians gathered around their father. In obedience to a rule, later abrogated when its observance became impossible, all the Directors convened at the Oratory during the triduum preceding the feast of St. Francis de Sales. They gave a report on their own Houses, discussed business, clarified any doubts they might have had, and brought themselves up to date. All this was done with great simplicity and mutual confidence. There was ample opportunity to consult Don Bosco—a thing that strengthened the family spirit that the Founder was constantly striving to foster among his sons.

On these occasions there were two kinds of conferences. Some were private, attended only by the members of the Superior Chapter, the Directors, and the Novice Master; the others were public, open to all the confreres. Sometimes Don Bosco would allow the upper classmen to take part in the public conferences both to deepen their love for the House and to give them an opportunity of learning more about the general development of the Congregation and the esteem in which it was held. Such insight into the intimate life of the Salesians undoubtedly helped to further promising religious vocations.

That year six conferences were held; three private and three public. Fortunately, we have the minutes taken at that time and we shall glean from them whatever has bearing on these *Memoirs.*

The members of the Superior Chapter were: Fathers Rua, Cagliero, Savio, Durando, Ghivarello, and Lazzero; the Directors were: Fathers Bonetti, Lemoyne, Francesia, Cerruti, Albera, Dalmazzo, and Costamagna; Father Barberis was Novice Master.

Father Rua presided at the three private meetings; Don Bosco at the others.

The first three meetings, all private, dealt either with matters of routine administration which today are no longer important, or with affairs which, important though they were, are scantily recorded in the minutes. Besides, it will be more opportune to refer to them later on.

The minutes of the fourth meeting, which was public and presided over by Don Bosco, open candidly with this personal comment by the secretary: "January 27, 1875, the day before the eve of the feast of St. Francis de Sales, shall always be remembered in the annals of our Congregation because of the many favorable things that took place and were announced at this meeting. Praise to our Lord and St. Francis de Sales because of them." If we are to evaluate these words properly, we must bear in mind that in those early days, hardly a year after the Rules had been approved, the members of the Congregation were not yet fully conscious or aware of the Congregation as a distinct entity. Any event that might contribute however slightly to the glory of the Congregation would readily gladden them and send their spirits soaring with enthusiasm. Don Bosco, who deeply understood the human heart, knew how to take advantage of everything in order to foster a true bond of fellowship among his followers and consequently strengthen their unity.

At the opening of the meeting the question of privileges, which was later to cause so much trouble to the Saint, was broached for the first time. Another remark is necessary here to help us understand the way in which Don Bosco expressed himself. At such meetings his manner of speaking was very plain. The writer has heard many reliable witnesses say that he spoke with a natural candor bordering on simplicity, as if he were discussing trifles. Yet everyone listened with the greatest respect to what he said, and his words made a deep lasting impression on everyone.

We read in the minutes: "The meeting opened with a discussion on the privileges we wish to apply for in Rome on behalf of our Congregation. Don Bosco began by explaining to us that the Regular clergy enjoy a great many privileges; some of them have enough to fill a volume and a large one at that. But, he added,

they guard them very jealously. Although he had made inquiries here and there, it took him a long time to find someone willing to let him see a copy. He now had a copy of the privileges of the Oblates and of one or two more Congregations. He said he would formulate his request on the basis of these and try to obtain some of them for our Congregation; but at the present time, he said, these privileges were not so readily granted. In fact, it was now the policy not to grant any *per communicationem* that is, by making available to one Congregation the entire set of privileges enjoyed by another. He said he would, nevertheless, investigate the matter thoroughly and, he hoped, with success."

Don Bosco then read a short letter he had received that morning from Cardinal Antonelli. Enclosed in it was a money order for 1,000 lire which His Holiness was sending for the construction of the hospice at Sampierdarena. The minutes continue: "A remark was made to the effect that this was a generous and unusual donation because the Pope's contributions for such undertakings rarely exceed 500 lire. Don Bosco made it clear to us that although this contribution had been requested of the Holy Father, he had informed the right people that the sum would be returned in the form of Peter's Pence. However, this did not lessen its importance as a token of the Holy Father's great benevolence and esteem for us."

His listeners must have been moved by this information because two proposals were made: first, that the letter be framed; second, that it be published in *Unità Cattolica*. Don Bosco agreed, but ruled out any mention of his name, for this would merely provoke the hostile press. In fact, some newspapers delighted in attacking him from time to time. We shall speak of this later.

Don Bosco then gave the assembly news of two encouraging letters received that very day; first, the official acceptance of his proposals for Buenos Aires; second, the anxiously awaited royal decree, expropriating the parcel of land on which the church of St. John the Evangelist was to be built. Later we shall also speak of these things.

The brief reference in the minutes to two other matters, one of them rather touchy, would hardly satisfy the reader's curiosity,

so we will return to them in due time. For the moment we will also pass over a minor question of Canon Law.

Novices and aspirants also attended the fifth meeting. This was held in the church of St. Francis de Sales since there were approximately 150 people present. As usual each Director gave a full report on his own school: finances, health, buildings as well as its intellectual, moral and religious condition.

Father Bonetti, Director at Borgo San Martino, was the first to speak. His school was so overcrowded that it was no longer possible to accept even one more pupil, no matter how deserving. Twelve Sisters of Mary Help of Christians had moved into an adjoining house built for them. There, to everyone's advantage, they took care of the linen room and did the mending. Now it was rumored that the surrounding countryside would be turned into rice fields; however, the health hazard caused by this would be present only after the water had been drained off for the harvest, sometime between August and September while the boys would be home on vacation. Everyone was in good health and, judging from the number of boys who received the Sacraments frequently, the religious and moral climate seemed satisfactory. The boys were in good spirits. Father Bonetti attributed the noteworthy improvement during the current year to his excellent staff. He concluded by earnestly asking everyone present to pray for him.

Father Lemoyne, Director at Lanzo, spoke next. The number of boarders registered at his school had already surpassed the enrollment of previous years and several more were expected. He believed that the total would exceed two hundred. He said that the members of the Altar Boy Society, drawn mainly from the older pupils, deserved special mention. Everyone marveled at the general good health; no sickness, no colds, not even a slight cough. This remarkable state of affairs was due in great part to the painstaking care of the Prefect, Father Scappini. The complete separation of the upper classmen from the rest had proved most beneficial. He himself was convinced that the progress made was due to the more numerous and better qualified personnel Don Bosco had sent him.

Father Francesia, Director at Varazze, complaining that his school was too small, said he had been obliged to refuse more than 80 applicants for lack of space. The boys seemed to be very fond of the school and of their Superiors. He said he had no words to describe the very lively recreations; not a boy could be seen alone or idle, nor did boys ever gather in groups without a cleric among them. He declared he was highly satisfied with his staff.

Father Cerruti, Director at Alassio, said that there were about 50 students in the college department, and their conduct was excellent; a number of them wished to enter the priesthood. Lack of space had obliged him to restrict enrollment. A new building, now under construction, offered greater possibilities. Plans were under study for an additional building which would not only be adequate to meet the number of applicants, but would also accommodate the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who, as he hoped, would be a very great asset to the school.

Father Albera, Director of Sampierdarena, said he was glad that a new building was now almost completed, making it possible to double the enrollment. He informed the assembly that his Holiness had already made another contribution of 2,000 lire toward it. There were about 60 artisans and students, all of them well-behaved; he really could not expect more; they went to the Sacraments very frequently. The confreres also devoted a good deal of their time to the neighborhood boys. Many of them were day students and a very large number attended the Festive Oratory to everyone's satisfaction. The Salesian work was quite popular in town.

Father Dalmazzo gave an excellent report on the Valsalice school which was conducted for the sons of the nobility. He noted first that the enrollment had doubled over the past year. The successful outcome of the examinations, the reputation of the school for earnest study, a trip to Rome during the vacation for the best students, and especially the Holy Father's blessing—all these had contributed to the increased enrollment. Only one thing worried the parents—they feared that the Salesians would make priests of their sons! This was the bane of the well-to-do. Yet this redounded to the great credit of the Salesians because it meant the parents

understood that their sons were receiving a genuine Christian education. Everyone was in good health. The progress of the boys in their studies was due mainly to four university professors who taught in the college department. These were: Allievo, Lanfranchi, Bacchialoni, and Roda who taught mathematics. From the time the Salesians had taken charge of the school a steady improvement in discipline, piety, and conduct was noted.

In his report on the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese, Father Costamagna, their Director, praised above all their fervent and excellent spirit; [not only the postulants, but] even the [other] girls wanted to become nuns and were so fond of their boarding school that none of them would think of leaving. Regretably, their number was very small, partly because the school was not yet well-known and partly because of transportation problems; the remote village had no regular coach or rail service. Yet the number of Sisters and postulants had steadily increased to eighty. Furthermore, Don Bosco was working on a plan that would also attract a larger number of girls. All were in excellent health.

In his report on the Oratory, Father Rua remarked on the fervent piety and goodwill of the students and on the eagerness of the artisans particularly in their effort to say their prayers devoutly. Much had also been done for the boys of the neighborhood. Something new had been added this year: a night school that was well attended by many of the older boys not only during the week but also on Sundays. As for the confreres, now that meditation was obligatory for all, their punctuality and devotion were admirable even though attendance demanded great effort. The professed and the novices made their meditation separately. To find time for this practice of piety, which might otherwise have been impossible to make during the day, the hour for rising had been anticipated half an hour. The novices, moreover, had their own study hall and attended classes and conferences separately. Father Rua also spoke of the flourishing Altar Boy Society and of the other equally active sodalities that were made up mainly of the best upper classmen. He ended his report with the words: "Let us thank God for all this. *Oremus ad invicem.*" [Let us pray for one another.]

We should not be surprised at the above remarks of Father Rua concerning the confreres and the novices as though implying that up to now the community had done without meditation or regular observance. Prior to the approval of the Rules, Don Bosco had directed his sons almost on an individual basis, and had assigned only those community devotions that he felt were necessary and suitable. But once approval had been obtained, he had to establish a set order and this, too, gradually. Not a few of his sons had an incomplete or incorrect concept of the religious life even though they were very devoted to him personally and were ready to go through fire for his sake. Any abrupt transition from a relative freedom to a strict observance would have alienated them and led them to rash decisions.

Don Bosco never entirely abandoned his former method. During the preparatory years it had proven successful. Without even mentioning the principles of the religious life, Don Bosco had instilled them into the hearts of his sons. He had acted in this manner so as not to arouse distrust or suspicion either within the Oratory or outside, at a time when a general feeling of hostility against religious congregations and their members had reached an all-time high. His method was to make them so attached to the House and his work that they would feel completely at home. The rest would follow as a matter of course.

The lateness of the hour prevented Don Bosco from discussing the general state of the Congregation and thus end the conference. He therefore addressed the same audience on the following day. The minutes sum up his speech as follows:

Last evening the Directors told us so many things about their schools that we were amazed. I, too, wanted to talk about the Congregation so that all would know where we stand. Since I was unable to do this yesterday I shall speak of it now. First of all I want to tell you of a very special favor that His Holiness was pleased to grant us. You know that we are enlarging the House at Sampierdarena. The Holy Father, apprised of this, was so kind as to send us 2,000 lire to help us continue the work, for he realized that we lack the necessary funds and have been relying totally on alms. We must strive to be truly thankful to him

for the great concern and fatherly interest that he shows toward us. We must try to become ever more worthy of so great a Father and make known his greatness and prerogatives as much as we can.

I have been visting our schools and must truly say that I was most gratified by what I saw. In the first place I found all the boys in good health and well-behaved, as their Directors have told you. I was particularly impressed, too, by the way the members of our Congregation are working. There is so much to do and it is done with so much dedication; a confrere, will teach, assist the boys, supervise them in the dining room and dormitory, and take them out for walks without ever having a free moment to himself. They were all so busy that when I needed to have a few pages copied, no one could be found free to do it. Yet, even more than with their work, I was delighted with the spirit in which everything was done. I really must say that one could not ask for more. I truly feel that we have attained the ideal I had set for our Congregation, because over and above all the work that is being done, there is the spirit of obedience and willingness that goes with it. When necessary, neither priests nor teachers object to giving a hand in the kitchen or sweeping floors. Praise God for this. Let us try to keep this spirit and make ever greater efforts to strengthen it in every way.

Now that the Congregation is becoming organized, we must take courage and be prepared evermore to endure inconveniences caused by cramped quarters or inadequate furnishings. I hope that the day is not far off when every priest and teacher will have a comfortable little room much more suitable than the accommodations available now; likewise, there should be separate quarters for the novices. We shall have, I hope, fine, spacious, and well-ventilated dormitories. Meanwhile let us patiently endure our present discomforts.

I also wish to introduce the Christian classics in our schools to replace the pagan classics. This cannot be done all at once, but I wish to make a start in whatever measure possible. Personally I would be satisfied if my priests and clerics were to write Latin like Jerome, Augustine, Ambrose, Leo, and Sulpicius Severus. After all, is there any student really able to appreciate and to grasp wherein lies the beauty of Cicero and Livy? Besides, by adopting these [Christian] authors we would not put into the minds of the young so many questionable, useless, and highly dangerous ideas scattered on every page of the pagan classics.

With this thought in mind we have already started to print excerpts from the works of St. Jerome, and I hope soon to publish Sulpicius Severus and others. Perhaps this will help put a stop to one of the very great evils of our times.

Lastly Don Bosco called attention to the missions in [South] America. The minutes continue:

> Recently we received letters from [South] America asking us to go and preach the Gospel to the people in those distant lands. We had already stated our terms and those terms have now been accepted. Presently we shall take steps to determine the *quid agendum* [what must be done]. Meanwhile we are expected in two places: Buenos Aires and San Nicolas de los Arroyos, a whole day's journey from the capital. Several times before, there had been some talk about the missions with reference to America, as well as Asia, Africa, and Australia. But it seems that the mission in Buenos Aires is far better for us both because of particular circumstances and because Spanish is much easier for us to learn than English, which is spoken in nearly all the other territories.

Here the minutes end abruptly with a few etceteras. It is easy to imagine the rapt attention of the audience as it listened to this final remark. The Congregation was in its beginning and this was the first time that Don Bosco had discussed the matter in public. From Valdocco to Buenos Aires! It was enough to make one ecstatic!

CHAPTER 3

The Sons of Mary Project

IN 1875, spurred on by priestly zeal and divine inspiration, Don Bosco turned his attention to the creation of a new project.

We know that the time was not favorable for vocations. False political principles, secularization of the schools, unbridled freedom of the press, contempt for the Church and her ministers, and the economic hardships of the clergy had thinned the ranks of aspirants to the priesthood. Undaunted by any sacrifice Don Bosco did all he could to remedy this grave damage. Moreover, when he recognized the trend, he never wearied of repeating that now priests should be sought mainly from among those "wielding the hammer and the hoe." Even this would not suffice; for boys are only boys, and, despite the most solicitous care, many fall by the wayside along the road to the priesthood. Don Bosco had observed that only a small number of these students finally attained their goal.

What should he do? The need was pressing. If the present trend continued the vineyard of the Lord would soon become a wasteland for lack of priests. Once while still in high school Don Bosco had, with thoughtful kindness, helped a good man to become a priest despite his age. Because of his patient assistance the man had been able to enter the seminary, complete his studies, and receive Holy Orders. Later Don Bosco had given a helping hand to other adult vocations especially at the Oratory where he allowed several middle-aged men who aspired to the priesthood to enroll in the school. It gave him an opportunity to see how assiduously these men applied themselves to their studies, how sincerely devout they were, and also how willing to help their younger

companions.[1] As he prayed God for enlightenment to find a way to give many priests to the Church, the idea came to him of bringing together willing young men and offering them a special program that would adequately prepare them for ordination.

Then at the beginning of 1875, while pondering over the project, something occurred that goaded him on to launch the undertaking. His own account to the members of the Superior Chapter was immediately recorded, and we reproduce it here verbatim.

One Saturday evening, as I was in the sacristy hearing confessions, I was distracted by the thought of the scarcity of priests and vocations and considered the possible means of increasing the number. I saw the many boys around me who had come to confession—good innocent boys—but I said to myself, "Who knows how many of them will make it and how long it will be before those who persevere succeed; meanwhile the Church is in pressing need."

As I continued to hear confessions and was still absorbed by this thought, I seemed to be in my room sitting at my desk, and holding the register containing the names of all the residents of the House. I wondered, "How is this possible? Here I am hearing confessions in the sacristy, yet at the same time I am also in my room at my desk. Am I dreaming? No. This is really the boys' register; this is the desk where I always work." At that moment I heard a voice behind me saying, "Do you want to increase the number of good priests quickly? Study that register and you will know what to do."

I looked and then said, "This is the list of the boys registered here this year and in previous years; there is nothing else in it." I was very puzzled; I read the names, wondered, and searched through the list to see if I could find anything; but all in vain.

Then I said to myself, "Am I dreaming or am I awake? Yet I am really here at my desk, and the voice I heard is a real voice." Suddenly I decided to stand up and see who *She* was who had spoken to me. And I actually stood up. The boys who were waiting to go to confession thought I must be sick when I stood up looking startled; they tried to help me but I assured them it was nothing and continued hearing confessions.[2]

[1] *Informative Process Summ.* p. 324, No. 409.

[2] At first Don Bosco did not say whether it had been a man's voice or a woman's; but at the end he said quite plainly, "I wanted to see who *She* was who had spoken to me." This was obviously an allusion to Our Lady (Secretary's note).

When confessions were over I went to my room, and there on my desk I found the register with the names of everyone enrolled in the House, but I found nothing else. I examined the register but found no clue to help me obtain priests, many priests, and quickly. I studied other registers that were in the room to see if I could find anything in them, but these did not help me either. I asked Father Ghivarello for other registers, but it was useless. As I continued to think and to thumb through old registers in obedience to the order given by that mysterious voice, I noticed that of the many boys in our schools who study for the priesthood hardly 15 out of every 100—that is, not even 2 out of 10—ever receive the cassock because they leave the seminary for family reasons, or to take the examinations for college, or they change their minds as so frequently happens during the last year of high school. On the other hand, among the adults, nearly all—that is 8 out of 10—receive the cassock; they succeed in less time and with less effort.

So I said, "They are more reliable, and they can do it in less time. This is what I am looking for. I must give more attention to them; even open schools just for them to help them in a special way."

The results will show if what happened was a dream or reality.

From that moment both the idea and his determination grew apace to open schools for young men just out of their teens who felt they were called to the priesthood and who would be able to pursue an accelerated course of studies especially adapted to them. Whatever further doubts he may have had were dispelled by an illuminating dream he had in Rome on March 15. He told this dream at dinner in the Sigismondi home in the presence of Father Berto, his traveling companion and secretary, who has given us the following account of it:

I had a very restless night. I had a dream that upset me very much, and this is what I dreamed.

I seemed to be standing in a garden near a fruit tree with extraordinarily large fruit on it. The tree was heavy with three kinds of fruit: figs, peaches, and pears. Quite suddenly a strong wind arose and it started hailing; the hailstones were mixed with real stones that hit my shoulders. I tried to find shelter, but someone came up and said, "Hurry, pick the fruit!" I looked for a basket, but the one I found was too small. The man scolded me and said, "Get a bigger one."

I changed my basket for another, but no sooner had I picked two or three of the fruit than the basket was full. Again the person chided me saying, "Hurry, or the hailstones will ruin all of them."

I resumed picking the fruit, but to my great astonishment I saw that some of the enormous figs I had picked were rotten on one side. The stranger then shouted, "Hurry, sort them!"

I began to sort out the good fruit, making three separate stacks in my basket, putting the *figs* on one side, the *peaches* on the other, and the *pears* in the middle, but all the fruit—figs, peaches, and pears—were so big (they were bigger than a man's two fists) that I could not stop staring at them—they were not only large but beautiful. The stranger then said, "The figs are for the bishops, the pears are for you, the peaches are for [South] America." He then clapped his hands and said, "Courage, *bravo, bravo,* well done, *bravo!*" and disappeared.

I woke up; the dream made such a deep impression on me that I cannot get it out of my mind.

It is not known whether Don Bosco immediately tied in this dream with the project that was then so dear to him; but in time the connection became more and more apparent. Careful choice was necessary, especially at the beginning so that unsuitable candidates would not compromise the whole project. The large basket that could hold so much stood for the size of the school to be set aside for the project; the figs for the bishop symbolized young men for the diocesan seminaries; the peaches for [South] America, the Salesian missionaries; the pears in the middle, the Salesians for the Headquarters of the Congregation. What about the hailstones that bruised his shoulders? They signified the strong, high-placed opposition that he would encounter especially from two bishops. We possess letters they wrote to Rome in an effort to block approval of the project.

There was good reason for calling it a "project," instead of "school" or "institute." It was foreseen that the majority of the students would be recruited from humble homes, and that to assure its establishment it would be necessary to affiliate the project with an organization whose members, by alms or other means, would support the young men and would supply whatever was needed for their studies.

When Don Bosco went to Rome (we shall speak of his visit

later) he told Pius IX about his plans for this project. "We talked at length on this subject," he said at a meeting of the Major Superiors and Directors on April 14. It was at that time that he gave them copies of the regulations printed on the Oratory presses only a few days before. The Pope was so delighted with the idea that he manifested his intention to give it his solemn approval. However, he recommended that it should be shown first to several bishops; their approval would be the basis for a papal brief of commendation. The Holy Father also wanted to know how Don Bosco had hit upon such an idea. Don Bosco told him everything, even the dream referred to above. The Pope told him to relate his dream to the Superiors of the Congregation, and Don Bosco obeyed as already described.

Before the regulations were read to this assembly he had already sent copies together with all the necessary explanations to about ten bishops. On the cover was this title: THE SONS OF MARY PROJECT FOR VOCATIONS TO THE PRIESTHOOD, followed by the scriptural text on the abundance of the harvest and the scarcity of laborers (*Luke* 10, 2). A concise and simple preface stated the reasons for the project. The text of the regulations was divided into four parts: *Admission* (from sixteen to thirty years of age); *Finance* (the generosity of the faithful); *Remarks* (explanation of the title and the assurance that the project would not interfere with already established organizations); *Spiritual Advantages.*[3]

Since these regulations were not for the general public there was no need for a *nihil obstat* from the archiespicopal Chancery of Turin. However in an effort to sound out reactions or to avoid possible difficulties, Don Bosco sent copies only to those sub-Alpine bishops who were favorably inclined toward him, that is, to all but two. At the beginning of August the regulations were published in the second issue of *Bibliofilo,* a small periodical that was the forerunner of the *Salesian Bulletin.* It was printed outside the diocese to avoid the delay concomitant with any ecclesiastical revision in Turin.[4]

[3] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 1.

[4] Letter from Bishop Moreno, August 7, 1875, with annotation by Don Bosco in the letter from Father Chiuso of August 9. So far, despite all research, it has been impossible to find even one copy of those early issues.

Between April 12 and 18, Don Bosco had the consolation of receiving seven letters of commendation from the Bishops of Albenga, Vigevano, Acqui, Alessandria, Tortona, Casale, and Genoa; four of them were addressed to him, and three were sent directly to Rome. He immediately forwarded them to Cardinal Berardi with the following letter:

Turin, April 18, 1875

Your Eminence:

On the feast of St. Joseph I was unable to present to Your Eminence the token of gratitude that I wanted to as a unique tribute for all the good you do for us.

Tomorrow is the feast of the Patronage of St. Joseph, and I hope you will graciously accept a spiritual gift offered for your holy intention. We shall celebrate Mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians, and our boys will offer their Communion and say special prayers for you. It is little, but we hope that God will reward you with His abundant grace and His blessings.

A particular intention will be made for Your Eminence's mother-in-law[5] and mother.

Enclosed herewith you will receive the letters of commendation from the Bishops of Casale, Alessandria, Vigevano, and Albenga. I am told that the Bishop of Acqui sent his letter directly to Your Eminence.

There will be others within two days. There was some slight delay because I had to have everything printed for easier reading.

Since the two projects are distinct from each other, may I ask Your Eminence to implore the Holy Father to grant the indulgences and blessings to each individually so that they may be applied as required.

I hope to write to you again this week and offer you yet another opportunity to exercise your charity.

May God in His goodness grant you a long, happy life. I respectfully beg your holy blessing and, kissing the sacred purple, I am honored to be,

Your grateful and humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

[5] Cardinal Berardi was a widower before entering the ecclesiastical career. [Editor]

Even before all the letters of commendation from the bishops had been received, Don Bosco wanted to enhance the prestige of the project immediately and thereby strengthen its impact. Therefore, through the good offices of Cardinal Berardi and Archbishop Vitelleschi, he sought a special blessing from the Holy Father.[6] The Pope granted it "with pleasure and wholeheartedly." The two prelates informed him about it with genuine cordiality.[7] The Archbishop of Seleucia wrote in part as follows, "Cardinal Berardi and I asked for the special blessing you implored of the Holy Father. But I was first, and therefore it was I who obtained the first blessing which I gladly send on to you with all my heart and with my sincerest and warmest wishes that God bless all the undertakings of your Congregation."

Both of these eminent correspondents agreed in their recommendations. The Archbishop wrote, "Put your hand to the task and see it through, but act with such prudence and circumspection as to avoid any further trouble with the prelate well-known to us." Frankly supporting this advice the Cardinal wrote, "On my own behalf in particular and because of the genuine interest I take in your Institute, please accept my suggestion to consider whether it would not be wiser to establish this work for priestly vocations outside the diocese of Turin. In the light of existing precedents there could well be problems, obstacles, and opposition; you know what I mean. So reflect *coram Domino quid magis expediat* [what is more expedient in the eyes of the Lord]. Consider what I say as merely my personal opinion."

Very soon events fulfilled that prediction. After Don Bosco received the Pope's blessing and the letters of commendation from twelve bishops, he felt that he ought to publish his plans. He therefore revised the above mentioned program, amplifying and explaining it in more detail, mentioning the papal blessing and indulgences to be announced later.[8] He applied again to the ecclesiastical censor for a *nihil obstat* and also asked him to inform the Ordinary. It was a week before any answer arrived and when it did, what an answer it

[6] We could not find either the originals or copies of these two letters, but the tenor of them is readily understood from the two replies.

[7] Letters dated June 2, and June 11, 1875.

[8] *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 2.

was! The gist of it was that in matters of such importance he must apply in person to the Archbishop; meanwhile he must suspend all publication of the matter since His Excellency foresaw that he would have to consult the bishops of the two ecclesiastical provinces of Turin and Vercelli and perhaps even those of Genoa.[9]

When all attempts to obtain an audience with the Archbishop proved futile, Don Bosco persisted once more by letter. He explained that the *Sons of Mary Project* was not an innovation but only a development and a more systematic consolidation of something already existing at the Oratory in a rudimentary form; it did not in the least conflict with the conditions laid down when the regulations were approved; all he required was permission to go to print. The reply from the Chancery office harped on the same theme as before plus the additional feature referred to in the following letter:

Turin, July 29, 1875

Dear Father Chiuso:

Please inform His Excellency the Archbishop that to date I have neither a decree nor a rescript of the indulgences for the planned *Sons of Mary Project.* The Holy Father has already granted them but he does not want them made public until the Project has been launched; the indulgences are to be granted only to the participants. He said so himself and also repeated it through Archbishop Vitelleschi. However, before I have anything printed I consider it my strict duty to submit the text to His Excellency for any remarks or modification which he may consider advisable.

You would do me a real favor if you would convey my humble respects to His Excellency. Meanwhile thank you, and my greetings in the Lord.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

While this correspondence was taking place, the Ordinary drafted a circular letter, which he sent to all the bishops of the ecclesiastical provinces of Turin, Vercelli, and Genoa, urging them to sign a

[9] Letter from the secretary, Father Chiuso, dated July 29, 1875.

protest to the Holy Father against the *Sons of Mary Project.* The letter expressed the fear that because of the Project, the minor seminaries and even the clergy of every diocese would suffer; in fact, with its appeal to the faithful, the diocesan seminaries would be deprived of alms and donations, and the best young men from every diocese would be attracted naturally to Don Bosco's Congregation. The Archbishop said that he personally was not opposed to the Project provided Don Bosco would promise not to enroll any boy under the age of eighteen and would not have any other program of studies than the one to be worked out with him, the Ordinary. He also wanted it understood that he and the two senior bishops of the province were to be fully empowered to visit and inspect the new school to make certain that it pursued its objectives without detriment to the seminaries.

The Bishop of Susa quite rightly replied that such fears for the seminaries were uncalled for, since Article 5 of the program gave the students full freedom to return to their respective dioceses after completing their studies. As for the intention of placing the Institute under episcopal jurisdiction, "Forgive me, Your Excellency," the Bishop continued, "if I dare voice my doubts as to whether it is advisable that, in view of Don Bosco's exceptional position, we bishops should venture even slightly to encroach upon the privilege of exemption granted to him by the Holy See. However willing he may have shown himself to accept any modifications that may be suggested by Your Excellency, I doubt very much whether he would be prepared to accept any that might alter his legitimate exemption or diminish his independence. In such an event he would be forced either to go ahead despite the opposition of Your Excellency, or to relinquish any plan to proceed with his Project. In the former instance you would be the loser for none of the dangers you fear would arise; in the latter, the Church would be harmed by being deprived of the advantages of such a Project. We now should be most concerned with obtaining such advantages."[10]

The Ordinary did not limit himself to writing the circular letter. He also wrote a long letter to Cardinal Bizzarri, Prefect of the Con-

[10] Letter dated August 2, 1875.

gregation of Bishops and Regulars, well worth quoting here in its entirety.

Turin, July 25, 1875

Your Eminence:

The Rev. John Bosco, founder and Superior of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales in Turin, yesterday submitted a printed document for ecclesiastical revision, said document containing plans for a school that his Congregation intends to open for *all* young men expressing an inclination for the priesthood, with a view toward educating them in philosophy and theology and then admitting them in religious Congregations, or sending them to foreign missions, or else returning them to their own dioceses for incorporation into the diocesan clergy. Besides the general invitation herein extended to young men of any and every diocese, a general appeal is also issued to the faithful of any and every diocese to support the new school with small donations. This undertaking would be called *Sons of Mary Project,* and it is said that the Holy Father has blessed and recommended this project. Now such a school would spell the ruin, wholly or in part, of diocesan minor seminaries because the bishops would be deprived of a large share of the alms given by the faithful in their diocese, which would be diverted to Don Bosco's school, and a great many boys in their diocese, attracted by the economic advantages it offers, would abandon their minor seminaries to attend the seminary of the aforesaid Congregation. Furthermore, Don Bosco would manage to retain the better candidates for himself, letting those who are less desirable return to their diocese.

I am, therefore, convinced that as soon as they are informed of this project the bishops in the provinces of Turin, Vercelli, and Genoa will file complaints against this project as a formidable menace to the most vital interests of their respective dioceses. As for my own diocese, I maintain that this project would be fatal to the minor seminary in the town of Giaveno under my jurisdiction, which at great expense, I am about to open within the next two months; and I find myself in the unpleasant necessity of protesting and preparing to use every means available to me to prevent the establishment of this kind of cosmopolitan school that Don Bosco wishes to open in Turin.

It is certainly a necessary and holy thing to educate young men for the priesthood and for foreign missions, and in this light the Holy Father blessed and encouraged the plan; but for the past several years

all the bishops in Piedmont have worked wisely and energetically at the task; each has opened his own minor seminary where the blessing of God is apparent, so that within a few years they should reap a fine harvest unless some new whirlwind comes to lay it waste.

In Turin, furthermore, we have the Institute of the Apostolic Schools founded and directed by Canon Ortalda, Director of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith. He has worked hard, and, at great expense, still works hard to keep it open; there are about 100 boys in it.

There is also a school at the renowned Institute of Canon Joseph Cottolengo where about 60 boys from various dioceses are maintained gratuitously. Its religious, moral, and classical education stirs the admiration of all who know it, and it succeeds in forming excellent and exemplary priests.

Therefore, the school now planned in Piedmont by Don Bosco would be superfluous on the one hand and harmful on the other.

Consequently, I cannot consent to such a school, and since it is not yet certain that the Holy Father has exempted Don Bosco's Houses from episcopal jurisdiction, I feel that I have sufficient authority to prevent its foundation.

Nevertheless, since I am anxious to avoid all strife and do not intend to provide grist for the anticlerical newspapers, I earnestly request Your Eminence, and through you, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, to order Don Bosco to desist at once from this plan until the bishops of the ecclesiastical provinces of Turin, Vercelli, and Genoa have investigated the matter and given their considered opinion.

This is a very serious matter, and unless measures are taken immediately it may well have deplorable consequences; therefore, in the interests of my diocese as well as those of my suffragan bishops, I beg Your Eminence to order Don Bosco to refrain from carrying out his Project.

Meanwhile, I kiss the sacred purple, and with the greatest esteem, I declare myself

Your most humble and respectful servant,

✠ Lawrence, Archbishop of Turin

On August 7 it was the Bishop of Ivrea's turn to address to the same cardinal a long-winded accusation in which he heatedly elaborated the same thesis of doom. "Establishing the *Sons of Mary Project for Vocations to the priesthood* in Turin for young men

from all parts of Italy, would gravely impair the jurisdiction of other Ordinaries; it would seriously harm both the major and the minor seminaries, and also the attempts being made to exempt clerics from military conscription;[11] it would also help to pave the way for the suppression of many dioceses."[12] The letter ended: "I earnestly beg Your Eminence to give gracious consideration to this honest report of the evils lamented above and about which the incumbent Archbishop of Turin is also apprehensive, and to issue orders for the cancellation of the *Sons of Mary Project.* I also beg you to remedy in some way the knotty discord that bewilders both priests and laymen who come to know of it.

In the meantime the approach of the new school year made it imperative to print the program without delay so that it might be distributed in time. Again and again Don Bosco sent the manager of the Oratory press to the Chancery for the requested *nihil obstat.* Such persistence was not only useless but it drew down upon Don Bosco a strong warning in which one can also detect a certain anxiety to find out if he had "received from the Holy See or *any* of its Congregations *any* order or exhortation to come to an agreement with the Archbishop of Turin."[13]

Don Bosco replied immediately.

Turin, August 8, 1875.

Dear Father Chiuso:

Please tell His Excellency the Archbishop that I have received neither order nor exhortation from the Holy See or any of its Congregations instructing me to enter into any agreement with the Archbishop of Turin in connection with the *Sons of Mary Project.* Had any such wish been expressed to me I would have complied faithfully as I have always endeavored to do. The reason is simply this: the project in question is for the general welfare of the Church, so I do not think I should commit myself to any single Ordinary. Although at times it might be necessary to consult an Ordinary concerning some applicant, at other times no such need might exist.

[11] Inasmuch as it would cut into the alms then collected for this purpose.

[12] One of the motives adduced to resist the threats of suppression of diocesan seminaries, namely, that they were all equally indispensable for the training of local clergy, would be eliminated by an inter-diocesan seminary where clerics from several dioceses could be educated.

[13] Letter from Father Chiuso, Chancery secretary, August 5, 1875.

If you see fit, you might also tell His Excellency that since I truly would rather lessen than increase his troubles, I have decided to experiment with this project in some other diocese.

In great esteem I am honored to be,

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

That same day he mailed another letter to a higher level. From the mysterious words quoted above how could anyone fail to guess what was happening behind the scenes that we already know? This then is what he wrote to Cardinal Antonelli, the Secretary of State.

Turin, August 8, 1875

Your Eminence:

I would have gladly refrained from speaking to you of a matter that will certainly increase your worries, which are already too numerous; but since I know that the Holy Father himself has already been informed about this, I think it best that I explain briefly how matters really stand so as to clarify this unfortunate controversy.

Perhaps Your Eminence will recall—at least in general—the project in question that is described on a separate page. Its fundamental purpose is to mitigate the tragic consequences of the military draft of clerics. I spoke of it to the Holy Father who advised me to put it all in writing, which I did. His Holiness had also instructed His Eminence Cardinal Berardi to report on it, and the report pleased the Holy Father. He blessed and commended the plan exhorting me directly and through others to put it into action as soon as possible.

When I returned to Turin I presented the project to twelve bishops. They all commended it and gave it their support. Before printing the prospectus I sent everything to the ecclesiastical censor asking him also to inform the Archbishop about it. A week elapsed before I received any answer, and then I was told that in matters of such importance the Archbishop wished to consult with the bishops of the [ecclesiastical] provinces of Turin, Genoa, and Vercelli. Since I could not obtain an audience I asked the secretary to explain that this was nothing new, but merely an expansion and regularization of something that has already been in existence in our House for a number of years; that it did

not concern any diocese in particular but the general welfare of the Church; and that since it had been commended and blessed by all the bishops who had knowledge of it and even by the Holy Father himself, it seemed to me that all I needed was permission to print. It was all in vain. I was given the same reply as before.

In the circular letters sent to the bishops of the [ecclesiastical] provinces mentioned above, various reasons were adduced to persuade them *to sign a protest to the Holy Father against this project.* The reasons advanced were not the same in all the letters. The principal ones are: Don Bosco is asking a monthly fee of 24 lire but will also accept students for less, and perhaps for nothing; Don Bosco says he will accept applicants only between the ages of sixteen and thirty, but then he will admit them even younger, and this is detrimental to the seminaries. In addition it is said that such a project, inasmuch as it is to be supported by the faithful, would be harmful to the diocesan seminaries.

I do not believe that any remarks are necessary.

This project is for the benefit of all the dioceses, and, should young men be enrolled free of charge, the advantage will be even greater. I know that some bishops replied that once something has been ordered by the Holy Father it should not be opposed but praised, supported, and promoted. Others replied that although every bishop is free in the administration of his own diocese, nevertheless he is bound to comply with the rulings of the Holy See, and not to protest against them. The Archbishop adds that should he allow this project to be carried out he would want it entirely subject to him. To which one bishop replied: *Any attempt to impose terms on bishops of other dioceses is an invasion of their jurisdiction.*

This is the situation. I have the paper, the men, and the presses standing by, but the ecclesiastical authority has brought everything to a standstill. Nor has the Archbishop set a date for breaking this impasse. He does not answer my letters nor will he grant me an audience. Every delay is harmful as well as costly and fruitless.

Under the circumstances I have decided to break this deadlock by starting the project in the diocese of one of the many bishops who have commended it, requested it, and offered material and moral support. It is true that this will involve many problems of both personnel and expense, but at least we shall have no opposition.

Before I alter a project blessed by the Holy Father, however, I humbly request Your Eminence to think about this situation and, if agreeable, to mention it to the Holy Father and then inform me so that I may know what to do.

I have been told that Your Eminence is not too well; I am very sorry indeed. We shall continue to pray, both individually and collectively, that you may long remain in good health for the good of the Church and of the Salesian Congregation in particular. In Your Eminence we have found at all times a benevolent father and a most distinguished benefactor.

In profound gratitude I am honored to kiss the sacred purple, and remain,

Your humble and respectful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The Ordinary's reply to his letter of the eighth only made things worse. All of Don Bosco's dealings with the Chancery seemed to have the effect of heaping more wood on a blazing fire. In the margin next to a phrase in the Chancery's reply Don Bosco scribbled, "Woe unto us if any further steps are taken!"[14] By this he meant, "Woe betide us indeed!" In a word, Don Bosco was afraid of the consequences to himself. By "further steps" he meant any further attempt to wrest the Archbishop's approval.

When he realized that trying to obtain the *nihil obstat* in Turin was like going down a blind alley, Don Bosco made arrangements for the printing with Bishop Manacorda of Fossano.[15] But a formal veto forbade him to distribute any form of "invitation, appeal, or prospectus" in the diocese of Turin until he produced "an authentic document" stating that "the Supreme Pontiff, in the fullness of his authority and despite all rulings of Canon Law to the contrary had, as regards this project, granted Don Bosco absolute authority and independence from episcopal jurisdiction."[16] At the same time the editor of *Unità Cattolica* was ordered not to publish anything further about the [*Sons of Mary*] *Project.*

Don Bosco had intended to carry out the initial experiment [at the Oratory] in a building to the left of the church; but wishing to end all delay and dispute once and for all he discussed the matter

[14] Letter from Fr. Chiuso, August 9, 1875.

[15] Letter to Archbishop Vitelleschi, August 10, 1875. The printing was done by the Saccone Press.

[16] Letter from Fr. Chiuso, August 11, 1875.

with the Archbishop of Genoa and decided to start work at Sampierdarena where he already had the Hospice of St. Vincent de Paul. According to the prospectus, applications were to be sent there. In writing about it to Archbishop Vitelleschi, he remarked, "I wish I had followed your advice about establishing the *Sons of Mary Project* in some other diocese. I would have struck it rich!"[17]

Throughout this distressing controversy Don Bosco was always perfectly calm. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that this trouble was not an isolated one but was related to others of even greater importance. Also his were many other responsibilities and duties which, of themselves, would have fully absorbed the energy of the most enterprising of men. Don Bosco's letters constantly provide us with evidence of his unshakable serenity. Here is his reply to the peremptory letter of August 11 that we quoted above:

Turin, August 14, 1875

My dear Father:

As I wrote you in my letter of the eighth I earnestly desire not only to refrain from causing any trouble to my ecclesiastical superior but also to lessen his worries as much as I can. Therefore, I have thought it best to establish my project for the training of young adults for the priesthood elsewhere. I have also been advised to do this by someone in an important position who is very fond of our Archbishop and who is also very generous to our humble Congregation.

You mention two conditions[18] which, though praiseworthy in themselves, would utterly destroy the autonomy of the Project, for then it would no longer be general in scope but merely diocesan. On the other hand, I would have to refer the Project once again to the Pope who, as in the past, would refer it to a committee for a report on it after which he would decide whether the promised indulgences should be granted. This would certainly take up much time. Besides I have already received letters from some bishops forbidding the establishment of this Project

[17] Letter already quoted.

[18] "His Excellency instructs me to inform you that he will give his consent to this work and that all his suffragan bishops will likewise endorse it, if these two conditions are explicitly added: (1) that the young men enrolling in the school be at least twenty years old; (2) that the school be always under the supervision of the Archbishop and of the two senior Bishops of the province in which it is founded. (Letter dated August 11, 1875)

in their dioceses if it is to be administered and directed by a bishop of another diocese.

I regret very much that my Project has not been properly understood. It would be much easier for me to make myself understood if I were not always forced to talk and write through intermediaries. An Ordinary is free to propose, accept, and modify as he wishes any diocesan project. But this Project is conceived as extra-diocesan. Its purpose is to gather a number of young men; two or three might be from one diocese, none at all from another; years might elapse without there being anyone from our own diocese. The aim of this Project is to come to the assistance of religious Orders and the missions, and also to train clerics for their own dioceses without materially or morally burdening their Ordinaries.

You write that I may neither publish nor distribute information about this Project, nor make any appeals to charity. This is entirely against common practice. I have always believed that only the *nihil obstat* was required for the printing of such material and that appeals to charity could be made because they are not subject to ecclesiastical jurisdiction. This is what I have done for the past thirty-five years. Nevertheless I shall not publish anything in this diocese; if it should become necessary to make appeals, I shall apply for the required permission, and if denied I shall seek help elsewhere. I regret very much that, although much is being said about me no mention is ever made of either my past or present efforts to secure young men for the Turin seminary,[19] or all that the

[19] One Sunday in 1875 Father Soldati, honorary Canon and Acting Director of the seminary, was explaining a chapter of the *Imitation* during his morning conference to all the clerics and seized the opportunity to speak about the respect due to the Archbishop, and of a certain kind of training being given in certain schools where young men were dissuaded from obeying their ecclesiastical superior and from entering the diocesan seminary, to the scandal and detriment of the clergy. He did not mention Don Bosco by name, but his listeners knew exactly what he meant and were unfavorably impressed.

And here is the proof: during the afternoon recreation, the senior seminarians were in their dormitory and in due course, the conversation turned to the conference. Fr. Berrone, their Assistant and an alumnus of the Oratory, invited the clerics to form two groups: Don Bosco's alumni were to gather around him, the others to stand to one side. Of the thirty-eight clerics present, thirty-five of them gathered around their Assistant. He asked them to remain there for a moment and went to call the Superior saying his presence was urgently needed in the seniors' dormitory. And there the Assistant respectfully pointed out what a large number of seminarians out of that group alone, had been given to the diocese by Don Bosco.

The Canon looked rather embarrassed and assured the clerics that he had no intention of offending them. He said a few more words in apology and then withdrew.

Father Augustus Amossi, who later became a Salesian and died at the Oratory in 1926, was a witness to this episode.

Salesians do by way of preaching, teaching catechism, or in any other activity; and all this without in the least inconveniencing the Ordinary. Now when we would have every right to count on special support and goodwill, serious obstacles are placed in our way. None of the other bishops who are acquainted with this Project have ever hindered it.

Please bear with me, read this letter as best you can, and rest assured that my only intention is to do some good through a Project about which our Archbishop on several occasions has both said and written that the finger of God is in it, and that it should be supported by all those in a position to do so. Believe me to be always, with great esteem,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The same calm spirit of resignation is evident in a memorandum to Archbishop Vitelleschi dated August 14. In a letter informing Don Bosco that he had been obliged to report to the Holy Father "about complaints by the Archbishop of Turin and the Bishop of Ivrea, against the planned new school," the Secretary to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars concluded, "This Sacred Congregation will have to send a reply."[20] These words were equivalent to a request for an explanation. Don Bosco wrote to him from Mornese:

August 24, 1875

Your Excellency:

I very much regret that a significance and importance that were never intended are now being attached to the *Sons of Mary Project.*

Here in brief is the historical background: One day with the Holy Father I was deploring the difficult position that the Church would be in because of compulsory military service in the near future. I then went on to speak of the encouraging results obtained in the experiment of training older boys.

The Holy Father benignly encouraged me. I then drew up a plan and submitted it to him, and he graciously blessed it.

It was not a question of opening any new school but merely of bring-

[20] Letter dated August 15, 1875.

ing together a selected group of students in one of our Houses. This was already being done on a small scale, and now I planned to continue it on a larger one. To avoid any complaint on the part of the Archbishop, the prospectus was submitted for ecclesiastical approval. The Archbishop did not answer but kept the matter dangling for a week. During that time he wrote to Rome and also addressed a circular letter to the bishops of the ecclesiastical provinces of Genoa, Vercelli, and Turin urging them to add their signature to a protest to the Holy See against the Project.

As far as I know nearly all the bishops replied to this effect: "Once the Holy Father has blessed an undertaking, approval or disapproval are no longer debatable; instead the utmost should be done to implement his holy desires." The Archbishop wrote a second and a third circular letter stating the following terms: "Students were to be between twenty and thirty years old and under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Turin." Objections were raised to this last condition, and several bishops wrote stating emphatically that I should not accept this condition because it would mean that the Archbishop would exercise jurisdiction in the dioceses of other bishops.

I tried to write to him, but in reply only received letters from his secretary that did not lead to any solution. I attempted to talk with the Archbishop in person, but despite long hours in his antechamber I was finally told to tell his secretary what I wanted because he could not grant me an audience. I then asked his secretary to explain to his Superior that I had no intention of undertaking anything new but merely developing something already in existence; that the Project was not just diocesan but general in scope and that it might well be that not one single young man from his own diocese would join the group. I added that it was not my intention to make priests of them; my only aim was to select good laymen, give them an academic education, and leave them free to return to their respective dioceses, enter a religious Order, or join the foreign missions when the time came for them to decide their vocations. I then wrote that "in my desire to diminish the problems of my ecclesiastical Superior I would start the Project in some other diocese where this kind of work had been requested; and that I believed this would consequently remove all misgivings and put an end to the controversy."

The secretary replied that the Archbishop would not permit the publication of the program in his diocese, its distribution, or any appeal for alms, etc., etc.

I answered that I would abide completely by such orders.

I have now decided to experiment with the *Sons of Mary Project* at

our House in Sampierdarena in the diocese of Genoa where I have the full approval of the Archbishop there.

Other bishops as well have asked me to open similar Institutes in their dioceses, and I hope that in the years to come this may be accomplished.

I believe that under these circumstances the Archbishop of Turin has no further cause for complaint. If he wishes, he himself can start such a work together with the Bishop of Ivrea. I would be very happy if they were to accomplish in their own dioceses what they feel should not be done by others. It would multiply time and effort and bear even greater fruit.

Should Your Excellency have any advice to give me I shall consider it a genuine act of charity; for, although this undertaking is in harmony with the Divine Will, its realization requires the guidance of men of great wisdom; and any suggestion Your Excellency may offer would be so regarded.

I am writing this letter from the convent of Mary Help of Christians where a retreat is in progress for 150 ladies; the Sisters are in charge of discipline and the material preparations. These Sisters are the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians about whom we have already spoken previously. Their number grows rapidly. In one town they have charge of the elementary school, and they have a boarding school and two other houses in other dioceses. Mornese is in the diocese of Acqui, and the Most Rev. Joseph Sciandra, its bishop, is a real father to us and guides us in everything.

Please be so good as to pardon the trouble I constantly give you, and permit me to be, in profound gratitude,

Your devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. So not to jeopardize the *Sons of Mary Project* in any way, the printing will not be done on our presses [at the Oratory] as we had started to do, but at Fossano with the permission of Bishop Manacorda who is well-disposed toward us.

The Ordinary was still not appeased. In an official letter to Cardinal Bizzarri dated August 25, he plunged directly into the main argument immediately after stating his official reason for writing. He related the whole story of the Project from his own point of view. Meanwhile Don Bosco, awaiting an answer from Rome, received these comforting words from Cardinal Antonelli:

Rome, September 4, 1875

Dear Don Bosco:

Due attention has been given to what you wrote to me in your letter of August 8 about the difficulties encountered in your own city in connection wtih the *Sons of Mary Project* for vocations to the priesthood. In the face of such difficulties your plan to establish this work in some other diocese where you are not denied the approval or support of the Ordinary, can only be considered a wise decision.

In writing this answer to your letter mentioned above, may I convey to you my best wishes for the success of your undertaking, while I am, in great esteem,

Your servant,
James, Card. Antonelli

The Saint loved peace and did everything aboveboard. Although he was not obligated to do so he now informed his Ordinary, without the slightest trace of resentment of his decision to establish the *Sons of Mary* elsewhere. He apprised him in the following letter:[21]

Turin, September 29, 1875

Your Excellency:

So as to spare you displeasure and annoyance I am now establishing the *Sons of Mary Project* in another diocese.

I would like to distribute copies of the program here in the Archdiocese of Turin, too, but I shall not do so unless I receive the necessary permission.

I therefore beg Your Excellency to grant me this favor if you do not consider it to be contrary to the greater glory of God.

In deep veneration, I am honored to be,

Your most devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco's prudent and charitable serenity never faltered whether he was writing about this disagreeable subject or even

[21] At Fr. Chiuso's death his private library was dispersed and a collection of twenty-seven letters came into the possession of Fr. Giuganino. Later these letters found their way into our files enabling us to fill in the timegap which previously existed in the correspondence between Don Bosco and the Ordinary and his Chancery.

when he was discussing it. On August 14 when he reported on the situation to the Superior Chapter, he was quite sparing in his words and always spoke in his usual, kind, indulgent tone. Toward the end of January 1876, he remarked to Father Barberis, *"The Sons of Mary Project* is now started. There have been a few obstacles during this first year, and it is not progressing as well as we would like, that is, we have only a few students. But this Project will most certainly succeed, you'll see, and in time it will be the only resource of bishops and the missions. It is easy for some people to say, 'Times are bad, but maybe they will soon change, better days will come and vocations will increase!' We may yearn for better days but we cannot hope for them. If it is true that effects are proportionate to the cause and that from a certain cause a certain effect must follow, what we now see is so deeply rooted and so grim that its effects will necessarily endure for a long time and be exceedingly bitter, and no mortal eye can see where all this will end. Barely thirty or forty years ago many countries were Catholic, and they could look to each other for assistance. But now no more, no more. Yet despite all this, let us not lose heart. The harvest is great. We, too, shall contribute our little pebble to the majestic monument of victory."[22]

The more enlightened bishops considered the [*Sons of Mary*] *Project* good and useful. The Bishop of Albenga proclaimed it "worthy of all praise," and warmly encouraged its founder to carry it out.[23] The Bishop of Vigevano recognized "Don Bosco's spirit" in it and said he had always admired him "as a man of God."[24] The Bishop of Acqui said that the Project "would fill a much-felt need" and supported his words by narrating an episode. "Only yesterday a parish priest came to tell me of a young man in his parish. He is 24 years old, no longer subject to military service, very devout and talented and desirous to become a priest. However, he has no background in Latin and at his age could not adapt himself to the routine study of it at the seminary; nor would he have the financial means to do so. Certainly such a young man, and many others who are in the same circumstances, would benefit greatly by such a school as that now planned by Don Bosco."[25]

[22] Brief chronicle written by Father Barberis, January 23, 1875.
[23] Letter to the Holy Father, April 12, 1875.
[24] Letter to Cardinal Berardi, April 12, 1875.
[25] Letter to Cardinal Berardi, April 15, 1875.

The Bishop of Alessandria "was happy" to approve the plan, and said he was praying that God would hasten its realization with his grace.[26] Although the Bishop of Tortona held that it was necessary and very worthwhile to have boys enter the seminary at an early age to assist them to the priesthood with greater assurance of success, he nevertheless believed that it was "undeniable" that through "the *Sons of Mary Project* there would be the addition of a considerable number of young men—so sorely needed at present —with greater propensity for the priesthood."[27] According to the Bishop of Casale "Don Bosco, a man of God," had drawn up "a well-conceived program that offered hopes for excellent results."[28] The Archbishop of Genoa hoped that in the face of the existing scarcity of priests "it would prove to be of great assistance to the Church."[29]

Don Bosco was always delighted to talk about the *Sons of Mary,* as these young men with late vocations were now called. Speaking with some confreres on February 6, 1876, he deplored the tyrannical military draft law that was doing so much harm to vocations. He added that he was trying to minimize it by seeking young men who had either completed their military service or been exempted from it. He then continued, "Here, too, the bishops will see the excellent results we obtain with these young adults, and they will follow our example and open schools for the same purpose.[30] *Deo gratias.* [Thanks be to God.] We have started the ball rolling and shall be happy if the good work continues and develops by whatever means or ways. I pin my very special hopes on these *Sons of Mary* for I believe that they are the only resource the Church has nowadays."

"It's really wonderful how things move," one of those present remarked. Don Bosco starts something and there is no turning back."

"We never turn back because we are always sure of what we

[26] Letter dated April 16, 1875.
[27] Letter to Don Bosco, April 16, 1875.
[28] Letter to the Holy Father, April 18, 1875.
[29] Letter to the Holy Father, April 18, 1875.
[30] This did indeed come about. For example, after the First World War, schools of this kind were founded in France, Germany, and elsewhere thanks to the efforts of zealous bishops.

are doing," said Don Bosco. "Before we undertake anything we make sure that it is God's will that it be done. We begin our task with the certainty that God wills it. Once we are convinced of it, we go forward. We may meet with a thousand obstacles along the way, but it does not matter; God wills it, so we are undismayed in the presence of any obstacles."

"But the difficulty lies precisely in knowing with certainty that God wants such a thing," said Father Chiala.

"Who could be sure of it without an actual revelation?" the others asked.

Without heeding their remarks, Don Bosco continued, "However, we do not proceed blindly. Even though we have unlimited trust in the will of God and His Divine Providence, before undertaking anything we first thoroughly examine the means available—I do not mean those that we actually have, because we do not have any, if we did!—no, such means as we may reasonably expect. Then when part of the work has been done I say, "Now let us pause a moment. Have we the means to continue? Is there any reasonable hope of getting them? Or are our resources not sufficiently reliable? If we go on, we do so with caution. Besides, we do not sit with folded hands. We send letters, reminders, and appeals here, there, and everywhere. We organize lotteries and other fund-raising projects, and leave no stone unturned. I always anticipate these things whenever I put my hand to anything. After all how would we ever succeed otherwise? I have unlimited trust in Divine Providence but Providence also wants us to contribute all that we can and have."[31]

Although the *Sons of Mary Project* met with so much opposition at the outset it must be numbered among those undertakings that held out to Don Bosco not a vague probability of success, but really "extraordinary expectations." He said as much himself on September 26, 1875, when presiding at a meeting of the Superiors of the Congregation. "These young men show maturity and will do much good once they become priests. In fact they are already doing so because they help with tasks in the House that could not be entrusted to others—assisting, supervising, teaching in the elementary grades. A number of applications have been received, some

[31] Chronicle previously quoted, February 1876.

from soldiers and one from a brigadier. Every day I receive letters from bishops commending the Project, and applications for admission from young men, either directly or through their pastors."[32]

At the beginning of the new school year quite a number of these young men were still lodged at the Oratory although their official headquarters were, so to speak, at the hospice in Sampierdarena. In both places they attended high school with the other boys. At the Oratory the newcomers found a congenial group of companions who had been living there for some time and who shared their aspirations. In March 1876, Don Bosco started something new. He formed a new class made up of the older boys in the second and third year high. With the emphasis on Latin and Italian this class was to accelerate its studies and prepare these students to receive the cassock in November. This special course was called the *"school of fire"* because of the ardor and eagerness with which they pursued their studies. Don Bosco had already made an announcement about this course in his regular *Good Night* on February 8:

My dear boys, I want to tell you something that I have already confided to a few people although it is not generally known. I hope to accomplish a lot of good with it. Therefore I am now making it known to all.

Now this is it. I want to catch a big haul of fish. I want to cast my nets and haul in everyone who wants to be caught. Now, this is the situation! [South] America begs me insistently for missionaries. Immense territories over there have no missionaries; people still languish in the shadow of death, in the darkness of idolatry; and this tragic state of affairs persists only because no missionaries have yet gone there to make the true faith known to them. Then here at home we are beginning to feel the effects of the great scarcity of priests and everyone is saying, "No one wants to become a priest anymore!"

This scarcity of priests at home and this crying need for missionaries have induced me to set up a special course of studies for those who want to complete their high school, and later their philosophy course, at a faster pace. My plan is to set up a real accelerated course in which only the essential subjects will be taught. Free of minor subjects this course could be completed much faster.

Anyone now in the fourth, third, and maybe even the second year of

[32] Chronicle previously quoted, September 1875.

high school who wants to enroll in this course may do so provided he is not too young; he should be at least sixteen. Eight-year olds, for example, do not need to rush because they can comfortably attend classes at the regular pace. I hope that with this special program, carried out, as I was saying, in the shortest possible time and with the aid of good teachers and your own great goodwill, you will make so much progress that you will be ready to receive the cassock on the feast of All Saints.

The first essential condition however is a firm will, because if your will is weak now while the pace is slow you will not be able to keep up with the course once it gathers momentum. Therefore, your teachers should vouch for this firm will of yours. Do not wonder now nor ask, "How shall we manage so fast?" I know that under the conditions I am about to describe you will succeed with the help of your good teachers, your own goodwill, and, of course, your own great intelligence and talent. (*There were whisperings, big smiles, and some elation on the part of many of the boys at these words of praise.*)

Now there are other conditions besides those of age and goodwill already mentioned. Each of you must decide either to remain here or go to the missions. I say remain here at the Oratory rather than belong to the diocese of Turin, because to be admitted to the seminary of this diocese you need the diploma given at the end of the fifth year of high school. As seen in the case of Giglio last year, good marks alone are not enough to get you admitted to the seminary. Giglio would have passed the examinations for receiving the cassock, and with high grades too, but, because he had not taken the fifth year of high school, he was disqualified, and he had to complete his fifth year at Giaveno. I do not think that other dioceses require anything like this. If we recommend someone, they will let him receive the cassock; however, I cannot give you any definite assurance or guarantee on that. Here in Turin, furthermore, you would also have to take an examination on the entire catechism, and you lack the time to prepare for it. Moreover, you would have to give up the idea of taking the state examinations, or at least think it over very carefully before reaching a decision. These examinations cover all the subjects required by the curriculum whereas here we have to skip the minor subjects so as to get on with Latin and Italian. The omission of the minor subjects will not prevent you from making satisfactory progress. Therefore anyone who intends to take the examination for the high school diploma should not take this special course that we are now starting.

You will have to be patient and give up your regular vacations. There

will be a few days of diversion and the retreat at Lanzo when we shall put all books aside and devote ourselves to spiritual exercises. But nothing more because we are pressed for time. If we start at the beginning of March, as I have planned, we can count on about eight months before November, and if you study very hard much can be done. You must also understand that if you were to go anywhere else, to a seminary for example, you would not as a general rule have any classes in Italian literature during the philosophy course; so you would be a bit behind in that subject. Here, on the other hand, you will still have the regular program in both Italian and Latin literature during the two-year philosophy course. So even if things are done rather hurriedly now there will still be time and opportunity to make up for it during the philosophy course.

Last year, for example, there were a few students who were somewhat behind in both Latin and Italian, but if they attend class this year and the next, they will be able, we hope, to catch up and become useful both to themselves and to others.

As you see, dear sons, we are forced to do things this way; everywhere people are calling for us and expecting us. [South] America, more anxious than any other country, looks to us for assistance in the form of many laborers, like Xavier, men as dauntless as he was. We have no choice, it is true, but we will turn necessity into virtue.

Courage, dear children. Let us sincerely try to consecrate ourselves entirely to God; let each of us do whatever he can according to his abilities to promote His glory. Then you may be sure that our Lord will not fail to bless us. Good night.

A little incident which occurred in those early days ought not to be passed over in silence.

Don Bosco had instructed the Director of Studies, as the present Prefect of Studies was then called, that Cornelius was to be the Latin author in the accelerated course. Without clearing it with Don Bosco, the good Father substituted Caesar, because the former third-year students had already translated Cornelius. The outcome could easily have been foreseen. The former second-year students had difficulty when abruptly confronted with the *Commentaries,* and some of them asked to return to their former class.

When Don Bosco heard this, he reprimanded the Director of Studies in the presence of other priests, saying rather strongly, "This would not have occurred if obedience had been observed. Every-

thing would have turned out better if the goodwill of the boys toward that author had been gained in the way I had suggested." So as not to discourage those who were weak in Latin, he had suggested that in the beginning, the transition to Cornelius should be presented as follows: "So far you have been translating the *Epitome,* in fact, quite a few chapters; now we should advance a little further and take Cornelius as is customary in high school. The upper classmen will join you, but you will all continue together to study the same author."

The Prefect of Studies tried to offer an explanation, pointing out that some of the students had already translated Cornelius. "That is not the point," Don Bosco said firmly. "The point is that that was the agreement, and accordingly, in the spirit of obedience, that should have been done!"

In the ensuing embarrassment someone tried to change the subject, but someone else interrupted to say that the three boys who had dropped out of the accelerated course were really very good boys. "Those three boys!" exclaimed Don Bosco. "I, on my part, no longer count on them. . . . I shall not even try to advise or guide them any longer. . . . They declined an obligation they had assumed. . . ." But the expression on Don Bosco's face had a deeper implication. It seemed to indicate that the greater part, if not all, of the responsibility for this incident belonged to the Prefect of Studies.[33]

This lesson is reminiscent of the patron saint of the Salesians. He solemnly and severely reprimanded St. Frances de Chantal for an act which, from the point of obedience, was not even a venial sin and which in fact had been no more than a mere imperfection. The spot where he delivered the reprimand has not been forgotten and today is still pointed out and looked upon with reverence. The kindly St. Francis de Sales adapted his spiritual direction to the state of the individual soul he was guiding along the path of salvation. In directing people called to the highest perfection he followed the evangelical principle, *Cui multum datum est, multum quaeretur ab eo.* [Of everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required. Luke 12, 48] Thus Don Bosco's words, which seemed very harsh when they were spoken, were really not at all contrary

[33] Chronicle quoted above, March 27, 1876.

to the true concept of holiness. He, too, demanded greater fidelity to his instructions from the older members of the Society because they were pledged to greater virtue.

It must be admitted however that not everyone at the Oratory shared Don Bosco's views about the *Sons of Mary*. Some had little confidence of success with men whose minds were no longer plastic and who, moreover, had previously been unskilled laborers or peasants. Usually something new arouses diffidence. Don Bosco was not in the habit of confiding his plans to everyone. Neither did he make them known all at once, but only as circumstances dictated and when there was reasonable hope of their being understood. Consequently those in the habit of obeying his instructions did whatever he said, convinced that it was the best thing to do; but others who tended to fault-finding or who looked at things superficially frequently objected. In our case, who could ever have imagined the number and caliber of the spiritual children of Abraham who would be raised from the very stones by this work of Don Bosco! It became especially apparent in the missions that the accelerated course had produced a class of men of astonishing apostolic fiber.

As was his custom Don Bosco went his way and let people talk. He never overlooked an opportunity to praise this program which was under particular fire and to gain appreciation and support for it in the community. He placed the saintly priest, Father Guanella, in charge of the program to mold it into a compact, well-organized body, quite distinct from the rest of the House; and Father Guanella gladly shouldered the burden. Shortly after, Don Bosco had to go to Rome. It was his intention to bring to the Holy Father a letter from each group at the Oratory, and he wanted the *Sons of Mary* represented. He therefore asked their Director to draft a letter. Father Guanella wrote this fine address for which our readers will be grateful:

April 1, 1876

Most Holy Father:

Providence, in whose hands the fate of mankind lies, called me to the religious life in the Salesian Congregation while I was a parish priest at Savogno in the diocese of Como.

Here I experience the greatest spiritual happiness and thank the Lord

for it. Time passes quickly in fulfilling the duties entrusted to me by my good Superiors. On Sundays I supervise the Oratory of St. Aloysius that is attended by some 700 boys from the city. But my main occupation and greatest joy on weekdays is to direct the young men in the *Sons of Mary Project* which was so graciously blessed and befriended by Your Holiness.

There are over a hundred *Sons of Mary,* and at least forty of them will receive the cassock in November. Their conduct is exemplary and their love of study admirable. Even the less talented are undaunted. Many of them can now reasonably look forward to completing five years of Latin in only twelve months; the rest may need two years. They are enthusiastic about our beloved Don Bosco, and all of them admire the great Pontiff of the Immaculate Conception and are impatient to work for souls.

Most Holy Father, bless all of them so that in the future their numbers may multiply as we now hope, and that they may turn out to be worthy laborers in the vineyard of the Lord.

I beg the Vicar of Jesus Christ to bless me also. I am now finishing a book entitled, *A Guide for Catholics*—forty talks on Christian Doctrine explained in parables and examples. Bless this work of mine also, and, above all, bless whatever our Lord shall want of me each day until I die.

Bless the diocese of Como so that it may soon have a Salesian school.

In conclusion, I implore your Holiness to grant me and my beloved mother, brothers, and relatives unto the third generation a plenary indulgence at the hour of death when our Lord shall summon me and them to Himself.

Meanwhile we shall pray to God that He soon will grant you peaceful and happy days.

We shall pray that all men may recognize the Guardian Angel of nations in the great Pontiff of the Immaculate Conception and of the Vatican Council.

I prostrate myself at the feet of Your Holiness and remain now and always,

Your most respectful and loving son,

Fr. Louis Guanella

Don Bosco delivered this letter to the Pope in person. The Pope graciously read it, commented on it, and wrote his august signature on it with the date, April 16, 1876, and the following blessing:

Benedicat vos Deus et dirigat vos in viis suis. [May God bless you and guide you in His ways].

Our good Father was so happy about it that despite all he had to do he could not wait to inform Father Guanella.

Rome, Easter, 1876

Dear Father Louis:

Yesterday (April 15), during the last audience, the Holy Father graciously read from beginning to end the letter that the *Sons of Mary* had addressed to him. He then asked about their number, their studies, and our expectations. He inquired also after their health and their inclination, if any, for the foreign missions, etc. I did my best to answer his questions. "Thank God," he said, "for having permitted this Project to get started! Tell these good young men that I love them very much in our Lord and that I am relying on them to save many souls for God. Their program of action should be a good moral life, love of study, and contempt for the world. I bless them with all my heart!" He then took his pen and wrote some precious words at the bottom of their letter and granted them a number of indulgences about which I will tell them myself.

Meanwhile, work hard, dear Father Louis; divine assistance shall not fail us. Be calm, patient, and brave. I will tell you many things when I see you . . . .

Give my warm regards to all the *Sons of Mary,* and also please write Father Albera about the special blessing the Holy Father has sent to the *Sons of Mary* at his House. Love me in Jesus Christ, and believe me always,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Please offer up a prayer and a Communion for my intention. Tell Father Barberis to ask the same of the novices.

At the same time Don Bosco petitioned the Holy Father for special indulgences to encourage the generous people who were helping him realize his project.[34] He received an all-inclusive Brief

[34] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 3.

from Rome that should have buried forever all opposition to the Project.

But it did not. As the result of an article published in the September 17 issue of *Unità Cattolica* the canonical controversy suddenly erupted again. After a reference to the purpose and nature of the *Sons of Mary Project* the article reported: "The first experiment made this year has been highly gratifying. The hospice of St. Vincent de Paul at Sampierdarena was chosen as a suitable location for this Project though only a limited number of students could be accommodated. Since the building designated for them is still under construction, some of the students had to pursue their studies in other houses of the Salesian Congregation. The results of this past year were as follows:

Total number of students	100
Students attending high school	35
" aspiring to the religious life	8
" aspiring to the foreign missions	6
" studying for the priesthood for their home dioceses	21

After mentioning the gratification of the Pope and the spiritual favors that he had bestowed upon the Project, the article printed the Italian translation of the Brief. The Oratory had sent the article to *Unità Cattolica* and a modified version of it to *Il Cittadino* of Genoa and maybe to other Catholic newspapers. The program of the Project had also been included. "I want our priests and Directors to realize how important this Project is," Don Bosco said in commenting on this publicity, "because as yet they do not appreciate it sufficiently. I believe that henceforth this Project will be the major source supplying bishops with candidates for the priesthood who will not be taken from them by the military draft. I also need people to realize the importance of the Salesian Cooperators. So far this has not been achieved, but I hope that through some publicity a large percentage of the Italian population will join the Salesian [Cooperators] and open the way for us to undertake very many things."[35] Contributions to the *Sons of Mary Project* was precisely

[35] Chronicle of Father Barberis, October 1, 1876.

one of the many varied forms of aid that would be given by the Salesian Cooperators in the course of time. It is worth noting that in this private conversation with Father Barberis about newspaper publicity, Don Bosco did not make even the slightest reference to the storm that had just been aroused by this publicity.

Two days after the publication of the article in *Unità Cattolica* Don Bosco, who was conducting a retreat for the Salesians at Lanzo, sent another article to Father Margotti, the editor, with this calm note:

Lanzo, September 19, 1876

Dear Father:

I enclose a second article dealing with the *Sons of Mary Project;* it was edited by Father Durando.

Please take good care of the letter from [Fr.] Cagliero; I need it for a reprint in *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings].

The Holy Father wishes us to take charge of the schools at Albano and also recommends other schools to us as well.

Oh! If we only had a thousand teachers!

God protect you.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

Margotti sent the following reply:

Mirabello, September 20, 1876

Dearest and most revered Don Bosco:

I have this very minute received your letter together with the second article. Yesterday I received the reprimand enclosed herewith. I never would have thought that Don Bosco would trick me into printing something not suitable for publication. The fault is mainly yours. So far I have not sent any answer to the Canon and perhaps will refrain from doing so.

Return the letter to me and let me know what you think *in Domino* [in the Lord], but do not discuss it with anybody. For the sake of those *quos Spiritus Sanctus posuit regere ecclesiam Dei* [whom the Holy Spirit has appointed to rule the Church of God—Cf. Acts 20, 28] we have to

sacrifice all our pride. I am in a hurry now, but always with great esteem and sincere affection.

Devotedly,

T. Margotti

[P.S.] I must ask you not to make any copy of that letter.

How prudent and charitable both of them were! Don Bosco with his own religious community and the journalist-priest with Don Bosco. The phrases, "I would never have thought" and "the fault is . . . yours," do not sound as a reproach but rather suggest irony of which the great journalist was abundantly endowed. How well they understood each other![36] We would be cheating our readers and mutilating history if we did not reproduce the severe "reprimand" here.

Turin, September 17, 1876

Very Reverend and dear Monsignor:

His Excellency the Archbishop has asked me to inform you that he was most displeased to read an article on the *Sons of Mary Project* in the September 18 issue of *Unità Cattolica,* No. 216, an article written without his knowledge. In that article a Papal Brief is published. As yet no authentic copy of it has been given to the Archbishop of Turin as should have been done. There is also reference to a *canonically established* association of the faithful: the Archbishop of Turin knows nothing about this *canonical establishment.* There is reference to indulgences about which the Archbishop knows absolutely nothing and this is against the decrees of the Council of Trent. In short, the hierarchical order of the Church is being ignored, and the prerogatives and duties proper to the archiepiscopal authority by divine and ecclesiastical right are being infringed upon. Some time ago this Chancery remonstrated with Don Bosco for having published these things through his print shop without the *approval of the Archbishop,* and for this reason you had been requested

[36] In the August 23 issue there was the following footnote to an article on the *Salesian Missions in Patagonia: "Unità Cattolica* has always felt great affection and veneration for Don Bosco, and we are aware that in all his activities he is motivated solely by the glory of God, his love for the Church and the Pope, and his eagerness to save souls for Jesus Christ. We consider ourselves fortunate whenever we have occasion to promote his holy, apostolic efforts in the columns of our newspaper."

not to reprint such publications in your journal. But neither remonstrances nor directives have availed anything. It is not the first time, but the third or fourth, that *Unità Cattolica* has abused the freedom granted to it and the trust of the present Archbishop by publishing articles that are in no way compatible with the respect due to the archiepiscopal authority of the diocese by all the faithful and especially by those journalists who claim to be sincerely Catholic.

It is not enough to do good: one has to do it in the proper manner. *Bonum ex integra causa, malum ex quocumque defectu.* [Good must be totally good; or it is good no longer.]

The Archbishop hopes that *Unità Cattolica* will not give him any further cause for complaint, and that it will therefore abstain from publishing the program as is promised toward the end of the article. This until the Archbishop himself, after examining the information that Don Bosco is obliged to give in this matter, will assure you that everything is in good order.

The Archbishop asks me to convey his respects to you and congratulates you on the article, *The Cross of Thorns* appearing in the aforementioned issue.

Your devoted servant,

Canon T. Chiuso, Secretary

The apprehensions of the Ordinary, his unjustified demands, and remonstrances about Don Bosco's affairs arose mainly because he had not yet acknowledged Don Bosco's legitimate privilege of exemption about which, as already stated above, he had been respectfully reminded by the Bishop of Susa. It is true that in the Archdiocese of Turin the Project existed only *de facto* whereas the Brief recognized it as already "canonically established": there was also the customary formula, "as we have been informed." Nevertheless, at the outset the Ordinary of Turin had never made an issue of the Project but of the "school," of the "interdiocesan school."[37] On the other hand, it is quite probable that during the discussions which took place directly between Don Bosco and Rome, the positive permission of the Archbishop of Genoa to establish the Project at Sampierdarena, had been considered as canonical approval. At

[37] Letter to Cardinal Bizzarri, August 25, 1875.

Don Bosco's request Father Paul Albera, the Director, had spoken with Archbishop Magnasco who had approved the Project and given his *imprimatur* for the publication of the program printed at the Hospice.[38] Since there was no surreptitious motive the spiritual favors were not abrogated.

The displeasure of the Ordinary was increased by his belief that Don Bosco intended to bring grist to his own mill with the *Sons of Mary Project.* In fact, when preaching in the church of the Holy Spirit in Turin that year, the Ordinary had appealed to the congregation for clerics in financial straits, adding, "It is true that in one part of this city many clerics are trained, but they are sent far away and are therefore of no help to us." The allusion was obvious—the faithful knew perfectly well at whom his remark was aimed; for in Turin missionaries were sent abroad only from Valdocco.

Unità Cattolica published Father Cagliero's letter from [South] America as Don Bosco had requested, but no further reference was made to the *Sons of Mary Project.* Don Bosco was under no obligation to contact the archiepiscopal Chancery since he had received no communication about this matter other than the confidential note from Father Margotti. Nevertheless he wrote this very respectful letter to the Ordinary.

Lanzo, October 5, 1876

Your Excellency:

Father Margotti informs me that he will not print the program of the *Sons of Mary Project* until he receives word from you that I have submitted the required information to Your Excellency. I shall be happy to give you any explanation you may wish.

As Your Excellency may remember, this Project was to have been established in Turin. However, to avoid certain difficulties, it was moved to another diocese, and precisely, to Sampierdarena in the diocese of Genoa. The Archbishop there repeatedly endorsed and recommended this Project that had already been blessed and recommended by the Holy Father.

The Archbishop came to the Hospice to bless the cornerstone of the new building that is nearly completed.

[38] Process or *Positio super dubio,* etc., 1921, p. 126.

When the Holy Father was informed of the matter he appointed a committee to examine the Project, and in consideration of the letters of commendation written by several bishops he issued a Brief granting the indulgences of the Third Order of St. Francis to anyone giving assistance to this pious undertaking.

The scope of this program was to be not just local, but general, with headquarters in Genoa. My intention in sending the papers in question to Father Margotti was to have an announcement made about this new work in *Unità Cattolica,* the official journal for ecclesiastical affairs. As to the ecclesiastical revision, I entrusted the whole matter to the usual handling by the editors.

I myself have neither printed nor sent out anything either last year or this year, nor shall I do so until the publication of the document I submitted to Your Excellency last July has been authorized by you.

You may have seen the copy of the Papal Brief in the newspaper mentioned above; if you wish to have an authentic copy of it I shall send you one immediately.

I humbly ask you to authorize *Unità Cattolica* to publish the second article and am prepared to obey any instructions Your Excellency may see fit to give me.

With the greatest reverence, I am honored to be,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

This latest opposition dismayed him so slightly that when he wrote to Father Cagliero on October 12, he said, "We have bought a magnificent building at Nice. In it we shall be able to accommodate 100 artisans and as many *Sons of Mary.*"

As if this attack from the outside were not enough, an incident at home added bitterness to bitterness in Don Bosco's heart just at the time he was accompanying the second group of missionaries to Rome. Although this occurred at the end of 1876 we shall describe it here rather than return to the subject later.

We already know how dear the accelerated course was to Don Bosco. He loved it for reasons that concerned the vocation of the *Sons of Mary,* their studies and also the good management of the House. Being apart from the other boys, these young men could be better strengthened in their vocation. Besides, their classes

suffered no interruption during the summer and this eliminated the dangers of vacation.

For diversion during the summer months Don Bosco took them to Lanzo on retreat with the Salesians. There they had the opportunity to understand better the call of God. As regards their studies, there was a double advantage: The *Sons of Mary* had a curriculum adapted to their needs, and were not exposed to the inevitable discouragement that would have arisen from feelings of inferiority if they had attended regular classes with the younger boys. Furthermore, it was also possible to satisfy the desire of the older ones among them who, impatient of the slow pace, were anxious to speed up things. Finally, there was need in the House for people who could perform tasks that did not involve much work but demanded trustworthiness. For this purpose mature, amenable young men not strictly bound to the usual schedule, as were the boys, would be the answer. These were some of the reasons why this program meant so much to Don Bosco and he spared no effort to make it succeed.

But we also know that there were some who were not in favor of it. Their own teacher complained that his students were not studying enough because of their extra-curricular activities, and that they were neither punctual nor regular in their attendance. Father Guanella was no longer at the Oratory to give them his devoted attention, because he had been appointed Director of the new House at Trinità near Mondovi. Furthermore, it was becoming obvious that the Hospice at Sampierdarena was made to order for the *Sons of Mary*. Under these circumstances, a *coup de main* was carried out at the beginning of the school year 1876-1877 during Don Bosco's absence. It was made all the easier because the Vice-Director, Father Lazzero, was good-natured and yielding; to avoid trouble he let things take their course. The accelerated course was cancelled; some students were sent to Sampierdarena and the rest were assigned to the regular classes.

When word of this reached Don Bosco in Rome he did not wait until his return to voice his displeasure. He had established this course himself; he himself had made plans with Father Durando and some other superior to improve it; often and in many ways he had shown how anxious he was to have it succeed. His disappointment then must have been intense. "It is true," he wrote from

Rome, "that this course exists at Sampierdarena, but for many reasons at least one class should be kept in Turin."[39] Apart from what we have already said, one reason seems to be that Don Bosco hoped to form excellent missionaries from some of the older boys and had intended to train them himself. He had obtained magnificent results with a few of them in the past; now he expected even greater results by working on a larger scale. This can reasonably be inferred now, as later events confirmed, but Don Bosco was not then in a position to divulge it. The fact is that in the following year the "accelerated course" was reinstated at the Oratory.

It would indeed have been a great pity if it had not been given support. In those days there arrived at the Oratory men who, according to Don Bosco, could be regarded as real saints and who were well-instructed in the faith. They always ended up with a desire to become priests, and they insistently requested Don Bosco to help them. "In three or four years they could all be trained as missionaries," he said one evening during a private conversation.[40] He had just finished talking and was on his way to bed when he met two of these good laymen.

"Here is a fine missionary," he said pointing to one of them whose name was [Angelo] Lago. "With that beard of his he would make an impression even on the Shah of Persia. Would you like to go to Oceania?"

"I'm in your hands. I'm willing to leave this very evening," Lago answered.

"Well, we shall see. But not dressed like that, eh? We would have to send you there as a priest. Let's leave it to our Lord."

He then said something similar to the other man so that both of them went to bed overjoyed.

Lago, who was a pharmacist, had given all he possessed to the Salesian Society. He did become a priest and worked indefatigably in the confessional. He was also Father Rua's tireless and incomparable secretary until the latter's death.

A large number of zealous apostles whose fame will be everlasting in the annals of the missions came from the ranks of the *Sons of Mary*. Men like them are still coming from those ranks today.

[39] Letter to Father Barberis, November 10, 1876.
[40] Chronicle of Father Barberis, December 6, 1875.

"The Sons of Mary," the eminent historian, Father [Hartmann] Grisar, S.J. wrote,[41] "are valuable workers for the Salesian Missions, because as a rule they are strong, inured to fatigue, and in most cases they have had to make great sacrifices in order to follow their vocations."

[41] In 1915 Father Hartmann Grisar, S.J., published several articles on the *Missions of the Salesians of Don Bosco* in the magazine *Die katholischen Missionen* of Freiburg. Bound in one volume, these articles constitute a valuable monograph (cf. *Bollettino Salesiano,* October 1915, p. 305).

CHAPTER 4

The Salesian Cooperators

DON BOSCO'S idea of the Salesian Cooperator did not materialize in its final form all at once. The initial outline was sketched in 1841 when he realized he had to rely on alms and help from laymen and ecclesiastics for his festive oratories. The final touches were given during a three-year period (1874 to 1876), in three successive editions that definitively brought out the characteristics of the Salesian Cooperator. It would not be out of place here to make a quick comparison of these three drafts that complement and clarify each other.[1]

First, the title. Initially, it was *Christian Union;* then it became *Association of Good Works;* finally, it was changed to *Salesian Cooperators.* Union is one thing, association is another. Apparently, the original idea was to unify the forces of good to oppose successfully the attacks of evil. At first we have a large grouping of people loosely united toward a common goal; then this grouping becomes as close-knit as the members of an organic body because between the first and second phase something new emerges: a firm bond of unity as embodied by the Salesian Congregation. As it attained full juridical status within the Church, the Salesian Society united its co-workers more closely not only to itself, but also among themselves. Further development was then possible. The title of Salesian Cooperators was then given to the grouping as if it were an organization in the strict sense of the word and comparable, in all effects, to a third order. As such were the Cooperators regarded by the Church when it granted them its canonical approbation.

[1] See *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. X for the first edition; for the other two see Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 4 and 5.

Let us now examine the purpose. It was implied in the title of the first edition, *Christian Union;* it was vaguely expressed in the second, *Association of Good Works;* it became more restricted, but not yet specific in the third where the title *Salesian Cooperators* was followed by this clarification, "a practical way to promote good morals and the welfare of society." In those days great caution was needed when speaking of associations, especially religious ones, because serious misunderstandings could easily arise on both sides. This was the real reason behind the noncommittal titles: they were purposely so in order to dispel, from the very start, every possible suspicion.

The "practical way to promote good morals, etc." was described in all three editions, but not in the same manner. The first defined the main purpose of the Cooperators as a special activity on behalf of "poor and abandoned boys." The two succeeding editions widened the scope, presenting the purpose as the "practice of charity toward one's neighbor, especially toward underprivileged youth." Since charity should begin at home, the Cooperators were urged first of all to strive for their own spiritual growth.

All three editions described the means of accomplishing this purpose. The Cooperator was to help in the work of the Salesian Society in four ways: by encouraging Christian piety among the people; by fostering religious vocations; by supporting a good press to oppose a bad one; and by taking an active interest in underprivileged boys. In all matters pertaining to religious practices complete submission was prescribed not only to the Pope but also to the bishops and parish priests.

The Salesians and the Cooperators were to consider each other as brothers, freely calling upon each other for mutual assistance in whatever promoted the glory of God and the welfare of souls. The obligation to contribute one lira annually, as stated in the original program, was deleted from the later versions since it was assumed that monetary contributions were of themselves means to implement the objectives of the Association, and therefore no specific imposition was necessary.

We shall leave out the by-laws which have remained practically unchanged to the present day. They concern parishes and dioceses

and are similar to the regulations that were later established for Catholic Action groups.

Although the first edition did not mention an official organ for the Cooperators, the two that followed repeatedly promised one; but publication did not begin until August, 1877.

In all of these programs there is no mention of women. Was it an oversight? Did Don Bosco perhaps think that he could do without their cooperation? Not at all. Once during a friendly talk with Father Barberis he remarked that since the [training] schools for the *Sons of Mary* were now a reality, he was working on "another very important project, namely the *Association of Salesian Cooperators.*" Then he continued, "I have been working at this for about two years. Now I shall write up the regulations and publish them before the end of the year. It will take two years to consolidate this Association. In the meantime I have been working on another project and shall perfect it during the next two years. Then once the Salesian Cooperators have been put on a firm basis we shall announce this plan also. It has to do with what I would call a Third Order of women, associated not with us but with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians."[2]

Shortly after this conversation he went to Rome and submitted his plan for the Salesian Cooperators to Pius IX. When the Pope saw no mention of women Cooperators he expressly disapproved of their exclusion. "Women have always played a leading role in the performance of good works in general, in the life of the Church, and in the conversion of nations," he said. "By their very nature they are charitable and zealous in sponsoring good works, even more so than men. If you exclude them you will deprive yourself of the very best help." Every wish expressed by the Pope was an order to the Saint. Don Bosco [as we shall see] abandoned his own point of view and admitted women to membership in the Association of Cooperators as soon as the male branch of the Association was firmly established.

Before resuming our story we shall quote two remarks made by Don Bosco at a later date which throw light on a proper understanding of both the letter and the spirit of the Association. In a

[2] Chronicle of Father Barberis, February 19, 1876.

public address on July 1, 1880, at Borgo San Martino, he again stressed the idea found in the preamble to all three editions, complementing it as follows: "Time was when it was enough for people to unite in prayer. But now there are so many means of perversion, especially for youngsters of both sexes, that we must join forces and spring into action."[3]

Six years later when addressing priests who had come to the Oratory to honor him on his name day, he said, "The Association of Salesian Cooperators . . . will spread to all countries throughout the whole Christian world. The day will come when the name Cooperator will signify a true Christian . . . The Cooperators will be the ones who will help promote the spirit of Catholicism. . . . The more the Holy See is attacked the more the Cooperators shall exalt it; the more widespread the growth of disbelief, the higher shall the Cooperators raise aloft their flaming torch of active faith."[4]

Speaking to a confidant a year before his death Pope Pius IX said, "The Salesian Cooperators are called to do much for the Church and for society. In time their work will be so deeply appreciated that I can already foresee not only families, but indeed entire cities and whole nations, becoming Salesian Cooperators."[5]

Does not Catholic Action, which Pius XI described as cooperation between laymen and the ecclesiastical hierarchy, embody the predominant idea that guided Don Bosco in setting the guidelines of Salesian cooperation?

In all his undertakings Don Bosco never lost sight of his supreme goal: to enrich souls with treasures of heavenly grace. While his benefactors were few in number he had considered it his bounden duty to show his gratitude by assuring them of his own and others' prayers and by obtaining blessings and particular indulgences for them from the Holy Father. But this became impossible when the number of his benefactors increased apace with his own undertakings. Thus, once the Association was established, he did all in his power to have it endowed with copious spiritual benefits that

[3] *Bollettino Salesiano,* August 1880, p. 9.
[4] *Bollettino Salesiano,* August 1886, p. 4.
[5] *Bollettino Salesiano,* March 1878, p. 3.

would be a generous reward for the zeal and sacrifices of its members.

Pope Pius IX first praised the *Salesian Association* and gave it his verbal approval in an audience on February 22, 1875. Encouraged by the Pope's kindness, Don Bosco sent the rules of the Association, along with those of the *Sons of Mary Project* to bishops asking for their personal commendation. The Bishop of Tortona, among others, wrote to Don Bosco. "I think that the *Salesian Association,* which may certainly be regarded as a Third Order of your worthy Congregation already definitively approved by Holy Church, is most timely and even providential for the present conditions of society both because of its aims and because of the organization and plan of operation you have outlined. In my opinion it will prove most helpful in carrying out the loving exhortations that the Holy Father has repeatedly given in this matter."[6] In the letter to which we have already referred[7] Don Bosco availed himself of the gracious mediation of Cardinal Berardi to have his petitions and the accompanying commendatory letters of the bishops reach the Holy See.

He could not yet apply for definitive approval because it was not usually granted until a decree of commendation had been issued. Therefore he addressed a humble petition to the Holy Father imploring him to grant the following faculties: (1) that the Superior General be allowed to extend to benefactors favors and indulgences granted to the members of the Congregation; (2) that the Superior General be authorized to delegate this faculty to the Directors of the individual Houses of the Congregation. In the Brief of Concession, dated July 30, 1875, Don Bosco had the consolation of reading that the benefactors of his Society were considered on an equal footing with "members of a Third Order."[8] A great step forward had been made.

Yet Don Bosco did not halt halfway. He wished to obtain formal approval from the Holy See. He therefore submitted the following petition to the Holy Father on May 4, 1876:

[6] Letter dated April 16, 1875.
[7] *See* below, p. 25.
[8] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 6.

Turin, March 4, 1876

Holy Father:

From the day Your Holiness deigned to grant definitive approval to the humble CONGREGATION OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES, the number of its members has increased considerably and its range of evangelical activity has been greatly extended. In the face of this growing need the number of pious laymen and ecclesiastics who generously cooperate with us has likewise grown larger, and they have unanimously joined in asking for some kind of Rule to preserve their uniformity of action and assure them stability in the holy principles that our Catholic Faith alone can instill. Holy Father, such a Rule has been drafted under the title of SALESIAN COOPERATORS, with the aim of inviting people living in the world to assist in laboring for the harvest entrusted to the PIOUS SALESIAN SOCIETY.

Your Holiness was pleased to bless and commend this project after its study. A number of bishops promptly welcomed it into their respective dioceses and have now, by their letters of commendation, delegated the humble petitioner to implore Your Holiness to open the treasury of holy indulgences in a special show of kindness. This will assure everybody that our work in the Oratories has Your Holiness' blessing and approval and that it draws comfort and strength from that Faith to which the Cooperators willingly consecrate their efforts.

Everyone therefore implores your Holiness graciously to grant to the SALESIANS and to their COOPERATORS:

1. A plenary indulgence at the moment of death, provided that they offer up their life to God in acceptance of whatever kind of death He may be pleased to send them;
2. The indulgences and spiritual favors granted to the Third Order of St. Francis of Assisi;
3. That the indulgences granted to the churches and feasts of St. Francis of Assisi be gained on the feast of St. Francis de Sales and in the Churches of the Salesian Congregation.

In the confident hope that Your Holiness will graciously grant the favors implored, I now humbly beg a special apostolic blessing for all the Cooperators and benefactors of our Congregation, while prostrate in greatest veneration and filial homage, I remain,

Your humble son, the devout petitioner,

Fr. John Bosco

The reply came in a Brief dated May 9,[9] in which His Holiness granted the requested indulgences "in order that the Society may prosper more day by day." They were no longer granted through the Superior General but directly to the "Society or Union of Salesian Cooperators." By this act His Holiness had plainly recognized the Association.

There remained now the task to make the Association known and to publicize the apostolic blessing and the spiritual benefits.

Don Bosco prepared a pamphlet for this purpose after informing his Ordinary about it. To him he sent the first copy, incomplete for a reason that we will see.

Turin, July 11, 1876

Your Excellency:

This morning the composition and printing of a pamphlet entitled *Salesian Cooperators* was completed. These Cooperators are a type of *Third Order* through which the Holy Father is granting a few spiritual favors to our benefactors. Now that the Holy Father has granted his blessing, I humbly beg Your Excellency, as Archbishop of the Motherhouse to give it your blessing too, and, if you have no objection, to permit us to insert your name immediately after that of the Holy Father in our list of sponsors.

It is my duty to submit the two proposals above and should you consent I shall consider them as two outstanding favors. In any case I ask you to consider this letter as a token of my great esteem and profound admiration for Your Excellency.

Respectfully and in deep gratitude, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Now we are faced with a controversy skimmed over in the previous chapter. This time the Ordinary himself brought it up. First of all Don Bosco was informed that the Archbishop was displeased that the booklet, *Salesian Cooperators,* had been printed without first being submitted to the ecclesiastical censor. Moreover, the

[9] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 7.

Archbishop was displeased at the publicizing of indulgences and of a Pious Society about whose canonical erection the ecclesiastical authority of Turin had not been informed. The Archbishop demanded an explanation of such a transgression of the rules laid down by the diocese and the Council of Trent itself. Don Bosco was also strongly called to order for having permitted the band to play in church, contrary to all synodal and canonical regulations.[10]

Don Bosco was then visiting the schools in Liguria and did not return until the 29th of the month. His answer was therefore dated August 1.

Turin, August 1, 1876

Dear Canon Chiuso:

I found your letter of July 16 waiting for me when I returned home from a visitation of our Houses in Liguria. Although somewhat late, I now hasten to reply.

The booklet entitled *Salesian Cooperators* has not been made public. The first copy was sent to His Excellency and was not fully printed; if you will please turn to page 38, you will find it is blank. I had planned to print the Archbishop's blessing on it had he seen fit to give it. I did this on the advice of a very important person, who felt that it would be a special act of deference [toward the Archbishop] to have his name listed immediately after that of the Holy Father.

The Association of [Salesian] Cooperators is not diocesan but general, and in all matters concerning religious practices is totally subject to the local bishops and pastors. It is not possible to negotiate with all the Ordinaries about such an Association; but I would willingly have done so with our Archbishop were I not obliged to deal with him through a third person, which makes it difficult to explain things in their proper light. The *Sons of Mary Project* is a case in point. It is now a year since the ecclesiastical revisor has had a copy of the program. It is a year since the type was set by the printers; everything is ready for the press, but as yet no definite reply has been given.

As long as I was able to speak my mind to His Excellency I never moved a finger without first asking for his learned, prudent and wise counsel. To my regret I was obliged to forego it when I could no longer speak freely or was no longer trusted.

As to instrumental music [in church] I do not find any prohibition in

[10] Letter from Father Chiuso, July 16, 1876.

the Synod; nor do the *rules of the Church* appear to forbid it, for in Rome the most solemn ceremonies, at least those I have witnessed, are generally accompanied by instrumental music. Nevertheless, in deference to the wishes of the Archbishop, instrumental music has no longer been played at any ceremony in church since the feast of Mary Help of Christians last year [1875]. Recently the band did accompany the procession in honor of St. Aloysius, but this was only outside the church.

Many difficulties and many unintentional hurts would be avoided if things were interpreted in their proper light.

Believe me always in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The secretary acknowledged the receipt of the letter and promised to inform the Archbishop of its contents as soon as he returned home. He added that he hoped the Archbishop would understand the procedure followed and would be satisfied.[11] Meanwhile, not having received approval, Don Bosco while in Liguria availed himself of his incontestable right and had the program and the rules printed at Albenga with the permission of that Chancery. They were dated July 26 and signed by the Vicar General, Canon Folcheri. A French translation was immediately made.

The controversy over the booklet on the *Salesian Cooperators* seemed to have quieted down. But two months later when Don Bosco applied for permission to publish the Brief he had just received, the contention flared up more fiercely than before. The following letter is proof of it.

Turin, October 11, 1876

To the Very Reverend John Bosco, Superior of the Salesians:

The Archbishop has instructed me to reply to your letter of October 5, and inform you that he may not authorize the publication [of the pamphlet] as requested in your letter without failing in his own duty as custodian of the laws of the Church.

In the first place any pontifical Brief concerning indulgences must be submitted to the diocesan Ordinary prior to its publication so that the

[11] Letter dated August 2, 1876.

Ordinary may verify its authenticity and grant the imprimatur. Therefore, the original of the pontifical Brief to which you refer must be submitted to this archiepiscopal Chancery.

In the second place the pontifical Brief refers to an *Association of Salesian Cooperators* which *has* already *been canonically erected.* The Roman Pontiff says *"Cum sicut relatum est Nobis, pia quaedam sodalitas cononice instituta sit."* [Since it has been reported to us that a pious association has been canonically erected.] Now such an association cannot have been canonically erected other than by the Supreme Pontiff, or by a bishop for his own diocese, or by someone who though not a bishop has been specifically authorized by the Supreme Pontiff. In the first case the pontifical Brief relating to the canonical institution of the Association should be submitted to the archiepiscopal Chancery of Turin. In the second, both the document of its canonical erection issued by the bishop responsible as well as the document in which the Supreme Pontiff granted faculty to said bishop to erect said Association also in other dioceses, should likewise be submitted to the aforesaid Chancery. In the third instance, both the document in which the Supreme Pontiff granted faculty to establish such an Association to any person not a bishop, and the document by which said person availed himself of such faculties, are to be submitted to the Chancery.

Until this has been done it would be unlawful for the Archbishop to comply with the request submitted by you to whom he extends every blessing.

In great esteem I am,

Your devoted and humble servant,

Canon Chiuso, Secretary

Don Bosco had other things to worry about just then. A new group of twenty-four missionaries was soon to depart. The following brief note vividly describes the kind of cares that in those days increased the burden of his usual occupations.

To the Chevalier Mark Gonella — Chieri

Chieri, October 9, 1876

Dear Chevalier:

Several letters have arrived setting the departure of our missionaries early in November. This causes me great concern. I shall have to leave

very early tomorrow morning without being able to pay my respects to you. I have to make plans, prepare things and provide [what is needed.] But we shall certainly meet before their departure, and talk things over.[12] God grant you and your family all that is good. Please pray for one who in Jesus Christ is,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Nor was this all. As we shall see later he had to accompany the missionaries to Rome where he was to attend to important business. He wrote some instructions to the Oratory from the Eternal City. Their meaning becomes clearer in the light of the facts just narrated, and, in turn, they shed more light on the matter. They are all the more precious inasmuch as they make up the only document found as of now concerning the controversy on the Salesian Cooperators in its final phase. The document is neither signed nor dated, nor is it addressed to anyone in particular. Whether this is to be ascribed to prudence or to haste, we do not know; but it is certain that the note was included with the contents of an envelope. The wording is such that the note could only have been written to Don Bosco's counterpart, Father Rua. The note also contains information in Latin of a strictly confidential and delicate nature about persons and things at the Oratory. Judging from the content it evidently came from Rome, and when we consider the content and link it to the circumstances, there seems to be no doubt that it referred to this particular phase of the famous controversy. The handwriting is definitely Don Bosco's. Let us now draw our own conclusions.

This is the document: "As regards the reply from the archiepiscopal Chancery of Turin let us bide our time. Send someone to ask for the return of the Brief lest it may be lost. If something has to be done, we shall do it after my return to Turin, but insist on retrieving the Brief. This one of the Salesian Cooperators will not be printed in Turin so there is no call for argument, but the Brief must be returned. Should they insist in knowing where and by

[12] A typographical error in the Italian edition of 1930 has been corrected after referring to the "Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco," Vol. III, Letter 1502. [Editor].

whom the Salesian Cooperators were established, tell them that someone with great authority here in Rome told me, 'When a Roman Congregation issues a Brief or a Decree it is its policy not to give any other reason beyond what is stated in the Brief; the local authorities may only verify the authenticity of the document, not the reasons that led to it.' "

We gather then that the original of the Brief of May 9 was submitted to the archiepiscopal Chancery as demanded and that obviously Don Bosco complied without hesitation. But as regards the [Chancery's] reply they were to bide their time, that is to say, no refusal, but only postponement to a more opportune time. The words, "this one of the Salesian Cooperators," might imply a distinction between the Brief concerning the Cooperators and some other one previously mentioned. But this could not be because the final phrase, "but the Brief must be returned," which relates to the first sentence, can only mean the Brief of the Cooperators. A distinction is indeed made, but the distinction was in Don Bosco's mind and concerned documents from the Holy See that could be published everywhere. In substance this is what he meant to say: These gentlemen need not be uneasy about returning the Brief concerning the Cooperators. We will have other documents from the Holy See published in Turin but not the one relating to the Cooperators. No doubt it could have been worded more clearly; but when short of time, Don Bosco in his private correspondence frequently lapsed into imperfections of form. Who was this "someone with great authority"? Cardinal Berardi? Cardinal Antonelli? Archbishop Vitelleschi? It matters little to know the name. Finally, if pressure were brought to bear, every answer was to be evasive in order to give Don Bosco time to get back to Turin and do whatever was needed.

The reader will notice the very unusual inversion apparent in the words "where and by whom the *Salesian Cooperators* were established." It was an instinctive variation but not an accidental one; much less was it written for any conscious or unconscious purpose of style. At that moment Don Bosco's attention was focused on the answer about which they were to bide their time and, as quite frequently happened, his thoughts unconsciously influenced his words. The context leads us to believe this.

We possess the rough copy of this answer in Don Bosco's own hand on seven sheets of ordinary paper full of corrections. His aim was to prove that the *canonice instituta* [canonically erected] mentioned in the Brief was firmly based on fact, and that consequently the words, *sicut relatum est Nobis,* [as it has been reported to Us] were not based on false reports. Certainly, the best way to go about it would have been to first work it all out with the Chancery; but what chance would he have had in that attempt? Let us not forget his "Woe unto us if any further steps are taken!"[13] He therefore bypassed the obstacle and dealt with Rome directly. He could not waste time in futile debate when there was so much to be done [far more important].

It seems proper to insert here a conversation Don Bosco had with Father Barberis on May 31 of this year, recorded by the latter in his often quoted chronicle. It will help us acquire an ever better understanding of Don Bosco's incessant activity and method of operation. Don Bosco was speaking about the spirit that should mold the newly founded Congregation. It should be characterized, he said, by these three features: great activity; [tact] in never antagonizing our opponents; [flexibility of operation] in moving elsewhere when we cannot work where we are. He then continued: "We never call a halt. There is always something to be done pressing hard on the heels of what we are doing! It might seem just now as though we should concentrate on consolidation rather than on expansion. Yet I know that the very moment we stall the Congregation will begin to decline. We must keep moving every day. We have not yet completed one big undertaking and another is already hurrying us on. The missionaries had not yet left for [South] America and I was rushing to Nice to open a new House. While negotiations were still going on, we had to initiate similar ones for a House in Bordighera. Before this matter could be settled we had to hurry and study [the pros and cons] of a house for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians here in Turin. Then I had to go to Rome, and here, too, there was one thing after another. The program for the *Sons of Mary* was not yet completed, and we were already presenting to the Holy Father one for the Salesian Coopera-

[13] *Cf.* footnote 14, p. 34.

tors. This was barely done when we had to turn our attention to Patagonia. Patagonia itself had to give way to a most attractive offer by Cardinal Franchi and the Holy Father of a vicariate in India . . . and then other plans yet. Poor Don Bosco! He has so many things in his mind. What headaches! Yet, let us always go forward. The consolidation of our Society is imperative . . . and I see that it is being done while we advance without halting."

To return to the document. It is so important that despite its length it will not be relegated to the Appendix. It should be read in its entirety here within the framework of the narrative. In his calm limpid style Don Bosco wrote:

THE SALESIAN COOPERATORS

The history of the Salesian Cooperators dates back to 1841 when a start was made in gathering together poor homeless boys in the city of Turin. The gatherings were held in churches or other places where the boys were given instruction and prepared for a worthy reception of the Sacraments of Confirmation, Penance and Holy Eucharist. They were also entertained with wholesome recreation. A few laymen joined together to perform the many varied tasks [connected with these boys] and they contributed to the support of the so-called Festive Oratories either by their personal services or with donations. They were known by the name of the office they held but as a rule they were called benefactors, promoters, and also Cooperators of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales.

The Superior of these Oratories was the Rev. [John] Bosco who operated under the immediate supervision of the Archbishop and with his authorization. The necessary faculties for the exercise of his duties were granted to him both orally and in writing. Whenever any difficulties arose, the Ordinary would deal with them through the Rev. [John] Bosco.

The faculties to administer the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist, to fulfill the Easter precept, to admit children to First Communion, to preach, to hold triduums, novenas, and spiritual retreats; to have benediction of the Blessed Sacrament; and to celebrate High Mass were the first ones to be granted by Archbishop Fransoni.

The so-called Salesian promoters and cooperators banded together in a regular Congregation known as the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, first received a few spiritual favors from the Holy See in a Rescript

dated April 18, 1845 and signed *L. Averardi, Substitute for H. E. Card. A. del Drago.*

This same Rescript also granted several faculties to the Superior, among others that of imparting the apostolic blessing and plenary indulgence to fifty promoters to be selected by the Director.

On April 11, 1847, Archbishop Fransoni approved the Sodality of St. Aloysius founded within the Salesian Congregation and endowed it with favors granted by him as well as by the Holy See.

In 1850 Don Bosco informed His Holiness that a Congregation had been legitimately established in the city of Turin in the name and under the protection of St. Francis de Sales and implored more extensive favors on behalf of its members besides other spiritual benefits for the non-members.

These favors were granted in a Rescript dated September 28, 1850 and signed *Dominic Fioramonti, Secretary of Latin Letters to His Holiness.*

The Congregation of Salesian Promoters was thus established *de facto* in the eyes of the local ecclesiastical Authority and the Holy See. In view of the vast number of boys already attending, it was found necessary to open new schools and Oratories in other parts of the city. To assure unity of spirit, of discipline, and of administration, and to establish the Oratories on a firm basis, the Ecclesiastical Superior named the Rev. [John] Bosco as Director and granted him all necessary or proper faculties in a decree or certificate dated March 31, 1852.

After this declaration the Congregation of Salesian Promoters was always considered as canonically instituted and all its negotiations with the Holy See were always conducted by its Superior.

Several favors and spiritual benefits were granted to it between the years 1852 and 1858 when the Congregation was divided into two branches, or rather, families. Those who believed they had a vocation and were unimpeded, joined together to live in community in the same buildings that had always formed the Motherhouse and Headquarters of the association called the Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales as suggested by the Holy Father himself, and as known to this very day. The rest continued to live in the world with their own families but went on working on behalf of the Oratories, still retaining the title of *Union* or Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, *Promoters* or *Cooperators.* However, they were subject to the members [who had embraced the religious life] and worked jointly with them on behalf of destitute boys.

In 1864 the Holy See commended the *Pious Salesian Society* and appointed its Superior. In the decree of approval [of the Salesian Society]

there was also a section concerning the non-religious members who were always referred to as promoters or benefactors and finally as Salesian Cooperators. The original members of the Salesian Congregation [in its early beginnings] were always considered as promoters and cooperators in the enterprises undertaken by the religious members; they helped in the classrooms, in church, in the playgrounds, and in other fields of apostolate among the faithful. For this reason, on July 30, 1875 the Sacred Congregation of Briefs empowered the Superior of the Salesian Society *indulgentias et gratias spirituales societati ipsi a S. Sede Concessas insignibus benefactoribus communicandi perinde ac si tertiarii essent, iis exceptis quae ad vitam communem pertinent.* [to grant the indulgences and spiritual favors proper of the Salesian Society to his first benefactors, as if they were tertiaries, with the exception of those favors that pertain to the common life.]

These benefactors are none other than those who were always known as promoters or cooperators. In the first Salesian Constitutions a chapter is dedicated to them under the title of Non-religious Members.

For this reason, therefore, when the Holy See graciously granted new and more generous favors to the Salesian Cooperators and reference was made to the *pia Christifidelium Sodalitas canonice instituta, cuius sodales praesertim pauperum ac derelictorum puerorum curam suscipere sibi proponunt* [the pious Association of the faithful, canonically erected, whose members have as their special aim the care of poor and neglected boys], this reference was to be understood as applying to:

1. The original promoters who for ten years were accepted and considered *de facto* as genuine cooperators in the Work of the Oratories, work formally recognized by the decree of 1852.

To this work they continued to give [of their time and effort] as laymen even when some of the cooperators in 1858 began to live a community life under their own rules.

2. The religious members, that is, the Pious Salesian Society which always regulated the activities of these benefactors. In compliance with the rules given them, the latter offered themselves with zeal and charity to give moral and material assistance to the religious members.

After reading this memorandum carefully it is easier to understand correctly certain expressions in the petition requesting indulgences for the Salesian Cooperators, a petition which had prompted the disputed first paragraph of the Brief. It must be remembered that in the petition Don Bosco did not present the Association to the

Holy Father as something new, but carefully pointed out that after the Congregation had been approved and had enlarged its sphere of activities, the *number* of people who generously gave their assistance had *likewise increased.* If they increased they must have already existed. It might be objected that the presentation of Rules indicate something entirely new. But this was not so at all. The Rules had their beginning, Don Bosco tells us, when as the number of the Cooperators increased, they themselves *unanimously requested some sort of Regulations which would help them to retain uniformity of spirit . . . and assure stability to their organization.*

Another objection might be raised at the word *project* in the second paragraph [of the petition]: there by the word project is meant the draft of the Rules submitted for approval, and not any plans for a new Society. Further on in the text the work for which the indulgences were requested is described as having existed for a long time. It is the *Work of the Oratories,* the original work which Archbishop Fransoni had approved, which had been repeatedly blessed by Rome, and was still in its original entity on the date of petition.

There is, therefore, no substantial difference between the petition to Rome and the reply to [the Archbishop of] Turin. It was not just a clever way out of a difficulty with benefit of hindsight. Actually the petition and the reply are related to each other as text is to comment.

Whether the dispute went on or not we cannot say since there are no documents. But it is a fact that the Association carried on its activities, undisturbed, throughout the world, visibly blessed by God and universally acclaimed by men. Today the Salesian Cooperators and their aims are fairly well-known; yet many people persist in the mistaken belief that they form a body of auxiliaries who, working side by side with the Salesian Congregation, give to it exclusively their cooperation. But this was not Don Bosco's idea. Once in 1876 at Sampierdarena he, half seriously, half in jest, described the Salesian Cooperators to Father Angelo Rigoli, the parish priest of Somma Lombardo, as follows: "They will be like Catholic freemasons dedicated to their own sanctification and the spread of every form of good within their families and throughout society as a whole." Undoubtedly Don Bosco's sights were high,

his aim far-reaching. The praise of the High Priest Simon in the Scriptures fits him perfectly: "In his time the House of God was renovated; in his day, the temple was reinforced" (*Sirach* 50,1). The concept of modern Catholic Action had now germinated in Don Bosco's mind.

CHAPTER 5

The Mediation of the Archbishop of Vercelli

THERE are times when the historian finds himself face to face with rather delicate tasks. Occasionally, to tell the whole truth may not appear compatible with the religious respect due to the authority of eminent persons; on the other hand to sacrifice any part of the truth would wrong people who played prominent roles in these episodes and are entitled to the indisputable esteem of posterity. Caught between the anvil and the hammer, the historian must move very cautiously. After an impartial investigation of the facts, he must strive to reconstrue them precisely as they developed. At the same time he must constantly maintain a calm and respectful impartiality.

Instead of dwindling and disappearing, the misunderstandings with the Turin Chancery threatened to become more complicated every day. It is important for a better understanding of the complex subject matter of this chapter, to be apprised of the queries referred to by Archbishop Vitelleschi in the letter already quoted.

On September 23, 1874, the Ordinary of Turin had addressed the following five queries to the Holy See:

1. Were the Constitutions of the Congregation founded by Don Bosco definitively approved by the Holy See?

2. Was this Congregation classified as a religious Order? Was it therefore directly subject to the Holy See and exempt from episcopal jurisdiction?

3. Was the faculty to inspect the churches and Houses of the Congregation taken away from the local Bishop?

4. Was the Superior entitled to accept into his schools diocesan seminarians, have them receive the cassock or take religious vows,

or admit them merely as teachers, assistants, etc., without the consent, or even against the wishes, of their Bishop?

5. Was the Superior entitled to admit to his Congregation clerics dismissed by their Bishop as unsuited to the priesthood, and to do so without the Bishop's consent and even against his wishes?

The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars did not delay drafting a reply; but when the reply was ready it was not sent "because," as Cardinal Berardi phrased it, "of some scruples" of the Cardinal Prefect.[1] That worthy Prelate had an extraordinarily delicate conscience in the exercise of his high office, and Don Bosco occasionally described it with a respectful but humorous expression. The value that Don Bosco, a man of prayer, placed on prayer was equal to his own very great faith. He truly believed that he was reciprocating fully his most distinguished benefactors by promising prayers from himself and others. In alluding to the scrupulosity of Cardinal Bizzarri, he used to say that even in offering prayers for His Eminence, one had to be very careful lest the cardinal suspect simony.

The reply would have been indefinitely shelved with other similar business if Cardinal Berardi, who was described in the above mentioned memorandum as "a great friend of the House," had not again "insisted with those to whom he had previously appealed"[2] that this reply be sent to the Ordinary of Turin without further delay. This was done, in fact, on January 13. In substance it said:

The Constitutions of the Salesian Institute were definitely approved in a Decree obtained at an audience with His Holiness on April 3, 1874. You must surely be aware of this since I have well-founded cause to believe that the Superior General of the Institute in question has already informed you of it. You will readily understand the conditions [governing such approval] from the tenor of the aforesaid Decree of which I enclose a copy, as well as from the other Decree already known to you, which was previously issued regarding the approval of the Institute itself. In both decrees it is expressly stated: *Salva Ordinariorum iurisdictione ad praescriptum Sacrorum Canonum et Apostolicarum Constitutionum.* [Without infringement on the jurisdiction of the Ordinaries, according to the prescriptions of the Sacred Canons and the Apostolic Constitutions.]

[1] Letter from Cardinal Berardi to Don Bosco, dated January 9, 1875.
[2] Letter already quoted.

As a result of this condition, all Institutes having simple vows, and therefore also the Salesian Congregation, (unless some [special] privilege has been granted to it by the Holy See,) are exempt from, that is to say are not subject to, the jurisdiction of the Ordinary only in those matters set forth in their Constitutions if they have been approved by the Holy See.

Regarding the unhindered admission of diocesan clerics to Institutes having simple vows, in order that vocations to the more perfect way of life may not be impeded to the serious detriment of ecclesiastical discipline, this Sacred Congregation has extended to diocesan clerics the Constitution of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XIV, *Ex Quo dilectus,* in which adequate provision is also made for urgent exceptional cases requiring contrary dispositions. From the above mentioned Constitution of Pope Benedict XIV follows logically what is prescribed in the Decree of the Sacred Congregation, *Super statu Regularium Romani Pontifices,* of January 25, 1848, under number II, namely that "no Ordinary may ever deny Testimonial Letters to anyone seeking admission to any Order, even one of simple vows." I do not doubt that Your Excellency will conform to each and every one of these dispositions. May God bless you.

Three days later Cardinal Berardi kept his promise and sent a copy of this document to Don Bosco, naturally "in strict confidence and for your information only," in the hope that some solution may finally be found to "relieve you of the cross now afflicting you." [3]

Before continuing, we have to say that unfortunately the answer from Rome did not have any lasting effect. From the beginning to the end of the year there was no change in the situation. In January the Ordinary refused to grant faculties for preaching to two Salesian priests: one was Father Milanesio, the future missionary to Patagonia and at that time Director of the free day-school and of the Sunday Oratory at Valdocco; the other was Father Peter Guidazio, then a certified teacher in the senior high school at the Oratory and later Director of the first boarding school founded by Don Bosco at Randazzo, Sicily. In December the Ordinary refused the same faculties to two priests at the College of Valsalice: Father John Branda, the Prefect, and Father Angelo Bordone, a graduate professor. The reasons for the refusals were never revealed; they remained a mystery. Furthermore, the Ordinary continued in his

[3] Letter from Cardinal Berardi to Don Bosco, dated January 16, 1875.

refusal to admit clerics of the Oratory to Holy Orders, to grant testimonials to anyone wishing to enter the Salesian Congregation, and to officiate at religious services of the Salesians. Nor could a better state of affairs be expected, since in his reply of January 24, the Ordinary had thought it necessary to remark that the Cardinals had not understood his queries. They were meant to make it known that Don Bosco accepted in his Houses priests of the diocese as teachers and confessors and members of his Congregation without the Archbishop's permission.

At this point, before proceeding any further, a conscientious historian would feel it his duty to warn his readers against forming rash conclusions. Anyone who might presume to come to a hasty judgment of the Archbishop of Turin on the basis of his dealings with St. John Bosco would be far from the truth. The picture of Archbishop Gastaldi would be incomplete. In fact he left a lasting reputation of vigorous and enterprising zeal in his administration of the Turin archdiocese. Moreover some of his pastoral letters can still be read today with profit and enjoyment because they are based on sound doctrine and are written in a vibrant style.

Among the clergy itself he had both enthusiastic admirers and vehement opponents. This will not surprise anyone familiar with life. Only the man who does nothing never makes mistakes, and besides, no one has ever succeeded in pleasing everybody. As regards his relations with Don Bosco, it must be noted that some members of the Archbishop's entourage daily maligned the Oratory. But above all, the Archbishop, deeply concerned with the welfare of his own flock, was never able to convince himself that it was just and right to favor an Institution which, aiming as it did at far and wide expansion, seemed to deprive the archdiocese of means for doing good that more reasonably could have been used locally.

At any rate Divine Providence permitted these many tribulations to offer St. John Bosco innumerable opportunities to reveal the heroicity of his virtues. Besides, it is a well-known fact that in various degrees all the great Founders had to suffer heavy tribulations through misunderstandings of this kind.

From the nature of the queries and also through the kind mediation of Cardinal Berardi, Pius IX realized that the time had come to intervene and try to keep the situation from deteriorating. He

therefore instructed the Cardinal to request Archbishop Fissore of Vercelli "to mediate and try to end, once and for all, the distressing conflict" between Don Bosco and his Ordinary "over matters concerning the Salesian Congregation." The good Cardinal "immediately" obeyed "the papal instructions by sending at once" to the Archbishop of Vercelli a letter, a copy of which he "confidentially" mailed to Don Bosco. "Now I am awaiting the outcome," he wrote, "and as soon as I know what it is, I shall consider the *quid agendum*" [the next step].[4]

The wording of the above mentioned letter to Archbishop Fissore was deferential to both parties. [It stated that] perhaps the Archbishop of Vercelli was aware of the distressing controversy that had unfortunately arisen between the Archbishop of Turin and Don Bosco concerning the Salesian Congregation. Such disputes are always regrettable and more often than not have serious and deplorable consequences. Wishing to remedy the situation Cardinal Berardi had discussed the matter with the Holy Father; the Holy Father had graciously suggested that the wisest course would be for the Archbishop of Vercelli to intervene "between these two worthy ecclesiastics." It was hoped that his wisdom and discretion might bring to an end this deplorable state of affairs.[5]

Archbishop Fissore immediately contacted Don Bosco (he must have also contacted the Ordinary at the same time), asking him to be good enough to point out to him the items in dispute between himself and the most reverend Archbishop concerning the Salesian Congregation. He asked Don Bosco to keep this request confidential for the time being and to give him a "precise and detailed account" of the situation.[6]

Don Bosco had no objection either to the mediation or to the mediator. In fact, on the fourth [of the six] conferences given in January, he prudently informed the higher Superiors of the Congregation and expressed his delight at the choice of Archbishop Fissore as mediator. As Don Bosco put it, Archbishop Fissore was "an intimate friend of our Archbishop and at last it will

[4] Letter from Cardinal Berardi to Don Bosco, January 9, 1875.
[5] Letter from Cardinal Berardi to Archbishop Fissore, January 9, 1875.
[6] Letter from Archbishop Fissore to Don Bosco, January 14, 1875.

be possible to discover the reason for the latter's hostility." Don Bosco sent the following reply to the Archbishop of Vercelli:

Turin, [January] 16, 1875

Your Excellency:

You asked me about the reasons for the controversy existing between our humble Salesian Congregation and His Excellency our Most Revered Archbishop. On several occasions I have tried to talk to him in person precisely about this. I shall tell you exactly all I know: as for reasons, I know of none.

The Archbishop alleges: that *Don Bosco takes into his Congregation clerics who have been expelled from the seminary.* As of now (January 12, 1875) no such cleric is a member of any of our communities.
—that *Don Bosco publishes letters from the Archbishop* without first informing him. Such a thought has never occurred to me.
—that *Don Bosco has held retreats without permission.* Such retreats have been held for approximately thirty years now with the permission of all the previous Bishops, and of Archbishop Gastaldi himself. As soon as he showed himself opposed to them, or rather, as soon as the Archbishop wrote that he disapproved of such retreats for teachers we abandoned the idea and the retreats were discontinued. This is the complaint that he repeats *undequaque* [in all circumstances] and nothing more. The difficulty lies in the fact that he does not believe anything that Don Bosco says or writes to him and although on several occasions he has been given reassurance on the above matters, he refuses to accept it and merely continues to repeat the same accusations.

Other complaints he has filed in Rome. The *Salesians cause scandals of such a nature,* he wrote, *that I fear they may have incurred ecclesiastical censures.* Yet he does not give any explanation or cite any instance. In another letter he attacks the structure of our Congregation saying, *A great many ex-members of this Institute have made a poor show of themselves with several Bishops as well as in his own diocese.* As an example he cites the case of Father Pignolo, of a priest of Saluzzo, and of seven others who were at the Institute for the Deaf-Mutes and whose conduct was scandalous. I wrote him myself several times saying that these priests had never belonged to our Congregation. Nevertheless, he is still convinced of the contrary and has repeated the above statement both in conversation and, on several occasions, in writing.

I have asked him and even begged him, both orally and in writing, to tell me what it is he wants from me since I wish to please him in every

possible way. He said he wanted to examine our clerics in theology before admitting them to Holy Orders. We complied with his wish. He had them report to him forty days prior to ordination so that he could interrogate them about the schools they had attended, their place of origin, their vocation, and their reasons for entering the Congregation. His wish was gratified although this involved no small inconvenience to me. He wanted me to give him my written assurance that I would never admit any cleric who had been expelled from his seminary. I immediately did as he asked.

Nevertheless, for the past three years he has not seen fit to admit any more of our clerics to Holy Orders with the exception of one single cleric who, in spite of enormous difficulties, was finally admitted to tonsure and Minor Orders in September 1874. He has refused to give testimonial letters to several clerics who wished to enter our Congregation. He refused to admit a priest of ours to the examination for obtaining faculties for confession although this priest had attended the three-year post-graduate course of Moral Theology at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico* besides studying theology for five years previously. To justify such a refusal he said the priest had not taken his perpetual vows. Yet do not all religious Orders today require temporary vows before the perpetual profession? A parish priest from Como entered our Congregation. As soon as our Archbishop heard about it, he wrote to his Ordinary, "Inform Father Guanella (this priest's name) that if he comes to this Archdiocese he will never obtain either permission to stay or the faculty to preach." Then on Christmas Eve he made a serious pronouncement which although it may not be the first in the Church was certainly, as far as I know, the first in the diocese of Turin. In a decree that was received on Christmas Eve itself, he abrogated every faculty, favor, and privilege that had been granted by his predecessors and by himself to our Congregation and our churches. The only faculty left us was one permitting us to prepare our pupils for Confirmation and Holy Communion. By this decree we were not allowed any longer to have Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, Forty Hours, triduums and novenas, to administer Viaticum and Extreme Unction, and to hold exsequies and funeral services in our House, although we had enjoyed all these faculties for nearly thirty years. Since we are under the special jurisdiction of the Holy See, nothing has as yet been changed, and so gossip and scandal have been averted.

These measures presuppose serious reasons that so far no one has been able to discover. If you could ever find out what they are, it would

be an immense relief for me to eliminate them immediately as far as I can and our Rules permit.

If I may say so, I think that the devil, foreseeing the good that Archbishop Gastaldi could have continued doing for our Congregation, secretly sowed seeds of discord and succeeded in making them grow. [Results]: trouble without end, widespread gossip, fewer priests and confessors in our Houses, and grave displeasure for the Archbishop who had been my closest confidant for thirty years.

All that I have stated here is based on authentic letters that I can show you whenever you wish.

Please forgive this long letter; read it as best you can. I was unable to call on anyone else to copy it for me because of the nature of its contents. Give me your blessing and please call on me for anything in which I can be of service.

Your humble and grateful servant,

Fr. John Bosco

We have reason to believe that the following memorandum was enclosed with the above letter. It has neither date nor signature. On September 10, 1903, Cardinal Richelmy sent it together with other letters written by Don Bosco to the Sacred Congregation of Rites.

MEMORANDUM

I feel I ought to enclose a memorandum on what causes displeasure to the Archbishop. In my opinion the root of the trouble lies in the false information that someone keeps giving him. I shall cite only a few instances:

1. Attempts were made to convince the Archbishop that Father Chiapale and Father Pignolo had been members of our Congregation, whereas neither of them has ever belonged to it.

2. Several people who were employed either as assistants or as teachers by the Institute for Deaf-Mutes, brought little credit to themselves; in fact they disgraced themselves. I do not pass judgment on anyone. It is a fact, though, that none of them were ever Salesians.

3. It is alleged that some have left our Congregation, and have caused serious trouble in the dioceses where they later resided. I am able to assure you that no one has left our Congregation since 1874. Only one

professed member, Chevalier Oreglia, now Father Frederick Oreglia, was with us as a coadjutor and he decided to leave in order to become a Jesuit and continue his studies.

4. Attempts were made to have the Archbishop believe that I was printing or had others print certain letters of his and that I urged people to write to the Archbishop. Such a thought never even entered my mind.

5. I sent out a simple invitation for our usual retreat; yet this was represented to the Archbishop as a circular addressed to all the parish priests. I never sent any such invitation to any pastor, nor did I order anyone else to do so.

6. I wrote to the Archbishop to try to convince him that the retreat [for non-Salesians], which was to have taken place from September 7-13, had been cancelled. Immediately someone told him that in defiance of his Ecclesiastical Superior, Don Bosco had started the retreat and it was being held at Lanzo.

7. The Vicar at Lanzo assured him that only the members of our own Congregation were making the retreat, but immediately somebody tried to make the Archbishop believe the opposite. This caused a lot of anxiety to the people attending the retreat and distressed both of us.

I could list a long series of similar instances. Now what conclusions could be drawn from these facts?

It is disheartening to have to wrestle with other serious matters and also to bear the effects of these [false] reports.

If you have something to tell me, please wait until next week because I am leaving today in quest of funds. I am completely penniless. I shall be away for a week.

As could be expected, knowledge of this tense situation leaked out in the House. To begin with, Don Bosco had felt duty bound to inform the Superior Chapter and the Directors about it during the Conferences of St. Francis [de Sales], if for no other reason, at least, to acquaint them of the juridical standing of the Congregation before the local ecclesiastical authority. These Superiors did not in the least consider themselves bound, so to say, as by the secrecy of the Holy Office. It is therefore understandable that they sometimes mentioned this burning issue in Don Bosco's presence. Once when talking of these obstacles that hindered the progress of the Congregation, Don Bosco, skillfully bringing out as usual the brighter side of things, remarked with his habitual calm, "We

are fortunate in that we advance confidently *in nomine Domini* [in the name of the Lord]. We are certain that this is what God wants. Therefore, all the difficulties we encounter are due to this: things are either not explained clearly enough or not properly interpreted and hence a misunderstanding arises."[7]

Archbishop Fissore came to Turin on February 4, and spoke separately first with Don Bosco and then with the Ordinary. Next he presided at an exchange of views between them at the episcopal palace. He then returned to Vercelli in the hope that he had accomplished something.

Meanwhile, nearly a month had elapsed since Don Bosco had received Cardinal Berardi's letters. Don Bosco had not acknowledged them, and after this meeting he felt that the time had come to break silence. He wrote the following very informal report and sent it to the friendly Cardinal. The report is admirable for its simplicity and restraint blended with suitable firmness. The caption at the top of the letter, as if to underscore its main purpose and forestall any suspicion that he was coming forward for reasons of self-interest, plainly stated the point at issue which in the debate had been the Ordinary's main grievance.

DECLARATION NOT TO RECEIVE ANY MORE CLERICS FROM THE SEMINARY

Turin, February 7, 1875

Your Eminence:

I have waited until now to give you a report on the course of the dispute so as not to add unnecessarily to your problems. Now, in deep gratitude for your great charity toward us, I shall give an account of what has been done. The Archbishop of Vercelli without delay wrote to me requesting some information about the situation existing between our Congregation and our Archbishop. I obeyed. Shortly thereafter he came to see me in person and asked me to explain everything in detail. He then called on the Archbishop and put the whole matter before him, insisting that he list reasons for his violent hostility to a small Congregation in its very beginning. He then reported the following to me: "I had him talk at length, I questioned him on all the issues; he kept repeating that he has nothing

[7] Chronicle of Father Barberis.

against you; the only complaint he did make was that without asking permission Don Bosco accepts his diocesan clerics in Turin." Archbishop Gastaldi expressed a wish to speak with me and I called on him on Thursday. I was ushered into his presence after waiting an hour and a half in the antechamber. We talked politely at random but when we got around to the subject itself nothing could be said. I was just about to go *re infecta,* [with nothing accomplished] when the Archbishop of Vercelli arrived and asked me to stay. He invited me to continue the conversation in his presence, saying, "Everyone may talk freely here."

[*What follows is presented in dialogue form.* Editor]

Don Bosco: All I wish to know is what displeases our Archbishop, so that I may do my best to avoid it.

Archbishop Gastaldi: I have nothing against your Congregation. But there is one thing that causes scandal and I cannot tolerate it. Your Congregation welcomes clerics from my seminary and this is the root of the trouble.

Don Bosco: So far not a single cleric from the Turin seminary is a member of our Congregation.

Archbishop Gastaldi: Yes, there are some. Whoever says there aren't, ignores facts!

Don Bosco: Please believe me, Your Excellency. As of now (February 4, 1875), not one cleric of yours has joined the Salesians.

Archbishop Gastaldi: (He became angry at this; then he said that I wanted to pose as bishop in his stead, and added) Even though you may not accept them as members of your Congregation, you take them into your House and this displeases me.

Don Bosco: I replied that we had no clerics of his in our Houses in his diocese, either as Salesians or as teachers. It is true that one cleric has been accepted at Alassio, in the diocese of Albenga, to prevent threats and insults to the Archbishop from the cleric's relatives; but he was accepted as an assistant [and is not a Salesian] even though it is his intention to enter the Congregation.

Archbishop Gastaldi: I cannot allow this; no, I cannot.

Don Bosco: As I had the honor to write to you already, it appears that the Church, in its directives for safeguarding the freedom of religious vocations, grants clerics the right to enter religious Orders. . . .

Archbishop Gastaldi: Yes . . . yes . . . but . . . these clerics have no religious vocation; their conduct was bad.

Don Bosco: Then it should not upset you unduly if such clerics leave the seminary. Their present Superiors will know what kind of work they should be assigned to, etc.

Archbishop Gastaldi: I cannot yield on this point. I want a specific, formal promise that never again will any cleric who has been dismissed from my seminary be admitted either to your Congregation or to any of your Houses. And this not only in my own diocese but wherever they may be.

Don Bosco: So far no such thing has ever occurred. Therefore, I do not think I ought to renew here a promise which would affect our Houses in other dioceses. But if this will satisfy Your Excellency, I give you my word of honor that, just as I have done until now, I shall never without your permission accept any cleric expelled from your seminary. But, I wish this to be in conformity with the prescriptions of the holy canons in behalf of the state of greater perfection, namely the religious life.

Everything was acceptable except the last remark because, he said, it would leave me free to do whatever I pleased. I then begged him to tell me why he had written letters against us. He denied both the letters and their content though I even had a few of them with me in my wallet.

I also asked him why he had not allowed one of our priests to take the examination to hear confessions.

Archbishop Gastaldi: Because he has only made his triennial vows.

Don Bosco: But this is the way our Congregation has been approved.

Archbishop Gastaldi: That is wrong and I do not like it. Besides your Congregation has not been totally approved. Anyway, let this priest present himself and he will be admitted to the examination.

Don Bosco: Why do you prevent priests of other dioceses from entering our Congregation?

Archbishop Gastaldi: Because before a priest comes into my diocese I want to know who he is.

Don Bosco: But he wishes to enter a religious Congregation . . . .

Archbishop Gastaldi: Which happens to be in my diocese.

Don Bosco: Then what would you like him to do?

Archbishop Gastaldi: Apply for permission to say Mass.

Don Bosco: I know that the canons do not require this. I also know that other Congregations do not do it. Nevertheless, to please you, whenever a priest enters our Congregation, I shall apply in his behalf for permission to say Mass in this diocese.

At this point several things were said which it is wiser not to commit to paper. The final outcome was:

1. That, solely to please the Archbishop, clerics of this diocese who enter our Congregation will be accepted as lay members and not as clerics. Application will be made in behalf of priests of other dioceses for permission to say Mass. However, so far there has been no such case.

2. The Archbishop promises to admit our members to Holy Orders and to the examinations for the faculty to hear confessions.

We parted cordially although all three of us were deeply embarrassed by what had unavoidably been revealed. I shall tell you the rest myself when I come to Rome which, I hope, will be before the end of the month. Our Archbishop too was supposed to go to Rome, but it is now said that he has given up the idea. Archbishop Fissore is making out his report which you will receive. I must say that no better person could have been chosen for the task. He is one of the Archbishop's closest friends; they understand each other very well and he is perhaps the only one who refused to give us a letter of commendation for the Holy Father last year. Yet he has a delicate conscience and I am sure that he will be very objective in his report of the interview.

I shall remain in Turin until the 16th; then I shall leave for Rome. All the Salesians thank you and pray that God may reward you generously. With my heart full of gratitude, I am honored to be,

Your devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The Cardinal received the official report of the peacemaker shortly after the private report from Don Bosco. The official report certainly did not shed any new light on the facts or what had led up to them. On the contrary, Don Bosco, who read it in Rome had this to say about it on April 15 during a series of conferences to Superiors: in his opinion this report was "neither fish nor fowl." He also remarked that furthermore it differed considerably from what Archbishop Fissore had said to him, contained nothing concrete and much that was abstract, and the latter was rather slanted against him although the effort was apparent "to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds."

On the same occasion, Don Bosco said that the report did not reach the Holy Father without first being annotated.

Don Bosco had been in Rome on February 18. As was the practice in similar cases, Cardinal Berardi had to show it to him for some clarification before submitting it to the Pope.[8] After that, it is to be assumed that they agreed to write in the marginal com-

[8] *Cf.* Letter from Don Bosco to Cardinal Berardi, February 28, 1875.

ments. Don Bosco's own style is obvious. Nevertheless even these marginal notations contain nothing new for us and we could very well dispense with the publication of this document.

Nevertheless, anyone interested may find it in the appendix.[9]

Archbishop Fissore courteously sent a summary of his report to Don Bosco. He received it in Rome and was surprised to see how, even in this report attention was drawn to certain demands of the Turin Ordinary. He immediately informed Cardinal Berardi of the impression it made on him.

Rome, February 28, 1875

Your Eminence:

In the letter written to Your Eminence and in the letter adressed to me it is obvious that the Archbishop of Turin does not want any cleric of his to enter a religious congregation without his permission and without being first examined by him concerning his vocation. To me this seems utterly contrary to the directives of the Holy See and to the letter that the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has written to the Archbishop. Furthermore, to demand that clerics be refused admittance even in other dioceses not only seems to be contrary to the holy canons but even to charity itself.

I share your concern in the serious illness of your mother-in-law and have sent a telegram to Turin requesting prayers before the altar of Mary Help of Christians on your behalf that you may have a long life for the welfare of the Church and of our own humble Congregation.

Pray give me your holy blessing, and please believe me to be, in deep gratitude,

Your devoted and humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Archbishop Fissore's early optimism soon waned. We do not know why, but by the beginning of March he had a very definite feeling that the unfortunate disagreements far from having been resolved were instead about to flare up again over an issue that had been raised in Turin but had been quickly dropped. This concerned priests who did not apply for the faculty to celebrate Mass when

[9] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 8.

coming to Turin from other dioceses to enter the Salesian Congregation. Although under no obligation to do so Don Bosco had promised, *pro bono pacis,* [for the sake of peace] always to apply for such faculty in the future. But in this as in other matters he had not wanted to prejudice his rights of exemption by committing himself in writing. The Archbishop of Vercelli sensing that his efforts as peacemaker were failing, suggested that a tentative overall settlement be committed to writing. Since he knew how determined Don Bosco was not to compromise his Congregation by any written declaration, the Archbishop wrote to him while he was still in Rome asking him to consider the suggestion and find a solution.[10] There is no record that Don Bosco changed his position on this point.

Nor did he modify his position on another issue: his request for specific facts instead of vague general accusations. He stressed this in a note he showed to the Pope at an audience and which he later attached to a letter from the Archbishop. So certain was he of the facts that he titled the note "Indisputable Memorandum." "On several occasions," it stated, "both orally and in writing, the Archbishop of Turin has been challenged to substantiate his complaints by citing any person or any incident involving the Salesians, but he has never taken up the challenge. In another of his letters he presents facts and cites names for which he holds the Salesians responsible, but none of the people he mentions—clerics, priests, and laymen—were ever in any way connected with the Salesian Congregation, March 12, 1875." The "complaints" were the same vague ones cited in the letter to which this note was attached. We do not know what was written in it nor do we know the contents of the other letter mentioned in the note. But it is apparent (and authoritative sources in Rome confirmed it) that the Ordinary was sending letters upon letters to Rome against Don Bosco and his Congregation.

It is reasonable to believe that Rome would ask for specific facts. This seems to be the reason behind Archbishop Gastaldi's request to Canon Marengo to testify in writing as to whether or not he, the Archbishop, was telling the truth when he declared that: (1) He (the Archbishop) had instructed the Canon to ask Don Bosco

[10] Letter to Don Bosco from Archbishop Fissore, March 7, 1875.

not to cause his Ordinary a grave displeasure by accepting into his Congregation clerics who had been dismissed from the seminary; (2) the Canon had executed this order; (3) in reply Don Bosco had told him that he could not comply with such a request because the sacred canons gave him the right to admit such clerics into his Congregation. Canon Marengo certified and signed, but only after skillfully rectifying the third item. He testified that "the Rev. John Bosco had said he would do everything possible to comply with the wishes of His Excellency. However, he could not pledge his word not to admit into his Congregation any clerics dismissed from the diocesan seminary because, he added, 'this would conflict with the rights granted to, and enjoyed by, my Institute and I could not renounce them without detriment to my Congregation. I have no authority to do such a thing. In any such event, though, I shall not keep such individuals here at the House in Turin.' " Finally, to avoid any mistake, let us pay close attention to the dates. The request for the written declaration was made on March 29, 1875; but its object belonged to either April or May 1873, as stated by the Ordinary himself in his letter to Canon Marengo.

Is any further evidence needed to realize that the mission of the Archbishop of Vercelli had failed? And yet this is not all. On April 18, 1875, there was a new imposition: the Chancery demanded "a list of all the priests living in the Salesian Houses in the diocese of Turin" and relative data indicating in each case whether he was perpetually or temporarily professed; whether he was really listed as a novice or only as an aspirant, or simply a resident or boarder in the House; if they were *aspirants* or merely *residents* who came from outside the diocese, had they been issued an *Exeat* [a permit for temporary absence] and a *Maneat* [a permit for temporary stay] still valid? Then, in order to have their faculties to hear confessions renewed, it was to be stated "whether or not each one was perpetually professed, and where . . . he had taken his examinations prior to receiving for the first time the faculty to hear confessions."[11]

Although this was interference in the internal affairs of the Congregation and Don Bosco well knew what procedure to follow, he nevertheless more prudently sought the advice of Cardinal

[11] Letter from the Pro-Chancellor, Canon Caviani, April 18, 1875.

Berardi and of the Secretary of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. The Cardinal who was ailing had someone reply in his stead: "I am very sorry at this new incident that you reported in your courteous letter; but in this, too, patience is required. Strictly speaking the Archbishop is not entitled to demand this individual listing; but it would be wise to comply with his request *pro bono pacis* [for the sake of peace], especially as concerns confessors because on this point he has the right to do so." Archbishop Vitelleschi took a similar view and suggested only that if possible the requested information be given without any signature and with the comment that the information was constantly subject to change because of the possibility of the rightful transfer of personnel by Don Bosco in his capacity as Superior General. Don Bosco promptly complied in all respects with the wishes of the Ordinary.[12]

Not even the agreement on the question of Holy Orders was respected. The Ordinary had promised to admit Salesian clerics to Holy Orders, but in practice he did nothing of the kind. In his opinion he was justified in this action because, as he said in his reply of May 24 to the Sacred Congregation, concerning his queries, he had never been informed that the Salesian Congregation had been definitively approved by the Holy See or that the Rector Major had been given faculties to issue dimissorial letters for a ten-year period.[13] Such categorical statements would entitle us to infer that the Ordinary was doubly forgetful: first, Don Bosco himself had shown him in due course the authentic decree, and secondly, the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had informed him directly.

The same letter contained the usual complaints that the Salesian Congregation took in laymen and religious who wished to evade the authority of the Archbishop. This last remark was a careless inference. It would hardly have been compatible with Don Bosco's spirit of charity to turn anyone into the street no matter who that person might be; nor could he, in accordance with the Constitutions approved by the Holy See, refuse permission to anyone having the proper disposition to make at least the triennial vows, if not the perpetual ones.

[12] Letters dated April 26 and April 27, 1875.
[13] *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App.*, *Doc.* 9.

Things being so, how could any understanding be reached? That year the seventh anniversary of the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians was solemnly celebrated. Don Bosco had asked the Archbishop to attend the services and administer the Sacrament of Confirmation to the boys at the Oratory where he had not confirmed anyone for over three years! Don Bosco had pleaded all the more urgently because several boys who had recently been received into the Church and baptized were soon to leave the Oratory for England with the risk of not being confirmed at all. But the reply was *negative* on every point, including permission to invite another bishop. Such a triple refusal could not pass unnoticed without arousing comment both within and outside the Oratory.

Don Bosco's friendship with Archbishop Gastaldi had been so cordial that he would never have believed a break possible, not even if the most prudent persons had declared under oath that it was to be expected. This Don Bosco confided to Father Lemoyne in a conversation at Trofarello. Over and above such personal considerations he cherished the honor of the Archbishop as dearly as he did his own. Knowing the impetuous nature of the Archbishop he had on several occasions attempted to restrain him, warn him, and plead with him. Once, when they were still close friends, Don Bosco had entered the study where the Archbishop sat writing.

"Oh, Don Bosco, I have here a very serious matter," the Archbishop told him.

"I believe that everything the Archbishop does is always serious," Don Bosco answered.

"But this is exceptionally so. I am just about to sign a paper concerning a canon."

"In order to promote him probably."

"Promote him! I am suspending him *a divinis*!" [from administering the sacraments.]

"Before you do such a thing please think it over very carefully; find out if the case is exactly as it was reported to you."

"The matter is serious and the information given to me is correct."

"May I know who the canon is?"

"Father Calosso."

"Of Chieri?"

"Precisely, of Chieri."

"Your Excellency, please bear in mind that this canon enjoys an excellent reputation. All Chieri knows and loves him. This would be outrageous! The ecclesiastical authority would stand to lose.

"Yet this is what I must do!" the Archbishop exclaimed firmly.

That is exactly what he did. There had been a dispute concerning a chapel. The canon was an old man and rather stubborn. When informed of his suspension, the poor man, beside himself because he had never expected anything of this sort, ran to Don Bosco whose spiritual director he had been at the Chieri seminary. He asked him to spare him the embarrasment caused by this serious measure and grant him hospitality in one of his houses. Don Bosco sent him to the house at Alassio. *Inde irae* [Hence, more trouble].

We may well believe that the situation would not have deteriorated so much if people close to the Archbishop had not fanned the embers again and again. They stirred up more and more the impulsive temper of the Ordinary by portraying to him things in a false light or by grossly exaggerating blunders of individuals at the Oratory, and in general whatever was being said or done by the Salesians. It would have been humanly impossible for everything at the Oratory to run smoothly with clock-like precision. Furthermore, those accustomed to see schools for the elite or where, in one way or another, a tight hand ruled, would naturally find much to criticize in the methods used at the Oratory. One had to live there to understand it. The fact is that the older, but by no means senile, Salesians affectionately reminisced about the Oratory of those days as the paradise of their youth. To go on with our narration, there is much more to tell about this conflict and little by little a great many factors will come to light and help us form a considered judgment.

Readers who have followed us this far will have noticed that in the face of every disagreeable occurrence a humble serenity supported Don Bosco in his deliberations. Father Rua, who was closer to him than anyone else, never heard him utter a single word that might show lack of respect or of submission. In fact,

he never heard him mention these matters except to someone who had a need to know. He left others in the dark so that they would not harbor any less charitable or reverent feelings toward the highest authority in the Archdiocese. Even when he did mention these matters he spoke as though it were all a test to which it pleased our Lord to subject him.[15]

[15] Apostolic Process quoted above, p. 731, § 10; p. 736. *See also* in the *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App. Doc.* 10, the high-minded deposition by Countess Lorenzina Maze de la Roche, niece of Archbishop Gastaldi.

CHAPTER 6

Journeys to Rome

BUSINESS of a spiritual nature necessitated Don Bosco's going to Rome about mid-February 1875: his plans for the *Sons of Mary Project* and for the Association of Salesian Cooperators; the missions in [South] America that he had already accepted and others that the Holy See had proposed to him; the question of privileges for his Congregation, and the right to issue unqualified dimissorials for his ordinands. Enough has already been said about the first two undertakings, and the other two items shall be discussed in later chapters. These pages will cover Don Bosco's journey and sojourn, and his trip back from Rome.

In describing this journey we shall draw on two main sources of information. The first is the diary of his traveling companion. Its stilted listing of dates, names, and events gives the impression of having been written primarily to arouse rather than satisfy curiosity. The other source is two talks of Don Bosco handed down to us in the minutes of some conferences. Although they refresh us momentarily they do not satisfy us fully. We shall also avail ourselves of little bits of news from indirect sources.

Why was his secretary so sparing of information on more important matters while being, instead, so detailed in his description of the papal audience hall and of the Pope's appearance, and so alert in picking up news items about Don Bosco? We believe that this was due to Don Bosco's own caution when conducting important business. He would never speak of it except when necessary, and even then would mention only those particulars that served to minimize his own role.

He left Turin for Sampierdarena on February 14, the first Sunday in Lent. At the beginning of January, having foreseen that he

would have to travel a great deal during the year to carry out the designs of Providence, he had obtained a free railroad pass for the North, where he traveled more frequently. He was also allowed the special favor of applying for a free pass on other routes as needed. The Department of Railroads had now also exempted him from the customary forty-lire quarterly tax on such passes. The previous year this tax had been costlier than the regular fares.[1]

During the trip Don Bosco became aware that under the pressure of last minute business in Turin he had forgotten to take a few things with him. Therefore, as soon as he arrived in Genoa he sent the following letter to Father Joachim Berto, his private secretary and traveling companion, who was to follow him and take a young boy named Mantelli to the House at Sampierdarena.[2]

Dear Father Berto:

Please see to a few things that I have forgotten:

1. Bring me the train timetable and the little books in French about the Apostolic Schools.

2. Call on Father Chiuso or Father Audagnotto on Tuesday and tell him that I am in Genoa and intend to go on from there to Rome without returning to Turin. If the Archbishop has any errands I can do for him, you are to bring with you any papers or whatever he may give you.

If the opportunity presents itself you can tell why I am going to Rome: the missions in Argentina and in Australia that I must discuss with *Propaganda Fide.* [The Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.] You might also mention another reason: two letters and a telegram received from a well-deserving person who is very sick.

I suggest also, that you take the letters and the proposals from Buenos Aires and San Nicolas with you.

Vale in Domino et valedic. [Keep well in the Lord and goodbye.]

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. Ask Father Rua to send me each time the names of the lucky boys who will dine with the Superiors.

[1] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 11.

[2] The letter has no date, but its contents show that it belongs here.

The Apostolic Schools had recently been opened in France by a certain Father De Foresta for promoting vocations to the priesthood among the poor.

The well-deserving sick person may possibly have been Rev. Mother Galeffi, the Superior at Tor de' Specchi. Notice Don Bosco's clever and respectful way of forestalling any suspicion in certain quarters that his trip to Rome was shrouded in secrecy. Imagination could have seen hidden motives. Note too, that Don Bosco, though away and absorbed in affairs of great importance, always kept an eye also on things distant and of minor importance. He wanted his substitute at the Oratory to send him each time the names of the boys who by their conduct and serious study merited the coveted prize of having Sunday dinner at their Father's table.

Father Berto, his secretary, joined Don Bosco at Sampierdarena two days later, and on February 17, toward midnight, they left together for Rome.

They arrived on February 18 at 3 P.M. A servant from Tor de' Specchi met them at the station and took them by coach to 104 Via Sistina, the home of the Vatican expediter, Alexander Sigismondi. Here they had stayed the previous year and here they could say Mass in the family's private chapel. Signor Sigismondi treasured the vestments and chalice used by Don Bosco and after this pious gentlemen's death, his relatives donated them to the Salesians in Rome.

Rain kept the travelers from going out that evening. Don Bosco took the occasion to draw up plans for the hundred and one things he had to do. We need not repeat here what our readers most likely already know from the preceding volumes concerning the persons and the Roman families who for a long time now had been on good terms with Don Bosco, and the reasons for such cordial relations.

On the morning of February 19 he sent his secretary to convey his respects to Archbishop Vitelleschi: there were many things Don Bosco wanted to discuss with him. The Archbishop said that his sister-in-law, a woman of great piety, was anxious to meet Don Bosco. He also inquired of Father Berto about the Congregation and told him that a letter had arrived that same day from the Ordinary of Turin. In that letter Archbishop Gastaldi, leaving

aside the question of the clerics, complained that Don Bosco, without asking permission, accepted priests of the diocese into his House. Father Berto was able to assure the Prelate that there were neither priests nor clerics of the diocese in Don Bosco's House. It was agreed that Don Bosco would call at the Vitelleschi home between three and four o'clock that afternoon.

Don Bosco arrived punctually. The whole household welcomed him graciously and invited him to have dinner with them on Sunday the 21st. No serious discussion was possible because the Archbishop had to leave shortly for an audience with the Holy Father. However an appointment was made for the following evening. On leaving the house Don Bosco went in the direction of Trajan's Forum to express his sympathy to Attorney Bertorelli whose only son had recently died.

After this act of charity and a stop at a barber shop, as duly recorded by the secretary, they called on Cardinal Berardi, with whom Don Bosco was closeted for about two hours. The Cardinal with exquisite courtesy insisted on accompanying Don Bosco as far as the stairs. Back on the street Don Bosco said to Father Berto, "Cardinal Berardi told me that one day the Holy Father addressed these exact words to him, 'Do you know who made us a present of the Archbishop of Turin?' 'No, Your Holiness.' 'Don Bosco himself! And he is paying for it now.' " This was not the only occasion that Don Bosco, to his own embarrassment, recalled the elevation of Archbishop Gastaldi from the episcopal see of Saluzzo to the metropolitan see of Turin. He had indeed recommended the promotion hoping for effective support of his work because of their long friendship. But then he very humbly confessed that such reliance on man had not been pleasing to God.

He was also informed by the Cardinal that the Archbishop of Turin had written two more letters about the Salesians. One was addressed to the Cardinal and the other, a long one in sixteen oversize pages, to the Pope. The Holy Father, after reading his letter, had handed it to Cardinal Berardi and ordered him to inform Don Bosco. Later, during the April conferences, Don Bosco had these two documents read to the higher Superiors. In referring to them in the minutes the secretary wrote, "The letter truly revealed that

the writer was emotionally upset, and worse yet, that false accusations were leveled at us."

Don Bosco spent February 20 and 21 visiting; on the evening of February 21 he kept his dinner engagement with the Vitelleschi family.

His first thought on arrival in Rome had been to request a private audience with the Holy Father. On the morning of February 19 he filed his request with the Chamberlain, Msgr. Ricci, who scheduled him for an audience at eleven o'clock on the morning of February 22.

As usual Don Bosco entered the audience chamber with a list of things he wished to discuss. Each item was expressed in a few key words. There were twelve of them. Of the twelve items, the most intelligible to us now are the first, "Homage from all the Salesians and their pupils," and the last, "Blessing, indulgences for the Salesians and their pupils and respective families." In conveying to the Pope the homage of his entire spiritual family his aim was to obtain something for all of them and thus inflame them ever more with filial love for the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

The audience lasted an hour and a quarter. Going down the stairs Don Bosco remarked to Father Berto, "The Pope has granted us two big favors. One, all the privileges of a Congregation still to be chosen; the other, dimissorial letters *ad quemcumque Episcopum* [to any Bishop whatsoever]. The first concerns the communication of privileges and the second, the granting of dimissorial letters by the Rector Major for Salesian ordinands to any Bishop whatsoever." Don Bosco's satisfaction at the time could only derive from the ready acceptance by the Pope of the eleventh item on his list, "Dimissorials and faculties." He knew very well how much red tape he would have to go through before obtaining a Decree; but he certainly did not imagine how distant that day would be.

During the same audience he asked the Pope if the Salesians should request a Cardinal Protector as was customary with religious Congregations. The Pope replied, "As long as I live, I myself shall be Protector both to you and to your Congregation."

After his return from the Vatican to his lodgings in Via Sistina he received a welcome visitor. The previous day he had met a second lieutenant of the Engineer corps, stationed in Rome serving

with the King's bodyguards. The officer had come upon him in the street and had kissed his hand with great joy and respect.

"Dear Benvenuto, are you still Don Bosco's friend?" he had asked the officer.

"Of course! I have never forgotten my benefactor nor will I ever do so."

"You know that it is hard for friends to live far away from each other and so they stay always close, and you are so far away from me! Come and see me!"

This brilliant officer's name was Benvenuto Graziano; he came from Biella and was an alumnus of the Oratory. Impressed by Don Bosco's words, he had spent a sleepless night. Now he had come to tell him that if Don Bosco would accept him he was prepared to remain with him and later go wherever he would send him. Don Bosco listened to him with benevolence and then told him to come to the Oratory whenever he could or wanted to and there they would talk it over. He was to come, however, dressed in his elegant uniform for everyone would be delighted to see a brave soldier of the Lord among them. Graziano faithfully kept his word. There is more to be found about him in another book.[3]

Don Bosco was kept busy not only by the business that had brought him to Rome but also by other unforeseen matters. The Pope entrusted him with a secret mission to Vigliani, the Minister of Justice. On the morning of the 28th, Don Bosco called at the Ministry of Mercy and Justice but could not be received immediately and so was obliged to return the next day. We are unable even to conjecture what passed between him and the Minister. Later he called on the Secretariat of State and then sent Father Berto with some letters to the Minister. All he said on the evening of the 28th was, "Tomorrow, at a certain hour, I have an appointment with Minister Vigliani. I have a message for him from the Pope." It is probable that, as he had done before, he was negotiating for the vacant dioceses of Italy, because immediately after his departure from Rome some Bishops were named and at brief intervals that year and the following, more appointments were made.[4]

[3] Vespignani, G., *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco,* p. 105, S. Benigno Canavese, 1930.

[4] See *Civiltà Cattolica,* Cronaca delle Case Romane.

Now we must say something about the second audience. It took place on March 12 at 11:30 A.M. He was ushered into the Pope's presence with the usual memorandum in his hand. We read among other things, "Continue being a father to us, as thus far you have been, concerning the communication [of privileges] and the granting of dimissorials." Then in parenthesis there is the word "Yes" which again confirmed the favorable intentions of the Pope in regard to these two subjects that were uppermost in Don Bosco's mind. The audience had already lasted almost three quarters of an hour when Don Bosco, as he was about to leave, experienced a moment of intimate joy.

"Holy Father," he said, "I am about to leave Rome to rejoin my sons, so I would like you to tell me something that I can bring back to them, something suitable and particularly needful to all. I, too, have something to tell Your Holiness on their behalf, but first I would like to hear what you, in the goodness of your heart, wish to tell us."

Very graciously the Holy Father answered, "Yes, there is something I would like to say that may be good for all of them and I want you to impress it deeply upon the hearts of your Salesians and boys. Exhort them to pledge allegiance and devotedness to Christ and to His Vicar here on earth."

Don Bosco then showed the Holy Father his memorandum: the last item read, "We pledge allegiance and obedience to His Holiness as the Vicar of Jesus Christ."

Pleasantly surprised by such similarity of sentiment and words, the Pope exclaimed, "We must recognize here a true inspiration from our Lord, either in what you wrote or in what I said. This is a sign that these words are to be truly treasured."

"Certainly, Your Holiness, our Lord inspired you to give us such a holy memento because I wrote this in a great hurry, hardly realizing its importance. You may be sure, Holy Father, that when I return to Turin I shall not only inform my sons of this but shall strive earnestly to instill these ideas into them, expounding and explaining them in suitable sermons and exhortations."

He did exactly as he had promised. At the April conferences he instructed all Superiors to tell this incident to the boys in their

respective schools and to repeat it again and again on every occasion; furthermore they were to use it as a theme for sermons. For example: sermons on the joy of those devoted to Jesus Christ, joy in life and joy in death; then, on the unhappiness of those who do not love Jesus Christ, that is, those who do not profess the Catholic faith or who are in the state of mortal sin; finally, on the impossibility of being devoted to Jesus Christ without being devoted at the same time to His Vicar. As regards this last point they were also to explain carefully that the Pope is the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

At the end of the audience his secretary also had the honor of being ushered into the hall. Emboldened by the amiability of the angelic Pius IX, he asked for several personal favors and these were granted.

Don Bosco stayed in Rome twenty-five full days. Between visits to prelates of every rank and among various other matters, he still found time to visit a number of religious houses of both men and women, such as the Redemptorists, the nuns at Bocca della Verità and especially the Noble Ladies of Tor de' Specchi whom he visited eight times in all. He was invited to dinner by important families and individuals and met distinguished guests. Of course, there was an invitation from his enthusiastic friend, Msgr. Fratejacci who, it seems, had done much on his behalf.

This typical Roman, outspoken and jovial, who in his letters spared no one opposing his Don Bosco, was equally blunt in his conversation. About four o'clock one Sunday afternoon, on his way home from the church of St. Eustace, where he was a canon, he met Don Bosco in the Piazza della Minerva. "Come with me," he said and took him to the nearby Minerva Café for coffee. When they were seated he spoke out his mind and told him about all the intrigues in Rome against him in order to acquaint him with what was being said and done to his prejudice. He talked and talked and Don Bosco kept listening. Finally, he interrupted and said, "You see, Monsignor, Don Bosco is in the same plight as that famous leader of mercenaries, John of the Black Bands. First I must look carefully to the right and then to the left to figure out what to do and how to do it. Then I must give my followers the same command that that leader gave his soldiers, "Do not advance, just follow me!"

His habitual calm never abandoned him. During his stay in Rome his secretary seeing how perseverant and patient he was in going here and there, repeatedly and in vain at times, for favors in behalf of some people or for the good of the Church, or noticing him climb four flights of stairs for some alms, could not help exclaiming, "Poor Don Bosco! If at the Oratory they could only see or know how much you work and toil to obtain some assistance or get something done for your sons!" Don Bosco answered, "I do all this to save my own poor soul. For this we must be prepared to do anything. Look, there are only a few years of life left me and I have no other desire but to set in order the affairs of our Congregation. Aside from this nothing else interests me."

On the eve of his departure, March 15, Don Bosco felt that his journey to Rome had not been in vain. Truthfully, the more important matters that had prompted his trip were well under way; of some we already know; of others, we shall hear shortly. Now it was merely a question of time and of prudent maneuvering before steering them safely into port.

Even so, he was not leaving Rome empty-handed. Besides spiritual favors for several deserving people, he was taking home two Briefs and three Decrees, and two more were being drafted. In the first Brief, a plenary indulgence under the usual conditions was granted to all the faithful who would visit the church of Mary Help of Christians on any day of their choosing. This was a very welcome indulgence to the faithful who in increasing numbers and even from distant places made pilgrimages to this shrine. The second Brief besides two plenary indulgences, granted seven more favors:

1. A privileged altar in every church belonging to the Congregation.
2. A plenary indulgence for deceased confreres whenever Mass was offered for them at any altar in a Salesian church.
3. A plenary indulgence three times a week at any altar where a Salesian priest offered Mass for the soul of a deceased person.
4. The faculty to grant a plenary indulgence through the blessing with the crucifix at missions and retreats.
5. 200 days indulgence every time one of the faithful attended a sermon.

6. The faculty to preachers and confessors to bless medals, rosaries, and crucifixes.

7. The faculty to set up the Stations of the Cross in any locality where there was no Franciscan House.

Don Bosco also obtained permission for all the priests of his Congregation to say Mass one hour before dawn during retreats or missions; authorization to sing two requiem Masses a week in Salesian churches, except on doubles of the first or second class, vigils, or privileged feasts; and the faculty for every Director to bless vestments for use in his own House. Moreover, he was soon to receive two more faculties for the Directors. One was permission to commute the recitation of the Breviary to other prayers or good works whenever any religious in their Houses had a valid motive; the other permitted them to send their priests to say Mass in private homes provided the Bishop had approved the altar and its appurtenances. This was equivalent to granting the privilege of a private oratory to any altar at which a Salesian would say Mass. Today these concessions may not seem so important in themselves, but at the time they had a decided value insofar as they contributed to strengthen the feeling of a distinct moral entity and an all-embracing *esprit de corps* in the Congregation.

In his deep faith and piety Don Bosco was also happy to bring to his spiritual children three precious gifts from the Pope in the form of three important indulgences, namely, 300 days every time they made the sign of the Cross before or after any task, such as listening to a sermon, studying or attending class, whether during the day or in the evening, be the subjects literature or music; 300 days every time they taught or supervised the boys; and three years every time they took part, *corde saltem contrito* [at least with a contrite heart] in the regular morning devotions even if they did not receive Holy Communion.

Most important of all Don Bosco left Rome with the consolation that he could truly say that his Congregation was really appreciated there. During the April conference he said, "Not only is the Holy Father well-disposed toward us and willing to help us, but in general we are accepted by all. We are liked by both the good and the bad, by civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and with very few exceptions

everyone is willing to help us. I stressed the fact that even the bad approve of us because we can see that the very same people who rail against religious Orders and would have every last one of them suppressed speak well of us."

Before following Don Bosco as he resumes his journey back to Turin it may be well to insert here the rest of Don Bosco's correspondence from Rome as much as we have been able to trace.

1. *To Father Reviglio*

This note is addressed to Father Felix Reviglio, the first pupil of Don Bosco to be ordained to the priesthood. At this time he was about to take charge of the parish of St. Augustine in Turin. His name occurs frequently in the first five volumes written by Father Lemoyne.

Rome, February 28, 1875

For Father Reviglio:

I am unable to be in Turin for the Fourth Sunday in Lent. However, go ahead with your installation ceremony. I shall accompany you with my prayers. Announce to your new parishoners that the Holy Father, *Vivae vocis oraculo et expressis verbis* [orally and explicitly] imparts to you, the clergy, and all the faithful entrusted by Divine Providence to your care a special apostolic blessing.

Pray for your poor but affectionate friend in Jesus Christ.

Fr. John Bosco

2. *To Countess Callori*

Countess Callori di Vignale was always very generous in her charity to Don Bosco. She was in fact a mother to him, so much so that he used to ask her advice in many things and wrote to her with filial confidence. "Signor Emmanuel" was her second son. Now and then Don Bosco had tried to foster in him, as he grew up, love of

study and the practice of virtue by occasionally writing him short warm letters. He was now twenty-two years old.

Rome, March 2, 1875, Via Sistina

Dear Mamma:

I have just come from the Holy Father and on this occasion had a little more time to speak of you and your family. The Holy Father graciously spoke about you, your husband the Count, and the Medolago family, and he asked me to extend to all of you his apostolic blessing.

I also thought it opportune to request a special blessing for Signor Emanuel and recommend him to the Pope's prayers. Some good will come from it.

This morning the Tiber strayed somewhat from its regular course and has now flooded several parts of the city. We shall see how high it will rise.

I hope to be in Turin for Holy Week and have a chance to talk with you personally.

The Holy Father is in excellent health and looked cheerful and active as though nothing were troubling him. The exemple he gives us is without parallel. My own health is fairly good. May God grant you great holiness and good health. Pray for me. I shall always be in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. Father Berto sends his regards. I have something for you from the Holy Father, and will give it to you in Turin.

3. *To Mrs. Eurosia Monti*

This lady was a distinguished benefactress of the Oratory and had recently been widowed. The "Colonel" referred to was her late husband. She had also recently lost "her last surviving brother," Father [Felix] Golzio. [This priest had been] a former assistant of Father [Louis] Guala and Father [later, Saint] Joseph Cafasso at the Convitto and after the latter's death had been Don Bosco's confessor. When Canon [Eugene] Galletti became Bishop of Alba, Father Golzio succeeded him as Director of the Convitto.

Rome, March 2, 1875

Dear Mrs. Eurosia:

Here in Rome I often think of you and how lonely you must be. I not only pray every day during holy Mass that God grant you a long happy life but I also though it best to ask for a special blessing for you from the Holy Father. He was interested in what I told him about you and was sorry to hear of the Colonel's sudden death and of the death of your last surviving brother. When I had finished he said, *"Write her in my name that a happier home awaits us where we shall have the consolation of seeing our dear ones again. Give her my apostolic blessing and a plenary indulgence, which she may gain whenever she wishes. Tell her also to pray often for the present needs of the Church."* I wanted to write and tell you this, because I am sure you will be pleased.

I talked a good deal about you with Msgr. Fratejacci who has been very sick. He was very sorry over the untimely death of the late lamented Colonel.

I hope to be back in Turin before Holy Week and be able to pay my respects to you in person. I pray that God shower His blessings upon you. Please remember me in your charitable prayers, while I remain in filial gratitude,

Your devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

4. *To Father Michael Rua*

In his management of the Oratory Father Rua never moved a finger without first consulting Don Bosco, who even when in the Eternal City never felt that the Oratory or the smallest detail concerning it was insignificant. Some of these details were: "A wall behind the house" that was to replace the hedge around the orchard and stretch as far as the new buildings that now surround the largest playground of the artisans. All this was beyond the Pinardi chapel, which, in those days, made up the main part of the Oratory as it stands now. "A water turbine" which was planned but in all probability never installed. "The building alongside the square" refers to the endless negotiations then underway to build an extension opposite the former Moretta property, between Via Cottolengo and the present Società Editrice Internazionale; for some unknown reason

the extension was never built.[5] "An estimate of Catellino's property" has reference to a parcel of land adjacent to the Moretta property, later a playground of the first Oratory of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Finally Don Bosco with fatherly concern inquired *nominatim* [by name] about his coadjutors and priests.

Rome, March 8, 1875

Dear Father Rua:

It must be very cold in Turin with all the snow you have had. We are postponing our departure from Rome until Monday for that reason and also because we still have a few things to follow up. If there is any mail or anything requiring attention send it here to the usual address.

I think it is best that we talk over the matter of the wall behind the house. However, Chevalier Spezia, always so good to us, should be asked to start work on the water turbine, and the building at the side of the square. How about the estimate of the Catellino property? Was money sent to us *ad hoc* [for this purpose]?

Greetings in the Lord to everyone, especially Audisio and Cottini. Thank the former for the letter he wrote.

Love me in Jesus Christ. Have all continue praying for me who will always be,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. How is Father Chiala? Has Father Bologna put on any weight at all? Tell Father Guanella that I shall bring him something too.

5. *To Father Dalmazzo*

During the first half of October of the previous year, Father Francis Dalmazzo, Superior of the College at Valsalice, at Don Bosco's request had accompanied a group of boarders, sons of the nobility, to Rome. During their stay in the Eternal City Archbishop Vitelleschi had written to Don Bosco about them, "I was very pleased to see and make the acquaintance of the Superior of Valsalice and also to meet some of the boys he had with him. It was an

[5] *Cf.* Giraudi, F. *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco,* Tav. 8, 1935, S.E.I., Torino.

excellent idea of yours to send them to Rome as a reward and to bring them to the feet of the Holy Father." The first part of this letter shows Don Bosco continuing to draw from this "excellent idea" all he could for the good of the boys.

Rome, March 8, 1875

Dear Father Dalmazzo:

Time does not stand still but even as it flies I shall dedicate a moment of it to you.

I personally delivered your letter with its enclosed donation to the Holy Father. He read the letter through and seemed pleased indeed. He also recalled your visit last fall and dwelt on it in detail. Among other things he said, "Those boys behaved very well both here at the Vatican and in the city. Several people mentioned it to me, and all agreed that their excellent deportment was the result of sound Christian education." He read the names at the end of the letter and when he came to De Vecchi's signature remarked jovially, "We belong together." Then he put the letter aside saying, "I shall answer it; but meanwhile please thank them on my behalf and give all of them my apostolic blessing and a special plenary indulgence to be gained on whatever day they choose to go to Holy Communion."

I then asked him to extend this favor also to the families of the boys. "Certainly," he said, "I extend it to their families and relatives unto the third degree included." Now this is up to Valsalice.[6]

I was very pleased with your own good wishes and those of our very dear students at Valsalice and am grateful to all of you for the prayers you offer for me. I assure you that I remember you all every day during Holy Mass and as usual, I ask for the three S's, *Sanità, Sapienza, Santità* which, as your clever boys already know, mean Health, Wisdom, and Sanctity.

I shall soon leave Rome but have things to attend to on the way back, so I shall not be with you until Holy Week.

I shall give serious thought to what you wrote about Chevalier Bacchialone. As to Father Roda, since he cannot produce the academic titles for teaching mathematics, accept his proposal, or rather his threat, and let him go if you can do without him.[7]

[6] Meaning: It is your job to tell them. The remark, "We belong together" in reference to De Vecchi, was a humorous allusion to the Pope's advanced age.

[7] Mr. [Charles] Bacchialone and Father Roda, two university professors, taught Greek and mathematics respectively at the College of Valsalice.

As regards those matters concerning the Congregation we shall discuss them in Turin. In the meantime everything is progressing quite satisfactorily.

Messis multa, messis multa, [the harvest is great, the harvest is great] dear Father Dalmazzo! Tell all your boys to become good holy missionaries, but of such caliber that each of them be worth a hundred. Then we shall begin to fill some of the countless needs round about us.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always, with your mother, all our boys at Valsalice, and especially with me. I recommend myself to the prayers of each one of you.

Your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

6. *To Father Rua*

Don Bosco attached so much importance to the weekly conduct marks that even when absent from Turin he wished to be informed of them; the pupils, aware of this, were inclined to take these marks very seriously. The classifications *optime, fere optime, bene,* and *medie* [excellent, very good, good and fair] were equivalent to 10, 9, 8, and 7.[8]

Rome, March 12, 1875

Dear Father Rua:

We shall leave Rome Monday morning, God willing. After a day at Orvieto we shall go to Florence where you may send my mail until further notice. I hope to fulfill with you the Paschal precept and perform the ceremony of the Washing of the Feet.

Tell the students and the others how much I appreciated their gift of general excellence in conduct. I have an audience with the Holy Father this morning at eleven o'clock and mean to tell him this among other things. I shall also ask him for a special blessing for all of them, from our good Bro. Cinzano, their leader, down to the least of them. My joy will be doubled if they give me such a gift again for the current week.

My regards to Father Chiala. Tell him I received his letters and shall do as he suggests.

[8] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. VI, pp. 393-6.

I regret that I do not have time to write to Father Barberis and to his and my dear boys. If I cannot do it before my return to Turin, I shall do it at least then.

Tell Mazzetti I received his letter and also that of his pupils. Let him convey my thanks to them as well as the Holy Father's blessing and indulgence.

Sunday is St. Matilda's feast day and you should send a telegram more or less as follows:

"Matilda Sigismondi, Sistina 104, Rome. Happy Name day. Praying God grant you lasting good health, happy life. Rua."

Do the same for Cardinal Berardi on the feast of St. Joseph naturally *mutatis mutandis* [with due changes].

Let all of you continue praying for me. God bless all of us. Believe me, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

7. *To Father J. B. Francesia*

Father Francesia was the Director of the Varazze school. Among other things he is remembered because of the book *Due Mesi con Don Bosco a Roma,* [Two Months in Rome with Don Bosco] (Torino, Tip. Sal., 1905), which relates a number of interesting details about the visit of Don Bosco and Father Francesia to the Eternal City in 1867. The person for whom Don Bosco expresses deep gratitude in the letter that follows was Mrs. Susanna Saettone, a most distinguished benefactress.

Rome, March 12, 1875

Dear Father Francesia:

Before leaving Rome I want to tell you what I have done also for you and for your and my dear boys.

You will be notified of what concerns you in person and through authentic certificates with seals. Tell our pupils that the Holy Father was happy to hear about them and that he sends them a special apostolic blessing with a plenary indulgence to be gained on whatever day they go to Holy Communion. The Holy Father extends this indulgence and the apostolic blessing to all the pupils and persons connected with the school

(hence, also the Rev. Francesia), the day students, the parish priest, and his relatives, and the families of everyone concerned. These were his actual words.

Notify your pupils without delay so that they may tell their families.

Msgr. Fratejacci sends his regards; so do other people whose names I cannot recall at the moment. If you can contact Mrs. Susanna please tell her that I spoke of her at length with the Holy Father and that he sends her a special blessing. I shall have the details when I see her either at Varazze or at Albissola. Give her my regards and tell her that I am praying for her and recommend myself to her prayers.

I think you should send a telegram worded more or less as follows on St. Joseph's feast, in the morning:

"His Eminence Cardinal Joseph Berardi—Rome. Superiors, pupils Varazze school praying God grant you health, happy life."

Tu vero in omnibus, Francesia, labora, opus fac Evangelistae. Sanctifica et salvifica te et tuos et dic ut omnes ad Deum preces fundant pro me. Amen. [And you, Francesia, be watchful in all things, work as a preacher of the Gospel (2 Tim. 4, 5). Sanctify and save yourself and your own and ask all to pray to God for me. Amen.]

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. Tell Father Tomatis that it looks as though the Carlists are going ahead.

P. P. S. We shall leave here Monday, God willing, and hope to fulfill our Easter Duty at the Oratory.

The first postscript requires some explanation. From 1872 to 1876 Spain was in the throes of a civil war between the followers of Don Carlos and those of Don Alfonso. Don Carlos, who had taken the role of defender of genuine Catholicism against the liberal ideas of Don Alfonso, had ardent supporters everywhere among the faithful and they followed the war with passionate interest. There were enthusiastic adherents of Don Carlos also at the Oratory and lively arguments about him. Any defeat of his would plunge them into grief. When Father [Peter] Guidazio heard of a catastrophic defeat, he did not despair of the situation and, good-hearted as he was, spent the entire night in church. It was known that not

long before, Don Carlos had visited Don Bosco several times in Rome and that he had come to talk with him at the Oratory when he passed through Turin on his way to start the war.

While Don Bosco was in Rome, Bishop Simeoni, the papal nuncio, was about to leave for Madrid despite the fact that fighting was still going on in northern Spain. Don Carlos' followers interpreted the sending of the nuncio as a mortal blow to the Carlist cause. Don Bosco, in several talks with Cardinal Simeoni had asked him what he planned to do in Madrid. The Prelate replied that he would go there with two sets of credentials from the Holy Father, one addressed to Don Alfonso, the other, blank in case Don Alfonso no longer occupied the throne and the Carlists or republicans were in power. On June 2, 1875, Don Bosco in an after-supper conversation with Father Dalmazzo and a few others remarked, "I always spoke openly in favor of Don Carlos but in Rome I realized that other people did not think the same way, so I had to be more cautious."

8. *To Father John Bonetti*

Father Bonetti was the Director of the school at Borgo San Martino. [James] Para, a young Salesian, was doubling as doorkeeper while studying Latin in preparation for the priesthood.

Rome, March 15, 1875

Dear Father Bonetti:

I think you will be pleased at my writing to you at least once before leaving Rome. I received your letters especially the one telling me of the grave loss we have suffered through the death of our confrere Para. He was a fine young man. I was counting on him to win many souls, but God had different designs. All we can do now is to pray for him, and try to turn your pupils, my beloved children, into so many Paras in humility, piety, and especially in obedience.

Tell everyone that I was able to talk with the Holy Father last Friday and told him of our school at Borgo San Martino. He graciously asked many questions, this among others, namely, whether any of our boys could be compared to Dominic Savio.

I told him there were some who seemed to be his equals while many others were about to become so and even surpass him.

At that he laughed and said, "God bless the Directors, the other Superiors, and all the boys; announce to them a special indulgence to be earned on a day they go to Holy Communion."

At the close of the audience he said, "Goodbye, dear Bosco, but see that you do not become *bosco* fit for burning.[9]

"I shall try not to," I answered.

Remember me to everyone and tell them that, God willing, I shall visit them after Easter. I have something special for you but I shall tell you in Turin.

I shall leave for Turin tomorrow and will make several stops along the way. Pray for me particularly, and believe me always, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

N.B. All the spiritual favors are to be extended with my greetings to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, about whom I shall write more later.

It is the wish of Pius IX that each Salesian, each pupil, and each Daughter of Mary Help of Christians extend these spiritual favors to their individual families.

9. *To Father John Baptist Lemoyne*

On the eve of his departure from Rome Don Bosco wished to send a token of his affection also to the Director, the Salesians, and the pupils of the school at Lanzo.

Rome, March 15, 1875

Dear Father Lemoyne:

I can only write to you briefly but I want to do this much at least before I leave Rome. Please tell the priests, teachers, and clerics that there are some special [spiritual] favors I shall tell them about in person.

Aside from that, the Holy Father gives everybody at Lanzo, pupils and all, a special blessing with a plenary indulgence that may be extended to their individual families on any day they receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. I shall see to the rest myself

[9] A play on the Italian word *bosco* meaning wood.

after Easter. Tomorrow I set out for Turin and will travel in short stages.

My most cordial greetings to all my dear Salesians and the pupils at the school. Pray for me who am, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

10. *To the Attorney Nicholas Galvagno*

The letter was addressed to Marene in the district of Saluzzo, the birthplace of the addressee. The attorney Galvagno, who died on November 13, 1889, was a warm friend of Don Bosco for many years, visiting him whenever he came to Turin and giving him generous financial assistance.

Rome, March 15, 1875

My dear Attorney:

During a private audience I had with His Holiness, I had a chance to do some murmuring about you. [I whispered to him that] I often appeal to you when my finances are ready to crumble. The Holy Father listened with interest and asked, "What can we do for this kind gentleman?"

"I believe that he and his family would be happy if you would give him, his wife, and the whole family, especially the younger children, a special blessing that they may grow up strong and in the holy fear of God," I replied.

"That I will gladly grant."

"I wish to ask another exceptional favor, too."

"What is that?"

"That the Galvagno family and all their relatives to the third degree included may gain a plenary indulgence every time they approach the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist with the proper dispositions and pray for your Holiness."

"*Rem difficilem postulasti.* [What you asked for is not easily granted.] Nevertheless without exceeding the bounds of my authority I grant this favor on condition that they avail themselves of it frequently. Inform them of both favors on my behalf."

I thanked him and now carry out this pleasant duty with the request

that you inform of this spiritual favor those relatives who in your opinion will hold it in high regard.

In the hope of paying my respects to you in Turin where I shall be for Easter, I beg you to remember me in your charitable prayers. I am,

Your grateful and devoted servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco left Rome on the morning of March 16 and spent the night at Orvieto as the guest of Bishop Briganti. At one time en route he seemed unable to restrain his joy and it was obvious that he had something very pleasant on his mind. Father Berto asked him what had caused such joy.

"Last night I had a dream. I was in a vast field," Don Bosco said, "quite golden with ripe wheat of top quality. The grains were exceptionally large. There were many little lambs grazing in that field."

"Is that all you will tell me?"

"Now as I visualize that field I think I see the wheat becoming fully ripe."

He stopped over in Florence from the night of March 17 until the morning of the 20th and left a memento of his stay there. He visited a family named Parlatore and found the head of the house seriously ill. Don Bosco's words brought peace and hope to their hearts and before leaving he promised to pray for them. The lady of the house wrote to him on December 10 and after apologizing for her delay in writing she told him that his prayers had obtained her husband's complete recovery. He was now in much better health than he had been before his illness.

From Florence Don Bosco traveled to Bologna where he was given a cordial welcome by the Lanzarini family. Mr. Lanzarini, a sausage manufacturer, had visited the Oratory with Father Guanella and while there had taken ill. "I shall send my doctor to you," Don Bosco had told him. He did in fact send his own personal physician who was also the House doctor to visit him. Mr. Lanzarini, who used to take great delight in recalling this gesture of Don Bosco, later became a very generous cooperator of the Oratory. Father

[Louis] Guanella mentioned this incident in a report and remarked, "Thus the saintly man knew how to conquer people's hearts and turn events to his own advantage."

In Bologna Don Bosco called on Marchioness Zambeccari, then traveled to Modena on March 21 to visit Count Tarabini. The next day he went from Modena to Milan as the guest of Mr. Comaschi, an attorney and an old friend and admirer of his.[10] A constant flow of visitors came to see him, and he himself called on a number of people, such as the family of Duke Scotti who sent a coach for him.

On Holy Wednesday, March 24, he arrived at the Oratory amid general rejoicing.

More than anything else the question of privileges had kept Don Bosco busy in the Eternal City. We shall have to report on this at greater length. More successful negotiations would have necessitated a longer stay. It is true that someone did suggest this to him, but he brushed it aside with an irrefutable argument: his boys "needed food." Then he was told that if absolutely he really could not do otherwise, he should at least leave someone in Rome to keep things moving. In the meantime Cardinal Berardi and Msgr. Fratejacci promised to look after his interests and Don Bosco assured them that at a word from them he would return to Rome as quickly as possible if not to bring things to a conclusion, at least to offer explanations.

A trip made by Father Lemoyne and Father Bonetti at the beginning of May filled this need. For several reasons Don Bosco wished that from time to time some of his sons should visit Rome. It was a reward for the more deserving because of their great sacrifices; it widened the horizons and enlightened ever more the faith and piety of the more outstanding members; it instilled and spread throughout his Congregation the Spirit of Romanism that found its outward expression in a deep attachment to the Pope and the Church. Furthermore, if the presence of his more distinguished sons in Rome could help to give the lie to vicious rumors that tended to depict the Oratory as a fools' paradise, this, too, was an advantage that Don Bosco would not disregard. In this instance both Father Lemoyne and Father Bonetti were gifted men, and with their intelli-

[10] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. VIII, p. 304.

gence and tact they would be a credit to Don Bosco, who had sent them, and the Congregation to which they belonged.

The primary purpose of their trip was to convey the respects of Don Bosco and the Salesians to the Pope on the occasion of his eighty-third birthday on May 13. The relentless attacks on the Pope in Italy and elsewhere had shocked Italian Catholics deeply and aroused them into offering a gesture of filial allegiance to the Vicar of Christ on this memorable date.[11] Enthusiasm among the faithful was at its highest. Don Bosco was eager to be present in the person of two of his most distinguished sons. This is apparent from the following letter.

Turin, May 1, 1875

Dear Father Bonetti:

Would you like to go to Rome with Father Lemoyne to represent our Congregation on the 13th of this month?

Let me know as soon as you can. If there is nothing in the way, I shall make arrangements for your trip and lodgings.

God bless us all. Believe me in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The two delegates carried many letters from him to Cardinals, Monsignors, and even to the Pope himself; these letters were in his own hand and were either about business matters or merely courtesy notes. He also had thoughtfully seen to it that a substantial number

[11] To give our younger readers an idea of the anti-pope phobia which then raged among public opinion-makers, we reproduce here a letter written in April 1875 by Giuseppe Garibaldi to Karl Blind, a German author and political agitator.

"Dear Friend:

I do not believe that there is any nation in the world so feebly Catholic as Italy. Both the government and the upper classes affect a totally fictitious devotion to Catholicism. As for the people, they, as a group, do not believe in Catholicism at all, and only fanatic old women are seen in the papist churches. At the present time it would be very difficult to persuade the government and the parliamentary majority to pass a decree that would liberate us from the Papacy. Nevertheless you can be sure that the vast majority of Italians sympathize with Germany in her vigourous, unrelenting struggle against Jesuitism in all of its forms." (Cf. *Unità Cattolica,* April 13, 1875.)

of handsomely bound copies of books authored by them were available as gifts for the Holy Father, the Cardinals, and a few friends. He also gave them a very helpful list of instructions as a vademecum.

The two pilgrims were about to venture into an entirely new world very different from the one in which they lived. Like it or not, Papal Rome overawed even clergy men with a wide experience of life. The impact would be all the greater on two good priests used to a simple life, like Father Bonetti, or withdrawn from a grand social life after being brought up in an aristocratic family as was Father Lemoyne.

Don Bosco carefully wrote very detailed instructions on how to act when visiting or dealing with people from the Pope down to the Sigismondi family with whom they were to lodge.

Now that half a century has passed, it is no longer indiscreet to publish this handful of documents that reveal Don Bosco's profound knowledge of men, his tact and his way in dealing with them, and his spirit of faith even in acts of simple courtesy. In presenting them here we shall limit ourselves to add clarifying footnotes only where needed.

The Holy Father

1. Presentation of books.
2. Humble respects, unfaltering devotion of Salesians, their Cooperators, benefactors both laymen and ecclesiastics, and approximately 7,600 boys.[12]
3. Thank him for favors granted to our Congregation, implore him to continue being a father to us. All of us are prepared to work for him, pray for him, and die for that Faith of which he is the Supreme Head.
4. Blessing for all of us but particularly for our schools, with plenary indulgence for pupils and their relatives on any day they perform their devotions.

Cardinal Antonelli

1. Regards to his secretary, Father Augustine.
2. Gift of books.

[12] Included in this figure, besides the boarders at the Oratory and other schools, were the boys who in very large numbers frequented the Sunday Oratories.

3. Thanks, gratitude, respects, ask him to continue to extend his protection in all that concerns . . . .[13]
4. Assure him of our prayers both in common and individually.

Cardinal Berardi

He lives in Via del Gesù

He is a good friend of ours. Talk to him at length about our work, Houses, boys, Don Bosco,[14] and our prayerful remembrance of him.

1. Gift of books.
2. Ask news of his mother, and of his mother-in-law, for whom we have very often prayed.
3. Give him news of the Salesian Cooperators and of the *Sons of Mary.*
4. Ask if you may call on him again to pay your respects before you leave. Tip his servants 3 lire.

Archbishop Vitelleschi

Archbishop of Seleucia, Secretary to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He is in charge of all that concerns us. Lives in his own house, Via San Nicolò de' Cesarini, in a small square of same name.

1. Present books.
2. Thanks, etc., etc.
3. In my name ask news of his brothers, Marquis Angelo and Marquis Julius; also of Marchioness Clotilda, his brother-in-law and family.
4. Matters concerning our Congregation, whether there are difficulties, or things to be attended to. Ask if any action has been taken on special faculties referred to him,[15] and if anything else is to be done.
5. You may talk of . . .[16] if the subject comes up.
6. Same in regard to the Salesian Cooperators and the *Sons of Mary.*

[13] The dots stand for the problems in Turin. In all probability the Cardinal would mention them since they were matters that pertained to his office.

[14] Here Don Bosco meant that with Cardinal Berardi they could talk quite freely and fully on any topic.

[15] Namely the steps to be taken by him ex officio for the granting of privileges and the faculty to issue unqualified dimissorials.

[16] As above, this means the problems in Turin.

Cardinal Patrizi, Vicar, etc.

(next door to St. Louis of France building)

A member of the Commission for our affairs, last year and again this year;[17] very pious and kind but always very busy.

1. Gift.[18]
2. Thanks.
3. Assure him of special prayers in all our Houses.
4. Tell him Don Bosco would like news of his nephews and of Marchioness Genevieve.
5. Recommend our affairs to his fatherly protection which we have so often experienced.

Cardinal Bizzarri

(In the little square with a new church)

He is Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, member of the Commission entrusted with our affairs. Very pious, extremely scrupulous,[19] does not accept gifts . . . .

1. Do not present books but ask about his health; tell him we are grateful to him, recommend our Congregation.
2. Listen attentively if he talks; if he seems impatient, pay your respects and leave.

Cardinal Anthony De Luca

Barberini Square, palace of the prince, first floor. Member of the Commission. Kind, pious, generous, scholarly, very shrewd, you may talk freely.

1. Gift, thanks, recommend us.
2. Gratitude, prayers.

Cardinal Martinelli

Member of the Commission. Augustinian, very pious, kind, etc.
Gift, assurance of prayers, thanks, recommend us, etc.

[17] The committee of cardinals appointed by Pius IX to examine the Rules and later, the application for privileges. We shall refer to this again.
[18] Meaning, books.
[19] Cf. page 79.

Msgr. Ricci

Master of the Chamber to His Holiness. He is in charge of audiences; pious, was guest at the Oratory for several days. Pay respects, make gift, invite him to pay a return visit to our part of the country.

Pay respects to his secretary, Rosati Baldini.

Cardinal Consolini

Humble, not overawing, generous toward our House. Present gift, pay respects, recommend us to his prayers.

Msgr. Fratejacci

Auditor for the Cardinal Vicar, Canon Vicar Forane, etc. Lives opposite big fountain at Ponte Sisto.

He represents Don Bosco in our current negotiations, a very good friend, talks a lot. Present gift, pay respects, invite him to spend a month with us, etc.

Prof. Menghini, Attorney

He is a summist[20] for the Bishops and Regulars; everything is in his hands; he was here last year; has been very good to our Congregation. Invite him, etc. But when you leave give him a donation of one *scudo*.[21] Should he invite you to dine, accept the invitation but be sure to have a pastry shop deliver to him a *gateau*.[22]

Alexander and Matilda Sigismondi

You will be staying at their own house at 104 Via Sistina. Both are very religious and have always been most kind to us without ever accepting remuneration. They are convinced that all Salesians are saints, so now it is up to you.

[20] This is the name given to the clerks attached to Commissions of Cardinals. They are secretaries who prepare initial drafts of letter, briefs, and chancery deeds.

[21] A gold coin used in Italy up to the 19th century and approximately equivalent to a dollar. [Editor].

[22] French for cake. Attempts were made to italianize the word into *gatò* meaning indifferently sweets, pies, cakes, pastry, etc. Attorney Menghini wrote to Don Bosco on May 18, "I now resume writing this letter after a dinner honored by the presence of your two excellent priests, Father John Baptist Lemoyne and Father John Bonetti. Before the fruit was served, an exquisite rum cake suddenly appeared; this was quite unexpected and a most gracious thought on your part. We all shouted, 'Long live Don Bosco! In the midst of most important matters he does not overlook the smallest details.' "

The wife, Matilda, is very talkative, knows some theology, and asks a lot of questions; she goes to Communion every day. They have their own private chapel and you will say Mass at their convenience.

You may talk all you want about the Oratory; they will always be happy to listen. Ask about their little nephew, Louis, and their sister, Adelaide Fantoni.

In General

Always be prompt to answer questions put to you by any important people you visit. Always speak well of the Romans and Roman affairs, especially top-ranking clergy; but not with Msgr. Fratejacci.[23]

In regard to custom and etiquette, do whatever Commendatore Fontanella tells you.

Praebete vos ipsos exemplum bonorum operum. [Show yourselves in all things an example of good works. [Cf. Titus 2, 7.]

Avoid perspiring. Take a coach whenever you are in a hurry. When you meet people we know, always give them my greetings and tell them that we are praying for them.

Call also on Mother Galeffi, Superioress at Tor de' Specchi. Give her news of us, etc. Mr. Alexander is head steward or majordomo there.

On the envelop containing these instructions he wrote:

"Both Msgr. Fratejacci and Attorney Manghini would be very welcome if they were to come and stay here with us for a while. Call as well on Mr. Stephen Colonna, Via S. Chiara 49-3, to pay your respects.[24]

The time was woefully short for their vast program. The twelve days ahead of them before [their return to Turin for] the feast of Mary Help of Christians were utterly insufficient if they were to attend to their devotions, take in the sights and, above all, call on so many important people. However, they found goodwill everywhere and, consequently, easy access [to important people], far easier than was usual in Rome. Besides, they were never idle. They were utterly amazed at the great personal interest shown even by the highest Prelates in asking about Don Bosco and the Congregation.

The two pilgrims have left us little information about all the

[23] Probably because he was somewhat inclined to buttonhole people.

[24] He was a Vatican expediter like Mr. Sigismondi. These officials forward briefs, rescripts, and bulls issued by the Apostolic Chancery, the Datary, the Sacred Penitentiary or the Secretariat of Briefs.

things they must have reported to Don Bosco. They have however supplied some interesting details of their visit to the Cardinal Vicar and of their papal audiences.

Cardinal Patrizi showed them the greatest confidence. He spoke also of the difficulties in Turin and as a final remark quoted Pius IX as having said, " 'It is Don Bosco who wanted him; now let him keep him.' In a way I am glad that things are this way. The tribulations that are afflicting your Congregation prove that it is the work of God. I would feel sorry [for you] if things were to go differently! Yet it will all pass." This he said with great show of affection.

On May 14, the eighty-third birthday of Pius IX, they had passes for a public audience, which for them was somewhat different from a private one. They went to it with hearts aflutter as people feel when they are about to experience one of the solemn moments of their lives. They were thrilled at the appearance of Pius IX. "All dressed in white," Father Lemoyne wrote, "gracious and majestic, Pius IX was the living image of the goodness of our Lord."

At an opportune moment, Msgr. Ricci, Master of the Chamber, introduced them with the words, "Two of Don Bosco's priests, Holy Father." "The Pope looked at us in a way I can never describe," Father Lemoyne continued, "and came straight to us. He raised his eyes to Heaven and lifted his head as if inspired, stretched out his arms, and in a ringing voice, which, in the silence was heard by everyone in the room, he exclaimed, 'The miraculous family! Is it growing, is it really growing? How many are you now?' "

"Holy Father," I answered in a choked voice, "there are four hundred of us already and eight thousand boys.

"Then the Vicar of Jesus Christ pressed his hands on our heads for a moment before extending them to us to kiss. Everyone in the hall saw how he kept his eyes raised toward Heaven all the time. After this he walked past everyone else in the room without stopping or saying another word."

Msgr. Ricci also obtained a private audience for them even though they told him they had nothing in particular to tell the Pope. As they were ushered into his presence the Pope exclaimed, "Oh, my sons!" He was standing beside his desk and he asked, "How is Don Bosco? Is he well?"

They both knelt down and Father Lemoyne handed him a letter from Don Bosco and two sealed envelopes.

"Is this Peter's Pence from your boys? Aren't you Father Bonetti, Director at Borgo San Martino, and you Father Lemoyne, Director at Lanzo?"

"Yes, Holy Father; and on behalf of Don Bosco, the Salesian Congregation, and all the pupils in our schools, we offer you our humble homage and the sincerest assurance of our veneration and obedience. At the same time we implore your apostolic blessing."

"That I will gladly impart; I bless the Superiors and all their charges."

"Including our boys," Father Bonetti blurted out.

"Aren't the boys your charges?" the Pope asked with a kindly smile.

"That is true; but I would like to tell them that they were mentioned specifically."

"I understand. I am happy to give them my particular blessing."

"We would like to request a special favor from Your Holiness, one which Don Bosco himself suggested," Father Lemoyne said.

"What is it?"

"A plenary indulgence for everyone in our Houses."

"Isn't this the jubilee year?"

"Yes, Holy Father; but we ask this as a special token of your goodness and as a souvenir of our own visit to the Vicar of Jesus Christ."

"Then I will grant it; but only for once, you know, only for once!" He held up the thumb of his right hand.

At this audience they offered the Pope the first fruits of their literary efforts which he graciously accepted with words of encouragement.

Thus ended the audience. They had been given priority over hundreds of people; otherwise, they would have had to wait two weeks. This made them realize the great esteem in which Don Bosco was held in Rome.

On May 24, the feast of Mary Help of Christians, Father Lemoyne [was back in Turin and] sang the Solemn High Mass in the Valdocco shrine.

CHAPTER 7

Final Acceptance of the Missions in South America

PIUS IX had visited Argentina in the early years of his sacred ministry and knew of the abundant spiritual harvest that could be reaped there.[1] He therefore listened with great interest to Don Bosco's plans for the missions in that part of the world and dwelt at length on them. Don Bosco, as was his custom, had gone to Rome also to seek enlightenment, counsel, and approval from the Vicar of Jesus Christ. As soon as the Pope's blessing and commendation gave him the necessary encouragement, he set out with firm determination and energy to carry out his plans whose initial steps he had already taken.

The preliminary contacts described in Volume X had given way to more concrete negotiations. And thus, on the day before the vigil of St. Francis de Sales, replies arrived from [South] America accepting all of Don Bosco's conditions and urging an early departure of the Salesians. The letters were addressed to the Argentine Consul Gazzolo and were to be officially communicated by him.

Don Bosco wished to make this official announcement with the greatest possible solemnity. He gave orders that on the feast of St. Francis [de Sales] in the evening all the Salesians and boys at the Oratory were to assemble in the large study hall facing a large dais. The members of the Superior Chapter and the Directors of the other Houses, who had come in those days for their annual conference, took their seats around Don Bosco on the dais. Hardly anyone knew the real reason for this gathering, and so expectations ran high. At a

[1] In 1823 he had gone to Chile as auditor to the papal legate, Archbishop Muzzi. They landed at Buenos Aires and crossed the Pampas and the Andes to reach Santiago, enduring all sorts of privations.

sign from Don Bosco, Consul Gazzolo in full-dress uniform stood up and amid a deep silence read in a loud voice the letters from Argentina. Then Don Bosco rose and began to speak: as far as he was concerned the proposals were accepted under one condition, namely, the full consent of the Holy Father. He added that he would go to Rome to inquire from the Pope himself whether or not the project was to his liking. He would reject the proposal only if the Supreme Pontiff were against it.

The reaction to this impressive scene is indescribable. Both the boys and the Salesians were overwhelmed with emotion. A few of the Superiors, at the sight of such elaborate display, had been reluctant to take seats on the dais. They feared that when the time came to carry out the plan it would fail for lack of personnel or means. But enthusiasm ran so high in all those present that even the hesitant were swept off their feet. The electrifying news spread in a flash in and out of the Oratory. Shortly after, Don Bosco sent instructions to all the Houses. This convinced everyone that the solemn set-up had not merely been an empty show. He sent out the following circular.

Turin, February 5, 1875

To the Salesians:

Among the many proposals received to establish missions in foreign countries, the one from Argentina seems to be the best. Apart from some civilized areas, immense territories in that country are inhabited by savage tribes, among whom, by the grace of God, the Salesians can exercise their zeal.

We shall begin by opening a hospice in Buenos Aires, the capital of that vast Republic, and a school with a public church at San Nicolas de los Arroyos, not very far from the capital.

Personnel for this new venture must be assembled, but it is my wish that this be done on a volunteer basis and not through obedience. Therefore, those who wish to volunteer for the foreign missions should:

1. Send in a written application expressing their desire to go to these countries as members of our Congregation.

2. The Superior Chapter shall then meet, and after invoking the Holy Spirit, will proceed to examine the health, intellectual background, physical endurance and moral strength of all applicants. We shall select

only those who we have good reason to believe will go to the missions with advantage to their own soul and for the greater glory of God.

3. Those who have been chosen will then gather together for whatever time they need to study the language and customs of the people to whom they intend to bring words of everlasting life.

4. The departure is scheduled for next October unless some serious unforeseen reason will force us to modify our plans.

Let us thank God with our whole heart for His goodness in bestowing new favors every day upon our humble Congregation, and let us endeavor to become worthy of them by the exact observance of our Constitutions, especially those dealing with the vows by which we have consecrated ourselves to God.

Let us not cease offering prayers to God so that we may exercise the virtues of patience and meekness. Amen.

Believe me always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. I ask the Directors kindly to read and explain the contents of this letter to the confreres.

Father Ceccarelli, the pastor of San Nicolas de los Arroyos, had lavishly praised a venerable old gentleman in his parish, Joseph Francis Benitez, who was anxious to see the Salesians come to his country.[2] Don Bosco wrote the following charming letter to him three days before he sent his circular letter to the Salesian Houses:

Turin, February 2, 1875

Your Excellency:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always.

A number of people from Argentina and especially Commendatore John Baptist Gazzolo have told me about your great charity, your sincere love for the Holy See, and your zeal in all matters concerning religion.

Blessed be God in all things; may He keep you for many long and happy years for the good of our Holy Mother the Church.

My old friend, Father Ceccarelli, also tells me of your intention to

[2] Chiala, C. *Da Torino alla Republica Argentina,* Tip. Sal., Torino, 1876, pp. 20-28.

assist in a special manner the Salesians who may be assigned to the new school at San Nicolas. What a gracious gesture on the part of Divine Providence! Your name is Francis and you intend to take the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales under your fatherly protection. I am grateful to you from the bottom of my heart. It shall henceforth be my special intention that you participate in every Mass, and in every prayer offered by the Salesians, either individually or together. Every day when I celebrate Mass I shall make a special memento for a long life for you.

Our Congregation is in its beginnings and is opening many new Houses and schools, therefore we humbly entrust ourselves to your charity for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May God bless us all and grant us the grace to persevere on the path of virtue. May we all meet one day with our heavenly Father in the land of the blessed. So be it.

Please remember me in your charitable prayers.

Your devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco knew that the Pope would be quite favorable to the proposed apostolate, yet he thought it prudent to go to Rome with something more tangible than good intentions to substantiate his hopes of ultimate success. Therefore, he did not ask the Pope's blessing until he had first paved the way in distant America and created a more favorable atmosphere for the project in his own Congregation. In this way papal consent gave greater momentum to the execution of the plan.

Immediately after his arrival in Rome, he did two things. First he conferred with Cardinal Franchi and Archbishop Simeoni, respectively Prefect and Secretary of [the Sacred Congregation for] the Propagation of the Faith and in the twinkling of an eye won them to his cause. In fact, as he was leaving the Eternal City, the two customary decrees were already being drafted. One was for the Ordinary of the mission territory officially informing him that with the approval of the Holy See the Salesians were coming into his diocese endowed with all the usual privileges and faculties. The other decree was addressed to the Superior General granting him all the concessions necessary under the circumstances. "Many privileges have been granted," Don Bosco told the Salesians at the April

conferences, "there is no hair-splitting when it is a question of the missions."

While in Rome he also wrote to [South] America for further information in order to guarantee the Salesians full freedom in their work as well as to forestall any difficulties in admitting, in due time, clerics to Holy Orders. All the replies were favorable. Then, after announcing the Pope's approval, he gave his final formal consent and the matter was settled, except for serious anticlerical riots erupting in the Argentine capital in those very days.

In March 1875, after a mass rally at the *Variedades* theater, a handful of extremists, amid shouts of "Down with the Jesuits," set fire to the Jesuit school of *Salvador,* one of the finest in the city. It was feared that the fury of the extremists might go even further. Don Bosco therefore wrote again to ascertain whether these events were likely to prevent or at least defer the departure of his missionaries. But nothing happened.

This was the situation on the evening of May 12 when Don Bosco stepped onto the little podium under the portico whence the *Good Night* was given. He began: "Let us set aside all other topics tonight my dear boys, and let us talk about something that all of you have been eagerly waiting for a long time. I intend to talk to you about Buenos Aires and San Nicolas."

"Ah! At last! At last!" the boys shouted from all sides. Then there was deep silence filled with expectancy. Don Bosco continued:

Many people have asked me whether or not our plans for going to [South] America have been cancelled. I can now tell them that the final reply arrived today. Those who want to go must get ready. The letter I have just received informs me that when the *Alcade* of San Nicolas—an office that corresponds to that of mayor in our own country—received my letter of acceptance, he knelt down, raised his eyes to Heaven, and thanked the Lord as if for one of the biggest favors ever bestowed on the town; then he went personally to inform all the other local authorities. He answered my letter immediately, saying that he was completely satisfied with the stated terms and that as of that moment he was placing at our disposal a school and sufficient pasture land for as many as eight thousand sheep with an orchard, playgrounds, etc. As you see, in that country there will be enough work for all sorts of people. Priests will be needed to preach and conduct services in the public churches; teachers

for the schools; singers and musicians for the very many fond of music; shepherds to take the sheep to pasture, shear them, milk them, and make cheese; and then, people for various domestic chores. More important still, my dear sons, not far from San Nicolas is a territory inhabited by savage tribes. Now these natives are friendly and a great many of them have already expressed their willingness to embrace our Faith, if someone will volunteer to instruct them. At present no one has come forward, and so they live in idolatry. Now let us take courage and endeavor in every way to prepare ourselves to go to these lands and do some good there.

Soon we shall select the personnel, and those chosen will start learning Spanish, the language spoken in Argentina. No one should be dismayed by the distance of those lands. Today even the longest distances have shrunk, thanks to steam power and telegraphy.

As these words also reveal, Don Bosco aimed at the conversion of the savages, but planned to accomplish this in a way never before attempted. In the past, missionaries seeking immediately to penetrate those savage tribes had almost invariably met death at their hands. Don Bosco thought it much wiser first to found schools and hospices in the area bordering on these Indian tribes, then to accept into these schools some of the forest children so as to learn their language, habits, and customs, and thus slowly establish social and religious contact with them. Buenos Aires was to be the headquarters and San Nicolas an outpost.

He was also very much concerned with the welfare of the great and ever increasing number of Italians who lived in widely scattered areas throughout that vast republic. They had come pouring into the country from Europe in quest of fortune and now, deprived of schools for their children and all religious assistance, partly through their own fault and partly because of the scarcity of priests, they were in danger of becoming a large mass of people without faith or law.

In the meantime, what Don Bosco said and did for the missions created a great deal of wholesome enthusiasm among pupils and Salesians. Visible effects were a noticeable increase in vocations to the priesthood and in requests to join the Congregation. A good number of members were inflamed with a new zeal for the apostolate.

Two letters addressed to Father Ceccarelli very eloquently demonstrate Don Bosco's fatherly solicitude so to arrange things that

when his sons finally would set foot on those distant shores they would not feel as foreigners among foreigners but rather as friends among friends. His first letter, as it were, was one of introduction in which with charming tact, he broached the subject of steamship fares. It was not in vain; the municipality of San Nicolas paid the fare for five missionaries.

Turin, July 28, 1875

Reverend and dear Father in the Lord:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us always. After taking into account your letters and the important documents that the excellent Foundation Committee generously sent me, I have decided to speed up preparations and have my sons leave for the Argentine Republic just as soon as things are ready. Now would you kindly inform the gentlemen of the aforesaid Committee that:

1. I thank them with all my heart for the kind sentiments expressed in their letters and want them to know that the Salesians sincerely hope to meet their expectations in conducting the school at San Nicolas and the evening classes that are such a success here.

2. In keeping with the Constitutions of our Congregation I must to some extent make some changes in the personnel that had been requested. Five will be priests, all qualified teachers holding diplomas of this country. In addition, for the necessary church services and school activities there will also be a music teacher to take care of the accompaniment and to give lessons in singing, piano, organ and other instruments. This will apply also to the evening classes.

I shall send also two Salesian coadjutors, one to handle church maintenance, the other to look after the residential quarters at the school. For better dependability I wish the whole domestic staff to be made up of members of the Salesian Congregation, but once a start will have been made please write to me and we shall make arrangements for further requirements.

3. Father John Cagliero, Doctor of Theology, Provincial and Assistant Superior of our Congregation, will lead the Salesians and shall have full authority to negotiate and conclude any business with either civil or ecclesiastical authorities. Then, once the Salesians have assumed their respective duties, Father John Bonetti will take over. He has been for many years Director of a school with an enrollment of over one hundred pupils and is well-known as the author of several books. Father Cagliero will then return to Europe to make his report and provide whatever

may still be necessary for the welfare of the school and any other Houses that Divine Providence may entrust to us.

4. Since this is the first long sea voyage ever undertaken by my Salesians, I am most anxious that the Argentine Consul at Savona, Commendatore John Gazzolo, accompany them. We have complete confidence in him; he is an experienced seafarer and well-acquainted with the country and several of the people among whom our Salesians will settle. There will be ten people traveling and I appeal to the distinguished township to pay the fares of which only three need be second class. Should this prove difficult I shall pay the fares which they feel they are unable to meet. I am prepared to shoulder this and other sacrifices because I am very anxious that all go well, especially as regards proper moral environment, and that nothing be wanting that may contribute to a successful beginning of our work at San Nicolas.

5. The Salesians should leave here about the middle of November. I shall let you know the exact date as soon as it is definitely settled.

6. As to the tickets, instead of having them issued to each individual Salesian, it might be better to have one single group ticket made out in the name of Father John Cagliero or Commendatore John Gazzolo for the number of passengers for which the township intends to pay. This would forestall complications that might arise if someone should not be able to travel as scheduled.

7. Please tell His Excellency, the Archbishop, in whatever way you think best, about things not mentioned here. As for you, dear and worthy priest of God, I send you my humble and sincerest thanks for your goodness to us in this pious undertaking. The greater part of the merit will, undoubtedly, be yours if all this results, as I hope, in some glory to God and some benefits to the boys of San Nicolas. I am sure you will find the Salesians to be good brothers to you. By following your wise counsels they will meet the expectations of both civil and ecclesiastical authorities just as we ourselves have always done so far in the difficult situation prevailing in our own country.

Please write to me freely and promptly whenever you have anything to say. I shall write to you again very soon to give you a detailed account of our preparations for the scheduled departure.

Lastly, may I recommend myself, my Salesians, and all our pupils, to your fervent prayers, while I am honored to remain, in esteem and gratitude,

Your humble servant and friend,

Fr. John Bosco

In his second letter he comes down to minute details about things his sons might need when alone in a far-off country. He wanted to know the exact state of affairs, even going so far as to ask if music paper were available. In a word, he was anxious to give them all they needed to bring credit to their young Congregation. Even while taken up with things of everyday life, he unconsciously dropped a jewel of pedagogical wisdom. After saying that he would send copies of the Regulations of several Salesian schools, he added, "Still, the essence of all Regulations lies in the fitness of the educator."

Turin, August 12, 1875

Dear Dr. Ceccarelli:

As soon as I received your letter I agreed with Commendatore Gazzolo on an answer to you and the authorities of San Nicolas. Our departure will take place not later than November 15, or sooner, we hope. Since we are assembling our equipment and supplies, I have a number of details to clear [up] with you.

1. Will sacred vestments, vessels, and other church appointments be provided or must we bring them with us?
2. Ditto for household and bedroom furnishings, kitchen utensils, shirts, sheets, handkerchiefs, tablecloths, towels, etc.
3. Ditto for books: *e.g.,* missals, antiphonaries, altar cards for Benediction and Requiem Masses, breviaries, catechisms; textbooks such as grammars, dictionaries, etc.
4. Upon arrival in San Nicolas will our Salesians go immediately to the school or stay at the rectory? Must we make arrangements for a domestic staff or have arrangements already been made?
5. Will the municipal school be part of ours or is it distinct and run by others?
6. Must we provide a piano or is there already one at the school? The same goes for music paper; manuals for teaching organ, piano, and Gregorian chant.
7. I am sending the Regulations, or rather, the timetable of some of our evening classes at Varazze and Turin. However, the essence of all Regulations lies in the fitness of the educator.
8. Will our priests be engaged in preaching, teaching catechism and hearing confessions as they now do in our own churches?
9. Should I first write to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and if so, on what basis?

10. I am now printing a prayer book in Spanish for young people as I believe I have already written to you, and I am anxious to follow the customs prevailing in your archdiocese as closely as I can. Would you please send me as soon as possible a little catechism for children? From it I can take the daily prayers such as: I adore Thee, the *Pater, Ave, Credo, Salve, Angele Dei,* the *Decalogue, Acts of Faith,* and so on. This will help our Salesians to adapt themselves more readily to the customs of the diocese.

At this time please arm yourself with patience, teach me and help me. I want you to cut a good figure so that no one may say, "What a mess!" Since the honor of a budding Congregation is at stake, I intend to spare neither personnel nor expense if this will contribute to the success of the undertaking.

Lastly, please give me whatever advice is necessary and please convey my humble respectful regards to the gentlemen of the Foundation Committee who have very kindly written to me.

May God shower His blessings upon you. Pray for me who in sincere gratitude am honored to be,

Your humble servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Once Don Bosco put his hand to something that he believed to be God's will, he acted in accordance with the proverb, "God helps those who help themselves." Or better yet, he followed the maxim of St. Ignatius, "Whatever you do, work as if it all depended on you, then, when the task is completed, give praise to God as if you had had nothing to do with it." Therefore, he went in quest of means and knocked at every door. In his preparation for the departure [of the missionaries] he did not overlook the Cardinal Prefect of [the Sacred Congregation for] the Propagation of the Faith, to whom he made an earnest appeal for generous spiritual favors as well as for material assistance.

[No date]

Your Eminence:

I humbly appeal to Your Eminence to be both a father and a protector to me in the matter that I now respctfully call to your attention. With the blessing of the Holy Father, the Salesian Congregation has concluded negotiations with the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and the municipal

authorities of San Nicolas de los Arroyos, and is about to open a hospice in that capital and a school in San Nicolas. The latter will be particularly helpful to the missions. Our Congregation will also take care of the public schools and a church for the benefit of the population.

The first group of Salesians is scheduled to leave some time during the last ten days of the coming month of October. They are ten in number and another ten will follow them not very long after.

Since this is the first time that we are establishing Houses in the foreign mission field, I call upon Your Eminence:

1. To grant to the Salesian Congregation (which was definitively approved on April 3, 1874), all those favors, indulgences, and privileges that the Holy See usually extends to religious departing for foreign missions, whether they be regarded as individuals or as members of a religious community, as is the case with us.

2. Although this Congregation is fairly well-staffed with necessary personnel, nevertheless being still in its infancy, it has no funds whatsoever. We are, therefore, in dire need and call on Your Eminence to assist us with money, books, especially in Spanish, for use either in church or in the classroom, with sacred vessels and vestments, and similar items in the measure that, in your well-known charity, you may consider opportune.

The municipality of San Nicolas is providing the school building and the church and is also paying the fares of five missionaries. The Salesians are shouldering all other expenses connected with our preparations such as language classes, personal clothing, fares and travel needs, furnishings, and other new foundation expenses.

Your kindness and outstanding charity, which I have experienced on other occasions, lead me to hope that you will now once again condescend graciously to be a father and a protector to us.

On their part, the Salesians will endeavor, in their fervent zeal, to justify the benefits received and will forever gratefully remember him who gave them the means to exercise their evangelical ministry in the Argentine Republic, from where with God's help they hope to spread to other parts of [South] America.

They all pray God fervently to shower His heavenly blessings on you and to grant you for the benefit of the Church and of society, a long happy life. On their behalf, I kiss your sacred robes, and remain in deep veneration,

Your grateful and humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

This letter was written on August 31 as we gather from the answer dated September 14, which instructed him to appeal to the Cardinal Secretary of State because the Argentine Republic was under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for Extraordinary Ecclesiastical Affairs. We are unable to say whether or not Don Bosco made any appeal to that Congregation. Probably he did not because at precisely the same time the whole matter of the privileges and dimissorial letters was passing through an acutely critical phase, as we shall see, and he no doubt felt that it would be ill-advised for him to submit such an application at that time.

His anxiety over affairs in Rome was linked to his difficulties in Turin; both were simultaneously a source of trouble to him. Yet he pursued his objective of starting his missions in [South] America with superhuman serenity of mind. Nor did he lose his habitual sense of humor as we can see in this letter written to his good friend and benefactor Father Michelangelo Chiatellino.

Turin, September 25, 1875

Dear Father Chiatellino:

During your vacation you will not have much to do and it would possibly be good for you to move about a little. Therefore, in the name of Mary Help of Christians, I entrust you with our missionary enterprise. Our missionaries, led by Father Cagliero, will set out at the end of October for the other world, or rather the New World.

Here is a list of the things they absolutely need. It is necessary that good Catholics open their wallets while the missionaries offer their lives for the savage tribes in Patagonia.

This is what you can do: make the rounds to find charitable people to pay for the items listed here. If you do this I shall suggest to the Pope to make you a Monsignor or perhaps even something more.

We shall see. *Caritas omnia vincit.* [Love conquers all things.]

Bear well in mind that the need is very urgent and that as of now I have neither one stitch nor a single penny.

Among others, I believe you might profitably call on: Father Chiatellino at Villa Stellone; Msgr. Appendino; Father Fascio, the pastor; his brother who is assistant pastor; Mr. Assom, the former agent of Mr. Villa; Mr. Garabello, the druggist; Mr. Alloatti; Mr. Marcellino; and others.

At Carignano: Mrs. Calosso; Mr. Langero; Mrs. Aghemo, a widow; the pastor, Father Febbraro; his curate at Borgo, Father Michelangelo Chiatellino; Father Robatto, the pastor at Santena; and other charitable and well-disposed people whom God will inspire you to contact.

Should the Duchess arrive, I hope that she, too, will do something. God bless us. Endure [all inconveniences], and do it all for the love of our Lord. I am, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The necessary clothing for ten people and all the appurtenances needed for the sacred ministry, for their studies and for the running of a school necessitated huge expenses that the Oratory definitely could not meet. There was need of stockings, socks, shoes, shirts, cloaks, mantlets, overcoats, cassocks, bedroom articles, church furnishings and vestments, chalices, missals, antiphonaries, ciboria, Spanish and French books, theology textbooks, sermon books, handbooks of ascetics. Thorough as always, Don Bosco drew up a detailed list of all these items, specifying how many of each were required and their cost;[3] then he had copies of this list made for wide circulation.

A moving competition then took place in Turin. The Institute of the Daughters of Soldiers; the Refugio Institute; the Institutes of the Magdalens, of Orphan Girls; the Convents of St. Anne, St. Joseph, St. Peter, and that of the Faithful Companions of Jesus; the Sisters of the Good Shepherd; the Cascina Institute; and many private families toiled day and night to prepare what was needed. At the same time cartons of socks, shirts, stoles, dalmatics, copes, altar cloths, and napkins arrived at the Oratory. In the House all the workshops were mobilized to make shoes, clothing, crates, and iron fittings.

We would not be telling the whole story were we to omit this particular detail. Despite all these feverish preparations, there were still a number of people who did not believe that the departure would really take place. They viewed things from a purely natural point of view. They knew that Father Cagliero, the leader of the

[3] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 13.

group, was still professor of Moral Theology and music teacher at the Oratory; he was also the Spiritual Director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Of the other missionaries, one was Prefect in a school, another a teacher, and a third had important duties. It would have been extremely difficult to replace any of them. For example, the coadjutor Belmonte, whose duty it was to take care of the guests who came daily to the Oratory, was still on the job half an hour before departure time, and had he not been reminded to hand over his keys he would have put them in his pocket and taken them with him to [South] America. Nothing would have been accomplished if Don Bosco had been as shortsighted as these people! He had made his plans according to God's will and he was under no illusion of carrying them out without difficulties. He did not panic in the face of obstacles. Instead, he immediately studied ways of overcoming them; he had made his own the maxim of St. Theresa: *Let nothing trouble you.*

CHAPTER 8

Conferences, April, 1875

IN molding his Congregation Don Bosco was like the mystic vintner of Isaiah described in the Bible, "He spaded [the vineyard], cleared it of stones, and . . . within it built a watch-tower" (Isaiah 5, 2). Little by little Don Bosco transformed the Valdocco meadow into a select vineyard, well-cared for and protected by wise regulations. From his boys he carefully chose those whom he felt most likely to help him realize his projects. In his own way he fashioned them according to the ideal he had in his mind. He united them to one another with strong ties of common spiritual interests and drew them closely about himself with the powerful magnet of true affection until, quite unaware of it, they were welded into a sound, compact, well-organized body, able to stand their ground, grow, and develop to gigantic proportions. In the history of the Church there are no comparable cases. No [religious] founder ever gathered little urchins *per vicos et plateas* [from streets and lanes—Cf. Luke 14, 21] and with assiduous care formed them into the cornerstones of a mighty religious edifice as Don Bosco did. The men who rallied around other holy founders were already mature and immediately joined in building the foundations of providential institutions.

We must also remember that in Don Bosco's time life was very difficult indeed for religious Orders and Congregations—so difficult in fact that one could not even speak well of them with impunity. One can imagine what it was like to try to establish new ones! Don Bosco had to go about it very cautiously. Not that anyone could harbor suspicions about the rabble of boys who ate Don Bosco's bread. Yet, we must add that Don Bosco had to be on his guard even with the boys whom he planned to make the leaders of his

great Congregation, so many and so ingrained were the prejudices in everyone's mind. Had he made any premature allusion to them of religious life or vows, he would have soon found himself alone. Even Cardinal Cagliero told us several times, in the lively manner he retained until the end of his days, that had anyone spoken to him prematurely of religious profession or of a Congregation, he would have said, "Stay with Don Bosco and help him, by all means! But become a monk! No, never!" So, with patient understanding and gradual preparation Don Bosco led them where he wanted. He steered them to the open sea before they were even aware that they had embarked. This was the main reason why distinguished clergymen were shocked and opposed him. They invoked or took measures that we fully realize today were inopportune and rash. They could see the Oratory only from the outside and judged it by outdated standards.

The excellent Directors of schools, whom we shall now see gathered around Don Bosco, were those same thoughtless little rascals who only a few years before had sorely tried his patience with their liveliness. Kindness, training, protection from bad environment, spontaneous and cheerful piety gradually fostered in them a tender, powerful, and enduring love for their good father and they felt themselves linked to him in life and in death. His kindly guidance and teaching continued day after day. One of the means Don Bosco used to infuse into them his own ideas and to consolidate the recently approved Congregation, was to summon them all together frequently for conferences with him. He participated in these conferences very informally as a father rather than as a Superior. He was one with them in an intimate union of ideas and plans, making them more and more attached to his work, and through them he strengthened evermore the structure of the whole Congregation. Over and above the items on the agenda, the material, that is, that constituted the principal purpose of the conference, he had the opportunity of speaking privately with each one individually and thereby getting firsthand knowledge of their inclinations; he also had a chance to encourage and advise them. As if renewed, they returned to their daily tasks with greater zeal.

Don Bosco took the occasion of his return from Rome to invite again the more important members of the Congregation to the

Oratory. He was aware of the effect he would make on them by acquainting them with the vital interests of the Congregation and personally narrating what the Pope had said to him.

In the course of three days—April 14, 15, and 16—there were six conferences, five private and one public. They were attended by Fathers Rua, Cagliero, Durando, Lazzero, Ghivarello, Bonetti, Lemoyne, Francesia, Cerruti, Albera, Dalmazzo, and Barberis who, as acting-secretary, was the last one to sign his name to the minutes. Only Fathers Savio and Costamagna were absent because of previous commitments connected with their sacred ministry.

At the first conference Don Bosco in very reverent terms extended the Pope's special blessing to the Superiors of the Society. After giving the reasons for his trip to Rome, he informed them in detail about the situation, sketching it like a painting with highlights and shadows. He said he had met with genuine goodwill in Rome at a high level, in fact, at the highest level, despite the unfavorable reports that were pouring in from Turin. He had several pertinent and confidential documents picked from the archives and read so that they might all know how difficult the situation was and how careful they had to be in the government of their own Houses. The minutes of this meeting have already been used for information on previous occasions and we shall draw on them again for Chapter 9. We shall now continue with our narrative.

Father Rua presided at the second meeting. As a result of the reading of a report made during the January meetings a question was raised that today makes us smile in the kindly way one smiles at children. This should be said also of several matters that we shall relate later on. We must look at these things in proper perspective. It was not Don Bosco's habit to submit accurate detailed plans ready to be put into execution. Instead he planted small seeds in fertile soil, watched over them carefully while they germinated, sprouted, and finally grew and put forth branches. His greatest achievement, the Congregation, was born from a tiny seed like the mustard seed in the Gospel. It did not grow miraculously in great leaps and bounds, but very slowly, from humble beginnings, step by step. At the period under discussion the still tender trunk was strengthening itself and cautiously putting forth its first branches under the care

of the watchful gardener. Who could fail to watch with delight and rejoice at the sight of a plant in the very moment of its growth?

It became evident then that the Superior Chapter needed a secretary to take detailed notes, not only to keep the deliberations from being forgotten but also to record for posterity important matters that would otherwise be lost without a trace. It is true that "some time previously" Father Ghivarello had been appointed as a secretary of sorts. But, with so many things to do, he gave little attention to his task and, since no one minded, it was as if there were no secretary at all. The question now was whether or not Father Ghivarello should give up his other occupations and devote himself solely to the task of secretary, or whether someone with more available time should be elected. Since Father Ghivarello objected to the first suggestion because it was impossible to lighten the burden of his work and also because his memory was none too good, someone suggested the appointment of another confrere to the office. Yet, no one dared to express his opinion publicly because Don Bosco himself had chosen Father Ghivarello and therefore he should remain in office. It was agreed to submit the matter to Don Bosco for a decision.

After this preamble the list of spiritual favors with which we are already acquainted was read. The assembly then turned its attention to the agenda prepared by Don Bosco himself. It was divided into three sections: (1) No changes of personnel; (2) No interference with the House routine by dramatics; (3) No unnecessary expenses.

There was such a great difference of opinion on the first two items of the agenda that no agreement seemed possible. A doubt was expressed whether the assembly had correctly understood the significance of these items. After lengthy discussion it was decided to confer again with Don Bosco.

Only the third item remained. But what was to be understood by "unnecessary expenses"? New building projects? No, because it already was a rule that no Director could initiate such work without the consent of the Superior Chapter. It must have meant, therefore, minor building alterations. In that case, the Directors agreed not to make any such alterations, as was already the actual general practice.

Finally, they discussed the advisability of authorizing expenditures for summer clothing. During the warm weather the priests in Piedmont usually wore a very inexpensive light cloak. Should the Salesians follow this new trend and wear a light overcoat? Other religious, secular priests, and bishops were doing so already. The overcoats had the added advantage of prolonging the life of their rather worn and faded cassocks ("which nearly all of us have," say the minutes). However, no one ventured to come to a decision and for the third time it was deferred to Don Bosco.

Don Bosco took part in the third meeting. The first item was the mediation of the Archbishop of Vercelli, as described above, and the various Decrees of faculties and indulgences that we already know about. The remainder of the time was devoted to clarifying the two items that had been left dangling at the previous meeting.

First of all, Don Bosco was questioned about the "no changes of personnel." If he meant that no one was to be transferred arbitrarily from one House to another, there was no precedent when this had ever happened. If, however, he meant that no one should be reassigned to a new occupation within the same House without the permission of the Superior Chapter, then this measure might create some hardship since it was frequently necessary there and then to reassign people to other duties of assistance or teaching.

"This is a preventive rather than a repressive measure," Don Bosco answered. "As a general rule things should remain the way they are. You see, I have already asked the advice of Father Franco[1] on this subject and he told me that among the Jesuits no such changes are made without the previous consent of the major Superiors. Truly, this has two important advantages: it eliminates any ill-feeling that might arise against the local Superior; and the subject obeys more willingly and feels happier. Believe me, I would like to see this custom prevail in all our Houses. Of course, I realize that there are certain difficulties. Yet, if each Director were to write to the Superiors before giving any important order—and so the order can come from Turin—it would be extremely helpful for the smooth running of the individual Houses. The same applies to refusals. If, instead of refusing a permission, the Director were to say every time, 'Very well, I shall write to the Superior Chapter to

[1] Father Secondo Franco, S. J. [Editor]

ask them what should be done and will let you know,' it would spare the confrere the chagrin that is so easily engendered by a refusal that he might think was prompted by a whim of his Director. This is even more obvious in the case of transfer of personnel. Perhaps you want to send one of your subjects to another House. If you yourself order his transfer you arouse the unpleasant suspicion in his mind that you want to get rid of him because his stay is no longer advisable. If, instead, you write to the Superior Chapter and the Chapter informs the confrere of his transfer, a lot of unpleasantness is avoided. This makes for greater submission and less dissatisfaction."

Passing from one thing to another they came to discuss a certain infraction of rules regarding letter writing. Don Bosco made a recommendation and gave two directives. He insisted on the utmost freedom of anyone to write to the Superior General. On this point he reminded his listeners that in some religious Orders should the local Superior prevent his subordinates from writing such letters or arrogate to himself the right to read either these letters or their replies, he would incur excommunication. He moreover expressed the wish that all be encouraged to write to him frequently. The directives concerned all other correspondence. Every confrere was to give his outgoing mail unsealed to the Director, who was to distribute the incoming mail also opened. However, care should be taken that the distribution be made by the Director himself and not through anybody else. "But this rule should not be interpreted so strictly and absolutely," Don Bosco added, "as to constitute an obligation for the Director in every instance. It should only be well-established and recognized that the Director has the right to do so, and that as a general rule he should. Once this point is made clear, there will be no more hard feelings should the Director choose to exercise his right."

Father Dalmazzo who had raised this point also remarked on another disorder connected with leaving the premises. "Some confreres come to me," he said, "and tell me, 'I need to go out.' More often than not they give no reason and they go wherever they wish and do whatever they like." The decision was that, because of ever-present dangers, both going-out and permission to do so should be reduced to a minimum; and as prescribed by the Rule, confreres

should go out only with a companion; nor should it always be the same one. But then objections were raised: "Since there is such a shortage of personnel how can a confrere, in most instances, find someone else to go out with?"

"So much the better!" Don Bosco replied. "If it is so difficult to find a partner, going out will be permitted only when absolutely necessary. The impossibility of assigning a companion will justify saying, 'For the moment you may not go out.' "

Someone then remarked that Father Perrone and Father Curci[2] had been seen in the streets of Rome in the company of some rather clumsy lay-brothers. It would not be too hard to find such a companion. However, both in the matter of letter writing and of going out with a companion, it seemed more prudent to defer action, thereby sparing the Directors the charge of acting on impulse. "I shall write a circular to all the Houses soon," Don Bosco said, "and will call the Directors' attention to these two items in our Rule. In this way everyone will know about it at the same time, and the Directors will not be criticized for acting arbitrarily.

There are also other things to be corrected and achieved; but these will be attended to as our number increases. For instance, let us take accounting. Luckily (and he smiled as he spoke), you are all very honest and, rather than take from the Congregation you bring to it all you have. But, since there is no kind of control, who knows how many thousands of lire you could embezzle before being discovered! To forestall future trouble we must have strict bookkeeping."

There was still the question of dramatics. What had Don Bosco meant when he said that performances were not to disturb the routine of the House? That the boys were not to have a later rising the following morning? Besides, how could plays be staged without affecting the House routine? Unavoidably supper had to be advanced and bedtime delayed. "It is my opinion instead," Don Bosco said, "that suppertime should not be advanced. Rather, let supper be taken after the play. This would do away with the very great inconvenience of having to prepare a second supper for the actors after the play."

Someone remarked that this had indeed already been tried but

[2] The former was a Jesuit writer; the latter, a Jesuit orator. [Editor]

had been discontinued because of other problems it posed. Moreover, all the Directors were unanimous in saying that supper after the play would create even greater disorders. As things stood now, prayers were said right in the auditorium and the boys went straight to bed afterward, and so everything was over. But if supper were to follow the performance then there would have to be some recreation, and this would cause much greater problems. Furthermore, it would hardly be right to keep the kitchen and dining room staff working during entertainments. "And yet," Don Bosco said, "this extra supper for the actors alone must be eliminated at any cost. Untoward things always do happen. If you were to know of just one such instance after the last entertainment, you would all be in favor of abolishing this extra meal. If there is no other way out, schedule your entertainments on Thursdays[3] and during the day."

But not even this solution did away with the difficulties. Were the artisans to stop work to see the performance? Furthermore wouldn't this schedule inconvenience the local authorities wherever it was customary to invite them? "Then I see only one solution," Don Bosco said. "On days that we have plays we will eat in French fashion. A lunch at eleven and dinner at five for everybody including the actors. After dinner one hour of recreation and the play at six-thirty. Two and a half hours of entertainment are sufficient and by nine everything will be over without any need of an extra meal for the actors. Prayers will be said immediately after the performance and then to bed. And, since as a rule, entertainments are on the greater holy days, church services may be held before five."

However, he wanted the final decision deferred. It was his habit to be guided by experience before formulating any rule; therefore, he suggested that this plan be tried out first in some school. This would show if and what problems would arise. If all went well, that plan would be adopted everywhere.

Father Rua presided at the fourth conference. Permission to take off-schedule examinations to qualify as teachers in technical and academic high schools was still effective for another year. No time should be lost in encouraging confreres in all the schools to do so if they felt they could pass. However, Father Durando remarked, such

[3] A regular school holiday. [Editor]

candidates should study intensely so as not to fail and harm the good name of the House. The Directors were therefore to devise some way of freeing the candidates from other duties for a couple of months before the examinations so that they could all attend special classes at the Oratory. Applicants for either a junior or senior high-school [teacher's] diploma were not to take the examinations in Turin because the examining commission was far too prejudiced. No ecclesiastic would ever have a chance with them. They should rather go to Venice, Bologna, or elsewhere. The place could be chosen once the number of candidates was known. Applications were to be addressed to Father Durando who would forward them to the proper authority. The deadline for applications was the end of May.

As regards the examination to qualify as elementary school-teacher, there was some kind of a snarl not uncommon in the past under one guise or another. A circular issued by the Ministry of Education required all candidates to be enrolled at a normal school;[4] yet, it also permitted students who had not gone to such schools to apply for the examination if they could prove that they had taught for one year. Contrariwise, another circular from the same Ministry did not recognize any credit for teaching prior to having passed the examination. In short, teaching experience did not count. Father Rua truly felt that no one should apply, but Father Cerruti thought otherwise. He favored obtaining diplomas as in former years, but only a few at a time should do so and unobtrusively. Whoever felt qualified was to prepare himself for it. This was the agreement. In the past these examinations had been held in Novara; but this was no longer possible because that school was only accredited, and the last directive from the Ministry of Education required private students to present themselves exclusively at State schools. The State normal school at Pinerolo was designated for the examination.

After this matter had been settled, several of the Directors requested that something be done to put an end to an irregularity. Confreres in transit and staying at a House would sometimes go out, and even dine out, without saying a word to the local Director. This, however, did not require any new regulation. It was enough

[4] Usually a two-year school for training chiefly elementary teachers. [Editor]

to enforce the already existing rule that requires all Salesians, when guests at a House, to depend on the Director of that House; and neither to go out or do anything contrary to the Rules without his permission.

To further religious observance it was considered necessary to take some measures on unauthorized traveling. The increase of members was matched by an increase in traveling, and consequently stopovers in the Houses. Were these stopovers always authorized? Wasn't there the chance of someone deceitfully prolonging his stay? And how could the local Superior object when he did not know the true purpose for the journey, its length, or its destination? Therefore, whenever any confrere had to stop at another House his Director was to give him a letter of introduction stating the reason for his journey, its length, and his destination, in other words, all that the Director of the House he was to visit ought to know. Such letters were to be unopened, but the envelope should bear the seal of the school from which it came. This would enable the doorkeeper to keep out anyone posing as a Salesian. Upon receiving such a letter the Director was to tear up the envelope at once to prevent anyone else from making unauthorized use of it later.

This same love of religious observance also led them to consider the case in which a confrere, when traveling or visiting his relatives, might allow himself pleasurable diversions or excursions that had not been agreed to beforehand. Had not someone traveled as far as the Great St. Bernard Pass during the previous summer? No final decision was taken, but it was deemed advisable that in all schools the confreres were to be told not to do such things. Whenever anyone had to travel to a certain destination, he was to go there and not elsewhere; those staying with their families were to write to their Superiors before going on trips or undertaking anything of importance.

The fifth conference was public. All the Salesians at the Oratory—about 150 including novices and aspirants—assembled in the church of St. Francis [de Sales] to hear Don Bosco. Everything he said was recorded and included in the minutes. Naturally he began with the blessing of the Pope. He then told them about the coincidence of Pius IX's suggestion and the note that he, Don Bosco, had written on loyalty and obedience to the Vicar of Jesus

Christ; he also informed them of the general indulgences he had brought back from Rome—all things that have already been mentioned in Chapter 6. Then he continued:

I particularly stress that not only does the Holy Father like us and favor us, but in general everyone wishes our Congregation well. It is looked upon favorably by good and bad alike, by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities, and except for a very few, everybody is well-disposed toward us. I intentionally said that even the bad look upon us with favor because we see that the very people who protest against religious Orders and who would suppress every last one of them have only praise for us.

I will tell you something that happened only today. I was greeted by a tall stout man, who was holding two very scurrilous newspapers. I did not recognize him until he told me that he had been one of our first pupils here and that he had very fond memories both of me and of the Oratory. I asked him about those two nasty papers and then it dawned on me that he was writing articles in them and that he held opinions in flagrant opposition to what he had been taught here. I began to talk to him and gradually I asked him if he had fulfilled his Easter duty. I realized that he had not been to church for years. I kept talking and asked him how he could keep pleasant memories of us while living as he now did and writing such articles. He answered that if he wrote so much against priests, monks and prelates, it was because he had truly seen many unbecoming things, things that made him sick. However he knew us well, and even his friends and colleagues (all of his own kind) liked us because we do good, do not meddle in politics, and are not lazy.

"How can I believe that you speak well of us? It seems to me that only a few days ago your paper printed a shameful article about a priest!"

"By its fruits you shall know the tree, Don Bosco. If I wrote as I did, it is because those things actually did happen; but we see what you and your Congregation accomplish and we cannot help speaking well of you."

He continued to sing our praises, but I returned to the subject of his Easter duty and urged him to give some thought to his own faults rather than pass judgment on others over whom he had not been appointed judge. We parted then, but not without a note of hope. I have told you this only to show you that even bad people appreciate

those who work hard for genuinely unselfish motives. This is what people think of us, so let us try not to be any different than they see us. Let us encourage one another.

Now before speaking to you more pointedly about the state of our Congregation I must first make a few observations.

There are three stages in the founding of a religious Congregation. To begin with, the Holy Father appoints a Superior. This means that the Congregation has been temporarily approved, and that the Superior is allowed to gather followers who may begin to take vows. This is the first approval, the first phase, and for us it started in 1841 when Don Bosco first opened Oratories and looked for people to help him. In this he was encouraged by the Archbishop of Turin, although at that time Don Bosco did not have any definite plan. This first phase did not bear its first fruits until 1858 when Don Bosco went to Rome for the first time and spoke to the Holy Father about founding a Congregation. Finally, this first and most difficult phase reached its full development in 1864, when the Holy Father *praised the Institute* and gave us permission to take both temporary and perpetual vows.

The second phase begins when the Holy Father and the [Sacred] Roman Congregations finally approve the new Congregation as being good in itself and aiming at doing good to others. However, not all the rules are approved as yet and the Superiors may still modify them to suit them better to the spirit that the Society begins to develop. We obtained such approval in a Papal Decree on February 19, 1869, on which occasion we were also granted *ad decennium* [for a ten-year period] the privilege of issuing dimissorial letters *ad quemcumque episcopum* [to any bishops whatsoever] for our ordinands. Then, finally, when this phase is over the individual [articles of the] rules are examined by the Committees of Cardinals and the Rules or Constitutions are approved as being conducive, if practiced, to the prosperity and happiness of the Institute. Once this is done, nothing may be altered in the Rules thus approved without the consent of the General Chapter and the Holy See. This is the last and definitive approval given to a Congregation, and for us this solemn act took place last year on April 3, 1874.

However, even though our Congregation and its Constitutions have thus been definitively approved, we still lack those privileges that a religious Congregation needs to prosper and perform good works of charity. I went to Rome this year especially for this. As I previously said, we have already obtained many privileges; many others have been referred to the Holy Father, and although we do not yet have the

rescripts, we shall certainly obtain them before long. Others are still under study. Steps have also been taken, and have already progressed considerably, toward obtaining an entire set of privileges, such as other Congregations enjoy.

I now turn to the internal state of the Congregation. I must inform you with great satisfaction that things are progressing very well, both because the number of our members increases daily and new applications reach us every day, and also because the spirit of the Congregation is taking shape very well among our members.

Let us urge each other on, then, especially in two ways. First, let us work hard to do much good. Let people say what they will. Believe me, it is absolutely impossible to please everybody. I can tell you that I have always tried not to displease anyone, but I have become increasingly aware of the fact that it is impossible to satisfy all. So let us work with goodwill, doing whatever we can as thoroughly as possible. As to the rest, let people talk. Let us ignore what others say about us. On our own part, however, let us always speak well of everybody.

Secondly, we should strive after eliminating grumbling from our midst. Does someone have a grievance? Then let him speak to his Superiors. Every effort will be made to do away with whatever causes discontent; but let no one grumble about anything. Let us always back each other both among ourselves and with others, whether members of the House or outsiders. This will contribute greatly to the growth and well-being of our Congregation.

I also seriously recommend that everyone take good care of his health. It is my wish that when someone is not well he should be given all possible care and every remedy that will help him. In particular I urge the Directors to make sure that their sick confreres have everything they need; let them also see to it that the confreres are not overworked. I would rather leave some work undone than have someone overworked. Let us encourage one another; those who can do more should do it and cheerfully. Those who cannot, should be as respected as the others, and due consideration should be given to their weak constitution or poor health.

What else shall I tell you? *(Here his voice became very faint. It had already sounded very weak, and it seemed as though in his weariness he could say nothing more. Now it sounded as if he were about to cry; he betrayed ever-increasing emotion.)* I can only ask you to be always good enough to bear with me as you have done so far, and to pray to God for me. Let us bear with one another; let this be an important thing to remember for the rest of our lives.

Just one more thing and I am through. Let us all observe the practices of piety prescribed for our Congregation, especially what concerns the Exercise for a Happy Death on the last day of each month. On that day let us as far as possible put aside every extraneous occupation and let each one concern himself with things that pertain to the eternal welfare of his own soul. I have great faith in this Exercise [for a Happy Death] when it is performed well. None of us should be afraid of a sudden death no matter when or how it may come, if every month we set aside one day to put our conscience in order. On that day we should not only make our confession more carefully and receive Communion with greater devotion, but also put in order whatever concerns our studies, especially our material affairs, so that, should death take us by surprise we will be able to say, "I have nothing else to worry about than to die in the embrace of the Lord."

God bless you, my dear sons.

The last meeting also was held in Don Bosco's little room where all had gathered around him. After the usual invocation of the Holy Spirit, Father Rua, interpreting the wishes of the group, inquired about the negotiations for [the missions in South] America. Don Bosco willingly told them about the agreements he had reached in Rome, and with [the authorities] in Argentina. All of this has already been narrated in Chapter 7.

After having spoken of [South] America, Don Bosco turned to Italy. Requests for Salesian foundations had come from various parts of the country. There was one from Bassano, but it would cost too much to remodel and furnish the building that had been offered. There was one from Cremona; the Bishop himself was calling for us and possibly there would be no need for major expenses. There was also an invitation from Crema, but it seemed preferable to accept Como as more suitable. In Milan everything would be provided, but Archbishop Calabiana foresaw trouble: If the Salesians came to the city the resulting publicity might harm the schools already there. The same argument applied to Rho: everything, it seemed, had been already settled, and then the same fear was expressed. On this point Don Bosco had ideas of his own. Everywhere in Lombardy the school authorities hindered and opposed the clergy, and Don Bosco, not to compromise future possibilities, was anxious to keep on good terms with them. If, there-

fore, the school superintendents were averse to his plans for [opening schools in] Lombardy, then he would temporarily abandon them. "Right now," he added, "we have no great need to expand; rather, we need to consolidate. So we will turn our attention elsewhere unless some special advantage should counsel otherwise."

Unfortunately, in those years, as Father Durando related, some rabid anticlericals had been sent from Piedmont to Lombardy as school superintendents. At best they might not cause too much trouble to the Salesians, but certainly, they would not give them support. "I shall not go there," Don Bosco said, "unless they are willing to extend to us all the latitude permissible under the law."

Father Rua then raised the objection that since there were enough schools in the former Sardinian states, it might be proper to found some elsewhere. Don Bosco quickly replied that Cardinal Berardi was very eager to have a Salesian school at Ceccano, but so far no agreements had been reached. He was therefore inclined to abandon the idea, especially since he was anxious to put the *Sons of Mary Project* on a sound basis and, above all, he had to put aside personnel for [South] America.

They then turned from external to internal matters. Several Salesians were ready for Holy Orders but they had only temporary vows. Since it was possible for them to secure the [required] ecclesiastical patrimony, would it be wiser to have them ordained under that title, or should they rather wait for perpetual vows and then be ordained *titulo mensae communis?* [by title of common board?] If not, would it be licit to admit them to perpetual profession before the termination of their first triennial vows?

After discussion it was concluded: *Ad primum:* [As to the first point:] Since they were in a position to get the [required] ecclesiastical patrimony they should do so, not only because this would mean an income for the House, which was in straitened circumstances, but also because the ordinand would prefer to rely on a regular income for all contingencies, all the more so since parents with means gladly showed such generosity to their children. This, however, was to apply only to members who had taken perpetual vows. Those with only triennial vows should not be too readily promoted to Holy Orders under the title of patrimony. It would be too serious a temptation for any young priest to be able to leave

the Congregation whenever he chose since he was now a priest and sure of an income. Any clash with his Superiors could cause such a step. Finally no hint should be given of the chance of being ordained after taking triennial vows simply because one had a patrimony. This would be very injurious to the Congregation, because some would enter solely to be ordained and then leave. Such persons would be a real scourge in our midst, for they would have no vocation and as a general rule would have already been rejected by their own bishops.

Ad secundum: [As to the second point:] In regard to perpetual profession before taking, or before the expiration of, triennial vows, Don Bosco said, "There are reasons why some should be allowed to take perpetual vows immediately after the novitiate. Permission to take triennial vows before the perpetuals is a double privilege. It benefits the religious, who has more time to become acquainted with the Congregation and to examine his vocation; and it is also good for the Congregation because it allows more time to study the individual before he is permanently admitted into the Society. Now since this privilege is beneficial to both parties, it may be dispensed with if both sides agree to do so. It is therefore lawful to allow people to make perpetual vows and such vows may be taken even without first having made or completed the triennial vows."

Indeed, Don Bosco could have availed himself of the faculties granted him *vivae vocis oraculo* [by word of mouth] by Pius IX. In his foresight the Pope had granted him very ample powers in this respect so that he would be able to act quickly in every case. Later Leo XIII was equally generous to him until finally the long-awaited privileges were granted and the faculties, no longer necessary, were expressly revoked in the same Brief. However, prudence dictated that the least said about such concessions the better.

We will skip trifles. The last thing Don Bosco did was to ask the Directors to give his warm regards to the confreres and tell them of the cordial reception the Pope had given him, the many interesting things done in Rome, and the papal blessing given to each of them individually. In particular the Directors were to publicize every item of good news about the Congregation within and outside their Houses, especially the more distant ones, where he

remarked, they were particularly anxious to know how the Congregation was doing in Turin. He closed the meeting with these words, "Give my special greetings to our priests and to all the confreres. Tell them how highly I esteem them. Believe me, this means a lot; priests, too, want to know whether or not they are appreciated and remembered by their Superiors. You, too, must show that you have a high regard for them and think of them often. This will help strengthen the bond of brotherly love among us so that more and more we will all be one in heart and soul."

CHAPTER 9

Privileges and Dimissorials: The First Phase of the Proceedings [1]

DURING the January conferences Don Bosco mentioned privileges for the first time publicly when he revealed his intention of applying for them in Rome. He had no illusion about the difficulties ahead.[2] During the April conference he explained the subject concisely and reported on the steps that had already been taken. We shall briefly describe the origin and nature of these privileges and the first steps taken in trying to obtain them, our source being the minutes of the first meeting.[3]

Since early centuries, that is, from the time monastic life, in the wake of St. Benedict, spread throughout the Western world, the Popes granted privileges and favors to monastic Orders to facilitate their growth and enable them to perform works of charity. As time went on and new religious Orders were established, it became customary to extend to them, for the same reasons, the privileges of the first monastic Orders. This was done through a legal procedure later called *assimilation.* Other privileges were added when considered necessary for the needs of time and changing circumstances. Thus, the number of privileges increased gradually beyond measure and often the Decrees of the Popes or of the Roman Curia would remain a dead letter because Religious would bring their privileges into play in all controversies.

By the end of the 15th century monastic Orders ceased to be

[1] Besides the documents quoted in this chapter, we shall make use of fifteen letters of the summist Menghini and six of Msgr. Fratejacci, all written between April and December 1875 and never previously published.

[2] Cf. Chapter 2, pp. 12-13.

[3] Cf. Chapter 7, p. 145.

founded. In their stead a need arose for religious whose main purpose would not only be the praise of God and self-sanctification in the seclusion of the cloister, chanting the Divine Office in choir, but also for religious who would work in the priestly ministry outside the monastery, bound neither by cloister rules nor obliged to spend the greater part of the day in choir. This marked the beginning of the Religious Congregations. The Theatines were the first, then came the Jesuits, the Somaschi, the Piarists and many other religious families. They differed from the regular Orders not only in what was said above, but also because their members took only simple vows.

The difference between solemn and simple vows is this: solemn vows are made to the Church and may not be rescinded except by the Church, and then quite rarely; simple vows, instead, are made to the Superior of a Congregation and may be revoked by him without special formalities.

Realizing that the privileges granted to the regular Orders had increased beyond measure, Rome decided not to extend them to the newly founded Congregations. However, little by little, the Church realized that the efforts of the new Congregations to do good and promote the greater glory of God were constantly hindered by obstacles encountered at every step. The Church therefore resumed granting a few privileges; then a few more; and again some more. It soon became evident that the new religious Congregations were accomplishing as much good for the Church as the older regular Orders and that they needed even greater privileges because their activities were carried out for the most part outside their own Houses. Finally the same privileges enjoyed by the regular Orders were extended to the new religious Congregations. More than this, once the trend was started, privilege upon privilege was granted without limit.

Things went on at this rate until the beginning of the pontificate of Pius IX. The new Congregations would receive the customary privileges as soon as they appeared, the last being that of the Rosminian Fathers. Pius IX then put again into force the earlier ruling which prohibited the granting of privileges en masse. It was decreed instead that at the start of a new Congregation, the founder should apply for those privileges which he considered necessary

for it. This was the reason why Don Bosco went to Rome in February 1875. He wanted to initiate proceedings to obtain the communication of privileges, as had formerly been the custom, and also to obtain the faculty to grant dimissorial letters *ad quemcumque Episcopum* [to any Bishop whatsoever].

As soon as he arrived in Rome he discussed this in detail with Archbishop Vitelleschi, the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. No one was better qualified than the Prelate to give instructions on procedure. The Archbishop of Seleucia asked Don Bosco what privileges he needed. "I need many," the latter answered, "both for the smooth internal running of the Congregation and for friendly relations with local ecclesiastical authorities." Thereupon he submitted a list of some 80 privileges.

He then cautiously inquired if there were any chance of obtaining *per assimilationem* [through assimilation] the privileges enjoyed by the other Congregations. The Prelate replied:

"The Holy Father has absolute authority; he can easily derogate from a law he made himself. Speak to him about it."

"Your Excellency," Don Bosco said showing him a large book, "I shall present this volume to the Holy Father. It contains the privileges granted to the Redemptorists and I shall ask him to extend them to me *per assimilationem* [through assimilation]."

"For heaven's sake, do not let His Holiness see this!" Archbishop Vitelleschi exclaimed. "If you do, he will be so shocked at the sight of all those concessions that not only will he refuse to grant them to you, but he will even revoke them from others."

Don Bosco realized then the need for great tact. Therefore, when he did speak with the Holy Father he prudently steered the conversation toward this topic and showed how badly he needed the privileges enjoyed by other Orders. The Pope replied, "Very well, apply for them."

"There is only one obstacle, Holy Father. Some thirty years have passed since it was decided not to grant them any longer in a block through assimilation."

"Do what was done by the other Congregations approved by us."

"That is the difficulty, Holy Father. Poor Don Bosco is the first to find himself in this predicament. Privileges were granted

in this manner for the last time by your predecessor, Gregory XVI, to the Institute of Charity on December 30, 1838."

"What then?"

"Your Holiness has all powers. Perhaps you may see fit to make just one exception."

"Certainly I shall. Present your request to the competent Sacred Congregations. They will examine the matter, discuss it and report to me. We shall see what can be done. I myself am willing to make just this one exception."

Don Bosco thanked the Pope for this outstanding show of benevolence. It was, however, no simple matter; he would have to start all over again. He had only a few days to complete a task that normally would require many months. He did not even have a Latin dictionary with which to check certain words. Nevertheless, he went about it with enthusiasm. He studied the history of privileges, collected quotations from Bulls, names of Popes, opinions of canonists. He compiled a list of privileges and had to find out when, by whom, and to whom they had been granted. In short, "working desperately" as he said later, he had to make an extensive survey of canon law.

That feverish investigation produced two petitions in Latin addressed to the Pope and a memorandum that he later reshaped into a petition to the Cardinals whom we shall name later. The two petitions concerned dimissorial letters *ad quemcumque Episcopum* [to any Bishop whatsoever] and the communication of privileges already granted to other religious Congregations. A similar request from Archbishop Vitelleschi to the same effect accompanied the first petition. Quite properly the request for dimissorial letters was submitted separately. Such a concession could never have been included in the communication of privileges particularly to a Congregation with simple vows since it is granted only by specific or direct concession rather than in virtue of the communication of privileges. These three documents are in the appendix to this volume.[4]

The two petitions to the Pope had as their immediate result the appointment of an extraordinary Commission of Cardinals to vote on the matter. An official notification signed by the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars was sent to Don

[4] *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 14, 15, 16.

Bosco. It was worded as follows: *Ex audientia SS. die* 26 *Februarii* 1875 *SS.mus porrectas preces examini demittere dignatus est Em.mi Patrizi, De Luca, Bizzarri, Martinelli pro voto emittendo. Segr. Archiepiscopus Seleuciensis, Vitelleschi.* [In the audience of February 26, 1875 the Holy Father graciously referred your request to their Eminences the Cardinals Patrizi, De Luca, Bizzarri, and Martinelli in order that they may study and vote upon it. [Salvatore] Vitelleschi, Archbishop of Seleucia, Secretary.] These then were the same Cardinals who had been appointed the previous year to examine the Constitutions and to them Don Bosco addressed his aforementioned memorandum. We shall dwell briefly on it here, since the arguments listed therein are presented in greater detail than in his petitions to the Pope where of necessity he had to limit himself to a brief mention.

The memorandum is divided into two parts: The first concerns the privileges; the second deals with the [issuing of] unqualified dimissorials. We shall omit the canonical disquisitions and limit ourselves to glean what concerns Don Bosco personally, regarding his ideas and his works.

The general preamble nobly praises the Popes for granting such outstanding favors to the [religious] Congregations. "The privileges and spiritual favors bestowed on religious Orders and Congregations may be regarded as so many cords that bind these Institutes to the Holy See. Since it alone may grant, restrict, and revoke them at will, according to need and convenience, those who benefit from them acquire a fervent and lasting sense of gratitude toward their eminent benefactor." Don Bosco then comes to the point and presents his request to enjoy equal status, as regards privileges, with other Congregations. He selects one and gives his reasons for it.

We ask for the privileges enjoyed by the Redemptorists or those of the Priests of the Mission, because their Constitutions and aims may be said to be identical to those of the Salesians. The reasons that induced the Popes to grant those privileges to the Redemptorists are to be found in the Briefs of concessions listed herein. The special reasons for communicating these same privileges to the Salesian Congregation are as follows:

1. The [Salesian] Congregation is utterly devoid of financial means

and therefore it stands in need of great indulgence and much spiritual assistance to accomplish its ends.

2. This Congregation had its beginnings and development in the stormy period that is still ours and that aims at the suppression and annihilation of all religious Institutes. Nevertheless this Congregation has been able to grow, to open Houses in several dioceses, and even to found missions abroad. Because of the calamitous times, the diversity of nations, and the great distances separating many of the members, the Salesians need a proven form of government with privileges already known and well tried by other pious Congregations.

3. In the difficult times in which we live, civil authorities look unfavorably on frequent appeals to the Holy See. On hearing that the Holy See had granted us certain favors, the Government threatened us and demanded, in violation of our rights, that all Decrees and Rescripts be submitted for the so-called Royal *Exequatur.* We were forced to obey but never managed to get the *Exequatur,* or even recover the original documents.[5]

4. Finally, the petitioner humbly hopes to receive this favor so that he may dedicate what little life it may still please God to grant him to set up regular procedures in his various Houses and to acquaint the Superiors with a uniform policy in the use of such privileges. This policy would be based on the utmost discretion and prudence and would be used only for the obvious greater glory of God and the welfare of souls.

At that time a few canonists were raising three objections to the communication of privileges. They argued that this procedure would (1) cause friction, (2) disturb peace and harmony with the Ordinaries, (3) grant certain Institutes privileges that were inappropriate.

Don Bosco refuted each of them in order.

1. If such concessions were something new they might cause friction, but privileges have passed from one Order to another for more than 300 years. They have been the objection of constant study and inter-

[5] This makes clear the meaning of a phrase in his second petition to the Pope [*Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 16] in which he says that nowadays it was prudent *multa facere, sed non patefacere* [to do much, but without *fanfare*].

pretation; they have been used in a regulated manner and in accordance with policies established by the Holy See. They should be called a unifying link, a bond of uniformity, rather than a cause of friction.

2. They do not seem to disturb good relations with the Ordinaries, inasmuch as bishops and parish priests are already acquainted with the privileges enjoyed by Institutes approved by the Church. In our country it would only cause surprise if any Institute were to enjoy greater or lesser privileges than others. Moreover, since these privileges are favors that redound to the honor of the supreme authority of the Pope and manifest his full approval of an Institute, no one will believe that a Congregation has been definitively approved until the Holy See has given it the same privileges that others enjoy.

A learned and esteemed Ordinary is still unwilling to believe that our Congregation has been definitively approved, because *he has no proof that it enjoys the privileges belonging to the Servants of the Sick, the Priests of the Mission, or the Oblates of Mary.*

3. Neither can it possibly be said that through such communication of privileges some may be granted that are inappropriate. The clauses *Dummodo Institutis eorum conveniant ac regulari observantiae non sint contraria* [As long as they are appropriate to those Institutes and not contrary to the regular observance] are always implied in such concessions. We might also add that the Holy See, the sole authority that grants these privileges, always retains the power to modify or even revoke them whenever it judges this to be more beneficial to the recipients.

The reason given for requesting the privilege of issuing unqualified dimissorials was much simpler. It amounted to pointing out "the variety of the dioceses in which the Salesian Congregation had Houses, as for example, the hospices and boarding schools for the missions in the Argentine Republic, and others to be opened, following negotiations, in Australia and in Hong Kong, China. Hence the necessity of frequently having to present some cleric for ordinations on short notice and *extra tempus* [outside the appointed time]. To this must be added the urgent need "to remove the serious obstacles created by an Ordinary in whose diocese the Congregation has many schools and Houses and who, for three years, has refused Holy Orders to the Salesian clerics."

Don Bosco ended with a plea and a statement:

Everything I have said here in connection with the communication of privileges and the issuance of dismissorial letters has been in justification of the humble petition submitted to their Eminences. However, I shall lay aside all my arguments and request their Eminences to consider only what they, in their great wisdom and enlightened experience, judge to be for the greater glory of God and the welfare of a Congregation that is still in its infancy, so to speak, and greatly needs both material and moral assistance, advice, and guidance.

I therefore declare in advance that I shall be content with whatever they may decide and all the Salesians will strive to express their gratitude by daily invoking the blessings of Heaven upon their Eminences, asking God to grant them a long life for the glory of the Church and the welfare of the Salesian Society, which will always look upon them as benevolent Fathers and distinguished Benefactors.

Before leaving Rome Don Bosco called on the Cardinals of the Commission, all of whom he felt were sympathetic toward the Salesian Congregation. Each one had reassured him that since the Holy Father was in favor [of the concessions] there would be no obstacles. Merely by accepting the petitions the Pope had shown his intention to grant the requested favors.

In Rome Don Bosco left Charles Menghini, the attorney, as his representative. We already know him as the summist attached to the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He would be assisted by Msgr. Fratejacci, an excellent ecclesiastic, who was highly esteemed and whose influence on some Cardinals of the Commission could be helpful.

Only a few days after his return to Turin, Don Bosco received a letter from the Commission of Cardinals asking him to clarify the following questions: (1) Whether the Pious Society had made any progress after the final approval of its Constitutions on April 3, 1874. (2) What were the difficulties encountered in applying for specific privileges, that is, as needed singly and not in a block.

On April 12, Don Bosco replied to these queries in two concise statements; the first listed the progress made between April 3, 1874 and April 3, 1875; the second described the difficulties he had encountered when applying for each privilege as needed.

Turin, April 12, 1875

First Clarification

We can say that the past year has been used to strengthen our observance of the Constitutions and particularly in carrying out the changes introduced in their definitive approval. The novitiate has been made to conform with the prescriptions and suggestions of the Cardinals on the official Commission. There has been a marked increase in the number of religious; the novices alone are now more than one hundred and all give good promise of success. The original spiritual harvest in the various Houses already in existence has grown very much and it has therefore been necessary to augment the staff of each. Over and above the activities already described in last year's report, new ones have been undertaken by the Salesians as follows:

1. Administration of the public schools at Mornese in the diocese of Acqui.
2. Administration of the public schools at Borgo San Martino near Casale Monferrato.
3. A new convent of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who, in agreement with the diocesan Ordinary, take charge of the linen and clothing in the Minor Seminary at Borgo San Martino mentioned above.
4. A hospice with annexed public church in Buenos Aires, Argentina, [South] America.
5. A school, with annexed public church, for the Missions at San Nicolas, a densely populated town located not far from the savage tribes still living in the southern section of that vast region. Twenty Salesians are now studying the language and customs of that territory, preparing themselves to go there next October.
6. The construction of a church dedicated to St. John the Evangelist and of a hospice for poor boys besides classroom facilities for day students, and a recreation center—all in Turin, near the Protestant church located in a section where there are more than 30,000 people without a single Catholic church.

The number of pupils and homeless boys has increased in all the Houses of the Congregation. Work is going on in all: everywhere, new buildings or additions to existing ones are under construction in order to admit a larger number of boys who continually apply.

We are on excellent terms with pastors and bishops. We can truly look upon them as our protectors since they are generous to us in every way compatible with their authority. This is true with the exception

of only one Ordinary, yet we hope to reestablish our former friendly relations as soon as he will decide to reveal his reasons for opposing us. We have also been asked whether Salesians often leave the Congregation and thereby cause trouble to their home dioceses. I am in a position to answer that. As of now, only very few have left the Congregation during their trial period and not a single professed Salesian has ever left. None, therefore, can be cited as having caused trouble in any diocese.

However, it has happened sometimes that young men not belonging to the Congregation but accepted in our Houses and attending our schools have not given satisfaction in the dioceses that received them. We cannot be held responsible for the vocation or success of those pupils who leave our hospices or schools to return to their families or attend other schools or a diocesan seminary.

For the rest, I refer to the report submitted last year for the definitive approval of the Constitutions.

Second Clarification

When His Holiness deigned to approve our Constitutions last year, I was advised to apply not for the communication of privileges but for the specific privileges, faculties, and necessary spiritual favors a religious Congregation needs in order to retain its autonomy and accomplish its purpose, which is to promote the glory of God. In doing so I encountered many difficulties.

1. [In this matter] it is not possible to foresee what may be needed. Consequently one must wait until the necessity arises with its concomitant troubles before notifying the Superior in order that he may submit a petition for the needed privilege. This may be easy to do for just one House, but it becomes extremely difficult for a Congregation with already eighteen Houses or churches established in various dioceses.

2. Since one does not know to which of the Sacred Congregations such petitions should be addressed, in most cases considerable time elapses before the desired answer is received.

Last year I submitted petitions for a number of things that I felt were necessary; but after corresponding for a year I was obliged to go to Rome to seek the assistance of someone with experience who could direct me to the proper offices.

3. It is difficult to obtain what is asked for. I applied to the Sacred Penitentiary for faculties that are usually enjoyed by all religious Congregations, and it was deemed wise to refuse them. Other [Sacred] Congregations granted me a few desirable faculties, while refusing others that I consider truly necessary, such as the faculty to keep and read

forbidden books, impart the papal blessing in danger of death to members of one's own Congregation. Other [Sacred] Congregations amended the petitions in such a manner that what they granted no longer served the purpose. To cite an example: we petitioned for the faculty to celebrate Mass an hour before dawn and an hour after noon. This was granted but only for the time when missions were held, whereas such a necessity may arise any day.

4. To the difficulties set forth above we must add also the expenses of postage, taxes, and fees charged in offices and agencies. One single Brief, for example, cost over one thousand lire; it is true, however, that through the great charity of His Eminence the Cardinal Prefect of that particular Sacred Congregation who has helped us many times, this sum was reduced to only 120 lire. This is indeed a modest sum, but it is still considerable for a Congregation that is utterly devoid of financial means and depends on Divine Providence from day to day to provide for more than 7,000 boys, 400 religious, and to keep 18 churches open to Divine worship.

It now remains for me to renew my humble petition for the communication of the favors and privileges enjoyed by other religious Congregations and in this manner provide whatever is required for the various Houses and churches we have already established and for those we are to open in the near future.

Rev. John Bosco

It looked as though the matter would drag on for a long time; in fact, it did, far longer than Don Bosco could have foreseen. First one of the four Cardinals was absent, then another. Cardinal Bizzarri was away from Rome throughout May and a part of June; Cardinal De Luca was away for about three weeks in July. Then, at times they had to attend to the business of various other [Sacred] Congregations of which they were members. Finally came the summer, during which, as Attorney Menghini wrote, "to submit certain matters not in their calendar would have strange effects on the eminent judges." Meanwhile, week after week, time would go by until late in September.

Yet it was imperative for Don Bosco to present eleven perpetually professed members for ordinations, and it was sheer folly to expect them to be ordained in Turin. Therefore on July 16, he appealed "to the inexhaustible charity and clemency" of the Holy Father

imploring him to allow these Salesians to "receive Minor and Major Orders *a quocumque catholico Episcopo extra tempus* [from any Catholic Bishop whatsoever, outside the regular time]. He also implored a dispensation from the canonical age for four of them.[6]

In support of his humble petition he respectfully set down three reasons for the Pope's consideration. "Your Holiness will benefit the Salesian Congregation immensely by this great concession. In the coming fall we are to establish a school and a mission in the Argentine Republic and this calls for a substantial number of professed members, the majority of whom should be priests. Furthermore, [by this concession] more priests would be available to exercise the priestly ministry in public and private churches according to the need. It would also lend powerful assistance to the Salesian Congregation whose ever growing harvest increases the need for evangelical laborers."

The Pope referred the matter to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. In a letter dated August 2, the Secretary of that Congregation informed Don Bosco that the Holy Father had granted the favor requested "in part"; he should therefore ask Sigismondi, the Vatican messenger, to pick up the Rescript, from whose tenor he would understand "the import and the terms of the favors." Very grateful, Don Bosco hastened to thank His Excellency.[7] "I received your letter and thank you with all my heart for your kindness to me. We shall always be deeply grateful. I shall endeavor to abide by the terms prescribed in the favor granted. All I ask is that I be not [in this matter] subjected to the authority of our Archbishop."

When, however, he read the Rescript he was very bitterly disappointed, for only a minimal part of his request had been granted.

[6] They were the following, all well-known in the Congregation: 1. Stephen Albano of Verolengo (Ivrea); 2. Herminius Borio of Canelli (Acqui); 3. Augustine Mazzarello of Mornese (Acqui); 4. Valentine Cassinis of Varengo (Casale); 5. Charles Farina of Valle Lomellina (Vigevano); 6. Anthony Riccardi of Port Maurice (Ventimiglia); 7. Joseph Campi of Mornese (Acqui); 8. Joseph Beauvoir of Turin; 9. Joseph Leveratto of Genoa; 10. Louis Pesce of Fontanile (Acqui); 11. Joseph Villanis of Turin.

Those seeking dispensations from the canonical age were: Stephen Albano, sixteen months; Herminius Boria, eighteen months; Anthony Riccardi, sixteen months; Charles Farina, twelve months.

[7] Letter, dated August 10, 1875.

It stated that, by availing himself of the faculty already granted to him for a period of ten years to issue dimissorial letters for his religious, he would be permitted this time to refer only five of the eleven applicants to their respective bishops in their dioceses of origin. Nor was this all; the Indult made no mention of the *extra tempora* [ordinations outside the appointed time]. Worse yet, a follow-up letter from Archbishop Vitelleschi informed him that the dispensation from the required age was not to be inferred from the Indult.[8]

Don Bosco now found himself in quite a quandary. He believed he might remedy the matter by returning the Rescript to Archbishop Vitelleschi in the confident hope that it would be reexamined and modified. But in vain. The Secretary of the Congregation replied that the Indult represented what he had been able to obtain, not without great difficulty, and that he was therefore returning it just as it stood; and that perhaps Don Bosco had not understood its full import. Then he continued,[9] "Rather than grant you that faculty, the Holy Father wanted me to ask the Archbishop of Turin to accept your dimissorial letters. I ventured to point out that this would get us nowhere. Whereupon His Holiness consented that no more than five candidates of your choice be ordained by the bishops of their home dioceses, since it appears from your report that all but two of them, belong to dioceses other than Turin. If I failed to obtain the *extra tempus,* it is because you did not mention it in your petition;[10] if you did not obtain the dispensation from the canonical age it is because the Holy Father's Indult was granted in favor of only five of the candidates, not eleven, and presumably you would choose the five who do not need such dispensation. I am returning the Rescript: keep it, otherwise you may not use it. If the five that you will choose for ordination need a dispensation from the required age, let me know that I may request it along with the *extra tempora*. . . . For the others, present your dimissorials to the Archbishop of Turin." It was at just about this time that the Holy Father received the complaints of the Ordinaries of Turin and Ivrea against

[8] Letter dated August 10, 1875.
[9] Letter dated August 15, 1875.
[10] He should have applied for this separately. (Letter from Archbishop Vitelleschi, August 10, 1875).

the *Sons of Mary Project.* From the remainder of this chapter it will be obvious that Rome was afraid that the dissension might become more acute and that episcopal authority might be compromised.

What could Don Bosco do? He would have to be resigned and satisfied with that little. And so he was. He quickly sent off two petitions applying for the Holy See's dispensation from the defect of canonical age for three candidates[11] and for an Indult of the *extra tempora* for the five candidates he had selected.[12] *Sanctitas Sua benigne annuit* [His Holiness graciously granted] both requests on August 27.

That same month the Commission of Cardinals met in a preparatory session at which was read the report Don Bosco had submitted in the form of a petition. It sketched the history of the concession of privileges *per communicationem* [through communication] so clearly that it aroused their admiration. It was read by Msgr. Bianchi who was not at all sympathetic to Salesian causes, but honest and free of all bias. The Cardinals, thinking that Menghini, the attorney, had written the petition, now and then broke in with approving gestures and words. Msgr. Bianchi continued reading unperturbed. At the end when he heard a chorus of praise, he asked,

"Do your Eminences find this report rather good?"

"Magnificent!" they answered.

"Who do you think wrote it?"

"Attorney Menghini. His touch is obvious."

"Well, Don Bosco wrote it."

The Cardinals were surprised at such thorough knowledge of Canon Law. They thought the report had been drafted by Menghini and written by Msgr. Bianchi. When assured by the latter of the truth, they became silent, somewhat embarrassed by their wholehearted praise, which they now regretted as if it might prejudice the cause.

Archbishop Vitelleschi was scheduled to present the case at the meeting which always seemed far remote. From the very beginning he had asked Menghini, the attorney, to draft the consultation for him. This is an analysis of matters on which the Roman Congrega-

[11] Riccardi, Borio, and Farina.

[12] Cassinis and Leveratto, in addition to the above.

tions must express their consultative opinion. The consultations are drafted by special officials according to the instructions of Prefects and Secretaries [of the Sacred Congregations]; they are then printed and distributed to those concerned. The good lawyer did not perform his task as mere routine. He had embraced Don Bosco's cause with real enthusiasm because he felt a loving veneration for him. Therefore he studied the issue thoroughly, assembled a great deal of pertinent material, and drafted his consultation with the utmost care. Don Bosco was pleased with it.[13] Let us take a quick glance at it so that, from what has already been said and what is still to be said, the reader may get an exact and clear idea of this difficult issue.

The consultation opened with the timely observation that "it is indeed a wonder that while on the one hand the Holy See, buffetted by a raging tempest, suffers from the suppression of venerable religious Orders, on the other hand, it still undauntedly strives to establish religious Societies and Congregations which, like an auxiliary army, carry on the beneficial mission of the ancient Orders wherever the latter are unable to do so." This was followed by a short history of the Pious Salesian Society and a masterful exposition of the difficulties raised by the Turin Ordinary, especially those concerned with the recognition of canonical exemption and admission to Holy Orders. Having prepared the ground, the Relator now reached the crux of the matter outlined in the consultation. He summarized it as follows: "At the beginning of this year, the Founder filed two petitions. It was his desire to forestall clashes [with the diocesan authority] and also obtain for his Congregation those privileges that have been granted to other Congregations. His Congregation is by no means inferior to others, as can be seen from its remarkable success over the past 34 years in its work on behalf of religion and society." These are the petitions that Don Bosco had addressed to the Pope requesting unqualified dimissorials and the communication of privileges. The consultation stated the contents of the petitions and then went to the heart of the question.

The analysis was both scholarly and clear. The first part dealt with dimissorial letters. After referring to the historical origin of

[13] Letter from Menghini to Don Bosco dated September 8, 1875.

this privilege, it raised the question whether "it would be advisable to grant the specific request submitted by the Reverend John Bosco, founder of a well-deserving Institute." It seemed that this could not be so easily granted. There were three reasons against it: (1) Such a favor was rarely granted, (2) Orders of Regulars with ancient and esteemed traditions did not enjoy this privilege, as the Relator pointed out. Would it not perhaps be premature to grant it to a recently founded Congregation that could already avail itself of a Rescript empowering it to issue dimissorial letters *ad Episcopum Dioecesanum,* [to the diocesan Bishop] even though only for a ten-year period? (3) It was the policy of the Sacred Congregation to be quite strict about extending such privileges.

Then followed the reasons in favor. "Despite the fact that this privilege is rarely granted, a reason for doing so can be found in the extraordinary growth and remarkable expansion of the Salesian Society which, though founded in these stormy years, has nevertheless grown and continues to grow day by day to the benefit of religion and mankind . . . It befits the Supreme Pontiff by virtue of his sovereign and royal rights to reward meritorious and outstanding accomplishments with extraordinary privileges and singular favors." The consultation then went on to show this had already been done time and again in the past. Indeed, here we must pay tribute to the skill of Menghini; he [aptly] quoted Tomassin[14] who "attributed the grant of some extraordinary exemptions to such motivating causes as rigid demands, whims, and worse things yet . . ." After this he continued, "It would seem therefore that the reasons presented by the Reverend John Bosco concerning the excessive rigor of the Archbishop of Turin about ordaining Salesians should not be overlooked."

The second part dealt with the communication of privileges. After referring to the two different forms of concession, one *absoluta, plena et perfecta* [unqualified, total and perfect] and the other, *imperfecta et relativa,* [imperfect and relative] it noted that "in order to avoid any interpretation which, in case of *doubt,* might reestablish the *ordinary* jurisdiction of the diocesan bishop, Don Bosco fervently asked to share the same privileges already granted to other

[14] A French theologian of the 17th century. *Cf. Dictionnaire de Theologie Catholique.* [Editor]

Congregations and *specifically* those of the Congregation of the Holy Redeemer." Then citing less remote examples of similar communication of privileges, it continued: "Encouraged by these recent examples, Don Bosco makes several observations in his memoranda." Referring to the four reasons already known to us, Menghini eloquently stated: "Though a small boat needs only a few oars, the same cannot be said of a large ship. The latter needs a large crew, strong propulsion power, and other suitable equipment to travel more swiftly! Privileges are to a definitively approved society what the crew, power, and equipment are to a large ship."

The arguments in favor of the concession were followed by those against it. There seemed to be three obstacles to [the granting of] the concessions:

1. The communication of privileges had not been granted for a long time. Therefore, if a consultative opinion were to be given to the Holy Father, it should conform to practice, since this was a matter of [Church] discipline.

2. Among the directives of the Apostolic Chancery there were two, approved by Pius VI, indicating that similar privileges should be granted *specifice et nominatim,* [specifically and by name] especially to Congregations with simple vows and therefore not having the status of Orders of Regulars. They enjoy only such privileges as are granted to them and no more. Only Regulars have a greater latitude of exemption from episcopal jurisdiction although they too, according to *seven articles* of the Constitution *Inscrutabili* of Gregory XV, are subject to the jurisdiction, ordinary or delegated, of bishops.

3. Very many were the privileges that had been granted to Orders and later to Congregations and all would be included in the communication. Now, common sense seemed to suggest that doubts could always arise as to whether this or that Indult, this or that favor, would be suitable to Don Bosco's Institute which, although solemnly commended and approved, still appeared to be a Society *sui generis.* If doubts arose, the ordinary jurisdiction of the bishop would prevail. It seemed, therefore, wiser to take protective measures against future conflicts by forestalling such difficulties.

The writer, then, in his reply [to his own objections], laid aside the general principles and thought it best to investigate adequate

reasons in this case for urging the Supreme Pontiff to grant the petition that had been referred to the judgment of this Commission of Cardinals. The Pope [he said] is the supreme and independent dispenser of such favors and privileges; their Eminences must therefore decide, in view of the places, times, and persons concerned, if it would be advisable to make such a concession, especially since it concerned a recently founded Congregation, which however, in its brief canonical existence has possibly accomplished more than other Orders in a much longer time.

Here the writer touched on the two clarifications submitted in April, and he exploited them in the interests of the petitioner. We do not want to be repetitious, but since the Reporter had new data about the gradual development and progress of the Pious Society and introduced them in the consultation, our readers should be fully informed.

1. Many Salesians have distinguished themselves with writings of literary and historical value as well as with textbooks that have been printed and are used in public schools. Among other historical works the more recent publications, *The Evangelist of Wittenberg* and *The Protestant Reformation of Germany* by the Rev. J. B. Lemoyne, Director of the Salesian School at Lanzo, as well as his *Life of Christopher Columbus,*[15] have been highly commended. Some 20 religious of this Congregation have died leaving behind them a reputation of outstanding virtue; biographies have been written about each of them.

2. In the service of liturgy many musical works have been composed and printed to promote the study of organ and plain chant.

3. The Society has a bookstore and a printing plant with four steam-operated machines and 130 people working full time. This explains the remarkable success of the *Letture Cattoliche,* [Catholic Readings] now in their twenty-third year. This publication was blessed by the Holy Father who graciously recommended it in a special circular written by his Eminence the Cardinal Vicar. It is not surprising that the book *Il Giovane Provveduto* [The Companion of Youth] sold at least a million copies within a few years.

4. Various buildings are now under construction: (a) A sizable addition to the House at Alassio that will make it possible to increase

[15] The Reporter attributed this last book erroneously to Father John Bonetti.

the present enrollment from 200 to 400. (b) At Sampierdarena the facilities of the House are likewise being expanded so that enrollment may be tripled. (c) In October three new convents for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will be opened at Alassio, Lanzo, and in [the section of Turin called] Valdocco where for 30 years a house of ill-fame was formerly located. This building was recently purchased at great expense, and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will very soon devote their attention to the poor girls of the neighborhood who up to now had no facilities for either moral or religious education. (d) Lastly, the *Sons of Mary Project,* whose purpose is to gather young adults of good moral character between the ages of 16 and 30 for a course of studies in preparation for the priesthood. Their number will exceed 100 next school year.

This scholarly and cautious dissertation ended as follows: "These observations, together with what has already been set forth in the previous consultation on the approval of the Constitutions are the factors upon which their Eminences so well-endowed with mature discernment and prudence, may base themselves in giving a reply to the following

DOUBTS

I. Whether and in what form dimissorial letters *ad quemcumque Catholicum Episcopum* [to any Catholic Bishop whatsoever] and the *extra tempora* [ordinations outside the appointed time] should be granted in favor of the Salesian Society?

II. Whether, in what form, and what privileges should be granted by communication to the aforesaid Society?"

Don Bosco was very anxious that all negotiations about privileges be completed before the fall holidays since the date of the departure of the missionaries for [South] America was drawing near.[16] The delay, however, was not entirely fruitless because both Attorney Menghini and Msgr. Fratejacci, who was also "very busy" on this matter, were able to pool their efforts and draft their consultation more carefully. It also gave Don Bosco more time to learn the

[16] Letter to Archbishop Vitelleschi from Don Bosco, August 10, 1875.

mind of the judges through the correspondence of those two experienced and industrious friends.

Cardinal Patrizi, the Vicar, always ready to help Don Bosco, was happy to preside over this Commission; he appeared to be well-disposed, but also stated he would abide by the vote of his colleagues. Cardinal De Luca, a very determined man, did not feel the scruples affecting some other member of the eminent group; his presence was considered very advantageous to Don Bosco's cause. Cardinal Martinelli, in a very cordial letter dated July 9, thanked Don Bosco for the visit of Father Lemoyne and Father Bonetti and for the "gift of some booklets of theirs." Then for Don Bosco in particular he added, "Incidentally, this reminds me of a long-standing obligation toward you, namely, to thank you for your delightful little work entitled *Mary Help of Christians* that you so kindly sent me. The miraculous manner in which this church was built truly leads one to believe that *Maria aedificavit sibi domum* [Mary Herself built her own temple]."

These three Cardinals, however, were not the most influential. Cardinal Bizzarri wielded the greatest influence, although he in turn was swayed by Archbishop Vitelleschi. In discussing the communication of privileges in his works on Canon Law, the Prefect of the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars strongly insisted on *in praesens difficillime conceditur* [at the present time it is very rarely granted]; he could not say *nullimode* [nowise] because the favor depended on the sovereign will of the Pope; but his leanings were obvious. When the compiler, Menghini, necessarily had to consult him, he would suggest difficulties. The clever and good lawyer, however, tempered them, as can be seen in the consultation, with remarks full of consideration and gentleness. Menghini even said that he had drafted the consultation "haunted by the Cardinal Prefect who had even wanted what he could not do in conscience and in justice." It is easy to imagine the goodwill of Menghini pitted against the well-known scruples of the Cardinal.

We must also add that in August both the Prefect and the Secretary made it quite plain that they thought the communication of privileges in a block impossible. Later, the Cardinal himself was inclined to grant a certain number of privileges, but not all, and was totally opposed to unqualified dimissorials.

During that same month, still swayed by a conversation with Archbishop Vitelleschi, Menghini suggested to Don Bosco, "as a son might suggest to his father," that he apply indirectly for "at least some of the main privileges, such as dimissorial letters *etiam ad Episcopum originis* [also to the Bishop of the home diocese], exemption from visitation, and other special privileges and spiritual favors" of his choice; however, he left the entire matter to Don Bosco's wisdom and prudence. It would be interesting to know what Don Bosco replied to this; but in the absence of other documents Menghini's reply allows us to reconstruct substantially Don Bosco's answer. [Menghini wrote]: "I, too, am of the opinion that we must attain a firm status, secure and not precarious [as it would be] if we begged like poor mendicants for little favors that benefit more the *donor* than the *receiver* . . . Great things must not be done by halves; and unfortunately the saying, *Benefacta male collata maleficia existima,* [Favors unkindly granted are no favors at all] is true. As a wise and experienced general, write and take all necessary measures. Be convinced that unfortunately there is opposition."

Don Bosco was under the impression that Archbishop Vitelleschi was not opposed [to his requests]! He did not yet know that the Secretary of [the Congregation of] Bishops had instructed Menghini to draft the consultation with these words, "Don Bosco's petition is very odd; just write a simple note to air it"; that is to say, merely write a very brief report to show that the request has been studied.

The date for the discussion was drawing near. Worried by the way affairs seemed to be going, Don Bosco acted on the advice of Menghini and addressed himself directly to the Commission to recommend his own case. To each Cardinal and to Archbishop Vitelleschi he sent a copy of the following letter:

Turin, September 11, 1875

Your Eminence:

If I were fortunate enough to be in Rome these days I would not fail to fulfill my grave obligation of calling on Your Eminence in person to pay my respects and recommend the Salesian Congregation to your kindness. [By reason of your office] you are asked to pronounce a most

important judgment on this Congregation, concerning the communication of privileges usually enjoyed by other religious Institutes approved by the Church. Permit me, therefore, to express myself in this humble letter.

At the time our Congregation was approved Your Eminence acted toward me as a kindly father and an outstanding benefactor. Now I beg you graciously to continue your good offices toward me that our humble Congregation may receive the great favor of the communication of privileges. Such a concession would give us two very important advantages:

1. The Salesian Congregation would enjoy the status of other Congregations before the ecclesiastical authorities.
2. In October the Salesians are to travel to the Argentine Republic to open a Mission school. At the request of the Ordinary, we have agreed to take over the administration of the public schools and a public church at San Nicolas de los Arroyos. It would then be very helpful if our members were to enjoy the privileges and spiritual favors of the religious Orders and Congregations already existing in that immense country.

This would also do away with the cause of the opposition shown us by the Ordinary of the Archdiocese of Turin, who is not convinced that the *Salesian Society* has been definitively approved since he has no proof that it enjoys the privileges of other Congregations.

However, I leave everything to the deep, enlightened wisdom of Your Eminence and assure you that for all you have done as well as for any future act of kindness we hope for, the Salesians will be forever grateful, and will offer special prayers every day that you may have a long life filled with heavenly blessings.

While prayers and fasting are offered in all our Salesian Houses that God may inspire you to do what shall be for His Greater glory, I am deeply honored to bow before you and kiss the sacred purple in deepest veneration.

Your most devoted servant,

Rev. John Bosco

The discussion scheduled for September 9 was for some unforeseen difficulty postponed to September 16. Historical truthfulness as to what is said and done at such sessions can hardly be

claimed because they are surrounded by a justifiable secrecy. Indiscreet rumors may and do circulate, of course, but their actual value is always more or less questionable. At any rate it is below the historian to gather information from such unreliable sources.

Thursday, September 16, was the last day of Archbishop Vitelleschi's work as Secretary to [the Congregation of] Bishops and Regulars. He had been elevated to the sacred purple and his last official duty was the report on Don Bosco's requests. In fact, two days before he had already turned over to his substitute all his official files, except one—Don Bosco's. He wanted to handle that himself and for this reason took part in the meeting of the Commission of Cardinals.

The meeting began at 9 A.M. and adjourned at noon. What had been decided? No official communiqué could be obtained. The consultative opinion of the Commission was to be presented to the Pope at a forthcoming audience and the decision was up to him. No audience was possible, however, on the following day when new Cardinals were to be officially installed. This meant that the final verdict would not be obtained until the following week, and then the report would be made not by Cardinal Vitelleschi but by either the newly elected Secretary or the acting Secretary. "If only Cardinal Berardi were here!" Msgr. Fratejacci lamented in a letter, for logically enough he could have expected the Cardinal to take some effective action with the Pope. But the Cardinal was not in Rome. "Yet God and our good Mother, Mary Help of Christians, are with us!" the good Monsignor added, "and as in other crises, she will now enlighten the Holy Father on what should be done for the greater glory of God and the progress of your new Institute so well-beloved by all." Offering his services he continued, "If there is anything I can do, you know that I am always prompt and ready to act. Just tell me and it shall be done with a willing heart and with utmost pleasure."

But something unforeseen and unforeseeable happened. The newly appointed Cardinal, who after the Consistory would have been forced to disassociate himself from this matter took it upon himself to inform the Holy Father of the results of the Commission that same evening of the 16th, "contrary to ordinary procedure" according to Msgr. Fratejacci, that is, as he explained, "without waiting

for the usual schedule of audiences."[17] The following morning when Menghini asked him of the Congregation's decision, he replied, "Don Bosco will certainly not be very happy when he hears about it!"

Let us at last see the results. The answer to the first doubt concerning the dimissorials was: *Negative et ad mentem.* [In the negative and as directed.] The directive was that the Archbishop of Turin should be informed of the petition for the faculty of presenting dimissorials letters *ad quemcumque Episcopum* [to any Bishop whatsoever] and *extra tempora* [for ordinations outside the appointed time] which the Rector Major of the Salesian Society had submitted and the Sacred Congregation had refused to grant because Don Bosco already enjoyed a ten-year Indult since August 3, 1874. The Archbishop, however, was asked to comply with this concession lest it become necessary that the Sacred Congregation make other arrangements for Don Bosco to avail himself of this Indult. As regards the second doubt concerning the communication of privileges the answer was: *Communicationem, prout petitur, non expedire.* [It is inadvisable to grant the communication of privileges as requested.] But it was decided to ask the Holy Father to declare the Houses of the Salesian Society, with at least six members in permanent residence, exempt from the jurisdiction and visitation of Ordinaries in all matters of internal discipline and administration, without prejudice to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary over churches, administration of the Sacraments, and matters of the sacred ministry.

Menghini could not believe his eyes when he read that the Rescript was also to be sent to the Ordinary of Turin. However, when writing to Don Bosco he remarked, "I do not want to stir up any trouble. In your prudence you will know *quid agendum* [what to do]." He also realized that in all this the continued benevolence of the Pope would be a great comfort to Don Bosco. So when he obtained an audience with the Holy Father to thank him for appointing him Canon in the renowned collegiate church of St. Eustace, he purposely introduced the name of Don Bosco and noticed that the Pope listened with obvious pleasure to what he was saying. He hastened to inform Don Bosco of this.

As usual Don Bosco accepted this bitter disappointment with

[17] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc. 17.*

admirable resignation and calm.[18] Yet, to be resigned does not mean to give up.

In this matter a historian who is anxious to discover the reason for this turn of events has only one way to get to the facts. It would be a rash insult to assume that in matters so important men of such prominence would act through passion or motives best left unmentioned. Allowing then for a legalistic outlook, professional adherence to traditional procedure, and a consequent dislike for change in important matters, we have to admit the possibility that the grim specter of a split between the Turin Ordinary and the Holy See frightened the judges and in turn aroused the apprehension of the Holy Father.[19] Determined and unbroken opposition in Turin gave them reasonable cause to fear that a direct confrontation with Don Bosco might degenerate into a serious breach with Rome at a time when closer union between the entire episcopate and the Head of the Church was more essential than ever. In this lies the crux of the entire issue.

Barely a month elapsed after this epilogue and his elevation to the purple when Cardinal Vitelleschi died. A violent attack of typhoid fever ended his life in only a few days. "What a shock! What a meditation!" Msgr. Fratejacci exclaimed, almost beside himself. His vivid imagination immediately saw in it no less than the finger of God.[20]

In April, 1876, Don Bosco found the noble family of the Cardinal still filled with consternation at the sudden and, as they thought, mysterious death. On April 11 of the same year, Cardinal Martinelli disclosed that Cardinal Vitelleschi had raised all the difficulties. We may believe that if he did so, it was not because of any hostility to Don Bosco. The real reason for this setback was to be found far from Rome.

[18] Letter from Menghini to Don Bosco, dated September 26, 1875.

[19] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 17. *Cf.* also *Doc.* 18 and letter from Menghini to Don Bosco dated September 26, 1875.

[20] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 19.

CHAPTER 10

Life at the Oratory in 1875

We have enough data on life at the Oratory during the year 1875 to interest our readers with two long chapters. We will try not to be repetitious. Without stressing the obvious, we will limit ourselves to the most important events that occurred daily during this period and to Don Bosco's hitherto unpublished statements and activities that relate to our theme. The Oratory was a large family; therefore, in order to have some sequence in our narrative, we will speak first of the father, then of the House and the children, and finally of various other things worth mentioning. Our principal sources of information are diaries, minutes, reports, and letters preserved in our archives.

1. The "Paterfamilias"

The Oratory was Don Bosco's usual residence and also the Motherhouse of the young Congregation. It was not only a credit to Don Bosco in the eyes of the world, but it was also a model of Salesian life for the other Houses. Therefore, Don Bosco wished to keep the routine of the House under his personal control and guidance. This did not mean that he restricted the activities of the subordinate Superiors who bore *pondus diei et aestus* [the burden of the day's heat. *Matt.* 20, 12]; indeed, he allowed them great freedom of action within the framework of the rules he had established and in the spirit of his directives. His direct participation in the complex life of the Oratory was needed because all of the priests in the House were young. The life of Don Bosco's family, therefore, depended entirely upon him personally.

In the year we are now discussing there is ample proof that this was actual fact and not conjecture.

Primarily we can see it in the makeup and procedure of the House Chapter. Don Bosco was its Director, although now he was assisted by a vice-Director, Father Rua. It must not be thought that Don Bosco was merely honorary Director and that his assistant, though vice-Director in name, was the actual Director. The minutes of the meetings, so clear in their brevity, depict Father Rua presiding at the meetings, introducing proposals, or attaining agreement with the other members. Yet, it is very evident that his major concern was to interpret Don Bosco's mind properly. Whenever a new idea was introduced, the deliberation invariably depended on what Don Bosco would say about it.

It is quite obvious that this Chapter never deviated one bit from the line of conduct that Don Bosco laid down as a law for himself: in one word, "prevention." For example, everything was carefully studied in detail well beforehand. Major feasts were planned a month ahead so that every possible emergency could be foreseen and adequate measures taken. With this in mind, it was customary to review the deliberations of previous years along with the after-comments that had been added. Don Bosco had taught them to record the results of their experiences for safekeeping and later reference in like cases.

Here is a rather instructive incident relative to this period.[1] About 1875 it became customary on the feast of Mary Help of Christians to allow the people to linger in and about the church until quite late in the evening. This caused trouble; some boys dodged the vigilance of their Superiors and hid in the crypt of the church, where they held a party of their own.

Because of this some members of the Chapter insisted that the custom be abolished even though it promoted the piety of the faithful, especially those from out of town. When Don Bosco heard of the opposition he let them speak and then remarked, "Very well, this has happened. But whose fault was it? Your own, because you did not watch properly. We cannot abolish something good merely to prevent something bad. In the future let us rather set up proper precautions in time so that a regrettable incident as this will not happen again."

[1] Father Joseph Vespignani, who heard this from a reliable source, gave us this account.

Don Bosco personally handled the daily matters and business of the Oratory in the evening, after a frugal supper with the community. In the half hour between the end of the meal and night prayers, he would listen, summon persons and give orders.

One account quite vividly shows him at this task. On the evening of July 8, after almost everyone had left the dining room, he motioned to Father Chiala, the Catechist of the artisans, to stay and with him arranged for the printing of several numbers of the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings]. Immediately after, Father Lazzero, the Prefect, came to discuss certain measures to safeguard discipline among the artisans. They had hardly finished when Father Barberis, the Novice Master, came to tell him that the House Chapter had unanimously agreed that the clerics should be given a pleasant vacation to forestall their desire to go home; and then went on to detail his plans for a suitable place, time, duration, until Don Bosco cut him short, saying, "That is all very well, but that particular House barely accommodates fifteen people. Otherwise it is suitable. Make the necessary arrangements."

Father Durando, Prefect General of Studies, then came up to him and said, "Professor Rocchia wants us to print that book of his and is giving us the copyright. I believe he wrote you about it."

"Is it a textbook?"

"It's a glossary of Latin phrases. I think it's quite good."

"But it won't sell many copies."

"The Piarists will use it in their schools and help its sale."

"Talk it over with Barale (the bookstore manager, a coadjutor) and work out something with him. I'd prefer to have it printed at the author's expense."

Then Father Guanella came to present his plan for a book on spreading the Faith through the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings], and outlined it to Don Bosco. Finally, Father Milanesio, Director of the Festive Oratory and day school, joined Don Bosco as he was leaving the dining room and accompanied him upstairs. Meanwhile he requested approval of a new evening course for day students, explaining how, in his opinion, it could be handled. Thanks to this constant, sound, and sure guidance, the multiple activities of the Oratory developed smoothly, while, at the same time, future leaders were being trained.

When Don Bosco was absent he continued his guidance through his letters just as if he were there in person. Three letters written in November from Sampierdarena, Alassio, and Nice show his ceaseless vigilance over the affairs of the Oratory. They are best described as sets of directives, instruction, and briefings, for his "very dear Father Rua," the vice-Director. They touch upon some thirty, widely diversified topics: boys who had transferred from the Oratory to other Salesian schools; the removal of a boy from academic classes to the shoemaking course; a certificate for someone who was leaving; the investiture of clerics; business about real estate holdings; routine banking transactions; contracts for purchases or sales; admission of aspirants into the novitiate. Father Rua wanted to assign certain quarters to the day students, but Don Bosco felt that they would be too far away, "nevertheless, proceed if it seems best to your Reverence," he added humorously.

He wrote about personal affairs or matters concerning members of the Congregation in such a way that only those concerned would understand; about things they ought to do in their individual spheres of activity; about the accelerated course; about Holy Orders and dispensations connected with them; about loans on hand and new ones to be obtained. He did not favor putting up a partition in one of the large dormitories. He also wrote, "If you have 500 lire for Comaschi, the attorney, give them to him. Otherwise write and ask whether he would be inconvenienced by a few weeks' delay. In either case write to me, and we shall see what can be done."

He was perturbed by the silence of Father Rua from whom he anxiously waited to learn whether or not "the Archbishop had consented, as requested, to ordain Alban and Perrot." Finally, he told Father Rua to arrange "to go to Mornese on the Sunday after the Immaculate Conception to do whatever is needed." In a small diary Father Lazzero remarked that on Sunday, December 11, Father Rua had gone to Mornese to preach.

We shall leave all comment to the reader. We only want to show that Don Bosco was the focal point of all activity at the Oratory, both extraordinary and routine matters. We shall limit ourselves to answer only one possible doubt. Don Bosco was absent from the Oratory several times during the year. Was there any truth to the

proverb, "When the cat's away, the mice will play"? We find an answer to this in Father Barberis' diary in an entry dated June 7, during one of Don Bosco's absences. It reads, "The Oratory is so organized that hardly anyone is aware of his absence from Turin."

It has been written that, instead of doctrine, Don Bosco bequeathed a spirit that pervades the Salesians and gives them life.[2] This spirit was precisely what he attempted to inject into the Oratory. With the avowed intention of barring all outside infiltration, he centralized everything under his own control, not by doing everything himself, but rather by not allowing anything to be done without his knowledge. It was a fixed rule, a necessary rule, but always paternal. Bishop de Gaudenzi of Vigevano has described its effect for us: "Anyone who visits the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Turin and the other schools founded and conducted by Don Bosco in collaboration with his priests, is immediately aware of an indefinable atmosphere of piety not usually found in other institutions. In Don Bosco's schools one would actually seem to perceive the fragrance of Jesus Christ."[3]

2. The House and the Domestic Economy

Extensive construction was under way at the schools. Don Bosco outlined the plans and examined their details. No one attempted to execute them until he had given his final approval. This rule was particularly enforced at the Oratory. We have already seen that while he was in Rome he even concerned himself with the construction of a plain encircling wall. Here we should anticipate a certain episode. During his absence in 1876 Father Rua authorized the opening of a window near the bell tower of the church of St. Francis [de Sales] that had once been walled up. When Don Bosco returned and saw what had been done he remarked rather coldly, "Yes, yes, do whatever you want now while Don Bosco is in charge; but, one day when you are in charge, others too will do the same." Poor Father Rua, who had borne responsibility for the direction of the House, seemed crushed. Deeply embarrassed he

[2] *Vie Spirituelle* (July-August 1929, p. 218). An article appeared [also] in *Gerarchia* (July 1929, p. 574) entitled, "The Pedagogy of an Italian Saint." It ends as follows: "There is a vast field of action awaiting the Salesian Congregation, and it has but few written laws; in place of them, it has a spirit and an example."

[3] Letter to Pius IX, dated April 9, 1885.

stammered a few humble words in apology and in protest of his deep devotion. But Don Bosco did not soften a single word.[4] This is another example of the importance that the saints always attach to the renunciation of one's own will.

No important construction was undertaken that year at the Oratory. Its property boundaries were extended somewhat by the purchase of a parcel of land with a house on it that had belonged to Mr. Anthony Catellino; he had bought one part from Father [John A.] Moretta and another from the seminary. Anyone wanting to know more about it should recall the Moretta house so frequently mentioned in the volumes written by Father Lemoyne.

During the year, nearly all of the new construction or remodeling was limited to the immediate vicinity of the main entrance. The only new construction undertaken was the building that extends from the main entrance along the Via Cottolengo. It sealed off the first inner playground of the Oratory that was used by the artisans. For many years the building housed the bindery on its upper floor and the bookshop and stock room on the main floor.

The various alterations were not very important: an opening into the crypt of the church of Mary Help of Christians from the side of the carriageway; new heavy doors in the main entrance to replace the temporary ones; just past them, the weighing platform; to the left of the visitors' entrance a recessed alms box above which a marble plaque in Latin and Italian reminded all those who crossed the threshold of the evangelical precept to give of one's surplus to the poor. Finally, there was a little niche for a bell whose silvery chimes marked the hours of the day through half a century for all who had lived at the Oratory.[5]

Apart from the main entrance the only other noteworthy piece of work was the portico. It parallels the apse of the church of Mary Help of Christians, then makes a right angle and extends as far as the House, thus providing a covered walk between the House and the church. The cylindrical pillars that support the portico are of solid granite, quite boy-proof in their sturdiness.

[4] Father Joseph Vespignani was present at the time. He gave this account to the author.

[5] F. Giraudi, *L'Oratorio di Don Bosco,* pp. 222-223, 1935, S.E.I., Torino.

Don Bosco had to provide for the maintenance of this great House. There were no regular sources of income. The total fees for board and tuition of the boys did not amount to possibly as much as twenty centesimi per day for each. The House also had to provide for the personal expenses of a fourth of all the boys living in it. Nor did only boys make up the entire population of the Oratory; besides the Salesians and domestic personnel there were also the *Sons of Mary,* most of whom were poor, and the clerics, who paid little or nothing. Among the workshops, only the print and carpentry shops were solvent, but their earnings could not make up for the cost of the others. The bookstore brought in some money but not very much because, in his eagerness to do good, Don Bosco kept prices at a minimum. It is true that the schools sent their surplus to Don Bosco, but this did not amount to much because their fees were very low. In fact in one of the three letters already mentioned, Don Bosco wrote from Alassio at the end of the first quarter to Father Rua, who was eagerly awaiting a gift from the above: "Money at Alassio, Varazze, and Sampierdarena adds up to zero."

There were regularly three financial crises: every Saturday, twice a month on payday, and the end of every school term. Every Saturday the shop employees had to be paid. However, because there was usually not enough money or no money at all, Don Bosco, who was always a welcome guest, would lunch at the home of a benefactor so as to return with the money he needed. The problem became more acute whenever masons worked in the House as they so often did. Then the foreman came biweekly to get the payroll. On those occasions Don Bosco went begging, actually knocking on every door until he had scraped up the money he needed. His worries were even greater at the end of the school term when he had to meet the bills of his provisioners. Yet he never lost heart. Through long years of experience he had acquired the habit of patience, and he was confident that when the time came, divine assistance would not fail him. To him lack of means meant greater confidence in God.

When the good father was absent, his vicar who ran the House realized how many and how great were the financial difficulties confronting the Oratory. Whenever Don Bosco was at home his

benefactors came to him or he went in search of them. But when he was away Father Rua found himself in trouble.

We have already referred to the meals Don Bosco had with his benefactors. Before we continue let us take this opportunity to add that although he called on them for alms, he also had a special purpose that he never forgot: his desire to do good to these people and their families. Without ever giving the impression that he was fulfilling a special mission, he succeeded in elevating their minds by his exemplary mien, his moderation, his unpretentiousness, his kind words, and by his edifying conversation, which he handled so expertly and pleasantly that no one felt slighted. Well aware that avarice is like a festering sore that corrodes the wealthy and that no sermon can cure, he persuaded people to give alms in order, as he so often said, to gain merit without even realizing it. But when circumstances permitted, he bluntly stressed the obligation to give of one's surplus to the poor.

He also asked for money in his letters. Here are two delightful notes addressed to the generous Countess Callori; one begs, the other thanks.

October 3, 1875

My good Mother:

I expect to be in Vignale next Tuesday and to stay there in holy peace and quiet all day Wednesday until Thursday. What can you expect? This son of yours is penniless and in need of money. I do not even speak of *soldi*[6] in order to tell you that I will be content with very little. I know your good heart and would not ask if you were unable to give. May God make you happy in this world and in eternity. Amen.

Pray for your poor but affectionate servant in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

Nice, November 10, 1875

My good Mother:

I am now fulfilling a duty—thanking you most gratefully for the hospitality, courtesy, and charity extended to this beggar. Countess

[6] An Italian 5-centesimi piece. [Editor]

Bricherasio, who emulates your own charity, gave me a sizeable donation, so now all the granite work is finished.[7] But my gratitude is not, nor are the blessings of Heaven that we will invoke every day for you and your family.

Countess Corsi and Count and Countess Balbo were pleased to receive your greetings and have asked me to return theirs to you, to Count Casimir, Countess Vittoria, and Count Federico. Does Miss Mary still have a toothache? She should be better by now if God has answered my prayers. I prayed for you, too.

I am going to Cunico tomorrow. On Monday (the 17th) I expect to be in Turin to devote my attention exclusively to the missionaries for Argentina.

God bless you, Countess, and may He grant you resignation to His holy will on earth and assure you of a place in Heaven.

Pray for this poor creature who will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant

Fr. John Bosco

In 1875 he increased his usual petitions to municipal agencies requesting subsidies or special facilities of various kinds. At times these letters are veritable gems of courtesy, simplicity of form, and expression of thought. This letter to the Mayor of Turin, for example, is filled with graciousness and charm.

Turin, 1875

Dear Sir:

For many years the undersigned has conducted a number of elementary classes for the instruction of the poorest children in the city of Turin. These classes are held during the day, in the evening, and in the course of the summer. The total number of students now amounts to some one thousand and is constantly increasing.

Because of this situation there is need for desks to replace those that have become quite useless through long wear and tear, and also to accommodate the increasing number of pupils. Since the undersigned is very short of money, he respectfully appeals to your proven kindness

[7] This is an allusion to the granite pillars behind the apse of the church of Mary Help of Christians. *See* above.

requesting that you be so good as to let us have some of the old desks that were formerly used in the municipal schools and that now might be at the disposal of the honorable authorities of this city.

Confident that you will do so, the undersigned thanks you most sincerely in advance and prays Heaven to grant you its bounty, while he is honored to be,

Your obedient servant,
Rev. John Bosco

He also wrote the following interesting petition to the President of the Provincial Council:

Turin, September 8, 1875

Dear Sir:

In the face of the dire need of the young residents of this House known as the Salesian Oratory, I make bold to appeal to you for a charitable subsidy.

There are more than 850 residents in this school, approximately 400 of them from the province of Turin. Had these boys not found shelter here they would be exposed to great danger, and, besides being a source of trouble to the authorities and the people of the city, they most likely would come to a bad end. I want to mention also that quite a large number of these boys were recommended to this Institute by municipal or government authorities.

I confidently rely on your known generosity and beg you to appeal on our behalf to the Provincial Council. In deep gratitude, I am honored to be,

Your obedient servant,
Rev. John Bosco

Even the imperfections of style and form create an agreeable impression of trustful sincerity. We will omit similar letters addressed to the Department of Railroads, the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, and to Government bureaus. However, we cannot overlook three incidents; each one caused him some financial distress as well as a great deal of serious worry.

Louis Succi, an attorney and proprietor of a steam-powered macaroni plant in Turin, was noted for Christian virtue and charity. He asked Don Bosco to guarantee a bank loan of 40,000 lire. Knowing him to be a wealthy man from whom he had received several donations, Don Bosco agreed. Three days later Succi died. The term of the promissory note expired, and Don Bosco informed the heirs. During the process of Beatification Cardinal Cagliero testified as follows: "We were at supper when Father Rua entered and told Don Bosco that Succi's heirs knew nothing of any promissory note, nor did they care to. I was sitting beside Don Bosco who was eating his soup. (Note that it was January and the dining room was not heated in any way.) Although he did not seem to be disturbed and did not interrupt his frugal repast, between spoonfuls I saw drops of perspiration fall into his dish." There was no way of making the heirs listen to reason, and Don Bosco had to pay the money himself. Only some ten years later did he recover most of the sum he had guaranteed by his signature.

Another charitable act cost him a great deal, if not in actual cash certainly in anxiety. A certain Mr. Joseph Rua of Turin invented a device for a safer and easier exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It automatically raised and lowered the monstrance and the crucifix from the altar to the little niche above it, eliminating the risk involved in using the customary small stepladder. Parish priests and bishops were interested in it and Don Bosco used it in his own churches. The inventor would have substantially increased his profit if he had the approval of Rome. Don Bosco, wanting to help, sent the design along with a letter of recommendation to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. But the [Sacred] Congregation did not endorse the mechanism, and according to its usual policy did not return the design. Later, however, to spare Don Bosco any serious trouble, an exception was made and the plans were returned. Without this rejection from Rome, the inventor felt the device would have been quite profitable, but now, all his work had been in vain. He blamed Don Bosco and sued him for substantial damages. Luckily the judge did not agree.

The third distressing incident had its origin also in charity. Our readers will recall that during the winter of 1872-1873 Don Bosco devised his own system of soliciting alms. That winter was mem-

orable because of a prevalent financial depression. In an attempt to raise money and to keep himself solvent, Don Bosco sent circulars and raffle tickets priced at ten lire each to a very large number of benefactors asking them for a donation. Circulars and tickets were mailed in sealed envelopes and the prize was a handsome reproduction of Raphael's Madonna of Foligno. The civil authorities chose to interpret this as a violation of the law against public lotteries and took the matter to court. Don Bosco's explanation did not help. During the court proceedings he declared that "there had been no intention of speculating for gain; it was merely an appeal to Christian charity with the promise of a modest prize as a token of gratitude." The proceedings dragged on and on until 1875. The verdict of the Court of Appeals sentenced the "Rev. John Bosco, priest and chevalier," to a heavy fine for violating the law on public lotteries.[8] Yet, the text of this harsh sentence contains such remarks as "there could be no doubt that the intention of the Rev. John Bosco, priest and chevalier, had been absolutely commendable . . . and that the purpose for which the lottery had been organized was most praiseworthy . . . however, good faith did not exempt him from the penalty since the overt act in itself constituted a violation of the law." The next sentence in the verdict, however, remains quite inexplicable. "But since he might have possibly gone beyond the purpose he intended. . . ." Was sentence passed, then, on a mere possibility? Let the jurists decide.

The judge seemed to imply quite plainly that although the law obliged him to pass sentence, he was in conscience averse to doing so because of the intrinsic goodness of Don Bosco's purpose. This implication encouraged Don Bosco to take a further step. He appealed to King Victor Emmanuel II. He implored him to revoke the penalty by royal prerogative, not for his own sake but for the

[8] In its verdict of October 4, 1873, the Court of Turin condemned him to pay a fine of 3,500 lire "or to imprisonment in the event of nonpayment of costs." In its verdict of February 16, 1875, the Court of Appeals reduced the fine to only 1,500 lire plus the payment of half the value of the painting used as a prize. The painting was to be taken into custody but not confiscated. He also had to pay costs. At the hearing Don Bosco was represented by his attorney, Mr. Hyacinth Pipino. Attorney Dedominici acted as the prosecutor. Throughout the proceedings Don Bosco was referred to as "Chevalier" because the Cross of the Order of Saints Maurice and Lazarus had been conferred on him in 1852 (*Cf. Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. V, p. 489).

sake of the boys for whom he had to provide, since they alone would have to bear the painful consequences of the verdict. The appeal was delivered to the King through the good offices of Attorney Vincent Demaria.

The King graciously consented. The decree setting aside the sentence arrived at a most propitious moment, namely, on the very day that Don Bosco's missionaries were setting out for [South] America.

Considering this on a higher level, we can say that in matters of charity we find a wonderful proof of the proverb that good shall be done to those who do good. All the credit in the world is extended to men of charity who possess nothing but devote themselves entirely to the welfare of others, because people respect their promise, and regard their word as worth more than the most reliable guarantees. It was so with Don Bosco.

Charles Buzzetti, a contractor, was working at that time on building the church of the Immaculate Conception in Turin. The committee of dignitaries raising the necessary funds owed him 30,000 lire but could not pay him until the money came in. The contractor refused to proceed with the work until they either paid him or gave him a guarantee. To make him continue they pointed out that, were he working for Don Bosco he would advance any amount of money. "Of course, I would," he answered. "Don Bosco's name is my best guarantee. I am always positive that Providence will send him the means to pay me. After working for him all these years I haven't the slightest doubt about it. I don't feel that sure about other people. It is a fact that when I was working on the church of Mary Help of Christians I was paid to the very last cent!"

3. The Sons

In the Piedmontese dialect the word *son* means *boy*. Don Bosco had between seven and eight hundred such "sons" at the Oratory. Their quarters were cramped, but they managed to get along. They were grouped into students and artisans. The *Sons of Mary* constituted a separate body divided into three classes. We will not say more about them just now.

It may seem strange that as late as 1875 there was no printed

prospectus specifying conditions for admission. But that is how it was; everything was done in family style. We have a galley proof which is enriched by two lines scribbled in Don Bosco's own handwriting.[9] By some oversight in the list of documents required of students, no mention was made of a statement of good conduct from the boy's pastor. Therefore, under Article 5 in the galley proof Don Bosco added, "School record and conduct report from the pastor. The latter absolutely necessary."

During 1875 the shops made considerable progress. They were becoming more and more like shops of a real trade school. Classes for the artisans that used to end with the academic school year were now extended. No longer restricted to the later hours of the day, classes were now also being held in the early morning after Mass, which the artisans attended as they still do, immediately after rising.

Steps were taken to improve both scholastic standards and discipline. Boarders were to have no contact whatever with outsiders and boys who had been recently dismissed were to be completely barred from the House. Since some of them had been in the band and were sometimes invited back to play, the band conductor was now instructed not to call on them again. Prior to this time, also, the artisans had been allowed to keep their trunks in their own dormitory, a practice easily leading to disorders. The trunks were now replaced by open lockers. About the playground any hiding places on or under the staircases were eliminated both near the church and along the new building on Via Cottolengo. Finally, a Catechist was appointed exclusively for the artisans, to be known officially as Director of the Artisans.

It is interesting to note that Don Bosco never liked to see the artisans change trades once they had made a choice. In his opinion this was harmful. On May 30, he told the Superiors that no more transfers of this kind were to be allowed. "Anyone who comes here for a given purpose should devote himself to that and nothing else." he said. "Too many changes have been made already; and nearly all of them have proved useless."

To avoid repetition, we will limit our report on the students to a few incidents of the year 1875. We will concentrate solely on

[9] *Cf. Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 20.

matters concerning the classes and the various studies pursued at the Oratory. Occasionally we will quote some of Don Bosco's pedagogical maxims.

The most remarkable incident was a temporary, daring addition to the boarding school. It was inspired by Don Bosco's untiring zeal for the welfare of boys. One day a free elementary school opened its doors to the boys of the neighborhood. It was under Protestant auspices and was located only a few yards from the church of Mary Help of Christians. Unfortunately money, and lots of it, was the bait to attract the poor people. It was a challenge, and Don Bosco picked up the gauntlet. He had nothing of great value to give away—only a few small gifts for the boys attending the Festive Oratory on Sundays. That was all. But the boarders prayed and offered frequent Communion that he would succeed in wresting the souls of those little children from those insidious hands. Don Bosco opened a similar day school at the Oratory and Father Milanesio was put in charge. He devoted himself to it wholeheartedly, revealing a missionary spirit later to play a brilliant role in Patagonia. Gradually the Protestant school lost its enrollment, so that by April and May 1875, all its pupils were crowding into Don Bosco's school. The bitterly disappointed emissaries of heresy had to pack up and return to their headquarters whence they had come so confidently.

Once the danger was passed Don Bosco did not abandon his new children. Instead, he did more for them. During the school year of 1875-1876, he moved their classes to more comfortable premises in the newly acquired house that had formerly belonged to a Mr. [Anthony] Catellino. The house that could not be used for the *Sons of Mary,* as originally intended, now served this other purpose that was no less important.

Don Bosco admitted day pupils also to the boarders' high school classes. Secondary schools were urgently needed for the increasing population of the rapidly developing Valdocco district. For several years Don Bosco provided such schooling and tolerated the intermingling of students. But he was not satisfied merely to provide classes for the day students. In January 1875, he ruled that they should also attend religious services in the church of Mary Help

of Christians with the boarders and that "no exception be allowed for any reason at all."

Don Bosco carefully supervised his schools, always alert to any rumor about the teachers that might be circulating among the boys. Because of some such remarks, later confirmed to be true, he spoke to some of his Salesians one day in a fatherly manner. (We have summarized his words from the notes of Father Barberis.) "As a general rule teachers tend to prefer pupils who distinguish themselves by careful work and intelligence. They are apt to direct their teaching exclusively to them. They are fully satisfied to have the best pupils in their class understand, and they keep up this manner of teaching until the end of the year. On the other hand, boys who are slow or behind in their studies irritate these teachers, who end up neglecting them and leaving them to their own devices.

"Now I see things differently. I feel that it is every teacher's duty to give his attention to the more backward pupils of his class; he should question them more frequently than the others; for their benefit he should explain things at greater length; he should repeat things over and over again until they have understood; and he should adapt the lessons and the homework to their ability. If he follows any other method he will not be teaching the class but only the few choice pupils.

"One can easily keep the brighter pupils busy by assigning extra homework and lessons, rewarding them with marks for diligence. Rather than neglect slower students, less important matter may be omitted, and more important topics be adapted especially for them.

"I would also like to see the textbook carefully explained word for word. I think it quite useless to discuss too loftily.

"I also believe that pupils are to be questioned repeatedly so that, if possible, never a day passes without having the whole class interrogated. This has untold advantages. But I am told, instead, that some teachers enter the classroom, question one or two pupils, and then launch into their lesson without further ado. I would not endorse such a method even at university level. Question, question, question over and over again. The more the pupil is made to talk the more will he profit from his schooling.

"Never criticize the textbooks. It doesn't take much to discredit

them in the eyes of the boys. Once they have lost respect for them they will not study them. A teacher can remedy any deficiency in the book while teaching, but he should never belittle it."

Did the boys at the Oratory study? According to its long-standing reputation they did. However, in August 1875, commenting on the examinations held at the seminary before clerical investiture, the Ordinary of Turin reported to Rome: "Nine of the young boys were from Don Bosco's schools; four were rejected because of poor conduct; although the other five were accepted they are very weak in their studies and none have received a perfect score."[10] By this he meant passing marks in all subjects.

Apparently the Archbishop was not well-informed. First it should be mentioned that the "young boys" were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one as can be seen in the register. Furthermore the seminary register informs us that in August only seven candidates came from Don Bosco's Oratory, not *nine,* and that of the seven, *three* passed, *two* were conditionally accepted, and only *two* rejected. Two of the three who had passed had completed the fifth year of high school, and one of them even had a diploma; the other five had only completed four years. For the sake of truth we should add that the records of the Oratory refer to yet another student, also from the fourth year, who took the seminary examinations although the seminary records list him as a fifth-year student at the private school of a Professor Ferrero. Apparently he preferred to complete high school privately during his vacation. He passed the examinations.

Something more should be added about this young man. His family came from Chieri, but he had been born in Turin. He was deeply religious, very intelligent, and aspired to the priesthood. His mother, wanting to protect him at any cost from the temptations to which he would have been exposed in the public schools, had him enrolled as a day student at the Oratory. He was very dear to Don Bosco. He received the cassock in the fall of 1875 after his fourth year of high school but he spent only one year in the seminary, feeling himself called to a more perfect life. He is Father Joseph

[10] Menghini, the attorney, transcribed this remark in a letter to Don Bosco dated August 26, 1875.

Chiaudano, who preceded Father Rosa as editor of the *Civiltà Cattolica.*

Obviously if we have to go on the basis of conduct, only two candidates had been rejected. But this, too, is unlikely because the same records indicate that their conduct was good. On the other hand, just a glance at the record of the final examinations and at the other scholastic records of the Oratory immediately shows us their low academic standing. This, and not their conduct, was the reason for their rejection. As for the others, it is easily understandable that fourth-year students could not have been expected to score a high average in a fifth-year examination.

Documentary evidence in the records of the public high school *Monviso,* now known as *Massimo d'Azeglio,* proves that at the Oratory studies were taken seriously. These records show that in 1875 fifteen candidates from the Oratory took their examinations there for the high school diploma, and fourteen obtained it.

We did not detail our investigation enough to arrive at any comparative general conclusions, but we can at least compare them to the other candidates who attended private schools. Fifty-nine out of a total of eighty-seven graduated. The pupils of the Oratory ranked as follows in the class rating: Two achieved second and third place; three, fourth and fifth place; two, seventh place; two, ninth place; and one each, eleventh, fourteenth, and seventeenth place. A candidate who had attended private school came out in first place; he had higher marks than any of the public school candidates. His name was Anthony Ronco, and he came from the Salesian school at Alassio.[11]

We also checked the two following years. In 1876 seventeen candidates came from the Oratory; sixteen of them graduated. In 1877 thirty boys from a total of thirty-two graduated and two of them received honorable mention.

[11] The following results were obtained by the candidates from Don Bosco's other schools who also took the examination at the public high school *Monviso:*

School	*Candidates*	*Graduates*
Lanzo	11	9
Varazze	7	6
Alassio	6	5
Borgo San Martino	5	5
Valsalice	4	4

4. Discipline and Piety

Discipline and piety went hand in hand at Don Bosco's House. In 1875 the devout old coadjutor Enria overheard some visitors express astonishment at the sight of so many boys in the study hall absolutely silent and intent upon their work. They said to Don Bosco who was accompanying them on a tour of the House.

"You must have a large staff to enforce such discipline!"

"Look for yourselves," Don Bosco said. "There is only one proctor."

"You must be very strict."

"Not at all."

"Then how do you explain this?"

"You see, it is not fear of punishment that makes these boys behave well and study hard, but fear of God and the fact that they frequently go to the Sacraments. That works wonders with young people."

Such astonishment was quite natural. To many people it was really inexplicable that there should never be any trouble at the Oratory such as sometimes occurred in other schools where it was often impossible to control the boys. But these visitors did not know the secrets of the Oratory. One day early in June 1875, Don Bosco listed seven of those secrets. Here they are in brief:

1. The boys were poor, paying little or no tuition. Since they knew they would be expelled for bad conduct and that then they could not afford any other school, they were very careful not to commit any serious offense.

2. The boys received the Sacraments very frequently, thus their conduct was guided by their conscience rather than by fear of punishment.

3. The entire staff (Superiors, teachers, assistants, cooks) were all members of the Congregation, therefore the boys had no contact with "outsiders."

4. There were often special little talks that the best boys attended of their own free choice and that benefited them.

5. The Superiors won their pupils' trust and gladly mingled with them, but always in such a way as to discourage excessive familiarity.

6. Another powerful means of persuasion, exercising a good

influence over the boys, was the short fatherly talks addressed to them every evening after prayers. These short talks forestalled any trouble.

7. There was a lot of fun, singing, music, and great freedom during recreation.

Nevertheless, Don Bosco was not blinded by optimism nor did he view life through a rosy cloud. Instead he lived in a realistic world and nothing escaped his vigilant eye. On the whole he knew how very difficult it was to direct wisely so complex a House which, at short notice, could break out into bedlam. He also distinctly saw its occasional shortcomings and made no attempt to disguise them. But although he would not hesitate to resort to extreme measures in emergencies, he possessed the almost unfailing ability to forestall trouble.

Here, for example, is a simple and effective preventive measure obvious to anyone thumbing through the ledger of school accounts. The words "entirely gratis" rarely appear beside the name of a new boy. Instead there is nearly always "For the first term; later . . ." written next to the entry of the fees that range from five lire per month to a maximum of twenty-four. In the second term the "later" fee was determined by the financial abilities of the boy's parents or benefactors. Then the entry might read "entirely gratis" or "incidentals only," or there might be a reduced fee for board and tuition. This system had a very salutary effect.

New boys fulfilled their duties scrupulously in the hope of obtaining a reduction in their fee. Their parents or guardians, who very often deprived themselves of essentials to scrape together the small monthly sum, continually urged the boys to earn such a reduction by their good conduct. Meanwhile, in these first three months of effort at good behavior and study, the newcomers became accustomed to discipline, application to study and piety. All this turned to their advantage in the following months.

However, the strongest influence restraining the boys was Don Bosco's kindness. Prompted by fatherly affection he always had a kind word for everyone he met about the House. This created a cheerful atmosphere, and the boys were anxious to please him. We will now review a few of these casual meetings mentioned in the Chronicle of 1875.

One day on his way out Don Bosco turned to the doorkeeper and said, "I read your note and will think about it. Don't worry, Don Bosco thinks of you often and is always glad to do whatever he considers best for you."

Coming home on another occasion he paused to put his hand on the head of young Deppert who was on duty at the main entrance. "I'd like you to take off these clothes," Don Bosco said, "and replace them with a cassock. Trust Don Bosco, and Don Bosco will never let you down. He thinks of you often and wants to find a way to make you happy in this world and in the next." Deppert became a very good Salesian priest.

He cheerfully remarked to a cleric named Trivero, who had applied for the missions. "Here is our champion! I mean to make you into a little St. Francis Xavier. I think highly of you and expect much from you. We'll always be friends, won't we? Leave it to me. Only help me, that's all, and then . . . and then . . . you'll see. . . ." The cleric died a holy death in 1879 at San Benigno.

As Don Bosco was crossing the playground a group of boys ran up to him to kiss his hand and stopped eating the bread they were holding. "Go on eating your breakfast; never forget to do that," he said. "Play, run about, have fun. Just try not to get hurt, and be good."

When he visited boys who were ill, he stayed a while at their bedside and even sat down to talk with them about their classes, their home, their parents, or their pastor. Father Vacchina, who later became a missionary in [South] America, was a pupil at the Oratory at that time. He writes that when he was sick in 1875, Don Bosco passed some time with him as if he had nothing else to do. He spoke about an altar that he wanted to set up in the infirmary to have Mass said there every day, and together they discussed the best spot in the room for it. Don Bosco met Vacchina in the playground after he had left the infirmary, still weak and pale. He asked how he felt and said, "Exercise, take walks, not here but outside the House in the open." Just then the cleric Giordano, who was later to become the future Director of the School at Loreto, happened to pass by. Don Bosco said to him,

"Tell the Prefect that this boy is to go for a walk on the outskirts of Turin for an hour or so every day for the next two weeks."

This air of kindliness that was so apparent in Don Bosco irresistibly attracted the boys. Whenever he appeared in the playground they ran to kiss his hand while he talked, laughed, and joked with them, looking about him with an air of kindness, bending an ear toward any boy who seemed to want to whisper a secret. In a word, the boys loved him and liked to show their affection. "Don Bosco was everything to us," Father [Louis] Nai says; and Bishop Alberti of Argentina confirmed this in a talk given to honor Don Bosco's beatification, when he said that Don Bosco had the essential qualities of an educator, nothing of the policeman and everything of the father.

Lastly, piety was the supernatural preventive measure. No moral pressure was exerted over the boys to receive the Sacraments; in fact one might say that the Superiors were disinterested. The Chronicle of 1875 informs us: "Every day 50 boys or so go to Communion; about 200 go every Sunday and on some other day during the week; more than 300 boys receive once a week; a very few go once a month, and these do not stay long at the Oratory because with this attitude they either leave of their own accord or are sent away." In those days frequent reception of the Sacraments was something new and quite unknown in educational institutions.

An outstanding mark of 1875 was the growth of the sodalities; they encouraged piety and helped discipline. There were six altogether. The most important, to which almost half of the boys belonged, was that of *St. Aloysius;* it held meetings once a month. The *Blessed Sacrament Sodality* had an enrollment of 100 boys chosen from among the best in the House and mostly from the senior year of high school. The *Altar Boys Society* enrolled some 60 of the best members from the Blessed Sacrament Sodality who were also the best boys in their respective classes; they held special meetings on the most important feast days. Only a few mature boys, the very best, belonged to the *Sodality of the Immaculate Conception.* They never spoke of what took place at their meetings. Over and above exemplary conduct and devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, their main purpose was to help the more difficult boys at the

Oratory. Each member was assigned to such a boy as his special charge; he became the boy's "pal", guided him in activities, and encouraged him to behave well. The members gave progress reports at their regular Thursday meetings at which the moderator of the Sodality gave general instructions for the smooth functioning of the House. The fifth sodality was the *Conference of St. Vincent [de Paul]*. It was open only to the adult members of the domestic staff, and its purpose was to teach catechism to the boys attending the Festive Oratory. Its 30 members met on Sunday evenings. The artisans belonged to the *St. Joseph's Sodality,* founded exclusively for them.

Now a word about the altar boys and about some special achievements of these sodalities.

The altar boys in the church of Mary Help of Christians were thoroughly familiar with the sacred ceremonies. Their seriousness and exactitude at the altar were edifying. This conformed to Don Bosco's ideal, which was to honor God, to instill great veneration for divine worship in the minds of all the boys, and to foster religious vocations. In the minutes already quoted and written by Father Rua, he aptly interprets the thought of Don Bosco in these meaningful words added at the end of the report for the meeting held on March 21: "Charity, a smooth performance of religious functions, dignity, composure, and sincere devotion during the services will rise as fragrant incense in the sight of God and will inspire the faithful."

Quite unwittingly the members derived two important advantages from these various sodalities. One was intimate relationship with their Superiors. A second advantage was growth in virtue since it was customary for a boy, as he grew older, to be promoted to a higher sodality without losing his membership in the lower one. This was the way Don Bosco led the most promising boys to the threshold of the Congregation without their realizing it. On entering the novitiate they did not suddenly find themselves in a new world but in an environment familiar to them from their apprenticeship in the sodalities, whose structure reflected the rules and the spirit of the Pious Society. Consequently, it was no surprise to them to be invited to the pursuit of greater perfection.

5. The Father's Feast Day

At the Oratory Don Bosco's name day was an event of prime importance. Preparations were made far in advance. It was eagerly and joyfully anticipated and its effects were beneficial. It was a triumphant demonstration of filial love.

Since June 7, Don Bosco was on a visit to the schools at Sampierdarena, Varazzo, and Alassio. On the evening of June 21, Father Rua announced that Don Bosco would return on the following day, and he mentioned the symbolic bouquet of flowers that was customarily presented to him on the eve of his feast day. This was only a pretext to remind the boys that a devout corporate Communion on the morning of the feast would be the finest bouquet they could possibly give him.

Don Bosco arrived home just as the boys were filing into the dining room. They saw him at the main entrance and immediately dashed to meet him, shouting, "Viva Don Bosco!" After night prayers he mounted the usual platform to give the *Good Night.*

Here I am with you again. I went away without even asking your leave or saying goodbye. Next time I will not go without letting you know. During the past few days I visited our schools at Alassio, Varazze, Sampierdarena, and Borgo San Martino. I found everything in excellent shape: a very great number of boys, all more or less your own age, who act as you do, and who are just as good as you are. They were anxious to have news about you, and I gave them some, and it was always good. I not only told them how things really are, but, as I always do, I told them how I wish things really were. They seemed to be very satisfied and are now making every effort to be like you.

At this point a thought comes to mind that rather disturbs me. I really must tell you that although I am satisfied with most of you, I am not with all of you. A few really have been behaving badly. I had already started to write a letter to Father Rua telling him to take stern measures with these boys. But it was never mailed because I did not have time to finish it. Now I intend to wait a while to see if these boys will decide to behave; because if they don't, I shall have to take measures which, unfortunately, had to be taken with some other boys, that is, dismiss them.

Now that subject is closed. Let us all unite in properly celebrating the coming feasts of St. John, St. Aloysius, and St. Peter, and then we shall all be happy . . . . .

On the day before his name day joy was the keynote of the Oratory. Rain made it necessary to move from the playground where everything had been prepared for the entertainment to the big study hall that was now fittingly decorated. The teacher's desk was replaced by an armchair for Don Bosco, flanked by chairs for guests and Superiors. The choir had places on a temporary platform to the right; the students stood at the left, the artisans in front.

After hearing confessions for several hours, Don Bosco appeared at about ten o'clock and was greeted by thunderous applause. He was hailed with a hymn written by Father Lemoyne and set to music by Father Cagliero. The previous year Father Lemoyne had also read an original poem, but some remarks had been made by a certain reader. This is mentioned by Father Rua in a note to the handwritten minutes of the Oratory Chapter meeting of June 21, 1874: "The poem was very nice but the Archbishop considered it somewhat overlaudatory." If that was all the critic had to say, then the author had every good reason to be transported with joy. The hymn was followed by recitations in prose and poetry, either memorized or read, and finally by the presentation of gifts. With their small savings the boys had purchased objects for the church; the poor children showed their good heart by scraping a total of 200 lire; the artisans contributed 113 lire; the students, 87. The ceremony lasted barely an hour; Don Bosco gave the closing address. After expressing his joy and thanks to all, he continued:

Most of you have read poems, and a certain margin of exaggeration is permitted to the poet. I do not deserve what you said about me; nevertheless your words revealed your kind hearts, and for this reason I appreciate your praise. Most of you who read something concluded by saying: "Since I have nothing else to offer, I give you my heart and promise from now on to make Don Bosco happy with my good behavior." Yes, this is exactly what I want. I ask nothing more of you than to let me take possession of your hearts, so that together we

can adorn them with many virtues and offer them as a gift to St. John so that he may present them to God. I have dedicated my whole life to you; and what I say about myself is to be understood as applying to all your Superiors because they help me to save your souls. All that you say about me (my activities, my dedication, and my self-sacrifice) must be understood to apply not to me alone but to everyone else who works with me for your benefit. Now I assure you that I have always done whatever I could for you; I cannot promise that I shall do more than I have done, but I do promise to go on working for boys as long as our Lord shall permit me to remain in this world.

The twenty-fourth dawned bright. There was general attendance at Communion. The boys were jubilant as they streamed from the church. Don Bosco, having heard confessions all morning, said Mass at 10 A.M. As he was on his way to the dining room for breakfast and the boys were returning to church for high Mass, the Festive Oratory band arrived, escorting a large group of men including alumni. They, too, were bringing him gifts.

The musicians were also alumni. Don Bosco himself had encouraged them to organize their own band so that Turin might have a band made up of good Catholics. He had even drawn up some rules for them: they were to accept only alumni who had not been dismissed from the Oratory; they were to receive the Sacraments frequently; they were never to perform in public theaters; on the other hand, they were encouraged to offer their services freely at religious functions; and they were mutually to assist one another. Within a few months, Don Bosco's suggestion had become a reality when thirty of his best alumni joined together in a musical society.

Naturally, it was [Charles] Gastini who had suggested this filial demonstration. Pooling their small contributions, they had bought a handsome monstrance about three feet high which, also in the name of those absent, they presented to Don Bosco. There was also a repertoire of poetry, prose, and jokes by Gastini. After thanking them cordially, Don Bosco invited them to dinner. Other gifts arrived as well, but what delighted him most were the letters he received filled with expressions of affection, gratitude, and generosity.

The services in church were solemn and devout. Toward evening Don Bosco officiated at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Everyone was delighted since he did this only two or three times a year. He sang High Mass only on Christmas Eve, and he had not officiated at solemn vespers since 1850.

At sunset there was a cloudburst, so the second entertainment also had to be staged in the big study hall. The first one had been for the intimate family circle, but it was customary to invite a number of guests on the second evening. After the opening hymn, students from noble families at the college of Valsalice gave Don Bosco a magnificent chandelier; some 200 boys of the Festive Oratory were there with an address and a bouquet of flowers. With a full heart Don Bosco thanked everyone present and told them why his heart was flooded with joy:

Between yesterday and this evening you have said many beautiful things to me. If I could only extend the same benefits that are yours to many more thousands of poor boys! I believe that the thoughts of so many boys, without father, or friend, or persons to advise them, who lack the necessities of their physical and moral welfare because there is no one to take care of them, should also awaken in you a feeling of gratitude to Divine Providence and should strengthen your resolve to make good use of the benefits you have received. Please do this. If you only knew the dangers to which people living in the world are exposed and how many allow themselves to be deceived by its attractions! And now remember: the only thing necessary is to save our souls.

This thought is most important! Many of you have wished me a long life. No, my dear children. It is an error to wish for a long life. We are in the hands of Divine Providence. What really matters is not whether we have a long or a short life, but that we live well the life God gives us; that we dedicate it entirely to His honor and glory. As for the rest, leave it to God whether this life is to be long or short, and let Him do with us whatever He thinks best.

Then, enunciating his words very clearly, he concluded: "St. John the Baptist became the greatest saint in Heaven through his life of solitude, mortification, and zeal for the glory of God."

There was a brief extension of the festivities on the next day. On the afternoon of the 25th, he was visited by 150 boys from the

St. Aloysius Oratory together with their teacher, the coadjutor Brother Macagno, Father [Matthew] Abrate, the director of a private high school near that Oratory, and several of his students who were going to take examinations preparatory to clerical investiture. They had come to express their greetings. Don Bosco received them in the library, where Father [Louis] Guanella, Director of St. Aloysius Oratory introduced them. Don Bosco, the good Father, listened affectionately and then said:

Thank you for the lovely flower bouquets you have given me and for what you say in your letters and poems. I am delighted with all you have done. But it is all due to the goodness of those in charge of you; so your words of gratitude should be addressed to them, not to me. They take care of you! I do not do a thing for you. So thank Father Guanella, Father Abrate, and your teacher, Brother Macagno.

What I do recommend is this: Go gladly to [church services at] your Oratory every Sunday, both morning and afternoon. Take your friends with you. It is true that at present you have a cubby hole rather than a chapel, but I hope you will have more comfortable premises—larger and more convenient—very soon, and that you will also have more and better fun. I am happy when you enjoy yourselves, when you play and are lighthearted. In this way you can become saints like St. Aloysius as long as you try to avoid sin. Just ask Father Louis if you need anything in particular. He will let me know. Of course, I would much rather accept into this school boys who have already attended our Oratories and who behave themselves. Now tell me something? When should you start to be good?

"We should begin when we are little boys," someone said. Then another added, "From our earliest years."

That is correct, Don Bosco said, from your earliest years. What would have become of St. Aloysius had he waited until he was a man before trying to be good? He would never have succeeded. Had he said, "I shall begin to follow the path of virtue when I am twenty-five," he would have died without being able to carry out his intention. So start at once to be good. We may say that by the time St. Aloysius was four years old he had already given himself entirely to God. Now all of you are older than four. So take heart; be cheerful and obedient and our Lord will bless you.

Among other things I want you to foster the Sodality of St. Aloysius at your Oratory. Urge many boys to join it and to keep its rules.

I hope to see you again. Either you yourselves will come to visit me, and I'll always be glad when you do, or maybe I shall come to see you now and then. We shall also have to choose some feast on which all of you, that is all who have already made your First Communion may come home for confession and Holy Communion. On that day I will see to it that all of you will have a nice big roll with a thick slice of salami for breakfast.

Be cheerful then. Remember me in your prayers and always be grateful to your benefactors.

They asked for his blessing. Then, accompanied by their teachers, they returned home happy and contented.

During those days 600 letters from his boys were delivered to his room. They not only expressed best wishes and congratulations, but contained requests for rules to live by and for advice on vocation, along with wishes they hoped to see fulfilled and problems to be solved. He read them and in time showed that he had read them by replying to one or another as circumstances required.

Good Nights

Don Bosco's *Good Nights* give us an insight into the life of the Oratory, just as they inspired it when they were given. In the very few preserved for us we can discover certain aspects of daily life that could not have been captured even in a chronicle. They also give us detailed accounts of some intimate celebrations, and we shall insert them here more appropriately than in any other part of this narrative. We shall record them in chronological order, adding brief comments where necessary.

APRIL 18: *Patronage of St. Joseph. How To Honor the Saints.*

Today, dear boys, we celebrate the patronage of St. Joseph, and I can tell you with genuine satisfaction that I am happy! I am satisfied with all of you, very satisfied, indeed, because I see that many of you are really not only painstaking but persevering in all your duties in church and out, in the dining room, the dormitory, the study hall, and the classroom. I want to express my satisfaction to all of these boys because they truly make me happy.

Though I have words of praise for the good boys, on the other hand, it is true that I also have words of reproach for others who, though not actually bad, are, so to speak, neither hot nor cold (though we may hope their fervor will grow warmer now that summer is approaching). I refer to those boys who know it is right to go to church, and to pray, to persevere in doing their duty; they know it, and admit it. But for them to know is one thing and to do is another. They seem to find some very serious obstacle preventing them from acting; but this obstacle is really their own indifference.

A few days ago something rather ridiculous happened in this regard. One of these youngsters came into the sacristy with others for confession. The funny thing is that he had come for confession, yet he kept yielding his place to his companions who had come with the sincere intention of laying bare their conscience and ridding themselves of sin. Finally, only a few boys were left; it was now his turn. If you think he went to confession, you are mistaken, because even then he told the boy next to him to go ahead. He replied, "You go."

"No, you go!" the other whispered.

"No, you go!" he repeated.

"Take my place," that scatterbrain insisted. So saying he stepped back again. A moment later there was a thump outside. The large basket, full of breakfast rolls, had hit the ground. There and then, the boy took off like a deer at top speed.

What eagerness for confession! What I have said is just an aside, and I think it merely a youthful prank. Nevertheless, to return to the subject, I mean that such boys know it is a fine thing to be good, but they really do not make the effort. Do you know why? Listen. Some believe that knowledge alone suffices to be good. They think that they have devotion to St. Joseph if they know his life or a few episodes from it. How wrong they are! That is not the way it is at all, dear boys; it takes more than that. If you really mean to be good, you have to know what is right and do it. For example, it is fine to know that going to church and praying are good; but you also have to pray, and pray devoutly. It is fine to know that it is good to go to confession, but then you must go with a sincere determination and for the good of your soul. Mere feelings and idle prayers are not enough; there must be a firm resolve and then amendment. This is the way to honor the saints. Unfortunately mistaken beliefs to the contrary are quite common, and that is very wrong. In conclusion, do you want to be sincerely devoted to St. Joseph? Then imitate his virtues, and when you die, you will be glad that you did. Good night.

The next two talks concerned the students' retreat. Father [James] Costamagna gave the instruction and Father [Francis] Dalmazzo preached the meditations. Don Bosco referred to both of them as "belonging to the House," although one of them was the spiritual Director of the Sisters at Mornese and the other was Director of the college at Valsalice. No matter where they resided, the Salesians always considered themselves, and were considered, as intimately united with the family that surrounded Don Bosco at the Oratory from which Don Bosco had picked them for other assignments.

APRIL 23: *How To Make a Retreat Properly. Study Your Vocation.*

This evening we must have a talk together, my dear boys. Do you want to be Don Bosco's friends?

(Everyone) Yes! Yes!

Good! Then as Don Bosco's friends are you prepared to do whatever he tells you?

Yes! Yes!

Good! Then if he tells you to make the retreat properly, you will do that?

Yes! Yes!

Then everything is fine! With so much goodwill on your part I hope that we can do great things. Retreats, my boys, are of the greatest importance and are very, very helpful. It's true that all of you are already virtuous and holy. Nevertheless, you ought to know that retreats can be very helpful even to those who are good; they always add new zest, renew energy and strengthen the spirit that has flagged. Everyone needs to examine his conscience, to refresh his weariness. The Apostle tells you so explicitly: *Qui sanctus est, sanctificetur adhuc, qui iustus est, iustificetur adhuc* [He who is just, let him be just still; and he who is holy, let him be hallowed still. *Apoc.* 22, 11]; he who is good and virtuous should continue to progress in goodness and in virtue; he who is holy should aspire to greater saintliness and should become more holy.

Over and above this, every year on occasions like this, I usually urge boys very earnestly to think seriously about their vocations, especially those boys who are about to graduate from high school. This is something that concerns you very intimately, dear boys, because in many cases your happiness here on earth (whatever form it may take) and your eternal salvation in the next world may hinge on whether

or not you give thought to the way of life to which God has called you. For this a general confession of your past life, if you have never made one before, or one covering the time since your last general confession, is of the greatest importance. Anyone who wishes to confess to the preachers shall have the opportunity to do so; but I advise you, and so do the saints, to discuss such an important matter as the vocation to which God has called you with your regular confessor. Since he knows your past behavior and is furthermore enlightened by the special understanding that God usually bestows on him at such a time, he will be able to ascertain with greater ease and certainty which path, among all others, God has marked out for you. In saying this I do not mean that you should confess to your regular confessor and then through fear or shame conceal some sin you may have committed. No! If that is the case, I change my advice and say that it is better to pick a different confessor every time rather than even once to conceal a grave sin through fear.

Therefore, my children, now that you have this fine opportunity to make a retreat, give serious thought to your vocation, especially you who are in the upper grades. This is a most propitious moment when the Lord usually enlightens us and extends His grace. I must say this because despite my advice that everyone think about his future, there are always some careless boys who make their retreat thoughtlessly and let the opportunity pass. Then when it is time to decide, they are confused and do not know what to do. Then they go to their confessor and ask him about their vocation. "My dear boy," the confessor will say to them, "didn't you decide all this during the retreat?" And they answer, "I forgot." Now what advice can the confessor give to such empty heads? That will be a time of uncertainty and confusion. Naturally, the boy will have to decide on some course but he will always have doubts about the way of life he has chosen. Therefore, if you really wish to be Don Bosco's friends, think about this during your retreat. Do everything I have told you, and you can be sure that it will be very good for your soul. Good night.

APRIL 25: *Praise for boys who make the retreat in the proper Spirit. A warning to those who are not good that a well-made retreat may prevent their expulsion from the House.*

I am very happy to see how careful all of you are at the very outset to observe silence. This is most certainly one of the principal and most helpful requirements for a retreat; at the same time, it shows

that you intend to become virtuous. You are virtuous already, and, now that I stop to think of it, this retreat might even be unnecessary for many, if not all, of you. I am pleased to admit that a great many of you are indeed a comfort to me and make me very happy. You are also industrious in every way, whether at study, prayer or your other duties.

I say a great many of you, because if I am encouraged and gratified by your good conduct, in general I am grieved by a few who want no part of study, prayer, or obedience to the rules. Nor are they a mere handful; there is about one in every thirty. The Superiors discussed their conduct and almost decided to send them home; but the opportunity offered by this retreat led them to postpone such regrettable decision. Some of the Superiors hope that the boys will mend their ways and seriously try to behave as they should. I want the boys in this category to understand quite plainly what the alternatives are: they must either change their ways or pack up and go. I therefore advise them to take advantage of the present retreat and resolve to behave.

As for those who are already good, I can only encourage them to persevere and advance rapidly along the road to perfection. There are no obstacles to this goal for either group of boys. Both preachers belong to the House. They grew up here with us, and they know the Oratory and the needs of the boys they live with and preach to. They are very much interested in you and only seek your well-being. So, in this respect, you lack nothing. It is entirely up to you to profit from the generous efforts that they and your other Superiors make for you. Redouble your goodwill and the Lord will not fail to reward it with all His blessings. Good night.

Just as Father Cafasso had been the ordinary confessor at the *Convitto Ecclesiastico,* so was Don Bosco at the Oratory and the Directors in their own school. The system was in general use until 1900. One evening during the retreat Father Costamagna in a conversation gave occasion to Don Bosco to express himself on whether or not a Director should hear the confessions of his own boys also during the retreat. Don Bosco said: "Allow Don Bosco to be an exception and to continue confessing his boys even during the retreat, but as a rule it is unwise for a Director to do so. I say, as a rule, because there may be some boy who is sincere with his Director and chooses to confess to him. Being well-known to his

Director he can be brief, whereas he would have to explain a number of things to another confessor. This is how I look at it. The boys should be told that confessions will be heard by the preachers, that they are quite free to go to them, and that it is permissible, even advisable, to change confessors during the retreat. Then if any boy still wishes to confess to his Director he should be told to go either to the Director's room or to some other uncomfortable or unattractive place. In this way only those boys who really want to confess to him and have no ulterior motive will do so."

The boys liked so much to go to Don Bosco for confession that on the last evening of the retreat he left the confessional very late and was weary to the point of exhaustion; in fact, he was so tired that contrary to his usual custom he asked the boys who were still waiting to return the next morning.

At supper he entertained those at table with him by telling them about the cake of robiola cheese which was served to them.

A few days before, one of the third-year high school boys who had been home because of illness returned to the Oratory. After greeting Don Bosco he hold him that his parents were no longer able to pay either the overdue, or the current fees. "The only thing we can do to repay you in some way is to give you these six cakes of cheese," he said with much grace and ease. Don Bosco knew that he was an excellent boy, the best in his class. "Can't your parents do anything more than this?" he asked. "No, nothing more! But there is one thing I could do: make a general confession to you." Don Bosco laughed, thinking the boy was joking. But the next day he presented himself very seriously to make a general confession. Don Bosco remarked in concluding his story that each cake of that cheese from Brianza was worth fifty centesimi.

He then mentioned the great patience of the boys who were waiting for their turn at confession. For two or three hours many of them had knelt motionlessly without leaning against the pews. Sometimes they had even let other boys go ahead of them although they themselves had been waiting for such a long time. "That is a real test of great virtue," Don Bosco said.

We now come to two *Good Nights* given on two consecutive evenings during the early part of the month of Mary. They complement each other. In the second talk Don Bosco resorts to the

dialogue form which he often used when he proverbially "wished to pluck a goose without making it squawk." Every day the number of boys who wanted to become priests increased, and all of them came from very poor families. Without discernment on the part of Superiors many of them might become priests for material reasons rather than for any genuine zeal for souls. Naturally, Don Bosco felt that it was preferable to have one priest less than one scandal more in the Church. Furthermore, it was necessary to interest them in the Salesian Society. In short, it was a very delicate topic and so for the second talk he chose the dialogue form. It was carefully planned and not improvised.

MAY 10: *The selflessness demanded by a vocation to the priesthood. The safety that the weak [in virtue] find in religious Congregations.*

We are now in the lovely month of Mary and also in the middle of the novena to the Holy Spirit. I wish all of you would try and even resolve to make the May devotions and this novena with great diligence. Pray to the Holy Spirit during these days to enlighten you and make known to you what our Lord wants from you. Think about your vocation, all of you, especially you who are in the upper grades. Remember, this is one of the most important periods of your life. I would hope that, either during this novena or the one in honor of Mary Help of Christians that will follow, those of you who must reach a final decision, will do so. However, no one should enter the ecclesiastical state unless he is called to it by God. Likewise no one who is called by our Lord to serve Him in His Church should choose any other path of life.

Now I want to talk to you about a very serious error that unfortunately is deep-seated in both parents and children and you may have heard it also from persons in authority. "Become a priest," they say, "and then you will have a respected place in society and at the same time you will be able to help your parents." Boys, never let any of you enter the priesthood in order to help your parents! If you want to help them, choose some other career in which you can earn all the money you need. The man who wants to be a priest must work solely to win souls for God.

Here I must answer some of the questions that pastors and other prominent persons have asked me. They say, "Why does Don Bosco

suggest to some of his boys to become priests as long as they are willing to enter a religious Congregation, but advises against such a step if their intention is to join the diocesan clergy?" Dear boys, this is the reason: Many boys are virtuous and assiduously fulfill their religious duties as long as they live a secluded life; but they fail if they live in the world for even a short time because of its many temptations. Therefore, when I see that a boy leads an exemplary life as long as he stays at the Oratory or one of the schools, but falls into sin and reverts to his former habits whenever he goes home on vacation; and then when he returns he again resolves to do what is right and diligently carries out his religious duties, only once more to fall seriously as soon as he goes home, if he asks my advice about his vocation I unhesitatingly answer, "Do not enter the priesthood if you intend to become a secular priest—pastor or curate. It would be your ruin and the ruin of who knows how many other souls. Yet, if you feel a genuine call to the priesthood and are determined to lead a life of withdrawal from the world in some religious Congregation or Order, then I readily advise you and permit you to study for the priesthood."

Believe me, this has caused me much trouble because some people say, "Don Bosco advised so-and-so to become a cleric but later they had to expel him from the seminary; he advised someone else to become a priest, and now he is living a life far from exemplary." These critics of mine do not know that I told these same boys that they would be good clerics and good priests only if they lived a cloistered life. They asked me what I meant by this and I explained it to them.

I believe that if you boys will remember this advice you will not be swayed by any material considerations in choosing your vocation, and that those who are called to the priesthood will embrace it, and those who are not called will not do so. Then you will be sure of the path you are to follow, and you will be certain of your salvation. Pray to the Holy Spirit and to the Blessed Virgin to enlighten and help you.

May 11: *Again on the selflessness demanded by a vocation to the priesthood. Three objections answered.*

Father Barberis: (after a few remarks of Don Bosco) May I say something?

Don Bosco: Let us hear what you have to say.

Father Barberis: All work deserves a wage; therefore it is only right that priests earn money for their work.

Don Bosco: That's true. I do not expect priests who work in the

sacred ministry to fast all day. People who work must also eat and have whatever is necessary for life. St. Paul says so explicitly: *Qui altari servit, dealtari vivat.* [He who serves the altar should have a share with the altar. *Cf.* 1 *Cor.* 9, 13.] But over and above food, a priest's wages should be souls and nothing else. It is a known fact that whoever is after material possessions rarely succeed in converting many souls or take care of the eternal salvation of the souls entrusted to him. Instead, how many people are converted by the priest who is not concerned with making money or with providing for his family. That is why, and keep this in mind, St. Paul does not want priests to entangle themselves in worldly affairs, *non implicat se negotiis saecularibus* [does not entangle himself in worldly affairs. 2 *Tim.*, 2, 4]. Neither should a priest busy himself with buying, selling, or investing—nothing of that kind.

Father Barberis: May I say something else, Don Bosco? We know that the major interest of a priest should be the welfare of souls. Nevertheless, one of the commandments of God is: *Honor thy father and thy mother.* The word *honor* also means assist. Therefore, if all should vie with one another in assisting their parents, much more so the priest.

Don Bosco: I do not object that a father and mother be assisted when in need. But if this is your main reason for becoming a priest, then you should take up some other trade or profession, go into business, or some other more profitable enterprise, but should not become a priest. The moment you become a priest everyone who has a soul becomes your relative, and you must think of that and nothing else. Our Divine Lord wanted to exemplify this in a truly magnificent manner. While He was preaching to the multitude, someone came up to Him and said, "Thy Mother is outside looking for thee." And He replied, "Who is my Mother? In truth I say to you that all those who hear the word of God, and live by it, are my father, my mother, and my brothers." Jesus went even further and to the limit. He said: "He who does not hate his father, mother, brothers, and sisters, cannot be my disciple." So remember that the sacred character of the priesthood entails total detachment from the things of the world. All theologians agree on this and assert: *Bona clericorum sunt patrimonia pauperum:* the possessions of clerics—and by *cleric* here they mean *priest*—are the heritage of the poor.

Father Barberis: I think there is nothing else to be said. I felt exactly as you do but my only reason for asking was that I wanted a precise, categorical answer: people ask me about such things. However, may I repeat a remark that was made to me today? There are many in authority, men of learning and even priests who are not quite so strict about this same point. In fact they say, "By all means become a priest because then

you can do this and that, make money, buy things, and build up a good bank account."

Don Bosco: Of course I know there are such people, and unfortunately, not just a few. I know of others who not only say so, but do so. I'm not going to investigate what they do. They may act in good faith, or perhaps they know of some other Gospel different from the one I follow. The truth is that our Lord spoke as I just told you. So did St. Paul, and so did the Fathers of the Church who commented on the Scriptures. (*He then went on to some other reflections, and at last wished the boys good night.* Chronicler's note.)

Here are two *Good Nights* given during the novena of Mary Help of Christians. There is an allusion in the first one to a dream that we shall relate further on. The humorous reference to "money" introduces an order given two evenings later with even greater humor. On feast days the Prefect allowed the boys to spend some of their pocket money for things on sale at the Oratory and within a certain amount: tokens or coupons were used instead of money. There were booths for refreshments and other things, especially books, at greatly reduced prices.

May 18: *Ask the Madonna for Good Health and Purity.*

The novena of Mary Help of Christians has not only begun but is already well under way. This means that for her feast you must not only have some money ready, but also your hearts so that you can receive many graces from the Virgin Mary. During this novena ask our Lady, among other favors, for two in particular. The first is that Mary Help of Christians grant you the health you need to continue your studies and prepare for the examinations which, like it or not, are coming very soon. In fact the boys who are to take them elsewhere have just about two months left. So it is high time to start thinking about them.

But the principal favor that I want all of you to ask of her, and the source of all other favors, is this: all, and I mean all of you, must ask her to help you preserve the lovely virtue of purity. This is the virtue that the Virgin Mary loves most. Where there is purity there is everything else. Without purity there is nothing at all. We may truly say that this virtue is the source of all others: *venerunt omnia bona pariter cum illa* [all good things together came to me in her company. *Wisd.* 7, 11].

Suffice it to say that he who possesses this virtue flies straight to the shelter of the Blessed Virgin's mantle; he who was wounded and therefore lost it but later regained it and tries to hold on to it in every way he can, runs; he who does not treasure it as he should, will barely walk; and he who does not possess it at all, just crawls along.

Therefore ask her for this grace, and make every possible effort to acquire it. Those who have never lost the beautiful virtue of purity follow the Lamb wherever He goes, singing a canticle that no one else can learn. But since this virtue is so fragile, we must earnestly pray to the Blessed Virgin again and again and avoid every occasion that might lead to its loss. Such are dubious companions or indelicate expressions spoken or looked up in dictionaries. I beg you to avoid all such occasions! Do everything that can help you keep this inestimable treasure, such as fervent and frequent Communion, genuine devotion to the Blessed Virgin, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and so on. I hope you will do this. Then you will be really happy, so happy that whatever we say now about our future happiness is nothing by comparison.

MAY 20: *Explanation of the words of the Gospel: He who does not hate his father and his mother cannot be my disciple.*

Dear boys, as in past years we have decided that the currency to be used for the feast of Mary Help of Christians shall be minted at the National Bank of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. No other currency will be accepted. As you may have realized on previous occasions, this measure is taken to avoid certain irregularities that could take place.

[*What follows is in dialogue form. Father Barberis asked and obtained permission to speak.*—Editor]

Father Barberis: With your permission, Don Bosco, I would like to ask some questions on what you said about vocations.

Don Bosco: Speak up.

Father Barberis: The other day you quoted these words from the Holy Gospel, *If anyone does not hate his father and mother he cannot be my disciple;* but you did not explain them. Many have asked me about this, and I replied that the words should not be taken in a literal sense. Rather they must be understood to mean that when the wishes of parents are in direct conflict with the clearly manifested will of God, as, for example, in the case of parents opposing their son, a pagan, wishing to become a Christian; or a Protestant wishing to become a Catholic or, also when parents object to someone's following a certain vocation to the

priesthood, in such instances, rather than acting contrary to the will of God one should obey the Lord's call and, in a sense, hate one's own parents—that is, not obey them.

Don Bosco: That is true enough, but I would add something else. We must overcome the love of our own flesh and blood, not only in such instances, but also at any other time and in any other circumstances when it becomes necessary for the greater glory of God. Please note that it is not Don Bosco who says this, as some of you have foolishly asserted. Some parents also made this remark, "That's what Don Bosco says! Why does he say such things to the boys?" Now listen to me. It is not I who say this, but our Divine Savior. The only reason why I mention it is because I believe it is necessary and very important. It is also because I am anxious to explain the words of Jesus Christ to you. Let us consider the circumstances under which He spoke these words. He was preaching to the crowds. His mother Mary came with some of His cousins and relatives who according to custom were called brothers. They wanted to speak to Him. Those standing near the Divine Savior told Him, "Your Mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You." And Jesus replied, "Who is My mother? Who are My brothers? My mother and My brothers are those who hear the Word of God." In another passage He said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, he cannot be My disciple" (*Luke* 14, 26). "I have come to set a man at variance with his father and a daughter with her mother. . . . A man's enemies will be those of his own household" (Matt. 10, 35-36).

Does not all this show that whatever redounds to the greater glory of God demands such detachment? Therefore, it is not Don Bosco who says this but God Himself

Besides, never forget that God generously rewards sacrifices made in obedience to His Holy Will.

To conclude, notice that in our own case he who enters religious life may seem not to care about his parents; yet, he will always be able to give them advice worth more than so much gold; he will pray for them more fervently, and prayer obtains every happiness, even temporal. How often parents have good fortune without any idea of how it came about. It was their son's prayers that obtained it. How often business prospers, lawsuits are won, disputes settled, and all because of prayer. Isn't this helping one's parents, helping in a much more effective way than giving a little money? And then, do you really think that God who rewards even a glass of water given in His name would not

reward this sacrifice that costs the heart so much? (*In the manuscript the talk ends here.*)

There are no other *Good Nights* until after the feast of Mary Help of Christians. On that day huge crowds went to Communion, and many more came to receive the blessing of Mary Help of Christians from Don Bosco. Since the steady flow was endless, he dismissed the pilgrims with a general blessing when it was time for High Mass.

Later, when he went to his rooms he found in the waiting room a group of distinguished ladies who had come from Milan for the solemnities. With utmost simplicity he took from his pockets fifty or more offerings in bills and jewelry given to him that morning in gratitude for graces received. He then told them of a rather extraordinary thing. Four days before Count Vialardi was dying. Don Bosco had called on him and realized that it was time to give him Holy Viaticum. He urged the Count to have faith in Mary Help of Christians and assured him that he would live and would come to the church of Mary Help of Christians on her feast to receive Communion. Nobody in the Count's family believed it possible, yet that very morning the Count had come and received Communion. Now Don Bosco showed the offering that the Count had made in honor of Mary Help of Christians.

There was a large rug in the sanctuary of the church of Mary Help of Christians. It was greatly admired as the work and gift of some noble Florentine ladies who had embroidered these words along the front border: *Mariae Auxiliatrici in suam suorumque tutelam Matronae Florentinae, anno MDCCCLXXV*. [From some Florentine ladies to Mary Help of Christians to obtain her protection for themselves and their dear ones—1875.] They were highly honored by the letter that Don Bosco sent them to express his gratitude. We know neither why the letter was written in this particular form nor why there was delay in sending it.[11]

[11] The superb rug, worn by time and usage, was still displayed twice a year on the feast of the Immaculate Conception and at Christmas until recently. In 1930, the expert care with which the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians cleaned and mended it, again restored the exceptional beauty of the work.

Turin, October 1, 1875

To the greater glory of God and the honor of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, the powerful Help of Christians, in perpetual remembrance of the fervent piety of the Noble Ladies of Florence, I make the following declaration:

Inspired by a spirit of charity and devotion to the mighty Queen of Heaven, a number of noble Florentine ladies not only generously helped build the church consecrated to Mary Help of Christians in Turin, but also added a public and permanent token of their sincere devotion to their heavenly Benefactress by weaving the beautiful rug as described above.

The work was completed on May 15, 1875, and sent to its destination in Turin. With utmost gratitude I accept this precious gift and formally promise that it shall forever remain the property of the donors. I am happy to use it for the adornment of God's house and in honor of her whom the Church proclaims the mighty Help of Christians.

In addition to my own lasting gratitude I immediately inscribed on the list of distinguished benefactors the names of those ladies who contributed to this zealous act of charity by their handicraft and their donations. Every morning and evening special private and public prayers are, and will be, offered to God in this sacred building at the altar dedicated to the Virgin Help of Christians, to invoke Heaven's blessings on them and their families.

Finally, I declare that these obligations shall apply to myself and to my successors forever. I gratefully remain,

Your devoted servant,

Fr. John Bosco

During the course of the novena Don Bosco received many letters attesting to extraordinary occurrences. People came on pilgrimage from Genoa, Savona, Ovada, Chioggia, Bologna, Florence, and Rome. During the sermon the congregation crowded about the altars, the stairways, and the confessionals; while outside, the playgrounds, the church square, and the adjoining streets were jammed with people. Yet there was not the least disorder.

Don Bosco was exhausted from his endless audiences. Some

people would not leave Turin until he had granted them an interview. Yet, his sons always found him just as calm and amiable as if everything were normal.

MAY 27: *Don Bosco's Words on the Feast of Corpus Christi*

This is one of the most important feasts of the Church. *Corpus Christi!* In thanksgiving for His great gift in giving Himself to us as nourishment for our souls, I wish everyone of you would promise our Lord something: two things in particular:

1. Receive Communion frequently and devoutly.
2. Try to enrich your hearts with virtue and avoid sin so that Jesus may come to you and willingly dwell with you. *He then went on warmly explaining these two concepts.*

MAY 28: *Devout celebration of the six Sundays in honor of St. Aloysius. Intercession of this Saint for the virtue of purity. Special exhortation to unruly boys.*

The six Sundays in honor of St. Aloysius begin the day after tomorrow. You may gain a plenary indulgence every time you say a few prayers for the intention of the Pope besides going to confession and Communion. For the sake of consistency in carrying out these devotions, we shall follow the routine of former years. In church the appropriate portion of the *Companion of Youth* will be read aloud. I want to point out, however, that you need not follow these devotions or say the prayers exactly as they are in the prayer book. If someone finds other devotions, such as the Joys of Mary, the Little Office, or the penitential psalms more agreeable or suitable, that will be just as good and the plenary indulgence may still be gained. The prayers in the book are mainly for the sake of uniformity when they are recited in public. Unless otherwise prevented, we shall celebrate the feast on Sunday, June 27.

Let us observe these six Sundays devoutly. Since St. Aloysius is the special patron of purity, let us consecrate this virtue to him in particular and do all we can to preserve it untarnished. Recently, we celebrated the feast of Mary Help of Christians, and many good resolutions were made. So let us strive more and more to be able to offer our lily unblemished to our Lord.

Most of you are determined to be good. Will there be a small group,

small but nevertheless harmful, that will remain cold and go on indulging in improper conversation? I hope not. For some of these boys the scales are about to be turned. We are patient, very much so, just to let them finish the school year rather than send them home in disgrace or put them out in the street. But I want you to know that in such cases my conscience does not allow me to forbear without limit. If we find that these boys indulge in improper conversation or are guilty of acts contrary to the virtue of purity, then there will be no delay. I shall be forced to expell them from the Oratory to prevent their infecting the others. Let these boys follow the example of the rest and decide, once and for all, to lead a good life. Please give poor Don Bosco this consolation so that he will not have to send any of you away. Give this consolation to St. Aloysius as well, and you, too, will feel happier both in this world and in the next because then you will be called to share the happiness that St. Aloysius enjoys in reward for his virtue.

The artisans began their retreat on the evening of May 30. After night prayers Don Bosco went to speak to them separately.

MAY 30: *Exhortation to the artisans to make a fervent retreat. Going out without permission. A few thoughts for the retreat. Accounts to be settled.*

I am very glad to be able to visit you now and then, for various reasons. First, I always like to visit my children; secondly, I can visit you artisans by yourselves; and then, I am visiting you on this occasion at the beginning of your retreat.

I know that you are happy and that most of you really intend to make the retreat fervently; this also pleases me very much. This is a wonderful opportunity to become saints; do not miss it. Although I can say this of most of you, there are nevertheless some among you who do not want to hear about this retreat and would not make it at all if they could help it. Poor boys! They do not understand how much good the retreat can do them! Yet, someone had better listen carefully because we may be forced to dismiss him before the end of this retreat. As regards others, we shall wait and see if there will be a radical change. If not, they too will soon have to be expelled.

Some boys are really determined to sow cockle. There is no way to make them put an end to their bad talk and diabolic work. I am sorry

to tell you that up to this very evening there were misdemeanors and that some even left the premises without permission. Elsewhere they would not be permitted to stay another night: that indeed is the punishment they deserve. But I do not want to take such extreme measures just now: I want these boys to realize that they have done something very wrong.

Now let me give you three thoughts to meditate upon during this retreat: the past, the present, and the future. The past: some boys may have to reexamine their conscience and set it in order. Take advantage of this opportunity and do it now. The present: some firm resolutions should be made and steps taken to put oneself in the grace of God. The future: one should think about the kind of life to be led and use the necessary means to reach his destination.

I have said there are a number of you who ought to think about their past life and review their past confessions. There are several reasons for it, believe me: (1) In most cases some things were forgotten, then [when they came back to mind] were let go, and finally not another thought was given to them. (2) Other things were overlooked in the belief that they were not as bad, whereas they actually are. They should be called back to mind, repented of, and confessed. For example, some of you may have thought nothing of a number of things you did against purity when you were younger. Others may have stolen just a little at a time and said to themselves, "It's not a mortal sin." You may have stolen some coffee coupons, for example, or broken a window, or damaged something and said to yourself, "No one saw me"—and so you did not confess it. But God did see you! And you did cause damage. Another boy may have ruined a piece of work or secretly done something for his own profit. And so on. If you have a chance to sneak something from the kitchen or the orchard you do it, thinking, "It's only a little thing." A single drop of water falling into a glass can hardly be seen, yet, drop by drop the glass is filled. If we damage the property of the same person again and again, our sin can become a serious one and we absolutely must be sorry for it and confess it. Another thing that hardly anyone feels he should confess is the scandal he gives. It is obvious that when someone has given bad example or scandal to others by his wrongdoing, he does not make a satisfactory confession if he only says, "I committed such and such a fault." Instead, he must confess that in committing this fault he also gave scandal. Furthermore, unfortunately in past confessions some of you deliberately concealed some sins. There is no way of get-

ting around this, you must make a clean breast of everything and so straighten things out.

You will have enough time during the retreat to take care of this important matter. Set things right with your conscience, and one day you will be happy that you did, because for a few of you this will certainly be the last retreat. One need not be a prophet to say this; it happens every year. There is always someone who dies in the course of the year and therefore cannot make another retreat. So resolve to make this retreat well. You have no idea how happy you will be at the hour of death for having done so. It is equally true that those of you who will live a long life will never regret having made this retreat well. A tranquil conscience is one of the greatest consolations in life. If our conscience is at peace, we have everything. If not, what happiness can we hope to find here on earth?

Avail yourselves of this wonderful opportunity for the good of your souls. Whoever is already good, let him try to become better; whoever is virtuous, let him make every effort to enrich his heart with new virtues, and whoever should reform his life, let him take heart and put his hand to this task with firmness and perseverance. He will be truly happy when death will come.

When Don Bosco mentioned the secret offenses, Father Barberis, who was standing among the boys, overheard two of the older ones say, "Who'd have thought Don Bosco knew we'd gone out! How did he find out? Now we're in for it!" Such unpleasant surprises were often the lot of the culprits; they thought they had gone undetected, yet Don Bosco knew.

On the last evening of the retreat Don Bosco again took his supper very late because of the many confessions. Father Dalmazzo, one of the preachers who had also sat in the confessional for a long time, exclaimed, "It has been a busy day!"

Don Bosco answered, "I'm glad that the boys have such great confidence in the preachers and willingly go to them to confession especially during the retreat. Yes, it is good when so many of them go. I heard as many confessions as I could. A great many boys came to me yesterday morning, last night, this morning, and again this evening. A lot of them left because they would have had to wait too long for their turn. We couldn't ask for anything better. This retreat seems to have done them a lot of good."

June 4 was the first Friday after the octave of *Corpus Christi.* On the previous evening [at the *Good Night*] Don Bosco had announced the feast of the Sacred Heart.

JUNE 3: *Nature of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart*

Tomorrow, dear boys, the Church celebrates the feast of the Sacred Heart. We, too, must try to honor it as best we can. It is true that the public solemnity has been postponed until Sunday; but in our hearts we can begin to celebrate the feast tomorrow by saying special prayers and receiving Communion devoutly. On Sunday we shall have the external celebration with music and whatever else may contribute to make Christian festivities so beautiful and majestic.

Now some of you want to know just what this feast stands for and why we honor the Sacred Heart in particular. It is the purpose of this feast to honor by a special remembrance the love that Jesus had for us in His incarnation and birth, in His life and preaching, and especially in His passion and death! Because the heart is the symbol of love, we adore the Sacred Heart as the source of this infinite love. This devotion to the Sacred Heart, that is, to the love that Jesus has for us, has always existed and always will, although formerly no special feast had been set aside for this specific purpose. In the sermon on Sunday you will hear how Jesus appeared to Blessed Margaret Alacoque and revealed to her the great favors that mankind will receive by honoring His adorable Heart with special devotion. You will also learn how this feast came about.

Now let each of us do all we can to correspond to the great love that Jesus has given us.

Two very important events were to be celebrated on June 16, the centenary of the revelation of the Sacred Heart to St. Margaret [Mary] Alacoque and the 25th anniversary of the reign of Pius IX. This date was therefore chosen for the Exercise for a Happy Death although it was only a short time since the close of the retreat. The boys went to Communion, and then their joy was doubled by a longer recreation. In the evening the whole Oratory joined in with the universal Church in an act of consecration to the Sacred Heart. First Father Rua explained the significance and value of this tribute from the pulpit, then the formula was read and

repeated aloud by the boys. At Benediction a solemn *Te Deum* was sung in thanksgiving to God for having given such a great Pope to the Church. Two small groups of choirboys were not present because they had gone to sing for the same celebration at San Benigno Canavese and at the church of St. Francis of Assisi in Turin. In the latter church the Oratory choirboys had taken part also in the triduum sponsored by the Turin Catholic Youth Club, a group always in the forefront of public demonstrations in honor of the Pope.

JUNE 6: *Exhortation to Brotherly Love*

Today we have kept the second Sunday in honor of St. Aloysius. From my heart I deeply wish that everyone would try to honor this saint and consecrate the month of June to him in a special way. Try especially to imitate his fervor at prayer, during visits to the Blessed Sacrament and when receiving Communion. I would like you to imitate another of his virtues, let each one of you, for his sake, practice brotherly charity. In his honor refrain from all slander and bitterness against your companions. Sometimes a boy may step on your toe or inadvertently stumble and bump into you, and immediately you blurt out a harsh word and sometimes are about to return a kick or blow. No! Remember what our Divine Redeemer so often said: *Mandatum novum do vobis, ut diligatis invicem sicut dilexi vos . . . In hoc cognoscent, quod discipuli mei estis, si diligatis invicem.* [A new commandment I give you, that you love one another. . . By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. *John* 13, 34-35.] This is the great, the new commandment, given to us by our Lord. It is not that Holy Scripture had previously taught something else, it is only that the practice was different. Consequently, it became a doctrine among the Jews that good should be done only to those who had done good to them, and that one was free to harm anybody who had harmed them, provided only that he did not exceed the harm originally inflicted.

We instead should try not to act so foolishly. Let us accept this new commandment and always love one another. Whenever you can do a favor for someone, do it; and if you are unable to, the other person should be understanding about it. Do you realize how great the advantage will be if we act this way in honor of St. Aloysius? We will rightfully call ourselves true devotees and followers of his here on earth;

we shall be assured of his protection in death and after a holy death our Lord will allow us to share his great happiness in Heaven.

JULY 7: *As we sow, so shall we reap.*

When you go out tomorrow for your weekly walk, my boys, you will see the farmers harvesting wheat. They tie it into bundles and the bundles are bound together into what are called sheaves. This reminds me of something we have read many times in Holy Scripture: *Quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet,* which means that as a man sows, so shall he reap. Now tell me, if the farmers who are now so pleased and delighted with their crop, had not taken the trouble to sow, weed and water their fields carefully at the proper time, would they now be able to rejoice at the harvest? They could not, of course, because one must sow if he wants to reap. That's how it will be with you. If you sow now, you will have the satisfaction of a good harvest when the time comes. But whoever shirks this work now will starve at harvest time.

And notice these words of Holy Scripture: *Quae seminaverit homo, haec et metet.* [What a man sows, that he will also reap. *Gal.* 6, 8.] You reap what you sow. If you sow wheat, you gather wheat; if you sow barley, you reap barley; if you sow corn, you gather corn, or oats, if you have sown oats. If you sow weeds, you shall reap weeds. If you want a good harvest, one that will be profitable, you must first sow good, profitable things. And remember that even though sowing takes hard work, your efforts are nothing compared to your joy at the harvest. The farmer is a wonderful example of this.

One other thing: If our crops are to grow and be fruitful, we must sow at the proper time; the wheat in the fall, the corn in the spring, and so on. Your crops will wither if not sown at the proper time. Now at what season must man sow? So-and-so (and he named the most troublesome boy in the House) will tell us.

"In our youth, the springtime of life."

"What about the man who does not sow when he is young."

"He won't reap anything in his old age."

"And what must one sow."

"Good works."

"And what about the man who sows weeds?

"He'll gather thorns in his old age."

"Good, good. Be sure to remember what you said. Everyone should remember it. You need it and all need it.

On the same subject Holy Scripture also says: *When they sow the wind they shall reap the whirlwind* [*Osee* 8, 7]. Wind is a symbol of the

passions; if you allow budding passions to dominate you now, they, like weeds, if not uprooted, will grow and, I can assure you, will arouse storms and tempests in your heart. For heavens sake, never let any passion take root. Woe unto you if you do! Your old age will be an unending storm. Remember that the strong passions which dominate men and make them commit so many evil and wicked deeds were not always strong and violent. Once they were insignificant, but they grew little by little. When passions begin to show up in a boy and he makes no effort to control them, but instead says, "Oh! they don't amount to anything," I fear. It is true that they are not violent yet, they are like weeds that have barely sprouted, but if they are left there, they will grow. The harmless cub grows into a fierce lion; the cute little bear cub into a frightful bear; the cuddly-looking tiger kitten into the most ferocious animal of all.

What I have said applies to every passion. But above all, I beg of you to tear from your hearts everything that is contrary to the beautiful virtue of purity. It may be a mere trifle, but one can never be too careful in protecting this beautiful virtue. On the other hand, the contrary vice is so bad a seed that if it is allowed to grow it is fatal. Always look to St. Aloysius as your model to imitate. Never let bad thoughts get hold of you. Be reserved in your looks, your deportment, your conversation, and in everything.

I especially urge the boys who are now about to decide on their vocations, to take a close look at themselves. This is the most important step in their entire life. No one should reach a decision without careful thought. All should consult someone in a position to give them good advice. Every year some boys take this important step thoughtlessly and then they tearfully regret it, but then often it is too late for regrets. Consider it carefully and be guided by the experience of others. Good night.

JULY 9: *Exhortation to observe silence in conformity with the rules.*

During the recent visits I made to our schools I noticed that one rule is obeyed scrupulously everywhere except here. A thousand times your attention was called to this rule, but it is still not obeyed. I shall give one last warning; this will make it one thousand and one times, and we'll see if this will produce results. It is my express wish that silence be kept when you go from the church to the study hall or the other way around; and also after night prayers. And this silence should not be broken until after Mass the next morning.

When I saw how this rule was obeyed in all our other schools but

not here at the Oratory, I wondered whether the other boys are better than those here. But I told myself that although there may be lots of good boys at the other schools, many of our boys here at the Oratory are way ahead of even the best boys there as far as conduct is concerned. Yet, the last time I issued this warning the desired response lasted only for a few days, and then I noticed that you again broke ranks when you came out of church, one racing here, another there. Sometimes, even after night prayers there was so much noise it would have shamed a chorus of howlers. Now I'll wait and see. I don't want to enforce silence by threats or punishments. It will be up to your own conscience to carry out diligently this reminder. If you will do so, you will please Don Bosco very much; but do not obey merely for this reason. Do it to please our Lord and our Blessed Mother.

How many little opportunities there are to acquire merit! If we have enough good sense to act as we should, a lot of merits will be ours. Be convinced that if we insist on the observance of seemingly minor rules, it is only for your own good. By obeying these directives which, after all, cost only a small sacrifice, unknowingly you will progress in virtue and grow richer in merits.

JULY 28: *Blessed is he who from his youth obeys God.*

While visiting one of the schools, I promised to give a prize to any pupil who could tell me in writing what it is that gives the greatest happiness here on earth. Wealth, intelligence, virtue, faith, hope, charity were mentioned by various boys, but no one gave the right answer. So I made up this simile for them. What will make a pony happy? The training it received while very young for the work it is to do in the course of its life. Now apply this simile to man. Then one of the boys recalled having read this maxim in a book of devotions: *Beatus homo cum portaverit iugum ab adolescentia sua* [*Lament,* 3, 27], which means: Blessed is the man who already in his youth has observed the commandments of God. The boy wrote the verse on a piece of paper and handed it to me. I read it aloud before the whole class and then said, "Now while you are young try to keep God's commandments and you will be happy both in this world and in the next." I say the same thing to you now. Do this and you will learn what joy it is to serve our Lord. Good night.

A talk which he gave on August 1, was directed in particular to the high school seniors. Fourteen of them had finished or were

just about to finish taking the examination for their high school diploma at the public high school *Monviso*. Some of these *Good Nights* were only summarized by those who took them down.

AUGUST 1: *Vocation. Avoid worldliness and receive the Sacraments often during vacation*

The high school boys, who are through with their examinations or are still taking them, are free to choose the path of life that suits them. Many of them will choose the priesthood; of these, some will prefer to enter the seminary, others to stay here. But before leaving for vacation it is advisable, even necessary, that each of them tell his Superiors what he intends to do next year. If their choice is to remain here they can be admitted without any difficulty as soon as they return, after first making their retreat at Lanzo. As regards those who wish to enter the seminary, if they will let me know, I shall write to their respective Bishops. A good recommendation will precede them to the seminary making it possible for them to be enrolled at once without a lengthy examination on their vocation. Now, what should a boy do during the summer holidays so as not to jeopardize his vocation or good deportment? Now listen: When I myself was a cleric in the seminary at Chieri, Father Borel came there once to give a retreat. He was gracious and friendly so I took heart and asked him the very same question. Without a moment's hesitation he replied, "Avoid worldliness and receive the Sacraments often, especially Holy Communion." The same advice I now give you. If you wish to remain virtuous and not choke your vocation, *avoid worldliness and receive the Sacraments often.* Good night.

AUGUST 3: *Announcement of the feast of St. Dominic.*

Tomorrow is the feast of St. Dominic. The Blessed Virgin Mary taught this saint how to say the holy rosary, and he was the first one ever to say it that way. He also added these words to the *Salve Regina*: *Dignare me laudare te, Virgo sacrata; da mihi virtutem contra hostes tuos.* [Grant that I may praise Thee, O sacred Virgin; give me strength against thy enemies.] I shall not give you now a complete life story of this saint or tell you of the favors our Lady showered upon him. I shall only urge you to say the rosary devoutly. Never let a day pass without saying it, especially when we say it together either to honor the Virgin Mary and St. Dominic, or to gain the indulgences attached to it, or also to obtain from the Blessed Virgin Mary the graces all of us need.

The three *Good Nights* that follow were inspired by the thought of death. The boys who were to graduate went home immediately after examinations and returned to the Oratory for the commencement exercises on the feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Naturally, their going home and the season of the year could not help affecting the fervor of some and the conduct of others. This, perhaps, explains the opportuneness of these reminders about the Last Things.

AUGUST 8: *How to make devoutly the novena in honor of the Assumption.*

The novena for the feast of the Assumption has already started. We are not holding any particular devotions at this time in the House, but we exhort all of you individually to perform some private act of piety, such as receiving Holy Communion frequently. You might also practice mortification of the eyes, of the tongue, or of the taste. We celebrate the feast of the Assumption to pray to Mary to obtain for us a happy departure similar to hers that could be better described as a tranquil sleep rather than death. I wish all of you a death like hers.

AUGUST 9: *Perseverance in virtue to ensure peace of mind at the hour of death.*

A lady has requested that we pray for her. We shall hold a triduum according to her intentions, and I hope that on Sunday, you good boys will offer your prayers and Communions for her.

Today I called on a very wealthy lady who is very ill. Servants, relatives, and friends were all busying themselves about her. The poor lady was about to appear before the judgment seat of God, but all they were concerned about was doctors, medicines, and consultations. She made her confession but afterwards still seemed uneasy and unable to resign herself to the thought of dying and leaving behind all her riches. The vanity of worldly things! I thought to myself: My boys are much happier than the rich and mighty of this world. They look upon death cheerfully and even desire to be rid of their bodies so that they may enjoy being with the Lord. We have seen this with the boys who have died here in the House; whereas rich people, even when they are not really bad, cannot help but fear the approach of death. People who go to church one day but get drunk on the next, who fast on Saturdays but eat meat

on Fridays, and so on, people who alternately serve God and the devil, cannot be blessed by God. They tremble when their last hour approaches.

But we who always live in the holy fear of God, at the end of our life shall endure death's agony without fear.

AUGUST 10: *The remorse of sinners at the hour of death. Worthless resolutions.*

Someone from one of our Houses was summoned home unexpectedly because his father was very ill. When he arrived, his father was already dead. We always pray for those who recommend themselves to our prayers, and it is right that we do so pray even more fervently for him. He was the father of one of our priests, a priest who works very hard for the welfare of souls.

I shall now return to the topic I discussed last night because it is very important—the subject of death. If we miss on this, we lose everything because we die only once.

A life of pleasure will become a great torment for people about to die. They remember that God gave them good health, and they used it for evil; that God gave them hands, and they used them for stealing and other sins. God gave them a tongue, and what did they do with it? They grumbled or perhaps even blasphemed God or took part in sinful conversation. God gave them eyes, and they used them to read evil books or look at indecent things. Perhaps God gave them money, and what did they do with it? They pampered their pride and gratified the whims of a dissolute life, they oppressed the weak and harmed the poor. What torment such thoughts must bring!

I do not want to dwell on these things. I hope they do not apply to us. You see, though, that a life of pleasure will breed torments not only at the hour of death, but also during any critical illness. Then those people will lament: "If only I had done this. If only I had done that!" Yet, when they recover they continue to live as they did before, oblivious of their resolutions. Wretched people! At the hour of death, what matters is *what you have done, not what you plan to do.*

So let us not wait until those final moments to give ourselves to God. Let us do it right now so that on Sunday, the feast of the Assumption, each one of us may say in his heart: "Were I to die this very moment, I would die happy in the firm hope of going to Heaven."

6. A Dream

In 1876 Father Joseph Vespignani who was then new at the Oratory, ventured to ask Don Bosco about his dreams. With the confidence of a son, he inquired what should be made of them. Don Bosco's answer was not specific but satisfactory. He told him that in his circumstances, without money or personnel, it would have been impossible to work for youth if Mary Help of Christians had not come to his assistance with special enlightenment and with abundant help, not only material but also spiritual.[12] Therefore, his dreams are to be interpreted as a special enlightenment and special aids from our Lady. The influence of Don Bosco's dreams in the life of the Oratory cannot be ignored by the historian. By this time, they were of themselves a domestic institution. The impact and remembrance of earlier dreams were now history, and the expectation of new ones was ever present. News of another dream aroused anticipation among young and old alike: its narration was eagerly listened to: its salutary effects were not long in coming.

In his *Good Night* on April 30, Don Bosco exhorted the boys to make devoutly the May devotions. After urging them, therefore, to greater diligence in the fulfillment of their duties and the choice of some special act of devotion in honor of Mary, he added that he had a dream to tell them, but since it was already late, he would tell it on the following Sunday, May 4.

The boys were beside themselves with impatience. Their curiosity was further aroused by another two days postponement because Don Bosco was too busy. Finally, on the evening of May 4, their curiosity was satisfied. After prayers Don Bosco addressed them as usual from the little pulpit.

Here I am to keep my promise. You know that dreams come during sleep. As the time for the retreat drew near I was wondering how my boys would make it and what I should suggest to make it fruitful. On Sunday night, April 25, the eve of the retreat, I went to bed with this thought in mind. I fell asleep immediately and I seemed to be standing

[12] Vespignani, G., *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco,* p. 34, S. Benigno Canavese, 1930.

all alone in a very vast valley enclosed on both sides by high hills. At the far end of the valley along one side where the ground rose steeply, there was a pure, bright light; the other side was in semi-darkness. As I stood gazing at the plain, Buzzetti and Gastini came up to me and said, "Don Bosco you will have to mount a horse. Hurry! Hurry!"

"Are you joking?" I said. "You know how long it has been since I last rode a horse." They insisted, but in an attempt to excuse myself I kept repeating, "I don't want to ride a horse; I did it once and fell off."

Gastini and Buzzetti kept pressing me ever more and said, "Get on a horse, and quickly. There's no time to lose."

"But suppose I do mount a horse, where are you taking me?"

"You'll see. Now, hurry and mount!"

"But where's the horse? I don't see any."

"There it is," shouted Gastini pointing to one side of the valley. I looked and saw a beautiful spirited steed. It had long, strong legs, a thick mane, and a very glossy coat.

"Well, since you want me to mount it, I will. But woe to you if I fall . . ." I said.

"Don't worry," they replied, "We'll be here with you for any emergency."

"And if I break my neck, you'll have to fix it," I told Buzzetti.

Buzzetti broke into a laugh. "This is no time to laugh," Gastini muttered. We walked over to the horse. Even with their help I had great difficulty mounting, but finally I was in the saddle. How tall that horse seemed to be then! It was as if I were perched on top of a high mound from where I could survey the entire valley from end to end.

Then the horse started to move. Strangely, while this was happening I seemed to be in my own room. I asked myself, "Where are we?" Coming toward me I saw priests, clerics, and others; all looked frightened and breathless.

After a long ride the horse stopped. Then I saw all the priests of the Oratory together with many of the clerics approaching. They gathered around the horse. I recognized Father Rua, Father Cagliero, and Father Bologna among them. When they reached me, they stopped and silently stared at my horse. I noticed that all seemed worried. Their disquiet was such as I have never seen before. I beckoned to Father Bologna. "Father Bologna," I said, "you are in charge at the main entrance; can you tell me what happened? Why do you all look so upset?"

"I don't know where I am or what I'm doing," he said. "I'm all confused . . . Some people came in, talked and left . . . There is such a

hubbub of people coming and going at the main entrance that I don't know what's going on."

"Is it possible," I wondered, "that something very unusual might happen today?"

Just then someone handed me a trumpet, saying I should hold on to it because I would need it. "Where are we now?" I asked. "Blow the trumpet."

I did and heard these words: *We are in the land of trial.*

Then I saw a multitude of boys—I think over 100 thousand coming down the hills. There was absolute silence. Carrying pitchforks, they were hastening toward the valley. I recognized among them all the Oratory boys, and those of our other schools; but there were many more unknown to me. Just then on one side of the valley the sky darkened, and hordes of animals resembling lions and tigers appeared. These ferocious beasts had big bodies, strong legs, and long necks, but their heads were quite small. They were terrifying. With blood-shot eyes bulging from their sockets, they hurled themselves at the boys who immediately stood ready to defend themselves. As the animals attacked, the boys stood firm and beat them off with their pronged pitchforks, which they lowered or raised as needed.

Unable to overpower them by this first attack, the beasts snapped at the fork prongs only to break their teeth and vanish. Some of the boys, however, had forks with only one prong and these were wounded. Others had pitchforks with broken or worm-eaten handles, and still others threw themselves at the beasts barehanded and fell victims; quite a few of these were killed. Many had pitchforks with two prongs and new handles.

While this was going on, from the very start swarms of serpents slithered about my horse. Kicking and stamping, the horse crushed and drove them off: at the same time it kept growing ever taller and taller.

I asked someone what the two-pronged forks symbolized. I was handed a fork and on the prongs I read these two words: *Confession,* on one; *Communion,* on the other.

"But what do the prongs mean?"

"Blow the trumpet!"

I did and heard these words: *Good confession and good Communion.*

I blew the trumpet again and heard these words: *Broken handle: sacrilegious confessions and communions. Worm-eaten handle: Faulty confessions.*

Now that the first attack was over, I rode over the battlefield and saw many dead and wounded. I saw that some of the dead had been

strangled and their necks were swollen and deformed. The faces of the others were horribly disfigured; still others had starved to death, while enticing food was within their reach. The boys who were strangled are those who unfortunately committed some sins in their early years and never confessed them: those with disfigured faces are gluttons: and the boys who died of hunger, those who go to confession but never follow the advice or admonitions of their confessor.

Next to each boy whose pitchfork had a worm-eaten handle a word stood out. For some it was Pride; for others, Sloth; for others still, Immodesty, etc. I must also add that in their march the boys had to walk over a bed of roses. They liked it, but after a few steps they would utter a cry and fall to the ground either dead or wounded because of the thorns hidden underneath. Others instead bravely trampled on those roses and encouraging one another marched on to victory.

Then the sky darkened again. Instantly even greater hordes of the same animals or monsters appeared. All this happened in less than three or four seconds. My horse was surrounded. The monsters increased beyond count and I, too, began to be frightened. I could feel them clawing at me! Then someone handed me a pitchfork, and I also began to fight them, and the monsters were forced to retreat. Beaten in their first attack, they all vanished.

Then I blew the trumpet again, and these words echoed through the valley: *Victory ! Victory!*

"Victory?!" I wondered, "how is it possible with so many dead and wounded?"

I blew the trumpet once more and we heard the words: *Truce for the vanquished.* The sky brightened and a rainbow became visible. It was so lovely and so colorful that I cannot describe it. It was immense, as though one end rested on top of Superga and its arch stretched and stretched until it reached the top of Moncenisio. I should also add that all the boys who had been victorious wore crowns so brilliant and so bright and varied in color that it was an awe-inspiring sight. Their faces, too, were resplendently handsome. At the far end of the valley, on one side under the center of the rainbow, there was a sort of balcony holding people full of joy and of such varied beauty as to surpass my imagination. A very noble lady royally arrayed came to the railing of this balcony and called out: "Come my children and take shelter under my mantle." As she spoke, an immense mantle spread out and all the boys ran to take cover under it. Some actually flew; these had the word *Innocence* on their forehead. Others just walked; and some crawled.

I also started to run, and in that split second, it couldn't have been more than that, I said to myself, "This had better end or we'll die." I had just said this and was still running when I woke up.

For reasons later explained, he returned to this subject on May 6, the feast of the Ascension. He had the students and the artisans assembled together for night prayers, and then spoke as follows:

The other night I was not able to say everything because we had visitors in our midst. These things must be kept among us, and no one should write to friends or relatives about them. I confide everything in you, even my sins. That valley, that land of trial, is this world. The semi-darkness is the place of perdition; the two hills are the commandments of God and the Church; the serpents are the devils; the monsters, evil temptations; the horse, I think, is the same as the one that struck Heliodorus and represents our trust in God. The boys who walked over the roses and fell dead are those who give in to this world's pleasures that deal death to the soul; those who trampled the roses underfoot are those who spurn worldly pleasures and are therefore victorious. The boys who flew under the mantle are those who have preserved their baptismal innocence.

For the sake of those who might wish to know, little by little I shall tell those concerned the kind of weapon they carried and whether they were victorious or not, dead or wounded. I did not know all the boys, but I recognized those of the Oratory. And if the others were ever to come here I would recognize them immediately the moment I saw them.

Father Berto, his secretary who took down this dream, wrote that he could not remember many things that Don Bosco narrated and explainted at length. The next morning, May 7, when he was with Don Bosco, he asked him, "How can you possibly remember all the boys you saw in your dream, and tell each one the state he was in and pinpoint his faults?"

"Oh," Don Bosco answered, "by means of *Otis Botis Pia Tutis*." This was a meaningless phrase that he often used to evade embarrassing questions.

When Father Barberis also broached the same subject, Don Bosco answered gravely, "It was a great deal more than a dream"; and cutting the talk short he passed on to other things.

Father Berto ends his report with these words: "I, too, the writer of this report, asked him about my part in this dream. His answer was so much to the point that I burst into tears and said, 'An angel from Heaven could not have hit the truth better.' "

Once again this dream was the theme of another *Good Night* on June 4. The community was present at this dialogue between Father Barberis and Don Bosco.

Father Barberis: With your permission, Don Bosco, this evening I would like to ask a few questions. I didn't dare to, these last few evenings because we had visitors. I'd like some clarification on your last dream.

Don Bosco: Go ahead. It is some time since I last mentioned it, but it doesn't matter.

Father Barberis: You said at the end of your dream that some flew to Mary's mantle, some ran, others walked slowly and a few sloshed through mud, were bespattered with it, and were hardly able to take cover under the mantle. You already told us that those who flew were the pure. We can easily understand those who ran, but what is meant by those who got stuck in the mud?

Don Bosco: Those who got stuck in the mud and who, for the most part, could not reach our Lady's mantle symbolize those attached to the things of this world. Being selfish they think only of themselves; and because of this, they bespatter themselves with mud and are no longer able to get off the ground and aspire to the things of Heaven. They see the Blessed Virgin calling to them and would like to go to her. They take a few steps but the mud holds them down. It always happens like that. The Lord says: "Where thy treasure is, there also will your heart be" [*Matt.* 6, 21]. Those who do not raise themselves up to the treasures of grace set their hearts on the things of this world. Pleasures, riches, success in business, vainglory are all they think of. Heaven is just ignored.

Father Barberis: There is something else you did not tell us about, Don Bosco. You mentioned it to some privately, and I wish you would let us know, too. It is this: Someone asked you wether he was among those who ran or those who walked slowly, and if he had taken cover under the mantle of Mary and if the handle of his pitchfork was worm-

eaten or broken. You replied that you had been unable to see clearly because there was a cloud between you and him.

Don Bosco: You are a theologian and you should know. Well, there were indeed some boys, though not very many, whom I could not see clearly. I saw each of them well enough to recognize them, but that was about all. Those are the boys who are tight-lipped with their Superiors; they do not open their hearts to them; they are not sincere. Whenever they see a Superior coming their way, rather than meet him, they go off in the opposite direction. Some of them came to ask me in what state I had seen them in the dream. But what could I tell them? I could have said: You have no confidence in your Superiors, you never open your heart to them. Now all of you remember this: There is nothing that can be of greater help to you than opening your hearts to your Superiors, having great trust in them, and being utterly sincere.

Father Barberis: There's something else I'd like to ask but I'm afraid you might say I'm too curious.

Don Bosco: Isn't that fairly well-known? (General laughter) Yet, you know, there is a certain kind of curiosity which is healthy, as for example, when a boy anxious to learn, keeps asking questions about serious things from persons who might know. There are others instead who just stand around like fools. They never have any questions to ask. This is not a good reflection on them.

Father Barberis: Well, I won't be like that. For a long time I have wanted to ask you this question about the dream. Did you see only each boy's past, or did you also see his future, that is, his vocation and his possible success?

Don Bosco: I saw more than the past; I also saw the future that was to be theirs. Each boy had several paths stretching out ahead of him. Some were narrow and thorny; others were strewn with sharp nails, but God's blessings had also been strewn on these paths. All these paths led to a garden of rare beauty filled with every delight.

Father Barberis: Then this means that you can tell which path each one should take, that is, you know the vocation of each one of us, how we shall end up, and which path we shall follow.

Don Bosco: No. It would not be wise to tell each one which path he will follow or how he will end up. No good will result from telling a boy: "You will take the path of wickedness." This would only frighten him. What I can say is this: "If one follows a certain path he may be sure that he is on the road to Heaven, on the road, namely, to which he has been called; and, if one does not follow that road, he will not be on the right path." Some roads are narrow, uneven and strewn with thorns; yet,

take heart, my dear children, with the thorns there is also the grace of God, and so much happiness is in store for us at the end of our journey, that we shall soon forget all our pain. Honestly, I would like all of you to remember this: This was a dream and no one is obliged to believe it. I have noticed, however, that those who have asked me for explanations have accepted my suggestions in good part. Nevertheless, do as St. Paul says: *Probate spiritus et quod bonum est tenete.* [Test all things; hold fast that which is good. *1 Thess.* 5, 21]. Another thing that I would not want you to forget is to pray for your poor Don Bosco lest the words of St. Paul: *Cum aliis praedicaverim, ego reprobus efficiar,* [After preaching to others, I myself should be rejected. *1 Cor.* 9, 27] may apply to me. That is, after preaching to you I may end up with the damned. I am doing my best to warn you, I worry about you and give you advice, but I fear I may be acting like a brooding hen that hunts for crickets, worms, seeds, and other food for her chicks while she herself may die of hunger unless she gets some good nourishment. Therefore, pray to God for me that this may not happen, but that instead, I may adorn my heart with many virtues and be pleasing to God, so that one day all of us may go to Heaven to enjoy Him and glorify Him. Good night.

CHAPTER 11

Life at the Oratory (Continued)

ARTISANS and students did not make up the entire family of the Oratory. Under Don Bosco's fatherly rule, a considerable number of novices and professed Salesians also lived there. In this second chapter dealing with Oratory life, we shall see how Don Bosco blended so many disparate elements. Yet, this chapter would be incomplete were we to omit an initial reference to the aspirants who, for the most part, were boys from the Oratory.

1. The Aspirants

According to the Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco had boasted of supplying the diocese with boys who wished to enter the priesthood, whereas he actually attracted to himself large numbers of young boys from all dioceses; and after choosing the best for himself as with "a skimmer," he would send the rest back to their home dioceses.[1] No one knows how this fits in with the idle chatter that went on about the ineptitude of those who had become Salesians. The truth of the matter is that at the Oratory Don Bosco had providential opportunities to select good prospects, and he would not miss any of them.

After supper on the eve of the Immaculate Conception, during the customary half hour of intimate conversation he used to enjoy with a few of his confreres, Don Bosco expressed a personal conviction. To those who can look back and recall the early Salesians, it explains how the Oratory was able to give so many members to the Salesian Society. He said: "Of the 500 students at the Oratory, more

[1] From the extract of a letter from the Ordinary in question, as quoted by Attorney Menghini in a letter to Don Bosco, September 8, 1875.

than 400, perhaps 450, are now ready to receive the clerical habit; and judging from their behavior they may indeed be advised to do so. Certainly, in the course of their studies and especially during their vacation, some will drop out. Yet, a sizable number will always remain, and others will come to join their ranks. When they begin to realize the great opportunities of doing good available here at the Oratory and they find our way of life agreeable, many of the boys will be inclined to remain."

The Directors trained by Don Bosco had carried the spirit of the Oratory to new schools and therefore he was able to add: "Recently, while visiting our schools, I noticed a marked tendency toward the priesthood and the religious life. Quite a number of the boys explicitly discussed this with me, although their minds were still filled with thoughts of home and fun, and I had not brought the matter up at all, since it was not a suitable time to do so.

The right moment would come during the spiritual retreat some time from April to May. From then until the end of the school year, he considered it necessary to counsel, guide, urge, and assist. This was the period when the boys made up their minds and voluntarily consulted their Superiors without being coaxed to do so.

In this respect, how much the Oratory had changed! When the Congregation comprised only a small number of members, its spirit was in the formative stage and everything was done to some extent in secret. Accordingly, Don Bosco spoke of vocations in a whisper, so to speak, fearing to cause alarm. Whenever he invited anyone to join him [in his work], he took pains not to give the impression that he was thinking of a religious Order. Had he spoken plainly, "we all would have run away," said one of his most devoted sons, Father Julius Barberis.

He roused aspirants by such remarks as these: "Do you really care for Don Bosco? . . . Would you like to prepare for the priesthood at the Oratory? . . . In time, would you like to help Don Bosco by working with him? . . . There is so much to do! Even if many were to remain here as priests and clerics, there would still be work for everyone!"

Generally, the first Salesians were enticed in this manner, that is, freely and out of love. God had given Don Bosco the gift of amiably encouraging this sentiment in them, free of all trace of what today

would be described as moral violence. When the day came for Father Barberis to make his decision, he presented himself before Don Bosco and said candidly:

"My parents are trying to find an opening for me at the seminary. What should I write to them?"

"Write that to show gratitude to Don Bosco you wish to remain with him and see whether, as a cleric, you can help him in so many things here at the school—assisting the boys, teaching, or in any other way.

"Truly," wrote Father Barberis in this year, [1930] "I did not then fully understand these things, I did not realize their importance, nor was I anxious to know more."

But in 1875 the boys understood, and well enough. There was still, perhaps, the chance that some might be frightened, but such cases were very rare. From July to September, Don Bosco absented himself as little as possible because the boys in the fifth year of high school were about to go home for their last vacation. As a rule, the boys waited until the very last month before deciding upon their vocation. For some, the choice of their state of life might easily hinge on whether or not Don Bosco happened to be in Turin.

As the reader will now be eager to view Don Bosco in action, one case history will serve for a hundred. In 1875, Father [Bernard] Vacchina, whom we have met before, was in his fifth year of high school. During one of the last Exercises for a Happy Death, he was mulling over the decision he had to make, and could not make up his mind. At other times Don Bosco had told him: "Study, pray, and then we shall decide." But the days went by and "then" never came. As it happened, that morning Vacchina was first in line among the many boys crowding Don Bosco's confessional; and he was well-prepared. But Don Bosco made him wait until the end. When all the others had gone, Don Bosco blessed him, asked him to move from his left, where he was waiting, to his right side, and heard his confession. When the boy had finished, he broached the topic and asked Don Bosco for the long-awaited decision. He was advised to become a priest, but not a secular priest.

"Then if there are no objections," the boy said, "I shall be happy to stay here at the Oratory with you."

"I am very glad to hear that," answered Don Bosco. "You see, I

have always cared for you, and I have always been your friend, although I did not show it. Study, pray, and give good example. . ."

"He told me other things, too; he was so kind that I wept," writes Father Vacchina, "and at nine o'clock I went to Communion all alone, even forgetting the bread and salami I had been longing for." It is well-known that Don Bosco did not neglect the body while providing for the soul on the occasion of the Exercise for a Happy Death. In these days of grace he wished to gladden both body and soul.

Although Don Bosco was anxious to enlarge the ranks of the Salesians, he did not keep an open-door policy toward aspirants for fear that anybody and everybody might enter. At a meeting of the Superior Chapter held on November 7, the applications of nine aspirants were examined, but only eight were accepted. The ninth aspirant was already a non-clerical student of philosophy at the Oratory, yet he was subjected to some rather trying tests to ascertain his motivation. It was decided to make him temporarily drop, so to speak, the philosophy course and take up domestic work, but without telling him that this was only a temporary arrangement.

Don Bosco joined kindness with prudence; he never accepted anyone into the Congregation unless he knew him personally. In 1875 it became noticeable that he proceeded ever more slowly in admitting aspirants to the novitiate, especially when they seemed particularly eager to receive the habit. During the fall retreat at a conference of Chapter members from the various Houses, Don Bosco said: "We must not admit these aspirants unless they have given proof of well-tried morality, or unless they have made themselves sufficiently well-known and have confided fully in their Superiors. We may be a little more lenient on this point with coadjutors, but not with clerics. As for the first requisite, remember that neither goodwill nor good resolutions made on the spot are enough. They may be sufficient for absolution, but they are no guarantee against future falls. Therefore, unless they have given exceptional evidence of perseverance over a long period of time, we cannot rely on them, for as a rule, they relapse."

In 1875 the higher Superiors, who earnestly were supporting Don Bosco's efforts in steering the Congregation toward a more

perfect compliance [with the prescriptions of the Holy See] were faced with a doubt. According to the decree of 1848, was it mandatory to apply to Ordinaries for testimonial letters before admitting aspirants to the novitiate as clerics? Until then, no attention had been given to it for two reasons. In the first place the young aspirants had lived in Salesian Houses since boyhood and their own Bishops knew nothing of their background and social condition. They would have been unable to give any information about the aspirants, unless they themselves made inquiries of the Salesians, who had had these same aspirants under their eyes for as many as six, eight or even ten years. On the other hand, when Don Bosco had presented the matter to Pius IX, he had been given a favorable response by word of mouth. There was no reason to hurry in abandoning the course followed till then; for not only [the Archbishop of] Turin, but also [the Bishop of] Ivrea were difficult to deal with and a considerable number of aspirants came precisely from these two dioceses. The Superiors favored complying with the law because if such a case were referred to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars it would ignore any claim to faculties granted orally by the Pope. Therefore, would it not be advisable at least to petition the Holy See for a rescript, and in the meantime request testimonial letters from the bishops whenever admission to our Congregation was sought by applicants who had not attended our schools? Don Bosco remained firm for leaving well enough alone: he was going to Rome soon, and he would settle everything there; meanwhile, advantage should be taken of the privilege just as before.

But a measure that could not be postponed was the appointment of General and Provincial Examiners for the admission of candidates to the novitiate, as required by the aforesaid decree. Here again one could only do his best. After all had not Pius IX, who was acquainted with the difficulties surrounding the newly founded Congregation in those early days, given Don Bosco complete freedom in certain things? Therefore, it was decided that the members of the Superior Chapter should act as General Examiners and the individual local Chapters, as Provincial Examiners. At the Oratory, however, only members of the local Chapter, who were not also members of the Superior Chapter (seven out of ten), would

act as the Provincial Examiners. They exercised this office for the first time during the retreat at Lanzo (September 9-16), when all the Salesians who made up the local Chapters of the individual Houses were summoned by Don Bosco to examine the applications of candidates either for the novitiate or religious profession. Eighteen applicants were admitted to perpetual vows; "[it was] the first time in [the history of] the Congregation," so the Chronicle informs us, "that so many applicants were admitted in one single session."

In November forty-eight novices received the clerical habit—a figure never attained before. Don Bosco hoped that in the following year there would be even more, for a great many boys in the fourth and fifth year of high school had already made their applications or had shown a strong desire to do so. More than anything else, he was comforted by noting how the clerics were becoming strong in spirit. In the past, a number of clerics had been asked to lay aside the habit; others, who had found it convenient to stay at the Oratory, had left after a while to enter the seminary. But it seemed to him that among the clerics recently vested, there was no one, or hardly any one, of this kind.

We need not say how delighted the Novice Master was. We could not better convey his feelings at that time than by quoting the enthusiastic words uttered by that candid soul. When speaking of the clerics with Don Bosco on December 7, he exclaimed in the presence of others: "Four years ago all of us were astounded and exclaimed: 'Eighteen new clerics this year! What a wonderful number! We never had that many before here at the Oratory!' This number was surpassed the following year and the year after, and last year we considered it truly extraordinary that we had as many as thirty new clerics, and again we cried: 'We never had that many before at the Oratory!' Now there are forty-eight, and we hope that next year the number will be much greater."

One of those present, who apparently had a leaning toward mathematics and related sciences, added: "Things are developing in geometrical progression, or better, by the square of the distance." Everybody agreed when someone burst out with the scriptural praise: *A Domino factum est istud et est mirabile in oculis nostris.* [By the Lord this has been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes. *Matt.* 21, 42.]

2. Novices

That year the novitiate progressed rapidly toward a regular routine. The reader who is not acquainted with the circumstances will quite probably raise an eyebrow at this opening phrase. And yet, the Congregation has become what it is because in those days it did not attempt to do more than it could. How patient Don Bosco had to be in creating the proper atmosphere! There was a time when the word *novice* would have irked the strong and terrified the weak. Don Bosco did not dare to use it until 1874. In 1875 the novices themselves were using it and by this time they were calling themselves by that name without any fear.

The accurate presentation of this period in our history is more important than one might think. Since we are able to sum it up in the words of Don Bosco himself, our task is much easier. The following is his description and comment on the stormy events of those early years.

"What lack of regularity and discipline in those days! Conflicts among the clerics arguing over literature and theology without any regard to time or place; continuous and serious disturbances in the study hall when the boys were not there; mornings, many clerics remained in bed; others skipped classes without a word to their Superiors; no spiritual reading, no meditation, and no other practices of piety except those performed with the boys. Now it is different. Things improved little by little, took root and became permanent.

"Nevertheless, though aware of all these disorders, I had to make the best of a bad situation. Had I tried to remedy matters all at once, I would have been forced to close down the Oratory and send all the boys home. The clerics would never have adapted themselves to strict regulations, and all would have left. I realized that, thoughtless though they were, many of them worked willingly, were good-hearted and morally sound. I knew that once their youthful exhuberance had waned, they would be of great help to me. I must say that some of the priests in our Congregation who were of their number are now among those who work hardest and who have the better priestly spirit. At that time they would most certainly have left the House rather than submit to certain restrictive rules.

"We must remember, however, that those times were different; our Congregation could not have been established in the usual manner. I was alone; I taught day and night; I wrote books, preached, supervised the boys, directed [everything], and went out begging for money. Had I contented myself with a select few for the sake of perfection, I would never have accomplished a thing. Today, the Oratory would be some kind of a boarding school with an enrollment of fifty or one hundred young boys at most."

Piety was the cornerstone upon which the religious life of the Oratory was to be based if regularity was to be established. Among the practices of piety two are of the utmost importance: the annual spiritual retreat and the daily meditation. Since 1875, during the fall vacations, novices had separate retreats from those attended by professed members; everything, including the sermons, was tailored to their specific needs. Likewise, after rising, they made their daily half-hour meditation apart from the others, using books carefully selected for them. They also had their own spiritual reading in the afternoon. The more effectively novices are separated from others living in the same House, the easier it will be to foster the spirit of piety in them. Consequently, the novices were kept apart even in the dormitory and in the playground, which was adjacent to the west side of the church of Mary Help of Christians. They attended Mass and other church functions in the chancel choir, where they had no contact with strangers.

There was no interruption in their studies. According to the term used in those days, they "entered" philosophy, *i.e.*, they began to follow the college curriculum with philosophy as their major. In 1875, non-clerical students no longer attended class [with the novices]. As their numbers increased, the inequality of talents among the novices became more apparent. Therefore, the proposal was made, and adopted shortly after, that their course of studies be divided into two parts: the first, a genuine college course geared to the training of future teachers; the second, to be centered on philosophy, with only the essentials of the remaining subjects—as was customary in the seminary. Nevertheless, the Novice Master realized that he had to lessen the burden of academic and scientific subjects of the novitiate, so as to give the mind better opportunity to dedicate itself to spiritual things. Here again, Don Bosco acted in accordance

with the extraordinary faculties granted him by Pius IX. Moreover, he felt that they even authorized him to employ novices as assistants and teachers. Imbued with the spirit of the Founder, Father Barberis kept vigilant watch over the novices. He conferred frequently with Don Bosco, who always listened kindly, giving him wise and generous counsel.

What criterion guided Don Bosco when admitting a novice to profession? Of course, there were the rules; but it would be well to see how he applied them in each case. There are a few, meager details that we have uncovered in connection with this year.

On the evening of December 10, Don Bosco summoned the members of the Superior Chapter and also the Novice Master, to his room to discuss the admission of candidates to temporary and perpetual vows. The Chronicle states very specifically that anyone who had showed a tendency to drink, was not admitted, and adds that Don Bosco declared that great strictness should be used regarding this point. He added: "Nor let it be said that they were admonished and admitting their fault, promised resolutely not to let their craving for drink overcome them again. Such repentance is enough for sacramental absolution, but it does not offer the slightest assurance of future behavior. When they promise *never again,* this should be interpreted as *until I have another opportunity.*"

He confirmed this statement with an example. One of his classmates had the unfortunate habit of drinking. When admonished, he became all promises. He once said to Don Bosco: "You may be sure Don Bosco, never again shall I drink. I am firmly and absolutely determined, even though I were to die. At this very moment, I have made a pledge never to taste wine as long as I live." But it takes a great deal more than that! Next morning, Don Bosco was present at this priest's Mass. While kneeling in the chancel choir, he heard him say to the altar boy during the ablution: "Pour it in, pour it in! It isn't *your* wine, you rascal! Since Don Bosco felt that the poor man meant well, he pointed out to him the impropriety of this behavior. He renewed his promise; but a few days later Don Bosco saw him being wheeled home in a little cart, dead drunk.

Then Don Bosco posed a rhetorical question: "When a man is like that, what will become of his morals? I would like to make an experiment. If we were to give all the boys of the Oratory one glass

of good wine today, and then have them examine their consciences thoroughly the next day, what would be the result? The boys would never suspect the reason, knowing nothing of the whys and wherefores. Yet, the result would be many evil thoughts, many temptations, and, I believe I may say it with certainty, many lapses into sin."

Here Father Rua remarked that during the past scholastic year a few professors, some of them very good indeed, had kept wine in their rooms. Don Bosco answered: "This should not happen. Well, it may be condoned for the moment because they do not realize the danger, unless we think it is better to rule it out right now. But serious thought must be given to this in the future."

We shall now go back a bit. In the first week of July, while out with Don Bosco, Father Barberis took the opportunity to consult him about some of the novices who did not seem fit to become Salesians. One of them was spreading the rumor among his companions that he had made up his mind to go home. "Then make sure he goes, and quickly," said Don Bosco. "Tell him I shall let him go whenever he wishes. However, as long as he remains with us, he is to keep his lips sealed and not say a single word about this to his companions; if he does, I shall be obliged to take severe measures. Whenever the Jesuits discover that someone no longer wishes to remain in the Order, they do not allow him to remain even for a single day, nor for any reason whatsoever do they allow him to talk with any member of the Society. They are right. When someone starts talking about wanting to leave, it is only natural that the others ask why. He will never tell them the true reason, which may be his own lack of fervor, his dislike of mortification, or lack of virtue; instead, he will make excuses: 'I do not like this, I would like that, so-and-so is picking on me,' and so on. Much harm results when these complaints make the rounds; many others become discouraged, dissatisfaction and grumbling spread."

But we must not overlook one thing. The novice in question had a scandalous situation in his own home, making it impossible for him, in conscience, to live with his parents. "I know this," Don Bosco said, "and it grieves me deeply. But what can we do? It is unwise to let him stay and sow seeds of discontent among the others. Furthermore, he wrote me the other day that he would remain with

our Congregation, but on condition that certain things be allowed him. In short, he wanted to dictate the terms under which he would remain with us. Now as soon as anyone begins to dictate terms, I think it best to have done with him immediately. These boys convince themselves that they are indispensable, and as soon as you give in to them on one point, they immediately demand something else. Whenever one wishes to bargain, we must tell him quite bluntly: 'Look, you may remain with us, provided that it is under the same conditions as all the others; if, instead, you prefer to try elsewhere, or go to your parents, you may do so; we shall leave you entirely free.' He will realize then that we are not particularly anxious to keep him here and that we do everything solely for God. Therefore, much more quickly will he set his heart at rest and abandon all pretenses."

There is yet one more thing to add in connection with this case. Although the novice in question did not intend to persevere as a Salesian, he did want to stay to complete his studies, reciprocating with his services in teaching and assisting the boys. "No, that will not do," Don Bosco insisted, "In my opinion, it is not good at all for him to be together with the others as a member of the family, when he is not. Besides there is something even worse than that. In the letter I mentioned, he made insolent remarks about Father Rua. This proves that he is not in the least obedient but is acting solely for selfish reasons. I do not think that he has the spirit of true submission. See to it that he finds a place for himself quickly, because I fear his presence here is no longer beneficial to anyone."

This cleric was willing to enter the seminary. Father Barberis thought that he should encourage him to do so, and wrote a letter of recommendation for him, especially since Don Bosco himself had advised him to receive the habit. "I encouraged him," said Don Bosco, "because last year he had made it clear that he wished to enter the Congregation. He might do good to himself and others were he to live with us, far from worldly dangers, following a way of life suited to him, surrounded by good example. Yet I would never, never, counsel him to become a secular priest. He has already spoken to me of this, and I have told him that under no condition should he become a secular priest. He is not virtuous enough. Here, with us, even though his virtue is mediocre, it would easily grow

stronger, and he might become an excellent priest. In the world, surrounded by bad example, instead of becoming stronger in virtue he would day by day become weaker."

After this subject had been exhausted, they spoke of another novice who wished to remain in the Congregation, although they felt he should not be kept much longer. Outwardly he appeared good, and perhaps he was. Nevertheless, he was very reticent, avoided his Superiors, and hardly ever confided in them. For these reasons alone Don Bosco thought him unfit for the Congregation.

About that same time, a third novice came directly to Don Bosco, saying: "I joined the Congregation without knowing its spirit. I did not know that it was a religious Congregation. Now that I have heard its objectives in the conferences, I do not intend to remain, especially since one of my relatives has died and there is no one to care for my brother. I want to return home and then enter the seminary."

"My son, you are quite free to do whatever you feel is best," said Don Bosco. "From this moment you may do whatever you want. Only, remember, you are wrong when you say you joined the Congregation without knowing what you were doing. This is the same as calling yourself a fool. While on retreat at Lanzo, you heard the rules read; you heard the conferences in which they were explained. Do you mean that you still did not understand? This is the same as calling Don Bosco a fool, too, as though he admitted boys to the novitiate blindly, against all Church canons, without first explaining things as they are."

The cleric did not know what to reply. Nevertheless, he was determined to leave the Congregation and did so a few days later.

On another occasion, Don Bosco gave the Novice Master two practical norms for the proper training of his novices. One novice was not doing well, but he seemed devout and went frequently to Communion, even more frequently than the Rule required. Don Bosco remarked to Father Barberis: "Frequent reception of the Sacraments is not of itself an indication of virtue. There are some who are very lukewarm when they receive Communion; I do not mean to say that those Communions are sacrilegious; but, without doubt, their lukewarmness prevents them from appreciating the full meaning of the Sacrament they are receiving. If one goes to

Communion without first ridding his heart of worldly attachments, without casting himself generously into the arms of Jesus, he cannot produce the fruits, which, theologically, are known to be the effect of Holy Communion."

Another novice, partly out of aversion and partly out of pique, wished to be excused from certain academic subjects. Father Barberis had denied his request absolutely, but this novice stubbornly refused to take no for an answer. In his report to Don Bosco, the Novice Master said that this lad was exceptionally intelligent, steadfast in character and capable of great virtue, once his fiery temperament was under control and he made up his mind to behave. He wanted to know whether, without seeming to yield, he might close an eye and let things ride, cover up for him and try to make the best of the situation.

"No," said Don Bosco, "be nice to him; never speak as if you were irritated; show him that you are not impressed by his stubbornness and that you attribute it merely to youthful immaturity, but take a firm stand on whatever you have told him to do. Do not yield; otherwise, once they are professed, they will have to be treated with 'kid gloves,' and either left free to indulge their whims or be dismissed."

At this point we come to a conversation of Don Bosco on how to evaluate novices and deal with them. Readers will be happy to read it in full. He had this conversation on February 17, 1876 with Father Barberis, who was not content to treasure its memory for himself but also wished to record it for us in his simple diary. Don Bosco spoke as follows: "Some novices are well thought of, but one can see that they are not steadfast. They may go on for several months, and then they change. During the first few months they are all ardor and fire. Those who do not know them well expect great things of them. But later they begin to falter, their ardor evaporates, and it becomes clear that it was all a passing fancy. In fact they change their mind and even leave the Congregation. On the contrary, other novices, who are slow to make up their mind about joining the Congregation, advance in virtue almost imperceptibly; yet, one may see that they have gone ahead steadily over the years, with never a backward step. Those who do not know them well, rate them as lukewarm or at best, mediocre. But those

who have known them well for a long time evince the greatest hopes for them. They are slow in taking a step, but once they have taken it, they never go back. They are slow to make a resolve, but once they do, no one can dissuade them from it, and it is certain that they will continually grow in virtue. Therefore, set great store on any boy who is steadfast in virtue, even though he does not seem to be so zealous or fervent about it."

Father Barberis pointed out that several novices were now doing quite well, while just as simple high school students in previous years, they had given no evidence of fervor, and many objections had been raised before they were admitted to the novitiate. Don Bosco replied: "There is something to say about these. For the most part, they are extremely needy and would lack even the barest necessities outside the Congregation. Here they lack nothing; still more, in their opinion, our fare is excellent. Then again, since they have nowhere to turn, the fact that they are treated well and live in harmony here, helps to make them very happy in the Congregation. Little by little they grow strong in virtue and learn to embrace our way of life out of genuine religious principle. It is good to avail ourselves of such persons, too. How many are there in the House who now do very well, even though they joined us only because they knew of no other place where they could live so comfortably. It is very important indeed that such young boys be treated kindly and do not lack the necessities of life. Inconstant as they are, because of their age, a mere trifle could be sufficient to make them decide to leave. Later they themselves might regret such a step, but having taken it, they would not be able to return. Were they older, I would say: 'If they are so easily upset and wish to leave, let them go by all means; in the long run, they would be of no use to the Congregation. But since they are only youngsters, we must think differently. One finds even the best boys apt to make hasty decisions when some personal whim, or a relative, friends, hopes of material advantage, or a soaring imagination fires their fancy. If they remain in the Congregation, these whims will fade with time, and such boys will do a vast amount of good to themselves and others.' "

Father Barberis reported that the Prefect had written to the

parents of some of the novices, asking them to pay the overdue incidental expenses of the novices. Board and tuition fees were not mentioned because novices were kept free of charge. He threatened to dismiss the clerics in question, should the parents fail to meet this obligation. A priest, who was the uncle of one of the novices, had called at the Oratory, protesting that he did not intend to pay if the cleric remained in the Congregation, and furthermore, that he would remove him and enroll him in the seminary. Don Bosco told Father Barberis that he was to instruct the Prefect never to write in such final terms to the parents of novices in the future, because quite a number of them purposely refrained from paying so as to have their sons back home again. Then when he was told that this same cleric had said he was absolutely determined to live and die in the Congregation, he sent word to him not to worry since no one had ever been dismissed merely because of no money.

He was very much concerned about the health of the novices. A month had passed since the above mentioned conversation, when Father Barberis spoke to him about the poor health of some novices. Don Bosco replied: "After Easter, arrange that all of them be taken every Thursday for an early morning walk to Villa Monti on the Superga hill. The Villa is located at about a third of the climb. It is surrounded by woods, and its owner has placed it at our disposal. They can spend the day there, and return to the Oratory toward evening. Apart from health reasons, I believe that this outing will benefit them in other ways as well: it will cheer them and distract them from other thoughts and make them fonder of the Congregation."

A few days later, Father Barberis asked him whether he should allow one of the novices to go home because his grandfather was very sick. Don Bosco answered: "I believe you may. As a rule, permission should usually be given when a parent or relative is very sick and the boy is sent for. We would appear cruel were a parent or relative to die, without our having allowed their son, or nephew, or brother to return home. For the rest of their lives, these boys would regret not having been there to see their dear ones once again."

Then Father Barberis asked him another question. There was a

novice who was lukewarm in piety, lazy, and disobedient. What should he do about it? "Talk to him alone," Don Bosco suggested. "Put it to him bluntly; tell him to shake off his indolence and obey the rules in every way, if he really wishes to be a member of the Congregation. Say that otherwise he must make up his mind to return to his parents of his own free will; because, if he persists in such behavior, he will run the risk of being shamefully dismissed from the Oratory."

Don Bosco never liked to dismiss a boy who had shown a desire to remain in the Congregation; but he harbored no illusions. He was unrelenting with those who showed but little promise or whose morals seemed doubtful. He estimated that, out of 80 novices, 10 left during their year of probation and 10 more during the period of their temporary vows. Thus sixty remained who were genuinely sound. There had been a greater percentage of defections prior to 1876; but as things became better regulated, the number dwindled.

Only two months prior to the termination of that year's novitiate, a saintly novice named Defendente Barberis died on September 8. The pastor of Cassinelle in the diocese of Acqui had recommended him to Don Bosco in a letter: "Perhaps no one of his age or position here in the village surpasses him in virtue." At the Oratory he was devoted to his studies and to the practices of piety. He longed to become a priest so that he might soon work for the welfare of souls.

While an aspirant, he had acted as doorkeeper of the Day Oratory. He showed zeal and prudence in everything he did. As a clerical novice, he taught catechism with wonderful results to the boys of the Festive Oratory. He received Communion almost daily with such ardor that all his companions were edified. He was scrupulously obedient, exact in his duties, frugal and mortified when eating and drinking. He would listen eagerly to stories of the early days of the Oratory and of all Don Bosco's labors in founding it. He was absorbed by the prospect of a future in the Salesian Congregation dedicated to working with boys. But unfortunately his days were numbered. Every care was lavished on him. In his admirable patience, he suffered to think of the inconvenience he was causing the Oratory. When the doctor suggested that his home environment might benefit his health, he returned to his family, who were most eager to have him. At twenty years of age he passed away edifying

everyone by his resignation to God's will. His companions in the novitiate were inspired to persevere by his example.

3. Professed Members

The professed members included: coadjutors, clerics who were studying philosophy and theology, and priests.

At the beginning of the year there were twenty-three coadjutors at the Oratory; they increased to twenty-seven after vacation. It would be interesting to know more about their life with Don Bosco, but there is scant reference to them in the year 1875. Therefore, we must be satisfied with what we have, and squeeze a few essentials from whatever meager information there is.

Fifty-five years ago [1875] Maestro Dogliani had just made his temporary profession. Don Bosco never discriminated between his sons who wore the clerical habit and those who wore civilian dress. One day he chose Dogliani as his companion on a trip to Caselle. Since he had but little time before the train left, he said:

"Dogliani, run on to the station ahead of me and buy the tickets."

"First or second class?"

"Third, always third."

When Don Bosco joined him they climbed into a third-class compartment. But the conductor who knew Don Bosco, insisted that they move to a first-class compartment. As they did so, Don Bosco remarked to Dogliani with a smile: "See? If we had had second-class tickets, they would have left us where we were. But since we had third-class tickets, they moved us into first-class."

Once again Dogliani traveled with Don Bosco and can still recall the awful moment when he realized he had lost Don Bosco's suitcase! Don Bosco understood the reason for his embarrassment, and said: "Don't let it upset you! I only regret the loss of a few papers . . ." He could not finish what he was saying because just then a man ran up breathlessly and exclaimed: "Here is your suitcase!" Dogliani heaved a sigh of relief.

Poor Maestro Dogliani! He experienced Don Bosco's paternal goodness to coadjutors under somewhat different circumstances. One night the good Father finished hearing confessions long after the community's supper. Dogliani, who alternated music lessons

with serving at table in the dining room, ordered supper for Don Bosco as soon as he sat down. The cook sent out a dish of cold, overcooked rice. The young coadjutor became indignant and protested: "But this is for Don Bosco!"

The answer from the kitchen came: "Don Bosco is like everybody else!"

A day spent in the kitchen, in that kitchen especially, may explain, though it does not justify, such a remark. Besides, the much-talked-about Gaia was a good fellow despite his impetuous nature.

Embarrassed, Dogliani set the plate before Don Bosco and withdrew. But Cassinis, a cleric and future missionary, could not keep silent and repeated the foolish remark to Don Bosco, who neither frowned, nor was upset, nor maintained an indignant silence. Instead, he said quite calmly and serenely: "Gaia is right; it is true."[2]

There was another incident in which Dogliani, perhaps a little distracted by his music, was entirely at fault. One day Don Bosco invited a few guests for dinner and noticed a soiled tablecloth. He was annoyed and rebuked Dogliani, because this showed disrespect for the guests. Dogliani was deeply hurt. That evening he wrote Don Bosco a letter in which, among other things, he said this was the first time he had ever seen Don Bosco somewhat angry. Don Bosco chose to humiliate himself by reading the letter aloud at a Chapter meeting. Later, when he happened to meet the good coadjutor, he comforted him by grasping his hand and repeating the ill-advised expression: "Don't you know that Don Bosco is like everybody else?"

This was Don Bosco's usual way with his coadjutors. In his attitude toward them lay his great secret in training men for a sound religious life, men whose outward appearances and occupations did not differ in any way from laymen of their own age and condition. While visiting Alassio in 1875, Father Joseph Vespignani, who had never met a coadjutor, was deeply impressed by their sincere devotion in church where they prayed in common and chanted the Divine Office with the students. The Director, Father Cerruti, told him: "Do you know that at times the coadjutors humble us by their

[2] Poor Gaia went out of his mind and toward the end of March, 1876, had to be sent to an insane asylum.

virtuous life; we priests almost have to blush in the presence of their edifying example?"[3]

Don Bosco aroused such confidence in them that little by little they were ready to do anything for him. But one must first know how to win such confidence. In 1877 the coadjutor Bernard Musso, who was head of the shoe shop for fifty years, volunteered and was approved to go to [South] America. He treasured as a relic of inestimable value a little note that Don Bosco had written him from Rome in 1874, when he was still a simple artisan at the Oratory. The boy obviously had the makings of an excellent coadjutor.

Dear Bernard Musso:

I am in great need just now of your prayers and of those of your companions. Among your friends, find those eager to help me; take them to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament every day; ask Him to help me now in my needs. When I return to Turin you must show me the boys who accompanied you on such visits and I shall have a souvenir for each one of them.

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

In 1875 two confreres, Anthony Lanteri and James Para, died. The former was a full-fledged coadjutor, the latter a de facto coadjutor though not professed. They both deserve to be remembered because in our opinion they exemplify the religious training received at the Oratory at that time.

Lanteri, born in 1841, died in August [1875] at Realdo, Briga Marittima. He was a shepherd, devoted to the Church, the Sacraments, our Lady, and spiritual reading. While running after a straying lamb, he felt the earth give way suddenly beneath his feet, and fell headlong down a ravine. He barely had time to exclaim: "Jesus and Mary, help me!" A light seemed to flash before his eyes; he fell to the bottom of the ravine but did not suffer the slightest bruise. Leaping to his feet and noticing the frightening height of his fall,

[3] Vespignani, G., *Un anno alla scuola del Beato Don Bosco,* pp. 225-226, 1930, S. Benigno Canavese.

he raised his hands to heaven, exclaiming: "O Jesus, O Mary, from this moment I dedicate to your service the life you have saved!"

In winter he had to leave the solitude he loved for places where the irreligious and immoral conversation disgusted him. He therefore made up his mind to enter a religious Congregation. He came to the Oratory in September, 1871. He would have liked to study, but his health was not too good. He obediently did the domestic work assigned to him. Two months later, after a satisfactory test, he was sent to the House at Marassi, and then on to Sampierdarena, where he was appointed sexton. His piety, the peace of mind that shone in his eyes, his industry in cleaning and decorating God's house, his charity and courtesy, were generally admired by all.

He completed his novitiate and took his temporary vows. The time he had available for prayer never seemed long enough for him. A year later, his health worsened and all feared for his life. Upon the suggestion that the Piedmont climate might be better for him, he was sent back to the Oratory, where he became sexton in the church of Mary Help of Christians. Although the disease lay dormant, it flared up again with the coming of winter. The doctors recommended his native air, but he was concerned only with thoughts of a holy death. Back home, he continued to observe the rules of the Congregation, performed the practices of piety with utmost fidelity and remained calm and undisturbed to his last breath.

Para, born at Sampeire in 1850, was younger. He attended the local school and campaigned against the bad habit of singing lewd ditties in the streets and in the fields. With his teacher's permission, he began to teach sacred hymns to some of his fellow students as a protest. He tilled the soil, loved prayer, and went often to Communion. The meager resources of his family did not permit him to study for the priesthood. His mother (already a widow) died when he was twenty years old. Having heard of the Oratory, he applied through his pastor for admission. Don Bosco judged him excellent and put him with the students.

In 1873 he entered the novitiate. Although he had not yet completed his Latin studies, he received the exceptional distinction of being admitted to religious profession. At the re-opening of school, Para was sent to Borgo San Martino where they needed a good doorkeeper. Although very unhappy at having to leave Don Bosco,

he obeyed. There, he attended the fourth year of high school under a tutor. In poor health and accustomed to privation, he did not complain about having to rise at five o'clock in the morning and continued to do so even in depth of winter. On February 22 when, as usual, he went to pick up the mail, he told the clerk:

"Two days from now someone else will take care of this."

"Why?"

"Because I shall no longer be around."

That evening he took to his bed. His illness became worse. On the morning of the 25th he confided a wonderful dream to the confrere assisting him and assured him that soon he would depart from this world. After making his confession and receiving Communion, he begged the Director to thank Don Bosco, when advising him of his death, for the favor he had granted him a few months before in allowing him, in preference to so many others, to make his religious profession. He then added: "I think Don Bosco knew I was to die soon, otherwise he would never have granted me such a great favor."

He died two hours later, fondly kissing the crucifix.

Concerning the clerics, we shall now relate how Don Bosco supervised their religious, intellectual, and ecclesiastical formation.

The observance of religious life among the clerical students progressed at the same pace as that of the novices. At the April conferences, Father Albera, voicing the common desire, expressed the hope that soon a copy of the rules in Italian would be given to every member. Don Bosco would not have long hesitated to do something so obviously needed. However, he had to avail himself of every bit of free time he could save from all the things he had to do, in order to write the precious introductory pages, whose purpose was to explain fully the spirit behind the rules. Those pages were handed to the printer on August 15, 1875. At the same time, he sought to instill this spirit in the hearts of the young clerics in every way his fatherly concern could devise.

The Superiors whose work brought them in closer contact with him were not blind to his efforts in putting on the right track again clerics who were somewhat independent and impatient of restraint. He went about his task with such prudence, wrote Father Barberis, that even while the individual cleric felt himself completely won

over, he never realized why Don Bosco displayed such goodwill to him.

Necessity often forced him to send his beloved sons to help out in other Houses, but even then his vigilant charity followed them. We have proof of this in an affectionate note he sent to the cleric [Louis] Nai who had recently been sent to Borgo San Martino.

We must first supply some factual background. While Nai was still in the fourth year of high school, Don Bosco asked him point blank:

"Would you like to make a deal with Don Bosco?"

"What kind of deal?"

"I shall tell you about it next week."

During his weekly confession the boy asked Don Bosco:

"What is this deal you offer?"

"Would you like to remain with Don Bosco always?"

"Very much so!"

"Then this is what you must do: go to Father Rua and tell him that Don Bosco sent you."

The only answer that Father Rua gave him was to tell him good-naturedly to come to the church of St. Francis [de Sales] at such-and-such a time on the following Thursday. Nai arrived promptly and found a small group of his best friends there; with them he listened to what Father Rua told them about staying with Don Bosco. The next time he went to confession, Don Bosco said: "At this moment I can see your entire future." He then revealed it to him in detail. Now at the age of seventy-five, Father Nai declares that the prediction was fulfilled down to the smallest detail, and that he is ready to confirm this under oath.

A short time after receiving the habit, when the day came to take his vows, he was overcome by great uncertainty, such as he had never experienced before. He confided this to his spiritual father who answered:

Turin, Feast of Mary Help of Christians, 1875

My dear Nai:

Crickets jump on the ground and in the air, but the vows you intend to make fly to the throne of God; therefore, the former can in no way

disturb the latter. This means you have nothing to fear, so go ahead. If you need any counsel, we shall be able to talk together soon.

God bless you, *age viriliter, ut coroneris feliciter.* [Act manfully that you may have the happiness of receiving the crown.] Pray for me always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

It is interesting to watch the Servant of God in his daily life among the clerics at the Oratory. One report that was compiled immediately after the fact, portrays him for us as vividly as a snapshot from some cleric's candid camera.

A small group of clerics had gathered after supper to talk among themselves, when Don Bosco appeared with several others. The group at once broke up. They clustered about him and kissed his hand. He lingered, said a few kind, amusing words to each, and then added:

"You clerics are my crown!"

"Let us hope we are never your thorns!" one of them answered.

Don Bosco laughed and pointed to Father Barberis who was beside him saying, "Should that be so, here at my side I have *gloria patris filius sapiens!*" [A wise son makes his father glad. Cf. Prov. 10, 1]

He then resumed his good-natured remarks until finally he said: "I had a dream last night. It seemed to me, in fact I was certain that Holy Viaticum was being brought to some sick person. I was anxious to know who it was, so I asked someone near me, but got no reply. I asked him again, but he remained silent and made a wry face. 'Yet I intend to find out!' I said to myself. No sooner said than done, I started to follow the priest carrying the Holy Viaticum. We reached a house; the priests went in and I followed; but at the door of the sick room, I tried to enter and could not. I tried again and again to reach the dying person, but found it impossible. 'Now this is only a dream,' I said to myself. Then I woke up and repeated: 'It is only a dream!' "

Changing the subject, Don Bosco said he was glad that no one at the Oratory was sick. Then one of the clerics asked him if it

were true that a long life depended on good dental hygiene. He answered that generally speaking, it might be true; but it was more important that one's death be not set for a certain date in the book of eternity, because if it were, nothing could postpone it. However, good moral principles contribute immensely to a long life because they teach us to live as we should and to love virtue, temperance, and many other things that are essential to the good health of the body. "In regard to this, I have just heard how a boy who was very strong and showed great promise died only a few days ago," he said. "Yet his brother, who has always been sickly, consumptive perhaps, is still alive. So you see that health and strength count for nothing, if it has already been determined in the book of eternity that this one or that one has to die."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the bell and by the arrival of another priest, Father Louis Rocca. "We took leave of him, kissing his hand again and again," writes the chronicler, a cleric who had first started these reflections on death. His name was Caesar Peloso, and it is remarkable that among all the clerics present at the time, he should be the one to take notes of this interesting conversation, for he was to die shortly afterward.

In the interests of a thorough intellectual training Don Bosco gave the greatest importance to the study of philosophy. He kept himself informed of all that was done in this course by both students and teachers. To the teachers he would say: "Teachers must be patient, they must try to descend from their heights down to the level of their students; they must not try to deliver lofty dissertations all the time; do not lecture, but rather explain the treatise in detail."

Most likely the head of the philosophy department was dissatisfied with his students. He was a serious, rather severe man, of great talent and strong character who perhaps did not find his audience entirely satisfying. He probably wrote to Don Bosco one day, listing his complaints. The following precious words were written in reply by the saintly teacher:

Turin, April 9, 1875

Dear Bertello:

I shall do all I can to enkindle love of study among your pupils; but you must also do everything you can to cooperate.

1. Think of them as your brothers; kindness, understanding and patience are the keys to their hearts.
2. Make them study only as much as they are able and no more. Make them read and understand what the book says without digressing.
3. Quiz them very often, ask them to explain and read, read and explain.
4. Encourage them at all times, never humiliate them; praise them as often as you can and do not belittle them; only show your displeasure when you wish to punish them.

Try to follow this advice, and let me know the result. I shall pray for you and yours. Believe me always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had to make arrangements well in advance for the training of qualified teachers; he was, therefore, in the habit of sending clerics to take examinations for high school and college diplomas. Once when he was discussing this delicate matter, he explained how the problem must be approached:[4] "In choosing the clerics that have to take these examinations, we have to give primary consideration to the interests of the Congregation. We must not consider whether the individual himself is interested or not; in fact, we should not even consider whether the examinations would be beneficial or not to the cleric; but we must think only of whether this would be advantageous or detrimental to the Congregation. I do not wish to carry this principle as far as it is carried elsewhere; but, as a general rule, when making any such decision, we must consider the welfare of the Congregation and not of the individual. One more thing we must not overlook is to select only those who have the necessary requisites, give hope of ultimate success and are young. Less-gifted or older clerics may attend accelerated courses of study free from minor subjects so that they may soon be employed in the priestly ministry. We also need many to work as assistants, to help in administrative matters and in other tasks in our Houses."

In order that the ecclesiastical spirit of his clerics might be well-formed, he entrusted the theology course to good priests of Turin,

[4] Chronicle of Father Barberis, March 25, 1876.

such as the learned Canon Marengo. They were very happy to be entrusted with this important service. Don Bosco's own exemplary life as a priest and his practical teachings on the practice of the priestly ministry did all the rest.

Father Joseph Vespignani witnessed the following scene. As he was enjoying a friendly talk after lunch with Don Bosco outside the door of the dining room, where the famous Pinardi chapel has now been restored, Father Barberis joined them and handed Don Bosco a list of clerics who were ready for ordination. In looking it over, Don Bosco was surprised that the names of several clerics, who were already in their last year of theology and whose conduct was excellent, were missing. Father Barberis respectfully pointed out: "True, they are ready; but they are teaching, and if they now receive the subdiaconate, they will lose too much time in reciting the breviary, whereas they must . . ."

Don Bosco did not let him finish, but interrupted peremptorily: "What are you saying? Is the breviary a loss of time? On the contrary, it helps us gain time. When clerics recite the breviary, they fulfill a divine duty in praying together with the whole Church. They are instructed through the inspired words of Holy Scripture, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church and the lives and examples of the Saints. They pray the psalms, the canticles of God's chosen people, and liturgical hymns. Clerics will learn more from the breviary than from any book or teacher. It will inspire them in imparting knowledge of God and of the soul to their pupils.

"We must, therefore, make our clerics realize the importance of the subdiaconate and the usefulness of the breviary for their religious instruction and sanctification. You will see how they will benefit from it in every way." Then turning to Father Vespignani who was edified and full of admiration for this spontaneous and wholehearted praise of the breviary, Don Bosco concluded: "Is it not true that this is the most precious treasure of the cleric, once he is in sacred orders?"

Compulsory military service cast a dread shadow over the lives of the clerics threatening the most cherished hopes centered on them. The bishops of Italy felt oppressed by it. Every year perhaps as many as ten of Don Bosco's clerics were exposed to this danger. He left no stone unturned in his efforts to rescue them from the

dangers of the barracks: he thought up ways and means of exemption, called on influential people and solicited alms with which to redeem them. The following note addressed to Mrs. Teresa Vallauri, a benefactress of the Oratory who lived in Turin, apparently refers to some such case.

Oratory, July 3, 1875

Dear Mrs. Teresa:

I return your umbrella with heartfelt thanks. The person who is handling the case of my cleric is Captain Chiaves, a good Catholic who lives on Via San Domenico 3.

I very much appreciate your charity to me and to our young Congregation, which in its beginnings is in need of everthing and of everyone.

God bless you. Pray for me. I remain in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The situation grew worse, for on April 18 a bill was passed in the Chamber of Deputies, abolishing all exemptions granted to clerics. The second article in the bill read as follows: "As of July, 1876, the option to transfer from first to second class on payment of a sum of money is forthwith abrogated." The Senate likewise passed the bill that was ratified by the King on June 7. Yet, thanks to Don Bosco, up to the year 1875 not one cleric of the Oratory was drafted into the army.

July ushered in a welcome innovation for the clerics—a vacation away from the Oratory. A charitable lady, Eurosia Monti, who owned a beautiful villa on the hills of Superga loaned it to Don Bosco for this purpose. Since the house could not accommodate more than fifteen people at a time, Don Bosco arranged for successive groups of fourteen clerics to vacation there every two weeks. He also prepared the following list of detailed instructions that Father Barberis, who was in charge, faithfully committed to paper:

1. Try to keep the caretakers happy; ask them about the things we may or may not use; tell them about the places we may or may not visit; ask them, from the very beginning, to make note of anything we may damage or consume beyond the agreed limits and inform us of it, because we wish to pay whatever is required. For Don Bosco was thinking:

"If they are upset by our presence, they might paint a black picture of us to the owner of the estate. Such a report would put us in a bad light before the lady, even though she is not a stickler for trifles."

2. Call on the pastor and extend greetings from Don Bosco. Establish friendly contact with Mr. Arnaldi and Father Tomatis whose villas adjoin Mrs. Monti's estate; extend Don Bosco's greetings, and tell them that he always remembers them in his prayers.

3. Write a letter of thanks to Mrs. Monti who is now at Biella: tell her how you are enjoying her hospitality; say that since we are unable to repay her in any other way, the clerics are offering up prayers and Communions to our Lord for her; tell her that her presence alone is lacking to make the happiness of her guests complete; assure her that you are saying special prayers for the eternal rest of the colonel, her late husband, who died a few months ago.

4. Do not forget to do some work: "I would like you to conduct some sort of classes," said Don Bosco, "so that those who are weak in Latin may catch up a little: simple and easy things, without lengthy explanations, and correcting only grammatical errors. Make them practice reading. It hardly seems possible that one should find it difficult to read aloud correctly and intelligently in front of others. Many find the pronunciation of double consonants difficult; others have difficulty with *z*. Then they pronounce *o* as though it were a *u*. Teaching them how to write letters properly might seem insignificant, but it is very important. Some learned people, who have received a good education and are perhaps priests, doctors, or lawyers, find it a problem to write even a short note. They overlook mistakes in spelling and grammar, in forms of address, and even insert date and signature in the wrong places. I think that the vacation period is as good a time as any to teach such things. Such training is not fatiguing, but it has great practical advantage. You might also teach a little French to those clerics who have made good progress during the year in their ordinary subjects.

"You must have patience with those who are behind in Latin. For the most part, they are the ones who would prefer fewer classes. They believe they know as much as the others and so do not bother to memorize the rules they consider unimportant. They would rather do more important things and end up by learning nothing.

"Last year a special teacher was assigned to them. He was able to hold classes only intermittently, because they failed to attend for some excuse or other. The main reason for their absence was that they did not care. Nevertheless, I think it wise that we do this and try on our own part to provide more extensive instruction for those who need it."

5. Draw up a timetable. Practices of Piety: Mass and meditation at 6 A.M. At 10 A.M., an hour of class, and then a short spiritual reading. Free study from 3:30 P.M. to 5 P.M. At 5 P.M. visit to the Blessed Sacrament, which is reserved in the chapel of Villa Arnaldi, after first asking permission. Recreation for the rest of the day, and every evening a short walk until 7:30 P.M.; then supper as soon as you return home, followed by night prayers at 9 P.M., and then to bed.

Not satisfied with imparting these instructions, Don Bosco chose to talk about vacation time to all the assembled clerics. After the final examinations he summoned them all for a conference on the evening of July 6. The topic of vacation also gave him a good opportunity to mention things that would help to stir up the clerics' attachment to the Congregation and strengthen them against the risks involved in their inactivity during the summer.

Theology and philosophy examinations are over, and we are generally satisfied. Now your vacation is about to begin. I am aware that many of you are very tired and in need of vacations, so I have done my best to make arrangements for all of you to enjoy yourselves. A few of you still have things to do and so are unable to begin your vacation immediately. You will start later on. But some of you will begin tomorrow. I want this vacation to be a rest. At the same time I want you to be occupied in some way so that while you are building up your bodies, you may not jeopardize your spirit. A timetable for those who are spending their vacation here as well as for those who are going to Villa Monti has already been drawn up. This will provide for plenty of recreation and for things to keep you busy.

We also have to make arrangements for those who are going to [South] America. We have accepted this mission and now we must start Spanish classes and select the personnel, because the departure date is set for October or early November at the latest. We have received letters from [South] America, telling us how impatiently they are awaiting our arrival and how much they need us. A school has already been built and is to be made available to us immediately. We shall also have charge of a public church and take over the city schools. We must provide special refresher courses in Italian, French, and English as well. South Americans are good-hearted and very attached to their Faith; they only lack instruction, and there are no priests to teach them. The city of San

Nicolas, where we are going, has a population of some 50,000, all Catholics, with only three priests. What are three priests in a city the size of our own Alessandria, with Sacraments to administer, the dead to bury, Viaticum to bring to the dying, Masses to celebrate, confessions to hear, sermons to preach, and the catechism to teach? You must also realize that not very far from San Nicolas is a territory inhabited by many uncivilized natives. They are interested in the Christian faith and are asking for instruction; but there is nobody to attend to them, and so they live and die outside the Catholic Church, never knowing who God is. We agree to take over the school for the time being in view of these urgent needs. I hope that later on we shall also be able to instruct, educate, and make good Christians of the natives.

As you already know, we recently had a visit from Cardinal Berardi. This, my dear sons, was a very gracious act on the part of His Eminence. He came all the way from Genoa to Turin just to visit the Oratory. It was a moving sight to witness how kind he was to us, how pleased to see our boys, and the admiration with which he talked about them. I am also deeply moved by the affection the Holy Father has shown us; among other things the Cardinal also told us this: "The Holy Father instructed me most particularly to bring you his greeting and give you and your boys his blessing. Then he also told me to tell you several other things." Anyone would think we are very important people to receive so much attention from so great a Pope!

Now, to return once more to the subject of vacations. I must warn you of a great danger you may encounter. I have seen so many lose their vocation during the summer holidays! This is the greatest loss, the greatest disaster that could happen to you! It does happen, unfortunately, especially when you actually go home to stay with your parents. There the talk turns to material needs or business; then relatives come visiting and all they talk about is buying and selling. Caught in the midst of such talk, what possible benefit can a poor cleric derive? Not to mention other conversations that are very often immoral, and nothing can be done about them; quarrels between brothers, in which the cleric finds himself practically forced to take sides. There is the aged father who speaks of nothing but family problems and of how much he needs someone to help him; how his son, the future priest, will be in a position to help him, and so on.

St. Bernard had to give up visiting the home of his parents ever again. He himself says so: "I went home but once; when I returned to the monastery I did nothing but cry. For many months the tears and woes of my father lingered in my mind and I wondered what I could do to

help him, until in His goodness our Lord took this temptation from me." If this could happen to St. Bernard, how many may have destroyed their vocation by worrying about how they might help their parents?

In regard to vocation there is something I think it well to clarify here and now, namely, doubts about one's vocation. I shall not talk about the signs indicating whether one has a vocation or not; I only want to answer those who say: "I would very much like to enter the religious life, but who knows if I am really called to it? I am here; but who knows whether our Lord really wants me to be here or whether, instead, He has not called me elsewhere?"

1. From the moment that you had such a desire, your wish to enter the Congregation has been a sign that our Lord, who gave you this desire, this wish, wants you to follow it.

2. Since this desire was given to you by our Lord, you may not reject it unless God manifests His will to the contrary, and your spiritual director recognizes that this is so.

Some of you may say: "Who knows whether our Lord has not called me to live a harder, more austere life than this?" In the majority of cases, indeed, in almost every case, this is a deception. If our Lord inspired you to enter a Congregation where you believed you could do some good, any desire for something else means that you are prepared to abandon the post to which our Lord assigned you. The devil is trying to persuade you to live a more austere life elsewhere; once you are elsewhere, he will then tempt you to wonder: "Who knows if I can endure it?" or: "My health is suffering; does our Lord really ask this of me?"

The devil is the prince of discord and rebellion; he will always persecute us, putting temptation in our way wherever we go. And then, and then . . . Let us say that you go away from here to live a more austere life; you leave, but who can say whether or not you actually will embrace a more austere life? Someone did leave our Congregation, saying that our life was too easygoing, that he wished to live more austerely, more perfectly. After leaving us, a few days later he decided not to re-enter religious life at all, but live an austere life in the world. In a short time he grew lax; later he gave up his prayers. I met him only a few days ago. After asking what he was doing, I immediately began to speak of spiritual matters. But he replied: "Oh! Don Bosco, do not talk to me of such things!"

"Why not?"

"Because I no longer pay any attention to them; my eyes are open now . . ."

"How did this happen?"

"Oh! I was taken in long enough by such nonsense."

"Aren't you going to confession any more, my friend?"

"Who cares about confession!"

"But what about the salvation of your soul! You once were so concerned about it that our Congregation did not seem severe enough for you and you sought something more austere? If you do this, heaven is lost to you, and hell awaits you."

"That is enough; do not talk about these things any more. I no longer believe such nonsense."

My friends, I talked in vain; there was no way I could move him. He will be a lost soul, unless our Lord works a change in him by a miracle of grace.

There are others who say: "We would be happy to remain, but . . ."

"But what?"

"My Superior doesn't like me . . . he seems dissatisfied with me . . . I am no good to the Congregation. I am not virtuous enough. My Superiors dislike me."

What are you saying? How can they dislike you when they sacrificed their own lives for your welfare; when our Lord has put them in authority over you; when they would be ready to shed their blood to save you, should this be necessary? Believe me, as of now no such thing could ever happen here. And then, did you enter the Congregation expecting to find things exactly to your taste, or to be petted? If necessary, you must endure even contempt for love of our Lord. Might it not be that a Superior refrains from showing you any special esteem because he wants to cure you of excessive sensitivity or to test your strength? Believe me, this is an old snare of the devil, who always makes things seem the opposite of what they really are.

Is your Superior dissatisfied with you? Try to find out whether this is due to some fault of your own, whether you are doing the things you should, or whether you are really doing all you can. If this is true, then it is you who must improve, because you are at fault. Do you expect your Superior to be satisfied with you when you do not deserve it? Secondly, remember that you are not working to please people, but to please God. Yet, believe me, here again imagination plays a great part. You immediately think that your Superior is dissatisfied with you because he does not show you that he is pleased or does not pamper you. Only little children are treated indulgently, not grown-ups; and if you are reasonable, you will be satisfied with moderate signs of approval.

Someone may say, "I am incapable of doing anything worthwhile for

the Congregation; I do not earn my keep; I am no good as an assistant, still less as a teacher; I am not strong enough to work. I am only a burden to the Congregation." Would you like to know the ones who really are burdens to the Congregation? They are those who are gifted, but disobedient, whose Superior is obliged to pick his words carefully when he gives them an order, knowing that if he does not, they will either disobey or obey him begrudgingly; those who have no love of poverty, who complain about the food and drink that is served, or about their room; those who do not treasure the virtue of chastity scrupulously, because without it, one single person may bring ruin upon the whole Congregation. If you are good and do the best you can, you will never be a burden to the Congregation. Your Superiors would never have accepted you in the first place, if they had felt you were unfit; since they did accept you, it means they considered you fit; so let this judgment be theirs, not yours.

Others may say, "My Superior believed I was better than I am, but I realize that I do not have the virtues necessary for the religious life." If you are not good enough for the religious life where you are safe from harm, receive so much assistance, and have so much time to pray and therefore enjoy the grace of God, how will you be able to save your soul in the midst of dangerous occasions and companions with hardly any time for prayer, all taken up with earning your living? Then too, leave the question of moral fitness entirely in the hands of your spiritual Director. Just make every effort to do your best and do not be afraid; if you are not fit, you will be told, you will not be allowed to continue and will be asked to leave. If your Superiors do not say anything, you may continue without fear.

"But," some of you may say, "the way you put it, it would seem that to leave the Congregation and to be damned are one and the same thing. I believe that one may live in the world and still remain a good Christian. In fact, some who left the Congregation lead a better and more exemplary life than when they were religious."

To which I say: Certainly, theoretically speaking one may still be a good Christian outside the Congregation, and anyone who leaves the Congregation may still be saved. But believe me, I can tell you quite frankly that this is true in theory more than in actual fact. I am really convinced that very few people who leave a religious Congregation may be saved. To start with, by the mere fact that they entered a Congregation, one may be reasonably sure that they had a vocation; if they lost it by their own fault, it will be very hard for them to return to the right path. Then, if someone leaves a way of life he knows is good, with the

knowledge that the right thing to do would be to remain in it, then he is not prompted by love of God but by his own selfish reasons.

Now, to come to a practical conclusion, were I asked to give advice to someone who is doubtful of his vocation, this is what I would say: Do not make up your mind without first seeking wise counsel. Without it, any decision would be unwise. To whom should you turn for advice? I do not think anyone is better qualified than your spiritual Director. But keep this in mind; do not act as many do, who ask advice. If it is to their liking and agrees with what they themselves have already decided, all well and good, but if it is not, they disregard it. When the Lord appoints Superiors and Directors, He inspires them and gives them authority. He tells their subjects: *Subiacete eis, quasi rationem reddituris pro animabus vestris.* [Be subject to them for they keep watch as having to render an account of your souls. *Heb.* 13, 17] You must listen to what your Director tells you, as if God Himself were speaking, and if anyone offers resistance to what he says, he should fear that he is offering resistance to God.

Bear this other admonition of St. Paul in mind, all of you: *Manete in vocatione, qua vocati estis;* [remain in the calling in which you were called. Cf. *1 Cor.* 7, 20] for he who, like a weather vane, first wants this and then that, who now feels he is better off here but then feels he could do much better there, will never settle anywhere and will never do any good, no matter where he may be. Regard as addressed to yourselves these other words that apply to your Superiors: *Qui vos audit, me audit.* [He who hears you, hears Me. *Luke* 10, 16] Never do anything without the counsel or against the advice of your Superiors.

If you do this, you will always be happy, sure that you are on the right path. Nor must you later render account before the judgment seat of God for not having followed your vocation.

Don Bosco had pinned his hopes on these clerics; yet they disturbed the sleep of someone outside the Oratory. The last day of the year, a thunderbolt hit the Oratory in the form of a long list of complaints whose harshness, unusual in letters of this kind, was only matched by its crude style.

This Congregation is entitled to admit candidates upon application, but may not do so unless the applicants submit testimonial letters from their Ordinary (*Constit.* X). Should the Ordinary refuse to issue such testimonial letters and the Congregation consider such refusal unjustified,

appeal may be made to the [proper] Sacred Roman Congregation, but the [Salesian] Congregation may not act as judge in its own cause.

It is not entitled to operate schools where boys wear the cassock, unless permission has been granted by the Bishop in whose diocese the school is located.

Nor is it entitled to vest with the clerical habit any boy in such schools if it permits him to wear such clerical garb outside the precincts of the school without due permission of the Bishop of the diocese to which the boy belongs. Hence the recent clerical investiture of a boy from Vinovo without the permission of the Archbishop of Turin was in itself an irregular procedure, and represented under the circumstances a serious transgression against the obedience due to the diocesan Bishop.

The dissension now existing between the ecclesiastical authorities of Turin and this Congregation had its origin and growth in the fact that the latter started and continued to admit to its Houses clerics previously dismissed from the diocesan seminary, doing so not only without the permission, but even despite the distinct dissent of the ecclesiastical authorities. This subverts hierarchical order and seminary discipline and, as a logical consequence, strikes a most severe blow to the heart of the Archbishop in a matter most sensitive.

This discord originated and is kept alive by failing to show both in letters and conversations, the reverence due to the person and authority of the Archbishop, as occurred the other night (December 29, 1875). Even when apologizing for such lack of reverence, the Congregation contents itself by an apology that starts with an *"if"*, such as anyone entirely free of all fault may use in asking forgiveness for some omission.

Let the Congregation stay within the limits set by Canon Law, let it observe its Constitutions scrupulously, never forgetting the reverence due the Archbishop, never doing or attempting to do, anything in opposition to his jurisdiction, such as unfortunately has happened on more than one occasion. Let it not neglect its duties in justice toward him and the diocese. In dealing with him and all others and on every occasion, let the [Salesian] Congregation give an example of that humility which constitutes the foremost virtue of the Religious. If this is done, things will return to a normal state as required by Christian justice.

Don Bosco did not hesitate in dictating an answer, written as though it came from Father Rua. In this answer both the sentiments expressed and the words used were pervaded by the sweetness of charity, which *patiens est, benigna est, non aemulatur, non agit*

perperam. [is patient, is kind . . . does not envy, is not pretentious. *1 Cor.* 13, 4]

Your Excellency:

I must offer my heartfelt thanks for your observations of December 31, which only confirm what we ourselves believed, namely, that it was merely misinformation that caused your displeasure with the Salesian Congregation. Once the true situation is known to you and our goodwill disclosed, I firmly believe that obstacles which either do not really exist or are unintentional will disappear. As the Prefect of this Congregation I have at all times been thoroughly informed of everything and wish, therefore, to express my own viewpoint, if you will allow me, and submit the whole case to your own enlightened judgment.

"The Salesian Congregation," you write, "may not admit anyone who does not first present a testimonial letter from his Ordinary."

This does not present any problem to us, because it is so established in our Rule (Chapter XI). On the first day of every year we read aloud to all Salesians the decree *Romani Pontifices,* issued by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars (January 25, 1848), in which is prescribed what should be done in such cases. In fact, we always consult the many answers given in the past to clarify doubts and problems that have arisen.

"The Salesian Congregation is not entitled to operate schools where boys wear the cassock, unless permission has been granted by the Ordinary."

I do not believe we have ever disputed this. We do not operate any school, either in this diocese or any other, where boys wear cassocks.

"The recent clerical investiture of a boy from Vinovo, without permission from the Ordinary, was a serious transgression against the obedience due to the diocesan Bishop."

If we were at fault in this, then the fault is all my own; yet I trust that our Lord will not hold this against me, since it was quite unintentional. The boy in question was first admitted by me as a regular student on the recommendation of a holy and zealous priest. If he received the habit, it was because he applied for admission to our Congregation, and I availed myself of faculties extended to me to admit him, along with several others, to clerical investiture.

On several occasions you yourself were so gracious as to tell us that there would be no objection at all to our taking in boys as regular students, or to their entering our Congregation later on. Yet in all fairness I must point out that with the decree of definitive approval of the

Salesian Congregation (March 1, 1869), we were given the faculty to issue dimissorial letters for boys under fourteen years of age who were accepted into our Houses and who in due course applied for admission to our Congregation. Then, when our Constitutions were approved (April 3, 1874), this faculty was extended to include also older boys. Since the faculty for dimissorial letters had already been granted in regard to boys boarding in our houses, no further permission is necessary for admittance to the Congregation. This is what Archbishop Vitelleschi, of happy memory, told us several times, after consulting people well-versed in such things.

"The Salesian Congregation accepts, without the permission of the Ordinary, clerics dismissed from the diocesan seminary."

Your Excellency is aware, even more than I am, that no diocesan Ordinary may prevent his priests or clerics from entering religious Congregations. In fact, quite recently (January 13, 1875), the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars declared as much, as I presume your Excellency also must have been informed.

Yet, in the tragic times in which we are living, we have not stood for our rights, but solely for what is best for souls. As soon as you expressed your displeasure in regard to the above, we refrained from admitting any more such candidates. During the course of a conversation, you mentioned two clerics, Mundina and Macono, who had been admitted temporarily to one of our distant Houses. They were both dismissed after only a few weeks of residence with us.

"Both in correspondence and in conversation, we fail to show due reverence to the Archbishop, etc."

Your Excellency, not only I but all the Salesians do want to know what letters or what words were interpreted as irreverent toward the Archbishop, in order to deplore them, make amends and the most formal reparation for them.

We are in frequent contact with more than forty Bishops, all of whom are real fathers and friends to us. Permit us to say that with no others do we weigh our words and written statements so carefully, in order to avoid giving even the slightest cause for displeasure. I am genuinely anxious to learn the details of your charges, only in order to avoid them in the future.

"The Congregation must stay within the strict limits set by Canon Law, etc."

Once again, Your Excellency, permit me to make a request. Our Congregation is very young; it was born in stormy times; it therefore needs that in all things everyone extend to it the utmost indulgence

compatible with the authority of the Bishops. We do not invoke the severity of Canon Law, but rather the utmost charity and clemency in its application. In this spirit some 200 Salesians have worked and are still working in the diocese of Turin, not out of any fear of laws that bind them nor for material gain, but only in view of the need the Church has for laborers in the evangelical field. Nevertheless, all my Salesian confreres authorize me to assure you that whatever Your Excellency might mention to us as being in harmony with, or contrary to, Canon Law, we shall endeavor with utmost diligence either to follow or to avoid, as the case may be.

May I be permitted to list a few things that have greatly disturbed and humiliated the poor Salesians.

The first was the decree of November 17, 1874, in which Your Excellency saw fit to abrogate the faculties and privileges that your predecessors and you yourself had extended to our Congregation for more than 35 years: similar instances are very few in history. Then our Superior was granted only limited faculties, [for hearing confessions] while the faculty to absolve from reserved sins, which had graciously been granted to him although he had never applied for it, was revoked.

Your response was negative to both our requests that you honor with some function the seventh anniversary of the consecration of the church of Mary Help of Christians and give Confirmation to our young boys; and, besides, you would not even allows us to invite another Bishop.

At the beginning of this year the faculty to preach was refused to two of our priests, one of whom is the Director of the day school and the Festive Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

All these severe measures indicate very grave reasons, which we have never been able to find out.

Despite these things, our Superior, who is the principal victim of such measures, has never been heard to say or known to write or commit any act which might, in any way, be interpreted as disrespectful toward his ecclesiastical Superior. On the contrary, I can assure Your Excellency that when he was asked to sign reports against you which were then forwarded to Rome, he indignantly refused to do so.

He came to know that a writer associated with an anticlerical newspaper, had prepared a series of articles attacking Your Excellency. Our Superior decided to take in, free of charge, a son of this wretched man and even give him money, on condition that he hand over to him these scandalous articles and never publish them. He was successful.

As recently as last October (1875) someone who believed the rumor that Don Bosco was against you brought a shameful biography of Your

Excellency to him, together with an attractive sum of money, asking him to print it. Don Bosco told this person to leave the manuscript with him so that he could look it over; it ran into over a thousand pages, but when he scanned it and realized what it was, he tore it page by page into tiny pieces and cast it into the fire.

This act had serious consequences, and Don Bosco still carries this burden; yet he always rejoices when at the cost of any sacrifice he succeeds in safeguarding the good name of his Archbishop, for whom he has always felt love and respect.

I realize that I have been rather lengthy, but you will surely forgive me for giving vent to my feelings in order to assure you that the Salesians have never lessened their esteem or veneration for Your Excellency from the time when you were a simple Canon in this city, or Bishop of Saluzzo, or when Divine Providence willed you to be our Archbishop.

I shall always consider it a great honor whenever I am able to be in deepest gratitude to Your Excellency,

Your grateful servant,

Fr. Michael Rua

The original copy of these observations is still among the papers of Pius IX in Rome; it bears five marginal comments written by Don Bosco. (1) At the end of the first paragraph: "Several times he said that it was his right to examine the vocation of anyone who wished to enter the Congregation." (2) At the end of the second paragraph: "There are none in any of our schools." (3) At the end of the first sentence of the third paragraph: "We only give the habit to those who wish to join our Congregation." (4) At the end of the fourth paragraph: "The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has already answered him, assuring him that he may not prevent, etc. Nevertheless we have not had, nor do we have, at this present time, anyone in our Congregation who was ever expelled from the diocesan seminary." (5) After the word "conversations" in the first sentence of the fifth paragraph: "It is surprising that he has never quoted letters or remarks of this nature." Then at the end. "N.B. These five marginal notes were added on January 16, 1876, by Fr. John Bosco." The conversation on December 29 is one to which we shall refer later in Chapter 22, and the apology is contained in the letter from Father Rua to which reference is made.

We still have to treat of the professed priests. The Oratory roster showed that priests were not plentiful. But if one takes notice of all there was to do, he will be dumbfounded at how very few they were. Thus, we can understand Father Cagliero's complaints about this acute scarcity. The following is an exchange between the lively future Cardinal and Don Bosco, the unalterably calm man of God. As usual this exchange took place after supper, on July 4. Father Cagliero started it by lamenting how few were the priests for all the work to be done, to which Don Bosco replied:

"Cheer up! If everything goes well, we shall have eleven new priests ordained in less than three months."

"Good, good! that is even too many all at once. But I am not a newcomer in the Congregation. Priests are ordained every year, and every year the shortage is greater. We ordain one priest, but then there is work enough for two. If two are ordained at the Oratory, you send three out to other schools. Now eleven are to be ordained; but in the meantime a House is to be opened in [South America], and we need to open another in which the *Sons of Mary Project* is to begin. Then too, of these eleven, for some reason or other, four, six, or even eight may have their ordinations postponed, and that's the end of it: we shall be in a worse situation than before.

"Not at all, unless Rome will not grant us the *extra tempus* [ordinations outside the appointed time] for which I have applied. But that is improbable, because so far, they have always granted the favors we ask. As soon as the *extra tempus* is granted, the clerics shall receive minor orders on the following Sunday, the subdiaconate on the second Sunday, the diaconate on the third, and the priesthood on the fourth."

"They will fill the gaps left by the others; but then we shall need more to take their places."

"I am afraid things will always be like this as long as the Oratory is what it is. There is always something pressing: one thing after another; if we haven't two things to do at the same time, we have three; in this way there is never a dull moment."

"That's enough! This is your trouble! You worry about it; as for me, I am fleeing to [South] America; and we'll see if the situation there will be a bit different."

Only three other priests were present, but they were not in the least shocked by Father Cagliero's frankness, for he was on very familiar terms with Don Bosco. He would go to America, but not as a runaway. We already know who the eleven candidates for ordination were. Despite all the difficulties, eight were ordained priests, two, deacons, and one subdeacon. This we gather from the [Salesian] Directory of 1876.

As long as God grants us life to continue writing these *Biographical Memoirs,* we shall do our best not to omit any of the wise instructions on the sacred ministry that Don Bosco imparted so generously to his priests. If only more could have reached us through the years, what a great treasure we would have! Let us nevertheless gather up the crumbs.

Father [Louis] Guanella was outstanding among the very few professed members who had entered the Congregation as priests. When he was Director of the St. Aloysius Oratory, Don Bosco once gave him this practical advice on preaching: "If you wish to be pleasant as well as helpful to youngsters, intersperse your preaching with anecdotes, parables, and similes. The important thing is to amplify them down to the smallest detail in an interesting way. This catches the boys' attention, and they listen eagerly to find out how the story ends."

In 1875, he gave further instructions about preaching to young boys to Father [James] Costamagna. We give it here exactly as he related it to us when he was already a Bishop: [5] "I was to preach the retreats in our schools in Turin, Varazze, and elsewhere. He sent for me, and said: 'Insist especially that they avoid bad conversation, and stress the harm it does. You may also tell them that Don Bosco has read a great many books and has heard many, many sermons, and he remembers very little of them all. But he never forgot one evil word that a bad boy taught him when he was seven; for the devil takes it upon himself to recall it frequently to his mind. Yet Don Bosco is already sixty years old . . .' "

That same year he talked to Father Albera about the spiritual guidance of boys when he went to Sampierdarena for the departure of his missionaries. They were returning to the Hospice in a carriage after dining at Staglieno, in the home of Mr. Angelo

[5] Letter from Santiago to Father Lemoyne, December 20, 1898.

Borgo. The Director was sitting quietly beside him when Don Bosco suddenly exclaimed: "How difficult it is to do good to souls! I, who am sixty years old, still become aware of difficulties that may be met in hearing confessions of children! And this, despite the fact that Don Bosco has been given some enlightenment."

Don Bosco thrust into action men equipped more with good will than with sound training, for he felt that work would stir and enhance their natural gifts; but in matters related to the priestly ministry he moved very cautiously, and was far more exacting than people would have believed. One young priest, ordained in August, 1875, was assigned to the college of Valsalice. He was a gifted orator and preached often. One day Don Bosco said to Father Dalmazzo, the young priest's Director:

"I understand that so-and-so does a lot of preaching."

"Yes, Don Bosco, he does," said Father Dalmazzo.

"Is he a good preacher?"

"Outstanding."

"But do his sermons benefit the souls of his listeners?"

"I could not say, but he has a large audience, and everyone is enthusiastic."

"I want to know if people are converted by his preaching!"

"I could not say. He has great eloquence and imagination; he also has a fine voice; perhaps he is a little too affected . . ."

"Very well, you will bar him from preaching for a few years."

On the other hand, at certain times and places he had a way of dealing with his priests that would conquer their hearts. One day in this same year he opened the safe, remarking to Father Lemoyne, the Director of the school at Lanzo:

"Here, take some money."

"I do not need any."

"Take it for such time as you may need it so that you do not have to depend on the Prefect. On certain occasions you might want to feel free and not depend on somebody else."

Father Lemoyne kissed his hand, feeling deeply moved.

One evening, as Father Barberis was accompanying him to his room, he said in his fatherly way:

"You will always be Don Bosco's close friend."

"Oh! Indeed, I hope so."

"The *baculus senectutis meae.* [The staff of my old age. Cf. Tob., 10-4]."

"If I can help you in any way, I shall be delighted."

"You will complete the work that I begin; I shall sketch it, you will color it."

"Just as long as we shall not ruin what Don Bosco has done!"

"Oh, no! You see, I am now sketching a rough copy of the Congregation. I shall leave it to those who will come after me to perfect it. Now we have the seed: you have seen for yourself that since you first came to the Oratory our material set-up as well as order and discipline have improved. . . ."

"What does our Oratory here at Valdocco mean in relation to the world?" he said on another occasion. With these his words we shall end the second of two long chapters. "What is the Oratory? An atom. Yet how busy it keeps us, and from this little spot we plan to send people to various parts of the world. Oh! the power of the human mind! How good God is!"

"How great was the holiness of this man of God!" we ourselves in turn exclaim. Father Charles Ghivarello who, at the time, was a Councillor of the Superior Chapter, a man of few words, an expert in the field of mechanics and an impartial analyst not only of lifeless machines but also of living men—yet another of the singular characters molded by Don Bosco—conceived the idea of watching Don Bosco closely, to find out if he could succeed in detecting in his habitual, everyday conduct, his speech or actions, anything in any way unbecoming. He followed his movements for a whole month. But he later confided to Father Nai, after Don Bosco's death, that he had detected nothing, absolutely nothing in him that could be described as a fault. From such great virtue the little Oratory drew that inner vigorous strength that gives impetus to generous undertakings, fosters steadfastness in arduous good deeds, and fills the heart with aspirations for great and noble things.

CHAPTER 12

Audiences, Guests, Visitors

WHILE not explicitly stated in its title, this chapter also deals with life at the Oratory. People seeking interviews, guests, and visitors introduced temporary variations in the daily routine. Don Bosco was indeed what attracted them to the Oratory, but their coming and going was felt in greater or lesser degree throughout the Oratory. Under this aspect, let us see what happened in 1875.

Interested persons can always re-read Chapter 3, Volume VII of the *Biographical Memoirs.* It describes Don Bosco's heroic virtue under the overwhelming strain of audiences, particularly during the last thirty years of his life. The Chronicle of May 26, 1875 gives us a distant echo of a conversation in which this subject also came up. Don Bosco was seated at table with a group of guests; he was not at all well. His weariness after the celebrations of the feast of Mary Help of Christians had left him drained of all his strength. He was probably not his usual cheerful self and felt that he owed an explanation to his guests. He apparently said: "What tires me most of all are these continuous interviews. Everyone wishes to talk to me and to talk at length, and poor Don Bosco is exhausted. Now someone requests my attention for at least half an hour. Then someone else tells me: 'I will remain in Turin as long as necessary until I am able to talk to you freely.' I try to tell them: 'I really cannot! Look how many people there are!' But a third one continues: 'That does not matter; I will stay here and wait; my time will come.' In short, say what you want, but one man can only do so much."

People pursued him wherever there was hope of getting near

him. On the evening of June 1 such an indiscretion, not unusual in similar circumstances, created an incident.

After hearing the artisans' confessions, Don Bosco came late to supper. Two pious ladies, administrators of a hospital in Bologna, were walking about the playground. They had come to Turin to celebrate the feast of Mary Help of Christians and to confer with Don Bosco. When they heard that he was in the dining room, they went there at once to see him.

"At this late hour?" Don Bosco exclaimed as soon as he saw them.

"We summoned up courage to come here and try to have a minute to talk to you."

"Don't you know that at this hour enclosure is in force?"

"No, we did not know that; but if you wish we shall leave," said one of the ladies.

"Besides, it was Father Rua who let us in," objected the other.

"Well, I shall not turn you away, but please think of the penalty you might incur by violating this law."

There were about ten people present and the two ladies were even more embarrassed. We do not think that Don Bosco had any serious intention of threatening them with canonical censure despite the chronicler's remark that "although the words were not harshly spoken, they were not accompanied by his usual smile." Never before that evening had a woman ever set foot in the dining room during or after supper time. Anyone acquainted with Don Bosco's scrupulous reserve will understand that this episode could not have ended in any substantially different manner.

Something else happened during the month of June. Those who lived at the Oratory during this month realized how hospitable Don Bosco was at all times. His door was open to anyone. The two ladies had traveled from Bologna with Mr. Lanzarini, at whose home Don Bosco, upon his return from Rome, had been a guest in March. Now Mr. Lanzarini in turn was Don Bosco's guest for more than a month. At the same time there were several people of various nationalities and creeds staying at the Oratory: a Jew, recently converted to Christianity; a twenty-five-year-old English Catholic who wished to learn Latin and study for the

priesthood; a Maltese cleric; a Swedish Protestant boy who was receiving instruction for baptism; a Frenchman who had neglected his religious duties for many years but who, after meeting Don Bosco, had made his confession to him and now wished to remain at the Oratory forever. Three visiting priests stayed for several days: one, a Sicilian; the other, a canon from Alassio who had come to see a boy, a relative of his, who was sick; the third, a parish priest. Ten priests on a pilgrimage to Paray-le-Monial remained overnight at the Oratory. A priest from Modena, who was taking his degree in theology, spent twenty days. No one was surprised at this transient population; by this time the Oratory was becoming something like a seaport.

A table conversation with the priest from Modena acquired a certain degree of notoriety among writers and journalists. Talking about freemasonry, Don Bosco said: "Cavour, a masonic leader here in Piedmont, counted Don Bosco among his friends; he told me quite emphatically, and proved it several times by deeds, that he would not grant me an interview unless I also had dinner with him. He added that if I ever should be in need of a favor, I would always find a place at his table where we could talk with greater ease. Once when I called at his office for something urgent, he did not receive me immediately but had me wait so that I might dine with him. Then he would grant whatever I asked." Don Bosco then added that in the previous year Vigliani, the Cabinet Minister, had treated him with great confidence, just like a close friend; and that Rattazzi, too, had acted in the same manner.

At times his kindness and readiness to welcome guests involved him in some slight difficulty. A certain Father Boverio of the diocese of Casale stayed at the Oratory for a while. He had not failed in his duty to request permission from the chancery office to say Mass while in Turin. When his *Celebret* expired he returned it to the chancery for renewal in compliance with synodal regulations. Almost immediately he had to leave Turin and did not bother to call for it. Hence, a stern notification from the Ordinary with a warning about the past and a threat for the future unless both Don Bosco and the priest in question rectified the matter

within three days. Don Bosco did all he could to contact the priest and then he wrote this respectful note:

Turin, August 13, 1875

Your Excellency:

Now that I have obtained the required information concerning the Rev. Theodore Boverio, may I inform you of the following:

The Rev. Theodore Boverio stayed at our House for a short period and celebrated Mass in the church of Mary Help of Christians. For reasons of health, he went to Genoa to undergo medical treatment; at present he is in a hospital at Sampierdarena.

This is for your information, while with deepest respect, I am highly honored to be

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

High ranking people called at the Oratory to see Don Bosco and to get firsthand information about his work. During that year we find references to visits from missionaries and bishops. The Chronicle notes that in May a missionary from Asia came, although his name is not recorded. It does, however, report that he inspired many to go to the missions by telling them about a district of 8 million inhabitants cared for by only one Bishop and eight priests—one priest for every million inhabitants.

The Archbishop of Calcutta visited the Oratory in October. After talking at some length with Don Bosco, he officiated at solemn Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. November brought the Bishop of Acerenza, who wanted to visit the classrooms and workshops. Upon leaving he manifested his amazement at what he had seen. The Bishop of Susa, who had always been well-disposed toward Don Bosco, paid a visit in July as did also Bishop Parocchi of Pavia, who accepted Don Bosco's hospitality. We shall have to dwell a little longer on this latter visit which was to have repercussions later on during the apostolic process.

Canon Colomiatti, the former Promoter of Justice of the arch-

diocesan chancery of Turin, who hindered Don Bosco's cause by piling up difficulties, testified that in 1900 the then Cardinal Vicar Parocchi had told him: "While I was still Bishop of Pavia I called on Don Bosco and he asked me if I had come for advice. This annoyed me. Even though I was younger than he, I was a bishop, that is, I had attained the fullness of the priesthood. I also felt that I, and not Don Bosco, should have been the first to say as much."

Anyone acquainted with Don Bosco's great tact (not to mention his humility), which was always evident in Don Bosco's contacts with people, must surely smile to hear of his being suspected of so colossal an indiscretion. Either the Canon distorted the Cardinal's words or the Bishop had grossly misunderstood Don Bosco. Father Cossu[1] and others have proven conclusively that this champion of the old chancery interpreted whatever concerned Don Bosco according to his own bias even to the point of passing off white for black. We do not condemn his intentions but, as the saying goes, what has been done cannot be undone. After all, such things happen in the defense of any issue to the bitter end. A long time ago the Roman poet sounded this warning to lawyers: *Causa patrocinio non bona peior erit.*[2]

If this is not the case, then we beg to disagree with the Bishop for he must have misinterpreted Don Bosco's words. True though it is that Don Bosco was deferential to high ranking people who confided in him, his manner, nevertheless, was simple and friendly, a reflection of his forthright character that shrunk from any deception. When the Prelate, whom he considered his friend, came to see him, Don Bosco far from being condescendingly solemn, most likely as was his custom, talked with him in a humorous and familiar manner. He would never have done this had his habitual insight warned him that the person with whom he was conversing held such a hypersensitive opinion of his own dignity, that he would not tolerate jesting and joking. To suppose that Don Bosco would want to pose as a counsellor to bishops is to be totally ignorant of his psychological insight.

[1] *Positio super dubio: An adducta contra Ven. Servum Dei obstent, quominus in Causa procedi possit ad ulteriora.* Rome, Poliglotta Vaticana, 1921. [Ed.: Fr. Peter Cossu was legal advisor to the Superior Chapter for many years since 1919.]

[2] Ovid, *Trist.*, I, 1. 261: A bad cause becomes worse when defended.

In the annals of visits at the Oratory, July 5 was a red-letter day. The day was made more memorable also because of the dramatic manner in which Don Bosco steered the development of the event.

While the boys were eating lunch one of the Superiors came in and motioned to the reader to stop. He told the boys with an air of mystery that at a given signal, they were all to go to the dormitories, put on their best clothes, wash carefully, comb their hair, polish their shoes—all because some very important person was coming to visit them. They were all to be on their best behavior, with heads uncovered, and observing silence at the proper times and places. At 2 P. M. the band was to assemble to rehearse a musical selection for the occasion.

One may well imagine the unrestrained curiosity! As soon as they left the dining room the boys crowded around priests and clerics, overwhelming them with questions; but the priests and clerics were no better informed than the boys. So everyone started to guess: "It's Prince Amedeo . . . No, it'll be Prince Humbert . . . No, it must be Don Carlos, who will stop here on his way to see the Pope . . . Rather, it could be General Lizzaraga, sent to Rome by Don Carlos and now on his way back to Spain."

One cleric had overheard "cardinal" whispered by some of the Superiors of the Chapter. "Ah," he laughed, "some prelate is bringing a cardinal's hat for Don Bosco." Meanwhile, the musicians rehearsing in the band room saw the words "long live Joseph" substituted for "long live Don Bosco" on the music sheets of a well-known Oratory song. This gave them a further clue to the mystery. A little later a third clue was added: the visitor came from Rome. This started them recalling all the names of the Cardinals to find out which of them had the name Joseph.

The mysterious visitor was expected at 4 P. M. and it would soon be time. The arrangements for his reception were as follows: all the boys were to be in the classrooms or in the workshops; the band was to wait near the main entrance and Don Bosco [would welcome the Cardinal] on the portico outside the dining room. The visitor was to inspect first the workshops; meanwhile the students were to come downstairs and form a circle on the portico, where they would sing the welcoming song and the band

would play some choice selections. This was the plan, but as it unfolded, Don Bosco had to make some changes.

The secret remained impenetrable. The only new rumor was that the visitor was an outstanding benefactor.

Then at 3:45 P.M. four gentlemen appeared at the entrance. One of them, who seemed to be the eagerly awaited guest, was tall and elderly but of vigorous aspect. He was dressed in black and wore a top hat. The band was not yet ready, but Father Sala, waiting at the entrance, was personally acquainted with the visitor. Don Bosco was immediately informed, and the gentleman and his party, [after being greeted by] Don Bosco, were taken directly to his room.

Some minutes later Don Bosco accompanied his guests on a tour through the library, the study hall, and some of the dormitories. After taking a look at the garden behind the building, they went downstairs to the portico where the band began to play. They listened to one selection and then visited the workshops.

Before the visitor arrived, Don Bosco had requested all those who had been to Rome and who knew the guest, not to say a word nor show any sign of special respect. Even so the unidentified visitor ran the risk of being recognized. In the bookstore, Father Berto presented him with the score of a Mass composed by Father Cagliero and dedicated to Cardinal Berardi. At this point, one in the party exclaimed: "Oh! It is dedicated to you!" Some who were standing nearby overheard the remark and quickly spread the word. Later in the print shop two young boys from Rome exclaimed in wonder as soon as they saw him: "Oh! Cardinal Berardi!"

When he reappeared on the portico, the students, standing in two rows, gave him a round of applause and sang the song in his honor. The visitor and his party sat down for the songs and music that lasted half an hour. During intervals Don Bosco talked with his guest, explaining a few things about the boys and planning a quick sight-seeing tour of Turin.

At the end of the entertainment the visitor arose, removed his hat and greeted the boys amiably before taking his leave. Everyone was astonished and gratified at the extreme and deep respect that he showed for Don Bosco. He insisted on having Don Bosco on his right; when Don Bosco attempted to yield his place, he said:

"I am in command now: stay where you are, at my right." Outside he was the first to get into his carriage. When he noticed Don Bosco walking all around the coach to get in on the other side so as to sit at his left, he bade him come back and get in on the same side as he had and sit at his right. Don Bosco wanted to sit bareheaded but was told to put on his hat.

Crowding around the carriage and clapping their hands, the boys saw Father Cagliero and then Father Berto kiss the visitor's hand as he blessed them. At this the conjecture that many already formed as to his identity became a near certainty. We may even disregard the word "near."

The carriage drove slowly away in a long roundabout tour of the city as previously arranged by Don Bosco, who pointed out to His Eminence the most important monuments and their history. Their destination was Valsalice. The Cardinal was immensely pleased with the site, the building, and the welcome from the boys. "This is truly a school high in social prestige in accordance with the economic level of the boarders," he said to Don Bosco. "At Valdocco I found cleanliness and propriety but neither affluence nor elegance; again everything was in accordance with the social condition of the pupils. If this school were less elegant in appearance, parents would hesitate to entrust their sons to you; whereas Valdocco would no longer be a school for poor boys if it were more elegant. Everything, yes, everything is very appropriate."

Returning to Turin they drove across the iron bridge spanning the Po River. Don Bosco pointed out the site on which the church of St. John the Evangelist was to be constructed and told him of all the difficulties involved in the purchase of that parcel of land. About 8 P.M. the Cardinal stopped at the Hotel d'Europe, and Don Bosco returned to the Oratory where a number of priests were waiting for him, eager to hear how he had spent the evening. Don Bosco satisfied their curiosity during supper.

Unknown to anyone, the Cardinal had arrived in Turin the day before. Don Bosco had called on him and accompanied him on a visit to the cemetery. In describing this to his priests, Don Bosco said:

"After he had seen many of the tombs, admiring the various kinds of marble, craftsmanship, tidiness, and cypress groves, by

way of diversion, I told him the story of Mrs. Griffa which you already know.

"No, we don't know!" said the priests.

"Not so many years ago Mrs. Griffa was very sick. Her husband, a renowned physician at Court, was trying to comfort her and to instill in her sentiments of resignation for her final departure. Still she didn't seem quite resigned to die. When her husband asked what it was about death that upset her most, she replied: 'God knows that it is not the idea of dying that upsets me; no, it is not that. What distresses me is the thought of being out there in the cemetery at the mercy of the elements with nothing to protect me from sun, rain, or snow. If only I could at least have an umbrella over my grave! But I shall not be permitted even that!' Since that was all she wanted, her husband promised to erect a large iron umbrella over her grave to protect her against the elements. 'If you promise me that, I am satisfied!' said his wife. She died and her husband kept his promise, so I escorted His Eminence to see the famous umbrella that is still standing."

While Don Bosco was talking with the priests, Father Rua spoke to the boys after night prayers: "My dear boys, all of you are anxious to know who visited us today. Someone asked me whether he is the Pope, others asked if he is Cardinal Berardi or Don Carlos. I shall tell you briefly who he is. He is a person who is very fond of both Don Bosco and the Oratory but wishes to keep his identity a secret, that is, he does not want people to know who he is. Perhaps the time will come when you will know." These words only caused more speculation although the majority were convinced that the visitor had been Cardinal Berardi.

The Cardinal remained in Turin another day. Since he had come for the sole purpose of speaking with Don Bosco, he remained incognito, made no visits, received no visitors; he did not even call on the Archbishop. But he did exchange a few words with Father Margotti, the staunchly Catholic journalist and editor of *Unità Cattolica*. During his three days in Turin he said Mass every morning in the cathedral. When he inquired about saying Mass, his imposing bearing and reserved manner silenced those who would have insisted on the usual formalities. Accordingly, he was immediately given a cassock.

Two of the gentlemen who accompanied the Cardinal were his nephews; the younger and more lively one was the boy who had been miraculously cured in 1869 after receiving Don Bosco's blessing.

Don Bosco spent the whole morning with the Cardinal, escorting him to the royal armory, the botanical gardens and the royal zoo. He also took him on a tour of the royal palace, the chapel of the Holy Shroud, and the library of the university. Here the renowned oriental scholar, Professor Gorresio, with whom Don Bosco was on excellent terms, showed his distinguished visitor the finest miniatures and codices in the collection.

Don Bosco returned to the Oratory for dinner but later called again on the Cardinal to pay his respects and to say goodbye. The Cardinal was very pleased and gratified to have visited Turin and then said, directing his words particularly to Don Bosco: "I shall write to His Holiness now, and when I am back in Rome I surely know what to say about you."

At the *Good Night* Don Bosco addressed his boys as follows:

Now that the guest who was kind enough to visit us yesterday has gone, there is no longer any need to keep the secret. Some of you already know him—His Eminence Cardinal [Joseph] Berardi, a man who has done very much for the Oratory and who has helped us greatly in Rome. He asked me to bring you his greetings and to thank all of you on his behalf for the welcome you gave him. He also wants me to tell you that he was very pleased with all of you. He would have liked to talk with you before leaving but had he done so he would have had to reveal his identity; because he did not wish to do so, he asked me to say goodbye to you. He told me that when in Rome he will tell the Holy Father all about you. Since he is not returning straight to Rome, he will write to Pius IX to tell him of the warm welcome you gave him. When he does return he will employ his good offices with the Holy See on our behalf. Continuing, he encouraged us to approach him with the utmost confidence whenever we should feel the need of his assistance, whether it be in matters pertaining to individual students or to the general interest of this Congregation. He will make a special effort to oblige us. How gracious of him, especially for a person in his high position! He came to Turin for the sole purpose of seeing Don Bosco and the Oratory, about which he had already heard much. He did not want anyone else to

know that he was here, nor did he desire the company of anyone else but Don Bosco.

Upon leaving he told me to thank you for the prayers you have offered for him, and he asked me to encourage you to continue to pray not only for him but for all the needs of the Church, especially at this present time. On his part, he will never forget us, but will pray to the Lord that we may all meet together again to rejoice in Heaven. Good night.

Two nights later he referred once again to the Cardinal's visit in his *Good Night* to the artisans. He did this with an air of having something to tell of particular concern to them, but in reality it was an opener to imprint a wholesome thought on their minds.

There is no longer any need to tell you who came to see us the day before yesterday, because you already know him to be His Eminence Cardinal Berardi. He was delighted with the music and singing and with his tour of the workshops; and he asked me to thank you. See how kind he is! He came from Genoa to Turin just to see Don Bosco and the Oratory. I took him to see the principal sights in Turin and he was very pleased. Among other places, we visited the cemetery; its tidiness, craftsmanship, and marble tombs impressed him greatly.

How many thoughts does a cemetery bring to the mind of a Christian! For there you see gathered together rich and poor, old and young, learned and ignorant. It is everyone's home. Death is inexorable! All of us must submit to that dread stroke of the scythe. Do you ever think of that, dear boys? We should grow accustomed to this thought. Let us think often and seriously of the fearsome hour of death. Keep this well in mind that if we want our last moments here on earth to be free from worry, we must live a good life. There is a Latin proverb that you will easily understand; it goes like this: *Qualis vita, finis ita:* as your life has been so shall your death be.

If only death would warn us in advance of its coming! But, no; rather, it generally comes suddenly and unexpectedly. What will become of us if we are not prepared for it? There are many people in the cemetery who wanted to mend their ways, who planned to lead a good life later on; but then death came and there was no longer any time! Do you know what spurs death to rush madly at us? Sacred Scripture

tells us. Think of a horse trotting along a road. What happens if the horse is slow, but its rider is in a hurry? He spurs his horse on and the horse starts to gallop as fast as the wind. Sin is the spur that causes death to spring upon us furiously. *Stimulus autem mortis peccatum est.* Do you really want death to come quickly? . . .

In between the first and second *Good Night,* Don Bosco also had stressed, as we have seen, the importance of the Cardinal's visit in a talk to the clerics about vacation time. In short, everything leads us to believe that the meeting had been arranged for important reasons, but as of now, documents are not available for assessing its meaning.

Don Bosco received another visit that can be considered of historic importance on the feast of the Assumption. During the novena Canon Joseph Sarto and Msgr. Andrew Scotton had preached a retreat for the priests of Casal Monferrato. The local Ordinary, Bishop Ferre, prevailed on them to go to Turin and call on Don Bosco. They arrived at the Oratory on the morning of the feast, and Don Bosco invited them to stay for dinner. On that day and for the first time there was a little extra cheer to keep Don Bosco's birthday. (He always believed that he had been born on August 15 and this general error was not corrected until after his death by checking his birth certificate.) Leaving the dining room after a modest repast, the Canon politely took leave of Don Bosco and then, to put it plainly, took his companion straight to the nearest resturant in town. Even as Pope [Pius X] he still recalled with admiration how frugal Don Bosco's table had seemed to him on that occasion.

Pius X also recalled another incident that revealed how responsive the boys at the Oratory were to Don Bosco. At his word they would spring into action. It was a case of "no sooner said than done." Don Bosco said to him, "Would you like to see how obedient my boys are?" He called a boy and handed him a bottle. "Now open your hand," he said. The boy obeyed instantly and the bottle fell to the ground. The Canon laughed and so did the others, but the boy looked quietly at Don Bosco waiting for further instructions.

CHAPTER 13

Visiting the Schools

WE shall now visit the schools at random. We may or may not encounter Don Bosco, but we shall look for data, which may enhance this biography at least in a small way.

Don Bosco corresponded regularly with all his schools; he kept informed on every minute matter, and by his direction preserved a oneness of spirit in all things. At least twice a year he visited the schools, where he was anxiously awaited. There he heard the confessions of the boys, who enthusiastically hastened to reveal to him the state of their soul. One by one, he interviewed all the Salesians individually. He gave the *Good Night* to the community every evening, and held special conferences for the assembled confreres. An atmosphere of great peace and serenity would linger after his departure.

The year 1875 loomed as a stormy one for the Salesian schools in Liguria. The Hon. Boselli had warned the Director, Father John Baptist Francesia, in writing: "Storm clouds are now gathering over Varazze; Alassio, too, will feel its fury." It seemed that in the end not even Sampierdarena would be spared. But man proposes and God disposes.

The opening attack came from Colucci, Genoa's State Prefect. He refused to approve the technical schools as they had been set up at Varazze. He also refused to recognize the qualifications of the teaching staff that had been acceptable to the school authorities for the last five years. The Director immediately contacted the Hon. Boselli, who promised his support.

Besides the action of this faraway deputy, the assistance of another good man in the vicinity proved beneficial. Colucci was de-

termined not to retreat from his position. He numbered among his friends Mr. Maurizio, an outstanding Genovese lawyer, who was also a friend of Garibaldi and a very dear friend of Don Bosco. The Prefect needed Maurizio's help especially at this time when his term in office had just started and there was no more expert advisor than Mr. Maurizio in all Genoa. Furthermore, the friendship of a liberal, popular with the Government and at the same time a man of truly remarkable worth, enhanced the Prefect's own status. As soon as Maurizio heard of Colucci's intentions he told him quite bluntly: "If you want to succeed in your career, gain Don Bosco's friendship; if you oppose him, you will be crushed." In no time this remark reached Father Francesia through the Marquis Invrea.

But the Prefect did not heed this warning. Disregarding the precedent set by his predecessors, he personally toured and inspected the municipalities under his jurisdiction, pocketing the allotted thirty-lire traveling expenses. The official notice of his arrival for a tour of inspection of the municipality and the Salesian school was received in Varazze just on the feast of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist. Thus, because he had to receive him, Father Francesia could not go to Turin for Don Bosco's Name day.

At 4 P.M. Colucci called on the mayor and looked over the civil administration records. When he saw that funds had been allocated for Masses, religious festivities and public illuminations in honor of the local patron saints, he remarked with a tinge of sarcasm proper of the time, "Are you sure you haven't forgotten some saints in Heaven on whom to spend money?" The mayor, a wealthy man, answered him coldly, "We pay for our festivities with our own money."

Colucci went back to Genoa that evening so determined to return to Varazze after two days for an inspection of the Salesian school and the town schools that he put off the mayor's signing of his traveling expenses voucher until his return. But he never saw Varazze again. As soon as he arrived at his office, the roof figuratively came down on his head: orders had arrived from the Government transferring him immediately to Catania. He suffered an even greater setback later on when he relinquished his office to accept nomination to the Senate. The Senate did not approve his appointment, and barred him from membership; this perhaps was

the first time that such a rejection had been made. In the interests of truth we must add that in Catania, Colucci watered down his anticlerical hostility to such an extent that he did everything possible to facilitate the opening of Don Bosco's first school in Sicily, at Randazzo.

Even after Colucci's departure the stubborn opposition to Don Bosco's schools still persisted in the Prefecture of Genoa and it ceased only with the intervention of Garibaldi. When the general arrived in Genoa and sensed this hostility, he wanted to know the reason and then exclaimed: "Leave Don Bosco in peace! He is a priest who does a lot of good." That Don Bosco should have such a champion caused great astonishment in government circles. This incident was related by a person who was at the general's side on this particular occasion.

Since this narrative deals with events in Liguria, we shall add something more.

While Garibaldi was spending the summer at the Villa Gotica on the Alassio beach, he had a cordial conversation with a pupil of the local Salesian school, presented to him by Donna Francesca.[1] She had once been a sort of nurse or maid to the boy. Recognizing him as he was passing by with a group of other boys, she invited him into the house. Garibaldi welcomed him, saying:

"So you're a student at Don Bosco's school?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you want to be a priest?"

"I don't know yet what I want to be."

"Do they speak ill of me at your school?"

"I never heard anyone speak against you."

"Good! Now go back to your friends, work hard in school, and obey your Superiors."

Garibaldi's regard for Don Bosco was not just a passing fancy. In 1880 when he went to Milan and was triumphantly received, someone suggested that he also go to Turin.

"I will not go to Turin."

"Why not?"

"Because Don Bosco is there."

[1] This was the name by which Mrs. Frances Armonico was known; she was the last woman to live with Garibaldi.

On another occasion he said, "Don Bosco is my idea of a good priest, a true priest of God, a friend of the people. He helps boys and he is the only priest in Italy to do so." This was an overstatement. These words were undeserved by many excellent priests in Italy who sacrificed themselves for the welfare of their fellow men. Nevertheless, it is proper to note that, on this occasion at least, the implacable enemy of priests could speak well of a priest who was indeed a priest in the full sense of the word.

On one of his visits to Varazze, at the beginning of June, Don Bosco was able to gain a vocation. We have a very minute description of it in written form. We hope our readers will welcome a short summary of it.

Young Francis Ghigliotto was a day student in his fifth year of high school. In 1869, after reading some lives of the saints, he prayed that he, too, might meet a saint and be able to follow him. Six years later God granted his wish.

When Don Bosco arrived in Varazze, Father Tomatis, the fifth year high-school teacher, told his students that they were free to speak with Don Bosco and seek his counsel. Ghigliotto and several other boys left the classroom [to see Don Bosco.] However, he did not dare present himself to him because he had never met him before. A classmate, seeing his hesitation, pushed him into the room and shut the door. Bewildered, Ghigliotto found himself face to face with Don Bosco, unable to utter a word.

"Well, what did you come for?" asked Don Bosco.

"I . . . I am in my last year of high school. I came to ask your advice."

"Good . . . you give yourself to me and I shall give you to our Lord."

These words disturbed Ghigliotto. Then Don Bosco bade him sit beside him on the sofa. He took out a notebook and asked him, "What is your name?" Ghigliotto became even more startled and turned pale. What could be behind all this?

Don Bosco continued with a smile, "Do not be afraid; just tell me your name." The boy told him and Don Bosco wrote it in his notebook.

Then he said, "Look, in two months write to me at Turin and then come to spend a week with me at the Oratory. If you like it there,

you may stay; if not, you may return home. However, suit yourself. If you don't want to write, you don't have to, and it will all be over."

During the two months before receiving his diploma, Ghigliotto always kept reminding himself of the letter he was to write to Don Bosco. Finally, he did write it. Then he asked his parents to let him go to Turin for a week. He went and did not return. Two months later, tired of arguing with him by letter, his father threatened to appeal to the Prefect of the province and have him escorted home by the police.

By now the boy was already wearing the clerical habit. His father knew nothing of this, although the boy had confided all to his mother before leaving. This pious woman after shedding some tears, had said to the boy, "You know how your father feels about these things. Don't upset him. Don't say a word to anybody. Just resolve to do God's will."

When Ghigliotto received his father's threatening letter, he showed it to Don Bosco in the dining room, told him of his fears, and sought his counsel as to what to do and how to answer. "Look," said Don Bosco, "this is what you should write to him. 'Dearest parents, one does not usually leave a place where he is happy, and I am happy here. My Superiors take good care of me, and I am able to pursue my studies. So please let me stay.' Then, add whatever you wish." Ghigliotto wrote the letter and heard nothing for six months, and he was at peace.

At the end of the school year his grandfather died and he was called home. His fears revived. "Do not worry," said Don Bosco. "Tell them that rather than cause harm to any family, Don Bosco wishes to be of help, and that if they should need you he is ready to send you home."

The cleric went home. After listening to his family's difficulties, he made them understand that for the present they really did not need him and that the future should be left in the hands of God. When they heard what Don Bosco thought of the whole matter, his parents became resigned. The parish priest at Varazze tried to persuade him to enter the seminary, but he answered, "I would sooner become a storekeeper than a secular priest. I have no inclination for that life."

Later on his pious mother on her deathbed exclaimed, "Do whatever you wish in regard to the funeral and Masses for my soul; I am happy that my son is a priest and will pray for me."

Father Ghigliotto was always firmly convinced that in handling the matter of his vocation Don Bosco had been inspired by God.

Don Bosco made another brief trip to Varazze immediately after his missionaries had departed. We have three letters written from there on the same day. They reflect three different aspects of his many-sided personality: they reveal the man of business, the man of refinement, and the man of deep gratitude.

The first letter can well be said to touch on a different matter in every line and to show evidence of ceaseless activity. The "Marians" referred to are the *Sons of Mary* who were at the Oratory. "Our co-helpers" are the Sisters; we shall see later what matters relative to them had to be expedited.

Varazze, November 18, 1875

Dear Father Rua:

Since my departure, I have had no letters from the Oratory. Please forward them especially if they come from Rome.

For your information I am leaving for Albenga tomorrow, November 19, but shall spend the night at Alassio. Next morning, November 20, I shall leave for Nice where you may send the mail for the next 6 days. After November 26, or better, from that date on, forward my mail to Ventimiglia.

I shall be back at Alassio again from the 27th to the 30th, and then go to Sampierdarena, or wherever else I shall advise you.

I enclose a list [of clerics] whose fitness for ordination should be considered.

Some attention must be given to the Marians, even at a sacrifice. We must think of some way to free them from work, in order that they may give themselves completely to study. Keep things moving for our co-helpers.

Have there been any difficulties with the Archbishop of Turin about ordinations? Did the Chieri loan go through?

Find out from Father Cibrario if he would be willing to go alone to open a House at Bordighera where a priest is needed.

Registration for the *Sons of Mary* is set for December 9 at Sampierdarena. Do you think it will be a good idea to send there all those who have no particular job to do in Turin?

God bless us all *et valedic.* [Goodbye.]

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

The second letter is addressed to Count Eugene de Maistre at Borgo Canalense. We shall tell about the missionaries, Nice, and Bordighera, later on.

Varazze, November 18, 1875

My dear Count Eugene:

This year I could not come to see you on St. Eugene's day, but I remembered to offer up my humble prayers for you and your family, a thing we do every day during community prayers in our Houses.

Matters concerning our Missioneries have kept me busy here in every conceivable way. In addition to what you must have learned from the newspapers, I also accompanied them aboard the *Savoia* and saw that their accommodations for sleeping and meals were good. An altar and a good piano were made available to them and Father Cagliero played the piano while his companions sang the hymn *Lodate Maria.*

This caused some surprise and everyone joined in repeating and responding with other stanzas. The crew numbered about seven hundred; all came running up, wondering, but they remained silent and respectful. Then Father Cagliero addressed the crowd telling them that he had blessed their voyage and their reason for going to [South] America. Since he knew that among the many [South] Americans there were also a number of Frenchmen, after preaching in Spanish he then went on to tell a story in French. When he was through speaking, many people asked him if he would hear their confessions and all the necessary arrangements were made.

My dear Eugene, I saw for myself how even non-believers respect and welcome our holy Faith when someone proclaims it clearly and sincerely.

Our missionaries sailed on Sunday at 2 P.M. On Monday they wrote

from Marseilles telling us that their voyage was pleasant and that none of them had been seasick. They left Barcelona yesterday and, God willing, will be in Buenos Aires by the feast of the Immaculate Conception.

I shall now continue on the Riviera to Nice with three of our priests. We shall open one House there and another one in Bordighera among the Protestants who are doing very much harm there.

Another group of eleven missionaries will be leaving next spring to help out the first ones. By October, 1876, some thirty Salesian Sisters will also be going by request of the Argentine Government. I would have liked to write to the duchess but not to tire her out with my awful handwriting, I ask you kindly to give our news to her and to Father Chiatellino.

My humble regards to all and may God keep you all in His holy grace. Believe me, in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

The third letter addressed to Father Chiatellino, a teacher at Borgo Canalense, can be understood only in relation to a previous letter that Don Bosco had written in June humorously urging him to try to raise some money for the missionaries. This seems the best place for it.

Turin, June 6, 1875

Dear Father Chiatellino:

I have been visiting our Houses in Liguria and have had no further news from Borgo. Please let me know if the duchess is still there or whether she has already left for the seashore as in previous years. I would like to take a trip to Borgo. Why have you abandoned us in this way, dear Father Chiatellino? I can guess your answer: "Because I am preparing a small pocketful of gold coins for Don Bosco." Good. Let's have this timely offer.

God bless us all; pray for this poor mortal who will always be, in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The good priest did not turn a deaf ear to this request. Don Bosco sent him this letter of thanks from Varazze.

Varazze, November 18, 1875

Dear Father Chiatellino:

In due time I received the offerings you sent for our missionaries and I asked Count Eugene to inform you and the Countess of it. All is well and the news we have had so far is excellent.

Please thank everyone who has helped us and rest assured that, our missionaries, together with everyone in all our Houses, will not fail to invoke daily the blessings from Heaven upon them and their families. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,

Fr. John Bosco

In Liguria the hospice of Sampierdarena was expanding despite financial difficulties that could be overcome only by charity. Don Bosco was extremely fond of this work of charity and was anxious to extend its range of activity as much as possible. He launched earnest appeals on its behalf wherever he hoped to find support. Thus he addressed the following petition to the Head of the Department of Railroads discarding the formality usual in letters of this kind and stating his case simply and, so to speak, with his heart on his sleeve.

Turin, April 22, 1875

Dear Sir:

The hospice of St. Vincent [de Paul] in Sampierdarena was opened three years ago under the direction of Father Paul Albera. In order to provide shelter for a greater number of poor boys who daily seek admission, work is already under way to enlarge it and accommodate about 250 boys. The work is progressing, but now it is necessary to transport about 70 tons of cut stone from Gozzano to Sampierdarena. I therefore humbly beg that, inasmuch as this undertaking is wholly supported by private donations, you be kind enough to grant us free transportation or the lowest possible rates.

We do not want to boast of having rendered any special service to your department, but I would like to mention that the church adjacent to our Institute is very convenient for the personnel and families of the employees of the railroad station located nearby. It is even more convenient for their children who attend school there and a number of them who have been accepted in the same hospice. Perhaps the fact that the freight trains often return empty from Gozzano to Genoa might make this request easier to grant.

Together with the undersigned these young boys will daily invoke Heaven's blessing on you and on everyone associated with the Department of Railroads in Northern Italy.

With gratitude, I remain,

Your grateful servant,

Rev. John Bosco

We have not found any documents referring to the outcome of this petition. But we do have proof that the Pope, at least, did not turn a deaf ear [to Don Bosco's appeals]. Among his papers there is first of all the following short draft:

Most Holy Father:

Three years ago, in agreement with the Archbishop, we bought a church with an adjacent building at Sampierdarena in the diocese of Genoa, to forestall their conversion to profane use. The building was turned into a hospice for poor and abandoned boys, and a sufficient number of Salesian priests took care of the church for the benefit of the public.

Within a short time 80 young boys found a home at the Hospice. A far greater number however, could not be accepted because of lack of space. To meet this pressing need I purchased an adjoining lot where a new building, large enough to accommodate more than 200 boys, is now under construction.

This whole project depends solely on Divine Providence, and with this thought in mind I have mustered enough courage to turn also to Your Holiness and implore you:

1. To impart your apostolic blessing to all the faithful who by their offerings help us to complete this undertaking which is devoted entirely

to the moral and material welfare of that segment of civil society that is most in danger.

2. At the same time, to make an offering in whatever measure your charitable and paternal heart may deem adequate.

I know that your Holiness is also in straitened circumstances, but I beseech you to consider for a moment that these poor young boys . . . .

Through Cardinal Antonelli, the Holy Father praised this "great and holy undertaking highly" and "with a prayer that God would bless it," wished to take part in it by sending a personal contribution of 2,000 lire. The example of the Pope, reported in *Unità Cattolica,* inspired others such as Duke Thomas Scotti of Milan to do the same. Charity gave origin to this Hospice dedicated to the Saint of Charity, and, in the exercise of charity toward youth the Hospice continues its glorious traditions.

The laying of the cornerstone of the new building took place on February 14, 1875. It was solemnly blessed in the presence of a large gathering by Archbishop Magnasco of Genoa, a great friend and benefactor of both Don Bosco and his sons. In the address read to the gathering and then encased in the cornerstone, Don Bosco had included these significant words: "Christ's Vicar on earth has blessed this undertaking, therefore there is every reason to hope that it will be blessed [also] by God and successfully completed." In fact, within two years the building was ready, providing shelter for 200 boys. To the shops already in existence, (cabinet-making, tailoring and shoemaking) the bookbinding, print and machine shops were added. Expansion continued and in the years that followed additions were made and facilities improved. No appeal to the charity of benefactors was ever made in vain.

Let us now turn from the Houses in Liguria to the Motherhouse. In the Houses in Piedmont only a few events claim our attention; all can be summed up in a minor occurrence at Lanzo and an incident at Valsalice.

Valsalice celebrated the feast of the Patron Saint of youth with the customary solemnity. Several boarders were to be confirmed. What better occasion than the feast of St. Aloysius for so important a ceremony! The Superiors had invited the Ordinary to honor them with his presence at least by administering the Sacrament of Con-

firmation. When they realized he could not oblige, also because he was away from Turin, they repeatedly petitioned him to grant the necessary faculties to another bishop, preferably the Bishop of Susa. Eventually this was done. The Bishop of Susa came, pontificated, confirmed the boys, and made everybody happy, and went away very satisfied. But at Valsalice no one knew then that the devil, with his meddling tactics, was preparing another bitter pill for Don Bosco.

Obviously it was to be expected that the Superiors of the school, before suggesting to the Archbishop that he appoint the Bishop of Susa to administer Confirmation, would first contact the latter about it, and, if he accepted, then they would approach the Archbishop. But the Archbishop apparently did not view it in this light. Though a few lines would have sufficed, he took the trouble to write a long letter to the Bishop of Susa. After stating his reason for this official communication in two long and involved paragraphs, he had this to say about Don Bosco: "However, I cannot pass over in silence the lack of prudence and respect of which these Superiors are guilty in having asked Your Excellency to officiate at functions in their school without *first* making sure of my *consent,* as the Canons of the Church prescribe and as my Synod of 1873 expressly demands. Unfortunately, Your Excellency, I must deplore the scant respect shown to me by this new Congregation and first and foremost by its founder and Rector Major. Your Excellency will render a great service to this archdiocese, if, while there, through prayers to God, Mary and the Saints, and also by a few words to them you will be able to instill in Don Bosco's Congregation due respect for the authority and dignity of the Archbishop of Turin." [2] How true it always is that when someone is prejudiced, even the simplest things automatically become complicated and generate suspicions that may lead one very far from reality.

Don Bosco loved all his schools but he seemed to have a special predilection for Lanzo. Soon we shall hear him say as much himself. First, we shall observe the care he took in those early years to consolidate the regularity and uniformity of daily life at the Oratory and other schools. We cannot refrain from introducing the following document that was prompted by an official visit to Lanzo

[2] Letter from Pianezza, June 20, 1875.

by Father Rua as Prefect General. While there he had also examined the clerics in theology. The evening class, which is referred to in Paragraph 6, was an evening refresher course at the Oratory. We shall refer to it again in the next volume.

March 10, 1875

Dear Father Director:

I am listing here the impressions I brought back with me after visiting your school. I assure you that when I left I was highly satisfied with the outcome of the examinations, the demeanor of the clerics as well as the behavior of the boys. May the Lord ever bless you and help you to do better and better. However, I did notice some things that could be improved:

1. The altar cloths on some of the altars were not too clean.
2. I learned that the day students have no Mass on weekdays, whereas it would certainly be very desirable to have it, as is the practice here, at Varazze, Alassio, and other places.
3. You have hardly any classes in sacred ceremonies whether for the clerics, the altar boys, or the boys in general. You should insist with the one in charge that this be done on a regular basis: if he needs help, assign an assistant to him.
4. Also, the teaching of religion in the high school, is very limited, yet it is the most important branch of knowledge.
5. You have no classes in Gregorian chant, so much desired and insisted upon by our good Father Don Bosco.
6. Your evening class is no longer in keeping with what Don Bosco recommends, namely that everyone take part in it. If you want to hold it before supper, as we agreed at the fall conferences, delay your supper a half hour or three-quarters of an hour, and have it at 8 P.M. or 8:15 P.M. This evening class, open to all, would offer the opportunity of teaching the prayers to those who do not know them; of training the boys to serve Mass, something not all your boys are able to do; of preparing boys for first Communion, etc.
7. I find that it is necessary to organize the various sodalities of St. Aloysius, the Blessed Sacrament, the Altar Boys, etc., and grade them in importance.
8. The coadjutors should often have someone address a few words specifically to them after night prayers.

8a. It would also be advisable, if possible, that clerics attend classes more often, especially in philosophy.

9. As we said during the conference, it might be very beneficial to the clerics to get together at least once a day under the guidance of a priest, some for meditation and others for spiritual reading.

10. It is necessary that all the cells of the clerics be limited to no more than two feet beyond the bed by putting up curtain rods like those you already have there.

11. Reading during meals is too frequently omitted; we should teach the manner of putting time to good use, taking advantage even of mealtime.

12. I observed that in the various grades, the monthly tests are not given and in some classes no registers were kept. The marks of each class must be entered in the general register every month and the register must be kept in the custody of either the Director or the Prefect.

13. I would like to see the boys more concerned about their scholastic progress.

14. Several registers are missing and I shall see that you are provided with them. Many of the things I have mentioned should be done by your subordinates, dear Father Director; nevertheless, it is you who must keep abreast of all things and spark the activity of all. You are the head, the Prefect is the arm; and the two of you are the eyes and ears that must see and hear everything that goes on.

God bless both of you, together with

Yours affectionately

Father Michael J. Rua

Prefect of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales

Don Bosco now speaks about the students of Lanzo in his *Good Night* to the Oratory boys on December 22.

My dear boys, I have just come back from a visit to my beloved school at Lanzo. There are many boys there too and together with their Director, Father Lemoyne, and the other Superiors they asked me to wish you a merry Christmas and a thousand other joys and blessings. I answered them on your behalf, publicly reciprocating the greetings and good wishes of the boys and Salesians at Lanzo with those from all of us in Turin.

We agreed that as soon as the railroad between Cirié and Lanzo has been completed, which we hope will be soon, they will come to visit you by special train and stay with you the whole day. Then we shall return their visit. We shall leave early in the morning, and after spending the whole day with them, we shall return in the evening to our dear home at the Oratory. Lanzo is not as cold as some people think, though it is true that sometimes it is really cold. But there is the advantage that in fair weather one can enjoy sunshine all day long, whereas here the sun does not even show its face, but keeps above the fog.

I spent two days in Lanzo and I talked with the boys and they are good; but now I am here with you and I am entirely at your disposal for your spiritual needs during the last two days of this novena, in order to prepare you for a devout general Communion on the solemn eve of Christmas.

I believe that you already know that we have heard from our missionaries. The letters came from Cape Verde; they are too long to be read in public and we cannot hand them around to all of you; besides they are not easy to make out and so we have decided to print them. Everyone will then be able to read them at ease, even send them home if so desired.

I shall now close by asking you to prepare yourselves well for the coming of our Lord. Search into the remotest corners of your soul to purify it with a good Confession in the sacrament of Penance. Let this be your main concern now and prepare yourselves for a fervent and holy Communion. Good night.

If in every school a House chronicle had been kept, as is the practice in other Congregations, how many beautiful and edifying episodes would have been rescued from oblivion and read about in this chapter. Unavoidably it falls too short of satisfying our legitimate curiosity and is somewhat desultory because of gaps in our sources.

CHAPTER 14

The Fall Conferences

WE are greatly interested in the first steps our Congregation took after its canonical erection, the approval of its rules and the establishment of its hierarchy. They are important guidelines of Salesian tradition. What was done then under Don Bosco's eye and with his explicit or tacit approval is now for us a valuable yardstick for accurately gauging the spirit in which the letter of the Constitutions is to be applied in practical circumstances. This is our main reason for not omitting anything we know concerning those distant times.

We have already seen how, during the general meetings of Superiors, Don Bosco occasionally preferred to remain behind the scenes, and delegated Father Rua to preside in his place. He allowed them free reign in discussing the business of the Pious Society, but according to circumstances, he reserved to himself the right to approve or disapprove their deliberations. This was an excellent method to prepare them for administrative responsibility, and this method he followed also at the fall conferences, which are the subject matter of this chapter. We trust that our readers will not mind taking part once more in these meetings even though it is the third time in the course of the same year. Minutes of a sort, taken down by the Chronicler, will be our main source of information.

The meetings took place at Lanzo, September 18 to 26, during the second spiritual retreat.[1] Directors and members of the Superior Chapter were instructed to come to Lanzo three days beforehand

[1] Don Bosco gave several talks during the previous retreat. We have found three of them, more or less summarized, in notebooks belonging to Father Julius Barberis. They can be found in *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 21.

so as to be able to settle before the retreat matters less proper to that time. We need not list the names of those who attended those meetings as they are already too well-known to us. They met twice a day—morning and afternoon. During the retreat, which began on the afternoon of September 20, the meetings were not cancelled but merely shortened; the morning session lasting from 11 until noon, the afternoon session from 4:30 to 5:30. The Chronicler chose to make this disclosure: "After four sermons, church services and meetings, by nightfall everyone was very tired though happy to have labored *in nomine Dei*" [in the name of the Lord].

For a considerable time Father Rua presided over the sessions. The first opened with a number of appointments to important offices.

The Director for [South]America had to be selected, and it was felt that Father Bonetti was the man best qualified for the office. But Don Bosco's regard for family feelings was taken into account: Father Bonetti's parents were old and would have suffered too much from such a separation. Father Fagnano and Father Ronchail were mentioned, and it was decided that the latter be proposed to Don Bosco.

The Economist General, Father Angelo Savio, whose presence was indispensable at Alassio, where he was supervising long-term construction projects, could no longer carry out the duties of his office; therefore, it seemed advisable to replace him. Three Salesians were better qualified than others: Fathers Chiala, Bodrato and Fagnano. It was agreed to suggest Father Bodrato to Don Bosco.

Father Rua was not only Prefect General but also Vice-Director of the Oratory—two conflicting offices. It was becoming daily more apparent that he should be left free to devote himself to the general welfare of the whole Congregation. Therefore, of the potential nominees, Father Chiala and Father Lazzero, the latter seemed the more qualified to take over the reins of the Oratory, provided Don Bosco agreed.

As we shall see, Father Cagliero was to accompany the missionaries to [South] America, but he was also the Catechist of the Congregation. Who, then, would replace him in that office? The conferees believed that no one was better suited than Father Bonetti, but agreed that it would be best to leave the decision to Don Bosco.

Finally, a somewhat novel proposal was introduced for discussion. We can conjecture that those zealous sons of Don Bosco, seeing that their schools were multiplying, realized the need that all of them should absolutely mirror the same image. Deviations have a way of introducing themselves mainly through a course of studies. Studies [of course] must conform to the curriculum prescribed by the educational authorities; nevertheless, they should never be detrimental to the development of religious vocations.

Perhaps this consideration gave birth to the idea of appointing a "Superintendent of Schools" who would oversee the curriculum in all Salesian schools and visit them from time to time during the course of the year. At this time Don Bosco still directed everything, but the suggestion that Superiors of the Chapter should visit the schools did not have the impact of an exploding bomb. Have we not already met the Prefect General on a tour of inspection at Lanzo? In this proposal we detect the wholesome maturity of Don Bosco's sons who spontaneously offered to help share their father's burden of government. At any rate, the idea appealed to the assembly, the more so since at the Oratory Father Guidazio was perfectly capable of replacing Father Durando as Director of the Oratory whenever the latter might be called upon to shoulder this new responsibility. This discussion prepared the way for the specific duties later given to that Councilor of the Chapter who would be put in charge of the entire program of studies of the Society and would be known in current terminology as the Prefect General of Studies. This led to a digression in the proceedings in order to allow for a revision of certain titles in general use at that time. Only the principal Superior of each House was to be known as Director; the title of Spiritual Director was to be dropped in favor of Catechist; there was to be no more a Director of Studies but a Prefect of Studies. In all these things, however, Don Bosco was to have the final word.

When that part of the agenda that concerned the more important offices had been completed, attention was given to the appointment of the Prefects of the schools and the teaching personnel. First came the Oratory with its theology, philosophy and high school courses. The theology course during the school year 1875-76 [2] was taken

[2] Minutes of the deliberations of the Oratory House Chapter, October 31, 1875.

care of by Fathers Barberis, Bertello and Moglia and by two secular priests, namely, Father [Bartholomew] Molinari and Father Ascanio Savio. Fathers Monateri, Cipriano, Barberis, Paglia, and Guanella taught in the Philosophy department. There does not seem to have been any lack of teachers. When the staff of the Oratory had been selected, they passed on to providing for Borgo San Martino, Lanzo, Alassio and Varazze.

Don Bosco did not appear until close to the end of the afternoon session of September 20, which lasted from 2:30 until 6:00 P.M. After examining their deliberations he warmly congratulated them. As to the appointments, he approved the election of Father Lazzero as Vice-Director of the Oratory and of Father Bodrato as Economist General. Since the latter appointment was only a replacement, it should be noted that this was strictly a matter for the Rector Major to handle until the time of the ordinary elections.

Father Rua, always the faithful interpreter and frequently a humble spokesman for Don Bosco, presided over the morning session on September 23. It dealt with proposals, recommendations, and observations that substantially retain their timely flavor. What he said can be divided into two parts. First he spoke of two items, in regard to which Don Bosco had already expressed his opinion on several occasions. Secondly, he clarified five things that are essential for the perfect observance of religious life.

First of all, both at the conferences held during the year and at the close of the previous retreat, Don Bosco had insistently recommended that, in keeping with the Rules, the Exercise for a Happy Death be held each month, and as indicated in the Rules. The observance of this duty left something to be desired. This was to be rectified.

Would it not be advisable, therefore, to establish a fixed rule for everybody? Two questions were raised: one regarding the day chosen, the other concerning the laying aside of all temporal occupations. It was impossible to set the last day of the month for everybody; it was equally impossible for most of the confreres to lay aside entirely their appointed tasks. It was agreed to carry out an experiment suggested by Father Rua: in every House each confrere should choose one day of the month and inform his Superior about it; the Superior in turn would appoint a monitor to whom he would

entrust the list of the days chosen, with instructions to remind his confreres the day before. On the chosen day the confrere was to set aside as much as possible all temporal affairs. For example, if someone had to teach, he should only teach: no studying or correcting papers; his free time was to be given to the practices of piety prescribed by the Rules. However, the novices were expected to do more than that: every first day of the month was to be given almost entirely to pious practices.

Secondly, several times during the year Don Bosco had been dissatisfied with the extraordinary expenses that some schools had incurred without his consent. Here one of the confreres proffered a possible case, one in which Don Bosco's consent might be based on a misunderstanding; in other words, Don Bosco might have interpreted the proposal in one way, whereas whoever had presented it had meant something else; the latter would then go ahead with the work, convinced that he was acting in accordance with Don Bosco's wishes. As a matter of fact, not very much was needed to forestall such undesirable situations: before any extraordinary outlay of money was undertaken, the Superior Chapter's written permission should be requested. What if objections were raised after completion of the work? There would be written proof that neither more nor less was done than what had been authorized. Now what expenses were to be considered extraordinary? All that were not strictly necessary for food, clothing, and studies and especially those for alterations in buildings, such as cutting a doorway into a wall or walling it up, erecting or demolishing interior walls without Don Bosco's consent. In the future, they were to advise Father Rua of any such plan in writing, and he would hasten to answer. After the permission had been granted, the Director, in consultation with his own local Chapter, could then settle any particular problem, that might arise. For example, Don Bosco might give his consent for the opening of new schools: in this case the purchase of benches, desks, blackboards, and so forth, would be decided by the local Chapter.

Having thus concluded the first part, Father Rua turned to other matters, formulating and clarifying five recommendations that may be summed up as follows:

1. A greater obedience to the Rules and to the orders of Su-

periors was desirable. In such things the confreres should strive to be of good example to others. Father Bruno, a spiritual son of St. Philip Neri, who was preaching the retreat, had remarked that in any religious Congregation, it was never the novices, but rather the older religious who introduced transgressions of the Rule.

2. The confreres ought to be of good example to others by being prompt in interrupting whatever they were doing at the sound of the bell so that their charges might imitate them.

3. In the morning all should rise promptly at the appointed time. It should be said of no one that through disregard [of the schedule] he got up late.

4. At night, after prayers, there should be no noise to disturb the quiet, no more standing about chatting. All should retire at once to their own quarters. Each and everyone should do so, and endeavor to make others do likewise, be they priests or clerics.

5. Lastly, it should be kept in mind always that the most important thing of all was to carry out Don Bosco's orders, whatever they be, without complaints or ill will. It would happen occasionally that, despite Don Bosco's tact and restraint in dealing with the confreres, someone would not give in to his wishes. "He has already suffered much on this account," Father Rua said. "Now," he went on, "I do not mean that one may not present his point of view or make known his difficulties. This is in order, but one should not be obstinate if his objections are not considered valid. He should submit promptly and humbly, and show that he is prepared to do not only what Don Bosco asks of him, but to do it *laeto vultu* [with a smile] as our Rules prescribe: in other words, it should be obvious that he is happy to obey him."

The afternoon meeting presided over by Don Bosco, was taken up with the subject of admission to vows. Don Bosco showed himself very lenient in admitting to final vows. This was in accordance with a policy he had already made known on several occasions.

"As far as I am concerned," he used to say, "I can hardly find any difference between perpetual and triennial vows since I may dispense also from perpetual vows if someone is no longer suitable for the Congregation."

Here someone remarked that even though this was true it would be best not to publicize this power of the Superior so freely, since

otherwise there could arise abuses in making the perpetual vows.

"Oh! I do not think that for the moment any trouble would arise on this account," answered Don Bosco. "Instead, I believe it would be almost advisable to let this be known. It would prevent anyone from feeling alarmed at the prospect of vows for life in case unsurmountable difficulties should arise and consequently destroy his peace of mind. On the other hand, there must be a serious reason to release someone from his vows. This would never happen if one had only whims. But if a grave reason exists, I do not believe there will be any harm in knowing that a dispensation can be obtained."

These words provide us with the solution to an apparent difficulty that arises from some other utterance by Don Bosco. As the day of his profession drew near, the coadjutor Graziano, whom we have already met as an alumnus and an army officer in Rome, was tormented by doubts and fears that left him perplexed and undecided. Don Bosco who knew his past and present history put an end to his hesitation regarding the future by saying the vows were not [unbreakable] iron chains. This was stated by Father Vespignani.

Sixteen were admitted to final vows and nineteen to triennial vows.

This matter disposed of, Don Bosco spoke of the Manifestation to which every Director was bound to summon his confreres. He stressed this in particular, saying: "This is the key to the smooth running of a House. As a rule the confreres bare their hearts to their Superior in these Manifestations; they speak of all the things that bother them, and if there should be something to be corrected, they make it known.

Likewise it affords an excellent opportunity to give corrections, even severe ones, without giving any offense. In most instances, it is a mistake to reprimand someone immediately after he commits a fault, for at that moment he is still excited and will not easily accept any reprimand. We might even give the appearance of being a little excited ourselves. Instead, if the correction is administered calmly, out of love, as it is done in the Manifestations, the guilty ones will immediately understand the wrong they have done, and they will realize that it is the Superior's duty to point out their faults to them in order that they may correct them and benefit thereby.

After reporting on this meeting, the minutes refer to a minor incident. A cleric, Augustine Anzini, had been admitted to profession but had refused to take his vows. Later on he begged Don Bosco insistently to grant him this favor once again. Don Bosco referred him to Father Rua. Since the Superior Chapter could not hold another meeting, Father Rua had him renew his petition to each member of the Chapter and the Novice Master. Because of his manifest good will he was admitted to triennial vows, but then the unfortunate cleric was stricken with tuberculosis and had to return to his native Ticino Canton in 1879. Despite his chronic ill health, he became a very good priest and zealous pastor. At the cost of no little sacrifice he insisted on repaying Don Bosco for the expenses borne on his behalf during a period of approximately seven years. He also secured 450 subscriptions to the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings]. He died in 1921.

Don Bosco presided also over the two meetings of September 24. The subjects discussed during the morning session are listed here under thirteen headings:

1. Books belonging to the Oratory library had been borrowed by other [Salesian] schools and had never been returned. Those who still had them should return them; books that would be borrowed should be put back where they belonged as soon as one was through with them; no books were to be taken from the library without Don Bosco's consent, or without notifying the librarian. It should be noted that Don Bosco, from the early years of the Oratory, had begun to build a library next to his own room, and kept expanding it steadily with new books that were donated, left as a legacy, or otherwise acquired. Despite the lack of floor space he was able to accommodate the library in a fairly large room. A priest-librarian was responsible for the good order, cleanliness, and proper care, but Don Bosco himself kept a watchful eye over it, so anxious was he that no profane hands should bring in disorder or steal books.

2. Two copies of all books printed at the Oratory were to be sent and charged to every House, one for the library, the other for the general use of the confreres.

3. Whenever a confrere stayed for several days or weeks at a school other than his own for reasons of health or otherwise, the

Director of that school was to send to Father Rua or to the confrere's Director, after his departure, a report on his behavior and particularly if anything worthy of note had occurred in connection with him.

4. Local Directors were not authorized to allow their subjects to go away on vacation: this permission was to be requested from the Superior Chapter. This ruling spared the Directors embarrassment, since it would have been difficult for them to refuse any such request without causing resentment and jealousy. If refusal came from the Superior Chapter, no one would know to whom in particular such refusal should be attributed, and all would resign themselves more readily.

5. It was not advisable for newly ordained priests to celebrate some of their first Masses in their native towns. On these occasions there would be too many distractions that would interfere with the fervor that a newly ordained priest should have in celebrating these Masses. If circumstances should demand it, permission would be granted at a later date.

6. Requests for religious services or celebration of Masses outside the school should not be accepted unless the available priests or clerics were such as to cast a good reflection on the House and also the Congregation.

7. All Directors were to observe, or have the Catechist observe for them, the manner in which their priests celebrated Mass; exactness in performing the ceremonies was to be sought; haste or slowness was to be avoided.

8. To ensure such exactness it would be most helpful if, following the custom of nearly all the religious Orders, our priests from time to time would serve each other's Mass, especially during the spiritual retreat, at which time also, all the priests were to be advised to go over the rubrics.

9. A weekly lesson in sacred ceremonies was to be held regularly in every school.

10. The Directors were to take to heart the theology classes and should never dispense with them. They were to see to it that all the confreres who had been assigned to their school should be there as soon as the retreat ended. They were also to tell them

that while they had the time, they should prepare for the examinations to be held on or about All Saints' Day.

11. There was to be uniformity in the study of theology. In every House the same treatises were to be studied year after year. No changes were to be made in the curriculum established by the [Superior] Chapter. In this way a cleric would not encounter any difficulties should he be transferred to another school.

12. At that time it often happened that clerics were ordained before the completion of their theological studies. Every Director was to keep in mind that such priests were not dispensed from taking their remaining examinations. Consequently the Directors were to arrange for them to have sufficient time for their studies, and report for examinations once they were sufficiently prepared on the same treatise. In most cases, it was best for these priests to attend the regular theology classes and take their examinations together with the others.

13. Because it had been found desirable that during the retreat all the priests should say Mass in the House, two new wooden altars were ordered built for that time.

At the evening session presided over by Don Bosco, Father Rua publicly read the decisions reached concerning the personnel. The chronicler made the following observation: "We had to admire Don Bosco's acumen in immediately sensing what could cause trouble and his humility in accepting those modifications that others felt were necessary." Against the opinion of the Chapter, he chose Father Fagnano as Director of the new House in [South] America, instead of Father Ronchail for whom he had other plans.

Then three measures of a didactic nature were taken, one regarding the Oratory, and the other regarding Valsalice. It was decided that in the philosophy classes attended by those who had followed the accelerated course because of their age, the treatise [they were taking] should be first translated by them into Italian, incorporating into it explanations by the teacher to help make the terms intelligible. In regard to the college at Valsalice it was resolved: (1) That no outside professors were to be hired because of the heavy expense involved and some lack of concern on their part in the progress of their pupils, besides the moral dangers stemming from conflicting ideas, policies, and interests. (2) The college cur-

riculum was to be simplified by integrating two courses into one, and thus reduce the number of teachers. During the first year, for example, all the students would study medieval history and logic; the following year, modern history and ethics.

Finally, Don Bosco expressed the wish that not only at the Oratory, but in all the other schools as well, someone should be personally in charge of the clerics. This was a crying need. The Catechist should take over this responsibility in each House, and the Directors were to inform their clerics of this decision.

The morning of September 25 was taken up wholly with the ceremony of religious profession, which was conducted with solemnity. In the evening, at the conference presided over by Don Bosco, the agenda was about the admission of novices. For the admission of a novice into the Congregation as a cleric it was required that the Superior should be well-acquainted with the applicant, and that the applicant should have given evidence of great confidence in the Superior. As regards his moral character, it was essential that the novice be irreprehensible. Those who were undecided and whose decision hinged on their parents' wishes were advised by Don Bosco not to enter the Congregation, even though they were of good character and showed promise of success. In the case of others, whom he considered superficial and feared were ill-suited to the Congregation, he made it a condition that they pay the expenses usually expected from anyone entering a novitiate, especially if the novice in question happened to be poor. He hardly ever asked this of the majority of novices under similar circumstances. He added: "Afterwards, accept whatever they are able to pay. If they cannot contribute anything, as is usually the case, that will be it, and no further demands will be made. Their motives will be revealed by the effort they make in trying to get that sum of money from their parents."

Now we come to the last day. During the morning session, Father Rua, at Don Bosco's request, read a letter from [Ernest] Michel, an attorney. It was an invitation to the Salesians to come to Nice to do what they were doing in Turin. [The result was] that, after the departure of the missionaries, Don Bosco would go to Nice to come to some conclusion. After that, Don Bosco spoke about the Festive Oratories. He remarked that it was of the utmost importance that

Festive Oratories be established in all Salesian schools; so far this had been done only in Turin and at Sampierdarena. "We do not have the personnel," someone objected. "Nor do we have the facilities," said someone else. Don Bosco persisted. "This is the only way that lasting good can be done among the people in any locality. If we cannot provide recreational facilities for the boys, let us at least make our day students come to Mass at the school on Sundays and holy days of obligation. Care also should be taken that they receive the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist once a month."

[Mention was made that] Count Gazelli of Rossana was offering his own chapel, dedicated to St. Francis de Sales and near Valsalice, for a Festive Oratory. Don Bosco gave instructions for a reply in these terms: [1] He should inquire whether the Archbishop would give his approval; [2] The Salesians would bind themselves to maintain the Oratory even if they were to leave the college of Valsalice. But nothing came of it. Don Bosco adjourned the meeting expressing his hope that soon all the members of the Superior Chapter could be freed from the management of the Motherhouse, and that also all Directors of individual Houses would find a way to delegate less important matters to their subordinates, concerning themselves only with the high supervision of the House and the spiritual care of its members.

"Work is increasing constantly," said Don Bosco, "and if we are not careful, we shall be submerged by the burden of so many responsibilities." Everyone agreed with his proposal.

In the afternoon Don Bosco manifested a number of ideas in detail. Let us imagine ourselves there listening to him. This is more or less what he said:

1. The letters that in religious Orders are usually called "letters of obedience," should be printed. The confreres must present them to the Director of the House to which their Superior has sent them. Prior to this, no confrere should disclose its contents to other members of that House. Upon arrival, he should place himself under the jurisdiction of that Director and be completely subject to him.

2. After the close of the general fall conferences, the names and main offices of the confreres assigned to the various Houses

shall be printed. This may not be possible this year, but it is to be done next year. Likewise, a form letter shall be printed and given to each confrere informing him of his assignment.

3. All schools should save scrap paper. Sheets with writing on only one side should be set aside for use as galley proofs in our print shops; blank half sheets should be sewn into pads for jotting down notes or for use as receipt books; packing paper should be stored for shipping; paper with writing on both sides should be sold to paper mills. The savings will not be insignificant; they will run into thousands of lire.

4. In all our Houses perpetually professed members, whether clerics or coadjutors, should be held in very special regard. Great confidence should be shown them. They are to be treated with special confidence. The more delicate and intimate business of the Society should be entrusted to them even if less qualified than others who do not belong to our Congregation. They should be given to understand that such matters are entrusted to them rather than to others precisely because they are perpetually professed members, that is, true and inseparable brothers.

5. Each House should devote painstaking care to the formation of the personnel it needs. As things are now, it is certain that for the next few years it will not be possible to send to the Houses confreres fully qualified for the tasks entrusted to them. The Directors should make it their greatest concern to try to form their personnel by paying attention to the nature of their mistakes, giving them suitable directives and timely advice, even when this necessary duty will take up much of their time. This will provide us with the help we need.

6. The same should be said of the coadjutors and domestic help we send from Turin. Everyone should be convinced that from the Motherhouse we always send the best we have. But quite often we do not have qualified personnel; therefore, an effort should be made to train them for their jobs. This should be the primary concern of the Prefects. From time to time they should call them together to instruct them; care should be taken that they do not neglect the Sacraments, and thus, little by little, we shall bring them to the point where they will render us valuable service.

7. Moreover, people should not be dismissed for slight faults.

If they really are unfit for the job for which they were needed, they should be sent back to Turin with an explanatory letter. If they are seriously at fault, they should be sent directly home. Sending them back to Turin only creates more trouble for us without freeing from trouble the school that dismissed them. But even in such instances, inform the Oratory of the reason for their dismissal, so that if one should again apply for admission the Superior may be fully informed of what happened.

8. Let us help one another in every way we can. Let it be obvious to all in our Houses that the Superiors are united. It would be very unfortunate if the confreres could say with truth, "Our Superiors do not get along very well together; what one wants, another does not; one favors this, another is against it." Let us always stand united in the eyes of our subjects; let us even devise some ways to show them that we all agree, even though some of them may have already noticed that there is difference of opinion. Let us also stand united by praising one another and thus showing our great mutual respect. Let every school always give its moral support at all times to the other Houses. Let us speak on every occasion about our schools and praise them as among the best and most efficiently organized. Finally, let each school always defend vigorously the reputation of the Motherhouse, both with outsiders and with those living with us, respecting and making others respect the deliberations and directives coming from the Motherhouse.

9. A thing of utmost importance for our Houses is to endeavor by all means to secure, foster, spread and safeguard morality. As long as our Houses without exception will enjoy a good reputation in this regard, applications will be plentiful, we shall be esteemed as outstanding educators, and our schools will flourish in every way. If we should fail in this, from that moment, nothing else would matter. Not that we should promote morality solely because we want people to trust us: our purpose is far more sublime than that. Nevertheless, we do need also their trust and their goodwill, and that is why we do all we can to secure it. In order to obtain and propagate this morality, especially among the members of our Congregation, the following rules should be observed:

(a) The two customary conferences should be held every month: one in which our Rules should be read and explained; an-

other, for the presentation of some moral issue. Such conferences should never be omitted. If at times the Director is unable to hold them, a spiritual reading is to be substituted, but this much at least must always be done.

(b) All should obey faithfully the Rules of the Congregation. This will lead us without fail to the attainment of our goal.

(c) I believe that the key to order and morality and the most efficacious means for directing the House is punctuality in receiving the monthly Manifestation. Never neglect this for any reason whatsoever, but do it without rushing and with care. Every Director should remember to ask the following two questions: First, is there anything in your office so contrary to your inclinations that it might prejudice your perseverance in your vocation? Secondly, do you know of anything that should be done, or that should be prevented, in order to eliminate some irregularity or scandal in the House? As a general rule, the members talk, revealing things we would never think of and which they often believe we already know and make little of. Only this morning, very few words from a confrere in answer to my questions opened my eyes to something very important which, when taken care of, will put an end to a source of disorders and scandals that sometimes take place in the House, without anyone being able to understand their origin.

If you learn from the Manifestations that some confrere is doing some wrong or is the cause of some disorder, make a note of it, and when it is his turn for the Manifestation, sound him out with tactful questions, or even ask him direct questions, according to circumstances. In this way serious harm can be averted without offense to anybody, and some confreres may be warned about faults that unwittingly cause disorders, harm or scandal.

During the Manifestations, however, be very careful not to enter into matters of conscience. Those things must be kept totally apart. The Manifestation must deal only with exterior things because we have to avail ourselves of the things that are confided to us in any need. Should we, instead, enter into matters of conscience mixing Manifestation with confession, we would create trouble for ourselves.

(d) Beside these Manifestations and various other means, morality will be helped immensely by a categorical prohibition of those

little parties held by boys and clerics, and at times by boys, clerics, and teachers all together. They must be prohibited and stopped at any cost. As far as the boys are concerned, it awakens in them the desire to pilfer, and exposes them to real temptations: it makes them write home for dainties, it prompts them to seek out secluded spots in which to hide. Then, it gives both clerics and teachers a good occasion to take boys into their rooms: all these things are greatly dangerous.

(e) No priest or teacher should ask the boys to get water for them, or shine their shoes, or render them any such service. Let them attend to these things themselves. I notice a certain trend toward comfort here in the House, and once we weaken our reserve, be it ever so slightly, in no time regrettable things will begin to happen, and as a consequence the spirit of the Congregation will be lost.

(f) It will also be advantageous to morality to have the dormitory kept locked at all times. It should be opened only at night to go to bed, and very very briefly, if necessary, after breakfast.

(g) It will be very helpful to avoid particular friendships. Remember the words of St. Jerome: *Aut nullos aut omnes pariter dilige.* [Either love none or love all equally.] The Directors must be alert to this.

(h) Avoid handling one another or walking arm-in-arm. Although often there might not be any semblance of evil, yet, in most cases it becomes dangerous to morality. It can at least instill bad thoughts and fire the imagination either in a cleric, or in a boy, or in both, or even in someone who sees them.

10. Now coming to other things, I think it is wise that no one, except the Director of a House, subscribe to any newspaper. Directors should subscribe only to good ones and even in this case they should never be addressed to the school, the Director, or the administration offices, since this would indicate that the school is officially subscribing. Instead, the paper should be addressed merely to somebody at the school; the doorkeeper, cook, or someone else. As far as possible, never discuss politics, nor read newspapers in the presence of the boys.

11. It must be observed that until now obedience has been more on a personal than on a religious basis. Let us avoid this

serious error. Never obey just because this person or that one is giving the command, but for reasons of a higher order, because it is God who commands us, no matter through whom His order is given.

Let us begin to practice this religious virtue ourselves, and then let us try to instill it in others ever so slowly. We shall have accomplished little until we have attained it. Let us not do things because we like doing them, or because we like the person who orders us to do them, or because of the manner in which the order is given. Let us do them, and cheerfully, only because they are commanded. Stress this principle in your conferences and sermons, when hearing confessions, and on every other possible occasion.

12. One goal that we should strive to attain this year and henceforth is to unify the government of the Congregation by freeing the Superior Chapter from the management of the Oratory. I am here now, and as long as I shall be here, things could continue the way they are. I know you thoroughly and have full confidence in you, and I know that you have full confidence in me. But it is time we put things on a normal basis as though I were not here, and establish directives for those who shall come after you. Let all, therefore, endeavor to keep the Superior Chapter informed of everything, and never make even the slightest modification either in accounting or in anything else, without specifically informing Turin.

Let us now conclude this conference by wholeheartedly blessing the goodness of God and of Mary Help of Christians for all that we see taking place within the Congregation. Humanly it cannot be explained. Other Congregations wane while our own develops beyond expectations; in other schools the enrollment is going down; we, instead, are swamped with applications. A confrere is hardly able to do task *A* and immediately he is obliged to tackle task *B;* a place is found for him at once, a place that fits him perfectly.

The newcomers to the Congregation are all full of energy and goodwill: they seem to me to be forging ahead pushing those who are in front of them; these, in their turn, push still others. I see new horizons and new responsibilities shaping up for those who hold higher offices: they are impatient for someone to fill the place they now occupy, so that they may push forward toward more important undertakings.

Yes, let us give thanks to God, for we see that the Congregation is growing; and, more important still, its members are growing, becoming ever better, acquiring daily a more perfect religious spirit and greater experience, whether they be clerics or coadjutors. This is a sign that we are guided by the hand of God.

It is true that great sacrifices were made; but, now we begin to see the result of our planting, and we know that our sacrifices have been well rewarded. I have extraordinary hopes for the *Sons of Mary Project*. As soon as these young and very serious adults become priests, they will do much good. They do so now, even before ordination, helping us in delicate tasks in the House, supervising, watching, teaching in elementary grades. A number of soldiers have filed applications for admission, and we have even enrolled a brigadier. Daily I receive letters of commendation from bishops and application for admission from young men either directly or through their pastor.

Let us bless the Lord always. We hold responsible positions in the Congregation: let us see to it that it may never suffer any harm through our fault.

CHAPTER 15

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

THE modest House at Mornese, cradle of the young Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, sheltered within its walls a little company of elect souls, whose life was one of piety, poverty, and work. By her example Mother Mazzarello inspired postulants, novices, and professed nuns in the exercise of all the religious virtues. She revered as law even the slightest word Don Bosco might say to her. The spiritual direction of this House was in good hands. In a documentary chronicle, which belongs to the central archives of the Institute and which we have here before us, its Director is described as follows: "Father Costamagna neglects nothing. He is active, full of energy, and needs a wide field in which to work. Transferred from a boys' school to direct nuns, full of goodwill though inexperienced in a number of things, he flings himself into everything: exercises of piety, supervision of the school, hygiene, etiquette."

The most austere poverty reigned supreme in the convent. It is touching and edifying to read of the sacrifices to which these good Sisters not only resigned themselves but gladly endured in their love for the virtue of poverty. However, Don Bosco felt that he really should restrain their fervor a little, so he wrote the Mother Superior, suggesting that it might be wiser, for health reasons, if they ate a little more, beginning with their frugal breakfast which, if continued, would weaken their stomachs. The Mother Superior was always anxious to do whatever Don Bosco wished; at the same time she was afraid that this might pave the way toward other demands that would only weaken their spirit, so she resorted to a little ruse. She replied, assuring Don Bosco of her obedience, but

at the same time confiding her fear to him. She then questioned the Sisters individually, asking them: "Are you satisfied with your breakfast? Does it affect your health? Do you feel the need for something better—a little milk, for example?" With the sincerity which was habitual in their family spirit, from first to last the Sisters chose to keep things as they were, insofar as their breakfast was concerned, confirming their wishes by signing a sheet of paper that the Mother Superior put before them after hearing how they felt. She then sent the letter with the list of signatures to Don Bosco. He replied that he was very gratified with the goodwill shown by the Sisters, but that he was inclined to let them have coffee and milk with their breakfast. In her simplicity of heart, the Mother Superior exclaimed: "To please Don Bosco, we would be ready to eat even a chicken."

She never modified any part of their practices of piety without Don Bosco's consent. A word from him sufficed to make them adopt or discard any devout practice. For example the Sisters attached great importance to the commemoration of the joys and sorrows of the Most Blessed Virgin during certain hours of the day, because when Don Bosco had prescribed that such devotions be said at those given times, he had intended them to coincide with the canonical hours. In this way the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians could unite their prayers to the prayers of the Church.

In veneration for their Founder they regarded his sons as their own brothers. In 1875, a sister of Father [John] Tamietti was accepted. The chronicle has this comment: "How wonderful it is to have relatives of Don Bosco's sons come to Mornese! Is this not an even more obvious sign that our Lady considers the two Institutes as one, and that both branches are equally dear to Heaven?"

In that year the definitive style of the habit was decided upon. The good Mother Superior had subjected her nuns to various experiments. First they had worn a large black hood on their heads. When their Director General, Father Cagliero, saw them wearing it, he smiled to himself as if to say: "Let us see how they take to it!" Later they wore a white headdress but covered it with a black veil. "A little better!" Father Cagliero then said. Their habit was brown but the sun's rays and the wear and tear of manual labor wrought havoc with it, until it became a colorless rag so unsightly

that Father Cagliero, with his irrepressible humor, once remarked to Don Bosco: "Don Bosco, if those Sisters are as ugly within as they are without, woe unto us! Most of the nuns in Turin wear black."

"We might try that," Don Bosco said. They did try it out at the next investiture: the twelve postulants who filed out of the chapel in white reappeared dressed in black. This sudden change evoked a general murmur of surprise and approval.

Yet, the Mother Superior would never have ventured to introduce such an innovation without first discussing it with the Founder. When she mentioned it to him, he replied: "I hope to be with you for the retreat; then we shall decide. In the meantime Father Rua, who is the Prefect General but who hardly knows the Sisters yet, will be visiting you; he, too, will see it."

Father Rua went to visit them, and was welcomed with the greatest courtesy. As Prefect General he was interested in their material welfare, checking the ledgers page by page with scrupulous attention, and fully acquainting himself with their financial administration. After investigating everything with the eye of a lynx, he gave them some helpful instructions. On being asked, he gladly consented to hear their confessions and to preach.

During Father Rua's stay at Mornese, Father Albera, the Director at Sampierdarena, arrived in the company of Father Guanella, who had sent a good number of postulants to Mornese from Sondrio. It was June, and the chronicle tells us that "the two pious priests" took turns in preaching the meditations on the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in giving benediction, and the *Good Night* after night prayers. The Spiritual Retreat began on August 21 and was preached by Father Cagliero and a Carmelite priest. That retreat marked an important step in the Institute's progress toward perfect observance of the religious life, as we shall now explain.

Don Bosco came to Mornese during the last few days of the retreat. He heard confessions, held conferences, and then announced important news. "Though the temporary Rule does not refer to it," he said, "it is the intention of the Church that after a satisfactory trial period of three or six years the Sisters bind themselves to God by perpetual vows. Now three years have passed since the first professions. Those who wish to take perpetual vows and who are

found eligible by their Superiors, may do so at the investiture and profession ceremonies at the end of this retreat. The others may renew their vows; should anybody. . . ." His reticence was eloquent enough. He knew the situation in the House; in any convent there is always someone who is lightminded, and this happens everywhere.

The Sisters who had already been professed for three years, asked Don Bosco to be admitted to perpetual vows. But after expressing his own opinion, he invariably would conclude, "You will have to ask your Mother Superior." While exercising his supreme authority, Don Bosco never usurped the authority of the local Superiors in the internal matters of the Institute.

On August 28 there took place the solemn investiture of fifteen postulants who were blessed by Don Bosco, assisted by the Carmelite priest, Father Cagliero, and Father Costamagna. This time, too, the habit was black.

One of the postulants, Magdalene Martini, who was already known to Don Bosco, had been given precious words of encouragement by him in this beautiful letter, which she always treasured as a relic:

[no date]

Beloved daughter in Jesus Christ:

When you went to Mornese, you dealt such a blow to the world that it sent the enemy of our souls to torment you. [Never mind that], but listen instead to the voice of God who calls you to follow a smooth, easy path to salvation, and to spurn any suggestion to do otherwise. You should even be happy for any disturbance and uneasiness that you might feel, for the way of the Cross will lead you to God. On the contrary, had you felt happy and content immediately, there would be reason to fear trickery on the part of our insidious enemy. Therefore bear this in mind:

1. [Heavenly] glory is attained only by great effort.
2. We are not alone, but Jesus is with us; and St. Paul says that with the help of God we become all powerful.
3. Those who abandon country, family, and friends to follow their Divine Master are assured of a treasure in Heaven that no one may wrest from them.
4. The great reward that awaits us in Heaven should encourage us to endure any suffering here on earth.

Have courage then, for Jesus is with you. If you are troubled by the thorns of suffering, add them to the thorns in the crown of Jesus.

I shall recommend you to God during Holy Mass; pray for me, who remains always in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Fourteen Sisters made their temporary profession and eight took their final vows after the investiture ceremony. The Sisters' *Chronological Memoirs* tell us: "Mother Mazzarello is happy. She gave herself to God in perpetuity many years ago. Yet, by proclaiming this in the presence of the community, she feels as though the knot has been strengthened; the bond has been made more sacred; her consecration, more complete."

At the end of the moving ceremony Don Bosco ended both the service and the retreat with one of his talks. He spoke of the great gift of peace, saying that one must first be at peace with oneself before one can live in peace with God and neighbor. To attain this he exhorted them not to wait for a given day, a moment of great anxiety or need before seeking counsel, giving a warning, or revealing some hurt. From time to time they should confide in each other with respect, calmness, and serenity—Superiors to subordinates, subordinates, in turn, to their Superiors, the Sisters among themselves.

The Sisters from Borgo San Martino had also attended the retreat. One of them had something very nice to relate about Don Bosco. He had visited that school on the feast of St. Aloysius. After saying Mass for the Sisters, he had come to say goodbye to them before leaving. This poor Sister had been most anxious to speak with him, but had never been able to. When Don Bosco saw her in front of him, he understood her inner anguish and without uttering a word he calmed her with just one paternal glance. "With one look Don Bosco cleared away every cloud," the Sister declared, "and peace filled my heart."

Before leaving Mornese, Don Bosco assembled the whole Community and announced that he felt the time had now come to recommend strict observance of their enclosure. "Until now we have

been easygoing, insofar as enclosure is concerned," he said, "but this was because you were more of a family than a full-fledged Community, and there was the problem of masons and others. But now it is time that this, too, be done according to the rules. With all the young people you have in the House now and the others who will soon join you, the main door should always be locked and the keys should be entrusted to a Sister who will receive all visitors.

"In monasteries where enclosure is observed, only those enter who have an extraordinary reason and permission. When the confessor is called for a sick Sister, he is preceded by another Sister, who rings a bell. While the sick Sister is confessing, the other Sister rings the bell now and then to show that she is present. You do not have to do this because you are not bound by monastic enclosure; you are always in contact with young people and very often also with outsiders. Nevertheless, it is a good thing that no visitors be allowed in those rooms that are reserved for the Sisters, as prescribed in your Constitutions, unless it is absolutely necessary and provided a Sister accompanies them.

"For no reason whatsoever are any of you to go out alone, nor may any of you remain out of doors after dark; and once the *Ave Maria* rings in the evening, allow no visitors in the House."

"Those among you who have been at Borgo San Martino know that whenever something has to be sent from the kitchen to the Superiors' or the boys' dining room and also from the linen room to those in charge of distribution, the so-called wheel is used. This enables the Sisters to satisfy everybody without seeing or being seen.

"So far, we do not have any such setup here at Mornese for your services to the priests, though in due time we may have to install one here, too. Meanwhile, in this, too, we must be sure to observe enclosure, which means precisely a closing, a separation.

"Your Rules also state that the Sisters should not frequent the homes of pastors or of other priests, nor should they render any service there. So far there has been no need for this Rule, but should this come about . . . let us do whatever is prescribed in the Rules; the Rule is the voice of God."

He did not disapprove of the new black habit. For reasons of

economy, it was not possible to issue new habits to all the Sisters at once, so he told them: "Change to black little by little, as you can afford it, without straining your finances. Those Sisters who are not continually in contact with outsiders should wear out their brown habit. Naturally, we desire uniformity in this, but we have to take 'Sister Poverty' into consideration. Then little by little all of you will have habits of the same color. All right?"

Don Bosco, Father Cagliero and Father Costamagna set out for Ovada, where nine Bishops were gathering to celebrate the centenary of St. Paul of the Cross. Don Bosco exchanged visits with them. He must have made that journey solely to avail himself of the opportunity to speak of the needs of his undertakings with so many Bishops. Actually, in one of the letters that he always sent to Father Rua when he was away, with orders, briefings, and directives, he wrote: "I am going to Ovada to talk over some business matters with the Bishops." There is no date on the letter, though it must certainly have been written while at Mornese. He took the Director of Mornese with him, to help revise the Rules of the Sisters' Institute, before submitting them to the Bishop of Acqui for approval. They were guests of Father Titus Borgatta from August 29 to the 31st.

After his devotions in church Don Bosco retired to the rectory where Father Costamagna read the Rules to him, article by article, and Don Bosco made corrections, enlarged on them, added to them, and then had them read again. Then he corrected them once more until he was satisfied with the manner in which his ideas were expressed. As a result there was an almost entirely new set of Rules.

Thanks to this work, the Constitutions received episcopal approval in January, 1876. When commenting on the decree, Father Costamagna reminded the Sisters of certain words uttered by Don Bosco: "I can assure you that your Institute will have a great future as long as you all remain simple and poor, and practice mortification."

The good Sisters were dismayed by the unexpected departure of Father Cagliero for [South] America. The news had not reached them until after the Director General had sailed from Genoa; he had had so little time that he had been unable to take his leave of

them. The chronicle reads: "The Mother Superior is more grieved than anyone else; on her this moment weighs most heavily, since she, above all, experienced the beneficial effect of his moral support." But Don Bosco had already provided for them. Father Rua visited the Sisters on November 10, listened to what they told him, and inquired into everything; they understood immediately that he was replacing the faraway Director General.

Father Rua arrived at Mornese at a very propitious moment. According to our documentation, Don Bosco had sent "a venerable young lady of 63." He did not refuse her a chance to try, also because he wanted to please her brother, a professor at the Royal University and a friend of his. But at her age she was no longer pliable. Worse still, she had a following among some simple heads. The Superiors were incredibly patient with her. At last, greatly concerned, the Mother Superior went to consult Don Bosco, and returned home with the following reply: "Whomever I send to Mornese, I send to obey and not to give orders." It appears that the elderly lady was not prepared to obey, so Father Rua took her back to Turin.

Before we leave the beloved haven of Mornese, we would like to quote from a letter written by Bishop Costamagna which we found among some other papers. This is what the Salesian Bishop wrote: "Don Bosco came to visit the Sisters while I was Director of the Motherhouse at Mornese, and when they gathered about him to kiss his hand, he began muttering and shaking his head in sign of disapproval. Then he turned to me, for I happened to be present, and said quite loudly so that all could hear: 'Now they are kissing Don Bosco's hand; later they will want to do the same with the others, and undesirable things could result . . .' "

We shall see how the limited goals of Mornese will stretch ever more year by year as far as the eye can reach. But no matter on what shore or under what sky they might advance, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will always be carried there by that spirit which, under the inspiration of Don Bosco and thanks to the heroic virtue of Mother Mazzarello, pervaded that place where the Institute was born.

Don Bosco was busy preparing a home for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians near the Oratory. He struggled from

January until July to acquire the premises, for it was truly a matter of dislodging the devil. There is a cry of alarm in the following circular which he sent out to his Cooperators.

Turin, January 20, 1875

For more than 25 years we have had to tolerate a house of ill-repute opposite the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. One can imagine all the embarrassment and dangers for the young boarders and day students. This has prevented us so far from starting construction as planned in front of the church of Mary Help of Christians.

At last with the help of Divine Providence financial difficulties forced the proprietor of the building to put it up for sale.

To prevent others from buying it and conducting the same evil business, a third person was enlisted to arrange a deal by which the undersigned can acquire the building for 55,000 lire.

Since the house is poorly located and badly constructed, it must necessarily be razed, but the site is ideally suited for our plans concerning the Mary Help of Christians square.

The materials [resulting from the demolition] would be used for other buildings on which work is to begin as soon as possible around this square.

It is now a question of collecting the required funds! We are therefore appealing to all those, who are in a position to make a contribution, to prevent sin and save souls.

Rev. John Bosco

We have a sample of letters bearing the same date, to be used when sending his declaration of war to wealthy, influential people. The following letter is one addressed to Angelina Dupraz, a noble lady of Turin:

Oratory, January 20, 1875

Dear Madam:

I always appeal to you in grave emergencies, for your charity has never failed me. I am now engaged in a bold enterprise—the destruction, down to its very foundations, of a stronghold of Satan, as you can

see from the enclosed leaflet. So far I do not have a single penny. I trust that you will be the first to make an offering. If you can, the Lord will reward you. When you will appear before Him he will say, *By saving souls, you have saved your own.*

Whatever you are able to give, I shall continue to pray every day for you and the Commendatore, your good husband, asking God to grant you both a long and happy life. At the same time I beg you to remember me in your own holy prayers. I remain in profound gratitude,

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

He was unable to welcome victory until July 21, when he immediately announced the joyous news to Countess Callori, with a triumphant blare of words.

Turin, [Feast of] St. Mary Magdalene, July 21, 1875

My Good Mamma:

Father Milanesio gave me good news of you, good indeed, since I hear that your health is somewhat better. We have been praying for a long time at the altar of Mary Help of Christians for this intention, and shall continue until you tell me: "I am now happily feeling as well as before." May that be soon!

We finally signed the contract for that infamous house today. The devil did all he could against us.

I shall let you know all the hideous, yet strange episodes, of this purchase. For the present I shall only say that finally everything is over, thanks to patience, effort, and sacrifice, and that the devil has been defeated.

My dear Mamma! God bless you, and may He allow you to see the fruits of your charity. While expressing my sincerest gratitude for all you have done for me, I pray with all my heart that Mary reward you as you deserve in this world and in blessed eternity. Amen.

I am in Jesus Christ,

Your naughty son and grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The closing of that house of infamy was only the initial part of the undertaking. In its place he had to open another House, a house of benediction. So without delay he sought the required permission from the diocesan authorities.

[no date]

Your Excellency:

The Rev. John Bosco respectfully brings to Your Excellency's attention that poor girls living in the area of Valdocco lack adequate facilities for school and church services, and consequently are exposed to serious moral peril. In his desire to do whatever he can to meet this urgent need, the undersigned has secured a site where an Oratory for girls could be built. Then they could attend school during the week and church services and catechetical instructions on Sundays.

The place destined for the chapel is only about one hundred yards away from the church of Mary Help of Christians. It is on the ground floor with an entrance for the public and adjoining the building set aside for some nuns who would willingly take care of those underprivileged girls.

The undersigned therefore begs Your Excellency to delegate whomsoever you may wish to visit the aforesaid Oratory and, should everything in it be found in keeping with the prescriptions of the Church, to bless it, thus permitting the celebration of Mass and other services.

Your humble petitioner,
Rev. John Bosco

He had to wait for an answer until October 31. There is no date for the copy of the letter we have transcribed above; but when referring to it on November 7 to the Superior Chapter, a week after receiving the answer, Don Bosco said that he had written "already some time ago." However that may have been, while waiting for it, he had returned to the task and enclosed with the letter a copy of the Rules for [the Sisters in] Mornese. Here again we must content ourselves with an undated copy.

In his eagerness to meet the grave and urgent needs of underprivileged girls in the district of Valdocco, the Rev. John Bosco plans to open a

free school, entrusting it to the care of Sisters known as *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.* Their motherhouse is at Mornese, in the diocese of Acqui.

To this end, he implores your Excellency to give your consent, and is sending a copy of their rules and other related documents. I pray that Father Michael Rua be appointed their ordinary confessor and Father John Bodrato to substitute whenever the former is absent or otherwise prevented to carry out that office.

Your humble petitioner,

Rev. John Bosco

In the above-mentioned reply, the Ordinary enclosed a list of six conditions to be signed by Don Bosco, with the following note: "If you agree, sign your name and date, and return to the archdiocesan chancery."

One of these conditions was embarrassing. Since the Sisters were to live so near to the church of Mary Help of Christians, they were not allowed to have their own chapel; this meant they would have to go to confession and attend services in the church. But how could the nuns perform their religious practices in a church open to the public, and attended by the boys as well? Don Bosco wrote again presenting these difficulties. The Ordinary then replied that he would not object to a chapel provided the Sisters would open a Sunday Oratory for girls. This was exactly what Don Bosco wanted, so they were in perfect agreement.[1]

Now that he had obtained the coveted consent, Don Bosco gave orders immediately that the premises be altered and made ready for the Sisters. As has been said already, the day students and the *Sons of Mary* had their classrooms next to the convent, but they could be kept apart. "The premises are an eyesore," Don Bosco admitted to the Superiors of the Chapter, "but will accommodate a

[1] Letter from Don Bosco to Father Chiuso, November 7, 1875. In the second letter to the Ordinary, the words "is sending a copy etc." must be understood as "shall send," and not as meaning that the copy was enclosed in the letter, for in the letter of November 7, he writes: "As to the Sisters, I shall set to work, since we are able to open a Sunday Oratory for the poor girls, and shall forward a copy of their Rules for the Archbishop as soon as I myself receive one."

lot of people." Nevertheless, he consoled himself, saying: "Meanwhile the Lord will provide something better." Whether, and in what way the Lord provided, even a blind man can see for himself today.

If it took Don Bosco a long time to gain possession of the site, it took Father Rua just as long to put the house in order. God willing, we shall speak again of this House when we shall talk of those that were planned in 1875, but actually opened in 1876.

CHAPTER 16

The Departure of the Missionaries

ONE day in March, after several moments of silence and deep thought, Don Bosco turned to Father Cagliero beside him, and said: "I would like one of our older priests to accompany the missionaries to [South] America and to stay with them for about three months until they are thoroughly settled. It seems rather hard to leave them suddenly all to themselves without someone to turn to or a counselor in whom to confide. I haven't the heart even to think of it. "If Don Bosco cannot find anyone for this task," Father Cagliero answered, "I am ready to go, if he thinks I am qualified."

"Good," Don Bosco said.

Months passed and Don Bosco made no further reference to this intention of his, but as the day scheduled for the departure drew near, he suddenly said to Father Cagliero:

"Are you still of the same mind about going to [South] America? Were you joking, perhaps, when you said you were willing to go?"

"You know very well that I never joke when talking with Don Bosco!" Father Cagliero answered.

"Good. It is time to get ready."

Immediately Father Cagliero ran off to give instructions regarding preparations, accomplishing all that needed to be done in a few days of feverish work. Then it became quite clear in Don Bosco's mind that his conviction of Father Cagliero's elevation to the Episcopate was soon to be fulfilled.

Father Cagliero had earned his degree in theology at the Royal University [of Turin] and now taught Moral Theology at the Oratory, besides being the Director of several religious Institutes in the city; he was also the music teacher of the boys, and had a hand

in some of the most vital affairs of the House. No one would ever have believed that he could leave all this, even for a short time. Had Father Bonetti left with the missionaries, no one else would have been required to accompany them; but among those selected there was no one who could get things moving and relieve Don Bosco of all doubt and anxiety.

Second to Father Cagliero came Father Joseph Fagnano, the future Director of the school at San Nicolas de los Arroyos. Born in 1844 at Rocchetta Tanaro, he was old enough and was a brave, warmhearted man, a teacher of literature in the senior high school and formerly Prefect, first at Lanzo and later at Varazze. A simple wish expressed by Don Bosco had sufficed to induce him to renounce everything and overcome serious obstacles.

The deacon, Valentine Cassinis, from Varengo Monferrato, was an elementary schoolteacher. Though it was not easy, he finally succeeded in persuading his mother to resign herself to his departure. He was greatly missed by the artisans, of whom he had been in charge. He could not hold back his tears at the mere thought of leaving the Oratory where he had lived for thirteen years; yet he told Don Bosco that he was happy to go because he felt sure he was doing God's will, manifest in the will of his Superior.

There were two other priests [and a cleric]; Father Dominic Tomatis, a native of Trinità [Mondovì] and teacher of literature in high school; Father John Baptist Baccino from Giusvalla, an elementary schoolteacher; and the cleric James Allavena, of Ventimiglia, also an elementary schoolteacher.

Four coadjutors, listed as catechists in missionary parlance, completed the group: Bartholomew Scavini, a cabinetmaker; Vincent Gioia, cook and shoemaker; Bartholomew Molinari, a music teacher; and Stephen Belmonte, also a musician, and in charge of the domestic economy.

During the summer vacation Don Bosco gathered all these beloved sons at the Varazze school to study Spanish under the coaching of Commendatore Gazzolo. Pledged to converse among themselves in that tongue, very soon they were able to speak correctly and fluently.

It was September, however, and one of their number, Cassinis, had not as yet been ordained a priest. It would have been quite

useless to attempt to have him ordained in Turin. Therefore, Don Bosco turned to an old friend, Bishop de Gaudenzi of Vigevano, and asked him to ordain soon Cassinis and four other deacons: Herman Borio, Joseph Leveratto, Charles Farina, and Anthony Riccardi. The Bishop consented, but on one condition: that Don Bosco be present at the sacred ceremony, wherever it might take place. Don Bosco agreed.

The ordinands were invited to make a Spiritual Retreat at the villa of the Vigevano seminary, near Cava Manara. The ordinations were to take place in the parish church at Sannazzaro of the Burgundi on the feast of the Holy Rosary, the day chosen for the Bishop's pastoral visitation. Among the people there was some ill-feeling against the pastor; that was why Don Bosco's presence was desired by the Bishop.

Bishop de Gaudenzi arrived from Vigevano with three Canons on the eve of the feast. The ordinands arrived on the evening of the same day. Don Bosco came from Turin on the eight o'clock train and was met at the station by his Salesians and a few members of the local clergy. Father Borio recalls how the people, who did not know Don Bosco, stood staring in frank astonishment at the affection and veneration with which his sons greeted him.

They escorted him on the fairly long walk to the rectory, where the pastor's father was the first to meet him at the door. He welcomed him and placed himself at his service. Smiling, Don Bosco told him:

"That is very nice, but you are not giving me what I need."

"But, Don Bosco, you have only to say the word, and whatever you want will be done!"

"Oh no, you are not giving me what I need. I need . . . money!"

The good man, rather embarrassed, remained speechless.

When the Bishop heard of Don Bosco's arrival, he left the church where he was hearing confessions. They met in the courtyard of the rectory and embraced affectionately; then the Bishop said in a humorous tone: "Now come and help me with confessions if you want to earn your supper."

"Gladly," Don Bosco answered. He was led to the only confessional that was still empty, located in the most uncomfortable

part of the church. He heard confessions for a long time until someone came to take him by the hand and led him to the rectory for supper.

Next morning he was back in the confessional and remained there even during the ordination ceremony; the only exception being the solemn moment when he, too, laid his hands on the ordinands. Later, while the Bishop was confirming, he blessed the sick at the rectory, and even in their homes, when they requested it. After the afternoon procession, he preached to a very crowded church. The Bishop and the Canons had their chairs moved from the sanctuary to a place immediately opposite the pulpit to hear him better. The sermon lasted an hour and three quarters. Incredible as it may seem, a number of townspeople said that when he had finished, his listeners complained that the sermon was too short. At the start, though, he had a hard time trying to make his silvery voice heard over the buzz of the crowd filling that large church.

On Monday morning he called on the devout family of Mr. Villa, manager of the Confalonieri estate, at the neighboring village of Mezzana Bigli. When Father Abbondio Anzini, a Salesian, preached the Lenten sermons at Sannazzaro in 1906, he found that the memory of Don Bosco was still strong.

He accompanied the newly ordained priests back to Turin, and then busied himself in completing preparations for the missionaries' departure. Time was pressing, but nevertheless, he wanted them to have the joy of receiving the blessing of the Vicar of Jesus Christ. They left for Rome on October 29, accompanied also by Commendatore Gazzolo.

They arrived on October 31, and were granted an audience by Cardinal Antonelli, who was most gracious and spoke with them very kindly. On All Saints' Day they were honored by a special audience with the Holy Father. His Holiness first received Commendatore Gazzolo and Father Cagliero, who conveyed to him the deep gratitude of the Salesians for the many favors he had extended to their young Congregation; he also told the Pope how all Don Bosco's sons were affectionately attached to his august person. The Pope listened with paternal kindness; then, after granting the spiritual favors Father Cagliero had requested, he hastened toward the

hall where the little group of Salesians were waiting, showing a certain eagerness to meet them.

As soon as he entered, he exclaimed with the greatest kindness: "Here is a poor old man; now where are my little missionaries? . . . So you are Don Bosco's sons and you are going to preach the Gospel in distant lands? Good! Where are you going?"

"To the Argentine Republic."

"You will find there an immense field in which you can accomplish much good. I hope you will be well-received, for the authorities there are very kind. You will be like vessels filled with fertile seed; indeed you already are, since your Superiors have chosen you for this mission. Scatter the seeds of virtue among the people there, and you will accomplish much good. I want you to multiply, for great is the need and most abundant the harvest to be reaped among the savage tribes."

He then spoke a few gracious words to each of them. When he came to the coadjutors, who were distinguished from the others by their civilian clothes, he asked each one about his particular trade. He then extended his hand for all to kiss and finally blessed all affectionately. These good confreres emerged from the audience electrified, prepared to go to the ends of the earth and even to lay down their lives for their Faith.

Before they left, Cardinal Antonelli handed Father Cagliero a letter in his own hand in which he recommended the new mission to His Excellency Frederic Aneyros, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. A number of favors and privileges were also granted to the individual priests, among others the faculty to hear confessions and to say Mass wherever they might be, even aboard ship. Cardinal Franchi, the kindly Prefect of Propaganda, by a special papal decree declared all the priests of the group apostolic missionaries.[1] His Holiness, too, sent Don Bosco the following Brief [English translation] as a token of his deep appreciation.[2] Although Don Bosco received these official documents toward the latter part of November, we insert them here because they were drawn up at this time.

[1] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 23.

[2] For the original text in Latin, see *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 24.

To our Beloved Son, Father John Bosco, Turin

Beloved Son, Greetings and Apostolic Blessing!

We were happy to receive your letters during the last few days of October, and embraced with paternal affection the missionaries you recommended to Us. They were presented to Us together with our beloved son, John Baptist Gazzolo, and their presence and conversation has enhanced the confidence We already had, that their labors in the distant land to which they are destined, will prove fruitful and beneficial to the faithful. We praised their zeal, therefore, and blessed them wishing them God's divine assistance. We were also comforted by your news about the progress and growth of the *Sons of Mary Project,* from which We hope that, with the help of God, abundant harvest may be reaped in due time. Meanwhile We assure you once again of our paternal benevolence, and as a token of heavenly favors, We are happy to extend Our apostolic blessing to you and your whole Congregation.

Given at Rome, St. Peter's, November 17, 1875, in the thirtieth year of Our pontificate.

Pope Pius IX

The missionaries returned to the Motherhouse late on the night of November 4. Prior to their departure for Rome, Don Bosco, while thinking of the Pope, had not forgotten his Archbishop. To him then he turned, asking him to give them the solemn blessing at the departure ceremony. The Archbishop had his secretary reply to him on the eve of All Saints: [3] "His Excellency will be very happy to bless solemnly and publicly your religious whom you are sending to the Argentine Republic, if they will present themselves tomorrow, the feast of All Saints, in the metropolitan Basilica immediately after the papal blessing at the end of the pontifical Mass. This is the procedure followed whenever any of the missionaries from Canon Ortalda's Apostolic Schools leave for abroad."

Don Bosco answered that the missionaries would not be able to go to the Cathedral next day, since they had gone to Rome to see the Holy Father.

Whereupon the Ordinary had another letter written to him: [4]

[3] Letter from Fr. Chiuso to Don Bosco, October 31, 1875.
[4] Letter from Fr. Chiuso to Don Bosco, November 5, 1875.

"His Excellency instructs me to tell you that if your young men, who are about to leave for the Argentine Republic, wish to receive, besides the blessing of the Supreme Pontiff, that of the Archbishop as well, they are to come to the archiepiscopal residence at 9 A.M. either on the morning of the 7th or the 8th of this month. His Excellency will be away from Turin after that date."

Don Bosco was obliged to send the following reply: [5]

"Please thank His Excellency for his kindness on my behalf and on behalf of our missionaries. I am sorry to say that some are still away getting some documents together, and will not be back until Wednesday.[6] But the seven who are here at the Oratory will gladly go with Father Cagliero to kiss the Archbishop's hand tomorrow morning and receive his holy blessing prior to their departure." At the end of the letter, Don Bosco expressed [to Father Chiuso] his wish that God "grant all His bounty" to him, and asked him to pray for his "poor" Don Bosco.

He intended to make the departure ceremony as solemn as possible. An exceptionally large crowd was expected to attend since this was something entirely new in Turin and printed invitations had been sent out. "I would like to have invited a bishop," he said at the [Superior] Chapter's meeting on November 7, "but this might perhaps enrage our Archbishop too much. Instead we shall invite the pastor. As a church official he is entitled to attend; and besides, we invite him also as a personal friend of ours and especially of Father Cagliero who is leaving."

At this point, various doubts might arise in the mind of the attentive reader.

1. The remark "might enrage too much" in reference to the Archbishop is serious enough, but it is doubly so on Don Bosco's lips. Could it be that his words have not been faithfully recorded? Father Barberis took them down. His own gentle character and his great reverence for Don Bosco sooner inclined him to tone things down rather than heighten them. What was the underlying psychological motivation prompting so forceful a phrase?

2. The letter in which the Archbishop's secretary wrote that the Archbishop would be "very happy" to bless the missionaries at

[5] Letter from Don Bosco to Fr. Chiuso, November 7, 1875.
[6] Which was November 10.

the cathedral, does not refer at all to a previous letter from Don Bosco in reference to the same topic; instead the message is inserted, almost stealthily in the letter concerning the Sisters, to which we have already referred. This means that there had already been a previous verbal contact. Then why was the answer not given verbally as well?

3. Whenever Don Bosco wished to invite the Ordinary to some function, he never did it in writing, but always sent a member of the Superior Chapter to call on him and invite him in person. Now, is it possible that, in connection with so solemn a ceremony as the departure of the missionaries, Don Bosco failed to inform the Archbishop of everything in a manner befitting the importance of the occasion? What really took place?

Mulling over this chapter long after we had completed it, we, too, were puzzled, until we found an important document, [a letter by Don Bosco] in his own hand. In our opinion, it clears all doubts.

Turin, October 28, 1875

Your Excellency:

Yesterday Your Excellency saw fit to tell me whatever you felt was necessary, without even allowing me to utter a single word in my defense or to rectify the accusations you made against me. I regret this more for your sake than for my own. I had intended to tell you things that would have been very helpful in lessening and perhaps even freeing you of grave disappointments.

With all the respect due to Your Excellency's archiepiscopal dignity, I think I am in a position to say that, if you have been consecrated Bishop of Saluzzo and later have become Archbishop of Turin, and if the great obstacles that stood in the way of these appointments were overcome, this was due, as Your Excellency knows, to the good offices and efforts of poor Don Bosco, who now is not even allowed to speak, but is dismissed in the manner you well know.

I believed I had the right, or rather the duty to speak; now I feel that I have no longer any obligation whatever in this regard.

Please forgive me for any unpleasantness that resulted and believe that with the deepest respect I am always what I have always been and shall never cease to be

Your obedient servant,
Fr. John Bosco

Let us note well the date, October 28, the eve of the missionaries' departure for Rome. This means that two days before they left, Don Bosco had called on the Archbishop. It would be absurd to suppose that his visit was not motivated in part, if not entirely, by the desire to inform the Archbishop of the great event which was to take place and was already unfolding with the departure of the missionaries for Rome; but he had been treated rudely. When Don Bosco spoke of his "rage" he must have envisioned again the distressing interview he had had, of which he maintained silence with everybody, even discreetly glossing over it in his letter to the Archbishop. He kept silent on this topic even in the report that he was forced to present to the Sacred Congregation of the Council in 1881. In it, he states explicitly that he intends to omit "many facts and remarks that concern only *his own* person." It is obvious that, once the Archbishop had regained his calm, he was sorry and attempted conscientiously to put matters right. Thus he gladly seized on the fact that an answer to Don Bosco regarding the Sisters was overdue. Therefore, he had his secretary write a letter about them and, although in guarded words, also made reference to the blessing for the missionaries.

Don Bosco had important things to tell the Ordinary. What were they? The answer may lie in the next to the last paragraph of the letter of December 31, reported on page 284. It reads as follows: "As recently as last October"—this, it seems, is the answer to our query.

In view of the forthcoming departure of the missionaries could Don Bosco refrain from thinking of his boys, or from availing himself of an opportunity to procure some spiritual advantage for them? The ceremony was to be held on Thursday, November 11. On the evening of November 9, after mentioning this event and the timetable for the day, he announced that the Exercise for a Happy Death would also be held on that day. Then he continued with one of those typical exhortations that came to him so readily whenever the salvation of souls was mentioned.

Finally, November 11, the feast day of the popular St. Martin of Tours, dawned. Nowadays at the Oratory we are accustomed to see people coming and going, and we hardly pay any attention to them; but in 1875 our great history was only awakening in its first

dawn. Fifty-five years ago the departure of a group of missionaries for [South] America was an extraordinary event in the eyes of people living in the remote little corner of Turin known as Valdocco. They looked upon the departing missionaries as brave men, boldly venturing forth into the unknown. Seeing them walking about the House in their foreign clothes, everyone tried to approach them and exchange a few words with them. Father Cagliero, especially, whom the boys loved more than their own fathers, was the object of tender demonstrations of affection.

The Exercise for a Happy Death was the occasion for a truly general Communion that could not have been more fervent.

The festive sound of bells at 10 A.M. summoned missionaries, boys and guests to a moving ceremony: the baptism of a young Waldensian, an eighteen-year-old youth named Giovanelli. He had come to the Oratory a short time before and that day, after abjuring the false doctrines of Peter Waldo, was received into the Catholic Church. Father Cagliero received his abjuration and baptized him conditionally. Thus, at the feet of Mary Help of Christians a mission began that was to continue beyond the Atlantic.

At about 4 P.M. a steady stream of people into the church gave indications of an unprecedented crowd. Vespers were sung in plain chant. Hundreds of young voices, soaring high, devoutly and harmoniously under the majestic dome of the temple, blended with the strains of the organ. Shortly before, however, another kind of music had been heard at the Oratory. As 4 o'clock was striking and the first notes of the carillon were echoing, a sudden furious noise was heard inside the House, with slamming of doors and windows. A wind had arisen so violent that it threatened to sweep away the Oratory. It may have been pure coincidence, but it is a fact that a similar violent wind broke loose in the very hour when the cornerstone of the church of Mary Help of Christians was laid. It happened once again during the consecration of the same church and again the day Don Bosco returned home from Varazze after his sickness. A sudden furious wind lashed the Oratory in precisely the same manner ten days before the departure of the missionaries while Father Cagliero was preaching a farewell sermon and again about ten years later at the very moment that the decree granting the privileges reached Don Bosco.

It is said that this same howling wind blew on other occasions, all of them important. We were unable to investigate the matter, but we do feel that this is sufficient for us to doubt that it was due entirely to natural causes.

As soon as the *Magnificat* was intoned, the missionaries made their appearance two by two, and took their places in the middle of the sanctuary where space had been reserved for them. The priests were dressed in Spanish style and held their boatshaped hats in their hands; the coadjutors wore black suits and carried top hats. All the priests of the Oratory and all the Directors were present wearing surplices.

Not to omit any detail, we must add that the decision to summon all the Directors to Turin had not been reached without some discussion on the expense involved; but the opinion prevailed that the first departure of missionaries in a body not only from Turin but from the whole of Piedmont was an event that called for the utmost possible solemnity. Besides, this would offer the Directors an opportunity to give the boys of their respective schools a detailed description of the ceremony and perhaps attract some good vocations.

Don Bosco mounted the pulpit as Vespers ended. At sight of him, a profound silence fell over that vast sea of people, all trembling with emotion as they eagerly drank in his every word. Every time he referred directly to the missionaries his voice became choked, the words almost dying away on his lips. He manfully restrained his tears, but his audience wept. A very intelligent boy jotted down the basic points of the sermon in which Don Bosco elaborated the concepts here summarized.

Our Divine Savior, before leaving this earth to return to His heavenly Father gathered His Apostles about Him and said: *Ite in mundum universum . . . docete omnes gentes . . . praedicate evangelium meum omni creaturae.* Go into the whole world . . . make disciples of all nations . . . preach the Gospel to every creature. [Mark 16, 15; Matt. 28, 19]

With these words our Savior was giving His Apostles not a suggestion, but an order to go and bring the light of the Gospel to all parts of the earth. This order or mission gave the name of missionary to all those who venture forth from either our own country, or from other countries, to proclaim or preach the truth of our Faith. *Ite,* go.

After the Divine Savior had ascended into Heaven, the Apostles faithfully carried out the order of their Master. Sts. Peter and Paul travelled to many countries, cities, and kingdoms of the earth. St. Andrew went to Persia, St. Bartholomew to India, St. James to Spain, and all of them preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went, so that St. Paul already could write to the Romans: *Fides vestra annunciatur in universo mundo.* [Your Faith is proclaimed all over the world—*Rom.* 1, 8]

Yet, would it not have been better if the Apostles had remained where they were, and converted first the people of Jerusalem and the whole of Palestine? They would also have had the opportunity to meet together and discuss the more fundamental tenets of the Catholic Faith and the most effective way to propagate it, so that there would remain no one in those regions that did not believe in Jesus Christ. No, that was not what they did; the Divine Savior had said to them: *Ite in mundum universum.* Go out into the whole world. Therefore, the Apostles, realizing that they could not go personally to all parts of the world, successively recruited more and more evangelical workers, sending them forth here and there to teach the Word of God. St. Peter sent St. Apollinaris to Ravenna, St. Barnabas to Milan, St. Linus and others to France, while other Apostles did the same in the government of the Church.

The Popes who succeeded St. Peter and all the men who left for the missions, either from Rome or with the consent of the Holy Father, did likewise.

All this was in accordance with the will of our Divine Savior who established, as was only necessary, the solid, infallible focal point to which they might all turn, from which they all depended, and with which, all those who had to preach His holy word, should conform.

While we, in our small way, sought to carry out the command of Jesus Christ to the best of our ability, several Missions were proposed to us in China, India, Australia, and elsewhere in America. But for a number of reasons, and especially since our Congregation is just starting, we selected a mission in South America, in the Argentine Republic. As is customary, and as commanded by our Lord, as soon as this subject was broached, we immediately inquired about the Pope's wishes, and did everything else in complete agreement with His Holiness. Before leaving, our missionaries went to pay their respects to the Vicar of Jesus Christ and thus, with his apostolic blessing, they will set out for their mission as envoys of the Divine Savior Himself.

In doing this we are entering upon a mighty undertaking, not because

we have any pretensions, or because we believe we can convert the whole world in a few days; yet who knows? This departure [for the missions], this humble beginning may be the seed that will grow into a mighty tree. It may be like a tiny grain of millet or of mustard seed that will grow, little by little, and accomplish great things. It may awaken in many hearts a desire to consecrate themselves to God in the Missions, to join forces with us and reinforce our ranks. The extraordinary number of those who asked to be chosen makes me hope that it will.

Just to give you an adequate idea of the great need for priests in the Argentine Republic, I shall quote only a few excerpts of a recent letter from a friend in that part of the world. "If the people here were to enjoy the religious services available—I dare not say in the church of Mary Help of Christians, but in the most forsaken Italian or French village—how fortunate they would consider themselves, how obedient and grateful they would be to anyone laboring on their behalf!" he writes. "Instead, it often happens that even when dying they are deprived of the comforts of our holy religion. In many villages holy Mass is never celebrated." He then tells of a relative of his who wanted to go to Mass on Sunday. He set out on Thursday, and in order to arrive on time he had to travel in great haste on horseback, by coach or any other available means; even so he barely arrived at his destination on Sunday morning in time for Mass.

What few priests there are, are not enough to administer the Sacraments to the dying, because of the vast numbers of people entrusted to their care and the great distance between the towns.

I recommend particularly (*he said, turning to the missionaries*) the sad situation of many Italian families who live scattered throughout the towns, villages, and countryside. Both parents and children know little of language and local customs and live far away from schools and churches. They either do not attend any religious services or, if they do, understand nothing. I have been told that you will find a very large number of children and even adults who know absolutely nothing about reading, writing, and religion. Search out these brothers who were driven to a strange land by poverty or misfortune; teach them how great is the mercy of God who, for the good of their souls, is sending you to help them find and follow the road that surely will lead them to eternal salvation.

Large tribes of savages live in the areas bordering on the civilized regions. Religion, civilization, and commerce have not yet penetrated among them and no European has as yet gained a foothold.

The Pampas, Patagonia, and a number of surrounding islands form these regions; they are a continent vaster perhaps than all Europe.

Christianity is unknown in all these immense areas. Civilization, commerce, and religion are utterly unknown. Let us pray to the Master of the vineyard to send laborers into his harvest, to send many of them, but all fashioned after His own heart, that the kingdom of Jesus Christ may extend over this land.

At this point I ought to ask all of you now listening to me to pray for our missionaries; I hope you will. Here, not a day shall pass without our praying for them to Mary Help of Christians, and I believe that Mary, who now blesses their departure, will not fail to bless the progress of their Mission.

I ought to express my thanks, as well, to the many benefactors who in so many ways have worked for the success of this Mission. But what can I say? We shall turn to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament now to be exposed for Benediction, and ask Him to reward them for all they have done for our House, the Salesian Congregation, and this Mission.

I should speak of a distinguished person who initiated, pursued, and guided this pious undertaking to its conclusion; yet I must be silent, for he is present; I shall tell you about him some other time.

Now I shall address a few words to you, my beloved sons, who are about to leave.

Before anything else, I recommend that you never forget to pray, individually or together, for our benefactors in Europe. Offer the first souls you gain for Jesus Christ to our heavenly Father as a homage and well-deserved token of gratitude to those who contributed to this Mission. I have already said to each of you, individually, what my heart prompted or what I felt would help you most. I leave all of you some written mementos that are, so to speak, my testament for you who are leaving for those distant lands and whom perhaps I shall never again have the happiness to meet.

But my voice fails me, tears stifle my words. I only say that even though in this moment my soul is saddened at the thought of your departure, my heart is greatly consoled in seeing our Congregation strengthened; in realizing how we, in our insignificance, are yet able at this moment to contribute our little pebble to the mighty edifice of the Church. Yes, go forth bravely, but remember that there is but one Church that is spread over Europe, America, and the whole world and welcomes men of all nations who seek refuge at her maternal bosom.

Christ is the Savior of souls both here and there, and there is but one

Gospel, whether it be preached in one place or another. Therefore, although physically apart, we are united in spirit everywhere, because we all work for the greater glory of one and the same God and Savior, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Wherever you will be, beloved sons, always remember that you are Catholic priests, that you are Salesians. As Catholics you have gone to Rome to receive a blessing, or better yet, a mission from the Supreme Pontiff. By such an act you have made a formal profession of faith and made public the fact that the Vicar of Jesus Christ Himself sends you to fulfill the same mission as the Apostles, as though Jesus Christ Himself were sending you.

The Sacraments and the Gospel preached by our Savior, by His Apostles and by St. Peter's successors down to the present day, those Sacraments and that same religion jealously love, profess and exclusively preach wherever you will be, whether among savages or civilized people. May it never happen that you utter one single word, or do the least thing that could be interpreted as contrary to the infallible teachings of the Church, which represents Jesus Christ, to whom all things must be referred and from whom everything depends.

As Salesians, no matter in what remote part of the world you may be, never forget that here in Italy you have a father who loves you in the Lord and a Congregation that thinks of you in every circumstance, provides for your needs and will always welcome you as brothers. Go, then. You will have to face all kinds of trials, hardships, and dangers. Do not be afraid; God is with you; He will give you such grace that you will be able to say with St. Paul: By myself I can do nothing, but with Divine help, I am all powerful. *Omnia possum in eo qui me confortat* [Philip. 4, 13]. You will go, but you will not go alone because everyone will accompany you. Many of your companions will follow your example, and join you in the field of glory and tribulation. Those who are unable to accompany you to the evangelical field to which Divine Providence has destined you, will follow you in thought and prayer, sharing your joys and your sorrows, the roses and the thorns, so that with Divine help, you may succeed in all your undertakings for the salvation of souls redeemed by Jesus. Go, then; the Vicar of Jesus Christ and our revered Archbishop have blessed you; I, too, with all the love I feel for you in my heart, invoke abundant Divine blessings on you for your journey, for all your undertakings and labors.

Farewell! Perhaps some of us shall not meet again on this earth. For a while we shall be physically separated, but one day we shall be reunited forever. We, who work for the Lord [will look forward to] hear-

ing these words: *Euge, serve bone et fidelis . . . intra in gaudium Domini tui.* [Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter into the joy of thy Master—*Matt.* 25, 23.]

Then Don Bosco descended from the pulpit and the pastor of Borgodora imparted solemn Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament. An eyewitness writes: "The magnificently decorated altar, the hundreds of blazing candles, and the image of Mary Help of Christians in the center of the big painting over the altar—all gave a tender, majestic atmosphere to the ceremony." After the antiphon *"Sit nomen Domini benedictum"* had been sung, silvery voices sang an inspiring *Tantum ergo.*

After Benediction the choir intoned the *Veni Creator* and Don Bosco approached the altar to recite the beautiful prayers the Church prescribes for her ministers whenever they are setting out on a journey, especially when the journey is an apostolic one. He ended the prayers by bestowing his paternal blessing to the new missionaries amid a general silence.

Then came the most pathetic moment of the whole ceremony, one which drew tears and sobs in every part of the church and sorely taxed the emotions of the youthful apostles. While the boys choir repeated the antiphon *Sit nomen Domini benedictum ex hoc hunc et usque in saeculum,* their beloved father and all the priests present gave the farewell embrace to the missionaries in the sanctuary. The climax came when the ten missionaries left the sanctuary and walked through the church, among boys and friends. Everyone tried to press near to them and kiss their hands or their garments. Don Bosco was the last to reach the main entrance; there he stood staring for a few moments at a magnificent scene: throngs of people filled the square and a long line of coaches was awaiting the missionaries. The darkness of the night was dispelled by the flare of lanterns and a flood of light streaming through the open door of the church. The sky was clear, bright with stars and a feeling of peace hovered over the bystanders.

Father Lemoyne could not stifle the swelling tide of feeling in his heart. "Don Bosco," he exclaimed, "is the *inde exibit gloria mea* [hence shall my glory come] beginning to come true?"

"Yes, it is," answered Don Bosco, deeply moved.

At last, accompanied by Don Bosco and the Argentine Consul, the missionaries took their places in the coaches, which moved slowly at first and then at a trot to the railroad station. Faster yet were the Valsalice students, who ran ahead of them and met them in the waiting room of the station. Within a few minutes they left for Genoa.

In his sermon Don Bosco had promised he would give the missionaries some written mementos that should be a father's testament to the sons he would perhaps never see again. He had jotted them down in a notebook while on a recent trip by train. He had had copies made, and he gave one to each missionary as he left the altar of Mary Help of Christians. These twenty recommendations will fittingly close this chapter.

1. Seek souls and not money, honors, or dignities.
2. Be kind and most courteous toward all, but shun conversations and familiarity with persons of the other sex or with persons of questionable conduct.
3. Do not go visiting except for motives of charity or necessity.
4. Never accept invitations to dinner except for very serious reasons. In these cases arrange to go with another confrere.
5. Take special care of the sick, the children, the aged, and the poor, and you will gain the blessing of God and the goodwill of men.
6. Show respect toward all in authority, whether civic, religious, municipal, or state.
7. On meeting a person in authority, take care to greet him with respect.
8. Do the same toward priests and religious.
9. Shun idleness and disputes. Practice great moderation in eating and drinking and sleeping.
10. Love, reverence and respect other religious Orders, and always speak well of them. This is the way of making yourselves esteemed by all and of promoting the good of the Congregation.
11. Take care of your health. Work, but only as much as your strength allows.
12. Let the world know that you are poor in clothing, food, and dwelling, and you will be rich in the sight of God and will become masters of the hearts of men.

13. Love one another, advise one another, correct one another, and never be carried away by envy or rancor. Rather, let the good of one be the good of all, and let the pains and sufferings of one be regarded as the pains and sufferings of all, and let each one strive to remove or at least to mitigate them.

14. Observe your Rules and never neglect the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death.

15. Every morning commend to God the occupations of the day, especially confessions, classes, catechism, and sermons.

16. Constantly recommend devotion to Mary Help of Christians and to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

17. Recommend to the boys frequent confession and Communion.

18. In order to foster vocations to the priesthood, you should recommend: (1) Love of chastity; (2) Horror of the opposite vice; (3) Avoidance of bad companions; (4) Frequent Communion; (5) Show a special charity, affability, and kindness toward the boys.

19. Hear both sides before judging on reports and matters in dispute.

20. In your labors and sufferings do not forget that a great reward is prepared for us in Heaven.

Amen.

CHAPTER 17

Before and After the Sailing

ONCE seated in the faint light of their train compartment after a busy and exciting day, the missionaries must have let their weariness soon overcome the fond sentiments with which they had enjoyed long, close contact with their beloved father for the last time. They arrived at Sampierdarena at midnight, to find Father Albera, Director of St. Vincent's Hospice, awaiting them. It took two days to load their belongings on board ship and to complete the interminable formalities connected with their passports. During those last two days it became obvious to all how dearly the young apostles loved their Superior and father. He could not take a step without their following him; some mysterious force would not permit them to separate themselves from him. They bombarded him with questions, again and again asked for advice and repeated their spiritual needs to him. Apparent also was the fatherly tenderness he felt for each of them—all raised, trained, and formed by him at the Oratory. With unfaltering serenity he did his best to make them happy, giving generously of the treasury of his experience and supernatural enlightenment.

On Sunday, November 14, after Mass and usual devotions, they set out for the harbor. Just as Don Bosco was about to step from the boat on to the ladder leading to the deck, Captain Guidard came down and held out his hand to him; then he escorted him on a tour of the quarters assigned to the missionaries and of the whole ship, the *Savoie,* belonging to a French shipping line in Marseilles.

When they entered the first-class salon, the coadjutor Molinari sat down at the piano and intoned the hymn *Lodate Maria,* and the others joined in the singing. A number of passengers were al-

ready in the salon and the singing attracted more. Father Cagliero seized this opportunity to inaugurate his apostolic preaching mission with a short sermon, in which he reminded his listeners that the feast of the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary was being celebrated in Genoa that day. He added that he thought it only proper at the start of such a long voyage to invoke the protection of her who is known as Star of the Sea and their safeguard. He also said that everyone would have the opportunity for Mass, confession, and Communion during the trans-Atlantic crossing... They not only listened reverently to his words, but immediately showed their appreciation. Many passengers at once asked him where confessions would be heard, and it became necessary to improvise a confessional with veil and curtain.

Until then the missionaries had lost none of their cheerfulness; their beloved father's presence gave them strength. But now the critical moment of parting was almost at hand. At 11 A.M. the signal was given for all visitors and guests to go ashore. Don Bosco had had a long talk with the captain, and recommended his beloved sons to him. The captain was most courteous; he promised he would give the missionaries every consideration and that the crew would always treat them with respect. Then Don Bosco gathered them about him, gave them his last paternal instructions, and blessed them.

The coadjutor Enria, who had been at Sampierdarena for some months and witnessed the scene, has described the parting as follows: "The missionaries were unable to tear themselves away from Don Bosco. He himself was deeply moved, but he encouraged them, reminding them of the purpose of their voyage: the glory of God, the salvation of so many souls, the conversion of so many pagans ... 'You are fortunate to be the first to sow the seed of the Gospel in those barren lands! What a harvest this will reap for the Church and for our own Salesian Society! Work untiringly and your labors shall contribute to the triumph of our holy Faith and of the Roman, Catholic, Apostolic Church, and earn a generous reward by God. Through me, He assures you of an immeasurable harvest; of this you may be certain. Do not mind weariness, privations, or the contempt of the world.' The missionaries and everyone else present

knelt down, and in a firm voice Don Bosco blessed and then embraced them beginning with Father Cagliero. Then he left the ship together with Father Albera, Father Lemoyne, Father Cagliero's brother, and others. In the small boat Don Bosco and we kept staring back at the ship to gaze once more at our missionaries on the deck, waving their last farewell to us. Don Bosco's face was flushed from the effort he was making to contain his emotion."

The passengers had taken their places at table for lunch when, to their great surprise, the missionaries were told that they had visitors: the boys from the Sampierdarena Hospice had come to say goodbye. Don Bosco had sent them. It was but one of his typical, thoughtful, considerate attentions. They barely had time to say a few words and then they had to go ashore, leaving the missionaries alone once more. The ship sailed at 2 P.M.

On November 15 they went ashore at Marseilles for a six-hour visit. They anchored off Barcelona on November 17 and the next day docked at Gibraltar. Here Father Fagnano and Commendatore Gazzolo, who was to be the missionaries' mentor in America, went ashore for a supply of hosts and candles. They also called on the Bishop, who told them how anxious he was to have Don Bosco's sons help him educate the youth of his diocese. At this point in our story let us leave them as they enter the open sea, accompanied by the earnest prayers of all the boys at the Oratory.

We have heard from contemporaries how the departure of the missionaries fanned the spirit of prayer at the Oratory. The pupils of each class, on their own, arranged rosaries of daily communions, until news would be received that the missionaries had reached their destination safe and sound. One boy even took to fasting three days a week until he, too, might receive the divine grace of becoming a missionary to those far-off lands after finishing school. As soon as his Superior heard about this austere penance they forbade it.

We also wish to add that Father Cagliero was carrying with him a special memento of Don Bosco's paternal solicitude in the form of a list of recommendations and errands that he had written down and given to Father Cagliero on the eve of his departure. Here is the document.

Sampierdarena, November 13, 1875

To Father Cagliero:

1. Take good care of the health and moral conduct of all, and make sure they get sufficient rest.

2. Tell Dr. Ceccarelli that I received the two hundred francs, and remind him about a copy of the Argentinian catechism. I need one for the Spanish edition of *The Companion of Youth.*

3. Have Tomatis translate my arithmetic book into Spanish, and then send it to me for printing here in Turin. See if there is a good Bible history textbook; otherwise we shall prepare one.

4. Do not forget a copy of *Cattolico* or of some other book for Dr. Espinosa.

5. As soon as Allavena and his companions board the ship at Marseilles, send me a telegram as follows: *All arrived safely and in good health;* if otherwise, leave out the word *all.*

6. During the voyage, whenever possible, have all send whatever news there is, but, you should always add a separate confidential note on anything you feel I ought to know.

7. Show Mr. Francis Benitez every consideration; tell him that he, too, is one of us, that is, he has the name of our patron.

8. Let no one boast of what he can do or of what he knows; when the time comes let everyone do his best, but without any ostentation.

9. Should you ever be in a position to send money, address it to Father Rua in the manner that Commendatore Gazzolo will indicate.

10. When any of you write, always say something about prayers and gratitude for the people who helped you and who continue to help the Oratory. There is never any danger of saying too much on this subject.

11. During your voyage or after your arrival, write short letters to our principal benefactors, such as the Marquis and Marchioness Fassati, Mamma Corsi and family, Countess Teresa Bricherasio, Via La Grange 20, etc., etc. This will help both you and us very much.

12. If you are in need of personnel, either Sisters or other Salesians, write at once; but also let me know who in your opinion would be most suitable.

Do the best you can; God will do what we cannot do. Leave everything to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Help of Christians and you will realize what miracles are.

I am with you in my prayers and shall remember all of you every

day during Mass. God bless you wherever you go; pray for me and for your Mother, the Congregation. *Amen.*

Fr. John Bosco

Don Bosco had also given Father Cagliero a Latin letter of introduction and recommendation for the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. He enclosed a list of the names, qualifications, and duties of each missionary along with a statement of expenses to be presented to the Committee at San Nicolas de los Arroyos [1] with the following declaration: "The aforementioned committee is not asked to pay for these expenses, but merely to cooperate in some measure. This will assist the Superior of the Salesian Congregation considerably in coping with the publicity attendant on this occasion and in training other Salesians to come to the assistance of their companions."

But Don Bosco's mind was never so exclusively taken up with one project as to neglect other matters at hand. In fact, the very next day, after the departure of the missionaries, he was already giving his attention to a new foundation. We shall have to talk about it shortly. He wrote to Father Rua:

November 15, 1875

Dear Father Rua:

Please write to the cleric Perret at Lanzo; tell him to pack his things and accompany me to Nice, where they are expecting us on November 25. Everything is now ready. He may go straight to Alassio where I shall join him.

So far, Father Bonetti has not said anything to me about [the feast of] St. Charles,[2] so I shall continue my trip along the Riviera. Before November 20 write or forward my mail to Alassio, thereafter to Nice.

Yesterday we escorted our Argentinians on board ship. Berths, meals, everything was princely. They were all in good spirits and sailed for

[1] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 25-26.

[2] The feast of the patron saint of the school at Borgo San Martino had been postponed. On November 13 (Saturday) Don Bosco had written to Father Bonetti: "If you celebrate the feast of St. Charles next Thursday the 18th, I shall do my best to be there. Let me know by telegram if you do, lest I accept other engagements."

Marseilles at 2 P.M.; they will write us from there. Let us pray. Whatever we cannot accomplish, God will. *Amen.*

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

Shortly after this he received the first news of the missionaries from Marseilles; he immediately forwarded it to Turin.

[no date]

Dear Father Rua:

Good news from our missionaries. Father Cagliero sends the following telegram from Marseilles: "All here and in good health; trip delightful."

With the words "all here" he means Gioia and Allavena [3] who joined the others in Marseilles. Please pass this on to the other confreres. Let us all give thanks to the Lord and continue in our prayers.

I leave for Varazze tomorrow. I am not going to Borgo San Martino because they celebrated St. Charles's feast on Monday instead of next Thursday and I knew nothing about it.

Goodbye in our Lord.

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,
Fr. John Bosco

He left on November 17 for Varazze; from there he sent this interesting letter to Countess Callori:

November 17, 1875

My good and dearest Mamma:

I accompanied our missionaries as far as Genoa, even going with them on board the ship that will take them to [South] America. They were in good spirits, stirred to emotion but resigned to giving themselves to the Lord wherever Divine Providence may call them.

Just as I was leaving them, Father Cagliero speaking on behalf of all his companions, said: "Please thank Countess Callori for her charity to

[3] The cleric Allavena and the coadjutor Gioia traveled overland to Marseilles, because they could not obtain passports due to their age.... The letter is undated, but was written on the 16th, because Tuesday fell on that date.

us. We shall always pray for her and her family wherever we may go; the souls we hope to save will surely one day open the gates of Heaven for her. We hope she will continue her generosity to us and that Don Bosco will go on sending fresh evangelical laborers to assist us."

After this they sailed from Genoa at 2 P.M. for another continent, not without shedding a few tears.

When they arrived at Marseilles, Father Cagliero sent me the following telegram: "All here, and in good health. Trip delightful."

As soon as I hear further news, I shall forward it to you wherever you are. Please accept our gratitude, and pray for this poor mortal who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

An unpleasant surprise awaited him at Varazze—an attack of miliary fever, such as had stricken him at the same time three years earlier when visiting that same school. He never did completely recover from the first attack. Every two months and even more frequently, under the pressure of overwork or because of sudden bad weather, his skin would break out again, accompanied by fever, violent headaches, insomnia, and very troublesome yawning. At every attack, the skin of almost his entire body was affected and changed. Yet few people were aware of it, because he continued working during the troublesome ailment and never lay in bed later than usual, even when at times the rash became violent.

The Director, Father Francesia, instantly sent word of Don Bosco's condition to the Oratory. When his letter was read to the boys, they were very grieved at their father's suffering and began to offer fervent prayers, fearing that the sickness might be more dangerous than it actually was and that it might postpone his homecoming for a long time.

But on November 20 he arrived in Nice, as we shall see, and from there went on to Ventimiglia. At the beginning of December he reappeared at Varazze. From there he wrote three letters, all of which have been preserved. The first was addressed to Father Reffo of the Artigianelli Institute, an important writer in the editorial department of *Unità Cattolica*. Don Bosco was sending him the Holy Father's Brief for publication in the newspaper.

Varazze, December 12, 1875

Dear Father Reffo:

I enclose a letter from the Holy Father. You may decide whether or not to publish it in *Unità Cattolica*. Father Francesia translated it and I wrote the introduction, but you may edit it as you see fit.

Once again, my grateful thanks for the magnificent article on the farewell ceremony of our missionaries.[4]

I have received letters from important people in Rome, Florence, Venice, and elsewhere: they praised it and [said they had] shed many tears in reading it. An eminent and respected person wrote, "I think that this is really the finest article that has ever appeared in *Unità Cattolica*."

May you be glad to hear this. May the Lord be forever blessed.

I am addressing this to you because I do not know if Father Margotti is already back in Turin. If so, give him my kindest regards. May God shower His blessings upon you. Please pray for this poor mortal who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Yours affectionately,

Fr. John Bosco

The Latin text of the Brief and its translation [see Ch. 16] appeared in Number 285 (December 7), with the following introduction written by Don Bosco:

As we have already reported, the Salesian missionaries, before sailing for the Argentine Republic, went to Rome to pay their respects to the Supreme Ruler of the Church, to receive his blessing and to be reassured that their mission is built solidly on that cornerstone which is Christ our Savior, the center of all truth and goodness. The Reverend John Bosco, their Superior, gave them letters of recommendation, in which he also outlined the successful beginnings of the *Sons of Mary Project* for the training of young adults to the priesthood, a project previously blessed and praised by the Holy Father. Now, while these brave sons of Holy Mother Church are crossing the Atlantic, the Holy Father has graciously acknowledged the Rev. John Bosco's letter with a Brief that will cer-

[4] He alludes to an article describing the departure ceremony in No. 266 (November 14). See *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 27.

tainly become a precious document for the new Mission and the budding *Sons of Mary Project.*

The second letter from Varazze was addressed to the Director of the school at Borgo San Martino; in it he humorously feigns solemnity:

Sampierdarena, December 5, 1875

Dear Father Bonetti:

I thought I would be able to take a little trip to Borgo San Martino before returning to Turin, but now some important business requires my attention tomorrow. I shall come probably during Christmas week, but will let you know.

God grant you, your sons, and confreres all his bounty. Regards to all from me in the Lord, and pray for me who am in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The third letter, which we present last because of its greater importance, was written the day before the letter quoted above. Obviously, Don Bosco never rested a moment!

December 4, 1875

Dear Father Cagliero:

I am writing to you and you in turn pass the news on to the other Salesians. We have been receiving your news up to your arrival at Gibraltar and thank God that you have had a good voyage. Prayers are being said in all our Houses that it may continue to be pleasant until you reach your field of battle.

The papers [we were expecting] arrived from Rome on November 29, that is, right after your departure: a letter to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, your decree, a letter from the Pope, another from Cardinal Antonelli. The other letters will be sent to you with these.

Our undertakings have truly made progress in a short time. A recre-

ation center with a hospice for poor boys was opened in Nice on November 21. Father Ronchail is the Director, Perret the schoolmaster, Rabagliati the pianist, and Cappellano the cook. The young Algerians were transferred there.

On my return I started our work to counteract the Protestants at Bordighera. The House, which is to shelter the boys and to provide a place for worship is under the care of Father Cibrario and a few laymen. The Sisters of Mary Help of Christians will look after the kitchen and the girls. For the time being we occupy rented quarters but have [already] purchased a parcel of land right beside the church, school, kindergarten, and hospice operated by the Protestants, and God willing, we shall open a church and the necessary adjacent buildings next spring.

Additional facilities at our House in Sampierdarena will be inaugurated on December 9, when the *Sons of Mary,* who, until now have been scattered among our various Houses, will take up residence in it.

Father Rua and Mr. Mina are going to Mornese on December 12 for a few investitures and professions. The number of Sisters continues to grow. At the beginning of next January a group of Sisters will take over their new House at Alassio.

Whenever you or any of the others write, be sure to mention even the slightest details concerning yourselves, because everyone is eager to hear news of you, no matter how slight.

All our Houses are full; everyone wishes to send regards to the missionaries and even go to visit them. Cherish these sentiments now; in due time we shall see to their fulfillment.

Tell everyone to take care of his health. Let me know whether any of you suffered discomfort during the voyage and whether you are all in good health now.

When you give news of us to my other beloved sons, see if you can read to all assembled together the mementos I gave you before your departure.

God bless you all. Pray for me who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

P. S. It is understood that whenever we write that we send our kindest regards to Dr. Ceccarelli, Mr. Benitez, Mr. Espinosa, etc., etc.

See that the Archbishop is informed about your missionary privileges before you start using them.

He was just about to leave Liguria when he received disappointing news from Lyons. He had sought help from the Society for the Propagation of the Faith, but the Society was unable to oblige because its statutes permitted assistance only to Missions in non-Catholic countries, and even then, exclusively through the immediate Superiors of the Missions concerned. In Don Bosco's case, before any subsidy could be granted to the Missions in the Pampas or in Patagonia, they would first have to be canonically erected as two missionary territories. Only through the appointment of an ecclesiastical Superior, either a Vicar or a Prefect Apostolic, would they cease to be under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese as was then the case, and become eligible.[5]

However, when he left Varazze for Turin he had at least the satisfaction of having accomplished one thing: he had straightened out the financial problems of two schools, heavily burdened by construction expenses, and now he hoped to do as much for the Oratory. In fact, he told Father Rua,[6] "I managed to straighten out the financial problems of our schools at Alassio and Sampierdarena in the best possible manner. When I'll be in Turin, we shall settle our own." Obviously Providence had assisted him.

With brief stopovers at Sampierdarena and Genoa, he arrived at the Oratory at 4 P.M. on December 6, after an absence of twenty-five days. Boys, clerics and Superiors were impatiently awaiting him. The Chronicle states: "It is always a joy to have Don Bosco with us; but when he has been away more than two weeks, it is even more delightful to have him back home." School was almost over for the day when word went around that he had returned and was already up in his room. The Chonicle continues: "When the boys heard that his sickness had only been slight, they were overcome by such joy that a few of them seemed to be beside themselves.

When the bell rang for supper Don Bosco entered the dining room after the reading had already begun. Father Rua immediately dispensed from silence and a cordial outburst of clapping came from all sides. The Chronicle describes his entrance as follows: "He walked very slowly into the dining room, smiling, nodding to one, patting another or saying a word to a third. In those few sec-

[5] *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 28.

[6] Letter written to Father Rua from Sestri Ponente, December 4, 1875.

onds he was replying to many letters asking his advice. It seemed as though he had been thinking all the time, not only of what they had written, but also of those who had written, and this delighted them all." For example, upon passing by Father Barberis he stopped for a moment, and looking at him in an indescribable way said, "I am very much interested in your plan and am now considering ways of carrying it out." This was enough to fill Father Barberis' heart with so much joy that he forgot many gloomy thoughts that had weighed him down for several days.

After supper he listened as usual, and expressed his opinion on matters that had been left unsettled. At the same time he had someone announce to the community that he would relate interesting things about his trips that same evening. At 9 P.M. students, artisans, novices and coadjutors assembled and waited for him. The shouts of *Long Live Don Bosco* that broke out as soon as he appeared must have been audible miles away, nor was silence restored until he had ascended the platform and motioned that he wished to speak. Then he began:

My dear boys, it is a long time since we last saw each other. On November 11, I left Turin to accompany our missionaries to Genoa. After they left I went as far as Nice to settle various things of which I now wish to speak to you. This evening I shall begin by giving you details of the departure of the missionaries.

We left by train at 7:30 P.M. on Thursday, November 11, and reached Sampierdarena after midnight. We had a pleasant journey; we talked of a number of things; then silence, and a few of us slept. Now and then we could hear barely stifled sobs from someone who was weeping. Father Albera was waiting for us at Sampierdarena and he was our host in St. Vincent's Hospice. The next two days were spent in completing the preparations for the voyage. Some of the missionaries still had to comply with formalities pertaining to their passports, and others had still to purchase a few necessary things, write letters, make arrangements, and say goodbye to the people of this world before setting out for the new one. (*Appreciative smiles from his audience.*)

At Sampierdarena their attachment to Don Bosco became very obvious. They couldn't part from me one single minute. If I entered the church, they all came in after me to pray; if I went for breakfast, they all came into the dining room; if I went to my room, they followed me

there. I could not walk a single step alone. I, too, must admit that I did not want to part from them. If they had not followed me around, I would have gone in search of them. I had many things to tell them; but a lot more they wished to hear and tell me about. It really seemed as if it would be impossible for us to part. I had already written down a number of things for them, such as rules and mementos from their father when they would be far away, but there always seemed to be something new that I ought to tell them. Had I been obliged to write them down it would have taken me days. But I gave them all the advice I could, the fruit of my long experience. We spent the 12th and 13th in this manner while we waited.

Then at last came Sunday (the 14th), the day on which they were to sail. We all drove to the harbor in several coaches. The ship was already at anchor outside the port. It belonged to a French shipping line in Marseilles.

It took half an hour for our boat to cross the harbor and reach the side of the ship, where we climbed the ladder to the deck. Of course you know that a ship towers high above sea level, and that there are many rungs in the ladder before one reaches the deck. Captain Guidard hurried to meet us. He came down the ladder, to hold out his hand to me and he kept close as I went up to make sure I did not slip.

Just try to imagine one of the largest ships afloat. I have already seen a number of ships, but none as large as that one. I believe that it is at least four times the length of this hall, more but not less. I would say some 345 feet in length by 40 in width and rather wide in proportion; in the various decks, leaving out the area of the engine room, 1,000 people can comfortably be quartered with room for strolling besides other conveniences. The captain took us all over the ship, topside and below decks.

I must explain that people traveling by ship are of different social levels and passengers are therefore divided into three classes according to fare. But I explained to the captain that there were really five classes. Now listen. Rich people travel first class; they enjoy every comfort both at the table and in their quarters that are like a first-class hotel. People who are not so rich travel second class, which is still rather expensive and is quite comfortable. The majority of passengers travel third class, because they cannot afford to pay much. They do not have too many courses at table; their deck chairs are the wooden deck; their cabin is a large room with hundreds of berths all around like stacks in a library.

"So there are three passenger classes, and no others," the Captain said.

"You should add two more," I answered.

"Please explain," the captain said.

"Look, Captain; can't you see the many chickens, cocks, hens, rabbits, doves, cows, and oxen in the lower decks and even two pigs? Don't you count them as passengers, too, since they also have mouths and eat the same as we do? I would say that they constitute a fourth class."

"Well, now I have learned something new!" the captain laughed. "It is true indeed, but I had never thought of it. Really, though, I don't see where the fifth class comes in."

"I can easily show you. All one needs is a little grammar, the kind that is taught in the 2nd and 3rd grades; that is, you need only change the verb from active to passive. Don't you see, Captain, what a variety of food we have here: roast meats, boiled meats, fried meats, vegetables, sauces, and gravy? Don't these travel as well? Could the other passengers travel without them. No! therefore, you have to count them as well. They constitute the fifth class, and if it weren't for the fact that I want to be discreet, I would name a sixth class, consisting of suitcases, trunks and all the heavier freight aboard ship."

Everyone who was listening burst out laughing, and then the Captain led us to the sleeping quarters of our missionaries. We went down by a wide, red-carpeted staircase. Fearing that I might leave footprints on the carpet, I examined my shoes to see if they were clean, but the Captain shrugged, as if to say, "What does it matter, even if you do soil it? The cabin boys will clean it." We then entered a large reception room; without exaggeration, it was larger than half this hall.

There were velvet-covered chairs, sofas, carpets on the floors, showcases, mirrors, and every conceivable comfort. All around this large salon were the sleeping quarters, that is, many small rooms called cabins. In each there are several small beds suspended one above the other: some sleep in the lower berth, others climb to the next one, and others yet still higher. Some cabins have as many as four berths; others have three or only two. A few, like Father Cagliero's, had only one for greater comfort.

The large reception room was crowded with passengers and crewmen carrying their baggage. As soon as Molinari saw a piano, he sat down and started to play a rousing march after which he intoned *Lodate Maria* and his companions joined in singing it through to the end. This attracted a number of other people. Then Father Cagliero made his way through the throng and there and then began his mission with a brief sermon. He opened by saying: "Since Genoa today celebrates the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin, it is only proper that we who are about to undertake

such a long voyage should invoke the protection of the Star of the Sea, who guides us safely into harbor, as St. Bernard says." He ended with a moving exhortation, to the effect that there would be facilities for everyone aboard for Mass, confession and Communion during the trip. It was remarkable! There were about 700 people present and yet, neither during this sermon nor during others, as Father Cagliero later wrote, did anyone show aversion or utter an objection. Instead, several people asked immediately where confessions would be heard, and since there were no confessionals available one had to be improvised with chair, veil and screen.

While we were touring the ship, sailing time was approaching and I knew I would have to tear myself away from my sons. They had never left me alone for a moment, but had clustered about me. Now they broke down with sobs and tears. I have to confess that although I wanted to act like Rodomonte [7] and be brave, I could not hold back my tears. Notwithstanding, the courage of all was admirable. True, they wept, but their tears told me quite plainly: "Though we are unable to restrain our tears, we are glad to go because we go in the name of the Lord to save souls in places where there are no laborers to preach the Gospel."

Meanwhile the signal for visitors to go ashore had sounded. That was a sight: Everyone knelt down by me to ask my blessing. Even the Captain and several other gentlemen who were present knelt down with them. I gave them my blessing and went down to the boat that was waiting to take me back to land. The hearts of my sons were with me and their looks and goodbyes followed me until they disappeared from sight.

They left Genoa on Sunday afternoon, November 14, at about 2 P.M. I have already received a few letters from them, mailed from Marseilles, Barcelona, and Cadiz, where the ship anchored a few hours and took on new passengers and provisions. Our confreres in Varazze and Alassio, who knew at what time the ship would be within sight, stood ready with field glasses, hoping to catch a glimpse of some of our missionaries. When I stopped at those schools a few days later, I found them all still in high spirts, for they felt sure they had glimpsed the ship on which our brave missionaries were sailing from their country and relatives and from everything to make the faith of Jesus Christ known and loved by peoples in most remote lands.

Now I'll tell you how they fared on their journey from Genoa to Gibraltar, the last European port of call before the vast Atlantic. From

[7] A famous warrior in Italian literature. [Editor]

there we received their latest news. None of them was sick, save for the usual discomforts of the first few days at sea; everything else was fine. Their meals are French style, as we say: coffee or tea in the morning, then at 11 A.M., lunch. Appetizers consist of salami, butter, bologna, salads, then soup and four main courses; after that cheese, fruit and pastry at will. As you see, after a lunch of this kind there is no danger that they will be starved by the time dinner is served at 5:30 P.M. with appetizers, eight courses, and all sorts of fruit and sweets. Yet, Father Fagnano complains that, although they are well taken care of and the food is excellent, he, nevertheless, seems to be unable to satisfy his hunger. This goes to show that seasickness is not what bothers him.

They have already begun their mission on board ship. Mass is said every day, and many passengers attend. On Sundays they preach in Italian for the majority, and in Spanish for the others; catechetical instruction for children is given three times a week.

In Marseilles they visited the famous shrine of Our Lady of the Guard, and those who had not said Mass aboard, had an opportunity to say it there.

On the morning of November 19, they saw Gibraltar, the last port of call in Europe. The latest news from our friends came from there.

They will stop at St Vincent, one of the Cape Verde Islands, to take on coal. By now they have already crossed the equator, and entered the southern hemisphere; they may have already landed, or are just about to land at Rio de Janeiro, the capital of Brazil, an important South American city. After that they have only one more stop at Montevideo before arriving at the longed-for Buenos Aires. It will take them another week to get there from Rio de Janeiro and so I think that they will arrive in Montevideo the afternoon of December 7 and remain until the next day, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. Tomorrow or the next day I expect some mail from the Cape Verde Islands and shortly after maybe a telegram, informing us that they have completed their voyage at last.

My dear boys, this is what I wished to tell you tonight concerning our missionaries and their voyage. Some other night I shall tell you some of the things I did while I was away from Turin. In the meantime, let us do our best to celebrate devoutly the feast of the Immaculate Conception, let us continue the special prayers we have been saying for our missionaries, and let us also implore God to send many more laborers to preach the Gospel, to work in His vineyard and to do good. Naturally, many of you at this moment are very anxious to be off somewhere as missionaries; well, I can safely say that even if all of you were ready

right now, there would be a place for all, and I would know quite well where to send you. Many are the needs and many the requests sent to me from everywhere. People beg and beseech, lamenting the fact that a number of missions already established, have to be abandoned for lack of missionaries. For the time being, prepare yourselves by prayer, by good conduct, by acting as missionaries among yourselves in giving one another a good example. Study hard, carry out your scholastic duties and with our Lord's help you will attain your goal and be loved by both God and men. Good night.

The Chronicle tells us that these words kindled a flame in the hearts of the boys such that most of them yearned to leave there and then to consecrate themselves to the far-off missions. But the youthful hearts of the Oratory were not the only ones to be fired by such enthusiasm. "Even though I was not a member of the Congregation," declared Father Ascanio Savio, "I longed to join the first group of missionaries. If I did not, it was because of Archbishop Gastaldi's opposition."

Don Bosco understood perfectly the special difficulties of priests who wanted to join the Congregation and become missionaries. "The poor Bishops are at a loss because they have such dire need of priests," he said. "Some of them do not know where to turn to find an adequate number of curates. When one of their priests asks to join the foreign missions, they find it impossible to reply with a cheerful "Yes" as they used to. [In days gone by] they used to praise the priest for his noble intention. They strengthened him in his resolve; they encouraged him; even urged him on. Nowadays, instead, the usual reply is that missionaries are needed in their own dioceses."

But one of the effects of the missionaries' departure was the increased number of applicants, priests included, for the Congregation. Formerly, the unknown Congregation had developed slowly and in obscurity; little or nothing was known about it outside Piedmont. But now, instead, before, during and after the departure, Don Bosco and the Salesians were given wide coverage by both the Italian and foreign press. Many became interested and an ever greater number applied for admission into the Society.

Thus it came about that, even in far-off lands, people began to

look on the Oratory as a supply center of missionaries. Don Bosco received requests from California, the Sudan, Hong Kong, and India; but the most insistent of all came from Bishop Quinn of Sydney, Australia. He had come twice to the Oratory to confer with Don Bosco. But Don Bosco, who used to proceed with the greatest prudence besides relying on Divine Providence, after deliberating over the matter, felt that the time had not yet come for this undertaking. For one thing he did not have the personnel; and then far greater preparations would be necessary for Sydney than for Buenos Aires, because the problems were greater. There was the language problem: it would take the priests much longer to learn English well enough to preach and teach than it had taken to learn Spanish. There were religious problems; in Australia they would have to struggle with the Protestants, whose ministers were arch-enemies of Catholicism, and who would therefore wage a relentless war against the newcomers; to combat them they would have to be well versed in theology. There were problems, too, concerning the natives, who were far from being as tame as the Indians of South America. They were very fierce. There were also difficulties of climate: it was not as agreeable as that of La Plata. He likewise foresaw that, though the recent departure had made a tremendous impression, in time sending a Salesian to South America would be as normal as sending him to any House in Europe, whereas going to Sydney would be quite a different matter. He therefore decided to postpone plans for missions in Australia for about three years. As things turned out, Australia did not have the Salesians till 1923.

Certainly, had Don Bosco allowed his zeal to guide him, he would have embraced the whole world in his charity; but he also had to consolidate his Congregation. Yet, to Don Bosco consolidation did not mean abandoning activities. It would not be possible to understand his mind on this, if we did not quote something he said to the Superior Chapter on the evening of December 10. He expressed his thoughts as follows:

"As for the Congregation, I see that although we keep repeating that we must consolidate what we have, things go better when we work hardest; our process of consolidation may slow down, yet perhaps it will be all the more lasting. We can see as much, even with our eyes shut: as long as we are intensely active, and do plenty

of work, everything goes on wonderfully. There really is a very great desire to work among the members of our Congregation." That was why at times, when he listened to important proposals that would be difficult to realize, he would exclaim:

"Ah! . . . we lack only one thing!"

"And what is that?"

"Time! Life is too short. What little we can do must needs be done in haste, before death overtakes us."

This also explains why he was always looking forward to new apostolic undertakings on a vast scale, despite the scarcity of personnel. Father Berto often saw him intently studying maps in search of territories to conquer for the Gospel. He was likewise heard to exclaim: "What a wonderful day that will be when Salesian missionaries, moving up the Congo River, from one mission post to another, will meet their confreres coming up the Nile and join hands, praising God!"

Father Francesco Dalmazzo testified that he had several times heard him say: "What a wonderful day that will be when our missionaries will go to evangelize the various regions of America, Australia, India, Egypt, and many other lands! I see them already penetrating Africa and Asia and entering China; we shall have a House right in Peking!"

Ever eager to spread the Faith, he would have liked to suggest to the Pope that the following prayer be added to the litany of the Saints: *Ut bonos et dignos operarios in messem tuam mittere digneris, Te rogamus audi nos* [That You would vouchsafe to send good and worthy workers to gather Your harvest, we beseech You, hear us], but never ventured to make such a proposal. Today this has been done, albeit in another form.

CHAPTER 18

Foundations on the French-Italian Border

ONE new foundation after another was proposed in 1875. Besides those we have already mentioned, Don Bosco received requests from Cogoleto near Savona, Druent in the province of Turin, Trinità di Mondovi, the Usuelli school in Milan, and from Susa, Lucca, Milan and Marseilles. The first request from the Holy Land came through Canon [Anthony] Belloni who offered to hand over to the Salesians the work he had started. Don Bosco considered these proposals but resolved to limit himself to fulfilling first of all the wishes of the Bishop of Ventimiglia in regard to Vallecrosia and those of Michel, the attorney, for Nice, France. In his *Good Night* on the evening of the Immaculate Conception, he talked at some length about these two projects and kept his promise to tell the second part of his recent trip.

The other night I told you about the first part of the journey from which I had returned that very day; this evening I shall tell you about the second part. After the missionaries had sailed from Genoa I had to go to Nice; I do not mean the town of Nice here in Piedmont, which is known as Nice Monferrato, or Nice della Paglia, in the province of Alessandria, but Nice on-the-sea, a town that once belonged to Italy but is now part of France. I was eagerly awaited in that town to discuss opening a House, a sort of oratory or school, but for the moment only a small one. I had already visited the town last year, and when I realized how very eager they were to have us—both the Bishop and a number of good lay people—I made up my mind at that time to open a House. Now I went back to complete negotiations and execute the plan.

I took with me Father Joseph Ronchail who was Prefect at Alassio last year and now is Director. I also took a cook, a few clerics, and the eight Africans or Algerians we had here. This is what we plan for Nice: we shall begin by opening an oratory for the boys of the town; the Bishop is permitting us to use part of his garden as a playground. Then we shall have a few classes at the elementary level by day or more likely at night. In the meantime we shall find out what Providence has planned for us. What we have now begun is not very much, but I hope that eventually it will grow and accomplish much good. The solemn opening of the House took place on Sunday the 28th. When I say solemn, I mean that we did the best we could; suffice it to say that the Bishop and many ladies and gentlemen of the Nice nobility were present. Everyone is well-disposed toward our work. While there, I called on the Mayor who, although a Protestant—mark these words carefully, *although a Protestant*—was very happy about our House, and very much impressed. He became very enthused when he heard of its purpose, and all that has already been accomplished in various parts of Italy. He kept exclaiming: "This is something we do not have in France." In fact, he wrote immediately, for I saw the letter, to the President of the French Republic in Paris to give him a most favorable report of our House. He also pointed out the need of establishing similar Institutes even in that great capital. I can add that this should not cause surprise because we already have a proposal of this kind.

Immediately some French newspapers published reports about our little House in Nice, and while I was still there I received a very tempting offer from Marseilles to establish a new House in that city. I answered stating that such a project was not alien to my own plans, that I would seriously consider it and that probably before the winter was over I would be visiting France once again to see the town and finalize arrangements.

From Nice I went to Ventimiglia where I was impatiently expected; both the Bishop and the civil authorities gave me a very warm welcome. Now what was Don Bosco doing in Ventimiglia? I shall tell you in a few words: he was there to arrange for the opening of another House. We had already discussed this last year, but it had not been possible to complete arrangements till now. Between Ventimiglia and the neighboring town of Bordighera there is a plain over three miles long. As little as 30 years ago there was not one single house; then, little by little, people began to build, more people moved there, and the area is now densely populated, but it has no churches or schools. As soon as the great number of Protestants who live there realized they were masters

of the situation, they built a church and opened some sort of tuition-free boarding school. They even paid parents to send their children to that school. Since there were no other school facilities, nearly all the parents sent their children, boys and girls, to the Protestant school rather than have them grow up without any education at all.

When the Bishop saw this deplorable state of affairs, he appealed to Don Bosco, for he had neither priests nor money with which to build a church and establish a parish. Last year I had already discussed this thoroughly with him but had not inspected the area nor had we come to any conclusion. But this time the Bishop went with me to look into everything. We have rented a house that will do for the moment and are now trying to purchase a suitable piece of land on which to build a church and an adjacent House. The wonderful thing about it is that we have an opportunity to buy one close to the Protestant school and church. We shall also open a House for the Sisters and they will teach the girls. This is what we shall do: on one side of the church we shall house the Director, the teachers, and the clerics who will be sent from here to look after the boys; on the other side there will be room for the convent and the girls' school.

I hope we can open this House during the Christmas novena, or else in the octave, so that this, too, may be started early in 1876. For the present, boarders will not be accepted in the House; we shall limit ourselves to day students and at most will provide lunch for those who live some distance away, and who would otherwise have to go back and forth twice a day. We shall accept boarders after the House and the Church I told you about have been built.

Now would you like to know why I tell you all these details? For two reasons: First, during the course of the year, especially last year, I asked you at different times to pray and to pray much because we were in need of many favors. When I make such requests I am usually unable to tell you why, because these things involve thousands of unpredictable factors; but at that time I was alluding to things which, as we now see, are a reality, and to many other things which I am still unable to disclose. So pray with all your heart because important matters are always at stake.

Secondly, I am happy that you know what we are doing and what still needs to be done. I do not intend to keep you ignorant of the great needs of the Church or of the vast field of action that awaits anyone who is eager to do good and work for the greater glory of God. I can tell you truthfully that the field before us needs many, many laborers, for the harvest is extraordinarily abundant, and our members must greatly increase if we are to finish the task. In this moment, in the face of the

immense needs of the Church, I cannot help urging and encouraging each of you to grow in virtue and sanctity. If all of you were priests this very moment, I would already have places for each of you, and there would be so much work that you would be unable to stand the strain. Yes, I have real need of as many Directors as there are boys here; then you would see how much good we could accomplish! True enough, you are already so many little Directors, doing your duty and performing your tasks properly. Well then, keep it up. Whoever is at fault in this regard should really make a good resolution. With the help of the Lord I hope you will be able to do much good.

We shall invert Don Bosco's order of things and speak first of Bordighera and then of Nice.

Bordighera [1] is improperly named; henceforth we shall call it Vallecrosia, because it is here that the work of the Salesians is located. Vallecrosia is the name of a large plain between Bordighera and Ventimiglia. Its natural beauty, mild climate, and convenient transportation facilities provided by the completion of the railroad, attracted both Italians and foreigners alike. They built so many small villas and cottages in rapid succession that the area soon boomed into a good-sized town.

A town, however, in which no one had thought of building a church or a school! The Protestants were quick to notice this. A renegade priest invited the Waldensians there, and they unhesitatingly established themselves in the heart of the area. Backed by the funds of the London Bible Society, they built a magnificent building and church without regard to expense. After the opening of the church there came the kindergarten, schools for boys and girls, and later even a hospice for destitute children; thus unobtrusively they became masters of the place.

Good Bishop Lawrence Biale did not sit idly by. A vigilant shepherd, he could find no peace of mind in the face of this Protestant invasion, all the more because the heretics were extending their influence even into the surrounding countryside. He tried to find Catholic teachers, begged for help, and appealed to Rome. In a Brief, the Supreme Pontiff congratulated him for having opened Catholic schools in the Vallecrosia plain, despite the poverty of his

[1] *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App.*, *Doc.* 29.

diocese, so as to counteract the influence of the Protestants who were trying to lead the children astray. More than that, the Pope set the example by being the first to assist the eminent Prelate.[2]

But how could a poor Italian Bishop compete with foreign gold? He invited to Ventimiglia Father Cerruti, the Director at Alassio, and tearfully said to him, "Dear Father Cerruti, ask Don Bosco not to abandon me. I am more than ninety years old, I have but very few priests and scarcely ten clerics at the seminary, while here, at my very door, the Waldensians are destroying the Faith under my very eyes. I have deprived myself even of necessities in order to try to stop this; but it is not enough. I must have help from Don Bosco, and soon."

Actually moved to tears, Father Cerruti left immediately for Turin to see Don Bosco but was told that he was at Cuneo. He hastened to Cuneo, but Don Bosco was at Beinette as the guest of the pious, charitable Father Vallauri. Father Cerruti rushed to Beinette and found him in church saying the rosary with the [Vallauri] family. Alarmed at Father Cerruti's unexpected appearance, Don Bosco feared that something very serious had occurred. He was reassured, however, and given the message. He reflected a moment and then said, "Go back to Ventimiglia and tell the Bishop that we are at his disposal from this moment on."

Father Cerruti left the next morning to bring the comforting news to the Bishop. The venerable pastor lifted his hands to Heaven and cried out in tears, "Lord, I thank You, now I can die in peace." He lived long enough to see his project well on its way and died shortly after.

Don Bosco found no difficulty whatever in coming to an agreement with the venerable Bishop, once he arrived at Ventimiglia. He had a long-standing acquaintance with the Waldensians, and the Bishop had what we might call a blind faith in Don Bosco, recognizing in him a man of Providence, in fact, the only man on whom he could depend to withstand the menace of that heretical invasion. The Bishop knew that Don Bosco had no money, but he was also aware that Providence was never loath to make its treasures available to him.

[2] *Acta Pii IX*. Vol. V, p. 67.

The basic features of the agreement were as follows: The Salesians were to take care of the boys and girls; the Bishop would pay 700 lire per year for men and women teachers, pledging his word to bequeath that amount to them in perpetuity; he would likewise pay the rent for their temporary dwelling and provide everything except their personal wardrobe.

The Bishop asked Don Bosco if he wanted all new furniture, to which Don Bosco replied, "As long as the chairs do not collapse, the tables are sturdy, and the school desks are smooth enough to write on, that will do." The Bishop was very appreciative.

He then donated land for the Salesians to build a church and a House at their own expense, but he promised to send a pastoral letter to his whole diocese urging the faithful to contribute. He also assured them that even after his death he would provide for them generously through one of his trusted friends. Canon Emil Viale, his Vicar General and the executor of the Bishop's estate, was very well-disposed toward the Salesians and was present at these discussions. He reassured Don Bosco with a smile: "I am very well-acquainted with the Bishop's intentions."

Published on December 8,[3] the pastoral letter was read in every church of the diocese. Later it was formally printed as a circular and signed by the Bishop, to be sent to individual persons and published in newspapers [4]; Its wording was not altered in any way. The Bishop was also anxious to send copies to Rome, to acquaint the higher ecclesiastical circles with Don Bosco's newest foundation.[5] Don Bosco had provided a draft which the Vicar General amplified, finding the original too brief. "I retained your ideas and also, I might say, your own words," he wrote to Don Bosco, "but I lengthened it a little. Everyone here likes it. Forgive any fault you may find in it, accept my good intention, and remember that I am very, very far from possessing Don Bosco's spirit.[6]

Don Bosco was advised to charge a modest fee to the boys who would come to the school, if their parents could afford something; but he replied that he intended the school to be tuition-free. He

[3] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 30, pp. 594-6.
[4] *Unità Cattolica,* No. 25, February 1, 1876.
[5] Letter to Don Bosco from the Bishop, January 24, 1876.
[6] Letter to Don Bosco from Ventimiglia, January 11, 1876.

was also asked to set up facilities for serving lunch to those boys who lived at some considerable distance from the school so that they would not have to go back and forth twice every day. He said this posed no problem and a practical solution could be found.

Meanwhile a building was rented where, in lieu of something better, the project could be started. A ground floor storeroom was cleaned and fitted up as a chapel. Classrooms were set up on the second floor: two on the right for the boys, and two on the left for the girls. Alterations were being made according to Father Savio's instructions from Alassio. Later he also inspected the premises personally for final arrangements. Everything was more or less ready a week after Christmas.

Now the personnel had to be chosen. Don Bosco intended to start with a few Sisters from Mornese, having already made arrangements with their Mother Superior, and a priest with a couple of clerics as well. At first the Sisters and the Salesians were to take care of the elementary classes, the night school, and the Festive Oratory. The priest, however, was to be free from teaching in order to supervise and direct the entire work, preach to the Sisters and to the Oratory boys, and hear confessions of both young and old. But the presence of those particular neighbors required that the priest be well-versed in theology and endowed with self-control and prudence. Don Bosco's eye was on Father Nicholas Cibrario, Director of the church of Mary Help of Christians, as the office was then called, a confessor very highly respected for his learning.

The year had ended. January, 1876, was almost gone too and Don Bosco had neither selected the personnel nor set the date for the opening of the new House. The Bishop kept after him and suggested that the chapel be opened on the feast of the Purification. Don Bosco immediately made up his mind: he set the date of departure for February 10, gave Father Cibrario the necessary instructions, and assigned a cleric, Caesar Cerruti, as his companion. Cerruti, a mere novice, was to teach. Under different circumstances, the scenes from the St. Francis' *Fioretti* were re-enacted in those happy days. Let us relate the events just as simply as they occurred.

After dinner on Wednesday, January 26, Don Bosco turned to Fathers Rua, Cibrario, and Barberis, and said, "We shall have to hurry. The Bishop of Ventimiglia writes that it is time we got

there. The Sisters and Father Cibrario must get ready and leave by February 10. The cleric Cerruti will be going with you, Father Cibrario."

This cleric, a tall, heavily built man, already advanced in years, was very anxious to have more time for study and become a priest as soon as possible. On the other hand, he was also very obedient.

Don Bosco then said to Father Barberis, the Novice Master, "Take Cerruti aside and say, 'You asked Don Bosco if your course of study could be curtailed because of your age, to be able sooner to help the Congregation in which you wish to work very hard. Don Bosco has now figured out a way by which this can be arranged. Besides, he knows that you are strong and experienced in practical matters and he wants to put you to work.' After that, send him to Father Cibrario, who will explain the situation to him. I may go there myself for the opening of the House. What do you say, Father Cibrario, are we ready to leave?"

"I do not even know what I am supposed to do."

"Neither do I, but do not fear, there will be no shortage of work. At first you will not have very much to do on weekdays: the Sisters will teach the girls, and Cerruti will teach the boys, but you will have to direct things. Most of your work will be on Saturdays and Sundays. On Saturdays you will hear the confessions of the Sisters, boys, and girls; on Sundays you will be available for anyone else who wishes to go to confession, and after Mass give a short explanation of the Gospel. In the afternoon you will teach catechism to the adults, preach a short sermon if you feel up to it, and give benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. For the present you may omit Vespers because they do not have this custom in Liguria; but gradually you should introduce it for it is a good thing. The Bishop wanted to establish a new parish, but I felt that this would only complicate matters, so for the time being we have decided to postpone the plan; otherwise you would have had to start immediately with the registration of births, deaths, and other problems. Once the regular church will be built (and construction will have to start soon), it can be converted into a parish church. Thus our network of schools on the western Riviera will be completed."

Father Barberis pointed out that unfortunately immorality and Protestantism were making progress at San Remo, a much larger

town than Ventimiglia. He said that San Remo would be a strategic place where much good could be accomplished, because Protestant tourists came there in great numbers for the winter.

Don Bosco replied, "In this instance we have to do as Hannibal did when he carried the war to Italy to save Carthage, and as Scipio did when he carried the war to Carthage to save Rome. We shall creep up on San Remo gradually, pretending that we have set our sights on Bordighera while in reality we have them on San Remo. Bordighera will be a line of defense against Protestantism and prevent it from spreading any farther. Later, God willing, we shall establish ourselves in San Remo and do all we can to accomplish some good there. As to books that may be of help to you," he went on, turning to Father Cibrario, "I think you will find *Protestantism and the Rule of Faith* and *The Waldensians,* both by Perrone, most helpful in dealing with the Protestants."

They set out on February 9 at 1:30 P.M., but instead of two there were three of them, for a non-clerical student had joined them. As Don Bosco bade goodbye to Father Cibrario, he said: "I promise that I shall not leave you at Bordighera forever. Go there now to establish the House. Then the church will be built, and you shall become the pastor of the new parish. After that, *maiora te exspectant* [greater things await you]."

The records say that the cleric Cerruti was "virtuous beyond all doubt, endowed with admirable patience and sound common sense." He had recently written to Don Bosco, "I am getting old and regret that I am only good to keep a bench warm in some classroom. I am not yet able to help you in any way; I am nothing but a burden to you. I hope some day I can show you how grateful I am by working with you for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls."

The third person in the party, whose surname was Martino, was a good fellow in his early twenties. When asked whether he was happy to go to Bordighera, he replied, "*Happy* or *unhappy* do not mean anything to me. If I am sent, then I am happy to go; if I am not sent, then I am happy to remain here."

The newcomers did not lose any time in finding their bearings in their mission field. On the Sunday following their arrival the chapel was blessed and catechism classes began. That evening they

had a group of 29 boys and 45 girls. That Festive Oratory proved to be the ruin of the Protestants, since it attracted both young and old. The schools were likewise well attended. In a pamphlet the Waldensians described them as follows: "The reader must try to imagine a hovel below street level, humid, and lacking both adequate light and ventilation; this will give an idea of the school facilities, which Don Bosco has opened in the Vallecrosia plain.[7] With this they hoped to hurt the Salesians, but instead they only stimulated public charity to go to their aid and generously assist them in building better facilities. When the parishioners were invited to receive the Sacraments at Easter time, a goodly number responded, and very soon the Protestant schools and church were deserted. That area, already taken for granted as the future stronghold of heresy in Liguria, had been saved.

Pius VII's blessing to this site must have borne good fruit. For he had passed through it on February 11, 1814 on his way from Fontainebleau to Savona. A certain J. B. Apronio, an acquaintance of Father Cerruti, swore, as an eyewitness, that the august Pontiff, after being joyfully welcomed by the people of Vallecrosia, inquired about the name of the place. He was told, and then [as a sign of appreciation] he blessed the very spot where the Salesian House, consecrated to Mary Help of Christians, now stands.

As said in the presence of Father Rua twenty-five years later, the year 1875 was the year in which God gave Don Bosco to France. A venerable old man, Bishop Peter Sola of Nice was a shepherd of souls on the French Riviera. He had been seen roaming the piazzas and streets of his city that year in search for a place where he could find shelter for homeless boys and girls. Nice had many charitable institutions, but very few were devoted to the welfare of orphans or underprivileged children. In some dire emergencies no one knew where to turn for shelter for some destitute or homeless boy.

The members of the Conference of St. Vincent, all zealous and active men, now conceived a way of meeting this need. Two of them, Michel, the president, an attorney, and Baron Héraud, submitted a proposal to their colleagues. As soon as it was favorably

[7] *L'asilo evangelico di Vallecrosia e le scuole di Don Bosco. (Risposta agli articoli del Bollettino Salesiano.)*

voted upon they applied to Don Bosco, visited the Oratory and found no difficulty in reaching an agreement in principle. Bishop Sola had already been there ahead of them; he blessed their initiative and gave them valuable assistance in every way possible. Also a wealthy Jew named Lates contributed a generous sum of money after meeting Don Bosco, whose manner and conversation fascinated him.

At this point we must say a little more about Attorney Michel, whom we shall meet again along Don Bosco's route through France. He was a man of great intelligence, a Christian of the old school, a true friend of Don Bosco and one of his earliest and most distinguished French cooperators. He had had a chance of becoming acquainted with Don Bosco's work and appreciating it during his law studies at the University of Turin. Two letters addressed to Don Bosco dated October 9 and November 12, 1875, respectively, show that he spared no effort in trying to secure the benefits of a Salesian House for Nice. Thanks especially to his charity and zeal Don Bosco had the joy of establishing his first House in France on November 21.

First of all a place had to be found to locate this House. The idea of buying a place at once had to be abandoned. A committee of gentlemen rented a textile mill and provided the basic furniture. The Bishop offered over 300 square yards of his own garden as a recreation area for the boys. *Sine baculo et sine pera* [Without purse or staff—*Luke* 22, 35], two priests, a cleric, and a coadjutor arrived in Nice on November 9. Never was any House opened so modestly. Father Rua took pleasure in extolling the squalor of those beginnings and stressed two particulars in regard to them. Once when the Salesians there had visitors, they had to sit on their beds, first removing the mattresses, in order to have seats for everybody. Then when one of them had to go into another room to look for something, the others had to sit in the dark because there was only one lamp. Father Rua ended his description by saying, "These Houses are usually those most blessed by God."

Don Bosco exercised great tact in avoiding anything that might slight nationalistic feelings, especially since there was a local political party known as the Separatist Movement clamoring for the separation of Nice from France and for reunion of that area with

Italy. He therefore appointed as Director Father Joseph Ronchail with his fine French surname: he had been born at Usseaux near Pinerolo close to the French border and spoke French fluently since childhood. When he entered the Congregation as a cleric, he had absorbed the spirit of Don Bosco, who had drawn him to himself by some kind of superior intuition when passing through Usseaux. Two vacationing seminarians had visited him and had practically dragged along their friend Ronchail. As soon as Don Bosco saw the three young clerics, he looked at Ronchail with deep affection, and taking him by the hand remarked to the others, "Here is a blackbird that should be caged!" The cleric was impressed by these unusual words which became the seed of his vocation.

Of the Salesians who accompanied this Director, two were qualified to teach in elementary schools because both spoke fluent French. Don Bosco also sent from the Oratory, where they were studying, a few boys from Nice, as well as a small group of Algerian boys who only a little while before had been sent to the Oratory by Archbishop [Charles] Lavigerie. Thus Don Bosco forestalled any suspicion of separatism. We have already heard from his own lips how the civil and political authorities of Nice welcomed the Salesians.

Don Bosco went to Nice on November 20 after the departure of the missionaries. While there he wrote to Father Rua, asking him to send still another cleric, Evasius Rabagliati, the future Apostle of Colombia, to teach music, and to send the Algerian boys with him.

[No Date]

Dear Father Rua:

Here things have started and we are now really beginning. Therefore, tell Rabagliati to come whenever he likes, and to take with him the Algerians who have just started high school. They are to bring their African clothing, which they can wear here. Tell the other Algerians to be good and they, too, will come here as soon as I arrive in Turin. All Rabagliati need bring is some music and his own personal wardrobe. Both a piano and a harmonium await him. If possible, he ought to get here by Sunday (the 28th), because on that day the first Mass will be celebrated in the *Patronage de St. Pierre,* Rue Victor 21. If he

cannot, they can stop over at Alassio, where I shall stay from next Friday through Monday (26th-29th). See that they do not bring a trunk with them, but only hand luggage; should they bring a trunk, it should travel with them so that they can be present for Customs inspection at Ventimiglia. There is much goodwill and great enthusiasm for us and the new Hospice, which is modelled exactly after the one in Turin. We pray that God will bless us in this new undertaking. I shall pass through Nice (*sic,* Ventimiglia) the day after tomorrow to see what has to be done about Bordighera.

God bless us all. Believe me to be in Jesus Christ,

[*No Signature*]

Twenty days later, he was able to inform the Superior Chapter, "There was genuine enthusiasm in Nice." The unselfishness he had shown had contributed greatly to stimulate such benevolence and trust. The proposal had been to pay the teachers 800 francs, but Don Bosco had demurred, saying it was too much and that half that sum would be adequate. The sum of 450 francs was then agreed upon. When it became known in town that he had refused half the salary offered, there was a general outburst of praise for him. The Bishop told Don Bosco, "Now I understand why people want Don Bosco everywhere; in this way he will surely win over the entire world." Don Bosco said that he was really very much in need of money, and that he would therefore be quite unable to shoulder any expense for the new House, but the sum agreed on would be enough for the upkeep of the Salesians who were accustomed to frugal living.

The Bishop did not conceal the fact that he had contacted several other religious Orders, with a view of entrusting them with such a House or Oratory, but all had immediately demanded regular incomes and far bigger salaries than those offered to the Salesians. Then the committe members who were present told him,

"We are afraid that your teachers may die of hunger."

"You can be sure that will not happen," he replied, "because I know in what hands I leave them. Besides, I would rather have them knocking at your doors for charity, should they really find themselves in need. I am convinced that you gentlemen would not

be indifferent to such a plea, and that you would never let them die of hunger."

The members of the committee were touched by such consideration in declining what he considered superfluous, but being fully aware of the real needs they gave him the extra money already agreed upon as a donation and not as money due to him.

Don Bosco opened the House officially on Sunday, November 21, while the Festive Oratory dedicated to St. Peter in honor of the Bishop of the same name was opened the following Sunday. The Bishop said Mass in the humble chapel in the presence of many distinguished citizens. Announcing the ceremony that was to take place next day, the local Catholic newspaper, *La Semaine de Nice,* began as follows in its issue of November 27: "At the beginning of the week we had the good fortune to welcome to our town the Rev. John Bosco of Turin; he is the apostle of homeless youth, a man of God, humble and admirable in his works. He came here to Nice to install three of his collaborators and to lay the foundations for one of those Institutes such as he alone is able to create with the sole help of Providence and without any other support save that of God." As our story unfolds we shall see how much Providence assisted him and how God supported him. The *Patronage Saint Pierre* prospered with God's blessing extended to it in its early days by God's Vicar on earth in poetic and prophetic words. Don Bosco had asked Father Cagliero to inform the Holy Father of the imminent foundation and to ask his blessing. In commending the work, Pius IX said, "May God bless it and may this tiny grain of mustard seed grow into a mighty tree: may many doves nest in its branches, and may the hawk keep at a safe distance." [8]

After pushing deep roots in Nice, it did indeed grow into a mighty tree, extending its branches all over France, unshaken even by the onslaught of recent storms. At the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its foundation, in the presence of the first saintly successor of Don Bosco, the main speaker said, "Let us compare the lowly Bethlehem of twenty-five years ago with today's vast Institute, with its many pupils and teachers, particularly with the

[8] *Unità Cattolica,* No. 284, December 5, 1875.

priests who tomorrow will bring affectionate greetings from all the other Salesian Houses in France: then we shall have to admire the omnipotence of God with lively sentiments of gratitude.

Then he added, "For this, our Lord had a faithful servant, Don Bosco, who watched lovingly over the growth of this work, guiding its Superiors by his counsel, generously giving them his fatherly encouragement and frequently comforting them by his presence."

We shall see for ourselves how he comforted his sons at Nice by his presence; but before going any further, we must give our readers a sample of his advice and encouragement, while we deplore that so much of it has either been lost or is otherwise untraceable. Unfortunately, we have so far been able to reproduce only two of his letters written in that first year. He wrote one of them four days after returning home to Turin. He always tried to make his presence felt to the sons who had recently left his side, and therefore never begrudged them his correspondence.

Turin, December 10, 1875

Dear Father Ronchail:

The newspapers have given much publicity to our House at Nice, so we must do everything we can to make it a success.

In the meantime give me detailed accounts of how things are running from time to time, and tell me about the aspirations of everyone. Give my personal regards to Prince Sanguwski and his mother the princess, and assure them of our special prayers for both of them.

Kindest regards to Attorney Michel, from whom I now await a long letter; and also to Baron Héraud, Count and Countess de la Ferté, and others with whom you have occasion to discuss our affairs.

If you have more Mass intentions than you need, send them to us, and we shall see that they are celebrated on behalf of St. Peter's Hospice. Do not keep any money unless you have urgent need of it; anything beyond that, send to Father Rua at the Oratory; it will help pay for other [missionary] departures. Likewise should you be unexpectedly in need and unable to meet the emergency, let us know, and we shall send whatever is required.

Always take note of the name and address of anyone who gives you alms. Thank them all and keep in touch with them, especially when they are ill.

Most likely Bishop Sola has already seen *Il Cittadino* of Genoa; if not, let me know and I shall send him the issues that mention him; call on him sometimes.

Pass on the enclosed notes with my regards to everybody,[9] especially to Cappellano.

You will be receiving your letter of recommendation [10] for the Bishop of Nice. Write if anything else is required.

Regards from everyone here; they all are very happy about the Houses at Nice, at Ventimiglia, and in the Argentine Republic. Love me, pray for me, who will always be in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

The other letter has neither signature nor date; but it was certainly written by Don Bosco, for we have the original. As it appears from the context, he must undoubtedly have written it about the same time as the previous letter.

Dear Father Ronchail:

1. You had better keep a watchful eye on all you think suitable for the Congregation; be kind to them and see if you can win them over.

2. Converse often with our clerics and confreres; when you can, have them accompany you on some errands. Encourage them to confide in you on any temporal or spiritual problem and in turn be open-hearted with them.

3. Give that poor Algerian boy who does not wish to receive the Sacraments a chance to go to confession elsewhere, or, better still, have some outside priest come in from time to time to hear confessions. These may be trifling things, but we must bear with them. Remember that if any of the Algerians become a problem for the House, we are quite free to send them back where they came from.

4. Call on some priest such as Father Giordano, Father Giovan or others, to help you with the preaching and with Mass, too, if possible. Soon you will have another priest or at least some help from a cleric.

[9] By "everybody" he meant those of the House. Cappellano was a coadjutor.
[10] *Memorie Biografiche*, Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 31.

5. Take good care of your health and that of the others.

6. The Bishop suggested to Rome that we or the Piarists take charge at the Laghetto [11] but neither we nor they will accept; but say nothing about it.

7. Neither Father Benigno nor anybody else on his behalf said anything to me.

8. The two Canons who were sent to Rome may not accomplish much, if anything at all. I did what I could with the Holy See to put the Bishop in the proper light. The Bishop knows it and is satisfied.

9. Did Count La Ferté do anything about the French railroads? It would really be a help to me.[12]

There was the same "openness of heart" in Don Bosco's correspondence to his sons as prevailed in his contacts and conversations with them. A family atmosphere had always been Don Bosco's ideal. Children talk frankly to their fathers within the family circle, and the father does not take offense when they do, but rather is pleased and encourages such confidence. That was why his sons trusted him and very frankly and unhesitatingly asked his advice on any subject.

[11] The shrine of our Lady of the Lake in the diocese of Nice. Serious controversy raged about it among the clergy and also in other circles. We shall refer to this again in Vol. XII. Also what is said under Nos. 7 and 8 concerns this thorny problem.

[12] He wished to obtain reductions in fares when traveling on French railroads.

CHAPTER 19

Apostolate of the Press

ONE of Don Bosco's most relentless activities was to promote good publications and oppose bad ones. Since the Congregation's rapid growth constantly offered him more means of combating bad literature with good, we will now attempt a comprehensive survey of his efforts in this field.

First we shall consider textbooks. Not only did he promote an anthology of Italian authors and *Selections* of pre-Christian Latin classics—both expurgated of anything offensive to modesty—but he also did the same for a Collection of Latin Christian Classics, starting with St. Jerome. At his request, Father Tamietti edited with commentary, St. Jerome's *De viris illustribus,* the lives of St. Paul the First Hermit, St. Hilarion the Hermit, and Malchus the Monk, along with selected letters.[1] Just what inspired this new publishing venture we will learn from Don Bosco's own words told in Father Tamietti's florid Latin style some years later, when the *Selections* will have proved a success.[2]

It had been a most propitious moment. By the encyclical *Inter multos* of March 25, 1853, in which the French Bishops were urged to link the study of the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church with that of the ancient pagan classics, the Pope had settled the serious controversy which, through the efforts of Bishop [Pierre Louis] Parisis, had been raging in France over the teaching of the classics ever since 1846. When the debate broke out again

[1] Sancti Hieronymi, *De Viris illustribus liber singularis, Vitae S. Pauli primi eremitae, S. Hilarionis eremitae, Malchi monachi et epistolae selectae, cum adnotationibus Joannis Tamietti, sacerdotis, politior, litt. doct.* Augustae Taur. 1875.

[2] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 32.

over Msgr. [Jean] Gaume's *Ver rongeur* [The Never-dying Worm], the Pope stressed anew the same recommendation in a Brief of April 22, 1874, addressed to that fiery polemicist. Later still, in another Brief of April 1, 1875, addressed to Bishop Bartholomew D'Avanzo, of Calvi and Teano, later a Cardinal, Pius IX broached the subject once again. This learned Italian Prelate had written an open letter at the beginning of the school year to the professors of his seminary in Calvi, in which he briefly summed up the situation and urged them to follow the Pope's instruction. In confirming the Bishop's declaration, the Holy Father maintained that Christian Latin was not a corruption, but rather a necessary and actually an excellent transformation of the pagan tongue. He added that the mixed system used in teaching Latin had always been adopted by the Church since ancient times; and that the Bishop's arguments had so thoroughly cleared the matter that all teachers were now convinced that this method should be adopted; such was the desire of the Pope.[3]

Don Bosco was anxious to hasten the complete realization of the plan. There is evidence of this in a letter dated April 26, addressed to the editor of this new series to encourage him to hurry the publication of St. Jerome.

Turin, April 26, 1875

Dear Father Tamietti:

I really ought to scold you, berate you, and beg you to finish this blessed job, which is a headache for the printer and has been keeping everyone waiting far too long.

If you can, arrange with your Director to come some Wednesday morning; you may return Friday on the train leaving Turin at 7:20 P.M., should your venerated presence prove so indispensable.

I think that here, with books, helpers, and money at your fingertips, you will be able to get this weighty business moving, and bring such a mighty enterprise to an end.

Love me in Jesus Christ, and believe me to be,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

[3] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 33.

The book was published at the beginning of the school year 1875-76 and did not pass unnoticed. Don Bosco, who never left things half-done but kept a vigilant eye on everything he launched to see if and how it fared, wrote the following letter to Msgr. Almeric Guerra of Lucca, who had ordered two copies of St. Jerome:

Turin, December 10, 1875

Dear Canon:

The two little books of Jerome, which you so kindly ordered are now in the mail.

You truly favored me with your observations, and due account will be taken of them in the next edition. Please note any other detail you think had best be altered or deleted; our aim is to put out a good job, and your experience and knowledge will often detect things that a young author either may not understand or cannot properly evaluate. Any advice you give, any observation you make, better still, any share you take in this publication will prove of great help, if you let us know about it.

God bless you; pray for this poor mortal who remains always in Jesus Christ,

Your humble servant,

Fr. John Bosco

Here, too, Don Bosco followed his usual pattern. Was there a debate over some idea or other? Without flinging words to the wind, he studied the matter, unearthed its good, practical aspects, and, while other people argued, went into action.

Besides textbooks on literature there were books on history. Unfortunately, his plans in this direction never went beyond the stage of pious aspirations, for he did not find people capable or willing to carry out his plans. He had long been aware of the harm done the Church by the distortion of history. On this score, he had long mulled over the preparation of a good Church History for seminarians, a history imbued with a spirit of loyalty to Rome. During the years 1849-1870 he succeeded in compiling one in four volumes. Realizing the importance of the work, he was in no hurry

to publish it, hoping to bring it to a certain degree of perfection. But then, one after another he lost, without hope of recovery, parts of the manuscript that he used to take with him on his trips, to give it every moment of his spare time. In 1875 he asked Father Bonetti to start it all over again, but nothing ever came of it.

Then he turned to the history of Italy, which instructors in secondary schools used as a weapon in their attacks on the Church and the Papacy. Don Bosco persuaded Professor Anthony Terreno to write a textbook for college use. In 1876 the professor began to publish a *Compendium of Italian History* in two volumes, one dealing with the history of Rome, the other with medieval and modern history, but they were intended for secondary schools, academic, technical and normal. At a later date he revised the work and developed more extensively Don Bosco's concept, publishing a more comprehensive *History of Italy* in 1879, also in two handsome volumes: Middle Ages and Modern History, with reference to the history of other European countries. *Civiltà Cattolica* described it "as a most valuable compendium . . . well-planned . . . and excellently written." Treating of the spirit that inspired the previous publication, the same review had said: "As far as faith and morals and the rights of the Church are concerned we found nothing in it conflicting with sound principles." [4] Nor could it have been otherwise, for the book had been printed by the Salesian press under Don Bosco's vigilant eye.

Something also had to be done to meet the requirements of popular enducation that was ever more increasing. Here again a steady flow of pamphlets and periodicals distorted history in hatred of the Church. Don Bosco planned a universal history to appear in as many volumes as there were countries, all to be written in the same simple style, following the method he had set in his *History of Italy*. The series would be as follows: Oriental Ancient History, Greek History, Roman History, History of Italy, History of France, History of England, History of Spain, History of Germany, and so forth. He assigned the first two volumes to Father Barberis, who willingly went to work. Pen in hand, Don Bosco read the manuscript as the author handed it to him, patiently correcting, deleting,

[4] No. 707, p. 607 (1879); No. 633, p. 340 (1876).

and substituting. These were the only two volumes ever to be published.

As popular education advanced, a thirst for reading developed everywhere. History books as such were not to everyone's taste even when written in a simple style; more entertaining fare was necessary for the young and for the masses. Don Bosco provided for them as well, though he excluded all romantic novels and favored historical fiction. As a result we have the brilliant works of Father Lemoyne. It was Don Bosco who made him write the adventures of Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortez, Fernando Pizarro, Bartholomew Las Casas, and those of other conquerors and pioneers. He also suggested biographies of Luther, Calvin, and other leaders of disbelief and heresy. In their day these books were best-sellers and a strong force for good. Perhaps in the course of time they may emerge from unmerited oblivion. *Habent sua fata libelli.* [Books have a destiny of their own.]

Now let us return to school books. [Don Bosco] found it necessary to expurgate a certain category of books, namely, dictionaries, to render them inoffensive to youngsters. Experience had taught Don Bosco how certain words, phrases, and examples of the use of a word may hurt the souls of boys and incite to sin, even when they come upon them accidentally. Now that he had a press at his disposal, he felt that it was high time to rid the schools of such a blight.

Father [Celestine] Durando was given the task of compiling a small one-volume and a larger two-volume Latin dictionary. Father [Mark] Pechenino was to compile a Greek dictionary and Father [Francis] Cerruti an Italian one. Don Bosco also was planning a geographical dictionary by Father [Julius] Barberis and a dictionary of history by some other Salesian; but neither of these was ever completed. The first three, however, appeared in several editions. They have not as yet outlived their usefulness. Father Cerruti worked on his until 1879. Father Durando and Father Pechenino, who had been gathering material for a long time, provided the schools with their finished products much sooner, for the former's two-volume dictionary and the latter's Greek dictionary were already in use in high schools and colleges in 1876. These three publications earned the sincere approval of everyone who was gen-

uinely concerned with the Christian education of youth. Father Cerruti anticipated other Italian lexicographers by introducing numerous technical terms, giving short shrift to the scruples of purists. From the moral standpoint, with which Don Bosco was concerned more than with anything else, *Civiltà Cattolica* referred to that dictionary as veritable "manna."

Here we must point out one of Father Durando's special merits. When Don Bosco first suggested a similar undertaking to him about 1870, it was not merely a question of eliminating obscene words and unbecoming illustrations of their use; he also had to make up for the lack of scientific terms in Latin dictionaries. The most popular dictionary used at that time, printed by *Officina Regia* [The Royal Press], contained so many errors that the Subalpine government had offered 13,000 lire to [Thomas] Vallauri to correct them; but Vallauri had declined, perhaps because he thought the sum too modest. The work was then entrusted to Professor [Charles] Bacchialoni, but after correcting some hundred pages, he wearied of the task. It was Professor Mirone who steadfastly pursued the work to the very end, though even then it was still incomplete. Some time later, Vallauri took over Mirone's work, wrote a ringing preface of his own, had his own name printed on the title page, added little or nothing of his own, and thus issued forth the famous Latin Dictionaries of Thomas Vallauri which, printed in varied type faces on glossy paper and leather-bound, enjoyed a success out of all proportion to their actual merit, not to mention the foulness that sullied their pages.

In his own compilation Father Durando, too, sought maximum scientific precision; neither did he neglect to incorporate a few original features and enrich his dictionary with Christian terminology.

The Chronicle tells us how the finished product was presented to Don Bosco: "While we were discussing these things, and praising God, Father Durando came into the dining room holding a copy of the second volume of his Latin dictionary which had just been completed. Everybody was delighted. . . . Don Bosco deeply appreciated the volume presented to him by Father Durando, and said, 'Now take a little rest. Later, in due time, you shall go and present a copy to the Holy Father.' " He then encouraged him to round off

his task, by going to work on what was to become the *New Mandosio* for junior high schools.

Now let us pause a moment to ask, "Did authors spring up like mushrooms about Don Bosco?" The answer is quite simple. Just as Don Bosco trained Directors, Prefects, preachers, confessors, assistants, and all those who held specific offices in his Houses, he also trained authors. He knew his sons thoroughly. He perceived their individual talents and tastes and would suggest various tasks to them, always trying little by little to impress upon them his own concepts and his own spirit. Hence, he suggested books to be written, corrected their manuscripts, labored over the smallest details of style and form, and gave advice, orally or in writing. Frequently he would call on his sons to collaborate with him on books he intended to publish. Here is an example of how he entrusted the editing of one of his manuscripts to Father Bonetti:

Turin, January 15, 1875

Dear Father Bonetti:

I need your lynx-like eye and your keen intelligence to revise these pages before they are printed.[5]

They will be your responsibility. Let the grindstone not only smooth the wood, but also refine and polish it. Is that clear?

God bless us all. Be cheerful.

Pray for your poor, but always in Jesus Christ,

Your affectionate friend,

Fr. John Bosco

By such methods he made his priests aware of the use they could put their pens to, and awakened a desire to have their works published. But he did not like them to use the word *Salesian* on books they published. In June 1876 he happened to see the funeral eulogy of Msgr. Vallega, pastor of Alassio; the title page read: "Father Cerruti, Priest of the Salesian Congregation." He noticed that Fa-

[5] Again in 1875 Don Bosco published only one volume of *Letture Cattoliche*, and this letter must refer to the first portion of that volume. We shall say more about it before the end of this chapter.

ther Bonetti, Father Francesia, and Father Lemoyne did the same thing and feared that this avowal of membership in "the Salesian Congregation" might sound boastful and distasteful to many people. He remarked to Father Rua, "It would be better not to repeat the practice. Let them use the word 'priest,' of course, and even *Director of such-and-such a School,* but people might dislike the use of the word Salesian, and say, 'You see, now while every Congregation and all Religious Orders are in such sorry straits, they preen themselves and want to attract attention . . .' Let us leave it to others to call us by that name. There are so many things to underscore and publicize. Let us emphasize them, for they may stimulate vocations, create goodwill toward the Congregation and do good. Let them appear in print, too, and let them be publicized, but let us omit whatever does not directly aim at doing good."

From textbooks we now turn to biographies of the saints. Here Don Bosco found a condition that caused him much grief. He wanted the lives of Saints to be read in his schools. Seeking therefore to arouse his boys' interest in this kind of literature, he wanted to compile a book containing a very short life of a saint for each day of the year. When he began to pore over legends or collections of lives of the saints in order to choose the best, he found that, although they had been written with the best of intentions, they contained anecdotes and said things that might all too easily arouse evil thoughts or fire boys' unwholesome curiosity. He also realized that such books for the most part stressed penances and extraordinary acts of saints, rather than dwell on their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and the Blessed Virgin Mary and explain by what means they had overcome their faults, and what efforts they had made to enrich their souls with virtue. He therefore conceived a new collection of such lives according to his own spirit, assigning the work to several people. Among others he chose Count [Francis] di Viancino, and gave him many detailed instructions; but after the Count had written the lives of the Saints for the first few days in January, he wearied of the task and abandoned the project. He then appealed to the Oratory physician, Dr. [John] Gribaudi. The doctor made substantial progress almost as far as the end of February, but then he, too, felt disinclined to continue. Don Bosco then entrusted the task to others; they also, after he lost a good deal of his

time instructing them how the work was to be done, only left him again in the lurch. Yet, he never abandoned the idea.

There was also need to make known the life and works of St. Francis de Sales. There were biographies already in existence but they did not seem suited to the young and to the times. Don Bosco, therefore, in January 1876 publicly invited the more outstanding Salesians to compile two lives of the saint: a short one, in one volume, suitable for the general public and the young, to be stocked in schools and parishes; the other, in two medium-sized volumes, whose contents were to be gleaned from the most reliable authors and carefully written for educated people. He felt that whatever would help strengthen Catholic teachings in face of Protestant principles ought to be extracted from the teachings of that saint and put into action. Once the Life of St. Francis de Sales was in print, he planned to publish a handy edition of his works as well. In the meantime he was eager for an early printing of the saint's *Philothea* in an attractive format, edited "for young people and educational Institutions." Of course he wished that the complete works be published without abridgment.

Publishing the complete works of St. Francis de Sales in Italian was a daring project, and it reveals ever more how grand our Founder's concepts were, a boldness and magnificence that is even more apparent in another of his aspirations. We are astounded to learn how anxious he was to reprint the [*Acta Sanctorum*] of the Bollandists. As we are treating of hagiography, this is not out of place here. He spoke of this aspiration on more than one occasion; but on January 7, 1876, he discussed it at length and set forth his plans in detail. Many of our readers will surely appreciate our reporting the conversation in the words of the chronicler.

The conversation centered on Migne's patrology and the Bollandists. Don Bosco repeated several times, "I would really like to publish these books." Then he went on, "I am very, very anxious to reprint the Bollandists, as I have said on several occasions. Yet I notice that people practically laugh at me behind my back, as if it involved such sums that only a publishing firm subsidized by a munificent king might consider it. Well now, I maintain that I could start the project with an initial capital of only 12,000 lire and be certain of a sizeable profit. Not that some may not smile a bit at

the idea of my undertaking such a project. In fact, I am so hard pressed by other work that were I now to try this additional project, I would only prejudice other affairs. I still maintain, however, that, in itself, the idea is very feasible.

"I would [first] go to Rome to obtain the Pope's blessing as well as a Brief that would authorize and encourage me in the project; we would send out announcements to every Bishop in Christendom; we would establish contact with all the bookstores in Italy and the principal bookstores of Europe; we would send out salesmen to contact distributors personally. We would also make a pre-publication offer, advising people that anyone subscribing before publication would be able to purchase it at half the regular price; then we could meet the publishing costs of the second volume with the income of the first. The terms of the pre-publication subscription would not demand payment in full for the whole series, but only for one volume per year, prorated according to the number of signatures in the book. I believe that by planning it this way, we would be able to publish the greatest of existing works, with immense advantage to Italy and to Europe. The volume now sells for about 2,000 lire or at least 1,500; and yet, I believe I could sell it for 600 lire and still clear a net profit of approximately half that amount. I really feel in my own element when I make such calculations and dream up such plans. Of course one would first have to reach some agreement with death so that it would not come and upset things before the job was completed. There would be sixty volumes, one a year!"

An eminently practical man, he was unable to find one single book on philosophy and theology among the textbooks more frequently used in seminaries suited both to the age of the students or the needs of the times. He felt they needed books that were concise, easy to understand and accurate—books that went straight to the heart of fundamental issues, vital to their day and age, books that barely touched upon or actually omitted all issues which, though quite important in themselves, would at best arise very rarely, if at all. He discussed his ideas with Father [Joseph] Bertello, who was just the man for such a task; he promised his aid, but nothing came of it.

Convinced that music is a powerful educational tool, he could

find only very few musical compositions that were both inspirational and appealing. So he urged Father Cagliero to prepare a number of compositions, both sacred and profane, that might unite these two qualities. Father Cagliero did his task excellently well and thanks to him, the Oratory Press vied with Italy's foremost music publishers.

Two things were indispensable in the apostolate of the press as he conceived it; low prices and mass distribution. He could not have his own way about prices until he had his own printing plant. At first he set up only a modest one, but it grew little by little until it rivaled the best in Turin. In 1875 the Oratory print shop had already ten presses, its own type foundry, stereotype and copperplate engraving. At the same time he opened a small bookstore that later expanded so much that its sales surpassed those of all other bookstores in Turin. When Don Bosco was able to send everywhere books he himself had published at prices accessible even to the leanest purse, it was as though he had touched Heaven itself with his finger.

For a number of years he had been saying, "First, a printing plant, then a large printing plant, later, many printing plants." He lived long enough to witness not only the establishment of a large printing plant, but the multiplication of others, flanked by busy bookstores that sold out what the printing plants produced—the scope of his apostolate of good publications extending so far that nothing has ever been able to stop it.

We have not yet said anything about *Letture Cattoliche* [*Catholic Readings*] because we had intended to treat it separately as becomes a publication that was Don Bosco's favorite. He left no stone unturned in order to spread it throughout the whole of Italy. If we are to judge by its success, we must indeed conclude that it filled a very vital need and met that need in its policy and management. In 1875 it completed its twenty-third year of publication with a total of more than ten thousand [6] subscribers. As the time ap-

[6] Father Lemoyne states that the total number of subscribers varied, from 1870 onward, between 12 and 14 thousand. This assertion was based on ledgers which we, unfortunately, were unable to consult, because they had already been utilized as scrap paper. It is, however, confirmed by reliable verbal testimony. In recent years this number declined sharply, and efforts are now underway to improve the situation.

proached for the renewal of subscriptions, Don Bosco mailed this circular:

To Our Worthy Distributors and Gracious Readers

We are happy to inform you, dear Subscribers and Readers, that regular publication of *Letture Cattoliche* and of the *Biblioteca dei Classici Italiani* [*Collection of Italian Classics*] which we have several times recommended to your zeal, will continue in 1876. May we also assure you that we shall direct our special attention to the quality of paper, accuracy of printing, and mailing, particularly to the selection of contents which, as far as possible, will be instructive, entertaining, interesting and moral.

Yet we need your continued support in distributing and promoting these publications in whatever manner and in those localities that you, in your experience, may consider most advantageous.

Many Bishops, Archbishops, and the Holy Father himself, have blessed these little books and have urged their distribution; this is sufficient guarantee of their value. The *Letture Cattoliche* strives to further the interests of religion. The expurgated Classici Italiani [*Italian Classics*] cannot but prove beneficial to young students.

While bearing in mind the tragic consequences of bad books and remembering the sacrifices that many people make to distribute them, everyone should say to himself, "If wicked men take so much pain to spread evil, how much more should decent people do for good morals and our holy religion?"

Not so long ago a distinguished person said, "What we spend in distributing good books is likened to alms given to the hungry."

Confident in your cooperation, we pray that God may favor you with His blessing and grant you a long, happy life, while on behalf of the editorial staff and our distributors I am honored to be,

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

The subscription price could not have been lower: on payment of only 2 lire and 25 centesimi per year, the subscriber received 12 issues (108 pages each) and a gift almanac for the current year, the well-known *Galantuomo* [*The Gentleman*], the first national

Catholic almanac ever published in Europe. Don Bosco had undertaken its publication to counteract a Waldensian almanac.

The 1875 almanac was a booklet of 96 pages, 20 of which were devoted to the almanac proper, the remainder to food for thought. It should not be imagined that it was only a random collection of amusing anecdotes or miscellaneous data; it was obvious how one important, unifying idea knitted together all other reasonably diverse topics. From start to finish Don Bosco's spirit is discernible through his style and turn of phrase. That is why we shall now examine it.

The idea was to assemble "a few facts that recalled the glories of national or Catholic interest" whose centenary would be celebrated during the current year. This was announced in a short, very friendly dialogue between *The Gentleman* and a subscriber, in which a number of truths were pleasantly presented. The instructive part of the booklet opened with an episode illustrating the power of confession, corroborated by a famous quotation from Pellico; then followed another anecdote, likewise on the efficacy of the same sacrament, entitled "Even Thieves Respect a Good Priest." This good priest was none other than St. Paul of the Cross who headed the list of centenaries.

The first six were:

1. The centenary of the death of St. Paul of the Cross, with three pages of biographic data redundant with tenderness.

2. The centenary of the election of Pius VI accompanied by a stirring account of the end of the conclave, the opening of the Holy Door for the jubilee and the virtues of the Pope.

3. The second centenary of the first consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, *i.e.*, that of Blessed Claude de la Colombière, with a detailed description of the origins and characteristics of this devotion taken from the autobiography of St. Margaret Mary Alacoque—twelve pages of excellent reading.

4. The third centenary of the transfer of the relics of the Holy Martyrs Solutor, Adventor, and Octavius, with an account of what had happened to their sacred remains and a picturesque description of the feast interwoven with affectionate references to the glories of the House of Savoy, especially of "our Duke Emanuel Philibert,"

as *The Gentleman* called him. *The Gentleman* then extolled the zeal of the Duke "in promoting with all his power the glory of our holy religion . . . because this Christian hero was fully conscious of the fact that the Catholic faith is the basis of national prosperity, and that subjects cannot be faithful to their prince unless they are faithful to God."

5. The fourth centenary of "a young Italian boy, martyred by Jews." It was a dramatic account of the ritual murder of little Simon of Trent, an "Italian city," *The Gentleman* said, instead of "a city in the Italian Tyrol," as Rohrbaker, from whom the whole narrative was taken, had called it.

6. Fourth centenary of the birth of Blessed Nicholas Albergati, with a moving narrative of his religious vocation, the description of his defense of the Pope's temporal power in Bologna and of the rights of the Holy See elsewhere.

Next came a most singular centenary: the seventh centenary of the birth and the sixth centenary of the death of St. Raymond of Pennafort. In the brief chapter dedicated to this Spanish saint, *The Gentleman* began with a reference to Don Carlos whose cause, as we have seen, had been passionately espoused by many people, though *The Gentleman's* reference was far above the sphere of politics: "Now that a great part of European gentlemen are looking to Spain, whence it seems a star will rise to disperse the Northern fog (and someone indeed must be in a fog if he presumes to say: *The ancient European society is now about to collapse and new cradles of civilization are taking shape*—Bismarck), may I, too, likewise a gentleman, look toward Spain to point to a star that arose at Pennafort in 1175, completing its orbit in one hundred years." After a description of how the saint had come to teach at the University of Bologna, *The Gentleman* depicted him as belonging to "those men who teach for the love of teaching." Finally, he concluded that "these are the stars we are to look for and which Spain needs."

There were two centenaries distinguished by humorous titles: "How Much Did a Queen Cost in 1475?" an episode dating back to the days of the Anjou Plantagenets in England, when those sovereigns forsook "the Christian politics of the Middle Ages to

embrace the spirit of modern politics," so *The Gentleman* said, and another episode also taken from English history, the "Prince Who Was Drowned in a "Vat of Wine."

Now let us go back to the religious centenaries: the twelfth centenary of the death of St. Armand, Bishop of Maastrickt who, "just as Bishops still do today," *The Gentleman* said, "courageously pointed out to King Dagobert his vices, for which he was exiled"; the eleventh centenary of the death of St. Rumold, Bishop and Patron Saint of Malines; the tenth centenary of St. Adone, Archbishop of Vienna in the Dauphin, the one mentioned in the *Martyrology;* another tenth centenary under the heading, "How Emperors Felt about Things a Thousand Years Ago": this was a reference to four articles that Charles the Bald had submitted for the approval of a Council assembled in Pavia to have the authority and the rights of the Roman Church, of the Pope, of Bishops, and of the clergy acknowledged.

In connection with the fourteenth centenary of the death of St. Senator, Bishop of Milan, *The Gentleman* gave an even more specific definition of the patriotism to which reference had been made in the introduction, for he wrote: "To an Italian Catholic who rejoices in the glory of his country, after Rome no name of a city has a more pleasant ring to the ear than that of Milan." After which he extolled the religious glories of the Lombard capital.

After reading through a tale of ambition and jealousy dating back thirteen centuries and instigated by the wives of two French kings who were brothers, we find this striking phrase: "How rarely does one come across sisters-in-law that love one another!" Then came "Farming by a Bishop in 475." Contemporary farmers would be happy to read the opening phrase of *The Gentleman:* "Those who (I know not why) despise the highly beneficial art of farming are to be pitied; they deem themselves fortunate if they can but rear their children to be local schoolteachers, or if they can at least train them for any other trade." The Bishop to whom the article referred was St. Eutropius of Orange who, although of noble birth, took up farming to help the poor in his diocese; but, *The Gentleman* added, "he did not neglect their spiritual welfare either." Lastly came the fifteenth centenary of the election of St. Savinus as Bishop of Piacenza. Here again *The Gentleman* had something to

say. After describing a miracle wrought by the faith of the saint, he remarked: "If only we, too, had a little of the same faith today!"

After this not even the serious-minded *Gentleman* objected to a little mixed salad of small anecdotes, curious items of information, historic facts, and a few practical tips; but the oil with which he seasoned it was pure olive oil with fine salt and without spices.

As one finishes reading, one feels a spontaneous impulse to close it and put it away for rereading from time to time and also to persuade others to read it. It is truly a gem.

There were eight volumes that year, but four were twice the normal size: there was a total of 1536 pages, a monthly average of 128, *i.e.,* 20 pages more per month than what had been promised; a handsome bonus.

Two of these carry the name of Don Bosco on the cover. Let us first quickly examine the other six which, even though they were not written by him, may nevertheless be considered as though signed by him, since he had selected the material and approved it, and therefore published them under his responsibility. Consequently, they, too, represent his thought on the choice of topics best suited to the *Letture Cattoliche* and the manner in which they were treated. For these reasons we could not ignore them.

The first of the series, entitled *Godfrey,* was subtitled *Moral Story for the People,* a moving and very instructive narrative. A young peasant boy converts his father and two brothers, who for many years had lived unmindful of God and His Commandments. Because it had been written by a Tuscan, there were footnotes explaining phrases which, especially in those days, were less intelligible to the majority of sub-Alpine readers.

The second volume was entitled *Some examples of How to Keep Holy Days,* written by Canon Gaetano Costamagna, professor of theology at the Saluzzo Seminary, narrating 173 anecdotes, mostly punishments visited by God on those profaning holy days, especially by performing servile work. Don Bosco added to it the *Rules of the Association for Holy Days,* which, under the patronage of St. Joseph, had its headquarters at St. Theresa's Church in Turin. Its organization was described, and the duties of its members listed, along with indulgences granted to it by Pope Pius IX in a Brief of

May 14, 1861. A subscription blank to the *Letture Cattoliche* was also included.

A petition signed by a million priests and faithful, headed by Cardinals and Bishops, had asked His Holiness to consecrate solemnly the whole world to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The request was granted. On April 22, 1875 the Sacred Congregation of Rites approved the act of consecration, and the Pope granted a plenary indulgence, applicable also to the souls in Purgatory, to all those who, being properly contrite, went to confession and Communion and recited the act of consecration on June 16, or visited a church and prayed there for the intention of the Holy Father. We have already described the ceremony that had taken place in the church of Mary Help of Christians on this feast. On that occasion Don Bosco had encouraged Father Bonetti to write a pamphlet on the Sacred Heart. Father Bonetti agreed and wrote the fourth volume for the June issue of that year's *Letture Cattoliche,* entitled *The Heart of Jesus on the Second Centenary of Its Revelation.* In it he set forth the reasons for loving and honoring the Sacred Heart of Jesus, pointing out the origin, vicissitudes, growth, and purpose of this devotion. Enclosed were subscription blanks to the *Letture Cattoliche* and the *Biblioteca della Gioventù* [Youth Library].

The sixth volume, *Holy Water,* was written by Father Charles Philip of Poirino. It was the sequel to another pamphlet, *The Sign of the Cross,* published in April, 1872. After an introduction on sacramentals, the author explained the rite for the blessing of water and discussed its salutary and wonderful effects, refuting the calumny of Protestants that the Church had copied this rite from pagans.

The seventh issue consisted of two booklets: *The truth of the Christian Faith,* by Baron Manuel di San Giovanni and *A Layman's Thoughts on Christianity,* by Sebastian Vallebona. The latter was a dialogue between a pastor and one of his parishioners. Both pamphlets confuted Protestant errors.

The eighth was Father Lemoyne's *Fernando Cortez,* the history of the discovery of Mexico. Mixed with many adventures of that daring warrior were descriptions of customs, monuments, Mexican religious rites, and endeavors of Catholic missionaries to restrain the impetuous temperament of the conqueror and to mitigate the

woes of the vanquished people. The narrative, based on reliable Spanish authors, was both instructive and entertaining.

Don Bosco had written the third and fourth volumes. The third was entitled *The 1875 Jubilee. Its Proclamation and Devotions for Visits to Churches.* It was not entirely a new publication. For the extraordinary Jubilee of three months instituted by Pius IX, Don Bosco had published in *Letture Cattoliche* of November, 1854, a pamphlet in three parts: the Pope's Encyclical, four dialogues, and visits to the churches. He had published it once again in 1865 for another extraordinary Jubilee of one month, but had naturally substituted the current Encyclical. The four dialogues had been increased to six, since the first two had been re-edited into four. In the previous edition he had offered three meditations for visits to three churches: salvation, death, and judgment. In the revised edition he offered two sets of three meditations each; the second contained the above-mentioned meditations and the first, three new ones: confession, Communion, and almsgiving. Where the previous pamphlet had ended with a short prayer in honor of Mary's Immaculate Conception and a hymn by [Silvio] Pellico, *Cuor di Maria che gli Angioli* [*Heart of Mary that the Angels*], the revised version ended with two accounts of favors granted by our Lady. One must note that the 1854 Jubilee was also aimed at imploring heavenly guidance for the Pope, that he might all the more quickly make a pronouncement on the Immaculate Conception of the Mother of God to the greater glory of God and of the Virgin herself. The 1865 Jubilee was proclaimed on the tenth anniversary of the dogmatic definition.

We now come to the Holy Year Jubilee. Don Bosco made use of the contents of his second pamphlet, substituting the 1875 Encyclical for that of 1864, and including the pastoral letter of Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi, in which the conditions and the indulgences of the Jubilee were explained. Since there were four churches to visit, Don Bosco selected the following meditations: Confession, Communion, Almsgiving, [Eternal] Salvation. But these were prefaced by very brief explanations of the intention of the Church in proclaiming the Jubilee, the favors granted, and the conditions to gain the plenary indulgence. At the same time he used part of the material for a handy pocket manual containing only these explana-

tions and the four meditations. It was distributed to the boys for use when visiting churches and as a souvenir. On behalf of the boys at the Oratory and his other schools, Don Bosco had petitioned the Sacred Penitentiary to commute the visits to churches, since processions had been prohibited. The Sacred Tribunal did not see fit to grant this indult, but to make it easier to gain the Jubilee indulgence it allowed the boys to go in procession as best they could even without cross or banners, and also in small groups. So the boys in Salesian schools went out in separate groups, as though for a walk, to visit the churches chosen by the respective Ordinaries of dioceses. There they assembled and prayed together as required by the Pope's Encyclical.[7]

The most original part of Don Bosco's pamphlet is that containing dialogues, entitled as follows: (1) The Jubilee in General. (2) The Jubilee among Jews. (3) The Jubilee among Christians. (4) First Solemn Proclamation of the Jubilee or The Holy Year. (5) Indulgences. (6) How To Gain Indulgences. The dialogues were between a pastor in whom Don Bosco's fervent faith and affectionate kindliness are obvious, and a parishioner recently converted from Protestantism, who anxiously seeks enlightenment on dogmatic issues pertaining to the proclamation of the Jubilee. In the short preface and in all three editions of this publication, with only very slight variations, Don Bosco wrote, "I have consulted conscientiously the most ancient and reputable authors in my determination not to write anything that might be doubtful. This should dispose of the accusation that some people, misinformed on the faith, cast against the Catholic Church, as if the Jubilee and holy indulgences had only been instituted recently." In each dialogue, he had carefully listed the authors consulted.

Don Bosco entitled his other work: *Mary Help of Christians and Accounts of Some Favors Obtained during the First Seven Years after the Consecration of the Church Dedicated to Her in Turin.* It was divided into two parts. In the first he treats of the origin of the devotion to Mary Help of Christians, the construction of the church, description of the church itself and the festivities accompanying the consecration. In the second part he quotes reports of

[7] Rescript of the Sacred Penitentiary, August 10, 1875.

130 favors granted by our Blessed Lady while omitting many others for want of space. He concluded with a short account (which he himself had written) about the Archconfraternity of Devotees of Mary Help of Christians, which had been established in the church of that name.

A second edition of this book appeared two years later. In May of the same year, 1877, the *Letture Cattoliche* contained yet another series of accounts of favors entitled *The Little Cloud of Carmel.* It had been printed at Sampierdarena with the approval of the Genoa Chancery. As soon as this new edition came to the attention of the Turin Ordinary, he hunted for a copy of the former edition of 1875 and wrote an indignant letter to Don Bosco. "Factual statements are presented herein as *supernatural* and as having taken place in my diocese. The Archbishop would be under obligation [to investigate] them, according to the *De invocatione sanctorum,* Session 25, of the Council of Trent. I therefore *formally* request that you, Reverend Father, inform me whether these accounts are based on such testimonies as might stand a thorough investigation by my Chancery." [8] To which Don Bosco replied:

Turin, May 18, 1877

Your Excellency:

In the booklet entitled *Mary Help of Christians* published some time ago by the Salesian press in Turin and in the other booklet entitled *The Little Cloud of Carmel,* I did narrate a few incidents that had been brought to my attention, believing them to be well-founded and possibly beneficial if known. The booklet published at Sampierdarena was submitted to the ecclesiastical approval of that same Archdiocese. The pamphlet printed in Turin was likewise submitted for ecclesiastical examination, nor was it published until our archiepiscopal Chancery had authorized it.

May I point out that in these booklets I have followed literally the reports submitted and signed by those stating that they had received these favors. I have very carefully abstained from qualifying the incidents as *supernatural.* I have not attributed any authenticity to them, nor have I induced anyone to credit them with any belief beyond that due to a prudent author. I believe that in so doing I have followed faithfully

[8] Letter, May 17, 1877.

the injunctions of Pope Urban VIII in such matters by the declaration inserted at the beginning of those booklets. I believe that I have followed the practice of all those who write Lives of Saints or who narrate incidents that might be of some benefit to readers, enhancing veneration and faith in heavenly patrons; to my knowledge such a practice has never yet been censured.

In my own defense I believe that I have not led anyone to believe that the booklets in question had been approved by the archiepiscopal Chancery of Turin; still less, that the incidents related had been investigated and canonically approved by this or any other ecclesiastical authority.

I believe I have adequately justified myself; in any case I am prepared to retract anything I may have done against my duty or the rights of your Excellency.

I am grateful for this opportunity to commend myself to your kindness, indulgence, and zealous solicitude, and ask that these booklets be returned without undue delay by the very reverend revisors as they are successively submitted, in order that their printing be not interrupted to the detriment of this publication.

I kiss your hand in deep respect, and am,

Your humble servant,

Rev. John Bosco

This explanation did not satisfy the Archbishop for he renewed his charge. "As Archbishop I am obliged to investigate incidents occurring in my archdiocese, ascribed to the supernatural intervention of the omnipotent God, so as to ascertain whether or not these things are real, and if they may truthfully be considered as favors or miracles. . . . I therefore regard it as my gravest obligation to investigate the reports of supernatural events that allegedly have taken place in my diocese, through the invocation of the Blessed Virgin, honored in your church in Turin under the title of Mary Help of Christians." Consequently, he invited Don Bosco to produce testimony of those incidents he considered demonstrable.[9]

The weak point in this archiepiscopal thesis lay in its arbitrary interpretation of the Tridentine decree, which did not refer to all

[9] Letter of May 19, 1877.

forms of miracles, but only those attributed to Servants of God not yet beatified or canonized. This is stated by Benedict XIV.[10] It was therefore not applicable to miracles or favors such as those reported in the booklets under censure, attributed to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, of whose canonization there can certainly be no doubt at all.

We shall tell the full story of this controversy later; here, we shall mention only what bears directly on this volume.

Don Bosco found himself now obliged to draw up a formal defense which he sent to the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1878 to clear both himself and his book, in the event that the Ordinary should report the matter to Rome, as experience warned him to expect at any moment. Nor was he mistaken. In fact, when Father Lemoyne's booklet of the *Letture Cattoliche* containing fifty-three accounts of favors received was published in May, 1879, by the [Salesian] press in Sampierdarena, the Archbishop sent all three books to Cardinal Bartolini, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and enclosed a letter beginning as follows: "I submit to the attention of Your Eminence the books containing reports of miracles alleged to have taken place in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin or elsewhere through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, invoked under that same title. I already wrote to the Holy Father about them and later to Your Eminence and you graciously assured me in a letter that upon receiving them, you would proceed with a thorough investigation of this delicate and most important matter."

We are concerned now with the only booklet printed and reprinted in Turin containing the notice of ecclesiastical approbation on the last page. How can this be explained? The Archbishop wrote to the Cardinal as follows: "On the last page of the first book . . . are the words *With Ecclesiastical Approval.* This permission was nothing more than a declaration by Father Saraceno, of the Congregation of St. Philip, who examined the book, that he found no reason against its publication. But neither the Archbishop, the Vicar General, nor any official of the Chancery had authorized its pub-

[10] *De Servorum Dei beatif.* et canon., 1, II, c.I: *Textus Concilii loquitur de miraculis sanctorum, qui tantum pie in Domino mortui sunt, necdum vero a Sancta Sede beatificati aut canonizati.*

lication by their signature." [11] Yet, the Archbishop himself had appointed Father Saraceno as synodal censor! More than that, the Chancery itself had referred the book to Father Saraceno for examination. Father Berto testified that he himself had read the original letter written by Father [Francis] Maffei [12] to Father Saraceno at the order of the Archbishop. It must not be imagined that any substantial difference existed between the 1875 and the 1877 editions, which were as similar as two drops of water.

The Cardinal referred the whole matter to Msgr. [Lawrence] Salvati, but wrote on the envelope in his own hand: "July 1, 1880. Will the distinguished Promoter of the Faith kindly examine the booklets herein enclosed; he will see that the Archbishop of Turin is not in error. Cardinal Bartolini, Prefect."

We do not know in what manner Don Bosco was notified of this denunciation, but he had Father [John B.] Rostagno, S.J. draw up a memorandum, which he sent to that same Cardinal, together with a copy of his letter of 1878. He enclosed the following letter:

From Our House at Nizza Monferrato
August 17, 1880

Your Eminence:

I very much regret that a matter without basis in fact should have already caused so much trouble to the Holy See and recently disturbed also your Eminence, who is already so busy with the welfare of the Universal Church. I have set forth herein the necessary explanation of all that led to, and has accompanied, this regrettable dispute, which I believe is entirely without foundation.

At any rate, I always was, and trust that I shall continue to be, a humble son of Holy Church, obedient, submissive to every command, counsel or admonition of your Eminence or any other official of the Holy See.

May God keep you in good health. Every day the Salesians and their pupils pray for this intention.

In deep veneration I beg your holy blessing, and am honored to be,

Your grateful servant,
Fr. John Bosco

[11] Letter of June 26, 1880.
[12] Assistant secretary to the Archbishop. [Editor]

He also wrote to Msgr. Salvati, Promoter of the Faith. We do not have the actual letter, though we may guess at its contents from the courteous reply.[13] The Cardinal, influenced by the letter sent to him from Turin, scribbled on the envelope: "August 23, 1880. Monsignor Assessor, please investigate carefully whether Don Bosco with his acts of humility is not trying, as it seems to me, to lecture the Sacred Congregation of Rites through his Consultant. In this case the Promoter of Justice should respond in kind. Cardinal Bartolini, Prefect." The humility referred to was the tone of Don Bosco's letter; the lecture, "through his Consultant" was the memorandum of Father Rostagno. The lecture, if any, was directed to a simple diocesan chancery and in the presence of a Roman Congregation sitting in judgment. However this may be, the matter was relegated to the archives and exhumed during the Apostolic Process, only to be buried again. We discuss it half a century later to show that God's friends on this earth have to face many tribulations, and that God reveals to the world by means of such tribulations that He has found them worthy of Himself.

Two years before this controversy began, Don Bosco had taken comfort in how much good the book was doing. In the precious little chronicle that Father Barberis kept, dated June 5, 1875, he writes that in the dining room after supper Don Bosco began talking about the May issue of the *Letture Cattoliche,* in which many favors granted by our Lady Help of Christians were described and then continued, "After the publication of this booklet and especially during the novena, so many other marvelous events occurred that they could already fill another booklet to be entitled *New Marvels of Mary Help of Christians;* or, with the addition of a few prayers and practices of piety, it could be entitled *Manual for the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians*. Many Bishops have written to commend the issue and praise it highly.[14] I had sent copies to every Bishop in Italy. This will increase the number of subscribers to the *Letture Cattoliche.*"

We have examined in a particular manner the entire 1875 issue of the *Letture Cattoliche,* not excluding the modest almanac, and we find that each booklet has four noteworthy characteristics: it is

[13] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 34.
[14] Cardinal Martinelli also wrote in praise of it (*see* p. 179).

popular, instructive, edifying, and timely. Herein lay the secret of the immense vitality enjoyed for so long by the *Letture Cattoliche,* that humble publication so dear to the apostolic heart of Don Bosco. We hope this will prove to be the leaven of its eagerly awaited rebirth.[15]

[15] Father Ceria's wish has been fulfilled. The *Letture Cattoliche* have been reborn, and since 1955, under the title of *Meridiano 12,* are successfully striving after the goals set by Don Bosco 111 years ago. [Editor]

CHAPTER 20

At the Beginning of the School Year

ONCE again we meet Don Bosco among his sons at the Oratory just before the beginning of the school year. Anyone who saw him in their midst and was unaware of the things we have related up to this point, would have imagined that he had no other care in the world than the welfare of his boys. We have records of only a few of his *Good Nights* during this period, yet they are enough to reveal him guiding the boys to a good start.

The artisans came back to find the band discontinued. Lack of discipline among its members had recently caused the Superiors not a little trouble. After this drastic measure had been taken, the House Chapter of the Oratory with Father Rua presiding met in two sessions in mid-October to draw up a set of rules that was submitted to Don Bosco, who approved it. Among other things, it was decided that also some confreres should join the band.

The students, too, found a little innovation. On arriving at the Oratory, all the boys, both old-timers and newcomers, were given passes with which they could report to the study hall, the dining room, and the dormitory, nor was this new custom ever discontinued.

The opening of the school term was set for mid-October, though there had to be, naturally, a margin for tolerance, as we can gather from Don Bosco's words below. He had been away from the House for many days, and returned to the Oratory when nearly all the boys had arrived and had settled down. He paternally welcomed them on the evening of October 20. As one might expect, his talk ended with an exhortation to all to make a good confession.

Once again we meet here, my dear boys. You have come from far away and so have I. I am happy to see so many of you returning these last two days. Now the latecomers will soon be returning, who either were afraid of the rain or for some reason or other were not able to leave home. Then, the normal routine will be resumed without delay and will continue throughout the year.

I can tell you sincerely that I am satisfied and delighted, just as a father is delighted when he sees his family growing. But because you have been out in the fields and the vineyards and have had to travel, possibly you are all dusty and splashed with mud; perhaps some of you have also fallen into the mire and have really gotten dirty. If so, you must scrub yourselves immediately with a brush and make yourselves presentable. You understand very well what kind of mud and brush I mean. All of you, to some extent have committed some fault or sin during your vacation. Some have been covered only by dust, and for these it will be a matter of a moment—all they have to do is brush off a little dust, that is, the little imperfections to which all of us, unfortunately, are subject, and which appear during vacation time more than at any other—and everything will be as right as before. But there might be others who are more or less badly stained; they must not let these stains take root in their heart, instead they should immediately make good resolutions, for the more recent a wound, the quicker it can be healed. Apply the brush of confession vigorously and everything will be all right.

Try not to create confusion while things are not yet fully organized. If you lack anything, or if it cannot be provided as you would like, have patience. Good night.

He talked to them again on the evening of October 22. He again spoke of confession, albeit in a different manner. He was very anxious that everybody in the House should be in the state of grace so as to merit heavenly blessings during the coming year.

A Jove principium. [Begin with God.] Always remember this motto, which even pagans respected, my dear boys. This means: always begin whatever you do with a blessing from Heaven. This is the beginning of the school year; try to begin well. There is an ancient proverb which says: *Dimidium facti, qui bene coepit, habet,* which a poet aptly translated as: *Well begun is half done.* We may continue and say: *You cannot make a good beginning unless you begin with Heaven.* Now if it

is true, as it most certainly is, that if we start something well, our task is already half accomplished, just think how important it is to make a good beginning. Therefore, if you intend to make a good beginning and are not in the state of grace, start by putting yourselves into the state of grace; then beg God sincerely to give you grace to persevere, promising Him to employ your time profitably and never, never to use your studies in a way that would offend Him. Promise instead to offer all that you do or will do for the greater glory of God, the salvation of your own soul, and that of your neighbor.

In his *Good Night* of October 26 he went straight to the heart of the matter, depicting in a persuasive and powerful manner the dread consequences that await those who fail to make a good beginning. Decisions were not reached hastily, but for the unruly there was dismissal. A remark found in the little chronicle of Father Barberis that year tallies with this timely, fatherly warning of Don Bosco. "It is the rule of the House," he writes, "that under no circumstances will bad boys, who might corrupt their companions in any way, be tolerated. One single indecent conversation or immoral act suffices to dismiss the guilty one from the House. But this may not be done without first talking the matter over with Don Bosco. The boy himself rushes to Don Bosco as soon as he knows of the threat hanging over his head to beg and implore forgiveness."

What Father Barberis wrote on January 23, 1876 is also very timely: "Severe measures are taken whenever a boy is guilty of indecent conduct. It is enough for us to know for certain that there have been indecent conversations or that acts have been committed —not in themselves completely immoral but rather in the nature of boyish [sexual curiosity]—for the offenders to be expelled from the House immediately. *Modicum fermentum totam massam corrumpit.*" [A little leaven ferments the whole mass—*Gal.* 5, 9]

This does not mean that boys were expelled immediately. As Don Bosco says, and this is confirmed by the records, some boys were dismissed quietly during the holidays, whenever the delay did not present a source of moral danger.

Besides conduct marks, good behavior was encouraged by the meetings held every Sunday evening from 6:30 to 7:00 by the Oratory Superiors. This was the principal device that kept things

running smoothly. These meetings were attended by the House Chapter members and presided over by Father Rua. The Chapter members underwent a form of mutual examination regarding vigilance within their own personal sphere of action. This helped to prevent trouble and to remedy it whenever it did occur. In this way the Superiors agreed on policies for conformity of action and of spirit; it also kept them informed of all that happened. Finally, by the advice given of the more experienced Superiors, the others learned lessons in prudence especially in going slowly before taking decisions when matters were doubtful. However, in matters of greater importance, the final word was always left to Don Bosco. We see this in the records of minutes which, though limited to bare essentials, are nevertheless valuable for the years of which we are now writing.

Your number has grown again. Today we began our regular routine. As the saying goes, to be forewarned is to be forearmed. So while we still have time, I must warn you of a few things. First of all, remember well that we shall immediately begin, and continue throughout the year, to give conduct marks in the study hall, the classroom, the dormitory, the dining room, and so on. Those who do not behave will be given a bad mark, and to their shame their names will be called out in the presence of everybody; when a boy does not hear his name announced, it means that his conduct is satisfactory. As for those who get poor marks, they must realize that their conduct will be tolerated only for a while, not indefinitely. I regret that every year we are obliged to do this to some boy, that is, lead him to the door and say, "You are not longer fit for the Oratory." With others we are a little more tolerant and permit them to remain in the hope that they will improve, but you all know the proverb: "A bucket taken to the well too often loses its staves," that is, fault after fault amounts to something big. We bear with someone until the end of the year, but then we sum up all his faults, he is given a poor mark, and during the holidays a letter is sent to his home bidding him to enjoy a longer vacation because there is no more room for him at the Oratory. We were obliged to do this again this year, unfortunately, and if you notice that a few faces are missing, that is also a reason. Now that you have been warned in good time, I hope this will not happen to any of you.

Nor should you imagine that the marks given every week lose their

value after a number of years. I must tell you something which occurred just a day or so ago, and which happens quite frequently. A gentleman with a handsome beard came to see me. I did not recognize him, but he greeted me by name and asked, "Do you no longer remember me? I am So-and-So, who was here at the Oratory a long time ago. I need a character reference." Now what did I do? I checked the files—we have files going back 10, 15, and 20 years—I write the character reference on the basis of this record; it would be impossible to furnish a reference any other way.

Therefore, remember your records will remain and even many years from now will supply a favorable or unfavorable character reference. Yet I do not want you to try for good marks merely to avoid disgrace or punishment, or expulsion. A far superior motive than this should spur you, and that is a clean conscience. Learn to do what is pleasing to God who will reward you, and avoid evil because it displeases Him and He would have to punish you. Do you know what will happen if you act like this? You will be successful, happy, respected, and loved here in this world, and more important still, there will be a great reward awaiting you in Heaven. I hope and pray that this will be both your destiny and mine. Good night.

The Novena in preparation for the feast of All Saints inspired Don Bosco to make a warm appeal to the boys on the evening of October 27. As he reminisced of Savio, Magone, and Besucco he must surely have said far more than what is contained in the report we have. He could never speak of Dominic Savio without showing some emotion. Father [Stephen] Trione testified that he once met Don Bosco pacing up and down, fully absorbed in correcting the galley proofs of a reprint of Savio's biography, and heard him say: "Do you know, I cannot keep back my tears whenever I do this."

We are now within the Novena for All Saints. I am very anxious that all of you really try to make a good novena. Why? During the year we shall each of us keep the feast of the saint whose name we bear, and we will keep it on that day. Now the feast of All Saints represents everyone's name day; you should, therefore, prepare yourselves to celebrate it well. There are so many boys who are now saints in Heaven and once they were flesh and bones as we are! I will even go further: how many

boys are there now in Heaven who were not only mortal like us, but who lived here in this very House, strolled through these same porticoes, prayed in the same church, and obeyed the same rules and Superiors. They became saints and are now in Heaven, as we have every reason to hope is the case of Dominic Savio, [Michael] Magone, and [Francis] Besucco, and many more. Now we must say: *Si isti et illi, cur non ego?* [If they could, why not I?] If those boys became so good, living under the same conditions as we do, why can't we do the same? Take courage, my dear boys, make every effort to persevere along the road to salvation. If we are called to endure discomforts such as cold or heat, physical ailments, or such; and even if you must force yourselves to obey, study or restrain your temperament, do so bravely, willingly, for you will merit an eternal reward in Heaven in return for every little thing you may have suffered here on earth.

Richer thoughts are recorded in the *Good Night* of October 28. Here Don Bosco encourages the boys to make a very careful examination of conscience, and to get ready with steadfast resolutions to celebrate the feast of All Saints devoutly.

We are well into the Novena for All Saints. This most solemn feast approaches rapidly. If only all my dear boys would give more serious thought to the way in which they can become saints! There is one thing I would like all of you to do. Ask yourselves, "What do I need most to become a saint?" Then single out the bad habit that holds sway over you and thus hinders you from this goal; or else you may single out the virtue that you need most and that would help you to attain your end. Then resolve firmly, "On this beautiful feast day I want to offer this gift to our Lord: I want to uproot this bad habit from my heart, replacing it with this virtue." If you do this, I assure you that our Lord will be very pleased with you.

Yet, before anything else, you must first make a careful examination of conscience, and begin by ridding it, if need be, of any serious sin. You would not put beautiful drapes around the walls of a sumptuously furnished room, and leave garbage or other junk in the middle of it. It would look ridiculous, and people would say, "First remove the garbage and then decorate the room." The same applies to your souls: it would not do to rid yourselves of minor faults if you kept a mortal sin

on your soul. The right thing to do is first to remove the serious sin, and then to think of beautifying the soul.

Our Lord told a young man who wanted to save his soul: *Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.* [If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments—*Matt.* 19, 17] Note that He said first of all: *Si vis;* this means that to save our soul we first must have the *will* to save it; yet not the *will* of a lazy person: wanting, yet not wanting—*vult et non vult piger*—but instead, wanting it earnestly and therefore working at it with determination. Doing what? *Serva mandata.* [Keep the Commandments.] Those of you who are learning Latin know that *serva* is the imperative form of the verb *servo, servas, servavi,* which means "keep." So our Lord says, "Keep the Commandments" of God's holy law. If we could only inquire of those who are in Heaven and find out what they did to attain that blessed place, they would all say, "We kept the Commandments." And if, on the other hand, we could open the gates of hell, and ask those who have fallen headlong into it why they were damned, they would answer, "We did not keep the Commandments." Now I ask you: Do you want to be saved? Of course you do. There is no one so foolish as to say: I do not want to be saved. Well then, keep the Commandments. And if I do not keep them? Then, my dear boys, there is no alternative—such persons are damned.

"But it takes effort!"

Yet, all those now in Heaven made this effort. Now they are happy and say, "How small the effort, how little we suffered, compared to all we now enjoy and shall continue to enjoy for eternity! On the other hand, the damned say, "We chose to shirk a little effort and now suffer horribly and shall continue to suffer for eternity."

Who are those who do not keep the Commandments? Examples are those who do not behave themselves in church, but chatter with others instead of praying; those who cannot bear with the faults of others and are forever quarreling; those who receive the Sacraments carelessly without devotion and, worse still, without feeling sincere contrition for their sins; those who blaspheme, profane the sabbath, disobey, and so on. Think of God's Commandments one by one, give careful attention to all the times you have failed to observe them, make a good confession and resolve never again to break them. Thus you shall put into practice what our divine Savior said, *Si vis ad vitam ingredi, serva mandata.* [If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments—*Matt.* 19, 17.] If at times you should find it difficult to observe them, just say, *Momentaneum quod cruciat, aeternum quod delectat,* that is, I may earn

an eternity of happiness in exchange for a little suffering. Courage, my dear boys, put your heart into it and you will realize that our Lord will help you to accomplish what you yourselves are unable to do. Good night.

On November 5, he spoke of St. Charles, whose feast at the Oratory had been postponed until the following Sunday. He spoke of this saint from a standpoint best suited to his youthful audience, stressing the subject of Communion. Yet, we must observe the discretion he used at the end of the talk when he urged them to go to Communion.

Tomorrow is the feast of St. Charles, and many of you bear his name. I want these boys especially and also all the others to try to honor this saint as much as they can. There will be a High Mass tomorrow morning to make the occasion as solemn as possible. One thing in particular helped St. Charles to become such a great saint. Do you know what it was? From his early youth he began to consecrate himself wholly to God. As a youngster, he only knew two streets in the town: one that led from his home to the church and the other that led from his home to school. His admirable aloofness from the world and love of study and piety enabled him to become very soon a very learned and saintly man. His merits were recognized and at twenty-three years of age he became Archbishop of Milan and a Cardinal of the Church. There is a wonderful episode in his life. On a tour of his diocese, St. Charles met St. Aloysius who was about twelve years old at the time. Noticing the boy's fervor and piety even though he had not as yet received First Holy Communion, St. Charles gave his permission and he himself wished to give St. Aloysius his First Holy Communion. The people of Castiglione were now wondering, which of the two was holier: the boy receiving Communion or the Prelate who gave it to him.

Naturally, since St. Aloysius is the special patron saint of youth, we keep his feast more solemnly; but we must also honor St. Charles and pray to him often, because in his youth he, too, was already endowed with so many heroic virtues and, then, he did so much for the instruction of youth. He insisted that parish priests teach them catechism, opened small schools and minor seminaries for them, and did everything possible to enhance their spiritual and temporal welfare and happiness. We must pray especially to St. Charles that he grant us a little of his

own unselfishness which enabled him to disregard all the riches and goods of this world, and to give in one day an alms of 40 thousand lire, while on another occasion he donated an entire inheritance. May St. Charles also grant us some of the love for neighbor that so distinguished him; for you already know how, during a plague that devastated the city of Milan, he was constantly among the sick, helping them in their physical needs and especially ministering to their spiritual wants. He even opened the doors of his episcopal residence to give shelter to the sick, and almost fell victim himself to the plague, as a result of his zeal. Those who can, should receive Communion in honor of this great Saint; the others should make a spiritual Communion and offer prayers to obtain his intercession.

One thing was still missing to guarantee a good beginning: a fervent Exercise for a Happy Death. This first Exercise for the new school year had been scheduled on a very important date: November 11, the day of the missionaries' departure. Two days before, Don Bosco directed the boys' thoughts to the Exercise for a Happy Death as he announced the program for the forthcoming celebration. He chose as his theme the purpose for which the missionaries were about to set out on their journey.

Our missionaries are eagerly awaited in America; let us hope that they can accomplish much. The sole reason for their journey is to try to save many souls. To save souls, nothing else than that! Today I received a letter from the mayor of San Nicolas, where they are to establish their first mission station; he promises to give them material assistance, and says that the whole population is looking forward to our good work. The main thing that you can do on this joyous occasion is to make the Exercise for a Happy Death well, especially by going to confession and Communion as though it were for the last time. Now remember this; when you are in the habit of doing something well, given the opportunity, you will do it almost without being aware of it. Instead, if it is difficult and you are not accustomed to it you will not succeed in doing it well enough, even with effort. Thus, those who train themselves to die happily, who go to confession as though they were about to die, who receive Communion as devoutly as though it were for the last time, will not find it hard to die happily on their deathbed. They are already used to it; their conscience will no longer trouble them; at

best, they will only need to examine themselves for things they may have done during that last month or the past few weeks, but nothing more. They will die happily with every hope of going immediately to Heaven.

On the other hand, what sorrow, what affliction death will be for one who has never prepared himself to die well! I have been at the bedside of many who were sick and about to die, and I can tell you, it is horrible to see a sick person in such a condition and with a confused conscience. Many times he would like to speak and to make his confession, but he is no longer able; other times he does not even have the comfort of a priest at his bedside. At times, his friends and relatives will not step aside to make room for a priest who is available, but instead torment the dying man with questions about his will, the inheritance, and the distribution of his possessions. The unfortunate sick person, already tormented by horrible remorse of conscience, dies sooner of anguish and disgust than of actual sickness.

You have all the time you need; prepare yourselves well; keep your consciences and your material affairs well-ordered; but particularly, for heaven's sake, be sure not to keep anything on your conscience in those last moments. If you have any doubts regarding past confessions or feel remorse for something that may have happened years ago, speak of it on this occasion. Act in such a way that next Thursday evening, should *you too depart for the next world,* you may say with peace of mind, "Here am I, Lord, I am prepared; summon me, for I have already put my temporal and spiritual affairs in order. *Ecce venio.* [Behold, I come.]"

Don Bosco had sent invitations for the ceremony to all the principal benefactors and friends. He had also enclosed a timetable for the day and had wanted the first item to be: "7:30—Exercise for a Happy Death." The boys made it with genuine enthusiasm. Now at last, everything was going on well.

CHAPTER 21

Further Steps toward the Privileges

THE question of privileges was of vital importance to Don Bosco. It was an essential condition for the full recognition of the juridical status that at last had been conferred on his Congregation. Success in obtaining the privileges would have done away with, once and for all, the many obstacles that prevented his clerics from being admitted to Holy Orders. Therefore, he was not discouraged at the failure of his first attempt, but set to work, instead, to find some other way to submit the matter for consideration again, being well aware that in this world it is often the persistent petitioner who overcomes resistance.

The possibility of reopening the case after the decision of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars lay apparently in an accompanying clause in the Rescript: It said, *"Communicationem, prout petitur, non convenire.* [It is inadvisable to grant the communication of privileges as requested.] The "prout petitur" [as requested] indicated that, should the petition be revised, there was legitimate reason to hope that the matter could again be taken under examination.

It would have been foolish to expect [a reopening of the case and] a different decision, unless the case remained the same with only a change in the form of the petition. This change, however, would have to be prompted by new circumstances. It was necessary in other words, that new facts should emerge as would alter the situation and thereby open the way to nullifying or revising the first decision. For example, either because of the foreign missions or for some other reason new needs might arise that would pave the way for reopening the case.

Yet it required time before the entire issue could again be broached; it was necessary to bide one's time for the opportune moment and not take any hasty action that might well compromise so delicate a matter. Then, too, the Cardinal Prefect, besides being far from inclined to grant the privileges, was suffering from serious physical ailments, and one had to be particularly discreet in dealing with him. It would have annoyed him, aggravated his illness, and exposed the whole matter to serious risks, if one were to approach him again so soon with new reasons for re-examining something on which he had already pronounced judgment. Nor did the Secretary, who had succeeded Vitelleschi in that Sacred Congregation have things well in hand as yet; he was said to be somewhat confused. In addition, there was a new element unknown to Don Bosco until Cardinal Berardi informed him of it. His Eminence wrote that the Cardinal Prefect, Cardinal Patrizi, and a few others were of the opinion that Don Bosco was asking too much and that his requests should therefore be subjected to a longer and more detailed examination than is usual,[1] "though I could not say on what they base their opinion."

Don Bosco was well advised to approach the subject from another standpoint. Although he was thoroughly engrossed in the final preparations for the impending departure of the missionaries, he chose not to wait, but modified his petition at the beginning of November. He requested only a limited number of privileges, thirteen in all, including those most indispensable for Ordinations. The new factor that justified the presentation of this new petition after so short a time was that the privileges requested would be particularly helpful to the Salesians who were now about to sail for foreign missions. Since we had the good fortune to find the actual draft of the petition, we quote here in its entirety.

Most Holy Father:

In deep gratitude to Your Holiness for Your great kindness in deigning to approve definitively the Salesian Congregation, the Reverend John Bosco, humbly prostrate at your feet, implores new favors, particularly

[1] Letter, November 20, 1875.

on behalf of those Salesians who are now about to sail for foreign missions.

The most necessary favors are:

1. That Salesian priests who already have faculties for hearing confessions in one diocese, may hear the confessions of members of their Congregation also outside that diocese; and that when traveling especially by sea, they may hear without distinction the confessions of others, especially their fellow travelers, always observing all the prescriptions and rites of Holy Church.

2. That they may celebrate Mass, administer Holy Communion and expose the Blessed Sacrament for the veneration of the faithful, teach catechism to children, and preach the word of God in all churches belonging to our Congregation.

3. That they may open chapels in the Houses of our Congregation, whether in the city or in the country, celebrate Mass and distribute Holy Communion, especially in the infirmaries [of our Houses] for the convenience of the patients.

4. That when traveling by sea, or making long journeys to foreign missions, they may have the privilege of a portable altar.

5. That the Superior General may grant the *Extra tempus,* [outside the appointed time], and present members of his Congregation for Minor and Major Orders and for ordination to the priesthood on days in which Holy Church usually permits such ordinations.

6. That he may commute the canonical hours and permit other prayers or good works instead, when members of the Congregation are sick or, because of extreme weariness, are unable to recite the Breviary without serious inconvenience.

7. That he may grant the faculty to members of the Congregation to read and possess forbidden books and to impart the plenary indulgence at the hour of death.

8. That he may bless scapulars, rosaries, medals, and crucifixes with the indulgences of St. Brigid and St. Dominic. These last faculties were previousy granted to the aforesaid Superior *ad tempus* [temporarily].

Special Indulgences

9. That the Salesians may gain a plenary indulgence: on the day they enter the Novitiate; when pronouncing and renewing religious vows; at the end of Spiritual Retreats and at the hour of death; also on the day they set out for the foreign missions; on the day of the month set

aside for the Exercise for a Happy Death as prescribed by the Salesian Constitutions.

10. An indulgence of 300 days whenever they say *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis;* this was already granted *vivae vocis oraculo* [by word of mouth] on February 12, 1869.

Ordinary Indulgences

11. That in all churches of the Congregation, all the faithful may gain a plenary indulgence on feast days of the respective titular saint, after receiving the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist. That a plenary indulgence may be gained on the feast day of St. Francis de Sales in all churches belonging to the Congregation.

12. That a plenary indulgence may be gained also on all solemn feasts of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Holy Apostles, St. Joseph, the Patronage of St. Joseph, St. Anne, St. Joachim, St. Francis Xavier, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the Guardian Angel, All Saints, All Souls' Day, and on the day following the feast of St. Francis de Sales when religious services are held for all deceased Salesians and for all the benefactors of the Salesian Society.

13. That the Salesians may gain said indulgences on the days and under the conditions described above, even though they may be unable to visit the aforesaid churches, provided they receive the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist.

Many of these indulgences have already been granted to the principal church of the Congregation; Your Holiness is now humbly implored as a special act of clemency, to confirm, extend and grant them in the manner humbly set forth above.

He proceeded through official and unofficial channels. Officially he addressed himself to Archbishop Sbarretti, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars; but previously and unofficially he had contacted Cardinal Berardi, asking him to pave the way and above all else act as an effective intermediary with the Supreme Pontiff.

Archbishop Sbarretti found difficulty in deciphering Don Bosco's irregular scrawl and turned to Attorney Menghini for help. Thus, Menghini came to know what was happening, and passed on the information to his inseparable colleague in the Chapter choir at

the church of St. Eustace, Msgr. Fratejacci. "If you could only hear our stirring duets," the latter wrote, alluding to their long talks about Don Bosco's affairs. One thing on which they were in agreement was that this step on the part of Don Bosco was ill-timed, but they would nevertheless help his cause "as an appeal against the decision already pronounced, or as a declaration of his non-acquiescence in the decision." [2]

Unfortunately, Cardinal Berardi's good offices were delayed by an unforeseen obstacle. He was away from Rome, so that "Don Bosco's welcome letter" only reached him a week or so later when, to his deep regret, "there was no longer time to take the necessary steps," since the missionaries on whose behalf the appeal was made had already left. He did, however, submit Don Bosco's petition to the Holy Father. The Pope recalled that he had granted certain faculties through the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars but did not wish to do anything contrary to the Rescript already issued, which he no longer remembered. Therefore, he directed the Cardinal to send the petition to the same Congregation. "We now await the outcome, whatever it may be," His Eminence concluded. "As soon as I know what it is, I shall inform you immediately." [3]

This benevolent Cardinal did everything he could to obtain favorable consideration of Don Bosco's petition by the Secretariat of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. As of December 17 he had not succeeded for several reasons that he listed and commented upon as follows: "(1) His Eminence, the Prefect Cardinal Bizzarri, is still in bad health. (2) There is a new Secretary of the Congregation in question. (3) Your Archbishop recently wrote a letter detrimental to your pious Institute. This made a deep impression on the new Secretary of the Congregation who is totally unacquainted with the background. As soon as I heard about it, I wasted no time in contacting the Secretary and giving him all the necessary explanations. I am sure that something will be done soon; I shall let you know immediately as soon as I myself know what it is. In the meantime, we must fortify ourselves with holy patience, never forgetting how the devil always does his best to hinder any good work. But God is mightier than the devil, so we have good

[2] Letter of December 5, 1875.
[3] Letter of November 20, 1875.

reason to hope that with His divine help we may be victorious in the end." [4]

Quite bluntly Msgr. Fratejacci comes out with other facts concerning the third obstacle that he obtained from a reliable source: "Every day a certain Archbishop, well-known to you, writes letters against the Salesians to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. It is quite a mania with him. I fear he will go completely insane. Quite recently, in reference to a complaint that the Salesians are hearing confessions of people not belonging to their Houses, Archbishop Sbarretti, who is already convinced that this is a real and groundless persecution, wrote a letter to that certain Prelate in the name of the Sacred Congregation. He did not commit himself in any way—just an *ibis redibis non* [you shall go, you shall return, not], a violin sonata, you know, nothing more. This, just so that you may know: It will certainly be pleasant news to you. Instead of inciting people against you, as that particular Archbishop is trying to do, he only reveals how he persecutes you, so that in the end, everyone will join hands to liberate you once and for all." [5]

Don Bosco certainly did not encourage these tirades. In the same letter the good Monsignor complained that Don Bosco had not answered a registered letter written some 23 days previously, despite the fact that in the meantime he had written him a second time requesting an answer; in both letters people in important positions were taken to task. He did this out of affection for Don Bosco. Nevertheless, Don Bosco only wrote to him twice in four months, and then only in reference to entries for the *Annuario della Gerarchia Ecclesiastica* [The Official Directory of the Holy See], for matters concerning the Arcadia [the Arcadian Academy], and to send him a photo of the missionaries. Thus, the two heated letters that we have published as documents were never answered. Anyone acquainted with Don Bosco would readily understand why such silence would be golden.

When the second petition from Don Bosco was referred by the Pope to the Sacred Congregation, it was again submitted to the committee of four Cardinals who had already examined the first one. Don Bosco was more concerned with the dimissorial letters

[4] Letter of December 17, 1875.
[5] Letter of December 24, 1875.

than with anything else, because this would free him of all the anxiety and expense he incurred whenever he had Salesians to be ordained. Because of its greater importance this item was separated from the others for immediate examination and judgment. Unfortunately no progress whatever was made. On December 28 Cardinal Berardi wrote to Don Bosco, "I am grieved to have to tell you that the Cardinals whose opinion was asked in the matter of your recent petition, did not see fit to give their consent to the application for dimissorial letters, because, they said, you already enjoy a ten-year indult granted to you on April 3, 1874. Therefore, be patient also in this. As soon as you can come again, we shall discuss how best to go about it." The reason given was the same as that for the negative answer in October. In such matters, fear of prejudicing episcopal authority always weighs very heavily on the scale.

Other articles were likewise examined separately for swift decisions by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and so was the seventh article, which the Sacred Congregation of the Index would examine.

This was the situation when the Turin Ordinary grew so perturbed at the news that Don Bosco was seeking privileges in Rome, that he gave vent to his feelings and voiced his fears to Cardinal Bizzarri, possibly at the instigation of someone who had reasons for wanting to stir up trouble:

Turin, March 24, 1876

Your Eminence:

The Reverend John Bosco, founder and Rector of the Salesian Congregation, has again appealed to the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars for privileges that conflict with the rights of episcopal authority; and this despite the fact that these same privileges were denied him last year precisely in order not to prejudice episcopal jurisdiction. I hope that before granting Don Bosco's demands to the detriment of Bishops, the Sacred Congregation will be so good as to acquaint me with his demands, so that should any one of them create difficulties for me, I may submit my own pertinent observations. I ask this all the more earnestly since I am afraid that, in order to substantiate the reasonableness of his request, he may have preferred charges against my administration as Archbishop, as he has already done in letters addressed to the Holy Father.

I have always defended religious Orders and always shall; I recognize their need for certain privileges and exemptions; but if they require exemptions in the matter of jurisdiction, transfer, and assignment of members, if certain privileges are necessary in some territories where conditions are abnormal such as, for example, in the foreign missions, my belief, corroborated by exhaustive studies and repeated practical observations in different countries, is that privileges granted to them in derogation of episcopal authority only undermine such authority. Furthermore, this same authority, now deprived of the support of civil power, more than ever has need of being supported and surrounded by the splendor and strength of the Holy See.

Fortifying with new privileges detrimental to my jurisdiction the spirit of *independence,* and I might almost add, of *superiority* [6] that Don Bosco has shown during the past few years toward the Archbishop of Turin (a spirit that is taking root among his followers), would certainly increase the worries and troubles that daily assail me in this vast archdiocese. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars has proof of it in a letter that Don Bosco wrote to me on April 29, 1875, which I duly forwarded to the Sacred Congregation on October 17 of the same year, in consequence of which the Sacred Congregation most graciously wrote to me on November 30, 1875 *expressing sincere regret over the facts related in that letter.*[7]

While Don Bosco has deserved well of the Church and still does, I do not believe that I myself have been or am undeserving, so I do not see why privileges, which would be only so many punitive measures against me, should be granted to him.

The archiepiscopal authority of Turin—totally stripped of all civil dignity and of four-fifths of its revenue, reviled, derided, mocked, and insulted daily by almost all the Turin newspapers, and this because the Archbishop is steadfast in his loyalty to the Holy See and in his demands that the commandments of God and of the Church be obeyed—ought not to suffer further restriction because of Don Bosco. In his letters, conversation, and actions he has shown such hostility to me that one of the worst newspapers in Turin voiced its delight that Don Bosco had succeeded in being *the only priest capable of resisting* the Archbishop. If more privileges are to be granted to the Salesian Congregation here in Turin to the detriment of my jurisdiction, then one should at least

[6] Here, as elsewhere, the words in italics were underlined by the Archbishop in the originals we have in our possession.

[7] We have not yet been able to trace these letters.

await my demise that cannot be but a few years hence. Else, I should be given the opportunity to resign from this office, since I shall no longer be able to remain, should new difficulties arise.

May I request that Your Eminence refer this letter to the Sacred Congregation, in whose wisdom and justice I put my trust.

Kissing the sacred purple I am, in great deference,

Your humble and grateful servant,

✠ Lawrence, Archbishop of Turin

[The Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars added this note:] Please inform the summist of this letter and arrange another audience for me with His Holiness.

E. Sbarretti, Secretary

In commenting on this letter we can find nothing better than a few words said by Don Bosco to the Superiors of the Chapter on January 27, 1876, and recorded by Father Barberis: "The Archbishop of Turin is turning the whole of Rome topsy-turvy on our account. He seizes every occasion, both *opportune* and *importune* [in season and out of season—2 *Tim.* 4,2], to draft reports, well-founded or not, detrimental to our cause. I have never tried to say anything to clear myself, save when Rome requested explanations. The only thing I ever did in my own defense was contained in several confidential letters to the Archbishop, begging him to desist from such injustice. Believing that these letters constituted the *corpus delicti,* he sent them to Rome as fresh indictments; instead, they helped to clear me. When in Rome, I used to talk of my situation and furnished explanations, but as for answering [the accusations of the Archbishop by writing or speaking] directly to Rome in our defence—that I never did."

As to the Archbishop's suggestion to wait for either his demise or his resignation before granting further privileges, Don Bosco observed in 1881: "This would constitute a dilemma: if it is a good thing to grant more privileges to the Salesian Congregation, why

does he not wish it to be done now? If it is a bad thing, why does he ask that it be done only after his retirement or his death?" [8]

The summist, to whom the Secretary's footnote referred, thought that it would be prudent to heed the Archbishop, especially since he, in his letter, admitted that some privileges were necessary, though complaining that excessive indulgence might lead to new disagreements. He felt that the Ordinary should be considered because, even though he was somewhat harsh toward the newly founded Salesian Society, he had nonetheless set forth his reasons for doubting that episcopal jurisdiction would be safeguarded.

But the Ordinary was not yet satisfied with the letter of March 20. The next day he sent the Sacred Congregation a *Postulatum* [complaint] in which he repeated that he had not as yet been informed officially that the Salesian Society was *definitively approved,* and then deplored its habit of interfering in the discipline of the diocesan clergy, alleging, in proof of this statement, that the Society enrolled clerics who had been dismissed by the Archbishop as unfit for the priesthood, and [consequently] such behavior only made a mockery of his authority as Ordinary in the eyes of his seminarians. He appealed to the Sacred Congregation, asking that effective measures be taken to remedy the situation.[9]

The whole question of seminarians dismissed by the Archbishop and taken in by Don Bosco was limited to one single instance, which Father Rua presented clearly in a letter to the Ordinary: "When I got home yesterday evening, I made inquiries to find the student who was accepted by Don Bosco, as Your Excellency claims, to spite you. I discovered that indeed a young man from Vinovo had been accepted last fall, but I must point out that Don Bosco himself had no part at all in this. It was I, the undersigned, who admitted him. I saw he was not a cleric; I had no knowledge of his past life, but he had been recommended to me by someone who is thoroughly reliable. [Under the circumstances] I felt it was quite in order to enroll him and help him pursue the career to which he aspired. I was quite unaware that this might displease

[8] *Esposizione del sac. Giovanni Bosco agli Eminentissimi Cardinali della S. Congregazione del Concilio.* Sampierdarena Tipografia Salesiana, 1881. [Statement by the Rev. John Bosco to the Cardinals of the Sacred Congregation of the Council.]

[9] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 35.

your Excellency, to whom we wish only to render every service and never cause the slightest offense." [10]

In his impatience for an answer both to his letter and his complaint, the Archbishop wrote to Menghini, the summist, on April 2, asking him to inquire. "I must know, so that I can act accordingly," he wrote. "I intend to write to the Holy Father about this because Don Bosco is leaving for Rome tomorrow on this account." As we shall discover later, Don Bosco was really going to Rome on other business. Be that as it may, on April 10 the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation issued a written order asking that an extract be made from Don Bosco's petition of all that concerned the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, and that the list of privileges and faculties he sought be sent to the Archbishop of Turin, informing him that this constituted the request, and asking him to make any observations he deemed fit. We have no further details regarding this regrettable affair until May 5, when the Archbishop wrote to the summist Menghini, complaining that he had not yet received the information he had requested. It is helpful to read this letter in order to understand much better his attitude and frame of mind.[11] As for Don Bosco, he took advantage of his being in Rome possibly to settle his affairs.

Before ending this chapter we shall borrow the comforting words written to Don Bosco by Msgr. Fratejacci. We shall ever be grateful to him for having written them. "The sorrows you have endured up to now cannot last much longer," he wrote. *"Dabit Deus his quoque finem.* [God shall put an end to these also.] On the other hand, this was necessary, as is evident in all the great accomplishments of God's Servants, in order that Don Bosco's Institute could emerge and grow to bear abundant fruits of glory and honor for Church and Country. Under the burden and the onslaught of so much opposition from men in the early years of its existence it should have collapsed [in the past], and should still [in the present], but it did not and does not. It will then be manifest that this was not the work of man but of God; not a product of this world but of Heaven, and therefore may glory be given to God, *cui soli honor et gloria.* [He alone to whom honor and glory is due—Cf. *1 Tim.* 1, 17.] The

[10] Letter, December 30, 1875.
[11] *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *App., Doc.* 36.

hostility and hatred that were indeed gratuitous, to which the Psalmist refers, *odio habuerunt me gratis* [they have hated me without cause—*Ps.* 68, 5], are nothing less than characteristics peculiar to all works dear to God. . . . Your enemies should be afraid, and very much so; you yourself, you can be sure, have nothing, absolutely nothing to fear. What now looks like evil and ruin, will soon blossom into life and glory!" [12]

[12] Letter, December 5, 1875.

CHAPTER 22

Don Bosco Suspended from Hearing Confessions

DON BOSCO never stopped doing all he could on behalf of Archbishop Gastaldi, and even in his defense. In October he was visited by certain ill-intentioned men, who through hearsay imagined that he opposed the Archbishop. They showed him a slanderous biography of that Prelate and urged him to print it in his print shop, offering to pay the expenses with a substantial sum of money. Don Bosco feigned agreement and asked them to leave the manuscript with him for examination; it was more than a thousand pages long. Naturally, he flung it all into the fire. This incident drew their wrath upon him, and they tormented him for many years by blackmail. Yet, he not only never regretted what he had done, but always expressed his great satisfaction at having prevented such a serious scandal and thereby protected the honor of his Archbishop.

A little later he heard that a journalist had accepted payment to write a series of disgraceful articles against the Archbishop, intending to publish them in a very disreputable local newspaper. Don Bosco immediately did his best to obtain the articles and prevent their scheduled publication. He was successful, but at great cost; he had to agree to accept a son of that wretched journalist into the Oratory free of charge, and even had to give financial assistance to the father. But in view of what was at stake, he did both gladly.

These and similar incidents were very well-known to the Ordinary, but only vaguely by the public. This only makes more painful the task of the historian, who is now about to describe the deplorable incident of Don Bosco's suspension. Faithful to the truth,

we shall not write a single word that has not been confirmed by authentic documents and reliable testimony.

In March, 1875, Archbishop Gastaldi had signed the faculties for confession of Don Bosco and the priests of the Oratory. Father Cagliero called for them at the archiepiscopal Chancery some time in June but was told that they would be sent to the Oratory. "Why?" Father Cagliero wondered to himself. "I am here, the faculties have been signed, they could give them to me directly, and they want to take the trouble of sending them later. We have always called for them. There must be something behind all this!"

Toward the end of October, while Don Bosco was surrounded by his priests and clerics in the playground, a messenger from the Chancery appeared with a package in hand and said to Don Bosco, "I am glad to find you so soon; I have been instructed to give you this folder." But alert Father Cagliero realized at once that it contained the faculties for the confessors of the House, so he held out his hand, saying, "No, this is for me." The messenger handed everything to him. After Father Cagliero selected what concerned him, he told the messenger to deliver the rest to Father Rua. Spurred by curiosity, he went upstairs to his room, opened the envelope and found Don Bosco's faculties for confession on top. He scanned them and read that they were granted *for six months;* he then examined all the others—they were all granted *for one year*. This meant that faculties to hear confessions had expired in September only for Don Bosco. Father Cagliero shook with anger, but he controlled his feelings and did not say a word to anybody other than to Father Rua, to whom he confided what he knew, urging him to do something about it without letting Don Bosco hear of it. Then he left for [South] America.

Father Rua then sent Father Cibrario to the Chancery to talk with the Vicar General, Canon [Joseph] Zappata, who, on realizing what had happened, burst out, "No, no, they can't do this! This is done only to drunkards! Please tell Don Bosco that he may continue to hear confessions; I give him faculties." He said this because in those days the Archbishop was away from Turin, as we mentioned when speaking about a visit to him from the missionaries.

Father Rua was very distressed, but he said nothing of this odious measure until Don Bosco's return from his trip to Liguria with the

missionaries. Then he realized he could not prudently defer the issue any longer. Nevertheless the Christmas holidays were close at hand, and that meant that Don Bosco would be in very great demand as a confessor; if he were suddenly to cease hearing confessions without any plausible reason, a major scandal would result. Therefore, Father Rua still kept silent.

Meanwhile word had come from the Vicar General that Don Bosco was to report to the Archbishop. Father Rua went in his stead but realized at once that the Archbishop would not listen to reason.

"Why have you come instead of Don Bosco?" the Archbishop asked.

"Because Don Bosco knows nothing about the matter," Father Rua replied.

"I purposely sent a messenger," replied the Archbishop indignantly. "I told him he was to deliver the faculties for confession personally to Don Bosco and to no one else."

"Perhaps the messenger could not wait," Father Rua said, for he did not know what had happened, "so he must have handed the faculties to Don Bosco's secretary and then brought me other papers that he did not consider confidential."

The Archbishop then refused to sign Don Bosco's faculties.

Yet, some solution had to be found, but it was impossible to do so now without telling Don Bosco. On Christmas Eve Father Rua entrusted the matter to God and informed Don Bosco that his faculties to hear confessions had expired some time before.

Don Bosco waited for Christmas to pass. Then he wrote the Archbishop a letter such as only a saint can write. Just in these very days has the original come into our hands.

Turin, December 26, 1875

Your Excellency:

Not until Christmas Eve did Father Rua inform me that my faculties to hear confessions had expired in September. Since the sacristy was crowded with boarders and day-students waiting for confession, I felt that I might avail myself on this one occasion of a faculty granted me by the Holy Father, authorizing me to hear confessions anywhere, when faced by special circumstances. Today, however, I have stopped hearing

confessions, and tomorrow will leave Turin to avoid answering questions that are being raised about the truth of the matter.

I now beg you humbly to renew my faculties in order to avoid gossip and scandal. The measure you have taken presupposes a serious reason. Both as an ordinary priest and a Superior of a Congregation definitively approved by the Holy See, whose Superior I have been specifically named, I respectfully implore you to let me know the reason in order to be guided by it and make amends for any fault I may be guilty of. Should you prefer not to tell me, but to report the matter to Rome, may I humbly ask you once again to let me know [your choice] in order to free me from a predicament which, painful though it is for all, is far more so for the Superior of a Congregation that comprises so many Houses.

Whatever your answer will be, please address it to the Oratory; it will be forwarded at once to me wherever I may be staying.

In esteem and veneration, I am honored to be,

Your obedient servant,

Fr. John Bosco

He left for Borgo San Martino on December 27. Most probably he spent the following night there in prayer, for the cleric Nai, who was sent to tidy up his room the next morning, found that the bed had not been slept in. But neither Nai nor anyone else in the House had any inkling of this painful secret; indeed, Nai, who did not hear of it until some years later, still recalls very well how, during his stay, Don Bosco gave no sign at all of being upset but interviewed the confreres as usual, talking with them as though he did not have a single care in the world. As far as he was concerned, the young cleric found him calm and jovial, just as he had been on other occasions when he had spoken to him. Any change in Don Bosco's manner of acting would certainly have been noticed by his sons who knew his every habit.

The Director [Fr. John Bonetti], nevertheless, was informed of the situation. We who have been close to Father Bonetti also in critical moments and know his ardent spirit and forthright character, were not the least surprised when we discovered the documents we report below. They are two letters: one addressed to Cardinal Antonelli, Secretary of State; the other, to the Holy Father himself.

Borgo San Martino, December 28, 1875

Your Eminence:

The kindness you have shown me on several occasions again prompts me to come to you for a favor.

I respectfully beg you to be so kind as to give the enclosed letter to the Holy Father, in whom I must confide, and whose sovereign assistance I must implore.

Confident that you will do it, I thank you with all my heart. May Heaven grant you a happy ending of the present year and a good beginning of the new one. In great esteem and profound veneration, I am honored to remain,

Your humble, obedient servant,

Rev. John Bonetti
Director of the Minor Seminary at Borgo San Martino

Borgo San Martino, December 28, 1875

Holy Father:

Before anything else, forgive me, Your Holiness, if by this letter I only add to a heart already burdened with so much sorrow. I hope that you will forgive me, both because your heart is gracious and because I am a son who, in great distress, turns for comfort to the best of Fathers, that Supreme Moderator of the Salesian Congregation, to which it is my good fortune to belong.

Perhaps Your Holiness knows only too well the persecution to which my very good Superior, Father John Bosco, has been subjected for several years by the Most Rev. Lawrence Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin. I know very well how you have already tried to end this distressful situation through the mediation of very distinguished people. For this I am deeply grateful, but to our deep regret, the outcome has not corresponded to our hopes. In fact, it now seems as though that Prelate's wrath waxes greater every day: recently he even took the unjustifiable measure of suspending this worthy priest from hearing confessions in the archdiocese of Turin. Your Holiness, who knows so well my Superior's virtue, may easily realize that he is incapable of committing any offense so grave as to warrant a punishment usually given only to priests of scandalous conduct.

Poor Don Bosco suffers in patience and even with calmness; but naturally his health is affected, and his loving sons grieve when they see how badly his health is declining, his precious life fading.

Holy Father, you are the meekest and yet, when necessary, also the strongest of Popes. Since meekness has availed nothing until now, I pray that you prudently and equitably take more effective action to put an end to such a great evil. I implore this favor on the feast of the Holy Innocents and on the birthday of St. Francis de Sales, the glorious Patron of my Congregation.

Perhaps I am guilty of indiscretion in writing you this letter, Holy Father; but, apart from the fact that the Salesian Constitutions authorize the members of that Congregation to write to the Pope unbeknown even to their Superiors, I pray and hope that you will attribute such boldness to my grief of heart, to the tormenting fear of scandal and discouragement among my confreres, and to my most fervent gratitude to the incomparable Don Bosco to whom, after God, I owe everything. If it is my very happy lot to serve in the thinning ranks of your soldiers, I owe it to him who, twenty years ago, raised me from the dust, gave me shelter in his Institute, helped me to study, and trained me for the priesthood. To him I owe my position, for the past ten years, of Director of 200 young boys who attend this school every year, thanks to Divine Providence, and receive that blend of learning and religion which will enable them one day to become zealous priests or at least good Christians. All that I have learned and all that I am, I owe to him.

Holy Father, so great is my trust in you that even in my present affliction I still rejoice at the thought that you will soon grant this prayer, giving yet another proof of your sovereign benevolence towards the Salesian Congregation, which is proud to have you as Father and Protector.

May I take this timely opportunity to wish Your Holiness a happy ending to the old as well as a happy beginning of the New Year, together with all the graces your heart desires. May the day of triumph, the day of peace and serenity dawn soon for the Church, of which you are Ruler and Infallible Master.

Kneeling at the feet of Your Holiness, I am in deep reverence,

Your humble, devoted son,

Rev. John Bonetti
Director of the Minor Seminary
at Borgo San Martino

The Cardinal, who had already demonstrated on several occasions his sincere regard for Don Bosco, replied very promptly:

To the Rev. John Bonetti, Director of St. Charles Minor Seminary, Borgo San Martino

Rome, January 3, 1876

Without delay I handed to the Holy Father the letter you enclosed in your note to me of December 28.

In informing you of the above, may I thank you for your New Year's wishes and extend the same wishes for your every good.

Your Servant,

James [Cardinal] Antonelli

In such dire necessity Don Bosco could not forget his eminent Protector, Cardinal Berardi. In fact, as soon as he received the unfortunate announcement he informed the Cardinal of it and asked him to send him from Rome unqualified faculties for confession. The unqualified faculties granted to him orally by the Pope satisfied his conscience, but were useless in the external forum. The Cardinal responded immediately with lofty words of comfort. "Your kind letter of December 25 arrived late yesterday evening; without a doubt the contents were both unexpected and astounding. At the same time I was filled with sadness to see that nothing can be done to placate this Ordinary. It is most unlikely that we may continue peacefully. In view of this, I would have come back this morning to speak with the Holy Father even though I saw him only yesterday, but I refrained, realizing that His Holiness would hardly come to any decision without first hearing this Ordinary's reasons for taking such a grave step. In spite of this I shall mention it to him in passing during my next audience with him on Saturday, and shall let you know the outcome, if need be. Meanwhile, be of good heart, do not be disheartened by these regrettable incidents, because it is obvious that God wishes to test you, and certainly *crescit in adversis virtus* [virtue grows under adversity]." [1]

[1] Letter of December 28, 1875.

In all this, it is gratifying to know that the person responsible for this measure was not insensitive to Don Bosco's humility. He undoubtedly realized his blunder because he had his secretary write the following note to Don Bosco:

Turin, December 27, 1875

Dear Reverend Father:

His Excellency, the Archbishop, instructs me to acknowledge your letter of December 26 and to advise you that your faculties for confession are still valid. He also adds that these faculties would never have expired, had you done at the proper time what is customary in such instances.

I am, with reverence,

Your devoted servant,

Canon Chiuso, Secretary

Two days later the Archbishop had another note sent to Father Rua advising him "to come to the Chancery as soon as you can, bringing Don Bosco's faculties for confession with you," certainly to validate them.

At this point we must ask: What did the Archbishop mean by the phrase, "had you done at the proper time what is customary in such instances"? To what "instances" did he allude—the presentation of faculties to the Chancery for revalidation or instances of guilt? Therefore did he want to rebuke Don Bosco and hold him responsible for the trouble because he had not called for the faculties sooner, or because he had not sooner acknowledged some—we know not what—fault and made amends for it? A mystery!

Father Rua reported to His Excellency on the evening of December 29, and the following day sent him a written report of what he had not been able to explain during their interview. He seized this opportunity to voice his own feelings. "I am very much saddened at the split that apparently exists between Your Excellency and our Congregation, especially its Founder. I am convinced that the many reasons which prompt Your Excellency to think so unfavorably of us, as though we disobey and offend you, would

vanish completely if Your Excellency would but listen to an accurate report on these things. Please forgive me if, in talking or in writing, I have inadvertently said anything less respectful. Naturally, it distresses me deeply whenever I hear people speak unfavorably of our beloved Superior. As much as I can in my own insignificance, I rise up in his defense when I see or think I see that something has not been sufficiently understood. I have been at his side for so many years; everyone can see how much good he does and how our Lord blesses his works. I also see how even the things most unlikely to succeed reach a successful conclusion when he has a hand in them. I cannot but be convinced that our Lord did indeed grant him *the grace of state;* by this I mean that, having destined him to perform certain works decreed by Providence, God is generous in the assistance He gives him so that he may succeed, even though now and then, as was the lot of other holy Founders, he comes into conflict with people who are in every way worthy of esteem. I say this because yesterday I ventured to defend him somewhat heatedly; but, as I already said, I humbly beg you to forgive me if I spoke irreverently, and I hope that in your goodness you will not hold it against me." This is language worthy of a saint who, without severing justice from charity, rises up to defend another saint in a very sensitive matter. Now compare this straightforward manner of talking with the opinions expressed by the Ordinary and reported on page 281.

Now that the measure taken against him had been revoked, Don Bosco felt duty-bound to inform Cardinal Berardi of it without delay. The Cardinal replied immediately, sending him limited faculties for hearing confessions because faculties for reserved cases were not usually granted from Rome.

Rome, January 3, 1876

Dear Father:

Not until yesterday evening did I receive your other welcome letter of December 29 which brought me the joyful news that the measure taken against you has now been revoked. This announcement gave me great pleasure and, consequently, I have ceased any further action in this matter. Let me know immediately if you wish me to do otherwise and

I shall act without delay. In such a case, I would need a more detailed and exact account.

In the meantime extreme caution and reserve are necessary. If I shall have the pleasure of seeing you here again, I shall open my heart to you in regard to this matter. In fact, I do not think it wise to entrust to the mail, which at times is not very reliable, the things I have to tell you. With this understanding, I beg you to remember me and mine in your prayers. I remain, in great esteem,

Your devoted servant,

Joseph [Cardinal] Berardi

As far as Don Bosco was concerned the incident was closed, so definitively closed that in his previously reported *Statement* to the Sacred Congregation of the Council, it was not even mentioned, since he plainly considered it purely a personal matter.

"Utterly ridiculous," Msgr. Fratejacci commented in his lively way, when he heard all about it from Cardinal Berardi. The following note written by the good canon will raise the reader's spirits. "You should laugh over this suspension," he wrote to Don Bosco. "Even the Apostle of Rome, St. Philip Neri, was suspended *pro tempore* [for a time] by the Cardinal Vicar! He received the notification with biretta in hand and said: 'Good; now people will know what a rascal I am. All respected me because they did not know me; now everyone will realize what a villain Father Philip is!' These lights and darks in a man's life marvelously bring out his virtue. It is the shadows that bring into better relief the background for the subjects in the paintings of famous masters." [2]

Truly, Don Bosco was not accustomed to laugh at such things, nor did St. Philip Neri's ways, so strikingly his, fit Don Bosco's personality. Grace perfects, but does not suppress nature; there are in men accidental qualities which are responsible for the different *formae mentis* [forms of mind] and *formae sanctitatis* [forms of holiness]. Far from laughing it off, in a report to be sent Cardinal Ferrieri, Pro-Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, which we shall see in Volume XII, Don Bosco wrote of this suspension and complained, above all, that even after almost

[2] Letter of January 9, 1876.

one year he still did not know the reason for it. Now, living and reliable witnesses tell us that what troubled him most was the possibility of some calumnious denunciation in matters of morals.

Word of what had happened had already gone the rounds of ecclesiastic circles in Piedmont. In fact, on January 30 the Bishop of Susa called on Don Bosco to find out about it and console himself, as he said, that he was not the only one subject to persecution.

Little by little even the higher Superiors of the Congregation heard of this latest act of hostility. Therefore at their annual conference in 1876 on the feast of St. Francis [de Sales] the Directors asked Don Bosco about it outside the meeting. Among other things, he replied, "What can be done? . . . In Rome they fear that some excess . . . Rome does not want to push him to anything rash; neither do I, or anyone else. It is far better that we suffer a little, bow our heads and keep our peace." To suffer, to bow one's head and to keep peace: three shining words in the gloom of sad events.

In this, too, we have yet another proof that Providence had sent Don Bosco to fulfill an extraordinary mission in this world. St. John of the Cross writes: "God endows the heads of religious communities with treasures and splendors of grace proportionate to the mission entrusted to their spiritual posterity, summoned to inherit their doctrine and spirit." [3] Now, in the course of time, Don Bosco's spiritual children were to win many souls for God. That is why the Lord endowed him with the treasures of His grace and enabled him to advance in perfection through grave tribulations that led him to the highest degree of sanctity, and helped his Congregation spread far and wide, always imbued with his spirit.

[3] *La fiamma viva dell'amore,* c. 2, Milano, Lega Eucaristica.

CHAPTER 23

A Hostile Press

CERTAIN newspapers, now defunct, certainly do not merit the renown of Erostratus.[1] Nevertheless, since their infamous calumnies, far from tarnishing Don Bosco's reputation actually make it shine all the more, it will not be out of place here to call them to account, nail them down, and brand them as calumniators.

Pulce, a scandal sheet that was inexplicably permitted to hurl the most atrocious insults with impunity at the city's most honorable citizens, was the first newspaper to attack Don Bosco. The Sunday edition (January 17, 1873, No. 5) was the *ne plus ultra* of virulence and impudence. Its abusive language was the kind usually heard only from the coarse lips of an enraged shrew.

The article was entitled "The Vulture of Valdocco." The characteristics of this king of all birds of prey had been picked from the works of three zoologists and provided the main features for a physical and moral profile of Don Bosco that should relegate him to the category of the so-called born criminal. The biography was a sacrilegious caricature. The reason for writing such an article became apparent in the closing lines: "Instead of the miracles of Don Bosco, the law courts will soon have to look into a *theft* committed by him: he has purloined an inheritance of nearly half a million lire from doddering old Count Belletrutti, who has left nothing at all to his *surviving son!*" Apparently such vitriolic words had their malig-

[1] Erostratus, Ephesian incendiary. To perpetuate his name as the destroyer of one of the seven wonders of the world he set fire to the magnificent temple of Artemis (Diana), at Ephesus, on the night Alexander the Great was born (356 B.C.). The indignant Ephesians decreed that whoever pronounced his name would be put to death, a sure means of insuring his fame. [Encyclopedia Americana]

nant effects. Judging by a document found in our archives, it appears that even as recently as 1918, some scrupulous conscience felt obliged to make this same accusation before someone of high authority, albeit in somewhat milder terms, though the basic sentiment was the same. This in itself is more than sufficient cause for history to put matters right.

General Count Philip Belletrutti di San Biagio died on September 17, 1873, designating Don Bosco as his only heir and executor of his will, "in order," read the will, written in his own hand, "to help him in his many works of charity on behalf of poor and homeless boys."

When the content of the Count's will was known, an illegitimate son of the deceased, Joseph Philip Proton, and two of the Count's nephews contested it as the next of kin. They tried to insinuate that Don Bosco had duped the old man, and therefore Don Bosco should be declared ineligible for the inheritance, on the grounds that in the will "he was named as the head of an Institute that could not inherit."

The Turin law courts pronounced an interlocutory sentence on April 17, 1874, whereupon Don Bosco appealed. The two nephews then turned against the dead Count's illegitimate son and proposed a friendly settlement or arrangement to Don Bosco. There is no doubt that these two men were no more entitled to the inheritance than the illegitimate son, but besides several legacies of which they and Proton were the beneficiaries, the testament also listed a great many legacies to churches and religious Institutes, so Don Bosco felt that a settlement would be the lesser of two evils.

As soon as Proton heard of this he began to insult Don Bosco in public. We must note also that Proton had reached a court agreement with Count Belletrutti on September 29, 1862, under which he acknowledged that he was not entitled to use the Count's name as he had been doing until then, and that nothing else was due him than his bare maintenance. When this wretch met Don Bosco on October 10, 1874 on the Corso San Maurizio, he assailed him with so many insults and threats that some cavalrymen, who happened to be passing by, ran up to restrain him. Don Bosco who had remained unperturbed, went calmly on his way.

At this point we are happy to quote a forceful and authoritative

remark of Archbishop Gastaldi. At Strambino, where one of the nephews lived, the controversy over the Belletrutti inheritance had become so well known that Father Oglietti, the parish priest, wrote to the Archbishop about it and received the following reply: "The people you mention in your last letter as suing Count Belletrutti's testamentary heir, are totally wrong. They sin against commutative justice, and will have to render account to God of the money being spent, which only diminishes the value of the inheritance. I know all the pros and cons of this affair, and I assure you once more that they are wrong. By this I do not mean that you are to deny them sacramental absolution, because possibly they are following the advice of some ecclesiastic who has a reputation for wisdom and zeal, and therefore believe themselves to be in good faith. But their spiritual director or their parish priest, both in the confessional and elsewhere, may and should warn them of the injustice they are committing." [2]

Don Bosco thought it wiser to agree to a settlement because "a law suit would involve serious risks," so stated the memorandum submitted. The settlement was signed on January 10, 1875, and left all costs for the litigation with Proton entirely to his charge.

But there was no litigation with Proton after all. He acknowledged his wrongdoing and begged pardon of Don Bosco, who helped him in every way he could. Later Father Rua found him a job that would provide for his needs at the Montmartre Basilica of the Sacred Heart in Paris. In our archives we have a letter he wrote to Father Rua on May 26, 1890. It is a very warm letter, in which he addresses Father Rua as his dear Father and Benefactor, stating that he feels proud and happy to address him as such, adding, "It is a genuine relief to my poor heart, which has suffered so much in having missed the love of a father and mother, to have found a true father and powerful protector in you. A thousand blessings on you!"

La Nuova Torino was another paper that attacked Don Bosco that year. Its masthead carried the title "Industry Newspaper," but its columns were pervaded with anticlerical frenzy. The following article printed in the Saturday issue of March 6, No. 65, protested

[2] Letter, November 26. 1874.

the construction of the church of St. John the Evangelist, in words and style befitting the nature of the attack:

DON BOSCO AND THE PROTESTANTS

The Rev. John Bosco who has the honor to converse with the Almighty once a month, and who is forever annoying people with new requests for contributions, has decided to build all the churches he dreams about all over Turin. A new church goes up every moment under his auspices; this would not be so bad if they were works of art, built with his own funds, without hurting other people; but what happens is precisely the opposite. Indignant that Turin should have a Protestant church, this humble servant of God, who already has a few churches of his own under construction, is now thinking of building another right near the Protestant church, and by dint of intrigue here and there has succeeded—we are loath to say it—in obtaining a decree of expropriation for public purposes against a Protestant landowner who lives in that area.

Are there no other sites for churches to be built? Is it wise to build two churches of different denominations side by side? Was there any justice in what we have described? In the year of grace 1875 it is only in Turin, where the black sect is still predominant, that one can obtain decrees of expropriation against a Protestant in favor of a meddling priest.

Vituperari ab iniquis laudari est. [To be censured by enemies is to be praised.] Let us look briefly into the story of this controversy, without dwelling on matters that belong in the tenth volume.

Just as construction was about to start, it was found that unless another strip of land were added to that already bought, architectural harmony would be impaired, because it would be impossible for the façade to face Viale del Re, now called Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. The strip of land needed belonged to a Protestant. The sale had already been arranged when some Waldensian clergymen heard of it, and promised to compensate the owner if he withdrew from the deal. When this man appeared with Don Bosco to sign the contract before the notary, he refused to accept the terms already stipulated, and demanded a sum of 135 thousand lire for only 350 square meters of land. This exorbitant demand was for

the sole purpose of obtaining the annulment of the contract according to the wishes of the Waldensian ministers.

Don Bosco was undismayed. He filed a petition with the government requesting that the church be declared a public work. The Ministry referred the matter to the Prefecture which in turn passed it on to the municipal authorities. They returned a negative answer, affirming that the Waldensian church was sufficient for religious needs. The matter was then referred to the Council of State, but neither was the atmosphere propitious there. The Minister for Public Works, Silvio Spaventa, assured both the Prefecture and the municipal authorities of Turin that he would never pronounce a favorable verdict. Marquis della Venaria did everything he could to persuade the Councillors to champion the good cause. When the time came for a final decision, everyone expected the application to be rejected, but oddly enough the verdict was given in favor of Don Bosco. The church of St. John the Evangelist was thus declared a public work; the expropriation of that much discussed strip of land was consequently enforced. The contract was drawn up; but it was two years before it was submitted to the King for his signature, and Don Bosco had to intervene in person.

When he went to Rome in February, 1875, he set in motion through the Minister of State, Vigliani, the search for the document, which was finally signed by the King. But the vicissitudes of this decree were not yet over. Three months elapsed after it had been sent to Turin and still no one had contacted Don Bosco, who had been assured by a friend that it had been forwarded. After a long, useless wait, he called on the Prefect of the province, asking that the decree be made public. The Prefect told him it had not yet arrived.

"Yet I know from a reliable source that it has been sent," said Don Bosco.

"Who told you?"

"I am sorry, but I cannot tell you, but please check and you will find that the decree is already here."

The Prefect summoned his secretary, who denied that the decree had ever arrived at the Prefecture. Don Bosco insisted, obviously certain of his facts. Now that he was cornered, the secretary said he would go and search among his papers. Whether he searched or

not, he nevertheless returned with the decree, saying, "Here it is; it really did arrive, but it was underneath the sandbox and I did not notice it."

At last the decree was made public, enabling the parties concerned to file any eventual claim they might have. But new setbacks arose because of a large pile of building stone on the land being expropriated: its owners demanded another exorbitant sum of money to remove it. Experts were called to make an on-the-spot appraisal. They estimated the land value and removal of the stone to be 22,500 lire.

We will end this story by relating now a later development. Some time after this, Don Bosco wished to buy the remaining plot of land on which the same owner had a small house in order to round off the site. In this way he could have enlarged the Hospice and provide room for the *Sons of Mary*. He offered to pay double the value of the land. The owner agreed and his family was also satisfied with the proposal, but the Waldensians were not, and so they urged the landowner to raise his price. Don Bosco would have been ready to make any sacrifice, but could not overcome the ill-will of the others. The first time the two parties were to meet in the notary's office, the owner did not appear; summoned a second time, he made such high demands that Vigna, the civil engineer, who was representing Don Bosco, lost his temper and tore up the draft of the contract, shouting: "You're only making fun of us!" Yet, in the meantime the church was being built in spite of the Waldensians.

The ultra-liberal newspaper *Opinione,* official organ of the party then in power, also became interested in Don Bosco. First published in Florence in 1859, and later in Rome after the breakthrough at Porta Pia, it became one of the most influential daily papers of the time in political circles. It did attack Don Bosco maliciously and in a manner that rather compromised him. Suffice it to say that it stepped into the controversy between Don Bosco and the Archbishop of Turin, but not exactly to side with the latter. The Tuesday edition (October 5, No. 271) carried a news item from a Turin correspondent entitled "Clerical Discord." It said some very true and complimentary things about Don Bosco: "This pious, indefatigable priest is founding and maintaining schools, hospices and institutes in many dioceses of Piedmont and Liguria. His fame is so

great that he is already known across the Atlantic in the remotest parts of South America. In fact, in that part of the world . . . Don Bosco has been asked to found two Catholic educational institutes with a regular curriculum and teaching staff. Don Bosco has accepted the commitment, which at the time of writing has already been fulfilled to a large extent."

Then because of the eclectic or rather the confused spirit of agnosticism, characteristic of Liberals, [the correspondent says that] "the piety and hard work of the Turin priest and the marvelous results already derived therefrom remind" him of a leader of the German Pietists. He then sings his praises and infers "that the Turinese Catholic priest of the 19th century did not intend to be second to" the Protestant Franke of the 17th century, and admits that "to a certain extent, he has succeeded." In fact, "without any money of his own, without official backing, this priest of Turin has built churches, opened schools, founded hospices, seminaries, and schools, thanks only to private contributions. The church, hospice and school at Valdocco, alone cost well over a million lire. I was told that as many as 8,000 pupils attend Don Bosco's schools and institutes. Perhaps this figure is somewhat exaggerated, but it is certain that the total number of pupils is indeed exceptional. Nor has Don Bosco come to the end of his career."

The correspondent was under no illusion that Don Bosco was one of those liberal priests—actually very few—who were extolled by the Liberals, and made use of as valuable supporters in the Liberal Party's secret and implacable war against the Pope. "It is needless to stress," he continues, "that in this commendable battle he wages against poverty and ignorance, this pious priest is dedicated, above all, to the defense and propagation of the Catholic Faith." In proof of this statement, he cited his latest undertaking, "the foundation of a special seminary, which is to train suitable ministers for the Catholic Church"—an allusion to the *Sons of Mary Project*.

But his standpoint was a purely Liberal one, and he was delighted to see that among the clergy there was someone who adapted himself to the new laws that violated ecclesiastical freedom. Don Bosco on the other hand operated from a very different standpoint, for he attempted to extract what was good out of something

that was bad, instead of spending his energy in futile battle, pitting himself against overwhelming opposition that would have damaged even more the conditions of religious life in Italy. "Endowed with great common sense and free of vain aspirations, Don Bosco does not view the conscription law as a passing cloud that will be dissipated by the slightest clerical puff in the near future. That is why the purpose of his seminary is to provide for the special conditions this law has created for the Catholic clergy. The seminary is to be open to those who wish to become priests or enter the religious life, after having fulfilled their obligation to the fatherland in their military service. The Roman Curia has commended Don Bosco's project very highly with a special Brief."

In the end, the correspondent carries grist to his own mill by calling on Liberals "not to lose sight of the progress these clericals are making in that most important sphere of social life, the education of youth, their manifest boldness and perseverance, and the extraordinary means they have at their disposal." The words "not to lose sight of" in a newspaper controlled by the Party then in power, was a euphemism that needs no comment for its inner meaning. The remark that follows seems not to warrant any sinister interpretation, but reveals, instead, the correspondent's good sense and not the spirit influencing his Party in the relations between Church and State. "The Liberal Party should and does reject much of the teachings now imparted in Don Bosco's schools and institutes. Yet his piety and diligence are worthy of admiration, and Liberals would be wise to imitate him in the interests of civilization, knowledge and reason."

If this were all, we might close an eye; but the worst of it was that, while praising Don Bosco, the Turin correspondent heatedly attacked the Archbishop of Turin, describing him as a despotic tyrant, who "rules his diocese with hard and absolute power . . . All the priests . . . must bow down before his every wish. One priest alone has won emancipation from his control—the Rev. John Bosco. This is a thorn . . . in the side of Archbishop Gastaldi and gives him no peace."

Then, plunging into the thick of the old and recent controversy, he describes the Ordinary on the one hand as absolutely opposed both to "exemption from episcopal authority and jurisdiction," and

to the *Sons of Mary Project*. On the other hand, he refers to Don Bosco as "a little bishop in his own domain," wielding an authority which is "not confined within the walls of Turin," but which is very great "even in Rome, with the Pope, many Cardinals, and other Prelates," and who is ever in search of "places and Prelates more favorable to the realization of his project."

Don Bosco deplored the fact that this unfortunate controversy should now provide subject matter for articles in newspapers of this kind. The enemies of the Ordinary who gleaned details at the Curia were those who secretly passed them on to reporters, as we shall see in later years. In writing to Cardinal Bizzarri about a newspaper that took delight in the fact that "Don Bosco was the only priest capable of withstanding the Archbishop," [3] the latter alluded to an unfortunate remark in the aforementioned article. We prefer to believe that he did not do Don Bosco the injustice of doubting that he had been the first to deplore bitterly such a false statement that wounded him in his most personal feelings.

Little more than a week had elapsed when a humorous journal of Turin, called *Fischietto,* which not only mocked everything but thumbed its nose at everybody, now chimed in with a column entitled "Current Items." This consisted of puns, insults and even remarks bordering on outright libel, such as "testament snatching at the bedside of the dying." Who could estimate the number of people in Turin who read the shameful calumny contained in the issue of Thursday, October 14? We are all too well aware how large a circulation satirical newspapers have in big cities, and how strong an influence they wield among the lower and upper classes of people. It is therefore all the more disgusting to find Don Bosco's spotless name dragged ignominiously in the mud.

But in the church
With saints and in the tavern with the gluttons.[4]

This journalistic rabble attacked him and his undertakings from time to time, but it never upset Don Bosco. He deemed it wiser to

[3] Trusting to memory, he mistook the name of the newspaper. It was not a Turin newspaper that had written the article, but *Opinione* of Rome (pages 444 and 465).

[4] Dante's *Inferno,* XXII 14-5. [Translation by Henry W. Longfellow.]

allow such hounds to bay at the moon, though he also pitied them. When someone wanted to retort he forbade him, saying only: "Come, come, be patient, this too will pass! These good people are angry with Don Bosco who only tries to do good. Are we to permit souls to be lost? They are unwittingly opposing the work of God. He will know how to thwart their plans!" [5]

[5] *Positio super introd. causae, Summarium,* page 533, § 70.

CHAPTER 24

Extraordinary Events

DON BOSCO's life was continuously interwoven with events of a supernatural character. We have only a few references to incidents of this nature for the year 1875; we shall relate these now, although we have reason to believe that there were many more of which record has been lost. Of course, we accept these stories with the simple credence usually given to accounts based on the evidence of reliable persons.

On March 27 a boy named Salvatore Pagani of San Giorgio Lomellina died at the Oratory. He was a pupil of the cleric [Moses] Veronesi, who taught first year high school. Don Bosco had announced that somebody would die by the next Exercise for a Happy Death. It was the last day of the carnival season, and it was snowing. Pagani came out of the church and took his roll and slice of salami [the usual treat] on the occasion of the Exercise for a Happy Death which had been scheduled for this day. Barely a few hours later he felt sick. A telegram was sent to his father who arrived in the evening, but the boy was already dead. Father Bernard Vacchina [then a boy] witnessed both the prediction and its fulfillment.

As Don Bosco was leaving Turin to accompany the missionaries to Genoa, a certain Signor Cerrato of Asti, who had come to Turin just to be present at the farewell ceremony, joined him in his train compartment. Cerrato was a very devout old man, a generous benefactor of the Oratory. Inspired by love of God, he had founded in his home town a *Piccola Casa* [Little Home] similar to Cottolengo's in its early stages. But he needed some nuns to carry on the work. He had talked the matter over two days before with the Sisters of St. Anne in Piacenza, who had seemed willing, though

nothing definite had been concluded. While he was in Turin, he had gotten an introductory letter from Don Bosco, and had called on the Superior of the *Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza* [the Little Home of Divine Providence] Father [Louis] Anglesio, to ask him whether he could have a few of his nuns. The Superior had said a few kind words to him and he had left, but that was all. He was already seated in the compartment of the train on his way home to Asti, and the train had already whistled its departure, when Don Bosco suddenly said to him: "Get off, get off the train. Go back, and try to talk to Father Anglesio again. Settle this thing." Cerrato got off the train obediently. His foot barely touched the ground before the train began to move. He had not even left the station when he bumped into a man who was looking for him, to deliver a note from Father Anglesio, worded as follows, "Come and see me, perhaps we can come to a quick agreement on the things we discussed." He called at the Cottolengo that same evening, although it was by then 9 o'clock; the whole thing was settled in the twinkling of an eye. Anyone in Cerrato's place would certainly have attributed Don Bosco's exclamation to a supernatural inspiration. He was more certain of it than anybody else.

Father Valentine Cassinis was one of the missionaries. He was very unhappy on the day of departure and was sitting all alone in a corner of the Oratory. Passing by, Don Bosco asked what the matter was. "I am unhappy because I have to leave Don Bosco and shall never see him again," he replied.

Don Bosco comforted him, saying, "Don't worry, dear Cassinis, we shall meet again. I assure you we shall."

"You are only saying that to cheer me up. You will not come to [South] America, and I shall probably never return to Italy."

"Rest assured, we shall meet again before we die. Don Bosco gives you his word for it!"

Father Rua was a witness to this conversation.

Father Cassinis confidently departed. He remained in [South] America twelve years, until Bishop Cagliero decided to take him along on a trip to Italy in 1887, although Father Cassinis had not asked to go; in fact, he was quite amazed by this turn of events.

When he had gotten over his initial excitement at being back in Turin, Don Bosco was the first to remind him, on the day after the

Immaculate Conception, "Did I not tell you that we would meet again before we die?" Father Cassinis no longer recalled their conversation. Then he remembered, kissed Don Bosco's hand, and quietly wept.

Don Bosco's gift of prophecy was revealed again on another unusual occasion. Constance Cardetti, a girl of fifteen, was under constant threat to her virtue from someone living in the same house: her own stepfather. By the grace of God she had always repulsed his advances, but she could not escape from the danger of her environment. She told her confessor her problem, and he ordered her to tell her mother. The mother listened in silence and then came straight to Turin to ask Don Bosco's advice. This occurred in 1875. Don Bosco gave her a medal of Mary Help of Christians and said, "Give your daughter this medal to wear about her neck. Our Lady will not grant her the grace of being rid of that person for two more years. But she will grant her the far greater grace of protection so that no harm will come to her."

The good mother, reassured by his words, returned home, gave the medal to the girl, and told her what Don Bosco had said.

Although she continued to be harassed by danger, at times seriously, the girl found almost miraculous strength to elude his advances for two years. Then, two years and a week later, on the feast of the Assumption, she was sent to work at a permanent job in a village twelve miles from her home, by the very same person [her stepfather] who had used his authority over her and had never before allowed her to stay away from home.

Without waiting to be told twice the young girl, thanking our Lady, hastily left for her new place of work and never again returned home. Sometime later she took her vows in the convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph at Cuneo, and was still there in 1903. She was always willing to confirm these facts under oath.

Don Bosco not only foretold future events, he could also read the secret thoughts of others. The two incidents related below both occurred in 1875.

One day Father Carpignano, a spiritual son of St. Philip Neri, sent Father [Maurilius] Mandillo, the rector of Bertolla,[1] a small

[1] This locality was known until quite recently as "Berthoulla."

village near Turin, to ask a confidential favor of Don Bosco. The priest usually frequented the church of St. Philip Neri and had never seen Don Bosco. As he was walking along the road toward the Oratory, he came upon Don Bosco, who approached him, and without giving him a chance to open his mouth, greeted him by name, saying, "Father Carpignano sent you to me to ask me this and that. You may tell him that things are so and so." He then said goodbye and went off, leaving him dumbfounded, for no one in the world could possibly have told Don Bosco what it was he had come to ask him.

This same rector of Bertolla also gave us the following report. The Superior of the Sisters of Charity in Turin was confined to bed with a bad sore on her leg. Two of her nuns had visited the church of Mary Help of Christians to pray to our Lady for her. They met Don Bosco in the square outside the church. He came over to them, told them why they were there, adding that their Superior would recover and live for many years. She was still alive in 1902.[2]

Peter Cornelio, a robust old man of Borgo San Martino, remembered the following incident to the day of his death and never tired of repeating his story, which he always ended with the same phrase: "This is true, as true as my baptism."

The incident in question occurred in 1875. Don Bosco was walking through the village with the parish priest one day, and a number of people came out of their houses to see him. He passed near a poor woman who begged him in pitiful tones to bless her. For the past two years her legs had been stiff with paralysis, and she had asked someone to bring her there in the hope that Don Bosco would cure her. Don Bosco took pity on her after hearing her story and blessed her, saying: "You will go to Mass on Sunday." The following Sunday she was able to walk alone and go to church. She was perfectly cured.[3]

We should mention here an exceptional grace obtained sometime before 1875, though it was not revealed until that year. A little boy, Eugene Ricci, son of Baron des Ferres, trying to jump over

[2] Father Mandillo is still alive [as of 1930] and resides at Cava dei Tirreni, where he enjoys an excellent reputation because of his priestly zeal and life.

[3] *Al Beato Don Bosco.* Omaggio del Collegio di Borgo S. Martino, Casale Monferrato, Unione Tipografica Popolare, 1930, p. 26.

a small ditch while playing with his brother Charles and a cousin, slipped, fell and broke his leg. Don Bosco liked the devout little fellow who loved him in turn, so he went to see him, much to the boy's delight. In the words of the Jesuit who tells the story, but whose name we do not know, Don Bosco, with "that gentle, humble, yet venerable expression that delighted and won all hearts" told the lad, "How I wish you had broken the other leg as well, my dear boy!"

"What do you mean, Don Bosco?"

"Then you could better appreciate the power our Lady has to cure you," the man of God replied calmly. "Come now, be brave, put your hope in our Blessed Mother. By the end of the month you will be able to set out for your trip."

This was literally true, for Eugene was supposed to go to Paris to St. Genevieve's boarding school.[4]

The boy's brother, Baron Charles, completed the story of the Jesuit by telling how, immediately after his brother's fall, the doctors had been very much afraid that they would have to amputate the leg. Don Bosco was immediately informed of this by letter, but did not come to see the boy until four or five days later. Charles also said that after receiving his blessing, his brother experienced a wonderful relief, and almost at once or shortly afterward, was able to leave his bed.

Our Lord blessed His servant with extraordinary powers to help him further His own divine glory and ensure the salvation of souls. These powers also revealed his great holiness to others. Yet, notwithstanding this, the aura of sanctity that surrounded him came primarily from the many virtues which so brilliantly shone in him at all times and in all places.

[4] *Vita di Eugenio Ricci della Compagnia di Gesù,* scritta da un padre della medesima Compagnia, Speirani, Torino, 1875.

CHAPTER 25

The End of the Year

THE last month of the year brings us back to the Oratory once again, where, in the intimacy of domestic peace we conclude our account of the many events that have often led us far afield. The beginning of this month had been brightened by the safe arrival of the missionaries [1] at their destination, as well as by the favorable effect of this mission both in and out of the Oratory, but at its close the incident of Don Bosco's suspension had caused a particular sadness. We do not have very many things to tell, but to make up for this our beloved Father will speak to us at length in words which, even after half a century, still sound welcome and timely to our ears.

The novices no longer participated in all the practices of piety of the community as they were isolated now from the rest of the House, and under the direct control of their own Superiors. They could therefore no longer be present at Don Bosco's public talks. On the other hand they could not do without the special instructions that Don Bosco used to give expressly to them in order to mold them carefully in the Salesian spirit. Don Bosco therefore went to speak to the novices for the first time on December 13. He explained to them what to do when in doubt, and suggested various ways to safeguard their vocation. Father Julius Barberis, then Novice Master, has preserved this talk for us in the following form:

This is the first time I have come to talk to you. I am glad to be able to do so now and then, and am happy to see all the novices only

[1] Four letters giving details about their arrival in the Argentinian capital are reported in the Appendix of the *Memorie Biografiche,* Vol. XI, *Doc.* 37.

of the Oratory gathered about me. This enables me to say a few words especially suited to you.

What should I say to you this evening? I shall simply select a few things that I feel are important for you to know, and I will say them without going into any digressions or trying to deliver a carefully planned sermon.

I shall take my inspiration from this morning's Gospel. As I read the Gospel during Mass this morning, I reflected for a moment over these words: *Simile est regnum Dei homini negotiatori quaerenti bonas margaritas et inventa una pretiosa, vadit, vendit omnia quae habet et emit agrum illum.* The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls. When he finds a single pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it. [*Matt.* 13, 44]

Now what can this pearl of great price be? This precious pearl has many meanings. Generally, it can be understood as virtue. What more precious pearl could we possess? Many people see in this precious pearl faith, for when somebody finds faith he is indeed fortunate because with it he can attain the kingdom of God. For you this precious pearl is the education that you have already received in abundance or can still receive, be it literary or religious. Not everybody is so fortunate to learn so many useful things that will last a lifetime.

Yet, when I talk with boys, I find that they could not look for a more precious pearl than a thorough knowledge of what their vocation is. Yes, a vocation to the priesthood or the religious life, I think, is so precious a pearl that nothing else can compare with it. But remember that when we speak of going in search of a precious pearl, it does not mean that we are to discard all the others. It only means that this pearl is of such great value that we must hunt for it with great diligence because with it we shall find many others. It is never alone; other virtues are drawn to it. We may really apply to this pearl what the Scriptures say: *Venerunt mihi omnia bona pariter cum illa.* [All good things together came to me in her company—*Wisd.* 7, 11.]

When a young boy is about to decide on his vocation, he finds himself faced with a thousand worldly allurements. How many things come to the mind of a boy at this age. He would like to have a good time; he thirsts for glory, wants to pursue a literary career, and is eager to make money and become rich. The devil puts in his mind the thought that religious life is monotonous, that he will be despised, will have to mortify himself, and be ever subject to Superiors.

How can he decide [wisely] about his vocation with such thoughts as these in his mind?

He should do as St. Ignatius did with St. Francis Xavier when both were students at the University of Paris. Once they became acquainted, St. Ignatius saw how much his friend liked vanity, honors, glory, and so forth, so he said to him, "What good will all this do you in eternity?"

"I intend to study, take my degree and become a professor. Who knows, I may even be a professor at the Sorbonne some day."

"Fine! But will this be of any use to you once you are dead? What will then be left of it? Life is a mere breath and lasts such a short time. Eternity has no end. What good does it do to strive hard to make an impression during the few days we have here on earth, while neglecting to prepare a place for ourselves in which to dwell throughout eternity?"

Much the same thing happened to St. Philip [Neri]. He met a young man named Francis Zazzera . . . first there was this . . . then that . . . then something else . . . this world is like a scene in a play. It is all over in a flash.

To make a wise decision about our vocation, we have to look at it from the vantage point of death; only then do we realize what is real and what is insignificant.

We have to consider what our real advantages are: not the fleeting, deceptive advantages, but the true, eternal ones. How fortunate a boy is, yes, I really mean it, how fortunate a boy is who is trying to find his true vocation, when he meets some holy person who can point out to him what God wants him to do, someone who can help him look at the problem of his vocation through the eyes of death; someone who can show him that making a mistake means eternal disaster for him; someone who can induce him to ask himself: and what *after death?*

So far I've been supposing that boys really achieve their dreams of fortune, happiness, and honor; and I said that even though they did achieve them, they are nothing in reality. But in most cases, do things really work out as we hope? Do we achieve fortune or honor? I have too much experience in such things and tell you that it happens but rarely, very rarely. A young man may think, "Once I have passed this examination, once I have my degree, I shall be a professor and earn loads of money!" But will you really pass the examination? Will you have enough money to continue your studies for your degree? And once you have it, will there be a job waiting for you? Plans are limitless, but achievements are few. Although things may look rosy, we are apt to encounter one difficulty after another, and then everything comes tumbling down.

I think I should tell you a certain incident. It is not an old story; it

happened this very day. A lad who was here at the Oratory some years ago found our life somewhat boring. He made many plans and thinking he would realize them almost instantly, left us. Today he came back, asking for help because he is in dire need. Straitened circumstances forced him into lawlessness and he had to run from the police. He longed for the days gone by and told me, "When one lives a secluded life, one thinks that the outside world must be a wonderful place, but the truth is that it is nothing but deceit, allurement and misery. When I left the Oratory, I hoped to improve my position. I thought it would be easy to achieve all I had planned, that my dreams would be fulfilled and I would be rich and influential. But it is one thing to make plans and quite another to realize them. All I have found is shame and ruin, both of body and of soul."

This is where the difficulty lies. "If I could only realize my ambition, I would be happy for ever and ever! How lucky I would be!"

Have you ever watched little children, rubbing soap in water and making soap bubbles? They look at the bubbles being blown in the air and feel so happy. They clap their hands, squeal with joy, and try to catch the shining jewels, but all they get is a little soapy water. "Oh, it looked so beautiful!" Yes, very beautiful when the sun is shining and the bubble is between the sunshine and you. Our dreams and plans seem just as lovely to us. But even if you could realize them, they would only turn out to be just a little dirty water soiling your hands, nothing more.

You have often heard the saying of St. James the Apostle: *Mundus in maligno positus est totus.* [The whole world is in the power of the evil one—*John* 5, 19.] Don't think that the word *totus* [whole] is an exaggeration. First of all, it is in the Gospel . . . and then it is all too true to life!

Now those who leave the world, who abandon it, find a pearl of great price, namely, a religious vocation. Sell all that you have to buy that pearl; whatever you have to pay for it will be cheap. Somebody may say at this point, "I am following a good road, my mind is at rest." To which I would add, "If you enter religious life you will not only find peace and salvation for your soul and innumerable spiritual blessings, but you will also find that material security which you would not have found in the world."

Even from a material point of view, let me say one more thing: If you want to avoid privation in any form, if you thirst for honor and glory, enter a religious Order and be a good religious. I can cite a few instances in our own Congregation: someone, for example, not in present company, who is a living proof of my words, Father Cagliero. If

he had not entered our Congregation, he might have become a good priest, or a zealous ecclesiastic, or a piano teacher. Instead, he gave up all worldly honors and joined our Society. Yet, look at him! The honors he left behind followed him in far greater measure, so much so that nearly all the newspapers not only in Italy, but in France, Spain, Germany, and England are talking about him and hail him as an excellent piano teacher, musician, renowned preacher, professor of theology.... He would not have achieved any of this, you may be sure, if he had not entered the Congregation.

Let us look at Gioia and Belmonte; the former would have become a humble shoemaker, the latter a simple servant. They consecrated their lives to God, and how much they, too, have been honored in Rome by the Pope, Cardinals and Prelates. And now the newspapers and all men of goodwill are praising them because they have gone to America!

Then, too, we would have been poor if we had remained in the world. Not so now. If I become sick, I have houses, summer homes, mansions set in the most favorable climate and there I have good faithful people to care for me. Not even kings have all this.

Am I suggesting that you should become a religious in order to achieve fame, comforts, and wealth? Far from it! I have only told you these things and want you to bear them in mind, so that we may always appreciate the goodness and generosity of God, who repays a hundredfold even in this world all that we do for Him. Another reason is that we live in the world and must deal with the people in it, who understand no other argument than this. We might convince them with just this viewpoint which they can grasp and which appeals to their own personal interest.

As for us, what reason should induce us to enter a religious Order?

St. Augustine tells Christians, "Pay attention to Him who calls us!" Yes, listen to the voice that summons you. Holy Scripture says *Manete in vocatione, qua vocati estis.* [Remain in the vocation to which you have been called—Cf. *1 Cor.* 7, 20.]

The remarkable thing about this is that God does not say to us, "Find out for yourself where your vocation is." No! Indeed, it is not difficult to know our vocation if we do not shut our ears to the voice that the Lord makes us hear. If only we acquire the necessary virtues, good works, and knowledge to further our vocation, we may be sure that God will reveal it to us. In fact, from the moment of our birth, He prearranges the things that must lead us to follow His vocation or calling.

I consider it very wrong for people to say that it is hard to know

one's vocation. God so arranges things for us that all we have to do is to continue on the same path: all that is needed is our cooperation. It is only difficult to know one's vocation when we do not want to follow it, when we turn our back on our first inspirations. It is at this point that things become complicated.

First, one does not follow his vocation, then he is no longer sure of it— he should, he should not . . . Follow the first impulse of grace and everything will look different. I say quite frankly that when somebody feels undecided as to whether or not he should enter a religious Order, it is apparent that he had a religious vocation but did not follow it immediately, and so became confused and uncertain. Praying and seeking advice will be of no avail. Until he thrusts everything else aside and places himself unreservedly in the hands of God alone, he will always be restless. Try to persuade him to make up his mind to enter religion; if he does, his restlessness will cease at once. Why? Because finally he has followed that voice in his heart that bade him do it.

The advice of the Apostle, *Manete in vocatione, qua vocati estis* [Remain in the vocation to which you have been called—Cf. *1 Cor.* 7, 20], seems perfectly plain and obvious to me. For if the Lord gave you this desire and led you this far, that is, if He enabled you to start carrying out the desire He inspired in you, it is a manifest sign that it is He who is calling you.

Now someone may say, "How can I be absolutely sure that I am called to be a member of the Congregation?" Is it not precisely for this reason that every Congregation has a novitiate, so that, during his year of trial, the novice may find out whether God really has called him to this way of life, and that Superiors may have the chance of knowing him, advising him, and telling him, either: "Remain with us, we know that you have a vocation," or, "Leave us, we know that you do not have a vocation."

In answer to the first query: "Do I really have a vocation?" I would say, "Of course you have. Who can doubt it?" I say this sincerely to each of you individually and to all of you collectively. You have all been certainly called to serve God in the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales. Those who fail to respond to that call will jeopardize their eternal salvation. Why? For two reasons.

1. You would not have been admitted to the Congregation if I or any of your Superiors had had any doubts about the matter. Almost daily someone applies for admission and the Superiors realize that one or another does not have the necessary qualifications, that is, he has no vocation, and so he is turned away. If you have been accepted, it means

that your Superiors, who were appointed by God to guide you and who *reddere debent rationem pro animabus vestris* [have to render an account for your souls—Cf. *Heb.* 13, 17] realized that this was the will of God. Now someone may think, "Perhaps the Superior is acting in his own interest." Do you really believe that a Superior would risk his own soul and betray yours, just to gain another member for the Congregation, someone who, not called by God, can only cause trouble in the House? You can readily see for yourselves that this supposition is foolish.

2. If the Lord had not called you to this way of life, He would never have given you the enlightened desire to become a religious or the will to embrace this life. He would not have so arranged things and enabled you to fulfill your desire. He would not have allowed you to feel the happiness, the peace of mind you experienced when you were told that you had been accepted. Do not think these are insignificant trifles; they are important considerations. God is Master of everything, of every single thought that we have.

"Then it is absolutely certain that we are all called to this way of life?" Yes, it is absolutely certain. To doubt it would be to doubt what God has done or has approved. Therefore rest assured that your vocation is certain and that if you observe the Rules of the Congregation, your road leads you straight to Heaven.

In answer to the second query, "Was the notiviate not established for novices to have time to know their vocation?" my reply is, No, the novitiate was not established for such a purpose. I believe that when one is moved by the right spirit, that is, one has been advised to take this step by his spiritual director and has not deceived the Superiors of the Congregation as regards himself, but instead has confided in them wholeheartedly, then he is already sure of his vocation on entering the novitiate.

Yet it is not enough for one to have a vocation to be sure of doing well in a religious Congregation; he must also have enough strength to follow it. There have been persons who had a vocation but did not follow it immediately. They yielded to sin and let their bad inclinations get the better of them; they became slaves to their passions which became so tyrannical as to be beyond control. Now, the novitiate was established so that the novice could measure his strength, discover whether the weakness resulting especially from his delay in following his vocation has made him unsuitable for such a holy way of life. The novitiate was also established for Superiors to observe the novice and see whether he

really does possess the strength, virtue, and determination to follow his vocation.

The novitiate was established so that every novice might become familiar with the Rules, and later be able to fulfill his duties easily and promptly. The novitiate was established so that every novice could steel himself in virtue, lest after regaining his baptismal innocence by his religious profession, he lose it again under the pressure of his passions, still active and unmortified.

Now let us assume a case that frequently happens in every Congregation. After a certain period of time passed peacefully and happily in religion, a religious feels a distaste for this way of life and finds reasons to complain. He may resent the heat, the cold, the food, or the requirements of obedience. Everything gets on his nerves. Is this a sign that he did not have a vocation after all?

Remember, first, that those who enter the service of God will not find their path strewn only with roses, but also with weeds, thistles, and thorns. The Lord did not say, "He who follows me will always find his path strewn with roses." Rather when he summoned people to follow Him, he told them, *Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum, tollat crucem suam.* [If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross—*Matt.* 16, 24.] This means that when we follow our divine Master, we must be prepared to endure everything for His sake. Whether this means cold or heat or discomfort, tasteless food, or anything else, we should still be glad that we are able to suffer a little for Jesus, who suffered so much for our sake. Jesus Christ Himself, our divine Master, made it clear to us that tribulations would not be wanting. He said, "He who would rejoice with Christ, must also be crucified with Him."

We must suffer, therefore, and suffer very much; in fact, we must be crucified with Jesus. The cross is His banner, His standard. He who does not want to follow Him is unworthy to be His disciple. "But it is so cold here," someone may say. "Especially at this time of year! We have so little to eat and drink, and what little we have is so unpalatable! Then, too, what a job they have given me! I work all day long without any break! Others do less work than I do, but whenever there is something to be done, they load it on me! The whole thing is too heavy!"

Poor lad, I pity you. How do you expect to get along in this world, if you get upset over a little heat or a little cold? How do you expect to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, if you whimper and cry because the food served you is not to your liking, or because the work assigned to you seems too hard?

Let us meditate often on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. When thoughts such as these come upon us, let us think of the intense sufferings He endured for our sake. If we do that, if we remember how Jesus was obedient *usque ad mortem,* [unto death—*Phil.* 2, 8], we will not find obedience so burdensome. Being poor will not seem such a burden when we recall how, because of His love of poverty, Jesus died on the cross in extreme poverty, without even clothes to cover Himself.

Yet, despite all this, the devil often assails a religious and really seems to be deliberately trying to aggravate him. First he says to him, "You could do good also in the world." He then points out how rigorous the religious life is, and how delightful, life in the world. Thus, little by little, he insinuates thoughts of freedom and feelings of discouragement, until the religious seriously begins to doubt his vocation. Finally he says, "You were not really called to lead such a life. If you had been, you would have found greater peace of mind. Had God truly intended you to lead this life you would not find it so difficult, and you would receive greater help from God." The devil goes at it so hard that not only is the vocation endangered, but also God's grace, and perhaps even the soul's eternal salvation.

Sometimes the devil disguises himself as an angel of light. "Perhaps it would be more pleasing to God if I were to lead a contemplative life. They practice no penances here. I am so inclined to evil, that woe is me if I do not practice greater penances!" This, too, is a temptation, *Manete in vocatione, qua estis vocati.* [Remain in the vocation to which you have been called—Cf. *1 Cor.* 7, 20.]

What should you do when assailed by such doubts? Remember that if the devil were to lead you this far, he would already have gained a great ascendency over you. If you are not very careful to do what I now suggest, you will find yourselves in serious danger of being overcome. I shall only repeat what St. Alphonsus, echoing other saints and doctors of the Church, tells us:

The first important word of advice is: Keep your doubts secret, do not discuss them with anybody, do not mention your temptations or the victory the devil has almost won over you. For heaven's sake, don't air your complaints among your companions. I have just said that a vocation is a pearl of great price. If you talk about such things with others, the devil will mingle with the grumblers and will create such a havoc among you as I would not want to see. Do you know why I insist on secrecy? Because Pope St. Gregory the Great warns us with these words, *Depraedari desiderat, qui thesaurum publice portat in via.* [Whoever carries a treasure openly when traveling invites robbery.] A

vocation is a great treasure. It will be lost if it is displayed everywhere. Therefore, keep your vocation secret and keep your doubts secret also.

The second word of advice is: Do not make any decision when you are upset. Remember what we read in the Scriptures, *Non in commotione Dominus.* [The Lord is not in the earthquake—*3 Kings* 19, 11.] God has no part in decisions we make when we are upset.

Pray instead; pray fervently. Think of the vanity of things in this world and of everything ending with death. Make your decision from the standpoint of death. At that moment would you be glad to have left the Congregation, to have shirked that work, that obedience, or that mortification?

Receive the Sacraments. Decisions should be made while Jesus is within us. Talk with Jesus; tell Him confidently what you want to do. Better still, ask Him to give you the strength and perseverance you need. But do not discuss any of this with your companions. In my opinion, to talk about these things is committing murder. You would be destroying your own soul and would also be killing the soul of your companion.

"What is one to do? We are not to confide in anybody nor make any decision while we are upset; we must not do this, or that. Meanwhile we feel like choking unless we can pour out everything that is in our hearts. Is it not a true saying that nothing brings more relief to the heart than telling somebody else what is troubling us?"

If you feel this way, then listen to my third word of advice. When I said you should not talk to anyone, I meant of course that you should not talk to your companions, that you should not talk to people who cannot or will not give you the proper advice. Do you feel you are choking? Then this is what you should do. You have your Superiors, *qui pro animabus vestris rationem sunt reddituri* [who must give an account of your souls—Cf. *Heb.* 13, 17].

Have you any doubts? You have your Novice Master. You may confide in him; you may bare your soul to him. I, too, am available; you may come to me and may tell me everything exactly as it is, openly, without fear, for you will always find in me a loving father, a loyal counselor.

"What about going to someone outside the Oratory? What about asking my pastor for advice, or some relative who is a priest or canon, or someone like that?"

If I should suggest this I would be making a very serious blunder. No, you should never turn for advice to people who do not belong to the Congregation. In the first place, God did not appoint them to

give you advice. Your Superiors are the only ones who can do this. I repeat it is they *who have to give an account of your souls.* In the second place, even though these people may be well versed in theology and saintly persons, nevertheless they are, for the most part, in no position to give you advice because they do not know you inwardly, they do not really understand what the Congregation is all about; they are often swayed by worldly considerations, personal motives, money matters or family reasons.

Therefore, follow this all-important advice: whenever you have any doubts, come to me or go to your immediate Superior. God will inspire him with the advice he is to give you and you will not be led astray.

However, there is one thing I would like you to do when you come for advice of this kind: do not merely say that you have a doubt or feel tempted, but manifest as candidly as possible also the cause of your doubt or temptation. It is not enough for you to say, for example, "I have a doubt about my vocation." You should say instead: "I have a doubt, because I feel that I might do better elsewhere; or because I feel that it would be easier for me to save my soul somewhere else; or because I think I could lead an even better life in the world."

These reasons may be true. But just a moment! You think you could lead a better life in the world! Tell me, what kind of a life did you lead in the world before you came to us? "Oh, but that was *then;* things are different *now!*" Do you believe that you have now grown so strong that you can withstand the allurements of the devil, you who in your weakness are unable to put up with the religious life?

Why don't you manifest the real reason, the reason that is closer to the truth: "I want to leave because I find life under a Rule tedious, because obedience is a burden, and so is poverty; in short, I want to leave because I feel like it and that's what I want." Just say so and there will no longer be any doubt. It will be simply quite clear that there is no question of doubt over your vocation. You have lost it; you have betrayed the vocation you had.

Someone may say, "The sole reason why I began to have doubts, and why I became almost convinced that God does not want me to remain here, is because my parents need me. I am very attached to them. I knew I could help them if I were with them, and I could brighten what little life God may still grant them. They too suggest that I come home again.

I can give you no other advice on this point than to quote the words of St. Thomas, who states quite unequivocally, *In negotio vocationis*

parentes amici non sunt, sed inimici. [When it is a question of vocation, parents are not friends but enemies.]

You have already renounced your affection for your parents when you applied for admission to the Congregation. You have chosen God as your heritage, your beloved, your all. God is your parent before your father and mother. It is God who created you, He is your father, your mother, everything; He is therefore Lord of all. If He calls you, then neither father nor mother should matter.

Am I advising you to run away from home, as we read many saints did and were miraculously assisted by God in their flight? No, I am not. But since you are already here, and they would like you to return to the world, I tell you quite frankly that you do not have to obey them. Rather, you are bound not to obey them: *Obedire magis oportet Deo quam hominibus.* [We must obey God rather than men—*Acts* 5, 19.]

"But who will take care of them? They are in need of help," someone may say. Our Father who is in Heaven will care for them. He who clothes and nourishes the birds of the air will think of them. He who does not permit a lily of the field or a blade of grass to die, unless He has so ordained, will think of them.

"But I could find someone to look after them and cheer them a bit. I could work harder as a priest, too, to provide them with everything they need." Did you by any chance come to the Congregation to earn money, and do you expect the Congregation to keep someone who has an eye on profit? If anyone were to advise me in this way, I would reply, *Vade retro, Satana!* [Get behind me, Satan!—*Mark* 8, 33.] You have sold yourself to God and must therefore try to win souls for Him. The salvation of souls—this is the only profit we should seek.

How many vocations have already been lost through this misguided love for one's parents! Unfortunately, a vocation is often lost during vacation time, in homes where one would think there was no chance of such danger. Invariably, the love that parents show for us makes us want to remain and help them, or even to become secular priests. But anybody who becomes a priest with such ideas in mind is more like a merchant or businessman than a priest of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We now turn to something else, to something which, over and above what has already been said, often causes us to lose our vocation. I shall be brief.

I am almost always in continual contact with the world. I frequently visit convents and monasteries and am often consulted by religious. I know by experience that the other things which induce people most

often to abandon the religious life are: gluttony, an unwillingness to work, and a feeling of dissatisfaction caused by grumbling.

1. For heaven's sake, never give way to gluttony. Be content at all times with the food served; do not ask for anything else. Whenever I see somebody eagerly helping himself to some special dish or willing to walk miles just to get it—when I see somebody never missing the chance for a drink and making merry over it, I immediately become uneasy about his perseverance, because, as the masters of spiritual life tell us, gluttony and chastity, and especially wine and chastity, never go hand in hand.

2. Willingness to work. You may say perhaps, "But some jobs are so tedious, so hard!" It is precisely these that put us to the test; these steady occupations are the ones that safeguard our vocation.

3. St. Francis de Sales says that if an action were to have a hundred different sides to it, and ninety-nine of them were manifestly bad and only one good, we should consider the action from that point of view alone, and never grumble or criticize it because of the others.

Dear sons, try to practice these things that came to my mind this morning as I read the Gospel. If you do, you will find true happiness and true peace of mind. You will also be helping yourselves and others. Since it seems that the Lord wishes to bless us in a special manner, let us try not to be unworthy of His blessing. Let us endeavor to adorn our hearts as much as we can with beautiful virtues, working diligently at all times for the greater glory of God.

May it be said that wherever there is a son of St. Francis [de Sales] there too is a light casting its rays on everyone around him; a warmth kindling the love of God in all those with whom he comes into contact; and the salt of that eternal wisdom that helps to season, safeguard, and strengthen all in doing good.

Read about the things that I have just been saying. You will find them in the introduction to our Rules. Nearly all of them are briefly summarized there. Then, bit by bit, your Director will explain them to you in greater detail.

Anyone who has doubts may come for advice. Should any companion discuss any of the things we have been talking about, give him at once the right advice and encourage him in the pursuit of good.

If you do this, you will be blessed both now and for all eternity. You will be blessed and our whole Congregation will be blessed. The houses we now have will be blessed, as well as those we shall establish in the future, together with the Salesians who are here now or will join us later.

As Christmas drew nearer, Don Bosco received, along with Cardinal Berardi's good wishes, news that must surely have softened the sorrow caused by the insurmountable obstacles he encountered in trying to obtain the privileges to which we referred in Chapter 21. "I am happy to inform you," the Cardinal wrote,[2] "that both the Pope and I were very gratified to learn about all that you have done and are still doing on behalf of our holy religion and of the Church, both at Nice and at Bordighera. The Pope blesses your new undertaking with a full heart and is confident that, in His infinite mercy, God will reward you by an abundant harvest."

A mood of mystical happiness, induced by the inspiring novena, pervaded the Oratory as Christmas approached, reaching its climax in the midnight Mass. The church was magnificently decorated and illuminated. Don Bosco sang the Mass, assisted by Father [Joseph] Bologna and Father [Charles] Cipriano. Their names are mentioned in the Chronicle, for the priests were so eager to officiate as deacon and subdeacon on similar occasions that those who were chosen by Don Bosco considered themselves worthy to some extent of a place in history.

Don Bosco distributed Communion to all the altar boys and clerics, while the priests gave Communion to the boys and the faithful, each officiating at half of the altar rail. Meanwhile, divided into two choirs, the singers chanted the responses, their voices interweaving as they sang at the two opposite ends of the church, *i.e.*, in the choir loft [above the main entrance] and in the apse. The minutes of the local House Chapter, dated December 26, remark on the crowds of faithful at the altar rail for Communion and tell of a discussion about an easier approach to the altar rail in the future.

After the ceremony the boys ate the ritual dish of tripe, and then went to bed. This custom, too, is nothing more than a distant memory at the Oratory. Alfredo Panzini in his *Dizionario moderno* [Modern Dictionary] describes it as heavy, coarse, and indigestible food," yet he feels obliged to add that "the Milanese are very fond of it, be they rich or poor, aristocrats or commoners, noble ladies or plain women." Panzini also adds that "this dish is still a tradition

[2] Letter of December 17, 1875.

in this city, where so many other things change." Tripe was popular in Turin, too, and Don Bosco, who was a good connoisseur of popular tastes, made use of them for his own ends, managing to satisfy his boys as his own economic possibilities permitted.

Something happened during the midnight ceremony that still brings laughter to the few who heard it and are still alive, whenever they recall the incident. When the deacon sang the *Ite, missa est,* he indulged in a vocal flourish with so many runs up and down the scale on the syllable *i* of the word *Ite,* that he got lost. In an apt Piedmontese phrase, the subdeacon told him to hush! Surprised at first, the congregation soon began to chuckle. Always calm and resigned, Don Bosco now and then would beg the hapless singer, "Stop it, Father Bologna, stop it!" But the deacon went right on, undaunted, beyond belief. One can easily imagine the comments made all day long. When someone brought up the subject in Don Bosco's presence the next evening, he let everyone have his say; then at the right moment, he started to tell them about something that had once happened to him: how he had once forgotten the proper intonation, just as he was about to sing something in church. He struck the first note that came to him and then got himself out of the mess by inventing a few other notes of his own. He then expected to hear comments from the parish priest. The latter praised him, assuring him that he would not have acquitted himself so well if he had been in his shoes. The moral of the story was obvious: put yourself in someone else's shoes, and you will learn to sympathize with him.

On the last day of the year Don Bosco announced the Annual Practice to the whole community assembled in the large reception room on the main floor of the new wing in the building where his rooms are located. The boys greeted him with thunderous applause and cheers so prolonged that he raised his hand, saying, "You must quiet down a little if you want to hear what I have to say." A deep silence set in at once. He began:

We have all gathered here to say goodbye to the year now about to end. Within a few hours 1875 will come to an end, and this year will not return. Other years, many other years, will come, but 1875 will never return. It will disappear into eternity, and we shall retain nothing

more of it than a faint recollection. Yet even though 1875 will no longer be with us, we shall feel the burden of another year on our shoulders, and have one year less of life before us. This is the last time this year that Don Bosco will talk to you, and it may be that when next year rolls around, someone else will be standing on this spot, on this day, to address you instead of me. "Where has Don Bosco gone?" you will ask. The reply will be, "Don Bosco is already in eternity, and we shall not see him again here on earth."

Let us then bring back to mind the events of 1875 up to this day. Let us look back a moment and watch our life as it goes its way and death approaches closer, scythe in hand. What do we see? Innumerable favors, of course, blessings received from our Lord and the Blessed Virgin; we see our good deeds, and the virtues that shone in us most. We see many fine things, but also many not so fine: and these are our sins, our faults, our acts of disobedience, our offenses against Jesus and Mary. Nor do we see only this. We also see that many of our friends, our brothers who were with us last year in this same place, are now here no longer. We note their absence; they are now in eternity. Several, in fact, died in 1875: young Bartholomew Collo, Peter Cotta, our old baker, James Para, [Anthony] Lanteri, Defendente Barberis [the cleric, not Julius who is here wtih us]; [Salvator] Pagani, Perini, and Falletti; some of them were professed, while others were students or coadjutors. Be that as it may, they have died, and we know nothing more about them. God alone knows where they are now. We have good hopes for them, because they all received the Sacraments; they all went to confession and received Communion; and as for those who did not die in the House, from the accounts we have received we have reason to believe that they died as good Christians and are now with God. What of the coming year? Who knows whether someone of us may be missing, someone be dead by next year? It is certain that not all of us will be alive this time next year. I shall not say who, but more than one of those now present will no longer be with us. One need not be a prophet to say these things. We see it happen every year; several of us depart for eternity. God alone knows. We cannot even be sure we will live through the last four hours of this year; still less can we be sure that we will live to see the end of 1876.

I feel that our companions who are now in eternity and are no longer with us are listening to my words and are now saying, "Don Bosco, you told us, too, so many nice things last year; now you are talking about us.... Would it not be better if you said some prayers for the repose of our souls?"

We shall do that; we shall pray for their eternal repose so that if any of them has not yet reached Heaven, he may do so soon. We shall say an *Our Father,* a *Hail Mary,* and a *Glory be to the Father* for them. And we shall also say a prayer for those who this year are about to depart for eternity from this vale of tears. What kind of eternity will they deserve? Let us be prepared.

Now that we have talked about last year, I had better give you some counsel that will help us all live through the coming year in peace with God. All the advice I can give is summed up in this phrase: *One thing and two friends.* This advice is not just for one day or a month, but for the whole year.

The two friends who should be dearest to you, the ones you should be most fond of, are a friend you should practice, and a friend you should frequent. First of all let me introduce the friend you should practice. This friend should accompany you everywhere and should always be at your side. This friend who should accompany you wherever you go and whatever you do, who should be very dear to you at all times, is, good example. We can practice good example in many ways: by receiving often and devoutly the Sacraments, by admonishing our companions who balk at rules, or are reluctant to follow the inspirations of our Lord or the exhortations of their Superiors. We may set a good example by not being afraid of people who might consider us bigots, that is, by not being concerned about what people may say, by obeying the Rules faithfully, by doing our duty, by being modest in our conduct. Treasure this friend and you will be very fortunate. He can help you to go through 1876 happily.

One thing I would like to see deeply engraved in your hearts is avoiding scandal at all costs, for scandal is the foe of good example. Try, I beg you, to shun it in every way possible. It will come to you often disguised as a friend. Dear boys, if you only knew what scandal really is, if you only knew the harm that it does, you would not even want to hear it mentioned. Yet, it can be given so easily. We can do immense harm by not obeying a rule, an order given to us, by shrugging our shoulders, by our conversation, by uttering a bad word. You know how angry our Lord was with those who give scandal! And greater yet is the harm to ourselves if we fall into it. First of all, it causes the loss of a soul; it casts on us God's most terrible curse; it disgraces us for the rest of our lives and makes people look upon us as men for whom there is no hope, as men possessed by the devil. I wish I could describe graphically to you what this monster called scandal is like. But I must be brief, so I will only tell you what little I can. Shun scandal, above all

avoid every word, deed, utterance, and gesture that might offend the virtue of chastity, that is, modesty, or keep others from doing the right thing. You may be sure that God will bless you if you safeguard this beautiful virtue and turn away from everything contrary to it.

The other friend I want you to meet for your own happiness this year is one to stay with, to love, to revere, and to cherish. Oh! how much good this friend can do for you! You must have already guessed that I am talking about Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He is and must be your true, your only friend. He will console you in trouble. He will grant you favors and true joy. From His hands come all sorts of gifts and also crosses. These he sends to test our faith and perseverance and to crown us with glory in Heaven. Tell me something, my dear sons, is it not true that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is the comfort of the dying? Yes, you say. See what happens when someone is about to die. His friends stand about the room sad and sorrowful, afraid of going near his bed for fear of catching his disease. They wait for a propitious moment to slip out of the room. It is not so with the Blessed Sacrament. Our Lord leaves the church to visit the dying. He goes to them, and not content with comforting them by His loving presence, He chooses to become one with them, and through the words of the priest, tells them: *Accipe, frater, viaticum, qui custodiat et perducat te ad vitam aeternam.* Receive, brother, as viaticum, the body of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will be the true friend that will lead you to life everlasting and to the glory of Heaven.

Nor does He give us proof of His friendship only in moments of happiness, as friends in this world do. On the contrary, He shows us even greater love in times of adversity, when things are going badly. He shows us His wounds and urges us to imitate Him and do penance for our sins. If we sincerely want Him to come to us as a friend when we are dying, let us receive Him often and devoutly as the Blessed Sacrament, treasuring Him in our hearts. Let us visit Him often in our spare time. Let us offer our hearts, our wills to Him, allowing Him to do whatever He wants with us. He is so very good that He will always protect and never abandon us.

Finally, one thing for all to do, an important part of the Practice I am giving you this evening is this: carefully keep the little sodalities we have here in the House—the St. Aloysius or Blessed Sacrament Sodality, the Altar Boys Society, the sodalities of St. Joseph, Mary Help of Christians and the Immaculate Conception. No one asks you for dues in these sodalities, so there is nothing you can lose. Let each one choose the sodality that will better help him grow in fervor. I commend these

sodalities to our Catechists, teachers, and Directors, in particular, and ask them to start them again and make them develop. Let them urge the boys to join them. No, that is not right, I shouldn't have said "urge them." No, they should not urge the boys, but rather let the sodalities be open to them so that anybody who wishes may become a member. I realize that you don't have to be urged. All sodality members should try to give others good example, bringing light to darkness, avoiding bad example, and doing all possible to eliminate it among their companions, going to Communion frequently, visiting the Blessed Sacrament often during the day, and encouraging others to go with them. I hesitate to suggest other devotions or mortifications because in spite of the good they may do, these things may also be dangerous. Rather, I constantly urge you to join these sodalities, because they are always good for all.

Now I shall say nothing more, but only urge you earnestly, once again, to follow my advice if you wish to enjoy God's peace this year and be visited by our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament at the hour of your death. Meanwhile let us now say an *Our Father,* a *Hail Mary,* and a *Glory Be to the Father* for our poor, departed companions, and then another *Our Father, Hail Mary,* and *Glory Be* for those who are here with us now, but who are going to die during the coming year. Statistics show an average of three deaths for every 100 persons each year in towns and villages. Since there are about 900 of us here, we should have about 26 or 27 deaths among us. You are young, however, you are not anxious to die, and that is why our average is only one per cent, therefore, only 8 deaths a year. I am glad it is this way; and I hope and pray that even this number may shrink rather than grow in years to come. Nevertheless, since some of us must die during the coming year, each should endeavor to employ well the little time remaining. Now Bro. Villanis will please take over and lead us in these short prayers.

Everyone knelt down. The room was so crowded that it took some maneuvering to find room for one's knees. At the end of the prayers, Don Bosco rose to his feet, wished everyone a happy ending of the old year and a happy beginning of the new, and then bade them good night. While shouting "Long live Don Bosco" the boys lined up and walked off to bed.

Don Bosco gave the Annual Practice to his sons for twelve years more. Each time, as he looked back, he took note of how his Congregation had grown and his work was being better and better

consolidated. It cannot be said that he always enjoyed fair weather, however! Yet even in the midst of storms the hand of God always upheld him. Father Felix Giordano, O.M.I., accompanying Don Bosco about this time on a trip from Genoa to the Oratory, asked him how his undertakings, always springing up from nothing, were so successful. With great simplicity Don Bosco replied, "I have nothing to do with it, you know. Our Lord attends to everything. He wishes in His goodness to do now one thing, now another. How does He show that the undertaking is His? He chooses as His instrument the most inept tool. This is what has happened with me. You have known me for a long time and I assure you that had our Lord found another priest in the archdiocese of Turin even poorer, more insignificant, and more devoid of talent than I, He would have chosen him and no one else as His instrument in the undertakings you mentioned. He would have ignored poor Don Bosco and let him follow his natural vocation by becoming a simple country priest." [3]

At every step new vistas open up to Don Bosco. Far from bidding him halt, they urge him to push farther ahead. This is the unbroken rhythm of his entire life.

[3] Letter of March 25, 1888 to Father Lemoyne from Nice.

SALESIAN TERMINOLOGY

(For the General Reading Public)

ANNUAL PRACTICE: a brief saying, in the form of a motto, summarizing the particular religious and spiritual program proposed by the Rector Major for a given year.

ARTISANS: trade school students.

ASPIRANTS: candidates for membership in the Salesian Society in the first period of their probation preceding the novitiate.

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.

CHAPTER: (a) House Chapter: members of a Salesian community who are entrusted with administrative duties and who assist the Director in the government of the House, namely, the Prefect, the Catechist, and one or more Councilors.

(b) Provincial Chapter: a group composed of Provincial Councilors, Directors, and elected delegates of the Houses, under the presidency of the Provincial. It does preliminary work for a General Chapter and deliberates important affairs of the Province.

(c) Superior Chapter: the Council of the Rector Major, consisting of a Prefect, Spiritual Director, Economist, and five Councilors, who with the Rector Major ordinarily exercise supreme authority over the entire Society.

(d) General Chapter: a general assembly of the Rector Major, the Rector Major emeriti, the Superior Chapter and its Secretary, the Procurator General, the Provincials and delegates from each Province and the Director of the Motherhouse. It meets to elect a Rector Major and members of the Superior Chapter and to treat of matters that concern the Society in general.

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

COADJUTOR: a lay member of the Salesian Society.

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

COOPERATOR: a member of the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators; one who contributes in any manner to the development of Salesian work.

DAILY PRACTICE: a religious practice or good work suggested daily during the period of preparation for a major feastday; a spiritual nosegay.

DON: a shortening of the Latin *Dominus* (lord, master), used in Italy in informal address of the clergy.

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.

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.

MANIFESTATION: a monthly account of one's exterior life made by a Salesian to his Superior.

ORATORY: a Salesian work which offers boys and young men organized recreational, educational, and religious activities that otherwise would not be available to them.

(a) Day Oratory: conducted daily.

(b) Festive Oratory: conducted on Sundays and festive days.

THE ORATORY: abbreviated form of "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales," the Motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

PRACTICAL TRAINING: the period in the training of a Salesian cleric, following his completion of philosophical studies. During this time he devotes himself to teaching and supervision of boys' activities.

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.

SONS OF MARY: delayed or adult vocations who, as aspirants, follow an educational and training program suited to them.

THE SALESIAN HOUSE

DIRECTOR: Superior of the House which he governs with his Chapter.

HOUSE CHAPTER: *Prefect:* entrusted with the administration of temporal affairs.
Catechist: in charge of spiritual matters.
Prefect of Studies (one of the Councilors): in charge of scholastic matters.

THE SALESIAN PROVINCE

PROVINCIAL: Superior of an entire Province, which he governs with his Council.

PROVINCIAL ECONOMIST: a member of the Provincial Council entrusted with the financial affairs of the Province.

THE SALESIAN SOCIETY

RECTOR MAJOR: Superior of the entire Society which he governs with the Superior Chapter.

SUPERIOR CHAPTER:
Prefect: vicar of the Superior General.
Catechist: entrusted with the spiritual and moral matters of the Society.
Economist: entrusted with administration of material goods belonging to the Society as a whole.
Councilors: five in number. Some are given a special charge, as (1) academic schools, (2) technical and agricultural schools, (3) the foreign missions, (4) parishes, oratories and alumni, (5) Salesian Cooperators and the Press.

PROCURATOR GENERAL: a priest elected by the Rector Major and his Chapter to act as liaison officer between the Holy See and the Salesian Society.

VISITOR: a superior appointed by the Rector Major with the consent of his Chapter to make a formal visit to determined Salesian Houses.

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ABBREVIATIONS

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D.M.H.C.	Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
M.H.C.	Mary Help of Christians
S.S.	Salesian Society

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