

VOLUME VIII - 1865-1867

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THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

---

of Saint John Bosco



## Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne

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

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

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

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

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# *The Salesian Society*

1987

<i>Membership</i>	17,644
<i>Countries</i>	92
<i>Provinces</i>	77
<i>Houses</i>	1,572
<i>Bishops</i>	63
<i>Archbishops</i>	19
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# *The Daughters Of Mary Help Of Christians*

1987

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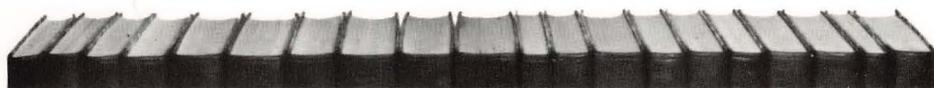
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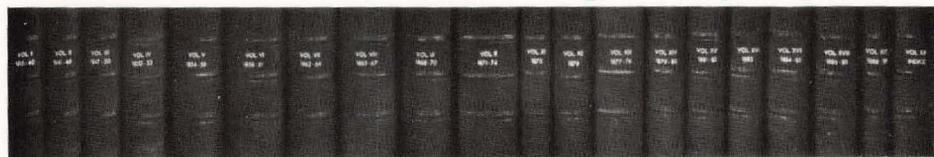
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THE  
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS  
OF  
SAINT JOHN BOSCO



*The*  
*Biographical Memoirs*  
*of*  
*Saint John Bosco*

by

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

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AN AMERICAN EDITION  
TRANSLATED  
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

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

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**Dedicated**

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE

TO

THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

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

(1904–1962)

TO WHOSE

WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART

THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

OF

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

OF

SAINT JOHN BOSCO

IS

A LASTING MONUMENT



**This Volume  
Is Respectfully Dedicated  
TO THE  
MOST REVEREND LOUIS MATHIAS, S.D.B.  
(1887-1965)  
Archbishop of Madras (India),  
Intrepid Salesian Missionary,  
Distinguished Church Leader,  
Outstanding Promoter of Social Works.**



## *Editor's Preface to the First Nine Volumes*

**S**AIN**T** John Bosco, the central figure of this vastly extensive biography, was a towering person in the affairs of both Church and State during the critical 19th century in Italy. He was the founder of two very active religious congregations during a time when other orders were being suppressed; he was a trusted and key liaison between the Papacy and the emerging Italian nation of the Risorgimento; above all, in troubled times, he was the saintly Christian educator who successfully wedded modern pedagogy to Christ's law and Christ's love for the poor young, and thereby deserved the proud title of *Apostle of Youth*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> True history in the sense that what he narrates is substantially true, though his method of presentation, his chronology, and his treatment of sources stand improvement. The episodes and incidents he reports did not necessarily take place *exactly* as described.

presenting chronologically his vast selected material and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.<sup>3</sup> When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, *The Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

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

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

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man whom Pope Pius XI called “a giant of sanctity” inspire his spiritual children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and

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

women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

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

New Rochelle, N. Y.  
*June 5, 1965*

124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

## NOTE

As with Volumes VI and VII—and continuing through Volume X—we will omit material from the original text that is of little interest to American readers and of no direct consequence to these biographical memoirs. Such omissions will always be pointed out in the footnotes, except when they concern *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] in which case dots will be used.

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

New Rochelle, N. Y.  
*May 24, 1973*

## *Acknowledgments*

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

As regards this volume, we wish to express special thanks to Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., Head of the English Department of Don Bosco College, Newton, New Jersey, for his editorial assistance. We are also grateful to those who have helped in one way or another, in particular, Mr. Joseph Isola of the Paulist Press in New York City. We also wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the Ufficio Stampa of the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin, Italy, for its *Dizionario Biografico dei Salesiani*, a valuable source of many footnotes in this volume.

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

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## SALESIAN GLOSSARY

(For the General Reading Public)

**ARTISANS:** trade school students.

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

**ASSISTANT:** A Salesian engaged in supervising boys.

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

**COADJUTOR:** a lay member of the Salesian Society.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

On a rainy night of May 1847 a hungry youngster, drenched from head to foot, knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco's mother fed him and prepared a place for him to sleep. (See *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. III, pp. 141ff) Thus, side by side with the festive oratory there began a hospice that eventually grew into a large boarding school and became the motherhouse of the Salesian Congregation.

**PREVENTIVE SYSTEM:** the Salesian method of education and discipline, based on reason and religion. It stresses vigilance, guidance, and sympathetic understanding in the training of the young.

**VALDOCCO:** a district of Turin.

The name is probably a contraction of the Latin *vallis occisorum*, the valley of the slain—i.e., some soldiers of the Theban Legion who were martyred under Emperor Maximian. The Salesian motherhouse stands on the site of their martyrdom. (See *The Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Vol. II, pp. 233ff, 268)



THE  
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS  
OF  
SAINT JOHN BOSCO



## CHAPTER 1

### *Year's Beginning, 1865*

**A**S we start this volume we feel it necessary to restate that all we have narrated so far and shall narrate is a faithful and factual exposition of events. Hundreds of witnesses can testify to the saintly life of our beloved founder. Indeed, very many of them have left us written depositions of what they themselves saw and heard from his childhood to his death. Even the dialogues are recorded as they were carried on in their presence. The documentation is so voluminous that, in a way, it can form a library of its own. We have taken no liberties and have indulged in neither poetical flights nor exaggerations. Truth needs no veneering. Thirty sworn affidavits of the diocesan informative process for Don Bosco's beatification bear this out. As in the past—with due authorization—we shall continue to draw from these sources. Now, let us proceed with our narrative.

The year 1865 was a jubilee year to be observed in every diocese for a whole month, as determined by the ordinary. For the occasion, Don Bosco had written and published the February issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled: *The Jubilee Year . . .* which was reviewed in *Unità Cattolica* on March 11. . . .

At this time the Salesian Society numbered some eighty members, including twelve priests. Some members had left, but others had replaced them. The Mirabello junior seminary<sup>1</sup> was doing very well, the Lanzo school<sup>2</sup> was beginning to yield good fruit, and at Mornese, toward the end of 1864, amid great rejoicing, Father [Dominic] Pestarino<sup>3</sup> had laid the first stone of a boys'

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 287f, 315, 327f, 338f. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 475 ff. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173ff. [Editor]

boarding school. The occasion had been enhanced by the performance of the brass band of Lerma.<sup>4</sup>

Don Bosco, meanwhile, with ever greater trust, saw to it that work on the Church of Mary, Help of Christians went on steadily. He also took steps to purchase a strip of land between the church and the Oratory.<sup>5</sup> His main preoccupation, however, was the painting to be placed above the main altar. When he broached the matter to the artist—Thomas Lorenzone—he astounded those present with the grandeur of his conception: high in the heavens, Our Lady amid choirs of angels; around Her, the Twelve Apostles; then, in descending order, martyrs, prophets, virgins, and confessors; on earth, below, banners proclaiming Mary's great victories and, finally, peoples of all races raising their hands to Her in supplication. He talked as if he had actually seen what he was so minutely describing. Lorenzone listened in amazement. "And where are you going to put this painting?" he asked.

"In the new church, of course."

"Are you sure it will fit?"

"Why not?"

"Where will you find a studio large enough for such a canvas?"

"That's your problem!"

"There is no place huge enough for this job. I'd have to make Piazza Castello my studio, unless you want a miniature painting to be seen through a magnifying glass."

Everybody laughed. Ruler in hand, Lorenzone proved his point. Regretfully, Don Bosco had to agree that in the painting only the Apostles, Evangelists and a few angels would represent the heavenly court doing honor to Mary, and the Oratory alone would stand in the foreground below the Blessed Virgin.

Lorenzone rented a loft in Palazzo Madama<sup>6</sup> and began working. He had a time limit of about three years. When he was nearly

<sup>4</sup> It was at Lerma that Father Lemoyne, the author of these memoirs, first met Don Bosco in 1864. *See ibid.*, pp. 455f. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> Palazzo Madama, located in the center of Piazza Castello, in the heart of Turin, is a massive building consisting of three structures of different origin—Roman, medieval and modern—summing up the city's two thousand years of history. Its magnificent internal staircase and its eighteenth-century façade by Filippo Juvarra represent one of the finest

through, noticing that the lion beside St. Mark was so striking as to divert attention from the main subject, he toned it down. Our Lady's features came out splendidly. One of our priests told us this incident:

One day I went to Lorenzone's studio to see the painting. It was my first visit. The artist, standing on a scaffold, was putting some last touches on Our Lady's face. He did not turn around as I came in but went on with his work. After a while he stepped down to survey his work. Seeing me, he took my arm and led me to a spot where I could observe the light's effect on the painting.

"Isn't She beautiful?" he exclaimed. "I can't say I did it. Another hand has been guiding mine. You are from the Oratory, aren't you? Tell Don Bosco that he will be pleased with this painting."

Elated beyond words, he went back to work.

We can add that, when the painting was set into place in the new church, Lorenzone fell to his knees in tears.

After honoring Mary through painting, Don Bosco sought to do likewise through music. Toward the end of 1864 he had entrusted the Oratory brass band to Maestro John De Vecchi, a gifted, expert musician and dedicated teacher. It was a splendid choice! De Vecchi wrote exquisite sacred and popular compositions which his pupils sang in church, on stage and outdoors, rousing the enthusiasm of their audiences.

On January 6, feast of the Epiphany, the Oratory boys restaged *The Fortune House* for many generous benefactors who took to heart Don Bosco's undertakings as their very own.<sup>7</sup> Thus did the year 1865 begin.

Temporal concerns even when related to works of charity usually cool somewhat the fervor of those who are not intensely spiritual-minded. This was not so with Don Bosco, who throughout his life unceasingly yearned for his one and only goal—the salvation of souls. His customary short talks to the boys after night prayers bear

creations of European baroque. Palazzo Madama was the seat of the Subalpine Senate from 1840 to 1860 and of the Italian Senate until 1864. At present it houses the City Museum of Ancient Art. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting the invitation that Don Bosco sent to Marquis Fassati's family. [Editor]

this out convincingly. We will now report five of them as recorded in our chronicle:<sup>8</sup>

January 2, 1865

Two days of the new year, my dear sons, are already gone. Did you start the year well? Anyway, start it you did. But are you sure you'll finish it? On the last day of last year, toward eleven at night, General [Alessandro] Della Rovere's <sup>9</sup> brother suffered a stroke while working at his desk and died two hours later, unable to receive the Last Sacraments. Fortunately, he was a devout man, and his friends have assured me that he received the sacraments at Christmas. Let us hope that God has now welcomed him in the blessed peace of heaven. He had two other brothers: one was a general, the other a Jesuit in Rome. Within forty days all three died of strokes. Did they imagine at the beginning of 1864 that it would be their last year on earth? Let us, therefore, be prepared because the Lord may call us when we least expect it. There are two ways of dying: unexpectedly or suddenly. Death is unexpected when one is unprepared for it; it is sudden when it strikes without warning one who is ready for it. We shouldn't worry about a sudden death, but may God deliver us from an unprovided death.

My children, should death strike now, would you be ready? Most of you are, I hope; unfortunately, a few are not because they are in mortal sin. If they could only see the horrible fiend on their back, they would be terrified. For some time I have wanted to warn them, but I have waited, hoping they would reform themselves. I will wait a few more days only, and then I will tell them. I could single them out now, but I will not do so. I shall warn them privately. Poor boys! The devil, my dear children, goes about among you—and I see him—seeking to devour you. He tails you and tries to trip you, but at your side stands a beautiful Lady stretching forth a hand to steady you. You will not fall if you take hold of it. What would you say of those who refuse Her help in danger, or even bite or strike out at Her hand? "I pity you," She tells them, and withdraws Her hand. "You refuse My help. Go your own way to perdition, then. I have done all I could to save you, but you would not let Me. You have yourselves to blame for your eternal damnation."

My dear children, that horrible fiend is the devil; the beautiful Lady is the Blessed Virgin Mary.

<sup>8</sup> Father Lemoyne began writing an Oratory chronicle in the fall of 1864. (See Vol. VII, p. 466) It will frequently be quoted in this volume. [Editor]

<sup>9</sup> Alessandro Della Rovere (1815-64) was Secretary of Defense from 1861 to 1864. [Editor]

January 5

Our Lady does not care for the homage of those who want to remain in mortal sin. Once there was a man who had long been living in sin; still, he never let a day pass without offering Mary some prayer or greeting. As he kept this up without amending his sinful life, the merciful Mother of God appeared to him one night. A very handsome youth stood before Her carrying choice tidbits of food on a tray covered by a filthy, smelly napkin. Our Lady asked the man to help himself from the tray. "No thanks," he replied. "That napkin turns my stomach!"

"I feel the same way about your prayers and devotions because of your many sins," She replied. "You would relish these choice tidbits except for the filthy rag covering them. I too would love your devotions but for the sins which defile your soul." She vanished. That man, touched by Her motherly rebuke, went to confession, turned over a new leaf and persevered in God's grace.

January 8

My dear children, the carnival season began yesterday and I want you to have a good time. Therefore, we shall have skits and plays in the evening, something extra at dinner, and other amusements as the superiors deem best. But this is not all. I want you to have also a "spiritual" good time. Let me tell you why. There is one among you who wants to have some fun of his own, and that is the devil. Since I don't want him to enjoy himself at your expense, I would like you to offer some good deed every day, starting today, for any soul in purgatory who may just need that in order to fly to heaven.

Think how many souls we can thus lead to Mary's throne! We number more than five hundred. Think how many souls we can free within these two months if we all do our daily share. Think how many friends we shall have in heaven who will be obliged to us for hastening their heavenly bliss and who will pray for us. We shall benefit handsomely from their intercession, not to mention the fact that our own purgatory will be shortened because God will deal with us as we have dealt with others. Like it or not, all of us will have to go through purgatory. So, let's provide for it. I am not telling you this on my own authority. (*He meant that this suggestion came from Our Lady.*) Suffice it for you to know that doing something for the souls in purgatory is most pleasing to Jesus and Mary. Our Lady expects this good deed from you.

January 9

Today is the anniversary of our dear Besucco's death.<sup>10</sup> It is quite proper that I remind you of it on this very day. He died peacefully, but there was one thing which bothered him at that moment! It had nothing to do with a bad life, a bad confession, lack of charity, disobedience or scandal! What bothered him was that he had not loved God as much as God deserves.<sup>11</sup>

January 11

I am going to tell you about something wonderful tonight. In recent years Our Lady has graciously appeared several times to Her devotees—for instance, in 1846 to two young shepherds [at La Salette] in France. Among other things She predicted that the potato crop and vineyards would become diseased, as in fact they did. She revealed that blasphemy, working on Sundays, and irreverence in church had provoked Her Son to anger. In 1858 She appeared to little Bernadette at Lourdes and asked her to pray for sinners. At Taggia Our Lady moved Her eyes. At Vicovaro She did the same in the presence of many witnesses. At Spoleto Our Lady's picture continues to work great miracles.

The acrostic we can make out of *Spoletum*—the Latin word for Spoleto—is striking. It goes like this:

S for *Sancta*

P for *Parens*

O for *Omnipotentis*

L for *Legiferi*

E for *Et*

T for *Totius* or *Tutrix*

U for *Universi*

M for *Mater* or *Maria*

All this can be freely translated as “Mary, Help of Christians.”

This evening I read of another wondrous event which took place in Tuscany. Mary's image suddenly appeared on the wall of a small house. Seeing it and feeling inspired to great trust in Our Lady, several sick people touched that image and were instantly cured. The word spread fast and crowds flocked to the spot. Civil authorities sent in carabinieri to disperse the crowds and cordon off the place. Arrests were made, but for every person arrested a hundred more swarmed to the hallowed spot. When a wall was erected in front of the holy image to conceal it, the same image showed up on the wall. The wall was then boarded up. It was no use!

<sup>10</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 357-62. [Editor]

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 362. [Editor]

The image now appeared on the wooden barrier. The crowd's enthusiasm soared to new heights. The carabinieri themselves who—as the anticlericals put it—had been dispatched to put an end to superstition were found kneeling in prayer before the image.

We too, my dear children, live amid Our Lady's favors and wonders. When I have more time, I will tell you in detail what Our Lady has graciously done in this very house of ours.

You will ask, "What do these apparitions of Mary mean?" They are tokens of Her mercy. The Blessed Virgin, like a good mother, seeing danger threatening Her children, hurries to their rescue. Do you want to please your heavenly Mother? Practice the virtue dearest to Her—the virtue of chastity.

The good deed I suggest you do is this: when you pray, think of what you are doing. To pray means to speak to God. To speak means to pronounce the words distinctly so as to be understood. Therefore, say your prayers unhurriedly and with the same tone of voice you would use when speaking to a dear friend.

## CHAPTER 2

### *A Dream: The Partridge and the Quail*

**W**E read in the Book of Proverbs: “Hear, O children, a father’s instruction; be attentive that you may gain understanding. Yes, excellent advice I give you; my teachings do not forsake.” [Prov. 4, 1-2] Accordingly, we shall continue to report our father’s life-giving words as we heard them [in successive “Good Nights”]:

January 16

January is now half gone. What use have we made of this time? If I may, I will now tell you a dream I had the night before last.

I was hiking with all of you and many others whom I did not know. We stopped in a vineyard for refreshment, and everyone scattered about to pick fruit, feasting on grapes, figs, peaches, and plums. I was with you, plucking grapes and figs for you to eat.

I seemed to be dreaming and somehow regretted that it was only a dream. *Anyhow*, I said to myself, *let the boys have their fill*. Through the rows of vines we could see the vinedresser.

Once we had our fill, we resumed our march through the vines, but we had a hard time crossing the deep furrows running the whole length of the vineyard. The sturdier boys managed to jump from one row to the other; the smaller ones couldn’t quite make it and usually tumbled into a deep furrow. Sympathizing with their plight, I looked about for some other way out and noticed a dirt road alongside the vineyard. I made for it with all of you, but the vinedresser stopped me. “Listen to me,” he said. “Keep off that road. It’s rocky, miry, thorny and rutted—absolutely impassable. Stay on the path you have taken.”

“I’d like to,” I replied, “but these little fellows cannot make it across the furrows.”

“That’s no problem,” he countered. “Let the bigger boys carry the younger ones. They will still be able to jump from row to row.”

Unconvinced, I made for the dirt road with all the boys, only to find that it was indeed forbidding and impassable.

Turning to Father Francesia,<sup>1</sup> I remarked, "We are between the devil and the deep sea." We had no choice but to keep crossing those furrows along a path parallel to the dirt road. When we finally reached the last row of vines, we were faced by a thick hedge of thorns. Clearing a passage with great difficulty, we descended a lofty bank into a lush, tree-dotted meadow.

In its center I spotted two former Oratory pupils who, on recognizing me, came over to greet me. We chatted for a while. Then, one of them, holding up two birds, said, "See what I found! Aren't they cute?"

"What are they?" I asked.

"This one is a partridge and this a quail!"

"Is the partridge alive?"

"Sure!" And he placed a most beautiful fledgling into my hands.

"Can it feed itself?"

"Yes, it has just started." While watching it eat, I noticed that its beak was split into four parts. Surprised, I asked the boy about it.

"You mean you don't know?" he replied. "The four-parted beak symbolizes the same thing as the partridge itself."

"I don't understand."

"You should! After all, you are well educated. What's the Latin word for partridge?"

"*Perdix.*"

"Well, then, you have it!"

"I still don't understand! Tell me."

"All right, I will. Consider what each letter stands for:

"'P': *Perseverantia* [Perseverance].

"'E': *Aeternitas te expectat* [Eternity awaits you].

"'R': *Referet unusquisque secundum opera sua prout gessit; sive bonum, sive malum* [Everyone must render an account of his deeds, whether good or evil].

"'D': *Dempto nomine* [Without regard to his name, worldly fame, glory, knowledge or wealth].

"'I': *Ibit . . .* [He shall go. . . ]. Now you also know what the four-parted beak means—the Four Last Things."

<sup>1</sup> John Baptist Francesia (1838-1930) began attending the Valdoco Festive Oratory when he was about twelve; two years later he became a resident student. In 1859 he was one of the sixteen pupils who joined Don Bosco in forming the Salesian Society. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f) He was also the first Salesian to earn academic degrees at the University of Turin. Ordained a priest in 1862, he soon filled important administrative positions, distinguishing himself for his fatherly kindness. He was a prolific writer and a distinguished Latin and Italian scholar. His last forty years were spent at the Oratory, where he died on January 17, 1930. For further details see the Index of Vol. VI. [Editor]

"I see—but what does 'X', the last letter, stand for?"

"Can't you guess? Didn't you study mathematics?"

"All right! 'X' stands for an unknown quantity."

"Good! Now replace the word 'quantity' with 'destiny' and you have 'unknown destiny.' *Ibit in locum suum* [He shall go to his unknown destiny]."

Amazed, but also convinced by this explanation, I asked him, "May I keep this partridge?"

"You are welcome to it," he replied. "Would you like to look at the quail too?" he added.

"Yes, let me see it."

He handed it to me. It seemed to be a very fine-looking bird, but on lifting its wings I saw that it was covered with sores. The more I examined it, the more hideous, festering and foul-smelling it became.

"What has happened?" I asked the lad.

"You are a priest and have studied Holy Scripture, and yet you don't understand? Don't you remember that when the Israelites grumbled in the desert, God sent them a flock of quails? The Israelites feasted on them, but even as they ate, God punished thousands of them. This quail tells you that gluttony is more deadly than the sword and is the fountainhead of most sins."

I thanked him for this explanation.

Meanwhile a large number of other partridges and quails appeared over all the hedges, trees, and meadow. You boys pounced upon them and got yourselves a meal. We then resumed our march. Those who had fed on partridges felt strong and followed me; those instead who had feasted on quails lingered in the valley and scattered about. I saw them no more.

As we marched on, the whole scene suddenly changed, and I found myself inside an enormous hall—vaster than our Oratory grounds—filled with people. I searched the crowd but could not spot even a single person from the Oratory. They were all strangers to me. As I stood there bewildered, a man came up and asked me to follow him to the bedside of someone who was dying. I obliged immediately.

He took me to a room where I heard the dying man's confession. As he kept sinking rapidly, I cut his confession short and gave him absolution—none too soon, for he expired soon after. Immediately an unbearable stench filled the room. Suggesting that he be buried without delay, I inquired about the foul odor. "One who dies so quickly is quickly judged," the stranger answered. I walked out of the room and, feeling very tired, asked if I could rest. I was obligingly taken upstairs to another room

where I found two Oratory boys, one of them holding a bundle. "What are you doing here?" I asked. "And what's in the bundle?" They gave me some excuse or other, but it didn't satisfy me.

"Why are you here?" I insisted.

They exchanged glances and told me to wait a minute. So saying, they untied the bundle and spread out a funeral pall. As I looked around the room, I saw that an Oratory youth lay dead in a corner but I wasn't sure who he was.

I asked the two boys to tell me, but they refused. I drew closer and scrutinized the face. I thought I knew him, but I still wasn't sure. Determined to identify him at any cost, I went back downstairs and found myself again in that enormous hall. The crowd of strangers had disappeared, and you boys filled the place. On seeing me enter, you ran over to me.

"Don Bosco, Don Bosco," you cried, "an Oratory pupil has died." I asked for the name, but none of you volunteered to tell me. You dodged my questions and declined to talk. Even when I pressed you, you still refused to answer. Worried and disappointed, I awoke and found myself in bed. It was already morning, but I felt as tired and worn out as if I had really walked the whole night. I tell *you* these things, but I want them to remain within the Oratory. Talk about them among yourselves all you want, but keep them to yourselves.

The next morning, January 17, Don Bosco went to Lanzo for a fatherly visit with the director, Father Dominic Ruffino,<sup>2</sup> and with all his charges. On such occasions, Don Bosco interested himself not only with spiritual matters but also with the material needs of the house, its routine, discipline, and rapport with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. We could say that he instilled fresh energy for work into every member of the staff. Two weeks later he sent this letter to Father Ruffino:

<sup>2</sup> Ruffino (1840-1865) had started corresponding with Don Bosco in 1856 while a diocesan seminarian at Giaveno. In 1857, at Don Bosco's invitation, he spent part of the summer at the Oratory. (See Vol. V, pp. 470f) In 1859, he had the foresight to start, on his own, a diligent chronicle of all that Don Bosco said or did. (See Vol. VI, pp. 282f) In 1860, he applied for membership in the Salesian Congregation. Ordained a priest in 1863, he continued his chronicle until October 1864 when Don Bosco sent him to Lanzo, near Turin, to open and direct this new Salesian school. He died prematurely the following year, a victim of priestly zeal. [Editor]

Turin, February 3, 1865

Dear Father Ruffino,

Scavarda wishes to pick up his belongings; it is understood that he is returning here. His replacement is [John] Chiesa<sup>3</sup> whose good will, I believe, matches Bodrato's.<sup>4</sup>

I have gone over the memorandum for the mayor and am having it copied in good hand.

Give my warmest wishes for every blessing from heaven to all—superiors and boys alike.

May the Most Blessed Virgin grant that in your school there be as many saints as persons. God bless you!

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Fr. John Bosco

Back at the Oratory on January 18, he spoke thus to the boys after night prayers:

I have visited our boys at Lanzo who are as dear to me as you are. I won't say anything of the welcome they gave me, for I'd be repeating myself. I will only say that last night, when I was through talking to them, they all said with one voice: "Please, Father, tell the Oratory boys that we love them as friends and brothers and that we hope they feel the same way toward us. Let them know that on the feast of St. Francis de Sales we will receive Holy Communion and will pray for them all, united in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Tell them we hope to visit them someday and would like them to come up to Lanzo and spend a few days with us." Speaking for you, my dear sons, I replied that possibly some of you may go to Lanzo for good or for a visit, as your superiors think best, and that if any of them should come to Turin, you would welcome them as brothers, especially because you have heard how good they are. You should have seen their happiness! They stood on tiptoe trying to make themselves a few inches taller and gave themselves a quick grooming to look their best!

Now, let's go onto something else. I know you would like to hear more about the dream [I told you the other night]. I will only disclose what the partridge and the quail stand for. In brief, the partridge stands for virtue, the quail for vice. I need not tell you that the fine looks of the quail

<sup>3</sup> Chiesa had frequented the Oratory since the early fifties. (See Vol. IV, p. 322) He was later ordained a priest and died in 1914. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 451f. [Editor]

masking the putrid sores under its wings symbolize impurity. The boys greedily feasting on quail, notwithstanding its rotten condition, are those who give themselves up to sinful habits, while the lads eating partridge are those who love and practice virtue.

I saw boys holding a quail in one hand and a partridge in the other, but feeding exclusively on quail. These lads know the beauty of virtue but refuse to use the God-given means to become good. Others, instead, fed only on partridge, but kept glancing longingly at the quail. They are those who walk the path of virtue, but half-heartedly, by force. Unless they change their outlook, sooner or later they will fall.

I also noticed that quails would keep fluttering in front of the boys eating partridge, but these lads just ignored them. These are the ones who follow virtue and who loathe and despise vice. Then there were boys who ate both partridge and quail. These are the fellows who swing from vice to virtue and vice versa, fooling themselves into believing that they are not so bad after all.

“Who of us was eating what?” you may ask. I have told many already. As for the rest, let them come to me and I’ll tell them too.

Privately he gave serious, wholesome admonitions or joyful news to each inquirer, as the dream had shown him.<sup>1</sup> One day, a dozen boys who were flocking around him asked him about their future. “One of you,” he replied, “will become a great scholar, another a great saint, and a third one a scholar and a saint.”

What shall we say now of the above-narrated dream? Don Bosco, as was his wont, did not explain it fully, limiting himself to what concerned the boys and to some insights into the future. Yet, if we are not mistaken, on studying his words we see in this dream the Oratory, the Salesian Society, and religious orders in general. We shall offer our own comments, leaving it to wiser men to assess their validity.

1. The vineyard is the Oratory. What makes us think so is that Don Bosco helps his boys to all kinds of fruit. This is one of the spiritual vineyards spoken of by Isaiah: “They shall . . . eat the fruit of the vineyards they plant. . . .” [Is. 65, 25] The scene described in the dream obviously points to harvest time.

2. Don Bosco’s trek. The vinedresser’s advice that the stronger ones, namely the Salesians, carry the smaller ones on their shoulders seemingly suggests that necessity then demanded that the

members' spiritual formation be not separated from the active life. Likewise, the impassable dirt road may symbolize the regal road once traveled by the great religious orders that Don Bosco so loved and advocated. It had now become impassable through their laxity, sectarian hatred and repressive laws. Similarly, the path parallel to this road may point to Don Bosco's new congregation.

3. The partridge. Smartness is a trait of this bird. Cornelius a Lapide,<sup>5</sup> in fact, commenting on Chapter 17 of Jeremiah, quotes St. Ambrose (Letter 47) where he describes the smart and often successful tricks of the partridge to escape the hunter's snares and save its brood. One of Don Bosco's frequent sayings to his pupils was: "Be smart!" The inference was that the thought of eternity would suggest to them how to escape the devil's snares.

4. The quail. Gluttony kills vocations.

5. The crowd and the large hall certainly symbolized something of interest. Don Bosco, however, chose to keep silent on these points. Could they perhaps suggest the future Association of Salesian Cooperators?

6. As to the dying man, Don Bosco later told us priests, "He was a former Oratory pupil. I intend to learn whether he has really died."

7. The dead Oratory youth seemingly was [Dominic] Ruffino, very dear to Don Bosco. This explains the boys' reticence. Don Bosco could not identify him because this dream was to prepare him for this great loss instead of shocking him with its bitter certainty. Though Ruffino was in good health at the time, he died on July 16 on this very year.

These are our views on this dream, but our readers may keep their own. We shall now continue with Don Bosco's "Good Nights" from the chronicle:

January 19

We have a custom here I want the new boys to know. On the feast of St. Francis de Sales we award prizes to the best pupils, but the pupils

<sup>5</sup> Cornelius Cornelii a Lapide (Cornelis Cornelissen van den Steen, 1567-1637), a Flemish Jesuit and exegete, wrote ample commentaries on all the books of the Bible, except Job and the Psalms. Above all he was a sincerely pious and zealous priest and an exemplary religious highly regarded for his saintliness by his fellow Jesuits. [Editor]

themselves will allot them to their schoolmates—students to fellow students, artisans to fellow artisans. It goes like this: each boy draws up a list of the ten most diligent, most studious, most virtuous schoolmates he knows, regardless of grade or dormitory, and signs his name to it. He then hands it to his teacher who in turn will give it to me. I will tabulate the results. Those who score highest will receive prizes on the feast of St. Francis de Sales. Clerics are not eligible because they are expected to be better than the boys. In fact, should you know that some cleric is not up to par, I want you to speak out and tell me. I don't want clerics of scant virtue. I will make that cleric doff the habit because a priestly candidate must be more virtuous than any layman. The clerics too can draw up a list of the ten best pupils, and so can the priests. I will draw up mine too, but it will count only as much as yours.

The St. Francis' novena starts tomorrow. I am not going to suggest special acts of devotion, but I want you to be more exact in keeping the house rules, and I particularly ask that you rise promptly in the morning when the bell rings. Raise your heart to God, then dress modestly, tidy up and wait at the foot of your bed until the bell calls you to church. If you wish to make the novena in honor of St. Francis de Sales, do it on you own. Our holy patron will know how to reward you.

January 20

One evening St. Philip Neri said to his youngsters, "My dear boys, I have something to tell you. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, yes," they replied excitedly.

"Good! Listen then. In this world there are lots of smart people and lots of fools. The smart ones are those who sweat and suffer a little to gain heaven; the fools are those who follow the path of eternal perdition. And there are so many of these!"

It's the same with you, my dear sons. Many of you are smart; some are fools. The other day a lad came to me.

"Don Bosco, may I go home?"

"Why?"

"Because I can't stand the cold here."

"My dear boy," I said to him, "don't you know that we must put up with a little suffering and learn to subdue our flesh in order to win heaven?"

Had this boy been really smart, he would have said to himself, *Oh well, if I stick it out, I'll gain more merits for heaven. I want to show Our Lady how much I appreciate Her bringing me here, away from so many spiritual dangers, and making it easy for me to do good and find my vocation.*

Then there are other youngsters who are even bigger fools; they eat meat on forbidden days, indulge in foul conversations or songs, read bad books, and run down their superiors. They are fools who heedlessly rush to perdition. To their dismay, they will realize, when it will be too late, that they thought they were smart because they got away with their wrongdoings. Seemingly, they fooled their superiors, but, in truth, they made fools of themselves.

Don Bosco's words, always well received, properly prepared his pupils for the feast of St. Francis de Sales, which, in the liturgy, was observed on January 29, the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. As usual, but more solemnly than before, the prescribed annual Salesian conference was held on that day in Don Bosco's waiting room. He presided over the meeting during which Father [Michael] Rua, director of the Mirabello junior seminary, and Father [Dominic] Ruffino, director of the Lanzo school, reported on the good being done in their respective houses. Father [Dominic] Pestarino from Mornese was also present. Don Bosco, after thanking and praising his co-workers, briefed them on what had been done at the Oratory. Exhorting them to promote festive oratories, he assured them of Our Lady's protection. He concluded by announcing that he intended to launch another lottery.<sup>6</sup> In fact he had already set things in motion and had selected thirty-two members of the commission. At his invitation, Prince Amadeus of Savoy and Marquis Emmanuel Luserna of Rora, the mayor of Turin, agreed to be respectively the honorary president and vice-president of this commission.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For previous lotteries see the Indexes of Vols. IV, V and VII. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 3

### *Fatherly Talks*

FIRST among the January 1865 documents of our archives is an official recognition of the benefits achieved by Don Bosco's festive oratories. On January 18, the Turin branch of the Banca Nazionale notified Don Bosco of a grant of two hundred and fifty lire for his oratories.<sup>1</sup>

We find also warm letters from important persons which promise or enclose donations and give detailed news of each member of the family whose welfare he was known to have at heart. There are also letters from seminarians who seek Don Bosco's prayers and advice in their spiritual crises. Only two letters of his are extant: the first, dated February 8, 1865 and addressed to the diocesan provicar, is a request for financial help to his Oratory clerics; the other, dated February 14, is a favorable reply to the Minister of Agriculture concerning a boy's admission to the Oratory.

[At about this time] Don Bosco had also applied to the Order of SS. Maurice and Lazarus for titles to be granted to benefactors who had given or promised large donations to his works. He was indeed remarkably inventive in tapping all sources of help, as we have already narrated.<sup>2</sup>

We now return to the chronicle and go on with Don Bosco's "Good Nights":

February 1

*Motus in fine velocior* [Speed increases as the end approaches]. The school year is well advanced and the farther it progresses the quicker days

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. IV, pp. 340f. This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

go by. It's February already and midyear exams are near at hand.<sup>3</sup> Those who have studied their lessons daily will have no fear; those who took things easy will worry and find it hard to cram in these few remaining weeks. Nevertheless, even these fellows should not lose courage because they will not be left to themselves. Your teachers will help you by reviewing past lessons if necessary.

Let me add that the clerics too have to take exams shortly, and I am anxious that they be a credit to themselves and to the Oratory. Try to leave them in peace therefore as much as possible so that they may prepare well. Furthermore, should a cleric find that he is overburdened with other duties, let him tell me and I will see to it that he gets enough time for study.

There is something else I wish to say. For some time now there have been a number of sudden deaths in Turin. They warn us to be prepared. The other night the father of one of our priests (Father Ruffino) went to bed as usual, but the next morning he was dead. Last night, too, a young boy of a well-to-do family retired for the night. His valet waited until he had gone to bed and then went in to see if he needed anything. Receiving no reply, he called and then shook him. The boy was dead! Again, a man, playing cards in a saloon, suffered a stroke. A waiter ran for a doctor, but when the latter arrived, it was too late! What a way to die—from a card game to eternity!

My dear boys, I must also tell you that one of you will die, perhaps even before this month's Exercise for a Happy Death. If he lives long enough to make it, this will be the longest he will live. I hope he will be prepared.

On coming down from the little platform, Don Bosco whispered to us: "Ferraris." It was both a secret and a mandate.

We will here emphasize what we have said elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> These predictions were immeasurably beneficial to those whom God was calling to eternity because Don Bosco took very special care of them. He would confide this secret to a prudent companion of theirs and charge him to act like a guardian angel to the doomed boy. This companion endeavored to make friends with him by playing with him, watched what schoolmates he associated with, suggested he go to confession and Communion often, took him along on visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and gave him opportune advice. This he did

<sup>3</sup> Exams usually took place about two weeks before Easter. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 244-47; Vol. VII, pp. 206-10. [Editor]

unobtrusively, without pestering him or arousing the least suspicion of the secret he harbored. At the Oratory today [1912] there are still some who were entrusted with so delicate a task.

We must also bear in mind that on various occasions when Don Bosco made such predictions, five to eight hundred boys and adults were present, and not all were disposed to believe him. Among adult newcomers there were at times spiteful individuals who impugned his statements, sowed discord and sought to discredit his words. It is then utterly irrational to suppose that Don Bosco could with impunity put something over on his pupils and then somehow or other explain it away if the prediction did not come true. His predictions were straightforward; equally clear were the circumstances of place, time, and person. Many boys wrote down what Don Bosco said—either the same evening or the next morning—compared notes, talked about them, voiced conjectures, ventured guesses, and stayed on the alert until the prediction was fulfilled. They were judges who probed deeply into the matter. We are unable to confirm the fulfillment of only two or three predictions either because they were perhaps conditional or because no news reached us. All those who lived at the Oratory witnessed the hundreds of predictions that proved true. Let us now continue:

#### February 2

Tomorrow, the feast of St. Blaise, bishop of Sebaste (Armenia), who was martyred in 315 A.D. under Emperor Licinius, we shall have the customary blessing of throats. Do you know how this custom came about and why St. Blaise was declared patron of throats? It happened this way. One day a little boy, while eating, got a fish bone stuck in his throat. Doctors could not remove it and the boy was choking. As his grieving mother helplessly watched her dear child gasping for breath, she heard a voice saying: "Bishop Blaise is now being led to his martyrdom. Take the child to him. Ask for his blessing, and the child will live." She ran to the martyr. Moved by her tears, the holy bishop blessed the child in the name of Jesus, and the child was instantly cured.

Let us therefore have our throats blessed tomorrow so that, through this saint's merits, God may safeguard us from all that can hurt us physically or spiritually through our throats. As the Holy Spirit says, gluttony is more deadly than the sword. Ask St. Blaise to guard you above all from

what comes out of the mouth and may be spiritually harmful—foul conversation, blasphemy, cursing, slander, lies—and from what goes in—unlawful foods on abstinence or fast days and excessive eating or drinking. Pray to St. Blaise to free you from all physical and spiritual throat ailments.

#### February 5

This evening I want to say something about Father Francesia's request. Rhetoric I and II students may come to confession one hour before the others. The younger boys will object: "Have these fellows larger souls than we?"

Well, they should have precedence because they are my elder sons. This entitles them to some privileges.

Now let me tell you something about the sacrament of Penance. To draw fruit from this sacrament, it is not enough to go to confession frequently. One must also honestly strive not to sin. In general, go to confession at least once a month, and not oftener than once a week, unless your confessor advises it, lest you make it hard for others to find time for confession. Between confessions, strive not to commit sins. This will be the best fruit of your confessions. As for Holy Communion, receive as often as you can, according to your confessor's advice, whenever your conscience is free from sin.

With customary prudence Don Bosco thus replied to Father Francesia's public request to make it easier for the older students to go to confession without having to lose too much time because of the crowd of younger boys ahead of them. It must be noted that such or similar requests were made at the "Good Night" from time to time, either spontaneously or by previous suggestion from Don Bosco. By this means he roused attention, his words were more effective, and whoever gave the "Good Night" had a better opportunity to correct certain faults or make the superiors' directives more palatable.

#### February 6

Two or three nights ago I had a dream. Would you like to hear it? You are very dear to me, and so you are always in my dreams. I seemed to be in the playground with you swarming around me. Each one held a rose, a lily,

a violet, or both a rose and a lily or some other flower. Suddenly a huge ugly cat, black as coal, appeared. It had horns, eyes as red as live coals, long sharp claws, and a disgustingly swollen belly. This ugly beast edged stealthily close to you, and in a trice clawed your flowers to the ground. When I first spotted this hideous creature, I was terrified, but to my astonishment you seemed totally unconcerned. Seeing it creep toward me to knock my flowers down. I immediately turned to dash off, but someone stopped me.

“Don’t run away,” he said. “Just tell your boys to raise their arms up high beyond the beast’s reach.”

I did as he told me. The monster tried hard to jump up, but its weight made it fall back clumsily to the ground.

The lily, my dear sons, symbolizes the beautiful virtue of purity, against which the devil wages endless war. Woe to those who keep their flower low! The devil will snatch it from them. Such are those who pamper the flesh by overeating or eating between meals, who shirk work and idle away their time, who are fond of certain conversations or books, and who shun self-denial. For goodness’ sake, my children, fight this enemy or it will enslave you.

These victories are hard to win, but Holy Scripture tells us the means to use. “This kind [of devil] can be cast out only by prayer and fasting.” [Matt. 17, 20] Raise your arm, and your flower will be safe. Purity is a heavenly virtue. Whoever wishes to safeguard it must raise himself heavenward. Prayer is your salvation. By prayer I mean your morning and night prayers devoutly said, meditation and Holy Mass, frequent confession and Communion, sermons and exhortations, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the rosary, and your school duties. By prayer you will rise heavenward. Thus you will safeguard the most beautiful of virtues. Try as much as he wants, the devil will not be able to snatch it from you.

### February 7

Last night I told you a dream; tonight I’ll tell you an incident.

A wealthy man, bedridden for two months, seemed to be worsening daily. A devout friend of his advised him to straighten out his temporal affairs and make his will. He also boldly suggested that it would be wise and good to send for a priest.

“Oh no,” the sick man replied. “That’s one thing I won’t do. I will have no priest in my house.”

“Yet,” his friend insisted, “it would be better!”

“Nothing doing. I never wanted to hear about confession even when I was well, much less now that I am sick.”

“Would you mind if Don Bosco came to you?”

“He is welcome as long as he doesn’t speak of confession.”

Last Saturday I took the invitation and called on that sick man. I was courteously received and ushered to his room. The patient seemed very happy to see me.

As I usually do with people of that sort—and with good results—I began telling him funny stories and jokes which made us both laugh so heartily that the sick man asked me to stop because it was just too much.

“Very well, then,” said I. “Let’s shift to something serious.”

“Fine! But keep confession out. That’s the condition I laid down for your visit.”

“But, my friend, how can you expect me not to talk about confession when you yourself are the first to mention it? You have gotten me started on it. I won’t ask you to make your confession, but let me at least talk about it.”

So, I began to tell him of his past life and, by minutely describing his deplorable spiritual state, made him realize the need of returning to God’s grace.

He listened intently without interruption until I was through. “How do you know all that?” he asked.

“It’s simple!” I replied. “I just say, ‘*Otis, Botis, Pia, Tutis.*’ These magic words instantly open up anybody’s conscience to me.”

“Then I don’t have to confess anything. You already did it for me.”

“Yes, my friend. Are you willing to admit that you are guilty of all these sins, are sorry for them, ask God’s pardon and firmly resolve to lead a better life if God restores you to health?”

“Yes, I am!”

“Good!” Then, picking bad books and papers from his bedside table, I asked him, “May I throw these in the fire?”

“Why?”

“Because either they burn to ashes or you land into hell’s everlasting fire.”

“All right, the books can go!”

I threw them into the fireplace.

“There is more yet, my friend,” I continued. “You must get rid of so-and-so at once.” He raised a world of difficulties, but in the end he yielded, though very reluctantly.

“Now,” I said, “I can absolve you from your sins.” Truthfully, he was sufficiently sorry. I spoke to him about receiving Holy Communion, but

he wasn't too keen about it. He declined with the excuse that it would be too much trouble and that it wasn't really necessary. I did not insist. After all, he had made his confession and this was what mattered most. Before leaving, I told his family that if he should ask for Viaticum, they should call a priest from the parish, and that they should send me word if the patient's condition worsened.

I received no call, but one day I went to see him anyway. Unfortunately he had already died. In his last days he kept choking but still hoped to recover. He got the best doctors and promised them fifty thousand lire if they would cure him. The day before he died, a friend called on him to warn him that his condition was critical. "My friend," he told him, "money can buy anything, but it cannot bribe death. You had better think seriously of the life to come."

The poor man calmed down, resigned himself like a good Christian and, after a little more suffering, passed away.

My dear children, I can hardly call this an ideal death. Yet, since he made his confession and died resigned to God's will, we have reason to hope that the Lord dealt mercifully with him. I'd like to stress one thing for your benefit—the words of the patient's friend: "Money can buy anything, but it cannot bribe death." We must be prepared because, when death comes, we cannot send him away for all the money in the world.

### February 9

This evening I want to call your attention to my displeasure on hearing that you refer to the food that is served you with disparaging names. Some jokers come up with nicknames and pass them on to their companions. What will your parents say when they learn that you can't call things by their proper names? As students, you should show yourselves well mannered at all times. What would you think of army generals if you saw them throwing snowballs at each other in Piazza Castello? Wouldn't you laugh at them? So don't give others reasons to laugh at you. Follow the example of people you respect. I won't tell you to imitate Don Bosco, Father Francisca or Father Durando, but act like sensible and respectable people. Have self-respect. Ask yourselves, *How would I act now if my parents, my pastor and my best friends were watching me?* If you do this, you'll act the right way.

But let us now go on to something else. The carnival season is fast progressing. Let us sanctify it as we have planned; let us receive daily Communion, at least spiritually, and say some short prayers during the day. If you would like a nosegay for tomorrow, I'd suggest that since it is

Friday—the day when Our Lord died—for His sake you should forgive offenses, bear patiently any annoyance from your companions and generously offer Our Lord the sacrifice of rising when the morning bell rings and the dormitory assistants get you out of bed.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

**W**E may fittingly apply to Don Bosco and to the Oratory these scriptural maxims: "A fountain of life is the mouth of the just. . . . On the lips of the intelligent is wisdom found. . . . A path to life is his who heeds admonition, but he who disregards reproof goes astray. . . . The just man's lips nourish many, but fools die for want of sense." [Prov. 10, 11. 13. 17. 21]

Indeed Don Bosco's utterances gave him such a hold over his boys that order and morality ruled over the Oratory and facilitated the control of over seven hundred boys. Among so large a crowd there was of course a handful—perhaps a score—of youngsters intolerant of discipline and correction who slyly tried to sow discord and create trouble. Such individuals are to be found in every group. At the Oratory, though, the pupils as a whole actively withstood these troublemakers. Firmly banded into sodalities, they did their utmost to rehabilitate as many of these scamps as they could, to shield the unwary from their snares, and to isolate and unmask the diehards.

We make these observations lest anyone be led to misjudge the state of affairs at the Oratory through Don Bosco's talks. Whatever he said or will say about things he saw in his dreams mainly concerns the spiritual struggles that beset us poor mortals—struggles which God alone knows and often reveals to privileged ones whom He chooses as special co-workers in the task of saving souls.

We shall now draw on the chronicle for summaries of talks which Don Bosco gave at this time:

February 13

The other night I told you about an ugly big cat I had spotted sneaking into the Oratory and knocking flowers from your hands. It had horns, and

its eyes burned like live coals. I also said that this hideous beast was the devil himself trying to ruin you.

At the time I thought that I was only imagining things, but now, to my great sorrow, I must say that this monster has wrought great havoc among you. I am not implying that most of you were victims. No, the victims were very few, but still more numerous than I thought. These last few days, certain things have happened here which never happened before. There is a lot of stealing going on: books, money, clothing, fruit, anything left unguarded. Then there are some who read books that are positively bad; they read them in church during the spiritual reading and even during services. There are those also who skip church and school and hide away even in restrooms. They would rather die in that foul air than report to their duties. Worse yet, some have set themselves up as corrupters of their own schoolmates. To make matters worse, they brag about the evil they do as if it were something to be proud of. Scripture says that they "delight in doing evil, and rejoice in perversity." [Prov. 2, 14] I have therefore decided to get rid of these scandal-mongers. Don Bosco is the most forbearing man on earth and will put up with vandalism, mischief and pranks, but he draws the line when souls are at stake. Then he becomes adamant.

When a boy comes here, I am happy because I see in him a soul to be saved. When he joins my other boys, he becomes my crown. But there are two sorts of crowns. If he cooperates with me and does his best to save his soul, he is a crown of roses; if, instead, he rejects my advice and shows no interest in his spiritual welfare, he becomes a very painful crown of thorns. And should it happen that, besides harming himself, he tries to ruin others, then I absolutely cannot put up with him and must get him out of the Oratory. Therefore, those who are responsible for these disorders will be notified tomorrow to leave this Oratory which they have disgraced by their misdeeds.

Those who are less guilty can take this as a public warning, though I will also speak to each one privately. To them I say now: "My sons, mend your ways or the same punishment will befall you. Turn over a new leaf now while you can, or you'll be lost forever."

I know that some of these fellows inwardly scoff at my words, but let them understand that, if I let them stay here a few more days, it is only to give them a last chance. The devil pushes you into sin and fools you into believing that you will not be found out. He will do his utmost himself to cover up your misdeed, but there is only the slimmest chance that I may not come to know of it. And even if your wrongdoings may go undetected

for a while, bear in mind that if the devil is clever, the Lord is more clever yet.

Let me unburden myself. I keep no secrets from you. I feel that I must be candid with you. You boys may be very much at fault, but those who have authority over you are not entirely guiltless. If everyone did his duty, certain disorders would not take place. Let every superior therefore strive to use his authority for the good of souls.

To remedy these disorders I suggest two means, though those most in need of them will probably turn them down. The first is obedience—the very thing which, in the wake of other disorders, was totally disregarded these past few days. I urge you therefore to obey your craftsmasters, assistants, and teachers in the shops, dining room, study hall, and classrooms.

Your obedience must have no limits. Even if your superior is at fault, obey and hold your peace. Come to me later and I shall uphold your rights and give each one his due. Obey and do not criticize orders. Let there be an end to the grumbling which has been going on for too many days in this house.

The second means, which will seem unthinkable to many, is this: denounce the ringleaders. They are a real plague because the devil uses them as his allies and spurs them on to do as much harm as they can among their companions. Denounce them! Unmask them! This way you will save their souls. Perhaps you are afraid that you will be called squealers. Are you going to keep from doing a good deed because some fools may call you names? If a burglar broke into a house, would you refrain from shouting “thief” for fear he might call you a squealer? If a sentry were to spot a man trying to break into the king’s palace to murder him, would he let him in? Do you know what a sentry would do if the assassin threatened to call him a squealer? He would order him to leave, and if the man refused, he would shoot him on the spot. It’s no different here, my dear boys. You are in the palace of heaven’s King. An enemy breaks in to kill souls. Will you be afraid to do your duty for fear of being called a squealer? Let these fools call you anything they want. The Lord will call you something else and reward you for your charity.

My dear sons, as I have already told you, one of us will soon have to face God’s tribunal! Did I say “one”? No! Before long, several—many, in fact—will be in the grave. To be more exact, all of us, sooner or later, certainly not many years from now, shall stand before God’s tribunal. The Lord will ask me whether I said what I was bound to tell you, but He will

also ask you whether you listened to me. Many will be able to say that they did and that they kept pure. Very many others will say: "Lord, sometimes we offended You, but we truthfully repented and strove to make amends." If someone will not listen to me, he will be lost, and it will be only his own fault.

In conclusion, do you want to outwit the devil? Never let him catch you idle. Work, study and pray, and you will surely overcome your spiritual enemy.

February 16

A few more days and the carnival season will be over. At its start I urged you to offer your good deeds and prayers for those souls in purgatory who needed them in order to be admitted into paradise. Contrary to what you may have thought, relief for the souls in purgatory was not my only purpose; my other purpose was that the Lord would grant me a lively faith, the kind that moves even mountains. You may say, "What has that to do with us? If you need faith, that's your problem." Yes, my dear boys, it is so, but you are good, and because of you the Lord will give me the graces I need.

We have to pray that God may set right the disorders that take place outside, and those which occur within our own house. There is no need for me to tell you what disorders take place outside. All I say is: "Pray."

As for those which happen in our own house, you have seen that I had to dismiss six boys. I assure you that two nights ago, after telling you of my decision, I felt so deeply distressed that I could not get a moment's sleep. My dear children, you have no idea of all I put up with in order to save you! To slave for years to save a boy and then to be forced to dismiss him and throw him back into the world from which I rescued him lest he be eternally lost is too painful for words, my dear boys. And what caused it all? Gluttony, the main cause of the loss of most souls. Food and money were stolen to satisfy gluttony! Books and other things were pilfered and sold for gluttony's sake. This is why some boys were expelled.

Another weapon the devil employs is immodesty, or, more frankly, impurity. My dear children, be on your guard. The devil will tempt you with bad books, bad thoughts, or the foul conversation of a companion. When any such fellow approaches you, say to yourself, *This is a minister of Satan*. And let each of these wretches who indulges in foul conversation say to himself, *I am a minister of Satan because I help him ruin souls!*

My dear boys, avoid stealing and impurity if you wish to please the Lord. The means to overcome the demon of impurity is faithfully to fulfill one's duties and follow the house rules.

Don Bosco had told his boys: "There is no need for me to tell you what disorders take place outside. All I say is: 'Pray.'" Afterward, when his young clerics and priests were alone with him, he disclosed that if many people prayed, a pending bill for the suppression of monasteries would not pass. As a matter of fact, such a bill was withdrawn on April 28, 1865.<sup>1</sup>

We now continue with Don Bosco's "Good Nights" as reported in the chronicle:

February 17

Recently a friend delivered a letter of mine to the Holy Father. The Pope read it and then asked the bearer for news of Don Bosco, his boys and the Oratory. All in all he displayed a keen interest in us.

With his reply the Pope sent me his blessing, adding: "Tell your boys that I bless them. May they grow as numerous as the stars of heaven, and may they be like young olive plants around the Lord's table."

The Pope has blessed us, and we should do something to show our appreciation. What will this "something" be? Promptness in rising. You may wonder, *What has this to do with the Pope's blessing?* Plenty, and I'll prove it to you. The Pope blessed you because he ardently desires that you become saints by gaining merits with your good deeds. One such good deed is starting the day by obeying this house rule. To begin with, you earn merits by overcoming laziness, thus exercising self-control. But there is also another reason. Each morning I go down to church ahead of you and find nobody there waiting for confession. Then, at the second bell, a crowd rushes into the sacristy. From the start of Mass to the end of meditation, I haven't enough time to hear their confessions as I earnestly wish. Therefore, rise promptly, raise your mind to God with a short prayer, and as soon as you are through washing and tidying up, come down to church. If you don't need to go to confession, you can always say some prayers. And if you don't wish to come at once to church, stand by your bed and

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

pray to St. Joseph, Mary's chaste spouse, to grant you the gift of holy purity. Then, at the second bell, come straight down.

It often happens that the priest is already at the altar and stragglers keep coming in through the sacristy and the side door too, and this goes on even when the Mass has reached the Gospel or the Elevation. My dear boys, be prompt in rising. Missing Mass is a serious misfortune. Be more concerned about it; be prompt in rising. One hour gained in the morning is a treasure for the evening, an extra hour of living, of studying, of gaining merits.

My dear children, I know you well because I can read your hearts. The devil employs two means to lead you into sin. The first is to entice you to stay in bed after the time of rising or to linger a while—five minutes today, ten minutes tomorrow, and so on. By the third day a boy will still be in bed when the bell rings for church. Then he will jump out and dash downstairs half-asleep. How can he pray seriously in that state and obtain the graces he needs? But there is more. He will get to like this extra sleep and then, under the pretext of an indisposition or ache of some kind, he will stay in bed throughout the whole Mass. While enjoying his comfort and laziness he may think he is alone, but he is wrong. He has company. And what company it is—the devil himself! The old tempter is with him and does a superb job! If you only knew how many sins the devil makes youngsters commit in this manner! When prayers are over and the boys come out of church, this lazybones dresses hurriedly and hustles over to the study hall like a little mutt, having never said a prayer. He pulls his books out, but how can he study? His head is heavy, his mouth tastes funny, and all he can think of is breakfast. Of course he will either forget his homework and invent some excuse for not doing it, or, if he does it, it will be a slipshod job. Therefore, rise promptly, and bear in mind that Mass is too important to be missed without a good reason.

I would also like to tell you something about gluttony but I won't do so because I have talked too long already.

### February 19

The carnival season is about over, and I hope you have spent it in a praiseworthy manner. In some towns and boarding schools it is customary to dedicate this month to Our Lady's sorrows in atonement for the many sins committed during the season. I hope that by praying for the souls in purgatory we have done our best to satisfy divine justice.

Let us now turn to Christ's vicar on earth. During these days something extraordinary took place concerning Pope Pius IX. I wish the published

report to be read here tomorrow night so that you may realize how saintly the Pope is.

Today we also begin St. Joseph's month,<sup>2</sup> and I'd like you to spend it devoutly. The Blessed Virgin's spouse will obtain many favors for us if we make him our friend. I don't want you to do anything extraordinary, like fasting. In fact, you should not undertake any such thing, however holy, without permission. Rather, let me tell you how you should honor St. Joseph. Many of you boys are lazy. I am not saying that most of you are lazybones, but the fact is that many are. Of course I realize that nearly all of you are doing well. That's why I am proud that the Oratory has such a great number of good lads diligently fulfilling all their duties. I therefore urge you all to honor St. Joseph by most carefully carrying out all your duties in the classroom, study hall, church, dining room and dormitory. Those who haven't been quite so diligent should strive to be so from now on, also because St. Joseph is particularly helpful to those who have to take exams. If you want to pass, pray to him. He won't let you down. How about those who have taken things easy so far? Let them strive to make up for it. I hope that with St. Joseph's help they too will not fare too poorly. Often it has happened that, through his intercession, such boys got better grades than they actually deserved, or they were questioned on topics they knew best, or they managed, when stumped, to give satisfactory answers. I am not saying that you should continue to be lazybones and leave it to St. Joseph to bail you out, but, rather, that you should turn over a new leaf and, while praying to him, resolve to be more diligent from now on.

If you want a suggestion, try honoring St. Joseph by reciting daily during the month a *Pater* and *Ave*. It's a little thing in itself but it will prove helpful. Good night! God's peace and blessing be with you.

#### February 24

My dear boys, I have been away a few days, though it is my deepest desire to be constantly with you in order to help you all I can. This I want to do because I have consecrated myself entirely to your spiritual and temporal well-being. But even when I am away, I work for the Oratory. In fact, I can say that I did more for you in the past few days than I could have done staying at home. I had a lot of things to attend to and many letters to write. I could hardly have done all this here, what with calls and unavoidable interruptions of all kinds.

<sup>2</sup> Since St. Joseph's feast was solemnly kept on March 19, it was customary to start a month's devotions on February 18 or 19. [Editor]

However, you, my dear children, were always in my thoughts and prayers. Did you think of me? Did you pray for me? Some did, but what about the others? Oh well! Never mind now! Let's forget it. If you did not pray, do so from now on.

I went to Cuneo and stayed a few days with the bishop who treated me royally. The first night, after an excellent supper,<sup>3</sup> I went to bed toward eleven and fell asleep immediately. As usual, I began to dream, and since the tongue always turns to the aching tooth, as the saying goes, I dreamed that I was at the Oratory with my beloved boys. I seemed to be seated at my desk while you were having a world of fun playing, shouting and running about. I was very pleased with all the noise because I know that when you are playing the devil has no chance to harm you, no matter how hard he tries. I was rejoicing at this hubbub when suddenly all noise ceased and a deadly silence fell upon the playground. In alarm I stood up to find out what had happened.

As I crossed into the waiting room, a horrid monster burst in from the outer door. Seemingly unaware of my presence, head and eyes lowered to the ground, the monster advanced straightforward like a beast about to spring on its victim. Trembling for your safety, I looked down from the window to see if anything had happened to you. The whole playground was full of monsters like the one in my waiting room, though smaller. You, my boys, had been forced back against the walls and porticoes, but many of you were lying on the ground, seemingly dead. This piteous sight so frightened me that I awoke screaming. I woke everybody else up too, from the bishop to the last servant.

My dear boys, generally speaking we must pay no attention to dreams, but when they teach us a moral lesson, we may give them a thought. I have always tried to learn why certain things happen, and I'll do so also as regards this dream. That monster may well be the devil who is ever trying to ruin us. Some boys fell victims to him, while others went unscathed. Shall I show you how not to fear him and successfully withstand him? Listen. There are two things the devil is deadly afraid of: fervent Communion and frequent visits to the Blessed Sacrament. Do you want Our Lord to grant you many graces? Visit Him often. Do you want Him to grant you only a few? Visit Him but seldom. Do you want the the devil to attack you? Rarely visit the Blessed Sacrament. Do you want the devil to flee from you? Visit Jesus often. Do you want to overcome the devil? Take refuge at Jesus' feet. Do you want to be overcome by the devil? Give up visiting Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting a few inconsequential details. [Editor]

Visiting the Blessed Sacrament, my dear boys, is essential if you want to overcome the devil. Therefore, make frequent visits to Jesus. If you do that, the devil will never prevail against you.

Tomorrow our young clerics will take exams. I wish them luck. As I always do on such occasions, I will offer up my Holy Mass for their success. I do hope everything will go well.

February 28

I am going to be brief. Tomorrow—Ash Wednesday—receive your ashes reverently. The Church introduced this ceremony for a good reason—to remind us of what we are and what we shall all be. “Remember that you are dust and unto dust you shall return.” When Adam was driven out of the earthly paradise in punishment for his sin, God willed in His infinite goodness to give him a memento to serve him as a norm and a restraint though life: “Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return.” [Gen. 3, 19] My dear sons, remember this great maxim. Call it to mind often and it will do you much good. “You are but dust and ashes,” we read in Holy Scripture. [Gen. 18, 27] Another passage tells us, “Worms shall be your covering.” [Is. 14, 11] After death our whole body shall swarm with worms. What good is it then to pay excessive care to our looks if one day worms will feed upon us?<sup>4</sup> But this is not the only lesson the Church teaches us by the imposition of ashes. As our body returns to dust, how will our soul fare? It will receive a sentence of everlasting happiness or misery according to our works. My dear boys, behave in such a way that when your body returns to dust, your soul will enjoy the everlasting happiness of heaven. Be on guard lest your body cause your soul’s damnation.

Along with these admonishments, Don Bosco also gave the boys the joyful news that the Holy Father had renewed his permission for three Midnight Christmas Masses at the Oratory and had extended the same privilege to the Salesian schools at Mirabello and Lanzo.<sup>5</sup> One thing, however, caused Don Bosco serious and constant worry—the need of the Holy See’s permission to issue dimissorial letters<sup>6</sup> to the Oratory clerics. He foresaw that without this power he would have serious difficulties year after year because some

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> Letters authorizing the bearer’s ordination. [Editor]

bishops were reluctant to issue such letters and some clerics were unwilling to put with delays to their ordination.

In Rome, meanwhile, Father Emilian Manacorda, knowing Don Bosco's wishes, tried to have them satisfied, but a reply from the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars on March 20, 1865 denied his request.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, on April 25, 1865, the subdeacon Joseph Lazzero was ordained a deacon at Susa by the ordinary, Bishop John Odone.

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 5

### *Special Charisms*

ON February 1 [at the “Good Night”] Don Bosco had announced: “One of you will die, perhaps even before this month’s Exercise for a Happy Death. If he lives long enough to make it, this will be the longest he will live.”<sup>1</sup>

The announcement had been prompted by a dream. One night Don Bosco dreamed that he was walking into the playground with his usual guide<sup>2</sup> during recreation time. Unexpectedly, a majestic, magnificent eagle appeared out of nowhere and began circling over the boys, gradually flying lower and lower. As Don Bosco gazed on in wonder, the guide said, “Do you see that eagle? It is after one of your boys.”

“Which one?” Don Bosco asked.

“The one on whose head it will rest. Look!”

Don Bosco’s eyes never left the eagle which, after wheeling about a little longer, finally spiraled down and perched on the head of thirteen-year-old Anthony Ferraris of Castellazzo Bormida. Don Bosco recognized the boy perfectly and then awoke. To assure himself that he was awake he clapped his hands. Then, mulling over the dream, he silently prayed, “O Lord, if this is really going to happen, when will it be?”

He fell asleep again and once more he dreamed. His mysterious guide reappeared and said, “Ferraris will not live long enough to make the Exercise for a Happy Death more than once.” He then vanished.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 18. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See pp. 21, 147, 158f. See also Vol. V, pp. 243f; Vol. VI, pp. 160f, 510; Vol. VII, pp. 143f. [Editor]

Convinced of the reality of the message, Don Bosco made it public to the boys [without revealing Ferraris' name]. At this time Ferraris was feeling quite well.

A month later, Don Bosco had occasion to call attention again to his prediction. When, on March 1, thirteen-year-old John Baptist Savio of Cambiano went home for serious health reasons, the rumor spread that this young artisan might be the one whose death Don Bosco had predicted. Don Bosco flatly squelched the rumor on Friday, March 3, at the "Good Night":

### March 3

Tonight I am going to talk about matters that concern our own life here at the Oratory. First, Lent has already started and we should sanctify it with good works. Those who are bound to fast already know what to do without my telling them, but what about the others? Is nothing expected of them? Yes, they too are bound to perform good works. If they cannot fast, let them do something else. Here is a suggestion: go frequently to confession and Communion to obtain the graces you need from God. These days of Lent are the most propitious in the whole year, as Holy Scripture tells us: "Now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation." [2 Cor. 6, 2]

I have already told you that one of us is [soon] to die. You will say, "Could it perhaps be little Savio?" I tell you frankly, he is not the one! Who will it be then? Only God knows, but it is one who is here among you and has heard my warning. I hope he has made his last Exercise for a Happy Death well.

Therefore, be prepared, all of you! Really, there shouldn't be any need for me to tell you this because Our Lord Himself gave us this warning nineteen hundred years ago when He said: "Be ready . . ." [Luke 12, 40] Death will come when we least expect it, like a thief in the night.

I am repeating these warnings because for some time now certain disorders have crept into our house and they must be done away with. There is too much blatant lying going on all the time, too many pretexts for leaving church during services. Anyone going through the house at any time can come across a few boys loitering about with ready excuses to sidetrack those in charge of supervision. There are some too who during study hours absent themselves under the pretext of going to confession, only to roam about the house. However, I must say that I am very pleased with the vast majority who conduct themselves very well indeed. The

disorders I have mentioned concern only a few, but they are disorders. In the dining room, bread and soup are spattered on the floor, on companions' clothes, and sometimes—jokingly—even on the assistant<sup>1</sup>—a thing we cannot tolerate. Let there be an end to all this nonsense. Do better from now on.

I have suggested frequent confession and Communion, but do not misunderstand me. Rather than make bad confessions, do not go at all. It will mean one confession less, but also one sacrilege less. There are some who go to confession but keep back sins. These boys should not go to confession at all. "Shall we no longer go to confession then?" they may ask. Certainly not, if you are going to make a sacrilegious confession. You are better off in your present state than by adding to your sins.

"What can we do then?" Straighten out all your past confessions without delay. Even if your sins have turned your souls redder than scarlet, they will become whiter than snow through the sacrament of Penance. [Cf. Is. 1, 18]

Holy Communion too must be received with due dispositions. Some boys dare to go to Holy Communion while giving no thought at all to correcting their faults. They think nothing of chatting for hours instead of studying; they receive Communion in the morning and then spend the day enjoying unbecoming conversation, criticizing superiors and companions, giving their assistants a hard time and so on. How can one believe that these lads received Communion devoutly in the morning? "By their fruits you will know them," says the Lord. [Matt. 7, 16] If such are their fruits, what are we to think of the tree which produced them? How good were these Communions that brought about no improvement? "What shall we do then?" you will ask. Do all you can to prove that you know how to draw fruit from the sacraments. I realize that you cannot become perfect overnight and that faults can be corrected only little by little and with difficulty. But the least you can do is to strive earnestly to root them out, to show that you are improving. Give proof of your good will by diligently fulfilling all your duties.

Lastly, I want to give a piece of advice to those who are about to graduate: "Strive by good works to make your calling and election sure." [2 Pet. 1, 10] During this Lenten season study your vocation. Strive by your good works to obtain the grace that God may show you your path of life. Some of you tell me, "We don't want to become priests." There is nothing wrong with that, but surely you want to be good laymen and save

<sup>1</sup> Usually a young Salesian brother entrusted with the supervision of the boys in practically every activity. [Editor]

your souls. Pray, therefore, that you make no mistake in choosing your state of life in the world. "There is plenty of time to think of that," you may add. I ask: When will you do it? When it will be too late? My dear boys, pray now and make good Communions. Above all, let us pray for the one who will die before the next Exercise for a Happy Death. What if I should be the one? Pray also for me. On my part I will pray for the one among you whom God has chosen to call to Himself.

The next day, replying to a private question, Don Bosco disclosed that the boy's name began with the letter "F." We must remark that about thirty pupils were in that category and that all the Oratory boys were in good health. It was on one of these days that Don Bosco, while in his room, remarked to John Bisio,<sup>4</sup> "I regret that Our Lord always takes away my best boys."

"Is it one of the best then that is going to die?" Bisio made free to ask.

"Yes!" Don Bosco replied. "Anthony Ferraris. But I am not worried about him because he is a very virtuous boy and is quite prepared."

Bisio then asked Don Bosco how he knew that. Very simply Don Bosco told him the dream of the eagle without suggesting in the least that it was a charism. He concluded with these words: "Watch over him and keep me informed that I may assist him in the last days of his illness."

Meanwhile Ferraris was beginning to feel indisposed and now and then had to report sick. At first it seemed only a minor ailment, but soon his illness became manifestly grave. When Don Bosco took Doctor Gribaudo to the boy's bedside, he diagnosed the condition as serious. The boy himself had apparently completely forgotten the dream he had had a year before, which we described in our previous volume.<sup>5</sup>

Don Bosco heard the doctor's diagnosis without betraying any emotion and lovingly cheered the boy up as if he knew nothing of his fate. His frequent visits greatly consoled the lad.

<sup>4</sup> Bisio was Don Bosco's receptionist from 1864 to 1871. (See Vol. VI, p. 20) Later, he became a lifelong Salesian cooperator. See also Vol. III, p. 352; Vol. IV, p. 131; Vol. V, p. 450. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 470. [Editor]

Ferraris' mother came to visit him. His condition was not then critical. After nursing him for a few days, she took Bisio aside and, believing Don Bosco to be a saint, she asked, "What does Don Bosco say about my son? Will he die?"

"Why do you ask?" Bisio replied.

"To know whether I should remain or return home."

"How do you feel about your son's condition?"

"As a mother I naturally wish him to recover, but I leave it to God to do what is best for him."

"Do you feel resigned to God's will?"

"Whatever God decides, I shall accept."

"And if your son were to die?"

"What can I say?"

At this display of Christian resignation, Bisio hesitated a little and then replied, "You'd better stay. Don Bosco has told me that your son is a good boy and is well prepared."

At these words that good Christian mother silently gave vent to her grief. "I'll stay," she sobbed.

Bisio had suggested that she remain because, according to Don Bosco's prediction, the next Exercise for a Happy Death was only five or six days away.

Anthony Ferraris died on Thursday morning, March 16 [1865] after receiving the Last Sacraments. As the end came near, Don Bosco was at his bedside, whispering short prayers to him. He then gave the boy final absolution and read the prayers for the dying. The boy's death occurred, as predicted, before the next Exercise for a Happy Death.

John Bisio confirmed the story of his part in this episode by a formal oath, concluding as follows: "Don Bosco told us many other dreams concerning Oratory boys' deaths. We believed them to be true prophecies. We still do, because unfailingly they came true. During the seven years I lived at the Oratory, not a boy died without Don Bosco predicting his death. We were also convinced that whoever died there under his care and assistance surely went to heaven."

On the evening of Ferraris' death, March 16, Don Bosco thus addressed the boys:

I can see that you are all anxious to hear of Anthony's last moments, and I am here to satisfy your rightful desire. He died fully resigned. In his short illness he suffered much but very serenely. When Anthony first came here, he told me, "Don Bosco, I am ready to do anything you say. I will obey you in everything. If I do something wrong, tell me and punish me. I promise that I'll correct myself." He restated this at other times. I replied that I would do my best for his spiritual and physical well-being. Every time I counseled him, he promptly corrected himself. He was so obedient that we could say he had no will of his own. His teacher told me that he excelled in diligence and study. When he fell ill, I hastened to visit him because the doctor had diagnosed his condition as serious. I asked him if he wanted to receive Holy Communion on St. Thomas' feast. "Must I get up and go to church with the others?" he asked. "I am too weak."

"No need," I replied. "Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will come to you. Would you like that?"

"Very much, Father!"

"Is there anything troubling your conscience?" I went on. "Anything you want to tell me?" He thought a while and then answered, "No, Father, I have nothing."

What a beautiful answer! He knew he was about to die and yet could answer tranquilly and serenely, "Nothing worries me!"

"Tell me," I went on, "are you willing to go to heaven?"

"Oh yes!" he replied. "After hearing so many wonderful things about Our Lord I'll be able to see Him face to face and I will understand what my soul is."

"Is there anything you would like me to do for you?" I asked him on another occasion.

"Just help me to go to heaven."

"Anything else?"

"Yes, help all my companions too."

I promised him that I would do my utmost. This morning he felt much worse. He could no longer speak because he kept choking.

I told Rossi<sup>6</sup> to call me as soon as the end seemed near and turned to leave. Exhausted, Anthony had closed his eyes. I had hardly taken a step when he opened his eyes and, tossing his arms about, gave a choked cry. I

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Rossi, a Salesian coadjutor brother, entered the Oratory in 1859 at the age of twenty-four and became a Salesian the following year. In 1869 Don Bosco appointed him purveyor for the Oratory and the other Salesian houses. In 1877 and 1886 he took part in the General Chapters as a consultant at Don Bosco's invitation. He continued to enjoy the trust of Don Bosco's first successor until his own death in 1908. See Vol. VI, pp. 159f, 274, 362, 426, 559ff. [Editor]

went back to his bedside and asked what he wanted. With an effort he said that he wanted me at his side in his last moments. I told him not to worry, that I was only going to my room to take care of some papers and that I would return at once should the end be near. Shortly afterward I was informed that Anthony was sinking fast. I immediately hurried to his bedside. He was very weak, but the end did not seem imminent. Again I made for my room. Opening his eyes once more, Anthony gave the same choked cry. He became aware of my attempt whenever I tried to leave the room. A few moments later, Rossi called me again. I ran back. Though Anthony's pulse was still beating, his breathing was no longer noticeable. After some minutes, with a sigh he gave up his soul to God.

Ferraris had contracted a very bad cold which, combined with an acute inflammation of the upper respiratory tract, brought him to his grave. He died most tranquilly after much suffering borne uncomplainingly with perfect resignation. Death did not frighten him. He had nothing on his conscience to worry him.

I am sure, my dear children, that every one of us would like to be in his place. I am convinced that he went straight to heaven, and I would gladly swap places with him. Tomorrow we will say the rosary for the repose of his soul. His classmates will accompany his body to the parish church tomorrow evening.

I conclude with a request: if I again should announce that someone is to die, for goodness' sake, take me to task. There are some boys here who get terribly frightened and write to their parents to come and take them home because Don Bosco is always announcing that someone is to die soon. . . . Yet, tell me, would Ferraris have prepared himself so well for God's judgment if I had not made that announcement? True, he was a good boy, but who can consider himself perfectly prepared to stand at God's severe judgment? Ferraris was very fortunate to have been forewarned. Anyway, from now on I shall no longer make such announcements. I will sound no warnings. (Here many voices broke in, "No, no, Father, always tell us!")

But to those who are so much afraid of death I say, "My children, do what you are supposed to do; do not indulge in foul talk, frequent the sacraments, and do not give in to gluttony. Death then will not frighten you."

In announcing Ferraris' death, Don Bosco had added, "Before long, several—many in fact—will be in the grave."<sup>7</sup> From the

<sup>7</sup> See p. 27. [Editor]

context of that "Good Night," it is clear that Don Bosco's words had a broad meaning based on the shortness of human life. Nevertheless, that same year, 1865, several others died, as we gather from the Oratory records and as we shall narrate in due time.

While teaching his pupils by word of mouth, Don Bosco continued his priestly ministry among the people with *Letture Catholique*. The March and April issues, authored by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, were entitled *Memoirs on Father John Ignatius Vola. . . .* This exemplary diocesan priest, a great friend of Don Bosco and of the Oratory,<sup>8</sup> had died in Turin on February 6, 1858 at the age of sixty-one.

The May issue, *History of the Inquisition*, was written by Father Peter Bocalandro. . . .

At this time Don Bosco was also busy writing the biography of the venerable servant of God, Mary of the Angels, a Discalced Carmelite nun of Turin whose beatification had been set for May 14 of that year.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Vol. II, pp. 336f. [Editor]

<sup>9</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 6

### *For God and Country*

**A**T this point of our narrative we feel that we must illustrate an episode which will serve as introduction to one of the most glorious periods of Don Bosco's life. At this time, when Italian Catholics needed guidance and comfort more than ever, one hundred and eight episcopal sees were vacant; forty-five bishops were in exile, seventeen had been barred from taking possession of their sees, and the rest had died. In the old states of Piedmont alone, eighteen bishops had died, worn out by age, work and worries, and no one had replaced them.

The government was not a bit concerned because its policy was to reduce the number of dioceses; the Pope, on the other hand, could not fill the vacancies as long as relations between Church and State remained highly strained. Just a few months earlier [December 1864] the publication of the *Syllabus* had enraged the whole world's anticlericals.

Don Bosco was grieved by such a deplorable situation. After praying much and having his boys pray, he consulted persons in authority and decided to initiate talks with government officials to induce them to end a state of affairs so harmful to Church and civil society. He did not consider the obstacles insurmountable because the revolutionaries themselves had often proclaimed that they wanted the Church to be free and the Pope to devote himself to strictly religious concerns, without territorial entanglements. Why not, then, appeal to the sincerity of their solemn declarations?

Besides, most government officials were not moved by hatred of the Church but rather by the pressure of revolutionaries, much against their will. Some, for motives Don Bosco well knew, tended to approve certain concessions to the Church; others strove to silence the remorse of their consciences by fooling themselves into

thinking that they had also done some good; finally, there were also those who, for personal motives affecting their relations with very important families, chose to profess moderate opinions.

Don Bosco had already dealt with these officials—prudently, of course—on matters affecting the Oratory or on Church matters, such as rebutting false accusations against bishops or clearing the way for the conferment of benefices or obtaining subsidies or endowments for parish churches.

We should not be surprised therefore that he would undertake to plead the cause of the Italian dioceses and pursue this noble task on and off over a period of some ten years. With the Pope's approval, he began, through some highly placed contacts, to investigate the leanings of some cabinet ministers.

Our records of February 1865 mention that an exchange of letters had been going on for some time between Don Bosco and Pius IX through a trusted intermediary, Father Emilian Manacorda.<sup>1</sup> The contents are unknown because Don Bosco himself must have destroyed them.

Meanwhile King Victor Emmanuel had been notified that the Pope would write to him, as in fact he did on March 6, 1865, urging the king to come to an agreement concerning the vacant sees and to send his personal representative to Rome. The Pope's proposal was forwarded to the Minister of the Interior—Giovanni Lanza—who was favorable to the negotiations.<sup>2</sup> Shortly afterward, Don Bosco received the following invitation:

Department of the Interior

Turin, March 17, 1865

By order of the Minister, the undersigned asks for a conference with you. If you can oblige, please come to this office at your convenience during office hours.

Very truly yours,  
Veglio

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 77, 380; Vol. VII, pp. 442f. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> These two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

Don Bosco obliged. On his return to the Oratory, someone asked him what he had gone there for. "On very important matters," he replied.

After this first meeting, Don Bosco was called several other times by the Minister of the Interior, and for good reason. At that time Don Bosco more than anyone else was in a position to assess the leanings of the Roman Curia, to know which envoy would be more acceptable to the Pope and cardinals and who could help bring about successful negotiations in Rome. Later on, he did mention this most delicate task of his to us, but at this time he maintained strict secrecy.

Among other things, he told us of Lanza's friendliness to him. One day, in the presence of other cabinet ministers, Lanza said to him, "Don Bosco, tell us, how can you meet so many expenses? Where do you get the money to feed all those boys? What's your secret?"

"Sir," Don Bosco answered, "I operate as a steam engine."

"What do you mean? I don't quite follow you."

"I keep going puff, puff!"<sup>3</sup>

"Yes, but these 'puffs' must eventually be paid. What's your secret for that?"

"I will tell you, Your Excellency. An engine needs fuel. . . ."

"What kind of fuel do you really mean?"

"The fuel of trust in God!" Don Bosco replied. "Without it, empires fall, kingdoms come to ruin, and the work of man is brought to naught."

These words, uttered as Don Bosco sometimes was wont to do, gave Lanza food for thought.

Eventually, on April 14, two government officials were dispatched to Rome and were warmly welcomed by the Pope. Negotiations produced the following tentative agreement:

1. The king was to submit candidates for vacant Piedmontese dioceses according to the existing concordat.

2. The Pope was to appoint bishops to vacant dioceses of the provinces incorporated into the kingdom of Italy, but was to inform the king before making the names public.

<sup>3</sup> A pun on the Piedmontese word "puff," a colloquialism for "debt." [Editor]

3. Exiled bishops with few exceptions were to be allowed back to their dioceses.

4. The revenues of all sees were to be left intact.

Rome was amenable to revising the boundaries of several dioceses but refused to submit papal decrees to the royal *exequatur* or to require bishops to take the oath demanded by the government.

When news of this agreement reached the anticlerical press, violent outcries were immediately raised to stir public opinion against it. Anticlerical government officials voiced objections, and finally, after heated debates, they succeeded in having the agreement rejected.<sup>4</sup>

Don Bosco had been kept informed of the progress of the negotiations and was deeply grieved by this setback. Yet he did not lose heart. We shall see him later working for a resumption of negotiations.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile throughout Italy, convents, monasteries and seminaries were being shut down or expropriated and bishops were harassed or forbidden to return from exile.<sup>6</sup>

We have made these sketchy remarks about the milieu in which Don Bosco also worked to underscore the will power and intellectual serenity with which God had endowed him for the adequate fulfillment of his mission.

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 45. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 7

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

THE life of the early years of the Oratory could not continue unaltered as the boys' number grew into the hundreds. Gradually, but unavoidably, the bland discipline of the past had to evolve into something more formal. Don Bosco was averse to the passing away—at least partially—of the cherished family life that had heartened him for so many years, but as “the man of understanding goes the straight way” [Prov. 15, 21], he too realized that he had to provide for new situations. However, he did not introduce changes by fits and starts; they came gradually, and always with prior psychological preparation so that his pupils would dutifully follow his directives. But he was firm in his decisions. Privately he kept using such expressions as “Would you please . . .” and “Would you do me the favor . . .” but publicly and frequently he knew how to say a firm “I want,” though always calmly and without a tone of command.

Some of his evening talks recorded in the chronicle bear this out. On March 19 [1865], St. Joseph's feast, he spoke thus:

St. Joseph's novena is over, but I would like you to continue sanctifying these few days preceding the feast of the Annunciation. I did not mention this before because I did not want you to interrupt St. Joseph's novena. Now, though, without adding anything to your ordinary devotions so as not to interfere with your duties, strive to make a spiritual or sacramental Communion daily.

The midyear examinations are also over, and I am generally pleased with the results. Some boys, however, did not measure up to their superiors' efforts on their behalf and failed. Don't fool yourselves into believing that these exams don't mean much. They do! Those who board gratis or at reduced rates at the Oratory and score just six points out of ten are sent home. Those who are not doing their very best do not deserve to live here

for free. Remember that in grading a boy we take everything into account—his behavior in church, in the dining room, and in the study hall. It may happen, therefore, that a boy may score only six or eight points instead of ten, or fail, even though he thinks he did well at his exams. If this happens, it's all his fault because he was warned in good time. Therefore whoever is here at a reduced rate and gets only a passing mark will have to pay the full fee; whoever fails will have to suffer the consequences of his misconduct by returning home. We have done this every year. Regularly, after the midyear examinations, some boys were sent home. If any exceptions were made, it was only after insistent pleading and sincere, firm promises that were faithfully kept.

One last remark. Of late the assistants are not heeded as they ought to be, especially in the dining room. Silence is not observed and you walk in noisily and in a disorderly manner. I therefore ask you to make a little sacrifice for Our Lady's sake by behaving in the dining room as our house rules require. Will you promise me this?

“Yes, yes!”

Good night, then.

On March 20, Don Bosco firmly restated the last admonishment of the previous night:

Last night I suggested that you make a little sacrifice [for Our Lady's sake] by observing order and silence in the dining room. I was hoping that you would cooperate. To my surprise I have learned that today you were more unruly than ever. I cannot tolerate such behavior because discipline in the house is everything. You walk into the dining room shouting and shoving, you keep laughing and talking in time of silence, and you rush out in the same disorderly manner. The assistants are completely ignored, as though they weren't there at all. Most of you behave, but there are about fifty who cause all the trouble just for the fun of it. I have therefore decided that from tomorrow on you will enter the dining room in an orderly fashion. Father Savio will line you up in the porticoes and send you in by groups. You will likewise leave one table at a time. I will also order the assistants to watch you carefully and bind them in conscience to give me a minute report of all that happens, no matter who causes trouble.

Since you complain about certain assistants, I absolutely forbid them to punish you. I do not want punishments in the house, but I want the assistants to report everything to me. I repeat that I intend to bind them in conscience to do so. Whoever is at fault in any way will be sent home at

once because I cannot tolerate indiscipline in the house. I put up with a lot of things, but when discipline is at stake I am inflexible. If it were only a question of a breach of manners or the like between you and me, I would overlook it, but when disrespect is publicly shown to the other superiors I can't ignore it. I'll be more lenient with the artisans<sup>1</sup> than with you students. The artisans, being less educated, are more excusable. Many of them would be utterly on their own if they were dismissed from here. That is not true of you students. You are sufficiently cultured, more refined and better educated and therefore have a correspondingly greater obligation to be beyond reproach. I want you to be exemplary; otherwise you shall have to go home or join the artisans. If you are sent home, you are not thrown out on the street; in most cases someone will look after you. I am giving you fair warning. As of tomorrow, that's what I'll do. You have been warned many times these past few days. Now it is time for action. You know what to do. Unruly students are not wanted in this house. Good night!

This warning was quite effective. The next day the boys filed into and out of the dining room in perfect silence by groups. Father Angelo Savio was charged with enforcing Don Bosco's orders.

March 21

I have to give you the sad news of the death of the bishop of Cuneo. He belonged to the commission charged with the identification of the body of Blessed Mary of the Angels. Of late he was ailing, but, remembering that formerly he had benefited by the climate of Genoa, he hoped that a stay there might do him good. This evening while I was in my room I received this telegram: "Bishop Manzini of Cuneo died in Genoa this morning at seven." The news grieved me because he was a generous benefactor of ours. Whenever he came to Turin, he visited the Oratory and often gave us substantial donations. You can't possibly remember seeing him because he went about dressed like a simple priest. He loved us very much and helped us all he could. His death is a sad loss for the Church because he was a learned and saintly prelate and a scholarly, pious and prudent man. The diocese of Cuneo is likewise deprived of its good shepherd, and the Oratory has lost a most generous benefactor. It is also a great loss for me be-

<sup>1</sup> This was the name given to the boys learning a trade to distinguish them from those taking academic courses. The latter were called "students." [Editor]

cause he was a bosom friend and a father to me. Whenever I was in doubt about what to do or needed advice, I either wrote to him or called on him. His truly prudent advice helped and heartened me. I may say that his home became my home. Whenever I was in Cuneo I was his guest and felt as much at home there as here at the Oratory. His death is indeed a great misfortune, but may the most holy will of God be ever done and blessed!

Many incidents are being told about this bishop and will soon be published. I myself heard many, either from trustworthy witnesses or from the bishop himself while we were both guests of Baron [Charles] Bianco of Barbania. He did not tell these things to boast of them. Like all saints, he was a humble man and considered these things to be special favors granted by the Blessed Virgin to Her suppliants. He who believes himself to be a saint is a fool. Genuine saints look upon themselves as the worst sinners. And when Our Lord grants favors through their prayers, they credit such favors to this or that saint, whereas their own faith was largely responsible for them.

What I am going to tell you now happened to the bishop of Cuneo when he was the pastor of St. Teresa's Church here in Turin. One day, while he was out on a sick call, some people came to the rectory around two in the afternoon to tell him that he was urgently needed at the bedside of a dying woman, the mother of several children. He returned to the rectory at about seven, and on hearing of this other sick call, he immediately went there, only to find that the woman had been dead for several hours. Her cold body lay on the bed and a small lamp cast a somber light about it. Her hands, tied together, clasped a crucifix. The official declaration of death from natural causes had also been recorded and signed. The whole family was in tears, mainly because she had died without the sacraments. The good priest comforted them and invited them to join him in prayer to the Blessed Virgin. He sensed that God was about to grant them a great favor. Kneeling with them, he prayed with all his heart. Then he stood up and, invoking the name of Jesus, blessed the corpse. After a moment or two the dead woman stirred, sat up in bed and, to the bystanders' bewilderment, told them to untie her hands. She then addressed everyone by name and asked to make her confession. Afterward, she gave some advice to her family, settled some matters, and finally lay back again, stiff and cold as before.

I could tell you many more incidents, but I leave them for other evenings. My dear boys, let us learn a great truth from this holy prelate's death: regardless of condition or dignity, we are all subject to death. Death spares no one. The holy bishop of Cuneo may not need our suffrages, but as we do not know whether he may yet have some debt with Divine Justice,

tomorrow I would like you to offer your rosary for him and also your Communion, spiritual or sacramental, as you may judge best.

I have another thing to ask of you. I would like to suggest a nosegay in Our Lady's honor for tomorrow and the following days, namely that you observe silence when going to your dormitories after night prayers. Up to now, silence in the dormitory was enough, but after much thinking I have come to the conclusion that silence also on the way to the dormitories would prevent many disorders. You have been told about this several times already; now, for Our Lady's sake, I would like you to do it. Go therefore to your dormitories in strict silence.

### March 23

We had a big snowfall today, and though seemingly it will go on for days yet, the sun will soon melt it all, since we are late in the season. I say this that you may look after your health. Discarding clothes, playing until you are soaked with perspiration, and then sitting still in your classrooms or study hall can be very harmful. So be careful.

Today we are midway in Lent. At Mass and in the Divine Office we commemorated SS. Cosmas and Damian—the only exception of this kind during Lent. Those who recite the Divine Office have certainly noticed this and would like to know the reason for it. I am sure that you boys won't mind knowing it too. It is an ancient Roman custom that during Lent the faithful meet in a specified church called "the station" [for the celebration of Mass and other services]. Midway in Lent, as today, "the station" is at the Church of SS. Cosmas and Damian and people flock there in great numbers. Church chronicles narrate that once on this very day this ancient church was crowded with people. Suddenly a murmur arose in the crowd. Something most extraordinary was taking place. The two marble statues of SS. Cosmas and Damian began to stir in their niches. As if they were flesh and bone, they stepped down from their pedestals, walked toward each other to the middle aisle, and then, together, walked to the exit. Incredibly astonished, the crowd followed them, but no sooner were they completely out of the church than the two statues stopped and stood still. At the same time a thunderous crash made everyone look back. The church had collapsed. But for this great miracle, all that multitude might have been buried under the ruins. This is why these two saints are commemorated in mid-Lent.

My dear children, I wish you would learn from this how effectively the saints intercede for us with God, and how we stand to gain by praying to them. If SS. Cosmas and Damian, without being asked, worked such a be-

wildering miracle in order to save the pious multitude, would they not come to our assistance if we pray to them? Let us therefore be devoted to the saints whose name we bear and have recourse to them in our spiritual and temporal needs. They will always be ready to help us.

During these days Don Bosco experienced a great sorrow caused by the thoughtlessness of some who nonetheless were deeply attached to him and intended to spend their life with him. This is the only episode of this kind which, to our knowledge, took place at the Oratory. It is also one that brings out Don Bosco's firmness in demanding respect and obedience to authority.

Father [Angelo] Savio—the Oratory's disciplinarian—was not popular with certain pupils because of his rigorous stand on discipline. One day, while he was supervising more than three hundred boys in the main dining room, a piece of bread hit him on the back. Perhaps the shot was not directed at him. Prudently, Father Savio ignored it, but when, the next day, the same thing happened, he mentioned it to Don Bosco. Evidently, this was no accident. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco spoke gravely to the boys about it, stating that anyone guilty again of such an offense would be immediately expelled.

The following day, as the boys were lined up in the porticoes waiting to go into the dining room by groups under Father Savio's supervision, a stalk of cabbage struck his biretta. Quickly turning round, he caught a young lad named Augustin R. . . in the act of lowering his arm. Immediately he sent him to an adjacent small room and led the others into the dining hall. The lad, flustered and crying, kept saying that he had aimed at a companion, not the superior. He was a very lively boy, thoughtless at times but well-behaved and a good student. Because of this, his teacher who thought highly of him and other teachers and assistants who were convinced of his innocence sided with him at once. Unmindful of their own affront to one of their superiors, they let the boy out of that room and, sympathizing with him, let him eat dinner with them, assuring him that they were ready to stand by him all the way. Much to the general surprise, they kept him with them the rest of the day. Emotion was clouding their judgment. At supper time these teachers, who for

other reasons bore some grudge to Father Savio, began to criticize him severely for having summarily punished an innocent pupil. Tempers were running high and words were not too carefully weighed. Then and there Don Bosco kept silent. At the "Good Night," however, he announced that Augustin R. . . would be sent home the next morning. It came like a thunderbolt.

After the boys retired to the dormitories, there remained in the playground only a few bewildered teachers, including those who had declared themselves against Father Savio and condemned his severe measure. After much grumbling, one of them, a Salesian craftsman, declared with ill-considered vehemence: "Let one of us go to Don Bosco and tell him clearly that if that boy is not relieved, we will leave."

"Let's not push things that far," objected the prefect of studies. "I will talk with Don Bosco. I hope that things will be settled satisfactorily."

He acted accordingly. It was 10:30 P.M. and Don Bosco was still at his desk. The prefect of studies told him of the deep dissatisfaction of certain confreres and pleaded for an immediate pardon. "There is no doubt about what the boy did," Don Bosco countered. "God alone can judge his intentions, but his action at a time when silence was mandatory was in itself a breach of discipline. Furthermore, such an action in the wake of repeated warnings to the contrary could have triggered other serious infractions. Yet, despite the gravity of the offense, I could have found a way to spare the boy, who is really good, but you people, by openly siding with him, have made it impossible for me to back down. Everybody knows that you have set yourselves against Father Savio, and I shall never permit authority to be so challenged."

The prefect of studies returned to his companions at about 11:15 P.M. and told them, "Not a chance. Don Bosco is adamant!"

All pensively withdrew to their rooms. Fortunately, saner counsel prevailed. Some—Henry Bonetti among them—whispered, "Leave Don Bosco? Never!"

"With Don Bosco till death!" another said, voicing everybody's sentiments. And so it was. At dawn Augustine R. . . left the Oratory.

One individual, however, seemed unable to accept Don Bosco's decision. For two or three days, in the superiors' dining room, he kept making ironical and resentful references to Father Savio, the expelled pupil, and the injustice committed. Don Bosco was very visibly embarrassed but said not a word.

A few weeks later, when things had quieted down and the matter was no longer an issue, Augustine R. . . , perhaps on advice, wrote to Don Bosco asking pardon for his thoughtless and involuntary act. Father Savio, sounded out on the matter, pleaded for him and the boy was able to return and finish his schooling with honors.

This incident taught a salutary lesson to all the pupils. They saw that when respect for authority was at stake, Don Bosco had no regard for anyone. Not even one of the best pupils, backed by some of the most influential members of the staff, had been able to escape the consequences of his disobedience.

Even amid these troubles, Don Bosco calmly continued addressing the boys after night prayers without indiscreet allusions:

#### March 26

I have some pleasant news to give you. Starting tomorrow, rising will be at 5 A.M. Don't be frightened, though. At 5 A.M. for the artisans and at 5:30 for you. But do not make a racket when you come to the playground for water lest you disturb the artisans at Mass.

I also want all of you to rise promptly instead of lingering in bed some fifteen minutes or more and then rushing into church—and of course being late. Two days ago, one of you here now, whom I shall not name, did just that. Jumping out of bed hurriedly, he put on his trousers backwards and ran downstairs trying to button them up at the same time. What a time he had! He pulled up here and hitched up there, but his pants didn't quite seem to fit. He finally realized what the problem was. What a nice figure he would have cut if somebody had been around. Of course, visitors are not likely to be around that early in the morning but I just happened to be there and saw his predicament. Let us therefore make a little sacrifice in the morning in a spirit of self-denial. By doing this we shall also gain time to make our beds, brush our clothes, and put our things in order.

Today I took a visitor to some dormitories. In the first, housing about thirty of the older boys, I noticed five or six beds in sloppy disarray. One or two looked like pippens; the rest had sheets and pillows lying in a pile at

the foot of the bed or right on the floor on top of shoes. I had to step out quickly lest the visitor should notice the mess.

I tried another dormitory, a larger one, and things were even worse. I had to change my plans so as not to shame you before a stranger. Messy dormitories are not a pretty sight. However, I will not blame you! I blame the assistants. They should see to it that beds are neatly made every morning. Anyway, to avoid reprimands, I'll have recourse to an effective means. Starting tomorrow, I shall appoint someone to inspect the dormitories daily and straighten up the beds that need it at twenty *centesimi* per bed to be paid by their occupants. This domestic will keep ten *centesimi* for himself; the rest will go into a kitty for a treat. Thus, those who have to pay will also get something out of it.

One more thing I want you to do: Comb your hair. Spring is coming and certain insects multiply! Our good Enria<sup>2</sup> knows this too well. Sometimes he has to scrub some heads two or three times. Believe it or not, even certain fellows who are rather particular about their hair need this treatment. I would say to them, "Silly fools, don't be so vain! Keep your hair clean rather than just glossy!"

### March 30

Tomorrow is the last Friday of March. I want you to sanctify it in the best way you can by making the Stations of the Cross with great feeling for Our Lord's sufferings and sincere sorrow for your sins. I urge you to do this also because some of our clerics are now in the Vincentian retreat house preparing themselves to receive the subdiaconate worthily. Pray that they may become Christ's holy ministers. These days are very important and even terrifying because the devil is doing his utmost to entice them from their vocation. Your prayers will greatly help and comfort them.

While counseling and correcting his Oratory boys, Don Bosco did not forget those at Mirabello and Lanzo whom he was planning to visit soon. Of these visits we could say that, in imitation of Our Savior, he too did good to all. Here is a letter of his to the director at Lanzo:

<sup>2</sup> Peter Enria, born in 1841, had entered the Oratory in 1854. He later became a Salesian coadjutor brother and nursed Don Bosco during several illnesses, including his last one. He died in 1898. At this time, obviously, he was also doubling as a barber. [Editor]

Turin, March 22, 1865

My dear Father Ruffino,

I had planned to come up to Lanzo this Thursday to close the first half of Lent with my dear sons at St. Philip Neri's,<sup>3</sup> but the weather messed up the roads and we must wait until they are repaired.

Your sister has been accepted at the Good Shepherd Convent. They made room for her on the basis of a hundred lire contribution which I shall make. So send her word to come whenever she is ready and to bring along her ordinary clothes and a couple of dresses. The convent will provide the rest. Tell her to report to me when she arrives in Turin. I will have her accompanied to the convent with a note.

Give my warmest greetings to all the staff and pupils. Next Saturday is the feast of the Annunciation. I shall remember you all at Mass. Please also pray for me.

Please beseech Father Provera<sup>4</sup> to solemnize that day with something extra at table so that my dear boys at Lanzo may have reason to toast my health while I shall perhaps do the same here for them.

May God keep us all in His holy grace. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The school's patron saint. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Francis Provera entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twenty-two, became a Salesian in 1862, was ordained a priest in 1864, and filled important administrative and teaching posts. He died in 1876 after much suffering, as Don Bosco had foretold. At this time he was prefect at Lanzo. For further details *see* the Index of Vol. VI. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to the Department of Education concerning the certification of the cleric Joseph Fagnano and another letter to the municipal council of Lanzo as regards allotting more classroom space for day students. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 8

### *The Church of Mary, Help of Christians*

WORK on the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, whose construction Don Bosco had so much at heart was steadily progressing. With basements and ceilings completed, Don Bosco could now gladly look forward to the laying and blessing of the cornerstone. Very soon Mary, Help of Christians, would be solemnly invoked for the first time in that hallowed, memorable meadow<sup>1</sup> where She had confirmed the mission entrusted to him when only a child<sup>2</sup> and had seemingly renewed the dialogue that had once taken place between Deborah and Barak: “If you come with me, I will go; if you do not come with me, I will not go.” “I will certainly go with you.” [Jgs. 4, 8]

This was a promise from the Mother of God. Obviously She kept it because from 1845—and even earlier—Don Bosco’s blessings in Mary’s name began to work wonders. For good reasons, therefore, Don Bosco wanted the laying of the cornerstone to be as solemn as possible. Accordingly, he invited the twenty-year-old son of King Victor Emmanuel II, Prince Amadeus, duke of Aosta, to attend the ceremonies. The prince graciously obliged.

At this time the first-fruits of the young Salesian Society were beginning to show up, thus allowing Don Bosco more time for the preparation of the festivities. For the past four years, at each of the Ember Day seasons, one or another of his young clerics had received some sacred order. Moreover, his several priests, assisted by other zealous members of the diocesan clergy, freed him almost entirely from the Sunday catechetical instructions at Valdocco and at the St. Aloysius and Guardian Angel festive oratories, though he

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. II, pp. 190f, 232ff. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. I, pp. 94f. [Editor]

still reserved to himself, until 1869, the Sunday morning homilies on church history at Valdocco.

Father [John] Borel<sup>3</sup> was always on hand, humble and full of God's love, and he continued to help him indefatigably. One Sunday this zealous priest was called to preach at the Oratory after having exercised his priestly ministry the whole morning in various city churches. The messenger found him in the vegetable garden by his residence at the Rifugio breakfasting on raw peppers and bread. Hearing that he was needed, he exclaimed: "I am ready. I just finished my dinner."<sup>4</sup>

Don Bosco also used him and other zealous diocesan priests for preaching engagements in other dioceses. Often bishops and pastors invited him to give missions in villages and towns. When free he responded in person; if not, he sent his willing friends, and occasionally one or other of his young priests—for instance, Father John Cagliero or Father Michael Rua. It was at this time that the bishop of Reggio Emilia wrote to Don Bosco about a mission they had preached there:

Reggio Emilia, May 1, 1865

Reverend and dear Father,

I cannot adequately tell you how grateful I am for the great favor you did me in sending such learned, zealous and saintly missionaries to give a spiritual retreat in this city. These two priests of yours labored indefatigably day and night for over a week with such success, satisfaction and spiritual fruit that obviously God was blessing their work. Overjoyed, I have repeatedly applied to them St. Paul's exclamation: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, of those that bring glad tidings of good things!" [Rom. 10, 15]

I thank you a thousand times, Very Reverend Father, for so great a favor. If I can possibly be of any help to you in the future, I'll be most delighted to oblige and show you in a practical way my appreciation and esteem.

Very sincerely yours,

✠ Peter, *Bishop*

<sup>3</sup> Father Borel was the first priest to help Don Bosco in the trying pioneer years of the Oratory. Don Bosco had first met him at the Chieri seminary when Father Borel went there to preach a retreat. See Vol. I, pp. 341f, and the Index of Vol. II. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting other such incidents. [Editor]

Meanwhile, the daily Lenten catechism classes had ended and Don Bosco was spending entire days hearing confessions. He also preached the triduum in preparation for Easter. In one of his sermons he spoke about sincerity in confession, and he so vividly described the anguish of Charles (the boy who had died in 1849 after making a bad confession)<sup>5</sup> and his good fortune in being called back to life to unburden his conscience before falling again into the sleep of death that when he ended his narrative, overcome by emotion, he broke into tears and sobs and was unable to go on with his sermon. All the boys were dumbfounded, and quite some time elapsed before the service could continue. Father Charles Ghivarello and the cleric Joseph Bologna were present and have testified to this incident.

While the festive oratory boys and the boarders made their Easter duty, Don Bosco wound up preparations for the lottery, whose success he took for granted. Years later, marveling at the results of Don Bosco's lotteries while his own were rather disappointing, Father Leonard Murialdo,<sup>6</sup> then rector of the Artigianelli Institute, asked him how he went about it. "Well," Don Bosco replied, "this is what I do. Once I have decided on a lottery, I pick the most pious boys I have and pray with them at Mary's altar to obtain Her blessing. Then we work wholeheartedly to make the lottery a success." Father Murialdo himself declared this in writing.

During this month [April 1865] Don Bosco also managed to enlist the support of various princes of the House of Savoy. He also made public the names of the lottery commission.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile preparations for the laying of the cornerstone were completed. The ceremony was set for April 27 and invitations were sent out along with the program.<sup>8</sup> Replying to his invitation, Mr. Anthony Spezia graciously informed Don Bosco that, wishing to contribute to this undertaking, he waived all architect's fees.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 349ff. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> Now St. Leonard Murialdo. He was canonized by Pope Paul VI on May 3, 1970. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> See Appendix I. [Editor]

<sup>9</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

[Thursday] April 27 [1865] was a beautiful sunny day from dawn to dusk.<sup>10</sup> All had been prepared as splendidly as possible. The church's temporary plank floor had been covered with canvas and a small wooden altar had been placed on the spot where, the day before, as required by the rubrics, a huge cross had stood on the site of the projected main altar. Another cross dominated the altar between lighted candles and flowers. The altar itself, decked out in gold-fringed linens, was shielded on three sides and above by a majestic canopy. The national flag served as a backdrop and a rich carpet covered the floor. To the right of the altar were laid out the lid of the cornerstone, a trowel, a silver hammer, and a capsule for official records. A decorative large cloth, supported by four tall red and white masts, covered the center of the future church. On the Gospel side stood a large platform for the choir and brass band; opposite it, a damasked kneeler and chair were reserved for Prince Amadeus. At the main entrance a triumphal arch with an inscription and a flight of steps leading to the site of the ceremony were erected.

The bishop of Casale had agreed to bless the cornerstone, but he was prevented from doing so by urgent matters and had excused himself by telegram. Father Celestine Durando, sent by Don Bosco to Susa, returned the same day with Bishop John Odone who had readily obliged. At about one in the afternoon, a violent wind suddenly threatened to sweep everything away. It lasted half an hour and stopped as abruptly as it had started. Satan seemed to have vented all his fury in one last vain attempt to prevent the sacred rite. A multitude of people, members of the nobility and of the lottery commission, provincial and local authorities and a crowd of boys, including the Mirabello junior seminarians, were at their stations ready to welcome the prince.

At two in the afternoon the bishop of Susa, between two rows of altar boys, donned his pontifical robes. As Prince Amadeus arrived with his noble cortege, the band played the Royal March. Don Bosco, wearing his mantelet, greeted him, escorted him to his place, and remained there, occasionally explaining the ceremonies to the prince.

<sup>10</sup> We are omitting a short digression about a papal rescript granting indulgences for devotions in honor of St. Joseph. [Editor]

After the ritual prayers, the bishop blessed the foundations; then, followed by the prince, Don Bosco and other distinguished guests walked to the base of the pilaster which was to support the Gospel side of the dome. It rose then but a few feet above floor level. Here the notary read aloud the official record of the event. After mentioning the date and the hour, April 27, 1865, 2:00 P.M., and the names of the reigning pontiff and king—Pius IX and Victor Emmanuel II—and of other distinguished guests, religious and civil authorities,<sup>11</sup> the document went on:

The church is in the shape of a Latin cross, covering an area of 1,200 square meters. This construction was undertaken to remedy the dearth of churches in this area and to give public testimony of gratitude to the august Mother of God for the many great favors already received through Her intercession and for the many more She will bestow. It is confidently hoped that this undertaking will be completed through the contributions of the faithful.

The residents of this area, the citizens of this city, and all who have received favors from Mary unanimously send from this sacred spot a prayer to God and to the Virgin Mary, Help of Christians, for abundant heavenly blessings on the people of Turin, on the whole Church, especially on her supreme head Pius IX, promoter and illustrious contributor to this undertaking, on all the ecclesiastical authorities, on King Victor Emmanuel II and his royal family, and on Prince Amadeus, who by accepting our humble invitation has shown his veneration to the great Mother of God. May the august Queen of Heaven assure a place in paradise to all who have contributed or will contribute toward the completion of this building or the increase of Her veneration and Her glory on earth.

This document, duly signed by those specifically named and by the most distinguished guests present, was then folded in a glass capsule along with the blueprints of the church and a Latin inscription composed by Father John Baptist Francesia.<sup>12</sup> It was hermetically sealed and then placed into the cornerstone. Medals of Mary, Help of Christians, gold, silver and copper coins minted that

<sup>11</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>12</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

year, holy pictures, and a portrait of the Pope were also enclosed. The bishop finally blessed the stone with holy water.

Close to the bishop, two very young altar boys—twins, Francis and Michael Paglia—holding elegant silver trays with trowel, hammer and the commemorative plaque, attracted general attention. The prince placed this plaque over the cavity containing the documents and spread the first trowel of mortar. Then the bricklayers went to work until the pilaster stood some three feet high.

After the ceremony, the prince and guests moved to the playground where they reviewed the ranks of boys. Twice the prince slowly went up and down the cheering rows, stopping in front of the band with evident delight at seeing among them a number of former Oratory pupils wearing the colors of his own regiment.

Escorted by Don Bosco, he then visited the residents' quarters, showing himself delighted at the boys' ovations as he passed by them. He was then escorted with the guests into the large study hall where Father Francesia greeted the bishop, the prince and the rest with a poetical composition of his<sup>13</sup> which the choir then sang. A thousand copies were given out to those present.

There followed other poems, musical selections—both vocal and instrumental—and, finally, the recitation of a dialogue composed by Don Bosco describing the day's festivities. The prince and his retinue left the Oratory at about 5:30 P.M., highly pleased with what they had witnessed. The day ended with an eloquent sermon by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi and devout thanks to the Lord with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the Church of St. Francis de Sales.

That evening Prince Amadeus had guests at dinner. After describing the beautiful ceremony he had attended, he said: "The good this poor priest is doing astonishes me. I would dare those who boast of their good deeds to do as much!"

Besides other tokens of his delight at the cordial welcome he got from the Oratory boys, he also graciously contributed a generous sum from his personal fund to the construction of the church, thus giving proof of his devotion to the Mother of God. Having also heard that Don Bosco's boys were fond of gymnastic exercises, he

<sup>13</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

donated part of his gym equipment to them.<sup>14</sup> Set up in the Oratory playground, it was put to good use for a long time and gave occasion to all visitors to admire the prince's goodness.

Don Bosco warmly reciprocated with a singular gift. In a corner of the playground near the site of the new church, a small apple tree was just beginning to sprout. When Don Bosco heard of it, he was surprised and asked the boys to leave it undisturbed so that apples could ripen for a gift he wished to make to Prince Amadeus. The boys daily played around the tree but scrupulously respected Don Bosco's wish. The apples grew to a wonderful size and ripened to perfection. Don Bosco forgot about them. One day a ripe apple dropped to the ground. One of the boys picked it up, placed it on a leaf and, followed by a crowd, took it into the dining room to Don Bosco who had the rest of the apples picked and then sent to the prince with an account of this story. Prince Amadeus reciprocated the thoughtful gift by sending Don Bosco a donation for a treat to the boys "to make up," as he said, "for the exquisite apples they had deprived themselves of for his sake."

The prince always cherished the remembrance of that April 27. In 1884, during a visit to Our Lady's shrine in Oropa, he spoke at length with Monsignor Peter Tarino concerning plans for a new shrine and the difficulties that stood in its way.

"Times are favorable for projects of this sort," the prince said among other things. "Look at Don Bosco! With no means whatever he spent millions [on the Church of Mary, Help of Christians]. He always finds people willing to help him in his bold undertakings."

Meanwhile, to preserve the memory of the solemn cornerstone blessing and also to foster contributions, Don Bosco immediately published the dialogue he had staged to entertain the prince. He titled it *Rimembranze* [Souvenirs] and added to it a brief history of the church being erected and a description of the laying of the cornerstone. At the same time, the newspaper *L'Armonia* published a booklet entitled *Devotion to Mary, Help of Christians*, a two-century historical sketch carrying a brief reference to the new church in Valdocco.

<sup>14</sup> We are omitting the official notification. [Editor]

The church's construction kept proceeding quite swiftly, but the lottery returns could not match the outlays. It was under these circumstances that Don Bosco's trust and devotion to Our Lady shone most beautifully. Generously he undertook daily to find the necessary means, notwithstanding unavoidable difficulties and worries. Finding himself very often without funds for either the payroll or materials, he called on or wrote to the sick or others who he knew were in difficulties, exhorting them to turn confidently to the Blessed Virgin and promise a donation for the new church. In this manner he showed them how to obtain their desires, found the means for his undertaking, and fostered devotion and gratitude to his heavenly benefactress.

Thus, within 1865, the edifice reached to the roof. The vaulted ceilings, except for the dome, were also completed.

While this work was going on, an incident astonished the workers. A street vendor who had come to the Valdocco area at the beginning of summer to peddle fruit, hearing that the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was being built with the private contributions of the faithful, was moved to give his mite too. Poor though he was, he went to the foreman and offered him all the fruit he had on his cart for distribution to the workmen. Then, desiring to give a more personal contribution, with some help he loaded a heavy stone on his back and started up the scaffolding! The good old man tottered under his heavy burden, but his religious enthusiasm lightened it for him. Upon reaching the top, he put down the stone, cheerfully exclaiming, "Now I shall die happy, for I hope to share in some way in all the good that will be done in this church."

## CHAPTER 9

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

**I**N the sixties, in Turin as in many other cities, it was hardly possible for a knowledgeable person, and even for an ordinary person, not to have heard of Don Bosco. This became all the more obvious after he started construction on the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. "Being constantly at his side," Father Michael Rua declared, "and having to answer most of his letters, I can testify that every week they ran into the hundreds and occasionally into the thousands. The writers begged for his prayers as they would of a saint who could obtain anything from God and the Blessed Virgin; others asked for a blessing to be given by him only; still others sent Mass offerings, pleading for the singular favor that he would say the Masses himself. Often they obtained the favors they needed."<sup>1</sup>

Let the following excerpts from a letter suffice as a sample:

Florence, August 8, 1865

Very Reverend and dear Don Bosco,

. . . You will remember what consolation your words afforded me by encouraging me to trust in God's mercy for the salvation of my dear ones. You told me to pray to obtain from God the graces I needed to meet the dangers to which my family would be exposed. But, alas! I feel that my prayers are not good enough to merit such a great favor. . . .

I must rely therefore on the prayers of the good. Since I have the greatest faith in your prayers, I make free to send you a tiny offering, asking that you say five Masses for the eternal salvation of my husband, my two sons, my daughter and myself. . . .

Countess . . . . .

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting a list of names of noble families that wrote to Don Bosco for prayers. [Editor]

Seemingly such contacts with people of means should have relieved Don Bosco of all financial worries both for his new church and for the regular running of the Oratory, but that was not the case. The enormous construction expenses made it more difficult to provide his boys with the daily necessities of life. Often his trust in the Blessed Virgin was severely put to the test in order that the faithful might merit favor through their contributions and that his prayers might constantly ascend to the throne of grace. Indeed, the Blessed Virgin loved to be invoked by Her devoted servant. As St. Augustine beautifully put it, *Ascendit iusti deprecatio, et descendit Dei miseratio* [Up goes the prayer of the just and down comes God's compassion]. Daily needs arose and were met, as can be seen from the following note of Don Bosco to Marquis [Dominic] Fassati:

Turin, April 8, 1865

My dear Marquis,

If you want to gain merit, the time is most propitious. By ten tomorrow morning I must have three thousand lire for our baker. As of now, I haven't a penny. Please do all you can for me in this exceptional circumstance. It is literally a matter of feeding the hungry. I will call on you sometime today to pick up whatever the Lord and the Blessed Virgin will inspire you to give me.

God bless you, the marchioness and Azelia with health and grace and an eternal reward.

Your humble servant,  
Fr. John Bosco<sup>2</sup>

And yet, notwithstanding straitened circumstances, he never hesitated to accept needy boys recommended to him,<sup>3</sup> though always with due prudence. If he himself happened to meet a destitute youngster, he promptly took him to the Oratory as one of his children.<sup>4</sup> His generosity never ceased. Years later, Father Leonard

<sup>2</sup> We omit another letter to a benefactor who had made him a loan at no interest. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting a short letter from Don Bosco making discreet inquiries in reference to a boy's admission to the Oratory. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting a flowery article from *Unità Cattolica*, April 22 [1865], about three ten-year-old boys accepted by Don Bosco into the Oratory. [Editor]

Murialdo testified: "Don Bosco took into his Oratory entirely free of charge several boys whom I—then rector of the Artigianelli Institute—had recommended to him because I could not accept them into mine for some reason or other."

He knew all his pupils by name and was intensely interested in their eternal salvation. Once, on coming to know that one of them had committed a grave fault, he was so grieved that he spent a sleepless night. He confided this at the "Good Night" the following evening, lamenting the offense done to God and showing himself much saddened about it.

This holy concern inspired his "Good Nights." The chronicle records four given between the end of April and the beginning of May:

April 29

Picture to yourselves a hen that refuses to go back into the coop some evening. In vain the housewife tries to prod her in. At last, too tired to keep it up, the woman locks the coop and retires. The hen saunters about the yard picking here and there, enjoying her freedom. At dusk she notices the ladder to the hayloft. Hopping from rung to rung, she reaches the loft and, finding a comfortable spot, lies down to sleep. Suddenly a noise wakes her up. It's dark, all in the house are asleep, and the dogs are far out in the vineyards guarding the crop. What could it be? It's a fox and it is after the hen. Terrified, the hen flies off and alights on a nearby tree. Pursuing her, the fox lands in the yard, but does not give up its prey. It squats under the tree and keeps watch. After a long while, the hen flies off again and lands on top of the wall enclosing the yard. At once the fox hurries there too. The wall is lower than the branch of the tree. Prowling about, the fox sees a plank leaning against the wall and starts climbing up on it. The hen's only chance is to fly off once more. Again she manages to perch on a branch of a tree on the other side of the wall, but a lower one than before. As you know, her weight prevents the hen from flying up. Unless the distance is short, she loses height every time. Immediately the fox goes after her through a drainage hole in the wall and attempts to climb the tree. Frightened, the hen flies to another tree with the fox in hot pursuit. The tree is rather low. The hen panics, flies off again and lands on a hedge. The fox dives into the hedge to get her. Successive efforts to flee always leave the hen closer and closer to the ground. Finally, the hapless

hen falls into the fox's clutches. A cry and then all that is left of her is a pile of blood-stained feathers.

My children, the fox is the devil; the hen symbolizes certain boys, good perhaps but overconfident. Like the hen that did not want to be locked up in the coop, they want no rules. In their inexperience they pay no attention to warnings. They trust in their own strength, good will and prayers, forgetting that our weak nature always tends to drag us down. Some of them are greedy in eating and drinking; others are lazy. God only knows what else may be wrong with them. Some complain, "Why do superiors forbid us certain friendships? We are doing nothing wrong!" But meanwhile they disregard the house rules, avoid superiors, and exchange confidential messages. Then follow fond thoughts, undue familiarities, sentimental friendships and unmanly emotions. One falls lower and lower because his wings are not strong enough. Meanwhile the fox keeps up its hot pursuit and one ends up in its jaws. Good night!

April 30

Something on my mind bothers me and I must tell you of it. If you were to ask our artisans here at the Oratory why they spend their whole day at various chores in their workshops, they would answer: "Because we want to become good shoemakers, cabinetmakers, or what have you, in order to make an honest living!" Now, let me ask you, my dear boys: Why did you come here?

"To get an education, to become men," you might reply.

Well, then, if you go through such trouble in order to learn a trade or get an education, let me ask you another question: What are you in this world for? I know what you will answer: "We are in this world in order to know, love and serve God, and then be happy with him forever in heaven." In other words, to save your soul! Isn't that so? I have been mulling over this for quite some time now. In fact, this thought haunted me so much today that I decided to unburden myself. If I could only make you understand it the way I see it! So important and sublime is this matter that words fail me. If all of you kept this thought in mind, if all of you worked solely to save your soul, there would be no need of rules, admonitions, or Exercises for a Happy Death because you would already be doing all that is necessary for your eternal happiness. If you aimed only at this important goal in all you do, how fortunate you would be and how happy you would make me. I couldn't desire anything more. The Oratory would then become an earthly paradise. There would be no more pilfering, foul con-

versations, dangerous readings, grumbling, or breaches of discipline. Everybody would do his duty, as indeed each should. Priests and clerics, students and artisans, rich and poor—all must work for this end; otherwise they toil in vain.

And yet there are some here who know all this and shrug it off. They seek only some little parties of their own. If some tidbits or beverages come their way, they immediately round up friends of theirs, check to see if superiors are watching, and slink away to some hideout to enjoy a snack. Why aren't they equally concerned about their spiritual well-being? Why don't they persuade companions of theirs to do some good deed or to join them in a visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament? Wouldn't that be a lot better? I remember that once, while giving a spiritual retreat, the late saintly Father Cafasso spoke so impressively of people's utter concern with their material welfare to the neglect of their souls that none of us could eat supper that evening. This frightful truth had overwhelmed us!

My dear children, for once at least let us seriously consider this all-important matter. Let us be smart by making good use of God's graces and thus saving our souls; let us not act foolishly by neglecting them, lest a day come when we shall bitterly regret it.

#### May 1

Dear boys, I dreamed that I was in church. It was packed with boys, but only a few were going to Holy Communion.

Near the altar rail a lanky horned individual, black as coal, was showing magic slide pictures. Enticed by them, the boys forgot everything else. As a result, only a few went to Holy Communion.<sup>5</sup>

Do you understand what this means, my children? It means that the devil does his utmost to distract you in church in order to keep you away from the sacraments. Some boys are so foolish as to pay attention to him. My dear children, this devilish lantern must be smashed to pieces. How? By glancing at the cruifix and reminding oneself that keeping away from Holy Communion is the same as throwing oneself into the devil's arms.

#### May 5

Tonight I want to tell you about the apparition of Our Lady at Mount Bonicca, near Campofreddo, in 1595. Charles Pecorini describes it in a

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

book of his about the most famous apparitions of Our Lady. From it you will learn that the Blessed Virgin wants brotherly love to reign among Her children instead of hatred, jealousy, strife and contention.

Campofreddo and Masone, two villages of the diocese of Acqui in Piedmont, were often at war as a result of ancient grudges and mutual violations of rights; hence there was aggression and bloodshed. This most deplorable situation saddened the good people of both villages—especially the pious pastor of Campofreddo, Father Gregory Spinola—and spurred them to pray most fervently to the Queen of Peace. She heard their prayer even beyond their expectations.

On September 10, 1595, obviously inspired by Our Lady, Father Spinola gathered his villagers and, holding aloft a crucifix, led them to Masone to plead for peace with those fierce highlanders. A meeting was held at which Augustinian monks of both villages took part. Proposals were made and an agreement was about to be reached when a young boy—Thomas Oliver—suddenly shouted, “Look at Mount Bonicca! It looks like heaven!”

All turned to look. Atop the hill which stood between their two villages they saw a most beautiful Lady emerging from a white cloud. Clad in blue with a white veil over Her head. She was escorted by two maids-of-honor and radiated a blinding light.

“It’s a miracle!” all exclaimed. “The Blessed Virgin Herself has come down from heaven to bring us peace! Brothers, let’s have peace forever!” There were tears of repentance, firm resolves of a more Christian life, and manifestations of mutual, brotherly love.

In the meantime the prodigy was renewed. Again, the Lady showed Herself in heavenly splendor in the company of the two saints. There is no need to say how astonished those fortunate people were and how they treasured this grace. The two villages pledged peace and never again broke it. As of old, the Blessed Virgin showered favor upon favor on the villagers; the sick found health by invoking the miraculous Madonna of Mount Bonicca. A little chapel, soon erected in Her honor at the foot of the mount, was later enlarged and adorned. Because of many favors granted by Our Heavenly Mother, it became the goal of devout pilgrimages.

A written record of the two apparitions and of the instantaneous cure of four persons was made without delay by the notary Michael De Padio, and the document was sworn to and signed by Father Gregory Spinola and by dignitaries of both villages.

Thus spoke Don Bosco. Meanwhile, as though he had nothing else to do, he was finishing up the June issue of *Letture Cattoliche, The Pontificates of Saints Eusebius and Melchiades*. . . the final pamphlets in the series of the lives of the popes . . . .

Don Bosco would have liked to continue this series up to the time of Pius IX, but to his great regret he was first obliged to interrupt it because he had lost some manuscripts<sup>6</sup> and then to abandon it altogether because he no longer had the time. Ardently desiring that this work be continued and brought to completion even after his death, he tried to interest others,<sup>7</sup> but without success because too many other things kept everybody busy.

Though incomplete, this series sufficiently reveals his scholarship. Monsignor Louis Tripepi, a renowned scholar and later a cardinal, mentions Don Bosco in his works as one of the most distinguished Church historians and frequently quotes from his *Lives of the Popes*, bestowing on him the highest praise. In his *Studii critici sulla vita di Papa Pio I* [Critical Studies on the Life of Pope Pius I], printed in Rome in 1869, Monsignor Tripepi states: “The learned and revered Don Bosco undertook the expert highlighting of this Pope’s achievements. . . . Unending glory and gratitude is due to this learned and zealous luminary of Turin and of the Church.”

Numerous other appreciations of Don Bosco abound in this author’s writings.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See Vol. V, p. 382. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 382f. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 10

### *A Dream: Gifts for Mary*

**A**FTER an effective spiritual retreat preached by Father John Bona, rector of the Madonnina Shrine near Brescia, the Oratory students went back with fresh energy to their school duties and exercised their literary talents by restaging *Larvarum Victor* [The Ghosts' Conqueror], a Latin comedy by Bishop Rosini [of Pozzuoli]. Father Louis Palumbo, S.J., who had revised the script, expressed his satisfaction to Don Bosco in a letter dated June 8.<sup>1</sup> Three other letters from other sources also praised him for his concern for needy youths learning a trade.<sup>2</sup>

These praises, however, could hardly mitigate his sorrow over the incurable illness of four of his priests: Father Provera, Father Ruffino, Father Fusero and Father Alasonatti. Father Francis Provera, ordained in 1864 and then prefect of the Salesian school at Lanzo, had been suffering for years from a foot ailment, but now a caries in his ankle was steadily eating into the bone and eventually he would be confined to a chair; meanwhile, he kept working at his desk or hopping along on crutches.<sup>3</sup> In 1862 Don Bosco had already told him of this cross he would have to bear.<sup>4</sup> Father [Dominic] Ruffino, director of the Lanzo school, was a victim of his own zeal. Returning to Lanzo by open stagecoach at the beginning of Holy Week after a call on Don Bosco, he had been drenched by a steady rain during his four-hour trip. When he finally arrived at Lanzo, hearing that he was needed in the parish church for confessions because large crowds were eager to make their Easter duty, he immediately went into a confessional without changing and remained

<sup>1</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 623-26. [Editor]

there for several hours. His generous imprudence brought about a serious lung ailment which proved fatal in a few months.

Since both the director and the prefect at Lanzo were seriously ill, Don Bosco sent Father Bartholomew Fusero, the young, learned, promising Oratory spiritual director, to help them, but no sooner had he arrived than he was struck by a progressive cerebral paralysis and had to be recalled. Eventually he had to be put into a nursing home.

The fourth priest—Father Victor Alasonatti, now ripe for heaven—kept visibly wasting away at the Oratory. A worsening painful rheumatism in his right shoulder and a throat ulcer, which constantly threatened to choke him at any moment, forced him into complete inaction. Hoping to benefit from his native air, he went to Avigliana at Don Bosco's suggestion, but, feeling no improvement, he begged Don Bosco to let him return and die at the Oratory.<sup>5</sup> Great was everybody's consternation at seeing him so much worse than when he had left. Excellent medical care, around-the-clock attention and fervent prayers did not succeed in restoring his former vigor. Learning of this sickness, Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi of Mondovì wrote to Father Celestine Durando on July 20, 1865: "Father Alasonatti's critical condition grieves me beyond words. Indeed the Oratory needed no such cross. Nevertheless, let us bless God even when He strikes us, for He is always a loving Father. Tomorrow I will offer my Holy Mass for him. Please visit him and comfort him on my behalf. Hearten yourself too by saying with St. Paul: 'God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ.' " [Gal. 6, 6]

In the midst of this grief Don Bosco found consolation in acts of devotion to Mary, Help of Christians, whom the whole Oratory honored particularly in the month of May. Of his "Good Nights" the chronicle records but one—a most precious one—which he gave on the 30th:

May 30

I dreamed that you boys were heading in procession toward a lofty, richly decorated altar of Our Lady. You were all singing the same hymns

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting two letters of his to Don Bosco dated May 7 and May 20, 1865. [Editor]

to Her but not in the same way: many sang beautifully, others rather poorly and some totally out of tune. I saw too that some kept silent, strayed from the ranks, yawned or kept disturbing others.

Everyone carried gifts, mostly flowers, to Our Lady. The bouquets differed in size and kind. There were bouquets of roses, carnations, violets and so on. Some boys carried very odd presents, such as pigs' heads, cats, slimy toads, rabbits, lambs and so on. A handsome youth stood by the altar. A close look would show that he had wings. He may have been the Oratory's guardian angel. As you boys presented your gifts, he took each and placed it on the altar.

The first to reach the altar offered gorgeous bouquets which the angel silently placed on it. From other bouquets, instead, he had to remove decayed or scentless flowers, such as dahlias, camelias and the like, because Mary is not satisfied with mere looks. Some bouquets even had thorns and nails which, of course, were promptly plucked out and thrown away.

When a boy carrying a pig's head came up, the angel said to him, "How dare you offer this to Our Lady? Don't you know that this animal symbolizes the ugly vice of impurity? Mary Most Pure cannot tolerate such a sin. Step aside. You are not worthy to stand in Her presence."

To those who offered a cat the angel said: "Don't you know better? A cat represents theft, and you dare present it to Mary? Those who take what does not belong to them, those who steal food from the house, tear their clothes out of spite or waste their parents' money by not studying as they ought, are nothing but thieves!" These too the angel ordered to withdraw. He was equally indignant with boys offering toads. "Toads symbolize the shameful sin of scandal, and dare you offer them to Our Lady? Step aside. Join the unworthy ones." These boys too shamefully withdrew.

Some lads came up with a knife stuck in their hearts, a symbol of sacrilege. "Don't you realize that there is death in your soul?" the angel asked them. "If it weren't for God's mercy, you would be lost forever. For heaven's sake, have that knife removed from your heart!"

Eventually the rest of the boys reached the altar and presented their gifts—lambs, rabbits, fish, nuts, grapes and so on. The angel took them and placed them before Our Lady. Then he lined up all the boys whose gifts had been accepted in front of the altar. I noticed to my deep regret that those who had been made to step aside were much more numerous than I had thought.

Two other angels now appeared at each side of the altar carrying ornate baskets filled with gorgeous, exceedingly beautiful crowns of roses. They were not earthly roses, but heaven-grown, symbolizing immortality. With these the guardian angel crowned all the boys ranged before Our Lady's

altar. I noticed among them many whom I had never seen before. Another remarkable thing is this: some of the most beautiful crowns went to boys who were so ugly as to be almost repulsive. Obviously, the virtue of holy purity which they eminently possessed amply made up for their unattractive appearance. Many other boys possessed this virtue too, though not to the same degree. Youngsters excelling in obedience, humility, or love of God were also crowned according to their deserts.

The angel then addressed all the boys as follows: "It was Our Lady's wish that you should be crowned today with these beautiful roses. See to it that they may never be taken from you. Humility, obedience and chastity will safeguard them for you. With these three virtues you will always find favor with Mary and one day receive a crown infinitely more beautiful than that you wear today."

All of you then sang the first stanza of the *Ave Maris Stella*. Afterward you turned around and filed away as you had come, singing the hymn *Lodate Maria* so full-heartedly that I was really amazed. I followed you for a while; then I went back to take a look at the boys whom the angel had pushed aside, but they were no longer there.

My dear children, I know who was crowned and who was turned down. The latter I will warn privately so that they may strive to bring gifts pleasing to Our Lady.

Now let me make a few observations:

1. All you were carrying a variety of flowers, but unfailingly every bouquet had its share of thorns—some more, some less. After much thinking I came to the conclusion that these thorns symbolized acts of disobedience, such as keeping money instead of depositing it with Father Prefect, asking leave to go to one place and then going to another, being late to school, eating on the sly, going to other boys' dormitories although knowing that this is always strictly forbidden, lingering in bed after rising time, neglecting prescribed practices of piety, talking during times of silence, buying books and not submitting them for approval, sending or receiving letters on the sneak, and buying and selling things among yourselves. This is what the thorns stand for.

"Is it a sin to break the house rules?" many will ask.

After seriously considering this question, my answer is a firm "yes." I will not say whether it is mortal or venial. Circumstances will determine that, but it certainly is a sin.

Some might counter that the Ten Commandments say nothing about obeying house rules. Well, the Fourth Commandment says: "Honor thy father and thy mother." Do you know what "father" and "mother" stand for? Not only parents, but also those who take their place. Besides, doesn't

Holy Scripture say: "Obey your superiors"? [Heb. 13, 17] If you must obey them, it follows that they have the power to command. This is why we have rules, and these must be obeyed.

2. Some bouquets had nails among the flowers, the nails which crucified Jesus. How could that be? As usual, one starts with little things and goes on to more serious ones. . . . He allows himself undue liberties and falls into mortal sin. This is how nails managed to find their way into those bouquets, how they again crucified Jesus, as St. Paul says: ". . . crucifying again . . . the Son of God." [Heb. 6, 6]

3. Many bouquets contained rotten or scentless flowers, symbols of good works done in the state of mortal sin—and therefore unmeritorious—or from human motives such as ambition, or solely to please teachers and superiors. That's why the angel, after scolding those boys for daring to offer such things to Our Lady, sent them back to trim their bouquets. Only after they had done this did the angel accept them and place them on the altar. In returning to the altar, these boys did not follow any order, but went up to the angel as soon as they had trimmed their bouquets and then joined those to be crowned.

In this dream I saw both your past and your future. I have already spoken of it to many of you. I shall likewise tell the rest. Meanwhile, my children, see to it that the Blessed Virgin may always receive gifts from you which She will not have to refuse.

## CHAPTER 11

### *Don Bosco's 1865 Lottery*

**A**FTER the solemn laying of the new cornerstone of the new church, Don Bosco sent out a circular<sup>1</sup> to solicit lottery prizes. The results were gratifying. Within a short time he received eight hundred and forty items officially appraised at over twenty-three thousand lire. He then secured a lottery permit and immediately spread thousands of flyers throughout northern and central Italy to enlist the support of prominent people. In addition, he himself wrote personal letters to acquaintances and friends.<sup>2</sup>

The lottery did well, but the drawing of prizes had to be postponed for various reasons until 1867—a boon for the sale of tickets, but hardly a help to Don Bosco's current financial difficulties. He therefore had to turn again confidently to his old friends, particularly Chevalier Xavier Provano of Collegno, who at this time was at his country home at Cumiana:

Turin, July 5, 1865

My dear Chevalier:

I am having a hard time with the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. May I interest you in footing the bill for some such item as roof shingles, laths, rafters or beams?

Each of these items will cost (please don't be frightened) some four thousand lire, payable in installments within this year. What does your heart say to this? I am sure that Our Lady would reward you for contributing to the construction of Her house on earth by preparing a dwelling in heaven for you and your dear ones.

<sup>1</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

I am happy to tell you that the walls have now risen to the arched ceilings of the side chapels. I hope that the roof will be completed by mid-August.

I make this request knowing your generous heart. Do what you can and I shall be satisfied. In any case, I shall always invoke God's blessing on you and your growing children, to whom I wish the best of everything.

I recommend myself and my poor boys to your prayers.

Obligingly yours,  
Fr. John Bosco

Similar letters to other friends were quite successful. Don Bosco also appealed to the board of ecclesiastical benefices on behalf of the fifty-eight Oratory clerics who were giving their time and energy to the care and education of so many poor youths, with the result that, on June 13, 1865, he was granted a subsidy of five hundred lire.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 12

### *Special Charisms (Continued)*

SINCE the Oratory May devotions were to be solemnly closed on Sunday, June 4, Don Bosco was able to go to the Mirabello junior seminary on May 31 to be on hand the next day for the closing of the Marian month with the participation of the bishop of Casale and numerous pastors and curates. Countess Callori was also present. On this occasion the pupils handsomely staged the Latin comedy *Phasmatonices* [Noisy Spooks].

Back at the Oratory, Don Bosco wrote to Marquis [Dominic] Fassati:

Turin, June 4, 1865

My dear Marquis:

Since you left for Rome I have had no news of you or your family, but I hope that God heard our humble prayers and kept you all in His holy grace. . . .

Today we solemnly closed Mary's month in a most gratifying manner. The band, organ, choir and preacher greatly contributed to make the occasion a memorable one. Canon [Louis] Nasi celebrated the Mass and preached. I wish you could see how beautifully decorated is the altar you donated.<sup>1</sup>

The new church is already six feet above floor level and work is steadily progressing. If the marchioness should ask: "How are you doing for funds?" I would have to confess that your departure was my loss. But the Lord has so far seen to it that we should have no shortage of materials. . . .

The Lord has visited us. Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino, Father Provera and Father Fusero are all seriously ill. As of now, they have no

<sup>1</sup> In 1852, the marquis had paid for a side altar dedicated to Our Lady in the Church of St. Frances de Sales, the first church built by Don Bosco at the Oratory. See Vol. IV, p. 298. [Editor]

hope of recovery. "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away." [Job 1, 21] The lottery is doing well. . . .

All of us here respectfully greet you and wish heavenly blessings on you, the marchioness, Azelia, and all the De Maistre family. May God keep you healthy physically and spiritually so that you may have a happy temporal and eternal life.

Yours gratefully,  
Fr. John Bosco

P.S. Kindly drop the enclosed letter into some mailbox for me.

On Saturday, June 10, eve of the feast of the Most Holy Trinity, Joseph Lazzero was ordained a priest by Archbishop Balma of Ptolemais. Don Bosco accompanied the newly ordained priest to Pino Torinese, his birthplace, to assist him at his First Mass and give the homily. Father James Aubert, the pastor, hosted Don Bosco, while the local clergy, Father Lazzero's family, and all the townsfolk did their utmost to make the occasion a solemn and joyous one. The same was done at the Oratory, where the newly ordained priest had endeared himself to all.

At about this time, the fulfillment of a prediction that Don Bosco had made on his last visit to Mirabello deeply consoled everyone there. Here is the account.

In the school year 1864-65, Latin IV and V and other subjects had been entrusted to the cleric Francis Cerruti, but the sickly young teacher became so exhausted that Father Rua, the director, begged Don Bosco to relieve him of his heavy burden.

"Let him continue to teach!" was Don Bosco's reply. The good cleric obeyed, but toward the end of April he fell seriously ill. What follows is his own testimony:

I suddenly felt totally exhausted. Often my spittle was tinged with blood, and a persistent cough and phlegm tormented me. I constantly ran a temperature and found it hard to breath. Doctor Pasini diagnosed my condition as a serious case of neglected bronchitis. At about this time Don Bosco paid us a visit. He asked me how I felt and told me to take some pills. Truthfully they did me a lot of harm.

"Don't worry," he said before leaving, "your hour hasn't come yet. You still have a lot to do to earn your place in heaven."

My condition, however, worsened and the doctor gave me up. I remember hearing him say, "There is nothing else medicine can do. He is too far gone. He must have total rest. Only nature can help him now." Father Rua, the director, solicitously looked after me and had the boys pray for me morning and evening, as is done for those who are critically ill, but to no avail.

One day he went to Turin and informed Don Bosco of my condition. When he returned he said to me, "Listen to this. Don Bosco wants you to know that your hour hasn't come yet and that you'd better think about getting well. He also asked me who your doctor was, and when I told him, he replied, 'That doctor doesn't know what he is doing.'"

Well, that same day I had such a coughing spell that, unable to stand it any longer, I threw myself on the bed, expecting to die at any moment. Yet, the next morning I resumed teaching and by evening felt better. The following day I felt almost entirely cured and continued my work to the end of the year. Trusting Don Bosco's word, I attended weekly lectures at the University of Turin with no adverse effect. Furthermore, in July of that year I studied for an examination in modern history at the same university.

I also recall that my doctor was mystified by my recovery and that months later he was still puzzled and could not quite believe it. "Of course," he would remark, "nature has many secrets we are not yet aware of." He could not bring himself to admit more. He was an upright man, but hardly a churchgoer. . . .

I am convinced that, considering my physical exhaustion and my serious and long illness, my recovery was a miracle. . . .<sup>2</sup>

We shall now mention other predictions of Don Bosco. Many years before Don Bosco's death Father Joachim Berto wrote:

One Saturday evening in 1865, shortly before graduation, I went to Don Bosco for confession in the choir of the Church of St. Francis de Sales. As I started to tell him of my difficulties in my priestly vocation and my doubts about remaining at the Oratory, he, foreseeing my fears, said, "Don't worry about your parents. Both will save their souls."

"Thank you for that, Father," I replied, "but I feel that I am not quite qualified to become a priest."

"Have no fear. Do your best and you will succeed."

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting a few lines from Father Rua to Father Provera at Lanzo confirming Ceruti's full recovery. [Editor]

“Very well,” I went on. “I’ll be happy to remain here. If I become a priest, it’s only because I want to stay with you. You know me well and I want to receive your fatherly guidance. You solved all my difficulties. I only wish for the good of my soul to continue confessing to you because I have placed all my trust in you.”

“Since trust begets trust,” he replied, “I want to tell you that, should you be separated from me, it will be but for a short time.”

And so it was. As Don Bosco’s private secretary [for over twenty years] Father Berto had a room next to Don Bosco’s. Only during the last two years of the latter’s life did he relinquish that office [for health reasons]. However, even then, as archivist, he continued having free access to Don Bosco, although his room was now occupied by Father Rua, Don Bosco’s vicar.

Louis Tamone, a young artisan, also had his future foretold. On taking leave of Don Bosco in 1865 to return to his family in Giarvenno, this young shoemaker apprentice, who was also a good cornet player, told him that he intended to enlist in the army and join the band.

“What!” Don Bosco replied. “You want to be an army musician? At forty you will be through both as a musician and as a workingman. Forget it!”

Tamone went home, opened a shoeshop, and did well financially, but, at forty, stomach troubles forced him to give up both business and hobby and take up the easier task of town hall usher. He told us of this in 1897, adding that his stomach troubles still plagued him.

Besides knowing his pupils’ future, Don Bosco seemingly also knew things of the afterlife. In this same year, 1865, a young pupil, Joseph Perazzo, told Father Berto the following incident:

My father’s death saddened me very much, and I kept wishing to know of his state in the other world. Once, after confession, I asked Don Bosco to pray for my father. “I have seen him,” Don Bosco replied. He then proceeded to describe him so minutely and accurately that I exclaimed, “Yes, that’s my father; that’s the way he used to dress.”

“Well,” Don Bosco went on, “he is still in purgatory. Pray for him, and soon he will be in heaven.” The amazing thing is that Don Bosco had never seen or known him.

In June, as Don Bosco's name day<sup>3</sup> drew near, a flood of letters reached him from past pupils eager to greet him and express their love and gratitude.<sup>4</sup>

On the eve of St. John's feast, as night fell, the Oratory boys gathered in the playground, turned for the occasion into a beflagged amphitheatre, to pay homage to Don Bosco. All the buildings were brightly illuminated. On a dais stood a throne of sorts, flanked on both sides by seats for the many benefactors who had been invited; facing it was a lofty stand for the band and choir, and in the center was a table with a fine display of gifts and flowers. All around were rows of benches for the boys. In prose and poetry several lads offered greetings and compliments between musical selections. Don Bosco often joined in the applause, turning the demonstration into one of common joy. The program ended with a short address by Don Bosco, who seemed serene notwithstanding his worries about his four ill brother-priests. His resignation, however, did not keep him from showing his grief to the boys and asking them to help him carry that cross. Many wept when he alluded to Father Alasonatti's approaching death.

These demonstrations of love were not limited to his name day. Though less solemn, they occurred often on scholastic and religious holidays and whenever he made an appearance in the playground, classrooms, study hall or workshops, and even when the boys met him in town. On two occasions a squad of eighty youngsters spotted Don Bosco in a much frequented square of Turin while they were returning to the Oratory on their weekly walk. Instantly they broke ranks and ran up to him to kiss his hand.

The end of June was marked by the joyous celebration of the feast of St. Aloysius, but it also brought sorrow to the Salesians at the Oratory. Father Dominic Ruffino, director of the Salesian school in Lanzo, had been brought to Turin with great care, but it was heart-breaking to see him in such an emaciated condition.

<sup>3</sup> At his Baptism Don Bosco had been named after the Apostle John, but in 1846 the Oratory boys, believing his name to be John the Baptist—a very popular saint in Turin—began to celebrate his name day on June 24, the feast day of this saint. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Father Provera, the prefect, had notified Father Rua of this and of what Don Bosco had said concerning the Salesian school at Lanzo. Father Rua's reply follows:

The news you have given us of the difficulties that have plagued your school is sad indeed. We heartily sympathize with you and wish that we could rid you of these crosses. We are fervently praying to this end. Let us, however, take some comfort in the thought that these crosses seemingly are signs of God's approval of your work. For this very reason I would almost suggest to Don Bosco not to give Lanzo up.

Here we have observed several festivities very satisfactorily. We have solemnized the feast of St. Aloysius by carrying in procession the statue donated by the members of the St. Aloysius Sodality. In the evening, the boys staged a play portraying the saint's battles in order to become a religious. Some scenes drew tears and most salutarily impressed any responsive heart.

Louis Lasagna,<sup>5</sup> who had transferred to Mirabello this year, played the leading role with such feeling that he himself responded to God's call by becoming a Salesian.

Father Rua went on: "The bishop of Casale again gladly presided at our clerics' examination. This Thursday, June 6, we shall make our Exercise for a Happy Death at Lu."

Meantime the Oratory press was busy running off the *Letture Cattoliche* issues of July through October. . . .

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 164, 166, 179f. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 13

### *Noteworthy Details*

ON June 30 [1865] Don Bosco was routinely asked to send the Oratory's annual scholastic report to the superintendent of schools. While readying it, Don Bosco could not help worrying about the next school year since three of his certified secondary school teachers—Father Alasonatti, Father Ruffino and Father Fusero—were seriously ill. A fourth was in poor health and yet another had left for the seminary.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, a very painful foot ailment confined Father Francis Provera, the prefect at Lanzo, to a chair. On July 5, the latter wrote to Don Bosco:

Lanzo, July 5, 1865

Beloved Don Bosco,

Here at Lanzo, the Reverend Vicar and Father [Ignatius] Arrò<sup>2</sup> are impatiently waiting to hear from you concerning the future of this school. I too would like to know as soon as possible if the school is going to remain open; if not, I would need eight to ten days to dispose of four hundred [lottery] tickets which I held back, hoping to mail them with the program of the next school year.

In a reply to my letter, the mayor at once sent us a voucher for twenty-two hundred lire, but so far the treasurer has not honored it. He has promised us a good sum by the middle of this month. . . .

Things are going on fairly well here. I hope Sala<sup>3</sup> will come back with news of what day we may expect your joyful visit.

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting at this point the narration of how requests for the opening of new Salesian schools were considered and eventually turned down. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 332. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Sala (1836-1895) entered the Oratory in 1863 at the age of twenty-seven after giving up the management of his family silk mill. He took vows as a Salesian on December 29, 1865 and was ordained a priest in 1869. In 1875 he was appointed to the Superior Chapter as a councilor and in 1880 became Economist General of the Salesian Society, a post to which he was re-elected in 1886 and 1892. He died in Turin on May 21, 1895. [Editor]

We are working and praying that the Lord will compensate you abundantly for the many sorrows you have had this year.

Please, Father, give us your blessing and recommend us to the Most Holy Virgin that She keep us from more misfortunes, especially spiritual ones.

Respectful greetings from all.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father Francis Provera

On the day the letter arrived, suppertime conversation centered on the difficulties besetting the Lanzo school and the Oratory. In comment, Don Bosco exclaimed, "It's remarkable how Father Provera manages not only to remain serene in the midst of his sufferings, but also to find strength enough to console others."

Through Sala he sent word to Father Provera that he would visit the school on his way up to St. Ignatius' Shrine for his spiritual retreat. He felt that he could not leave the Oratory while Father Ruffino's last hour seemed imminent. The latter died, in fact, on July 16, sacred to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, at the age of twenty-five. With holy enthusiasm he had given all his energy and goodness to the success of that new school, raising great hopes for his future. After closing Father Ruffino's eyes, Don Bosco came out of the room weeping. "Dear Ruffino," he exclaimed within hearing of Joseph Daghero, a Latin III student, "you have helped me so much! I will never forget you!" He often spoke of him. In 1884, nineteen years after the latter's death, he remarked: "How saintly was Father Ruffino! He seemed like an angel in the flesh. The mere sight of him enraptured the beholder. His countenance was much more devout than we usually see in pictures of St. Aloysius. How many angels God has sent us! Dominic Savio, Michael Magone and Francis Besucco were saintly youths, but they pale in comparison to so many others who have remained unknown and who, like them, were spotlessly pure." Then he named those fortunate students of his.

Neither did Don Bosco limit his gratitude to recalling Father Ruffino's memory. He proved it by looking after his sister, as we gather from a letter to Countess Callori, which also reveals his feelings in those trying days:

Turin, July 24, 1865

Dear Countess,

Miss Ruffino is away just now and I have no way of reaching her in time for tomorrow. Her mother is spending a few days at Lanzo housekeeping for the vicar. As soon as I can reach either of them, I shall see what can be done and let you know at once.

I have not forgotten about the book. I still intend to publish it, but lack of time has so far prevented me from attending to it. Just think: five of my priests on whom I counted most fell ill at the same time. A week ago Father Ruffino went to heaven; Father Alasonatti is about to follow him; the other three have but a slim chance of recovery. You can imagine the expenses, problems and extra duties which have fallen upon me.

Do not think, however, that I am downhearted. I am just tired! The Lord gave, the Lord changed, the Lord took away when it pleased Him. Blessed be His Holy Name! I take comfort in hoping for sunshine to return after the storm.

I hope to pay you a few days' visit when you shall have taken up permanent residence at Vignale.

My dear countess, in these trying days I badly need enlightenment and strength. Do help me with your prayers. Recommend me also to the prayers of other saintly souls you are acquainted with.

On my part I shall invoke God's blessings on you and your whole family.

Most gratefully yours,  
Father John Bosco

Father Ruffino's personal papers were painstakingly preserved. In his *Cronaca dell'Oratorio* [Oratory Chronicle]<sup>4</sup> we found this entry: "October, 1859. Don Bosco said to me: 'The balance of your life-span is one and one-half the time you have lived so far!' I had mistakenly told him I was eighteen instead of nineteen."

Ruffino had asked Don Bosco how long he would yet live. By recording Don Bosco's answer in the Oratory chronicle, he showed the importance he attached to it, well knowing how often Don Bosco's predictions were fulfilled.

But did Father Ruffino understand the true meaning of that prediction? Apparently not! Don Bosco could not have alluded to Ruf-

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 282f. [Editor]

fino's natural life-span because the latter died at twenty-five. This premature death is the key to the riddle why Don Bosco did not clearly express his mind. In his eminent prudence he never let such secrets leak out to those whom he knew to be ripe for eternity. We think we are justified, therefore, in saying that in his reply to Father Ruffino, Don Bosco was alluding to the latter's "Salesian" life which started in the school year 1855-56. It was then that Ruffino, while still a seminarian at Giaveno, decided to cast his lot with Don Bosco.<sup>5</sup> Four years elapsed between 1855-56 and 1859—the time of Don Bosco's prediction; four more elapsed between 1859 and 1863, and half that again—that is, two years—up to 1865 when Father Ruffino died. Be that as it may, this is our opinion. After all, not even the prophecies of Holy Scripture are all to be taken literally. Anyway, let each one judge as he deems best.

We could have omitted the above-quoted entry and thus saved ourselves an explanation, but we chose to report it because of our policy of not holding anything back. We have nothing to hide about Don Bosco. Another reason for reporting it was to forestall the accusation of having deliberately left it out, and also to make it clear to all—whether or not they approve of our interpretation—that we are the first to admit that it would be wrong to assume that Don Bosco always prophesied whenever he was questioned [about the future] or simply spoke of it.<sup>6</sup>

[Toward the end of July 1865] Don Bosco set off for St. Ignatius' and from that shrine, as was his custom, he wrote to those of his sons who were seeking advice. As we have not been able to trace any of these letters, we will report one that was recently handed to us, though it dates back to July 1860. It is always the friend of souls who speaks:

*Sancti Ignatii apud Lanceum, die 25 Iulii 1860*

*Dilecto Filio Cibrario Nicholao salutem in Domino.*

*Ut animae tuae curam geram per epistolam tuam postulasti; et exaudita est deprecatio tua. At quantum in te est, cura ut habitu, incessu, sermone,*

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. V, p. 318. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> We are omitting a brief poetical greeting by Don Bosco to a benefactor and some details about the lottery. [Editor]

*gestu, opere agas et vivas quemadmodum decet clericum in sortem Domini vocatum.*

*Dominus conservet te in via mandatorum suorum; ora Deum pro me, et cura ut valeas.*

*Sac. Bosco Giovanni*

St. Ignatius' Shrine near Lanzo, July 25, 1860

To my beloved son Nicholas Cibrario, health in the Lord.

You have asked me in your letter to take charge of your soul. Your petition is granted. On your part, see to it that your dress, deportment, speech and behavior, your whole life and your activities be worthy of one called to God's service.

May the Lord keep you in the way of His commandments. Pray to God for me and take care of your health.

Fr. John Bosco

The retreat over, Don Bosco went down to Lanzo. After conferring with the municipal councilors, in deference to Father [Frederick] Albert, the vicar, he agreed to keep the Salesian school open. He then returned to Turin for the solemn conferring of awards which was, for Don Bosco, one of the most cherished means for the moral formation of his children. Before they left on their summer vacation, he gave them a timely warning on not succumbing to human respect. He told them:

Bravely say with St. Paul: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." [Rom. 1, 16] Be men, not weaklings. Keep your head high; practice your faith undauntedly in private and in public, in church and on the street. Human respect is but a paper monster which cannot bite. The petulant words of the wicked are but soap bubbles that instantly vanish. Ignore them and their gibes. Their courage is based on other people's fear. Be brave, stand up to them, and you will see them pull back their horns. Be a good example to all, and the whole town or village will respect and praise you, all the more so because you are well educated. A farm boy who in his humble cottage lovingly kisses the crucifix captures my heart, but a teacher, officer, magistrate, or student who at the sound of the bell recites the *Angelus* or the *De Profundis* with his family for the souls of his dear departed ones earns my respect and arouses my enthusiasm.

Be a credit, then, to yourselves and to the Oratory. Have fun, but do not neglect study and prayer. Have you any talents? Use them always to good purposes. Blunt the self-conceit of unscrupulous students who are home from other boarding schools. Remember that knowledge without morals is but the soul's ruination. In conclusion, so conduct yourselves that people, seeing you unafraid and faithful to divine and church laws, upon inquiring who you are, may be surprised to hear, "He is one of Don Bosco's boys."

He also asked those who went home on vacation to promise to recite daily one Hail Mary for the salvation of his soul and the success of his undertakings, promising that he would do the same for them and their families. He warmly entreated them never to forget that Hail Mary which he called "his" Hail Mary.

This year he also gave the more dependable among them lottery tickets to sell at home.

As the school year closed, he sent to Canon [Alexander] Vogliotti, seminary rector and provicar of the diocese, the list<sup>7</sup> of Oratory pupils who were asking to don the priestly habit.

<sup>7</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 14

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**A**FTER the solemn awarding of prizes [to the best Oratory pupils] Don Bosco left on short trips to promote his lottery and dispatch some other business. Thus, on August 2, he obligingly called on Bishop [James] Gentile of Novara who had often invited him to his summer residence at Gozzano to discuss ways and means of promoting priestly vocations, then at an all-time low in his diocese. Don Bosco had planned to arrive by noon, but he missed a connection at Novara. With his usual calm, he made several visits while waiting for the next train. He finally arrived at the bishop's residence at half-past ten that evening, warmly welcomed, though unexpected.<sup>1</sup> On the following day, the bishop honored Don Bosco with a banquet attended by several guests. Afterward, he conferred at length with him about plans for increasing priestly vocations in his diocese and eventually providing priests for the many vacant parishes. Seminaries were plentiful: in addition to the major seminary, there were minor seminaries at Gozzano, Monte di San Carlo above Arona, San Giulio Island near Orta, and Masino. . . . It seemed advisable that all junior seminarians should be trained in one place, but who was qualified to run such a seminary and guarantee desired results with new academic policies and a stronger emphasis on prayer? Other things too had to be considered: possible jealousies, for instance, and recriminations by the diocesan clergy if the Salesians were put in charge of such a project. Furthermore, how could the bishop abruptly discharge veteran superiors and teachers without adequate remuneration? Would it be wise to change the status quo and antagonize people by closing seminaries

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting details about the bishop's embarrassment at being unable to give Don Bosco a good supper. [Editor]

and shifting the economy of the diocese? Would it not be better to leave the seminaries alone and have Don Bosco open an elementary and secondary boarding school in the diocese? This might be the best solution, but what about the expense?

The bishop and Don Bosco conferred at length, but they reached no agreement because the bishop saw difficulties in every proposal. "That's all for now," he concluded. "We shall return to it at a later date."

As Don Bosco emerged from the bishop's study, he found Father Reina, the latter's secretary, in the antechamber anxiously waiting word, for he was very much concerned about the diocese.

"No results," Don Bosco said.

We came to know this from Father Reina himself who had persuaded the bishop to consult Don Bosco. He also told us that Don Bosco was repeatedly called back by the bishop to discuss this important matter, but that Don Bosco became convinced that under the circumstances no agreement could be reached.<sup>2</sup>

From Gozzano Don Bosco went to another diocese where a convent of women tertiaries was in open rebellion against the local bishop and seemingly could not be persuaded to obey. They wanted to follow the strict rule of their order and thus become independent of their ordinary. On hearing of Don Bosco's arrival, they invited him to visit them. The bishop—Don Bosco's host—told him that he was free to accept but warned him to be cautious, because he had already been compelled to impose canonical penalties on the convent.

Don Bosco went there and was ushered into the reception room with signs of honor and esteem. All the nuns were on their knees; they likewise knelt on coming to the grill to speak to him. When the superioress asked him to address the community he tried to decline, but she insisted.

"All right then," he said. "Tell me, do you think much of Don Bosco?"

"Of course we do! We look upon you as a saint."

"Will you accept what I am going to tell you?"

"Most willingly."

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting a letter of Don Bosco dated August 3, 1865 to Countess Callori from Gozzano. [Editor]

“Good! You know that Holy Scripture says: ‘Obey your superiors.’ [Heb. 13, 17] Therefore. . . .”

“These are matters for confession,” the superioress broke in, “and are the exclusive concern of our spiritual director.”

“You say that you esteem me as a saint and then you refuse to listen to me?” Don Bosco countered.

“Excuse me, Father, but you’d better keep out of this.”

“Very well, but I hope. . . .”

He could not continue. The curtains had been drawn over the grill.

On returning the next day, he was again received most respectfully. He made another attempt to bring those tertiaries to better sentiments. “I’d like to speak to you as a father,” he said, “as a friend.”

“Would you like a cup of coffee, Father?” they asked.

“No, thanks, but think . . . your break with the bishop. . . .”

“How about a lemonade, Father?”

“Please listen; you must think of the consequences. . . .”

“Leave that to us, Father. This is no concern of yours. We’ll look after our own consciences.”

Don Bosco’s charitable intervention proved totally ineffective. The controversy ended with the bishop’s suppression of the convent. Two of those tertiaries later called on Don Bosco but still stubbornly clung to their notions.

“When such groundless stubbornness takes hold of one’s mind,” Don Bosco warned his Salesians, “how can sanctity ever flourish? Where humble obedience reigns, grace will triumph.”

Back from this short trip, on hearing that Father Provera’s health was not improving, Don Bosco decided to send him to his family, hoping that he would benefit from his native air. He notified him of this in the following letter:

Turin, August 8, 1865

My dear Father Provera,

After spending a few days here to plan the future, I think you should prepare yourself for a trip to Mirabello. Meanwhile:

1. Put your books in order and brief Sala and Bodrato<sup>3</sup> about everything.

2. Tell them that the school administration is, for the time being, in their hands. They should confer often and work together for God's glory.

3. Father Arrò<sup>4</sup> will continue to look after the boys' spiritual welfare until we find a substitute.

4. Leave whatever money is needed in the treasury. Bring the extra cash here and we will buy provisions for the school.

Come down this Friday or next Thursday, but let us know so that we may send a carriage for you.

God bless you, my dear Father. We'll take care of the rest when you get here. I suggest that you say nothing about returning there or not. We'll discuss it with your father at Mirabello. Remember me to all.

Yours affectionately,  
Father John Bosco

With Father Provera's departure the Lanzo school was entirely in the hands of young clerics who, for some two months, had worked in admirable unity to keep up its smooth routine.

"We were without priests," Father Anthony Sala wrote many years later, "yet everything went on without a hitch until the end of the year. Father Arrò and another priest of the parish came to say Mass, hear confessions and preach. I remember how hard we worked then to keep things going well. We would not have it said that the school wasn't functioning properly because we were only clerics."

Meanwhile, rumors of the appearance of cholera in Italy yielded to fact. The epidemic, originating among two hundred thousand Moslem pilgrims to Mecca, first spread to Alexandria and then to other cities where Europeans fled. Over a thousand sought safety in Ancona. There on July 8, 1865, the cholera made its frightening appearance. Seemingly sporadic at first, it flared up at the beginning of August and within six weeks claimed a thousand victims, half of whom died. Moved at the plight of so many newly orphaned boys,

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 475. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Father Ignatius Arrò, a former lawyer and eloquent orator, had come to the Oratory in 1863 not so much to remain with Don Bosco as to persuade him to open a boarding school in his own native town of Lanzo. [Editor]

Don Bosco wrote to the bishop of Ancona and to the Minister of the Interior offering to accept orphans at the Oratory. A few months later, in fact, when the danger of contagion had been removed, some twenty or thirty of them went to the Oratory.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 15

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**A**UGUST 16 [1865] was Don Bosco's fiftieth birthday. As he had stated some years before,<sup>1</sup> this was to have been his life-span. Indeed, he had been ill several times but had rallied thanks to the prayers of his boys at the Oratory, Mirabello and Lanzo.

He kept his birthday at Montemagno where, as usual, he was hosted by Marquis [Dominic] Fassati. During his two days' stay there, he accepted the pastor's invitation to preach the triduum for the feast of Mary's Nativity. Though he was always ready to exercise his priestly ministry, his indefatigable zeal for the salvation of souls was even more apparent when it was a question of facing up to the Waldensians and foiling their proselytizing attempts. At about this time he ordered a reprint of his booklet *Who Is Father Ambrogio?*<sup>2</sup> because this apostate priest continued to pave the way for heretics by his blasphemous and slanderous harangues in streets and squares. Regretfully, a number of unwary or unprincipled Catholics lost their faith.

Don Bosco's grief at someone's apostasy was beyond telling. Joseph Buzzetti reports that once, while he and others were conversing with him in his room, Don Bosco suddenly became serious, turned pale, and shivered from head to foot, his eyes remaining fixed and staring into space for a few moments, as if he were in a trance. In alarm, the bystanders feared that he had fainted, but presently he was himself again. "I have seen the flame of a small candle flicker out," he explained. "One of our festive oratory boys has become a Waldensian."

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VI, p. 56. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 439. [Editor]

He constantly toiled to safeguard the faith of youth. During the year [1865], he took into the Oratory many boys he had successfully removed from Waldensian schools—for instance, the two young sons of a Protestant Hungarian officer and the three sons of the ill-famed apostate De Achillis. They remained with us at the Oratory a long time and we knew them personally. He also zealously helped pastors in various areas as they resisted Waldensian inroads.<sup>3</sup>

At this time, too, a light but annoying cross fell upon Don Bosco. Quite concerned about cleanliness and tidiness in regard to both person and premises, he constantly stressed these qualities to his pupils and to his staff, and he saw to it that his directives were carried out.<sup>4</sup> The Oratory, however, was not a mansion for the rich but a dwelling for the poor. On August 19 [1865], health inspectors suddenly showed up at the Oratory. All city institutions were being checked for hygienic conditions in view of the cholera epidemic then threatening various Italian towns. This unexpected inspection was being made at a time when the whole Oratory was going through its yearly clean-up and furniture of all sorts was being moved around, repaired or replaced.

The health inspectors ignored this situation and submitted a nasty report of untidy and overcrowded dormitories, classrooms and study halls, of run-down restrooms, and of garbage bins too close to kitchen and dining areas. These and other deficiencies were either baseless or deliberately exaggerated. As a result, the Health Department ordered Don Bosco to take immediate steps to remedy this situation and “not to accept new boys until health inspectors had rechecked the premises and determined the capacity of dormitories, classrooms, etc.” The second inspection took place a week later. It set the number of boarders at five hundred, and the study hall occupancy at two hundred.

It is to be noted that accompanying the health inspectors were anticlerical newsmen who readily made capital of this situation to blacken Don Bosco’s name. *La Gazzetta del Popolo* led the attack, but it was promptly rebuffed by *Unità Cattolica* on August 30.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> What follows is a condensation. [Editor]

On his part, Don Bosco did his best to cooperate with the health authorities. He hurried the clean-up and repairs, excused himself from carrying out certain injunctions that were beyond his means, and, not the least put out, without curtailing even by one the number of his boys, made room for the expected cholera orphans. Eventually the residents increased to nine hundred.

After these inspections the Oratory had no further trouble from the Health Department, and state and local authorities did not hesitate to entrust orphans to him.

## CHAPTER 16

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**N**EGOTIATIONS for the Ancona orphans and the inspections conducted by the Health Department kept Don Bosco at the Oratory for several days, but as soon as he was free, he resumed his short trips to promote his lottery and seek contributions for the new church. On August 29 he was once more in Novara, whence he wrote to Marquis Fassati at Montemagno that, in view of the rumors that cholera was spreading, it might be prudent to cancel the triduum he had promised to preach<sup>1</sup> in Our Lady's honor. The marquis hastened to reassure him about the rumors of cholera. Consequently, on September 4, Don Bosco and Father Arrò traveled to Montemagno for the triduum. Father Rua had also been asked to come from Mirabello to help. The spiritual results fulfilled the expectations. The people were fired with holy enthusiasm, and during the triduum every family recited the rosary together, as was customary in late fall when work in the fields had ceased. . . . After the close of the triduum, Don Bosco returned to Turin to look after the construction of the new church. To this end he wrote to Count Charles Cays at Caselette inviting him to donate roofing materials.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Father Rua, after leaving Mirabello with admirable promptness, had already taken up the prefect's duties at the Oratory, a truly burdensome position made vacant by Father Alasonatti's illness. While at Mirabello, Father Rua one day was at his desk planning for the new school year when Father Provera arrived from Turin with the message that Don Bosco wanted him at

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. At this point we are omitting a letter of Don Bosco to the rector of the Turin seminary concerning Oratory pupils who had taken the required examination for donning the clerical habit. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. We are omitting a brief note to Father Rua concerning a payment to be made. [Editor]

the Oratory. "I'm ready to go," he replied. Without further ado, he stood up, picked up his breviary, and left.

Such instant obedience was doubtlessly a hard sacrifice on his part because he deeply loved his pupils. Yet he showed up at the Oratory with so cheerful a mien that one would have thought it meant nothing to him to leave a place where he had worked for two years and was loved by all. However, when his successor called on him to say good-bye before leaving for Mirabello, Father Rua said to him, "So you are going to Mirabello! Give my love to the boys. Love them yourself for me. They are good!" As tears came to his eyes, he went on: "Be an older brother to the confreres."

More remarkably still, a long-standing prediction of Don Bosco was beginning to be realized in those very days. Prior to 1850, Rua, as a young lad, had often met Don Bosco on his way to or from school. On spotting him, he would joyfully run up to him, doff his cap and, after kissing his hand, ask for a holy picture. Obliging, lingering a few minutes, Don Bosco would put the youngster's cap back on his head and smilingly hold out the palm of his left hand to him while seeming to cut it in half with his right.

"Take it, Mike," he would say.

Kissing his hand with deeper affection, little Michael would go, wondering what that gesture could possibly mean. He finally did ask Don Bosco on October 3, 1852 when he donned the clerical habit.

"My son," Don Bosco replied in a fatherly tone, "by now it should be clear to you, but you will understand better later on. . . . I just wanted to tell you that one day I would go fifty-fifty with you."

Now, as prefect, Father Rua, the faithful imitator of Don Bosco's virtues, was beginning to share his responsibility of running the Oratory and the Salesian Society. This he was to do for the next twenty years until, as vicar, he would also share Don Bosco's authority. At this time, however, Father Rua was preparing himself for exams in Italian, Greek and Latin literature to get certification as a rhetoric teacher.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Don Bosco, away on short fund-raising trips for the new church, kept his mind and heart constantly on Father

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Alasonatti whose strength was fast ebbing away. Hoping for relief from a change of climate, he had been moved first to Avigliana, his birthplace, and then to Mirabello and Trofarello. Finally, at his own request, he had been taken to Lanzo, where the writer of these memoirs was to keep him company.

Don Bosco's frequent trips during this year [1865] caused surprise, since he had never done that before. Of course, there was a reason for it—the new church.<sup>4</sup> Even more surprising was his constant serenity and cheerfulness, notwithstanding his ailments, toils, rebuffs and other heavy crosses. He loved to joke. For some time now he had been in the habit of jestingly conferring titles of nobility such as “Count of Becchi” or “Marquis of Valcappone” on his senior lay co-workers, particularly [Joseph] Rossi, [Charles] Gastini, [Peter] Enria, [Andrew] Pelazza, and [Joseph] Buzzetti, not only within the Oratory but also outside, especially when traveling with any of them during the summer months. They, in turn, simply but respectably dressed, enjoyed the joke and went along with it, playing their part well. Glibly and convincingly they would address each other by their respective titles, hinting at imaginary real estate holdings and acquaintances. Occasionally their fellow travelers would wonder at finding themselves in such distinguished company. At times, on reaching their destination, they would be treated with remarkable consideration by the conductor, whom Don Bosco often generously tipped. Now and then in small towns they might have to seek food and lodging in the local inn. Nonchalantly, Don Bosco would turn and say to his co-workers: “Have you had a pleasant journey, my dear Count? Aren't you tired, Marquis? What would you like for supper? As for you, my dear Baron, don't expect to find here the sumptuous dinners you are used to! My dear friends, you will have to be satisfied with what can be found in these out-of-the-way places!”

Naturally Don Bosco was joking, but he did it with such aplomb that the innkeeper, his family and the regular patrons would hustle dumbfoundedly to make their guests as comfortable as possible, even to the point of giving up their own rooms. Unobtrusively the

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

innkeeper would approach Don Bosco and whisper: "Did you say that this gentleman is a count and that the other one is a marquis?"

"They are very important people!"

"Goodness, how can we lodge them properly?"

"Don't worry, my good man! They are very understanding and easy to please."

Of course, Don Bosco's companions could hardly keep a straight face, but the make-believe sometimes paid off handsomely.

Once Don Bosco went to the Porta Nuova station with Joseph Rossi, who was carrying Don Bosco's suitcase. As usual, he arrived as the train was about to leave and all the coaches were full. The windows were either closed or had passengers blocking the view to convey the impression that there were no vacant seats in their compartments. Turning to Rossi, Don Bosco rather loudly remarked, "My dear Count, I regret inconveniencing you. You shouldn't be carrying my suitcase."

"Forget it. I feel honored to be of service to you." At hearing this, the passengers closest to them exchanged surprised looks.

"Don Bosco!" they immediately shouted. "We have two seats here. Please come in!"

"But I wouldn't want to trouble you!" Don Bosco replied.

"Never mind! It's a pleasure to have you. We have plenty of room!"

Meanwhile a prediction that Don Bosco had made toward the end of 1863 kept proving true—cholera was spreading more and more even outside Italy. Concurrently, as we shall soon bring out, many people in various cities were becoming convinced that the Blessed Virgin would safeguard them from the dread disease if they contributed to the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. As they did so, a serene, well-grounded hope banished fear from their hearts.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 17

### *A Grave Loss*

**A**T midnight, between October 7 and 8 [1865], Father Victor Alasonatti, first prefect of the Oratory and of the Salesian Society, died at Lanzo where he had gone toward the end of August. Aware of his approaching end, he had prepared himself for what was at long last to be for him a rest from so much toil and the gate to everlasting happiness. Daily for several years he had been reciting the *Proficiscere, anima Christiana* [Depart, Christian soul], fearing that he might not have the benefit of that prayer in his last moments, as it actually happened.

God alone knows how much he suffered. A throat tumor had forced him to bend his head almost to his knees; his right shoulder was constantly racked with pain. Yet he stayed out of bed a great part of the day.

His resignation to God's will was total. "Thy will be done!" he often exclaimed. He delighted in constantly giving thanks to God. His favorite invocation was *Deo gratias* which he uttered at every stab of pain in his shoulder. When he twinged, when mucus and cough nearly choked him and racked his chest, he neither moaned nor complained. Instead he smiled, but it was an anguished and spasmodic smile. Whoever witnessed these crises would be deeply affected for the whole day. And yet his first words on regaining his breath were *Deo gratias*. After a few minutes' nap, after a sleepless night, a light repast, or a short stroll in the garden, after good or bad news, he would always whisper, *Deo gratias*.

A few clerics, though quite busy with their own duties, kept taking turns to provide around-the-clock assistance to their beloved patient. But Father Alasonatti strove to give them and the school the least possible inconvenience. Dishes, presumably to his liking, were prepared for him, but often he felt such repugnance for food

that he had to decline them with thanks and apologies, asking that nothing else be prepared for him.

A bowl of hot light soup, which the doctor had prescribed every two hours, gave him a little relief. One morning, however, the cleric whose turn it was to bring it to him had to substitute for a teacher. He wrongly believed that somebody else had taken over his nursing duties, and so Father Alasonatti was left unattended the whole morning. Though he had the bell cord within reach, he chose not to pull it until his confreres had finished their meal. When the cleric Sala went to see him, Father Alasonatti smilingly asked, "Did you forget me?"

Surprised, he immediately ran to the kitchen for the soup. The cleric who had been involuntarily responsible for this slip hastened to apologize, expecting a rebuke.

"Oh, don't worry about it," Father Alasonatti reassured him. "Just bring me something now. *Deo gratias.*"

Fearing that he might die suddenly without his confreres' assistance, he would fret in discomfort if he were left alone for even a few moments. And yet at night he often ordered the infirmarian to retire and rest.

"It's not right," he would say, "that others should suffer because of me."

One evening he was asked if he had any objection to the boys having an outdoor supper in the meadow beneath his windows.

"Not at all," he replied. "I only wish they would not make too much noise because I feel worse than usual today."

"Then we had better put this off to another time."

"No, please! Go ahead with it. I really like seeing the boys enjoy themselves."

He then had his armchair placed near the window to enjoy the sight of the boys he loved so much. Another day, after dinner, as a domestic was playing a flute, there appeared on Father Alasonatti's lips the constrained and painful smile that betrayed intense suffering.

"Does that bother you?" his attendant asked.

"Yes, a lot!"

The attendant turned to go out. "Where are you going?" Father Alasonatti asked.

"To tell that fellow to stop."

"Please don't. It's his only relaxation. I don't want him to be deprived of it because of me."

Notwithstanding his own aches, he was more concerned about others than himself. If anyone was sick, he anxiously inquired how he was getting on. If the wind from the mountains was colder than usual, he ordered those who were nursing him to put on warmer clothes lest they should get sick. If he heard anyone coughing, he sent him to the kitchen for a cup of hot coffee and made sure that his order was obeyed. He always asked the pupils visiting him about their health. If anyone told him of not feeling well, he seemed so distressed that to spare him pain both clerics and boys thereafter always assured him that they felt fine.

He wanted to know how things went on in the house and very charitably admonished those in need of correction. If there was a shortage of confessors, he volunteered for the clerics' confessions. Mulling over the great good that a priest can do through his ministry, he lamented, "Here I am, a disabled veteran!"

He prayed constantly. With the exception of a few days in his last two weeks, he went down to the school chapel every morning for Mass and Holy Communion, even though fasting from midnight was very painful to him. He knelt during Mass as long as he was able to. When he became too weak to do that, he knelt only at the Elevation. Occasionally he said Mass at two in the morning, even though this truly heroic effort drained him of his strength for the rest of the day. He said his last Mass on Sunday, October 1, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. Every afternoon he dragged himself to the school chapel to spend more than an hour before the Blessed Sacrament.

He was intensely devoted to the Blessed Virgin. The rosary and many other prayers were his daily fare. And how he prayed! Watching him pray, one could not help exclaiming, "This priest has a truly lively faith!" Whenever he could he prayed aloud, notwithstanding the pain it caused him. When an attack of coughing or

extreme weakness made this impossible, it was still greatly edifying to see him slip his beads between his fingers. This was his daily practice to his very end.

At eight-thirty one night he was already in bed, seemingly asleep, when the boys, before starting their night prayers, sang as usual a sacred hymn. On this occasion it was the hymn *Noi siamo figli di Maria* [We are Mary's children]. At the first notes he roused himself from sleep, made an effort to sit up and, doffing his nightcap, joined in the boys' singing. Then, devoutly clasping his hands on his chest, he softly said night prayers with them. At that moment a cleric came into the room with a cup of camomile tea he had requested to facilitate digestion and presented it to him. Father Alasonatti motioned to him to put it on the bedside table.

"Please, Father, take it now while it's hot. It will do you good."

"Never mind. Give it to me after prayers are over."

"But it will be cold then and won't do you any good."

"Patience! Right now I must pray with the boys. If it gets cold, I'll drink it cold." Then he went on praying.

He greatly valued community prayer. Whenever the *Angelus* bell rang, he invited those around him to kneel and join him in that prayer. One day he noticed a senior pupil make the Sign of the Cross hurriedly. Calling him aside, he asked, "Son, may I tell you something?"

"Certainly, Father!"

"If Don Bosco saw you making the Sign of the Cross so sloppily, I am sure he would reprimand you."

"I'm sorry, Father. Really, I wasn't paying attention to what I was doing, but I thought I was doing it properly."

"When you perform a religious act, always mind what you are doing."

"Thank you, Father. I'll be more careful from now on."

"I hope you don't feel hurt. I correct you because I care for you. I wish others would do the same to me. In fact, I ask you to do so whenever you see the need for it. You couldn't please me more. Tell me," he went on, "have I hurt your feelings?"

"Not at all, Father. Really, I am grateful."

"Let's always be friends then. Go off and play now."

Truthfully, he himself set the example. Despite the rheumatism which rendered every movement of his arm most painful, he always strove to make the Sign of the Cross devoutly. His disease had so worsened that he could no longer rest his head on the pillow or support it with his hand. His extremely sensitive nerves caused him unbearable pain. Since he mostly sat up in bed, he asked that a wooden support be placed behind his back.

“Don’t be surprised,” he said, “if I seek some bodily comfort. I offer my body daily to the Lord, but I am bound to keep it alive as long as it pleases Him.”

Once he smilingly remarked, “I am already dead, or so at least it has seemed to me for several weeks now. It is as if there were two persons in me—one who is suffering, and another who is calmly watching the agony and the gradual disintegration of his body.” Such Christian resignation was truly heroic.

Father Alasonatti had been an edification to all at Lanzo for over a month when, on Thursday afternoon, October 5, feeling his strength fast ebbing, he sent for his confessor, Father Anthony Longo, the pastor of Pessinetto and a former schoolmate.

“What shall I ask of God for you?” Father Longo said to him upon reaching his bedside. “Health?”

“That God’s will be done,” Father Alasonatti replied. “Thanks be to God forever and ever.”

After making his confession, he asked for Holy Viaticum. Seeing his serious condition, Father Longo, escorted by altar boys, obliged. A surge of holy love then seized Father Alasonatti, making his breathing more difficult. He nevertheless recited the *Confiteor* with great feeling, as if he were no longer in pain. After Communion he remained absorbed in deep meditation for some fifteen minutes; then, slowly turning to the two young clerics at his bedside, he gravely said to them, “Learn from me, sons, to receive the Last Sacraments on time.”

The following day he felt slightly better because the consolations with which Jesus had filled his heart had made him forget his pains. Toward evening, however, feeling very sharp pains, he again made his confession, asked that a blessed candle be lighted, and requested Extreme Unction. Father [Frederick] Albert, the local pastor,

administered it to him. Father Alasonatti made all the responses so devoutly and with such compunction as to move all the bystanders to tears. After receiving the papal blessing, he thanked the pastor and requested his prayers should he pass away that night. He then withdrew into himself awhile in prayer.

The writer of these memoirs was at his bedside and the patient motioned that he draw closer. I bent over him the better to hear what he wanted to say. Taking hold of my hand, he said with difficulty, "I beg you to carry out my last will. I shall soon pass away. Perhaps tomorrow I shall be dead. Don't forget to have prayers said for me. Ask Don Bosco to remember me in his Mass for a month. Say good-bye for me to him and to all the priests, clerics, and boys of the Oratory and of the house of Mirabello. Remember me to Father Francis Montebruno of Genova and to the cleric John Garino. . . . Write to them to pray for me always. . . . Tell the Oratory boys to recommend me to the Lord and to forgive me if I ever erred in punishing them or in failing to do so. Lastly, I ask everybody's pardon for the bad example I have given. . . . They will forgive me, won't they?"

After momentarily stopping to catch his breath, he went on, "I have nothing of my own to leave because what little I had I have already given to the house; the rest belongs to my father. I have only the use of three things. I leave my watch to Chevalier Oreglia because it was he who gave it to me. Send it to him after my death as a token of our friendship. . . . Give the crucifix I have at the Oratory to Father Ruffino's mother. Notify Father Giacomelli of my death. To him I leave my rosary beads which I have so often used in reciting the rosary with him while going on foot from Turin to St. Ignatius' Shrine."

Then, addressing himself to me and pressing my hand more firmly, he said, "I wish you God's holy blessing that you may continue as you have started. . . . May He bless your efforts. Carry on the great work you have undertaken. . . . Courage. . . . We need many priests to work among the young. . . . My wish for you is that you save thousands of souls, especially the souls of poor neglected youths. . . . Save them! Too many are laying snares before them. . . .

How great is the need to save them! Nowadays only in rural districts—and even then very rarely—can one find an innocent boy. If you come across one, safeguard him from bad companions. . . .”

Exhausted by this great effort, he stopped. He then resumed praying, pausing between phrases:

“O Lord, how great are Your mercies. . . . Forgive me. . . . I offer You my whole self. . . . I shall soon go *in domum aeternitatis meae* [into my everlasting home]. . . . O Lord, may I be buried in the most obscure corner of the earth and be forever forgotten. . . . I am pleased, O Lord, that my body is going to be the food of worms in penance for my sins and misdeeds. I am glad that my tongue, my eyes, and my ears are going to rot in the grave in punishment for their wrongdoing. I regret only one thing: that I shall no longer be able to work for Your glory. One favor alone, O Lord, I ask: that I may die, even if it be with the most excruciating sufferings. . . . I so long to die in order to be united with You and thus be sure of never again offending You, but rather of loving You most ardently. . . . I’m ready to live and suffer as long as it shall please You. Have mercy on me, O Lord. . . . I am Yours by many titles. . . . I impose too much on You, O Lord. . . .”

Occasionally he emphatically exclaimed: “*Exurgat Deus et dissipentur inimici Eius!*” [Let God arise and let His enemies be scattered—Ps. 67, 1]

After remaining momentarily absorbed, he stirred. Seemingly, something worried him. “Obedience! Obedience!” he muttered. “Occasionally I told Don Bosco, ‘I want this! Do this, or else. . . .!’ There is no justification for that, absolutely none! What kind of obedience is that?”

He was reminiscing about having one day spoken firmly to Don Bosco for seemingly dealing too leniently with someone who stubbornly refused to obey to the other pupils’ scandal. Being familiar with the incident to which he was alluding, I observed: “You had no choice. A firm stand was necessary.”

“Yes, but I said: ‘Either this or else. . . .!’ At the point of death things look very different. . . . To give a superior an ultimatum. . . . I hope the Lord forgave me. . . .” And again he silently prayed.

Suddenly he said to me, "I want to ask a favor of you. Should I die tonight, help me along . . . remind me of God's mercy . . . and absolve me one last time. . . . Do you promise?"

"Yes, Father," I answered tearfully.

"Thanks! Now go to your room and rest. If I feel weaker, I'll send for you." Since I was not moving, he insisted: "Go, I tell you! Obey!"

The next morning he got up, walked down to the garden and sat under a bower. At the Oratory, notwithstanding his manifold duties, he had earnestly striven to have the Holy See recognize and approve the cult given from time immemorial to Blessed Cherubim Testa, an Augustinian monk who had died in Avigliana (Father Alasonatti's native place) in 1479. After the disbanding of the Augustinians, the saintly monk's relics had been transferred from the monastery cemetery to St. John's parish church. For fully nine years Father Alasonatti had researched documents and sent them with his own memoranda in well-furbished Latin to the Sacred Congregation of Rites. He was now daily expecting the longed-for decree.

Midday was chiming on the last day of his life when Sala came to him with a large, signet-sealed envelope. It contained the decree which approved and confirmed the cult rendered to Blessed Cherubim Testa, and also granted to the Hermits of St. Augustine and to the archdiocese of Turin the privilege of a special Mass and Office in his honor. The opening prayer of the Mass and the lessons of the second nocturn had been composed by Father Alasonatti himself.

After reading the decree, he remained silent for a moment. "I am truly pleased," he then exclaimed. "At long last it has come!" Tearfully looking heavenward, he went on: "*Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine!* Now I die content. This is all I was waiting for."

"After working so much for this saint," the cleric remarked, "you will be the first to experience the effects of his intercession."

He did not reply at once. After a moment's silence he remarked, "Ask him for favors? He has been granting me so many all along. I have nothing more to ask."

"How about your recovery?"

"No, no, I wouldn't dare ask for that because I don't deserve it!" To all who visited him he joyfully showed the decree.

Since I was on duty with him, he also had me read it. Afterward he began to talk about his illness and his saint. I listened and kept silent. Suddenly he stopped talking. After a short while, he again turned to me. "Now you'd better be going," he said. "It hurts me a lot to talk, but I can't keep quiet when you're around. You are very dear to me," he added, firmly clasping my hand. "I can't keep silent with you." As I got up, he went on. "I am really rude," he apologized, "but I can't help it. If I start talking, I can't stop. You won't feel hurt, will you?"

"You need not apologize," I countered, "not to me." I then sat a few yards away from him.

After a few moments he called me back. "We don't value friends so much when we don't need them," he smilingly said, "but we hurry to call them when we do. Please help me get to my room because I feel quite weak."

When we reached it, he sat down and said: "I'd like to take a little walk at three. Will you be good enough to accompany me?"

But instead of doing so at the agreed hour, he walked out of his room at two. He wanted to take a look at the whole school. He first dropped into the chapel for a few moments' adoration; he then went through the garden, the playground, the classrooms, the dining room and the dormitories. Seemingly this was his farewell. At three he returned to his room, saying he was too tired, and went to bed.

"We are about to face death," he remarked to the one assisting him, and he composed himself in prayer.

Toward evening, as the boys were at play below his room, he was asked whether the noise bothered him and they should be told to quiet down. "Oh no!" he replied "Let them enjoy themselves. It's the only time they can have fun."

A while later he said to me: "Tell me something to help me in this moment. . . ."

"What can I say? It's certainly consoling to think of having always worked for God."

"No . . . not that! What consoles me is to think of God's mercy. . . . I feel tranquil . . . but I wonder if this tranquillity of mine is

not presumptuous. . . . Yet I try to think of something that may humble and shame me and I can't succeed. How I long to be united with the Lord. *Cupio dissolvi et esse cum Christo.*"

Then he ordered that as soon as he died one of us should hasten to the Oratory and wire the news to Don Bosco in case he was still at Castelnuovo. At the moment several of the clerics who took turns in nursing him were present. Having been repeatedly on night duty with him on top of their regular duties, they felt exhausted. The dying priest noticed it and ordered them to retire. Since they hesitated, he insisted so forcibly that they had to obey. There remained with him only a young fellow townsman, Modesto Davico, who had been sent up from the Oratory some time before to assist him when required. I too had to retire.

Father Alasonatti seemed so serene that night that no one would have imagined he was so near the end of his sufferings. Shortly before midnight, making an effort to rise from bed, he called to Davico: "Please get me my cassock. I want to get up because I can't breathe. I want to walk a bit."

"But it's cold outside," the young man objected. "You may catch pneumonia."

"I am choking, son. I need fresh air."

Davico assisted him in getting dressed and helped him up as he walked to the door, but after only a few steps the good priest reeled and fell into Davico's arms. A fit of coughing racked him. Unable to expel the mucus, Father Alasonatti gasped for breath.

Frightened and unable to prop the limp body any longer or reach for the bell cord, Davico shouted, "Father is dying! Father is dying!" At this point, the latter turned his head to the young man and tranquilly fixed his eyes upon him.

Realizing that nobody had heard him, Davico gently laid the priest on the floor and ran along the corridors, banging every door and shouting, "Father is dying!"

The first to arrive on the scene was Sala who, lifting Father Alasonatti up in his strong arms, laid him on the bed. I got there at the same time, but not soon enough to read the prayers for the dying. Father Alasonatti had no sooner been placed on his bed than he expired. At that very moment the clock struck midnight,

ushering in the feast of the Motherhood of the Blessed Virgin. Our dear prefect had died with his boots on like a brave soldier of God. His sacrifice had been consummated.

Meanwhile the other confreres had arrived and were silently viewing the lifeless body of one who had done so much for them. Kneeling down, they all recited the litany of Our Lady and the *De Profundis*. One hour later, the cleric Nicholas Cibrario set off on foot for Turin, twenty miles away, to bring the sad news to Don Bosco and hand him a letter of mine describing Father Alasonatti's last moments. He got to the Oratory at eight o'clock. Meanwhile, Father Alasonatti, clothed in priestly vestments, had been placed on an armchair. Rollino, the artist, made a portrait, and a sculptor friend of his made a wax mask. The Oratory choirboys and other members of the house took part in the very solemn funeral.

Among Father Alasonatti's papers were two handwritten notebooks which were forwarded to Don Bosco. One contained the resolutions he had made at his spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine in 1861 along with some prayers to Jesus crucified; the other was a selection of short invocations from the Psalms for even the most trivial daily tasks, and of other prayers as well.

## CHAPTER 18

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

THE steady flow of contributions given to Don Bosco for the support and expansion of his undertakings was matched by his personal efforts to solicit them. For instance, [in October 1865] he requested and obtained a subsidy of eight hundred lire from Turin's railroad commissioner in recognition of his unbroken record of cooperation in accepting orphans of railroad employees.<sup>1</sup> The grant was received by Father Rua while Don Bosco was away on another trip to various cities to promote his lottery. We have no documentation on his itinerary or doings. All we have is a few letters, reminiscences which he himself left on the matter, and brief accounts from those who hosted him.

His first stop was Milan, where years before he had met two tradesmen—Mr. Joseph Pedraglio and Mr. Guenzati—at Father Seraphim Allievi's festive oratory<sup>2</sup> which they regularly attended. We have already mentioned Mr. Guenzati's generosity toward Don Bosco's works. We shall now quote what his daughter, Mrs. Carolina Guenzati Rivolta, wrote to us in 1909:

On a journey to Milan in 1865, Don Bosco honored us by accepting our hospitality. During his stay a Milanese lady, Mrs. Marietta Pedraglio, heard that Don Bosco was our guest and came over to greet him. Before she could say a word, Don Bosco asked, "You are sick, aren't you?"

"Yes, unfortunately so, and for several months now. I have tried all kinds of remedies and made novenas, but all in vain."

"If you want to be cured," Don Bosco went on, "make a novena to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Recite five times the Our Father, Hail Mary

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. IV, p. 119. [Editor]

and Glory Be, adding these words: 'Don Bosco has told me that You will cure me, and I want to be cured.' Then eat and drink as usual."

The next morning my family was astonished to find the woman entirely cured of her ailments.

From Milan Don Bosco proceeded to Brescia, Lonigo, Padua, Venice and perhaps also Bologna, promising Our Lady's protection to all who would help him to build Her church in Valdocco.<sup>3</sup>

He was back at the Oratory on October 20, very heartily welcomed by all the boys. Many of them, newcomers who had been accepted at the request of various municipalities, soon realized that they had a saint in their midst. Several times we have quoted sworn depositions of past pupils describing their first impressions of Don Bosco upon their arrival at the Oratory. We now quote another which, like the previous ones, was also submitted to the Turin diocesan tribunal for his cause of beatification. Unavoidably we shall have to repeat a few things already stated elsewhere in this work, but an additional authoritative declaration on behalf of truth is never superfluous. In 1896, Father Anthony Berrone of Casalgrasso, a canon of the Turin cathedral and a pupil at the Oratory from 1865-66 to 1868-69, corroborated the boys' constant, unanimous esteem for Don Bosco in these terms:

His whole life was dedicated to God's glory. Like my companions, I always admired his exemplary, self-sacrificing conduct. He was a model to us all. In misfortunes and difficulties, he remained calm and trusting in God. Many times I watched him at meals; he was totally indifferent in matters of food. I don't think he ever took a walk just for relaxation. His bedroom, most plainly furnished, was always also his reception room and study.

It was generally believed that he was endowed with supernatural gifts. When I entered the Oratory, I heard from my companions that he had foretold the death of several pupils and his predictions had come true in every detail. I remember that in 1865, when the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was under construction, my older schoolmates told me that, years before, Don Bosco had pointed out the site where it would be built and had described its size. This prediction was all the more startling when

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

we consider that at the time he was not only destitute but hardly known and very much opposed. I also recall that it was common knowledge that Don Bosco had many years previously foretold that the Oratory would grow and flourish. The pupils were likewise convinced that Don Bosco could read secrets of conscience. In fact, anyone who was conscious of sin did not dare face him except in the confessional, for fear that he would read the sin on his forehead. I have witnessed this myself several times. We were also convinced that sometimes, when away from the Oratory, Don Bosco knew what was taking place there.

Because of his steady, vigilant prudence, the Oratory was spared disorders and scandals that sometimes take place in even the best of boarding schools. It was his policy to place his pupils in the impossibility to do wrong. By his exemplary vigilance over all, he always maintained order and discipline, notwithstanding the number and wide range of boys. He dealt fairly with all in all circumstances. Also, those who paid the full monthly fee got far more than they paid for.

His humility shone forth in his familiar, cordial, affable ways; he was so easy to approach that we were drawn to him as to a magnet. We enjoyed getting near him and talking with him. In his familiar talks he always inculcated the thought and desire of heaven. He had such faith and trust in God's mercy that he hoped we would all go to heaven and believed that those who died at the Oratory would certainly be saved. Very often he whispered to us words that raised our minds to God and always did our hearts so much good. It was really startling to see visitors crowd around him in order to kiss his hand and kneel for his blessing. On such occasions we felt a great loss in being unable to approach him. He had the very remarkable gift of making himself loved not only by those who stayed on with him, but also by those who, after completing their studies, pursued various careers.

Recalling those times, I can state that Don Bosco's boys generally went along with his efforts on their behalf; they behaved well and even admirably. Piety and fear of the Lord reigned at the Oratory. If occasionally some pupil could not adjust to the spirit of the house, he usually left of his own accord; expulsions were extremely rare. This I partly witnessed myself and partly heard from long-standing Oratory pupils.

The filial remembrance Don Bosco had of his mother taught all of us respect for our parents. Mamma Margaret was very often mentioned at the Oratory as a very pious, virtuous woman totally dedicated to her son's

work. The pupils who knew her, and we too who were not so privileged, thoroughly esteemed and loved her.

We will now mention one of the means by which Don Bosco kindled the spirit of prayer in his boys. From 1846 to 1871—that is, as long as he could—he never failed to say night prayers with the community. One evening, as the boys were assembling for night prayers, one of them—Louis Bussi—whispered to a companion, “Why does Don Bosco always say night prayers with us?” When prayers were over, Don Bosco mounted the little stand and gave the “Good Night.” Afterward, as he stepped down, Bussi approached him, saying: “Don Bosco, please tell me something.” To his surprise Don Bosco whispered to him, “Don Bosco says his prayers with the boys to give good example!” The lad was astonished, for he was certain that Don Bosco could not have heard him.

The spirituality pervading the Oratory was so obvious that often priests working in boarding schools came to Don Bosco for advice when obstacles hindered or nullified their difficult work. If they consulted him by letter and described actual incidents, he replied very cautiously lest through some indiscretion secrets might be betrayed. One such answer was worded thus: “October 21st, 1865. *In Domino. Casus consideratione dignus. Vide; fac quod potes. Iterum in Domino vale. Sac. Joannes Bosco.*” [In the Lord. The case is worthy of consideration. Look into it; do what you can. Again, greetings in the Lord. Father John Bosco.]

A reply of Don Bosco to Turin’s school superintendent gives us the 1865-66 Oratory statistics as regards staff and pupils in the high school division: Fifth Year—Father Celestine Durando, 70 pupils; Fourth Year—Father John Baptist Francesia, 30 pupils; Third Year—John Tamagnone, cleric, 90 pupils; Second Year—Father Michael Rua, 40 pupils; First Year—Francis Dalmazzo, cleric, 90 pupils. Don Bosco also listed substitute teachers and those who taught minor subjects, concluding with this observation: “As nearly all these teachers are still taking university courses, their teaching hours vary to meet the schedule of the university lectures. Their daily teaching time amounts to four hours and forty-five minutes.”

Toward the end of October, new members were received into the [Salesian] Society and three priests were elected to the Superior Chapter. The minutes follow:

October 24, 1865. This evening, at the chapter meeting of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, Father John Bosco, director, proposed for membership the following clerics: Francis Maranzana, Secundus Bernocco, James Cuffia, Eugene Polledri, and Joseph Franchino.

October 29, 1865. The Superior Chapter of the Society of St. Francis met to fill the offices of prefect and spiritual director, made vacant by the death of Father Victor Alasonatti on October 7 and by the mental illness of Father Bartholomew Fusero. Don Bosco, the rector, elected Father Michael Rua as prefect and Father John Baptist Francesia as spiritual director.

On the same day, at a general meeting of the same Society, Father Celestine Durando was elected by majority vote to fill the vacant position of consultor.

Don Bosco often sought in his conferences to transfuse into his hearers the very high esteem he had for his undertakings and works, esteem rooted in the firm conviction that the command, the counsel, the trend of whatever he did derived from a mysterious impulse from heaven. In fact, his unshakable determination in pursuing a goal always stemmed from his clear knowledge of God's will on the matter.

He also gave very important warnings. Generally opposed to singularities, imitations and novelties, he held it as a principle that when things are going well, they should not easily be changed under the plea of improving them.

When anyone in the house suggested undertakings outside the scope of our rules, he would reply: "We have our own goals. Let us first do our own work. Other people's projects may be as good as you claim but they are not within our sphere of action, and they divert us from our goals. By God's goodness, we need not copy from others; rather, let others copy from us, if they wish."

He was also opposed to establishing new sodalities or introducing new devotions into our houses. He recommended, instead, that

those already existing be earnestly fostered and that our customs be maintained. He also wanted to root out the craze of some who preferred books by other publishers to our own: "This is a bad craze, sheer madness and an outrage. Let us familiarize our boys and pupils with what we have. Far be it from us to berate our own things."

## CHAPTER 19

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

ON October 27, 1865, a twelve-year-old Oratory pupil, Joseph Scotti, died of the gripe on the day he arrived home at Vallo di Caluso. Father Rua thus recorded this death in the Oratory obituary: "He was snatched away in the prime of life. We may say of him that 'he was taken away, lest wickedness should pervert his mind.' " [Wis. 4, 11] Don Bosco announced the boy's death to his schoolmates, thus preparing them for the forthcoming solemn celebration of All Souls' Day. On another evening, he told them in the "Good Night" of the apparition of a deceased father to his irreligious son as follows:

There lives in Turin with his elderly mother a thirty-five-year-old widower who has two sons. Until recently he was quite irreligious. As All Souls' Day was drawing near, his mother told him: "Remember to pray for your dear father, now dead several years."

"The devil I will!" he shot back, nettled by her suggestion which implied more than it said. "If he is in hell or heaven, he doesn't need our prayers. If he is in purgatory, he will come out in due time."

Deeply hurt by his rudeness, the good woman did not dare pursue the matter, fearing that he might use more abusive language. Besides, in her timidity she did not dare antagonize the quick-tempered family breadwinner. That night, she thought she heard strange noises in her son's room, and the next morning, her curiosity aroused, she waited for him in the hall. When he finally came down to leave for work, he looked as if he had had a bad night. "I thought I heard noises in your room last night," she remarked.

"Noise?" he retorted. "You women are very superstitious. You let priests cram your head with nonsense!" With that, he snatched his hat from the rack and bolted out the door. His mother was now convinced that something frightening had taken place. That night, her son looked worried

and frightened as he retired at the usual time, for he had indeed heard strange noises the previous night and feared that worse might come. Though he was far from timid, he was determined not to be caught off guard. He therefore thoroughly searched his room and furniture and even looked under the bed to make sure there was nothing that could cause noise. After getting into bed, he first hesitated to lie down and sleep, but then, ashamed of his fears, he put out the light.

His bed faced the window, outside of which a long balcony bathed in moonlight gave access to the other rooms. Presently he heard a dragging of feet just like his father's when he walked about the house in slippers. There was also the regular thump of his walking stick. As the steps drew nearer, he sprang up on his bed and stared wide-eyed at the balcony. At that moment his father's shadow glided across the window. There could be no doubt who it was. His clothes, his height and his gait were well known to his son. The shadow passed on to the end of the balcony and then retraced its steps. The son was breathless as the familiar sound again approached his window, stopped in front of it and then soundlessly walked through the closed sash into the room, to pace to and fro at the foot of the bed.

Thoroughly dumbfounded and bewildered, the son finally pulled himself together and stammered, "Dad, do you want anything?"

Without a word, his father continued to pace back and forth.

"Dad," his son repeated after a few moments, "do you need prayers?"

"I need nothing," he feebly replied, staring at his son.

"Why have you come then?" the son ventured to ask.

"I came to tell you that it is about time you stopped scandalizing your children whose innocence you jealously safeguard. These luckless little ones have learned from you to curse, to despise the Church and her ministers, and to lead sinful lives. I have come to tell you that God is tired of you. If you do not make amends, you will soon experience the severity of His punishments."

With these words the ghost turned to leave.

"Dad!" the man exclaimed once more.

The shadow turned around. "Make amends!" he repeated. He then vanished.

The following morning—that is, this morning—the good woman brought her son to my room and told me all this. The man was still dazed with fright. He confirmed the whole story and then made his confession. Afterward, his mother helped him home, for he could hardly hold himself up.

We ourselves met both mother and son as they were coming out of Don Bosco's room. To us the tearful mother said, "Pray for this son of mine!"

Meanwhile Don Bosco had the task of finding a new director for the St. Aloysius Festive Oratory to replace Father Leonard Murialdo.<sup>1</sup> The latter had left in October of this year [1865] for St. Sulpice Seminary in Paris in order to complete the theological studies he had so well initiated at the University of Turin. Don Bosco turned to the learned and zealous priest, Father Theodore Scolari of Muggiate, who willingly accepted. As soon as he could, he zealously took on this apostolate and continued it for several years, until Don Bosco had enough priests of his own to run it. The other festive oratories were already under the direction of Salesian priests; St. Joseph's Oratory at Borgo San Salvatio, opened by the Occelletti family, had been directed by Father Francesia since 1864.<sup>2</sup>

In October, Don Bosco appointed Father John Bonetti of Caramagna as director of the Salesian School at Lanzo. From a letter of Don Bosco to Monsignor [Joseph] Zappata, vicar capitular of the Turin archdiocese, it appears that Don Bosco always helped fallen-away priests whom bishops or vicars of Piedmontese and—occasionally—Lombard dioceses now and then sent to the Oratory to be rehabilitated under Don Bosco's spiritual guidance. Very willingly he lent himself for this merciful task, notwithstanding frequent disappointments. During their stay these unfortunate priests seemed to make good—and perhaps they actually did—but, once back on their own, they soon relapsed. Nonetheless, several turned over a new leaf and persevered. For several years Don Bosco generously obliged the bishops, but then he deemed it best not to risk offering his boys the spectacle of unedifying priests, although we have no indication that this ever happened at the Oratory. Nevertheless he still did make exceptions, on occasion mercifully

<sup>1</sup> Now St. Leonard Murialdo. Born in Turin in 1828 of wealthy parents, he became the priest of the poor, like Don Bosco. In 1873 he founded the Pious Society of St. Joseph to look after poor youths. He was also quite active in awakening Catholics to their rights and duties as citizens. His last efforts were to further the movement for a Christian democracy in Italy. He was proclaimed a saint by Pope Paul VI on May 3, 1970. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting two letters of Don Bosco seeking subsidies for his festive oratories. [Editor]

welcoming some apostate in order to bring him back into the Church.

On his appointment as director of the Lanzo school, Father Bonetti called on the vicar capitular with this letter of Don Bosco:

Turin, November 7, 1865

Very Reverend Monsignor:

Following your suggestion regarding Father V . . . A . . . I have decided to give him a chance in our house. So far he is doing well. He takes part in the practices of piety, including meditation, goes to confession and makes the warmest promises.

With your permission, he would like very much to say Mass and hear confessions. I would allow him one thing at a time.

The bearer of this letter is Father John Bonetti, teacher and spiritual director at the Mirabello junior seminary, whom I must transfer to Lanzo to replace the late Father Ruffino. I beg you to confirm his faculties for confessions. He has with him only the written permission of the bishop of Casale, having left his regular license at Mirabello. I would like him to help us with confessions here this evening because our boys are making the Exercise for a Happy Death in suffrage of Father Alasonatti's soul.

Tomorrow we will celebrate a Month's Mind Mass for Father Alasonatti, as you can see from the invitation that Father Bonetti will personally present to you.

Trusting in your continued good will toward this house, I wish you every blessing from heaven.

Devotedly yours,  
Father John Bosco

The solemn requiem Mass for Father Alasonatti was celebrated at the Oratory on November 8 at 10 o'clock and was followed by a moving eulogy of the deceased by the cleric Anthony Sala before a large audience of boys, friends and benefactors.<sup>3</sup>

Since Chevalier [Frederick] Oreglia of Santo Stefano had to travel at this time to several cities on private business, Don Bosco wrote to him, asking him to solicit subscriptions to *Letture Catholique* and to interest friends of his in selling lottery tickets.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Notwithstanding all these preoccupations, Don Bosco did not cease to look after the progress of the Salesian Society. During the past few years new recruits had flocked to him, many binding themselves to God by triennial vows. As we have already narrated,<sup>5</sup> there were twenty-two such generous souls in May 1862; six more clerics and Father Bartholomew Fusero entered in 1863, as well as one student, three lay members and nine clerics in 1864. At this time, according to the official register, the Salesian Society had forty members with temporary vows.

Since the Salesian Society had received preliminary approval in the form of a "decree of praise" from the Holy See, Don Bosco decided that in November of this year, 1865, the members would make their first perpetual vows, thus cementing inseparably together the foundation stones of his congregation—the first Salesians who had vowed themselves to help him even before the Church had publicly approved his fledgling congregation.

For several years Don Bosco had also been testing those who had joined later. These newcomers comprised two groups. The first, quite numerous, was made up of those whom he had educated from early boyhood. He knew their worth and goodness and could fully trust them. Sure of their vocation, he fondly invited them to stay on with him either by renewing triennial vows or by preparing to make them in perpetuity. He left them free, however, to accept or decline. Many, indeed, did accept; others, instead, after completing their studies, withdrew and became good priests in their own dioceses.

The second group was made up of laymen or priests who wanted to become Salesians. Without their realizing it, he tested their virtue and firm resolve for a period of varying length, as he deemed necessary. Elsewhere we have given instances of this.<sup>6</sup> Amiably and very cleverly he would ask a philosophy professor to teach first graders, an eloquent speaker to supervise domestics, or a gentleman of rank to look after artisans. To one seemingly too attached to his family he would entrust some business which took him to his native place; to another he would assign a less distinguished place at table. But, above all, he watched how they adjusted to community life and

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 101ff. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 441f. [Editor]

its demands. If he knew that someone found a certain task particularly distasteful, he would ask him on some occasion to do just that with a suave, "Would you be so kind as to do this for me? I'd be much obliged."

Reproof and admonishment also enabled him to probe their self-love. At times he would scrutinize their inner dispositions and the firmness of their vocation in various ways, especially by feigning a diminution of benevolence. This year [1865], for instance, a so-called late vocation was preparing himself to take vows. Let me quote from his personal memoirs:

For some unknown reason [today] I felt despondent and tired of living. On previous similar occasions Don Bosco had restored my peace and joy, but of late he seems to take no notice of me. On his name day I recited warmly and eloquently some verses of mine in his honor. He didn't even look at me and said not a word—not even a simple "Well done" as he usually does by way of encouragement. Knowing that he often can read one's heart, I even examined my conscience to make sure I had done nothing reproachable.

Today he really put me to a severe test. He came with a gentleman to the printshop where I work. All turned toward him. As he passed each type-stand, the lads respectfully greeted him. For each he had an encouraging word, some praise, or a suggestion. I was hoping that he would finally take notice of me. As he passed near me, I too kissed his hand, intently looking at him, sure that he would console me. He completely ignored me as if I were not there at all, as if I had not uttered his name when kissing his hand, as was our custom. *He must be really displeased with me*, I thought. *That's for sure! But what have I done?* I could see that I was the only one he was ignoring. Wounded more than I can tell, I sadly watched his progress as he continued his tour of the shop. At the far end he came across another lad. I am not trying to find fault with him, but this youngster seems to be rather thoughtless, empty-headed and even unruly. To my surprise, Don Bosco stopped by him, introduced him to the visitor, and smilingly praised him. He then told the youngster to go back to his place, but deliberately kept pulling him by the hand, pretending not to be aware of it. Then, playfully, he told him once more to go back to his work, without however letting go of his hand.

I resumed my proofreading but my eyes couldn't see a word; my mind was a perfect blank. I tried to concentrate, but in vain.

The printshop was on the main floor with some windows facing the playground. While I was so deeply distressed, I heard a light tap on the window pane above my head. I looked up in surprise. Who was it? None other than Don Bosco! After leaving the shop, he decided to remember me and, with this token of fatherly affection, put an end to my trial. "Oh, it's you, Don Bosco!" I gasped, joyfully bewildered. Waving at me very affectionately, he withdrew like a beautiful dream. I didn't know what to do or say. "Thanks, Don Bosco!" I exclaimed, jumping up from my chair and throwing the window open. "Thanks for your kindness!" He couldn't have heard me, but he turned and waved once more as if to say: "Good-bye; cheer up!"

I was myself again. Don Bosco had sensed my need and met it with fatherly affection. I'll never forget the smile which set my heart at rest.

A certain number of applicants failed when put to a test, but others persevered.<sup>7</sup> After testing those who wished to consecrate themselves to God for life or for three years, Don Bosco allowed them to take vows. Of course, he first consulted the house chapter and suitably prepared them with special conferences. It was in his modest antechamber that on several unforgettable occasions he presided over the impressive ceremony of religious profession, as recorded in these chapter minutes:

On November 10, 1865, in the presence of Father John Bosco, rector, Father John Cagliero and Father Charles Ghivarello, witnesses, and all the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, Father John Baptist Lemoyne made the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience in perpetuity in accordance with the prescribed ritual.

On November 15, in the presence of all the members of the Salesian Society, Fathers Michael Rua, John Cagliero, John Baptist Francesia, Charles Ghivarello and John Bonetti, the clerics Henry Bonetti and Peter Racca, and the laymen Joseph Gaia and Dominic Rossi took perpetual vows in the presence of Father John Bosco, rector. Afterward, he briefly addressed the group, stressing that no one should take vows to please a superior, to get an education or for any other human motive, not even to be of service to the Society, but exclusively for the salvation of his own soul and the souls of others.

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting a letter by Francis Bodrato, one of the latter, to Don Bosco. [Editor]

On December 6, 1865, Father Celestine Durando from Farigliano (Mondovì), Chevalier Frederick Oreglia of Santo Stefano from Benevagienna, and the clerics Louis Jarach from Ivrea, Joseph Mazzarello from Mornese, and Joachim Berto from Villa Almese made their perpetual vows in the presence of the rector, Father John Bosco, of two witnesses, Father Michael Rua, prefect, and Father John Baptist Francesia, spiritual director, and of all the members of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.

Next, Father Angelo Savio of Castelnuovo d'Asti and Father Joseph Bongiovanni of Turin, and the clerics Secundus Merlone of San Damiano d'Asti, John Tamietti of Ferrere, Joseph Manassero of Benevagienna, Louis Rostagno of Entraque, Francis Paglia of Coassolo Canavese, Julius Barberis of Mathi Canavese, and Chiaffredo Ricciardi of Villafalletto made their triennial vows.

Thus read the chapter minutes. On December 29, 1865, the clerics Francis Bodrato and Anthony Sala also took perpetual vows at the Oratory. Finally, on January 11, 1866, Father Francis Provera and the cleric Francis Cerruti made their perpetual profession in Mirabello in the presence of Father Michael Rua as Don Bosco's delegate. On this occasion three other clerics and one student made their triennial vows.

## CHAPTER 20

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

AS soon as the first perpetual professions were over, the newly appointed directors left for their assignments. Father John Bonetti was the first to go, but on reaching Lanzo he was assailed by an extremely severe toothache and fever. It would seem that the thin mountain air did not agree with him. A week later Don Bosco had to recall him to Turin and replace him with Father John Baptist Lemoyne, who had been assigned to the Mirabello junior seminary. In turn, Father Bonetti was reassigned as director at Mirabello, where the enrollment stood at one hundred and seventy pupils and was soon to reach the two hundred mark.

Father Bonetti was eminently virtuous, genuinely devout, well grounded in philosophy and theology, and uncommonly knowledgeable in literature. He did not spare himself in furthering the physical, intellectual and moral well-being of his pupils and most zealously sought their eternal salvation. We have many proofs of this also in his writings. In a letter to the director of the Lanzo school he remarked: "We must make our associates realize that pupils who are a comfort to their superiors in every way are especially nowadays not only a special favor, but almost a privilege. We must therefore deserve them by our own saintly conduct, prayer, supervision and vigilance. In short, we must follow the very wise norms that Don Bosco has given his directors in writing. This is how virtue will flourish in our schools."

And again in another letter: "A pupil's genuine success is a grace that we must wrest from God by means of great sacrifice and much prayer."

He himself practiced what he preached, as can be seen in the biography he wrote of Ernest Saccardi, a pupil of his. The success of so many of his pupils from 1865 to 1877, first at Mirabello and then at

Borgo San Martino, shows us how abundantly the Lord blessed his toil. A most ardent devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus animated all his activities and rendered his familiar talks fruitful and his sermons and priestly ministry persuasive. Seemingly, the Sacred Heart helped him also by special charisms as he went about his arduous mission. What we are now going to narrate happened at Borgo San Martino.<sup>1</sup>

One night he dreamed that a majestic personage came into his room and gently invited him to follow him. He obeyed and was led into a dormitory where, at that hour, all the boys were asleep. Stopping at the foot of a bed, the mysterious guide said to Father Bonetti, "Within a month this boy will stand before God's tribunal. Prepare him!"

When Father Bonetti awoke in the morning, he was so impressed by that dream that he could not take his mind from it. However, he did not dare talk about it because it might have been only a dream. But what if it were a warning from God? He could not rule out that possibility because God is indeed very close to each of us. [As St. Paul said:] "In Him we live, and move, and have our being." [Acts 17, 28] God loves us with an indescribable love. Father Bonetti hesitated to talk about his dream, fearing that it might somehow rebound to his own glory. He preferred to say nothing. He could not, however, dispel a nagging thought: *If the salvation of a soul depends on my disclosing this dream, will I not suffer bitter remorse for my silence if this warning should be confirmed by the boy's death?* On the other hand, even if it had been but a dream, what harm could there be in reminding the boys of eternity?

He finally decided to speak, but not to all. Calling a few of his more trusted co-workers, he told them his dream and the day on which the boy would die, without however disclosing the lad's name. Such an unusual matter could not remain secret. As the grapevine soon made it public, everybody awaited the fulfillment of the prediction with deep anxiety, all the more so because nobody was sick. Precisely as Father Bonetti had foretold, one boy did die after a short illness within the predicted time. Father Bonetti

<sup>1</sup> Don Bosco opened this school in 1870. [Editor]

declared that he himself prepared him for that fateful moment. Father Joseph Isnardi<sup>2</sup> is one of the witnesses of this event.

In the same school a pupil one evening suffered a stroke. Father Bonetti, immediately notified, hastened to his side but the boy was already dead. Greatly distressed, as if it were his fault that the youngster had died without the sacraments, he withdrew to the chapel to weep and pray for a long time. The next day he took no food and returned several times to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. Finally, to conceal his anguish and sorrow, he left the chapel and took a walk in the grove within the school grounds. Though weakened by a twenty-four-hour fast, he continued to walk and pray, when suddenly he stopped and gazed upward. He remained motionless for some time, his face beaming with joy. Finally coming to himself, he exclaimed: "*Deo gratias*. He is saved. He is already in heaven!" Cheerful again, he went to supper. Father Bonetti kept all this to himself, but he had been watched. Father John Tamietti<sup>3</sup> had followed him in order to be at hand, if needed, to comfort him. Hidden behind a hedge among the trees he saw and heard what we have narrated, but he did not dare question him then or after. Another witness was Father Charles Farina.<sup>4</sup>

To Father Bonetti, so dear to the Lord, Don Bosco wrote the following letter shortly after he had taken over his new duties [at Mirabello]:

Turin, November 20, 1865

My dear Father Bonetti,

Next Thursday [November 23] I shall be entirely at your disposal. Couldn't we arrange a conference for the Salesians that evening?

Assemble them tonight and tomorrow night, if possible, and ask if any of them are ready for either triennial or perpetual vows. Repeat to them

<sup>2</sup> Father Isnardi, a Salesian, died at Gualdo Tadino (Italy) in 1919 at the age of sixty-one. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> John Tamietti entered the Oratory in 1860, donned the cassock in 1863, was ordained in 1873, and filled important positions in the Salesian Society. As Don Bosco had told him, he died in 1920 before completing his seventy-second year. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Charles Farina (1852-1936) entered the Oratory in 1866. While teaching there, he took courses in mathematics at the University of Turin. Later he was assigned to Borgo San Martino and was repeatedly appointed director and provincial. He died in Turin in 1936. [Editor]

what was said here. Stress, particularly, that no one must, in so vital a matter, be moved by self-interest or any temporal motive, but only by a desire to offer himself to God.

*Confortare et esto robustus.* [Be brave and steadfast—Deut. 31, 23] Greetings to Father Provera, Goffi and all our dear teachers, assistants and boys.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

P.S. I plan to be at Giarole on Wednesday afternoon at one.

On November 22 Don Bosco was at Mirabello. During the train ride between Alessandria and Giarole, he and one other gentleman shared the compartment. Soon Don Bosco turned the conversation to religious matters and led his fellow passenger to make his confession then and there. Father John Garino testified to this.

A warm reception, to which the local authorities had also been invited, awaited Don Bosco at the junior seminary. In glowing terms he presented Father Bonetti to all of them as Father Rua's successor.

From Mirabello he went on with Father John Cagliero to Tortona to visit an Oratory pupil, Joseph Pittaluga, who for the last eighteen months had been suffering from a leg ailment. This youth had returned home in March 1864 to undergo treatment. Don Bosco was fond of him and esteemed his untarnished candor. On his part, the young man felt an equally holy affection for Don Bosco. Pittaluga was so likeable that wherever he went he won everybody's heart.<sup>5</sup>

As soon as he reached Tortona, Don Bosco and Father Cagliero called on the ailing octogenarian Bishop John Negri, who joyfully received him in his own bedroom. Then Don Bosco went to take lodgings in the seminary. As soon as Pittaluga knew that Don Bosco had arrived, he hurried to see him. Don Bosco told him that he had come just for him. After listening to the youth's confidences, Don Bosco comforted him, assuring him of his support and thus greatly uplifting his spirits. He then called on the youth's family,

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting extracts of two letters from Pittaluga to Father Bonetti. [Editor]

blessing and comforting everyone, especially the young man's ailing father. But no sooner had word spread that Don Bosco was in town than the vicar general, canons, and other priests came over to greet him. Even the bishop, despite his age and infirmities, returned his visit.

Before leaving, Don Bosco recommended his pupil to the seminary rector, Canon Ferlosio, who greatly loved Don Bosco and his boys. As a result, Pittaluga was admitted to the seminary.

Back at the Oratory, Don Bosco, wishing to aid the religious vocation of a good young lady, sent a letter of recommendation for her<sup>6</sup> to Mother Eudocia, superioress of the Faithful Companions of Jesus in Turin. He also cheered one of his young clerics, Julius Barberis<sup>7</sup> with another short letter:

Turin, December 6, 1865

My dear Julius,

Here is my answer to your questions:<sup>8</sup>

1. At breakfast, one roll; at dinner, according to your hunger; no mid-afternoon snack; at supper, according to your need, but with moderation.
2. No fast except the one prescribed by our rules.
3. Rest according to the timetable of the house. On awakening, start at once to review your lessons.
4. As regards studies, give priority to the subjects you teach; the rest is only accessory. Be primarily concerned with your school syllabus.
5. Do everything and suffer anything in the quest of souls for God.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

Meanwhile the house chapters of Lanzo and Mirabello had been regularly constituted, and Don Bosco's devoted sons were earnestly striving to be certified as elementary or secondary school teachers.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> Julius Barberis (1847-1927) entered the Oratory in 1861, made his first vows in 1865, and was ordained a priest in 1870. In 1873 he earned a degree in theology at the University of Turin. The following year he was appointed novice master—the first to hold this office in the Salesian Society. After twenty-five years in this position, he was made provincial and, finally, in 1910 was elected Catechist General or spiritual director of the whole Society. He died in that office in 1927. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> Barberis, about to make his vows, had asked Don Bosco for spiritual advice. [Editor]

<sup>9</sup> We are omitting details about their struggles on this score. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 21

### *Don Bosco's Trip to Florence*

**A**FTER the solemn feast of the Immaculate Conception, Don Bosco prepared to go to Florence to raise funds [for his new church], promote *Letture Cattoliche*, and attend to other important business. This visit, his first to that city, was to keep a promise he had made in response to numerous cordial invitations. Many noble ladies—Marchioness Louisa Nerli among them—had written to remind him of that promise. The archbishop too was expecting him, since he wanted to discuss with him effective means to combat Protestantism. He had offered Don Bosco hospitality at his residence.<sup>1</sup>

With a good-bye to the Oratory boys and a request for prayers, Don Bosco left for Florence after entrusting Father Rua with the following nose-gays for the Christmas novena:

#### *Christmas Novena*

1. Prompt obedience in all matters pleasant or unpleasant.
2. Simplicity in dressing and grooming, in conversing and obeying, in accepting lowly tasks.
3. Charity in bearing other people's faults and avoiding offense to others.
4. Charity in cheering the sad, in helping and doing good to others, and in harming no one.
5. Charity in warning the negligent and in kindly correcting those who might say or propose bad things.
6. Charity in forgiving enemies and giving them good advice whenever possible.

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting a short letter by the archbishop to this effect and a letter by a priest urging Don Bosco to come to Florence. [Editor]

7. Shun foul-mouthed individuals.
8. Shun idleness and diligently fulfill your duties.
9. Make your confession as though it were your very last one.

*Christmas Day*

Make a devout Communion and resolve to receive often.

Don Bosco probably left Turin [for Florence] via Genoa on Monday, December 11. "On his trips," Bishop Cagliero declared, "Don Bosco was always warmly received. Bishops too showed him great esteem and affection, even assigning him the place of honor at table."

Upon his arrival at Pisa, Don Bosco hastened to write to the Oratory, whose choir and band were getting ready to go to Avigliana for the first solemn celebration of the feast of Blessed Cherubim Testa since the Holy See's approval of his cult:

Pisa, December 13, 1865

Dear Father Rua,

I am in Pisa, a guest of Cardinal Corsi. I live as a lord. Carriages and servants are at my beck and call, and the meals are excellent. If our Oratory boys could only be here too, I would be happy. I have seen the Arno River which runs through the city; the *duomo*, its famous basilica; the Leaning Tower whose summit is seven meters off plumb;<sup>2</sup> the Starvation Tower where Count Ugolino was starved to death with his sons; the ruins of his mansion which the populace razed to the ground to avenge the wrongs suffered at his hands; the baptistery which is a marvel of workmanship in marble; a cemetery of such breathtaking magnificence as to delight all its dwellers and keep them in blissful peace. I liked everything I saw, but I miss my boys. I will tell you about Florence after my return.

Now to some business. I wrote to Chevalier Oreglia and enclosed a sealed note for somebody else, but I fear I forgot to write the addressee's name—Father Francesia. He was to recommend its contents to Chevalier Vallauri for *Unità Cattolica*. Please see to it.

<sup>2</sup> Not quite! Actually, the upper part of the tower overhangs its base by thirteen feet, ten inches. [Editor]

Kindly tell Father Cagliero that, as regards the trip to Avigliana, Father Valfrè would prefer to have the band and choir return the same day, even though meals and overnight lodgings are available. In any case, tell him to send Father Valfrè the list of the boys who are going, pointing out at the top of the list those with special needs so that they may be assigned to more suitable homes. As for services at St. Augustine's, the remuneration was set at seventy lire.

I shall not be back by Sunday, but I'll write again to tell you when. I have already collected some money, but not the amount you wanted. Pray and have others pray. Give me a detailed account of my dear children. Tell them that I always pray for them in every church I visit, and ask them to do the same for me.

May God bless us all and keep us always in His holy fear!

Affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

N.B. The cardinal of Pisa has given me some beautiful holy pictures for the more devout boys of our home. Let me know how many there are in your next letter. He also asked me about our poet, Francesia. I praised him to the sky.

P.S. Give my blessing and the far more precious blessing of Cardinal Corsi to all the Oratory residents, including Michael and his philosophers.

Ever jovial Don Bosco! Michael looked after a few pigs.

Don Bosco's visit to Florence was a triumph. He was hosted at the archbishop's residence and treated with the utmost respect. The cathedral chapter wished him to visit their magnificent cathedral and thus have the opportunity to greet him. The archbishop mentioned this to Don Bosco and accompanied him there at about ten in the morning. Attired in formal dress, all the canons were waiting for him in the sacristy together with the vicar general of Prato and the bishop of Fiesole. Such a reception was usually reserved to cardinals. At Don Bosco's entrance, all rose and stepped forward to greet him. Then they made him sit in their midst and addressed him in prose and verse. There were also piano selections and other addresses. At the end they invited him to speak. Though he had not expected such an invitation, he accepted. He recalled that the Council of Florence had been opened in the very place where they were meeting, that the council fathers had sat in the very same

stalls, and that the Pope's legates had spoken in that hall. He then went on to quote the words of praise and encouragement which the Pope had sent to the assembly. He concluded by saying that he felt the same way toward the prelates and the illustrious cathedral canons there present. They marveled at his address, for, besides being extemporaneous, it was most apropos and unexpectedly flattering.

In Florence, as elsewhere, Don Bosco so captured the hearts of all that, when he announced his departure, the general response was, "So soon?"

"I must return to Turin," Don Bosco explained to those who strove to persuade him to prolong his stay, "because I am needed there."

As he was leaving the cathedral, he met Marchioness Gerini. "Why do you want to go back to Turin so soon?" she straightway asked him. "Couldn't you stay on a few more days?"

"My boys are waiting for me."

"Let them wait! They will see you when you arrive there."

"My lady, they need food. If I don't provide it, they'll go hungry."

"How many are they?"

"Nearly a thousand."

"I don't think a few days' delay would cause them great hardship."

"Personally, I would gladly postpone my departure. If my Florentine friends are willing to provide food for my boys, I'll stay here till the end of the week."

"How much would you need for your boys for those few days?"

"Ten thousand lire."

"If we raise this sum, will you stay?"

"Surely."

"All right, then. I will give you ten thousand lire."

"I accept the deal!"

"I don't carry that much money with me, but if you don't mind, I will send you the whole sum this evening at the archbishop's residence."

"Agreed! May the Lord bless you!"

The noble lady was for Don Bosco the instrument of Providence. That same evening he was handed that sum.<sup>3</sup>

Countess Caroline Soranzo left a written account of another episode during Don Bosco's stay in Florence:<sup>4</sup>

In Florence, in the home of my grandmother, Countess Boutourlin, there was a lady of twenty-five, Caroline Sorelli, who for years had been bedridden because of a spine ailment and a shriveled leg. Don Bosco commanded her to walk about the house and to eat. She did so without any difficulty. He then asked whether she wished to remain cured or would rather return to her illness. After a moment's reflection she replied that she believed it was God's will that she should continue to suffer. Immediately she felt the need to go back to her bed, from which she never rose again. At the time of her death she had been bedridden for thirty-two years, suffering atrociously from caries of the bones.<sup>5</sup>

While in Florence Don Bosco accepted four Tuscan boys for the Mirabello junior seminary, intending to take them to Turin himself and then have them escorted to their destination. One of them, Ernest Saccardi, had been formed to piety since childhood through a genuine Christian upbringing. On the day of his departure, after saying good-bye to his mother, he dried his tears and then, pressing and kissing Don Bosco's hands, said smilingly to him, "Up to now my mother was everything to me. Now I put myself into your hands. Do with me what you think is best for my soul."

Don Bosco comforted him and assured him of his kindness. "I ask only two things of you," he said. "Be open with me in spiritual matters and be obedient to your superiors."

"I hope to please you entirely on this score," the boy countered.

Don Bosco left Florence with his new pupils to return to the Oratory. When the train passed by Prato, a strange thing happened. Several men in Don Bosco's compartment were discussing current events. When the conversation veered to the education of youth, one of them suggested that Jesuit-style education be abandoned and all

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting a newspaper article on this matter. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting an extract from another letter by the same countess reconfirming the above-mentioned episode. [Editor]

boarding schools run by priests be closed down. "If I had the power," he added, "I would shut down that den of little Jesuits Don Bosco keeps in Turin, kick him out with all his boys, and turn that place into a barracks. Don't you agree, Father?" he went on, addressing Don Bosco who was at the moment jotting down some notes.

"Not quite!" he replied. "By the way, do you know Don Bosco?"

"A little. Isn't it true that the training he gives his pupils is not in keeping with our times? He's making Jesuits out of them and that's what we *don't* need."

"Well," Don Bosco replied, "I have been at the Oratory many times, I have spoken to Don Bosco—the 'chief of rascals' as he calls himself—and I have seen how he trains them. I can assure you that he only aims at turning these poor boys into good Christians and upright citizens."

"But times have changed," his opponent insisted. "We are no longer in the Middle Ages."

At that moment the train pulled up at a station and Don Bosco's fellow travelers got off. Six or seven months later, bids were solicited in Rome for some important construction work. The gentleman who had spoken with Don Bosco on the train was a civil engineer and contractor and was anxious to win the contract. A good recommendation would help him considerably. On a trip to Turin he met a marquis with whom he was acquainted and asked his aid. "Go to Don Bosco," the latter replied. "Tell him I sent you, and I'm sure he'll do you a good turn with Cardinal Antonelli."

A few days later, the contractor followed the marquis' advice and called on Don Bosco for a recommendation.

"Of course," Don Bosco replied. "I'll give it to you right away." And so he did.

Thanking him, the contractor asked whether he could do anything for him in Rome.

"Yes," Don Bosco smilingly replied. "When you see Cardinal Antonelli, don't tell him that Don Bosco and his boys should be kicked out of the Oratory. That wouldn't be nice!"

Recognizing Don Bosco as the priest he had so vilified, the contractor humbly apologized, assuring him that he would never

again denigrate him or others. He won the contract and earned a hundred thousand lire profit. Eventually he became a practicing Catholic and was forever very grateful to Don Bosco. Baron Bianco of Barbania was our source for this incident.<sup>6</sup> Thus ended the year 1865.

<sup>6</sup> At this point we are omitting extracts of letters from Florence that extol Don Bosco's zeal and activities and show the high esteem in which he was held by all those who came in contact with him. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 22

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

THE November-December issue of *Letture Cattoliche* was entitled *Life of the Turinese Carmelite Blessed Mary of the Angels*.<sup>1</sup> Don Bosco had managed to write this biography between trips and other tasks. Many of his callers, not finding him at the Oratory, had come to know that now and then he would hide a few hours at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in order to work in peace. Naturally they began to flock there and thus forced him to seek other hideouts in the homes of benefactors and friends. Generously, they always put a well-supplied room at his disposal. Don Bosco went now to one, now to another of his friends, and quietly shut himself up in the room set aside for him. His favorite hideout was the apartment of Joseph Brosio who had helped him so much in the first difficult years of the Oratory.<sup>2</sup> This gentleman, who survived Don Bosco and fully enjoyed his trust, was wont to say, “Don Bosco was a great man, a great saint, and—I say it with pride—a great friend of mine!”

When Father John Bonetti asked Brosio about Don Bosco’s use of his apartment, Brosio sent him this written account:

When Don Bosco was writing the life of Blessed Mary of the Angels or other saints, he often spent a few hours in my home in order to work undisturbed. Then, before leaving, he would linger to chat with me.

One day my wife took him to see one of our daughters who was ill and asked him to bless her. “Get up,” he told the girl, taking her by the hand. At that moment, I wasn’t really aware of what Don Bosco had in mind. “She can’t!” I broke in. “She’s sick.”

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 76f, 90, 309f, 336, 348f, 395ff. See also the Index of Vol. IV. [Editor]

“Well, then,” Don Bosco replied, “if that’s the case, we shall send her to heaven!” He blessed her and said a prayer.

After he had left, my wife chided me: “Didn’t you see that Don Bosco wanted to cure her?” As a matter of fact, Don Bosco did know that the child had been sick for a long time. Why would he take her by the hand and command her to get up, if not because he wanted to cure her? I waited for Don Bosco to visit us again, but he was out of town. Shortly afterward, my dear child went to heaven. We did not repeat the mistake with my other daughter, still living. When she was practically at death’s door, Don Bosco brought her back to health, as I have already told you.

Thus reads the testimony of Joseph Brosio. Together with the November-December issue of *Letture Cattoliche* the subscribers also received *Il Galantuomo*, the yearly almanac for 1866. . . .

## CHAPTER 23

### *A Dream: A Life-Saving Raft*

**A**T the start of 1866 there were twelve priests among the ninety or so Salesians. Of this total, nineteen were perpetually professed, twenty-nine had made triennial vows, and the rest had taken no vows as yet.

Pleased with this sizable band of faithful co-workers, Don Bosco [toward the close of 1865] promised that on New Year's Day he would narrate a dream and give all the Oratory boys and confreres the usual yearly *strenna*.<sup>1</sup> It seems that he had beheld, as in a vision, the future of the Salesian Society—and perhaps of other congregations as well—along with what concerned his present and future spiritual children. But what he mainly wanted to tell the boys was how they stood before God. As we have seen time and again, all his words aimed at unabashedly fighting sin, in obedience to the Holy Spirit's direction: "Refrain not from speaking at the proper time" [Sirach 4, 23], which Archbishop Martini<sup>2</sup> interpreted as follows: "Do not overlook through false shame your neighbor's shortcomings; do not spare him, do not keep silent when you can save him by correcting him. Use then the wisdom that God gave you. Do not hide it when it should shine. Give glory to God by the self-reformation and conversion of a sinning brother."

At the "Good Night" on Monday, January 1, 1866, Don Bosco spoke thus:

<sup>1</sup> A New Year's gift customary in Italy. From the very beginning of the Oratory (see Vol. III, p. 433) Don Bosco had started the custom of giving a spiritual *strenna* or gift to his boys and co-workers on the last day of the year. It took the form of a motto or slogan to be practiced throughout the year then about to dawn. This custom is still kept by Don Bosco's successors. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Martini (1720-1809), archbishop of Florence, translated the New Testament from Greek and the Old Testament from the Vulgate into Italian. His version became the most popular in Italy. [Editor]

I seemed to be near a village that looked like Castelnuovo d'Asti, but was not. You boys were joyfully playing about in a vast, open prairie, when suddenly water surged from the far end of the plain and we found ourselves surrounded by a flood that grew more threatening as it kept rushing toward us. The Po River had overflowed and was spawning raging torrents.

Very much frightened, we ran as fast as we could toward a thick-walled, isolated grist mill and did not stop until we got to its courtyard. The surging flood, however, soon reached us, forcing us to seek safety in the upper floors, wherefrom we could gauge the wide sweep of the disaster. The whole Po valley from the Superga hills to the Alps had become an immense lake engulfing meadows, fields, orchards, woods, hamlets, villages and towns.

The water kept rising and so we had to climb to the top floor. Realizing that our situation was desperate, I urged you to put all your trust in God and in Our Blessed Mother. As the water neared the top floor and chilled our hearts with terror, a huge raft suddenly materialized in front of us. It was our only chance for safety. Breathless with fear, everyone wanted to jump on it, but no one dared because a wall jutting out of the water kept the raft away from the building. The only way to get across the water was by treading a long, narrow tree trunk connecting the raft with the mill. But this was risky because one end of the trunk rested on the raft and kept bobbing up and down. Bracing myself, I was the first to cross over. To make it easier for you and encourage you, I appointed priests and clerics to help you at both ends of the makeshift bridge. Oddly enough, they tired very fast and became so exhausted that they had to lie down and rest. The same happened to those who relieved them. Wondering what the matter might be, I tried it myself. In no time I too felt exhausted.

Meanwhile, many boys were growing impatient. Spotting a long, wide plank floating by, they seized it and maneuvered it into position to use as a gangplank to the raft. Then, either out of panic or recklessness, they rushed onto it without waiting for help.

"Wait, wait!" I shouted. They paid no attention to me. Bumping into each other or otherwise losing their balance, many fell off and were swallowed up by the murky, putrid waters. Eventually, the unsteady catwalk overturned. All in all, one-fourth of you boys were lost.

Up to this point I had been steadying my end of the tree trunk while you were crossing. Noticing that the water level was now above the wall, I managed to push the raft flush against the mill where Father Cagliero, one foot on a windowsill, the other on the raft's edge, helped the still stranded

boys safely aboard. Some, however, had climbed up to the roof and were huddled on the ridge. The ever-rising flood, meanwhile, had submerged the eaves and part of the rafters, but had also raised the raft. Seeing those boys in their predicament, I shouted to them to pray with all their hearts and not to panic. Then I told them to link their arms and step down to the raft which was now poised at the eaves' level. They followed my instructions and with their companions' help boarded the raft. On it a very generous quantity of bread was safely stored in many baskets. When all of you were safely aboard I took command, though still jittery. "Mary is the Star of the Sea," I said. "She never forsakes those who trust in Her, so let us get under Her protecting mantle. She will lead us out of danger and guide us safely to port."

Then we let the raft go to the mercy of the waves, and it began to float away. The wind-swept waters propelled it so swiftly that we had to hold fast to each other for dear life and form one body, lest we be swept away.

In no time we had traveled a great distance, but abruptly the raft came to a stop and then spun round and round with such speed that we thought we were surely being sucked into a whirlpool. Fortunately a mighty gust of wind pulled us out of it in the nick of time. We then sailed on at a more moderate speed. We had to contend with a few more small whirlpools, but finally we came to a full stop near a beautiful, vast shore, perfectly dry, sloping upward like a hill rising from the middle of the sea.

Enticed by it, many of you immediately shouted that God had placed man on land and not on water, and, urging others to follow, jumped ashore without permission.

Alas, their joy was short-lived! A sudden storm again swelled the waters and dashed them against the bank. Submerged to the waist and screaming in terror, those boys were finally swallowed up by the waves.

"How true indeed," I exclaimed brokenheartedly, "that he who clings to his own way pays with his own coin!" The raft too, tossed by the billows, threatened to sink. As you all turned to me pale and trembling, I tried to bolster you up.

"Take courage, sons," I shouted. "Mary will not forsake us!"

Then, one in heart and voice, we recited the acts of faith, hope, charity and contrition, several Our Fathers and Hail Marys and the Hail, Holy Queen. Finally, still kneeling and holding one another by the hand, we said a few more prayers privately.

Some foolish fellows however, ignoring the danger, stood up and began walking about as if nothing had happened, loudly laughing among themselves and almost making fun of their praying companions. Abruptly

the raft stopped and swiftly spun round and round, while a furious wind swept all thirty of them into the deep, slimy water. In no time they disappeared. At this sight, more fervently than ever we invoked the protection of the Star of the Sea by singing the *Salve, Regina*. Soon the storm abated, but the raft kept going as if self-propelled—whither we did not know.

Meanwhile relentless rescue activity was going on, both to prevent boys from accidentally falling into the water and to pull them out promptly. Indeed, there were some who foolishly leaned over and lost their balance; then there were others who cruelly and unashamedly enticed companions to the raft's edge and pushed them over. For this reason, several priests were busy readying sturdy fishing poles and giving them out, while others were already at their rescue stations. As soon as a boy fell in, a pole would be lowered and the poor fellow would either grasp it or get hooked by his clothes and rescued. But even among the rescuers there were some who were more of a hindrance than a help. The young clerics meanwhile were kept busy holding back the boys, who, thank God, were still a great multitude.

I stood at the foot of a lofty mast in the center of the raft, surrounded by very many boys, clerics and priests ready to carry out my orders. As long as they followed my instructions, everything went on smoothly and we felt tranquilly happy and safe. But soon several began to complain that the raft was uncomfortable and the voyage too long, arduous and dangerous. Others argued about our destination or the means of escaping from the flood. Still others deceived themselves into thinking that the land was not far off or were afraid that soon food would run out. The upshot was that they wrangled among themselves and refused to obey. I tried to reason with them but in vain.

At this moment, other rafts came into sight, apparently on a course different from ours. Following their own whims, the dissenters decided to leave me. They threw some planks into the water and, jumping on them and on others even wider which were floating nearby, they steered toward the other rafts. I can't tell you how greatly pained I was to see these unfortunate sons of mine rush headlong to their ruin. The wind blew and the waves kept rising. Some boys were swallowed up by the raging billows, others were caught in whirlpools, and still others rammed into floating debris and sadly drowned. A few managed to board the rafts, but, soon after, the rafts broke apart. As night fell, we could hear the victims' heart-rending cries. At this spectacle, these words came to my mind: *In mare mundi submergentur omnes illi quos non suscipit navis ista*. [In the sea of this world all shall perish who are not aboard this ship—Our Lady's ship.]

The number of my dear boys was now considerably reduced, but we kept up our trust in Our Heavenly Mother as we moved on throughout the dark night. At daybreak, our raft entered a very narrow strait between two muddy banks lined with brush, boulders, rocks, logs, branches, broken planks, masts and oars. Our raft was surrounded by tarantulas, toads, snakes, dragons, crocodiles, sharks, vipers and other hideous animals. Overhanging willows harbored strange-looking, oversized cats which devoured human flesh, while huge monkeys, swinging from the branches, attempted to snatch boys who in their fear squatted low to escape their clutches.

Here, to our surprise and horror, we saw again those unfortunate boys who had drowned. The waves had finally cast them up to this shore, shattered to pieces upon the rocks or partially buried in mud; hair, arms, torsos and heads were visible here and there. A few corpses were also floating about. Suddenly a boy cried out from the raft: "Look! A monster is devouring so-and-so!" Repeatedly calling the lad by name, he pointed him out to his terrified companions. Something worse yet—a mammoth blazing furnace with people in it—was coming into view not too far from where we stood. Feet, legs, arms, hands and heads were bubbling up and down like beans in a boiling pot. With dismay we recognized many of our pupils. The lid over the furnace bore a large inscription: "Sixth and Seventh Commandments."

Nearby rose a lofty hill dotted here and there with trees. A large number of boys who had fallen off the raft or left it of their own accord wandered about on it. Heedless of danger, I jumped off the raft and dashed up to them. As I got close, I noticed that their eyes, ears and hair and even their hearts were covered with vermin that most viciously gnawed at them. One lad seemed to be in greater pain than the rest. I tried to get closer to him, but he ran away and hid behind a clump of trees. I saw others loosening their clothes to get some relief, exposing at the same time their waists girded with snakes or vipers clinging to their chests. To all I pointed out a gushing mineral spring. Whoever washed in its cool waters was instantly cured and could return to the raft. Most of the boys followed my suggestion, but some refused. Delaying no further, I beckoned to those who had been cured to follow me, and they did so without fear because the monsters had now vanished.

As soon as we were aboard the raft, the wind rose again and out we glided through the rest of the strait into the limitless ocean.

Sorrowing over the sad lot of those left behind, but grateful for Our Lady's protection, we thanked Her by singing *Lodate Maria, o lingue fe-*

*deli* [O Praise Her! O Bless Her]. Instantly, as if by Mary's command, the wind abated and the raft began to glide rapidly and smoothly, as though propelled by the playful, backward push of the boys' hands on the water. Then a rainbow appeared in the sky, more marvelous and colorful than the northern lights. Inscribed on it was a mysterious word "MEDOUM." Though we had no idea what it meant, it seemed to me that its letters could stand for *Mater Et Domina Omnis Universi Maria* [Mary, Mother and Mistress of the Whole Universe].

After a long time we sighted land, and as we drew nearer, we felt an inexpressible thrill in our hearts. Before our eyes was the delightful sight of enchanting meadows dotted with trees of every kind, radiant with light as if the sun were rising behind the background of hills—a light whose soft brilliance, like that of a glorious summer evening, instilled a feeling of rest and peace.

Our raft finally came to shore, slid on the sand and stopped at the foot of a luscious vineyard. Of this raft we may well say, "O God, You gave us a bridge to enable us to cross the ground-swells of this world and to reach Your safe harbor."

You were all very anxious to get into the vineyard, and a few of you, more eager than the rest, jumped off at once. But after only a few steps, remembering what had happened to their companions when the raft was going through the strait, those boys quickly ran back. All eyes were turned on me with the silent question: "May we?"

"Yes," I said after a moment's reflection. "It's safe."

Shouting with joy, you all ran out into those neatly arranged rows of vines and trees. From the vines hung clusters of grapes like those of the Promised Land, and the trees were laden with the choicest and most delicious fruit.

In the center of that very vast vineyard stood an imposing castle that was encircled by a most beautiful garden enclosed within massive walls. We headed for it and were allowed in. Tired and hungry, we reached a large, richly decorated dining hall. A long table held all kinds of food we could eat to our hearts' content. Toward the end of our meal, a richly clad, indescribably handsome young man came into the hall and warmly greeted each of us by name. Noticing our bewilderment and wonder at his beauty and the many splendid things we had seen, he remarked, "Friends, this is nothing! Come and see!"

We followed him. From the balconies he showed us the gardens, telling us that they were for our recreation. He then led us on a tour of the whole building and through halls ever more breath-taking for their architectural

beauty. Finally, opening a door leading into a church, he invited us to step in. The church looked small from outside, but as soon as we walked in, we realized how wrong we were. It was so vast that we could hardly see the other end. The floor, the walls and the ceiling were exquisitely ornamented with marble, silver, gold, and precious stones. "How heavenly!" I exclaimed, bewildered. "I wouldn't mind staying here forever!"

At the center of this majestic temple, on a rich pedestal, stood a huge, magnificent statue of Mary, Help of Christians. By now many of you had scattered about to admire the church's beauty. Calling you together, I asked you to gather in front of Our Lady to thank Her for the many favors She had bestowed on us. I realized then how vast the church was! There were thousands of you, but it looked as if you were but a small group.

While we stood admiring the statue's heavenly beauty, to our great wonderment it suddenly seemed to come alive and smile.

"Her eyes are moving!" several cried out. Clearly, Our Lady was turning Her eyes with unspeakable motherly affection on all of you.

"Our Lady is moving Her hands!" you all exclaimed moments later. Indeed She was slowly opening Her arms and spreading Her mantle to gather us all under it. Tears of emotion ran down our cheeks.

"Her lips are moving," whispered a few. A profound silence fell over us.

"If you will be loving children to Me, I will be a loving mother to you!" Our Lady spoke.

At these words we all fell to our knees and broke into the song, "O Praise Her! O Bless Her!"

The singing was so heartfelt and sweet that I awoke, overwhelmed by it.

As you see, my dear children, we can recognize in this dream the stormy sea of this world. If you will readily obey me instead of listening to evil counselors, at the end of our lives, after struggling to do good and to avoid evil by overcoming our bad inclinations, we shall reach safe harbor. There we shall be met by Our Lady's messenger who, in God's name, will usher us into His most consoling presence to rest from our toils.

But if you disregard my advice and follow your own whims, you will be miserably shipwrecked.

Later on, privately, Don Bosco gave more detailed explanations of this dream, which seemingly concerned not only the Oratory but the Salesian Congregation as well:

The prairie is the world. The all-engulfing flood is its vices, irreligious maxims and persecution of the faithful. The grist mill, set apart in peace

but equally threatened, is the House of Bread, the Catholic Church. The bread in the baskets is the Holy Eucharist, the food for the voyagers. The raft is the Oratory. The tree trunk linking the mill to the raft is the Cross, symbolizing one's immolation to God through Christian mortification. The plank, placed by the boys as an easier bridge to the raft, is the transgression of the rule. Many boarded the raft for selfish, base motives: self-advancement, money, honors, comfort, higher status and so on. These were the ones who did not pray and even mocked those who did. The priests and clerics symbolize obedience and show the wonders of salvation that may be achieved by it. The whirlpools represent frightful past and future persecutions. The boys who set foot on the island that was flooded soon after are those who, despising their vocation, leave the Oratory to go back to the world. The same must be said of those who sought refuge on other rafts. Those who fell into the water, but held out their hands to their companions on the raft and, with their help, scrambled on it again, are the boys who, on unfortunately falling into sin, regain God's grace through sincere sorrow. The strait, the big cats, monkeys and other monsters signify the disturbances, enticements and allurements of sin. The vermin on the eyes, tongue, and heart symbolize immodest looks, foul talk and disorderly affections. The spring of healing water stands for confession and Communion. The miry swamp and the fire signify places of sin and damnation.

This does not mean, though, that all those who fell into the mud or into the fiery furnace are destined for hell. God forbid! It means that at that time they were in the state of mortal sin, and had they died then and there, they would certainly have been eternally lost. The verdant island and the church represent the Salesian Society solidly established and triumphant. The handsome youth welcoming the boys and leading them on a tour of the palace and of the church seemingly is a deceased pupil already in heaven—perhaps Dominic Savio.

This last explanation suggests that in this, as in other dreams of Don Bosco, there was a hidden meaning referring mainly to the Salesian Society. We must further remark that [in Don Bosco's dreams] every segment was supplemented by other simultaneous manifestations that completed and clarified it. Don Bosco did not deem it opportune to speak of these. We are led to this conclusion also from what Don Bosco told Father Julius Barberis in 1879—that in this dream of the flood and the raft, he had seen Father Cagliero crossing vast expanses of water and helping others to do

the same, and that he and his companions had made ten stops. He was then foreseeing their journeys in [South] America. Likewise, in 1885, he declared that he had understood that this dream was related to the one he had had in 1854 foreshadowing Father Cagliero's episcopal consecration.<sup>3</sup>

On the morning of January 2 [1866], the boys, anxious to know the state of their conscience, hastened to make their confessions to him in the sacristy. To one lad who confessed his sins, and then asked where and how Don Bosco had seen him in that mysterious dream, Don Bosco replied, "You were on the raft. As you were fishing, you fell into the water several times, but I pulled you back onto the raft each time."

"And did you see me also in the church?"

"Yes, yes," he replied smilingly.

To a seminarian from Vercelli who had stopped him in the playground to ask him about himself, he answered, "You were among those who hindered the rescuers."

And to a priest, "I saw you apart from the others busily readying fishing lines for the rescuers." He added a few more things which wondrously came to pass twenty years later but need not be mentioned here.

The pupils never forgot this dream which had so deeply impressed them. One of them, Augustine Semeria from Moltedo Superiore, recalled it to us in a letter dated September 24, 1883, confirming what we have narrated above, and adding what follows:

I also remember that one of the following evenings Don Bosco did quite an unusual thing by having us all say the rosary on the portico [before night prayers] for the needs of the Church. When we were through, he mingled with us amid cheers and acclamations and allowed us to lift him up to the speaking stand—a thing we had done pretty often. When the applause subsided, he spoke of the joy that the just will experience in reaching heaven and of the peace of heart a Christian enjoys by constantly living in the state of grace. Then, bidding us good night, he concluded, "While you undress for bed, do so with all modesty, mindful that God sees you. Then lie down with your hands crossed over your chest and, entrusting yourselves to Jesus and Mary, take your rest."

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 67ff. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 24

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**D**ON Bosco always counterbalanced the serious thoughts which he so well instilled into his boys with games, songs and wholesome diversions. On January 5, 1866, for instance, shortly after narrating his dream, he sent invitations<sup>1</sup> to the Oratory's main benefactors and to prospective ones as well to attend a play to be staged by his boys on Sunday, January 7. Soon after, he paid a visit to his school at Lanzo whose many new pupils he had not yet met. There, while at supper with the staff, he abruptly became serious at one moment and, turning to the director, whispered, "At this moment, at the entrance of the second playground, there are two boys by the water fountain who should be supervised. Send somebody there at once to tell them to join their companions."

The director quickly sent a young cleric. "There was nobody by the water fountain," he reported, "but two boys"—and he named them—"were coming from that direction. I asked them where they had been, and they answered: 'At the fountain.'"

After night prayers, the director called them. They were newcomers. "What were you two fellows talking about this evening?" he asked them.

"Nothing," they answered with embarrassment.

"All right, but come with me. Don Bosco wants to see you. He has something to tell you."

Don Bosco eyed them carefully for a moment and then whispered a word to each in his ear. They blushed and, admitting their fault, promised to do better. Don Bosco heard confessions during the entire following day and then, after night prayers, narrated his dream of the raft.

<sup>1</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Meanwhile, many of those who had volunteered to sell lottery tickets were sending in reports, seeking advice, or inviting him to visit their locations.<sup>2</sup> In general, ticket sales were lagging somewhat because of current unfavorable political and religious conditions.<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons, Don Bosco had urged extraordinary prayers, and one evening he asked his boys to recite the rosary [before night prayers], as we mentioned in the preceding chapter. At this time too he suggested the following nose-gays for the novena in honor of Saint Francis de Sales and of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary:<sup>4</sup>

*Novena of St. Francis de Sales  
and of  
The Purification of the Blessed Virgin*

1. God alone is our master—not the devil, nor our fellow men, nor ourselves.

2. We have only one soul. If we lose it, all is lost.

3. If any of us should die tonight, what would his lot be?

4. So far what have we done for our souls? What do we propose to do? Let us examine our past life.

5. Mortal sin is a serious evil because it makes us God's enemies, deprives us of paradise and condemns us to hell.

6. Mortal sin is a serious evil because it also draws on us many temporal punishments. Recall, for example, the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, of Lucifer [from heaven], the deluge, etc.

7. [Think about] the sin of scandal. Recall Our Lord's scathing words against scandal-givers.

8. [Think about] the certainty of death and the uncertainty of its hour.

9. [Think about] the sinner's remorse at the point of death.

10. He who lives a godly life will have a peaceful death, as was the case with Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco.

11. Make a good confession and draw up a firm resolution of amendment.

12. Make a devout Communion and resolve to receive frequently.

**PUT THE ABOVE SUGGESTIONS INTO PRACTICE!**

<sup>2</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Now the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. [Editor]

The January issue of *Letture Cattolice*—*The Martyrdom and Cult of SS. Solutor, Adventor and Octavius*—was of particular interest to the faithful in Piedmont and seemed quite timely in bolstering confidence in the help of the saints for the sad days ahead for the Church. In the course of the narration, the author—Canon Lawrence Gastaldi—also proved that the Church of Mary, Help of Christians was being erected on the very site purpled by the blood of those three martyrs. He also expressed this wish: “It is desirable,” he wrote, “that in the new church dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians, now being built in the Valdocco area, one of the side chapels be dedicated to these three saints in memory of the martyrdom they suffered in this neighborhood.” He himself offered to pay for the painting above this altar.<sup>5</sup>

The February issue, *The Hidden Pearl*, was a translation of the life-story of St. Alexis by Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman, archbishop of Westminster. . . .

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 25

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

ON the feast of St. Francis de Sales, which this year [1866] was kept on Sunday, February 4, the directors of Salesian houses gathered in Don Bosco's waiting room for their regular annual conference at which the Oratory confreres were also present. Father Michael Rua presided because Don Bosco was away attending Count [Rudolph] De Maistre's funeral. Father [Dominic] Pestarino, the first speaker, gave a progress report on the new boarding school under construction at Mornese.<sup>1</sup> The townsfolk were enthusiastic over it, he said; on Sundays, bricklayers and over two hundred other villagers were donating their labor with the bishop's permission. A common desire to complete the work bonded together pastor and parishioners, authorities and populace, families and friends. The young men of the village, instead of going to dances, spent their evenings at the rectory, and there was an increase in the reception of Holy Communion. The Lord too had shown His approval of this project. The wheel of a cart had gone over a boy's foot without harming him at all, and an ironsmith had fallen from a scaffolding onto a heap of stones without getting hurt. One-fourth of the building was now nearly finished.

Father John Bonetti, director of the Mirabello junior seminary, spoke next. He remarked that, as everywhere else, in his house too he found a mixture of good and bad. One bad thing was his own broken head; a good one, instead, was that holy fox of a prefect, Father [Francis] Provera. Other good things were the uplifting value of spiritual reading made in common and the establishment of a boys' circle for the purpose of having some boys receive Communion each day for Don Bosco's special intentions. Another bad

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 453. [Editor]

thing was the lack of precise observance of the rules on the part of some confreres. This report caused some ill feelings, especially among Father Bonetti's young clerics. Indeed, when giving a public report, it is best to praise or be silent.

The next speaker was Father [John Baptist] Lemoyne, director at Lanzo. He briefed the assembly on what had been done for the boarders and what was being planned for the day pupils and for a future festive oratory. Regarding the young clerics, he was glad that he could repeat the eulogies made of them last year by their former director, the late Father [Dominic] Ruffino.

Father Rua brought the conference to a close by stressing the unity which should reign in every house: 1. Unity of direction: everything should be centered in the director and depend on him; there should be no criticism of superiors. The pupils should learn this from the young clerics. If they are obedient, so will also the pupils be. 2. Unity of spirit: charity. Therefore, no reciprocal criticism but mutual help, forbearance and love. 3. Unity of community life: no one should claim undue exceptions in sleeping quarters, meals, or supervision. Father Rua also stressed chastity. He urged all to be very reserved in dealing with pupils and to remember that this angelic virtue is our glorious crown. He exhorted all to use the means suggested by St. Philip Neri for the preservation of chastity.<sup>2</sup>

In February Don Bosco went to Milan. We have some records of what he did there. What follows is an extract from a written statement of Countess Caroline Soranzo to Father John Garino:

In 1866, Don Bosco was a guest of a friend of mine in Milan. During his stay, he told her that I had given birth to a baby girl, as had really happened at just about that very hour. When he paid me a visit a few days later, I asked him: "How did you know I had given birth to a girl? I didn't even have a chance to wire the news to you!"

"Well, I just took a guess!" he smilingly answered.

On another occasion, I said to him, "Have you heard that Philip Migneis, my cousin's brother, is critically ill?"

<sup>2</sup> At this point we are omitting a digression about Count Rudolph De Maistre. We are also omitting a letter by Father Rua to Countess Charlotte Callori on Don Bosco's behalf. [Editor]

"I think he is dead," he replied. As I later found out, he had died at that very hour in Civitavecchia.

At other times too I had proof that he could read into people's hearts because he told me things I had never manifested to anyone and predicted most accurately my future.

Yet, there was nothing extraordinary or affected about him. He was admirably humble, and his constant joviality endeared him to us all the more. As was right, he attributed all miraculous cures to Mary, Help of Christians and knew how to downplay any other seemingly personal charisms of his with phrases or tales that diverted the admiration of those who as yet did not know him well.

One day, when someone in his presence expressed astonishment that his predictions came true and that he knew secrets and matters that could not possibly be known, he exclaimed, "It's pure luck! Listen to this. One morning, in a convent, a nun utterly unknown to me brought me coffee. Noticing that she seemed overly concerned about serving me, I said to her, 'Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things. . . .' [Luke 10, 41] I came to know later that she went about telling the other nuns: 'Don Bosco is really a saint, a prophet. He knew my name, though I am a perfect stranger to him.' In fact, that happened to be her name."

Likewise, there was nothing austere about him. He was always free and easy. His amiability won the hearts of all and his saintliness did not repel or make anyone uneasy. In fact, his conversation was very much sought after. His easy manners made him welcome even to those of a different ideology. Don Bosco was one of those few who can live a most joyous serene life patterned after that of their Divine Model. We can best eulogize him by applying to him what St. Francis Borgia's sister said of St. Teresa of Avila: "God be praised for having us meet a saint we can all imitate! Her tenor of life is quite ordinary. She eats, sleeps, talks and laughs like any of us without airs or affectation. She acts like one of us, and yet it is evident that she is full of God's spirit."

A distinguished gentleman gave us the following description of Don Bosco whenever—as was often the case—he invited some friend or benefactor to dinner: "When he went to the dining room with his fellow priests, he seemed the least of them. And how

pleased he was when he could have some friend to share his meal. 'Join us,' he would say. 'Please do. I hope you won't mind our humble fare. There'll only be. . . .' He would complete the sentence with a homely gesture implying that the guest would have to be satisfied with potluck. But no one can imagine what joy it was to break bread with Don Bosco. His table conversation, shared by his other priests or guests, became somewhat livelier and his stories were by far the most interesting. He ate and drank very sparingly, but he was not adverse to treating his guests to some choice wine to show them his appreciation. At their departure, thanking them again for their visit, he would remark, 'Please, pardon us if today you had to do some penance. You are a good friend and have done us a great honor. We do appreciate it.' "

Daily, with his charming ways, he widened the circle of his friends in order to draw them to God.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 26

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**D**ON Bosco returned to the Oratory [from Milan] in time to enjoy some wholesome fun with his boys on the last day of the carnival season [February 13]. Then, on one of the first days of Lent, he announced [at the “Good Night”] that three and a half months later one of the pupils would be called to eternity. “Be ready!” he told them.<sup>1</sup>

A letter from a previously mentioned former pupil, Augustine Semeria,<sup>2</sup> tells us of Don Bosco’s zeal for his boys during this year of 1866. The letter itself was written from Liguria in 1883:

Dear Father Rua:

It is seventeen years since I left the Oratory, but I haven’t forgotten it. How could I ever let slip from my memory Don Bosco’s solicitous attentions during the years of my immaturity? When I recall his wonderful kindly ways, his loving words of encouragement spurring us to virtue, his forbearance with our shortcomings, and his concern for our upbringing, I still feel deeply moved and can hardly withhold my tears.

I remember how this good father would at times gently complain that some pupils went but rarely to the sacraments. Anxious to know what ailed our souls in order to heal them by his advice, he also made use of dreams. Before telling them to us, he would warn us that dreams can come from three sources: from God, to spur us to good; from the devil, to tempt us to evil; from purely physical causes, as for example the way we lay in bed. I am convinced that Don Bosco’s dreams came from God. In 1866, about two weeks before St. Joseph’s feast, he spoke thus to us:

“I dreamt that, while I was in bed, a stranger holding a lighted lantern came up to me, saying, ‘Get up and follow me.’”

<sup>1</sup> At this point we are omitting a detailed description of Don Bosco’s painful efforts to staff his schools with certified teachers. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See p. 150. [Editor]

“Unafraid, I obeyed and followed him. All the while he never let me see his face. He led me through several dormitories where you were all sleeping. While going along I noticed cats perched on bedsteads by their hind claws, trying to throttle the boys with their front paws.

“I kept following my guide until he stopped by a bed and walked around it. When I asked him why, he answered: ‘By St. Joseph’s feast this lad shall be with me.’ I understood that he was to die.

“ ‘Who are you?’ I firmly asked, ‘and by what right do you tell me this?’

“ ‘Here is my answer!’ he replied. So saying, he vanished, lantern and all, leaving me there in the dark. I then turned to go back to my room but stumbled against something and woke up.”

Don Bosco then went on to explain that those cats trying to choke the sleeping boys symbolized our spiritual enemies who are ever around us to make us fall into sin if we are in the state of grace, or to choke us to death, should God tire of us and permit it when we are in sin.

“I know the boy who is to die,” Don Bosco continued, “but I will not disclose his name, lest you be too frightened. Let’s wait and see if the dream comes true. Meanwhile, let us all ready ourselves for a happy death. To those who will come to confession to me, I shall have something particular to say.”

After St. Joseph’s feast, Don Bosco told us that on the evening of that very feast an Oratory pupil had died at home.

The Oratory records bear this out with this entry:

Simon Lupotto passed away on March 19, 1866 at the age of eighteen. He constantly edified his companions by his outstanding piety. He received the sacraments frequently, devoutly attended church services and fervently loved Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament. When at prayer, he resembled St. Aloysius. He bore his long illness with heroic resignation. Greatly devoted to St. Joseph, he departed to keep the saint’s feast in heaven, as Don Bosco had predicted. He was “a lily among thorns,” for at home he was surrounded by people far different from him.

Semeria’s letter goes on:

Another day Don Bosco told us this dream. “I dreamt,” he said, “that I was hearing confessions in the sacristy thronged with boys, when, lo, a young goat wandered in and began to rove among the boys, gambling with them and distracting them from confession. One by one the boys left.

Finally, the little goat came close to me and brazenly tried to cajole away the boy then making his confession to me, so that I had to hold on tightly to him. Angered, I struck the beast on the head with my fist and broke one of its horns, compelling it to flee. I also felt like giving the sacristan a severe scolding for having let it come in. Then I vested for Mass and went to the altar. At Communion, not one but scores of little goats swarmed into the church through the main door and, scattering among the boys, tried in many ways to distract and keep back those who wished to receive. Some lads, who were already on the way to the altar or kneeling at the altar rail when enticed by the nasty tricks of the little brutes, returned to their seats without receiving.

“Those little goats,” Don Bosco concluded, “are the enemies of our souls who by distractions and disorderly affections strive to keep the boys away from the sacraments.”

With these and similar salutary talks Don Bosco kept preparing his Oratory pupils for Easter. Meanwhile, Lenten catechism instructions were given daily to them and to thousands who frequented the four festive oratories. He also made sure that all who had not yet been confirmed were adequately prepared to receive the sacrament worthily.

Quite opportunely, the March issue of *Letture Cattolice*, which came out at the beginning of the month, was entitled: *Novena of Meditations and Prayers for a Worthy Preparation for the Sacrament of Confirmation*. . . . This booklet was a continuation of the previous October issue entitled: *Catechetical Instruction on the Sacrament of Confirmation*. . . .

## CHAPTER 27

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**D**EVOTION to Mary, Help of Christians kept spreading ever more among the faithful, thanks to Don Bosco's large distribution of medals which, blessed by him, were everywhere looked upon as wonderful safeguards from mishaps and remedies for illnesses. No wonder, then, that the demand was endless and insistent, evincing trust in Our Lady's protection and in the efficacy of the prayers of Her faithful servant and his boys.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, with the passing of winter, work on the new church was resumed. Scaffolding was erected for the arched ceilings and the dome which was to be topped by a gold-plated copper statue of the Blessed Virgin. Another pressing matter was the successful closing of negotiations with city authorities for straightening the public street in front of the church. Don Bosco wrote again to the mayor,<sup>2</sup> and some time later his request was granted. Before resuming promotional trips for his lottery, he gave instructions for a show of gratitude to Father Lunel of Cortemiglia, a distinguished benefactor who had steadily helped him since 1850<sup>3</sup> and had died in the middle of February.<sup>4</sup>

He then set off for Milan. Seemingly, he also went to Monza in deference to repeated requests of Mother Seraphim, superior of the Sacramentine Nuns, who wished to speak with him. At the Milan railroad station a noteworthy incident occurred which evinced Don Bosco's concern for the financial welfare of his benefactors. Our source is this written statement of Father Rua, dated Milan, April 9, 1891:

<sup>1</sup> We are here omitting a letter from Archbishop Andrew Charvaz of Genoa thanking Don Bosco for his prayers. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. IV, pp. 332f. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Mrs. Rose Guenzati told me that in 1866 Don Bosco passed through Milan by train. As he had but a few hours to wait, he did not go out of the station at all; besides, he had previously written to her husband to meet him there. The gentleman came, accompanied by his wife. In the course of their conversation, Don Bosco remarked, "Mr. Guenzati, you had better stock up on cloth this year because you will be able to resell it at a handsome price." The Guenzatis acted on his advice and did a most profitable business, as he had foretold. Their elation at this windfall made them regret that they had not put greater trust in Don Bosco's word and bought more cloth. Expressing their gratitude to God for this blessing, they gave part of their profits to charity. Don Bosco's tip was the start of a sizable fortune they accumulated.

Don Bosco stopped in Cremona also, where he called on Princess Helen Vidoni, the Magdalen Nuns, and others. He then went on to San Giovanni in Croce to visit the noble Soranzo family. From there [on March 8, 1866] he wrote to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia, instructing him to have a circular printed announcing the opening of the exhibit of the lottery prizes.<sup>5</sup> On March 10, Don Bosco was back at the Oratory.

The exhibit was officially opened on March 19, in the presence of Mayor Galvagno, but attendance was rather poor because of a heavy snowfall. Afterward, a most enjoyable entertainment was offered to those who had braved the weather. Its highlights were a comic operetta by Father [John] Cagliero entitled *The Poet and the Philosopher*; a brilliantly recited, lively dialogue composed by Don Bosco and presented by three boys, explaining the why and wherefore of the lottery and thanking all who had contributed to its success; and, lastly, a poem in the Piedmontese dialect composed by Father Joseph Bongiovanni along lines suggested by Don Bosco and delivered by a pupil in the guise of Gianduia [the comic character of the Piedmontese theater]. The lad—who was making his stage debut—humorously told the audience that, in a dream, he had taken a long journey and ended up in a magnificent palace. Its lobby he found stuffed with banknotes and gold and silver coins, all of which the owner gave to him. Overjoyed, he filled his pockets,

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting both the letter and the circular. [Editor]

packed all he could carry on his back, and started off at once to bring his treasure to Don Bosco, shouting that finally they had all the cash needed for the new church. Alas, his joy was short-lived. Falling off his bed, he woke up and found himself empty-handed. He concluded with the hope that Don Bosco's benefactors would remedy that disappointment and make his dream come true.<sup>6</sup>

Quite in keeping with Don Bosco's financial situation was the April issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, entitled: *On the Use of Money*. . . .

The May issue, *Stories and Parables*, contained splendid material for talks to the young and uneducated; the June issue, *Theodulus*, was a biography of a virtuous Belgian student. . . .

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a few unimportant lottery details and two requests by Don Bosco to benefactors for donations. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 28

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**H**OW had the cholera orphans of Ancona fared? Many months had passed since that city's relief committee had accepted Don Bosco's generous offer of aid. During that time, moved by the sad plight of other orphans recommended to him from various places, Don Bosco had received them into the Oratory, burdening himself with considerable additional expenses. Furthermore, he had also sent generous funds to Ancona where aid was flowing from all parts of Italy in an admirable show of charity. Other institutions [following his example] were also offering shelter to Ancona's orphans.

On January 13, 1866, Don Bosco was notified that three orphan lads were on their way to Turin. Since the Ancona relief committee had by then received large sums from public charity, it seemed but reasonable that part of such funds should also provide for the orphans sent to Turin. The Ancona committee agreed to his request and approved a grant of six hundred lire for each orphan. In return, Don Bosco pledged to keep them for at least three years so that they could learn a trade or pursue their studies according to the Oratory's rules and usages, without outside interference. This last point was not to the liking of the Ancona authorities, but finally they accepted Don Bosco's terms.<sup>1</sup>

During this time Don Bosco was also concerned about three clerics who were soon to be drafted into the army. While rumors of war were growing, he could not find a bishop who, in accordance with existing laws, would include them among his exempted seminarians. He had written to their bishops and to others as well, but a

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

whole month had gone by without results. Finally, on May 24 [1866], Bishop James Philip Gentile of Novara was able to oblige and Don Bosco's three clerics were exempted from military service.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 29

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**D**URING the spring of 1866, Don Bosco often traveled to neighboring provinces to promote his lottery and to exercise his priestly ministry. His zeal for God's glory drew on him the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians.<sup>1</sup> Father Francis Dalmazzo<sup>2</sup> wrote:

Don Bosco's zeal for divine worship and the decorum of the house of God clearly showed itself one day when I accompanied him on a call to a pastor in the outskirts of Turin. After visiting the rectory, he walked into the church and, finding it dilapidated and obviously neglected, frankly reproached the priest for being so remiss in what concerned divine worship. "Your rectory," he went on, "is very well kept and nicely furnished, while God's house is in such disrepair! Why don't you do something about it?" Whether in consequence of these words or for some other reason, the fact is that the pastor made provisions for a new church in his will.

At this time, the Sisters of Charity had just opened a house in Cuneo to train poor abandoned girls. Sister Arcangela Volontà and another sister had been put in charge, but when they took over the building they found it quite unsuitable, its walls rather shaky and its furniture—a few chairs and two straw mattresses—utterly inadequate. Two little girls were already living there, but there seemed to be not the least shadow of income. Such was the situation when Don Bosco, who happened to be in Cuneo, was invited by Father Ciravegna, S.J. to visit the place.

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We have omitted a prefatory description of war rumors affecting Italy and other European nations and three letters of Don Bosco about subsidies, lottery tickets and honorific titles for some benefactor. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Father Dalmazzo (1845-1895) entered the Oratory as a rhetoric student in 1860. (See Vol. VI, pp. 453ff) After his ordination in 1868 he filled important positions in the Salesian Society, his last assignment being rector of the Catanzaro diocesan seminary, where he died on March 10, 1895. [Editor]

In that extraordinary poverty Don Bosco recognized at once the beginnings of a work blessed by God. "I see you are not encumbered with luxuries," he remarked to the two nuns. "Of course you cannot carry on under these conditions, but don't be afraid; the Lord will bless you and make your work prosper. In due time, He will also give you a spacious, comfortable building, where you will be able to do much good." He then blessed them and left. Twenty-four years later, Sister Arcangela went to thank Don Bosco at Valsalice<sup>3</sup> where his remains were resting. Her institution, now completely remodeled, was staffed by ten nuns caring for a hundred girls, all conveniently provided for by Divine Providence, as Don Bosco had foretold.

During this year he also went to Revello (Saluzzo). While he sat in the rectory with the pastor, Canon Francis Geuna, a sudden storm darkened the sky and a fierce wind arose. As hail began to fall, many villagers ran to the church to pray that their crops would be spared. The pastor quickly handed a surplice and stole to Don Bosco who, realizing the danger threatening the crops, invited the congregation to invoke Mary, Help of Christians. "*Maria, Auxilium Christianorum,*" he called out aloud. "*Ora pro nobis,*" the congregation responded. They were about to start other prayers, but Don Bosco forestalled them by repeating *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum* three more times. At the last invocation the wind ceased and the sun reappeared. The pastor and people were overjoyed by so evident a favor from Our Lady, Help of Christians.

Don Bosco did not mind the discomforts of traveling and of missing trains. This happened rather frequently because he always met people on the way who wanted to talk to him, and he always obliged. We ourselves witnessed the following incident. One morning he asked a confrere to accompany him to the Porta Nuova station, planning to say Mass at his place of arrival. He was no sooner out of his room than he met a cleric who wanted to speak to him. Don Bosco stopped and listened. On the stairs another cleric halted him. The same thing happened when he reached the main floor. When that conversation was through, several priests and

<sup>3</sup> A Salesian college on the hills just across the Po River on the outskirts of Turin. [Editor]

clerics standing in the portico crowded around him. He listened also to each of them. Finally he made for the exit, but a young boy called and ran after him. Don Bosco waited and answered his questions. It certainly took Job's patience to remain calm under such circumstances! When Don Bosco got to the station, the train had already left. Calmly he walked to St. Charles' Church, said Mass, and then left by the next train.

With the same unalterable serenity coupled to a firm prudence he governed the Oratory when the restless thoughtlessness of some lads brought on moments of crisis. A determined enemy of human respect, he could not bear to see it take hold in the house through the misconduct of some pupils. Under the direction of Father [Joseph] Bongiovanni, the Altar Boys Sodality was flourishing, but this year [1866] for various reasons many pupils began to look askance at its members, ridicule them and nickname them "Bongiovannist," which sounded to them like the perfect made-to-order insult. The feud lasted a couple of months. Seeing that the altar boys were intimidated and cooling in their piety and that some of them were even considering quitting, Don Bosco, after privately warning some of the troublemakers, spoke strongly to all at a "Good Night," declaring that he would uphold the altar boys at any cost. When his words proved ineffective, he admonished the scoffers again, this time stating that anyone daring to call the altar boys disparaging nicknames or to ridicule them in any way would be summarily dismissed from the Oratory.

Notwithstanding this threat, some boys kept up their opposition to the Altar Boys Sodality and, misjudging Don Bosco's goodness, continued their harassment, with the result that a number of them, for this and for other reasons as well, were sent home. One, however, a bright, diligent, well-behaved boy, though unreasonably antagonistic to the Altar Boys Sodality, stayed on. Don Bosco's threat enraged rather than cowed him. He kept mocking the altar boys, often adding: "I'd rather be expelled or even dead than join that sodality!" Neither did he spare those who he believed had caused his friends to be expelled. "Squealers!" he would mutter under his breath within their hearing.

Don Bosco was loath to dismiss him. Pretending not to notice his

impudence, he bade his time. Soon his chance came. The boy thought highly of Don Bosco and believed that those supporting the altar boys had unfairly won him over to their side. One day he tearfully went to Don Bosco with a letter from his parents. He was sure that Don Bosco knew nothing of his harassment of the altar boys. Don Bosco received him kindly and asked what the trouble was.

“Father, I have come to ask a big favor.”

“What is it?”

“I have received this letter from my parents.”

“Are they well?”

“Yes, Father, but they have had some setbacks and money is a problem.”

“I am sorry to hear that.”

“They can no longer pay eighteen lire a month for my board. They ask if you could possibly bring the fee down to ten; otherwise they’ll have to take me home.”

“Is that so bad?”

“Father, what about my schooling? I was hoping I could become a priest! This would wreck my future!”

“It’s too bad, but you’ll surely find some other way to earn a living.”

“But what would my friends say if they saw me back home? What shame it would cause me! They would know that my parents cannot afford to send me to school. I would have to work on the farm again.” With that he broke into tears.

“I am sorry, son, but what can I do? I am already loaded with expenses and debts. Perhaps next year. . . .”

“Don Bosco, please let me stay here. Help my parents. They are in such trouble!”

“You must realize that if I lower your fee, it will be at the expense of other poor boys,” Don Bosco went on as the lad kept sobbing, “but, for your sake, I am willing to make an exception, on one condition. Tell me, how is your conduct?”

“I will do all I can to please you, Father.”

“Good! I believe you, but still I’d like to have someone vouch for you, someone who may supervise you and let me know whether you really deserve the favor you are asking.”

“Yes, Father, I agree.”

“And I want you to follow the good advice of the one I shall give you as a friend and guardian.”

“Yes, Father, I will.”

“Do you know Father Bongiovanni?”

“Yes, Father,” the lad answered, slightly shaken.

“Well, then, report to him, and tell him what I said. Trust him fully and you will be happy. I promise that if Father Bongiovanni’s report about you is good, not only will I bring your fees down to ten or even five lire but, if necessary, I’ll keep you without cost.”

The boy kissed Don Bosco’s hand and, quite chastized, went to look for Father Bongiovanni, whom Don Bosco had notified and instructed beforehand.

The following Sunday was a solemn feast day. As the altar boys filed out into the sanctuary, everybody was greatly surprised at seeing our young friend among them, red-faced and with downcast eyes but dressed in cassock and surplice. His embarrassment lasted only one day, though; from then on he was an exemplary altar boy. He belied his own avowal “I’d rather be expelled or even dead than join that sodality.”

The Oratory’s annual spiritual retreat began on April 30 and was preached by Father Joseph Persi. The nosebags for the month of May were prepared by Don Bosco himself.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Appendix 2. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 30

### *Love for the Church*

**W**HAT Don Bosco expected of people making novenas to Mary, Help of Christians is revealed in a letter of his, dated May 12, 1866, to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia<sup>1</sup> in Rome.<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco wrote:

When you advise anyone to make a novena to Our Lady, stress these three things:

1. Have no hope at all in men's power, but faith in God.
2. Place total reliance on Jesus in the Most Blessed Sacrament—the source of favors, goodness and blessings—and on the Blessed Virgin, whom God wishes to glorify on earth through Her church [now under construction].
3. Everything must be subordinate to God's will and to the good of the soul for whom the novena is made.

At this time, war between Italy and Austria over the Veneto provinces seemed imminent. From every part of Italy troops were moving toward the border. The government was confident of victory but, fearing internal resistance to the unification of Italy, passed a law empowering it to confine, for one year, idlers, drifters, members of secret societies and any person rightly suspected of actively opposing the unification of Italy. A law so loosely worded could easily be abused—as indeed it was, particularly in the case of church authorities. Scores of bishops and priests in the former kingdom of Naples and other parts of Italy were summarily banished from their sees and parishes and confined to far-away

<sup>1</sup> Frederick Oreglia, a late vocation, came to the Oratory in 1860 and became a Salesian in 1862, but he left in 1869 to join the Society of Jesus. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

places with utter disregard for their age, health, and means of support. Nearly every day the press publicized the names of dozens of priests, religious and laymen who had been arbitrarily and forcibly deprived of their freedom.<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco was privileged to help and comfort Bishop Peter Rota of Guastalla, one of the first victims of that ignoble persecution. Forced to leave his see, he chose Turin as his place of temporary confinement and arrived there on the evening of May 14 [1866], not knowing where to spend the night.<sup>4</sup> He first called on the Vincentian Fathers who welcomed him most warmly. Finding, however, that two other bishops, also banished from their sees, were there and no more rooms were available, he went to the Cottolengo Institute. There he learned that, since this institution was officially recognized by the government as a charitable organization, there could be reprisals against it. Moreover, the institution did not have fit quarters for a bishop. He therefore was advised to call on Don Bosco who would willingly host him.

Bishops were no strangers at the Oratory. Don Bosco welcomed them with singular veneration. Their presence was a family feast for him and his boys. No matter where the prelate came from, he would always be invited to say the Community Mass or give Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and the choir would sing at both services. Later, the brass band would play in his honor. Biretta in hand, Don Bosco would escort him on a tour of the premises and would never fail to kiss his ring in the boys' presence. He would, moreover, mention at the "Good Night" what a blessing that visit had been for them all.

Bishop Rota knew the Oratory only by reputation. Understandably, he felt rather uneasy when he knocked at the Oratory gate at nightfall and asked for Don Bosco, who happened to be away. Father John Cagliero was called and, learning of the bishop's predicament, instantly welcomed him so warmly that the good bishop breathed a deep sigh of relief as if he had entered his own home.

<sup>3</sup> These last two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Don Bosco returned the next day, and when he heard of the new guest, he exclaimed: "If we have a bishop with us. Our Lord will be with us too. We have nothing to fear!" Immediately he went to offer him his respects and thank him for the honor he was doing the Oratory, apologizing for being unable to host him as he deserved.

"My dear Don Bosco," the illustrious exile interrupted him, "you care for the poor and abandoned. Who, now, is more abandoned than I? Take me in as one of your orphans. I shall be grateful if you shelter me as one of them."

When his identity and the reasons for his being there became known, all the Oratory residents rejoiced. "It is a sign that God blesses the Oratory," Don Bosco remarked at the "Good Night." Then, in a friendly gesture, before retiring for the night, the boys gathered under the prelate's windows, shouting, "Long live the bishop!" Living quarters at the Oratory weren't the best, but the saintly exile contented himself with a small bedroom and an ante-chamber where he received visitors and took his meals which, at Don Bosco's orders, were prepared separately. The bishop hastened to write a pastoral letter to his beloved flock. It was printed at the Oratory under the dateline: "Turin, Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, May 25 [1866], feast of St. Gregory VII," and was also signed by Father John Cagliero,<sup>5</sup> the bishop's acting secretary.

During his six-month stay, Bishop Rota edified all at the Oratory and readily obliged when asked to hear confessions. What particularly impressed the boys, however, was seeing him kneeling with them on the bare floor around Don Bosco's confessional every week, waiting for his turn. When that respected shepherd—all the more revered because of his patient suffering under persecution—first walked into the sacristy for his confession, all stood up respectfully to let him go ahead, but he withdrew instead to a corner and knelt until his turn came.

Don Bosco not only assuaged his grief but greatly comforted him with his tactful solicitude. Years later, the good bishop declared to Father Rua and to others that the time spent at the Oratory had been the happiest of his life. Almost daily Don Bosco invited some

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

prelate or a distinguished clergyman to dine with the bishop. He also managed to get him permission to go about freely in the city and throughout the province. Bishop Rota availed himself of it by going to Mondovì to visit Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi. The prelate had all the church bells rung in his guest's honor and hosted him for several days. Then, during the summer months, Don Bosco arranged for him to be the guest of generous Oratory benefactors.<sup>6</sup>

All who came to know the bishop were edified by his patient resignation and particularly by his singular modesty and his vast, profound learning. Never idle, he gave vent to his zeal by hearing confessions, teaching catechism, administering Confirmation, and conferring Holy Orders in the Church of St. Francis de Sales at the Oratory. Seemingly, Divine Providence, outwitting the bishop's enemies, had turned his exile into a solemn justification—nay, a triumph.

A few days after the arrival of Bishop Rota, Don Bosco also received a consolation he cherished above all others. A letter came from Pius IX thanking him for a complimentary copy of his *Storia d'Italia*<sup>7</sup> and encouraging him to continue to instill religious principles into the boys under his care.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 323-31. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 31

### *The Help of Christians*

LOVE for the Blessed Virgin and joy at Her triumphs sufficed to banish worry, discouragement and weariness from Don Bosco's heart. He proclaimed Her glories in his sermons, publicized them in books, and recalled them in friendly conversations and letters. On May 21, 1866, for instance, he wrote to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia, who was still in Rome, to entrust him with errands for benefactors and to tell him of a woman's instant cure from gout through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians.<sup>1</sup>

In publicizing Our Lady's wonders, he not only gave vent to his boundless love for the Mother of God, but aimed at doing good to others. He wished to spark the whole world with unlimited confidence in Her who, amid the anxieties, tribulations, errors and perils of this, our poor mortal life, was and would always be a loving, ever ready, powerful helper. At Mary's command, he had started his work for youth, and he was now building a church. But all along he kept insisting on the reception of the sacraments which cleanse and safeguard from sin, for sin is the cause of all misery.

Such was his mission—heaven assured him of that—but he realized that writing letters and speaking in private were inadequate to the task. He had to do what the Gospel said: "What I tell you in darkness, speak in the light. What you hear in private, proclaim from the housetops." [Matt. 10, 27] He had to blow the trumpet and make its sound echo through the world by means of the press. People could not love what they did not know.

And so Don Bosco made up his mind to do just that. He knew well that his plan was a complete novelty in Piedmont and that he would be maligned and accused of self-interest, vainglory, rashness

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

and even fanaticism. He was aware of the difficulties and opposition he would have to face, but it did not bother him at all because he was convinced that it is “honorable to reveal and confess the works of God.” [Tob. 12, 7]

In fact, the very first time *Unità Cattolica* published the account of a cure obtained through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, the recipient of the cure denied having granted permission for its publication. Don Bosco, however, had the man’s written permission and reprinted the same article in the July issue of *Letture Cattoliche*.<sup>2</sup>

The power of Mary under the title of “Help of Christians” was already known in many places, but as soon as the press began to publicize it, trust in Her was sparked everywhere. “Countless other people,” Don Bosco wrote in 1868, “had recourse to Her with a novena, promising offerings if their prayers were heard. If I had to list all the graces received I could fill large volumes. . . . By granting such cures, God supplies us with the funds to finish the building of this church. Turin, Genova, Bologna, Naples, but above all Milan, Florence and Rome, experienced the goodness of Mary under the title of Help of Christians and showed their gratitude by their donations. More remote cities, too, such as Palermo, Vienna, Paris, London and Berlin, had recourse to Mary. . . . I am not aware that anyone prayed in vain. Spiritual and temporal favors, more or less extraordinary, always resulted from praying to our most merciful Mother, the mighty Help of Christians. . . .

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 32

### *A Long-Desired Settlement*

**I**N a letter of May 22 [1866] to Chevalier Oreglia, Don Bosco wrote: "Mary, Help of Christians continues to bless us. One of Her blessings today was the final settlement of the disputed ownership of *Letture Cattolice*. True, we had to make heavy sacrifices, but now we are indisputably its owners." Unfortunately, this was to be no more than a fervent wish for some time yet.

Before finally reaching this long-desired settlement, Don Bosco had to go through a lot of trouble. He had conceived this publication, outlined its program, and initiated its printing. Likewise, he had either authored or edited its issues and promoted its circulation by mail or personal appearances. He certainly had every right to say: "It never entered my mind that *Letture Cattolice* was anyone else's property.<sup>1</sup> Claims of co-ownership had cropped up because of Don Bosco's own self-abasement, patience, profound respect for bishops and, above all, heroic disinterestedness. True, Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea had invested four hundred and twenty-five lire in bonds and Marquis Birago had made a substantial loan, but subscription fees should certainly have been more than sufficient to meet all liabilities.

Anxious to clear up all difficulties so as to assure the survival of *Letture Cattolice*, Don Bosco agreed to submit the dispute to the arbitration of Count [Charles] Cays of Giletta<sup>2</sup> whom the bishop's representative—Canon Francis Valinotti—had called in to act as a

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 97. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Count Charles Cays (1813-1882), a staunch Catholic, was a deputy in the Piedmontese Parliament from 1857 to 1860. After withdrawing from politics, he busied himself in works of charity. He became a Salesian in 1877 and was ordained a priest the following year. After serving as director in one of the Salesian schools in France, he was recalled to the Oratory to manage *Letture Cattolice*. After giving invaluable assistance to Don Bosco for many years, he died on October 4, 1882, as he himself had predicted. [Editor]

mediator. The count handled the thorny and delicate question with rare skill and regard and came up with a settlement acceptable to both parties. Confident that Bishop Moreno would abide by it, Don Bosco believed that the painful controversy was finally ended and said so to Chevalier Oreglia with a great sigh of relief. The bishop, however, had second thoughts, and the dispute dragged on with many a headache for Don Bosco and the patient mediator. Finally, on October 19, 1867, Count Cays obtained the bishop's signature to the document which declared the matter finally and irrevocably settled. At long last, then, *Letture Cattoliche* became the undisputed possession of Don Bosco. On that day, however, Don Bosco lost Bishop Moreno's friendship.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 33

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

WE now return to the end of May 1866. At that time the Oratory was awaiting the fulfillment of a prediction Don Bosco had made in mid-February.<sup>1</sup> In May, a sixteen-year-old pupil—Joseph Rosa, of Verolengo—had died at home. He had fallen ill in the second week of March and had gone home on the 14th. Father Rua wrote of him in the obituary: “A few months at the Oratory were enough to leave us a cherished memory of him. Docile and diligent, he excelled among his classmates. Cheerful and obliging, he was loved by all. He died at home, after receiving the Last Sacraments.”

Was this the lad Don Bosco had meant? By no means! Don Bosco had stated that the doomed boy would die three and a half months later. In fact, he himself revealed the lad’s name and the fulfillment of the prediction in a letter of May 31, 1866 to Chevalier Oreglia in Rome: “The three and half months were over yesterday and our shoemaker apprentice, Gili, died at home. He was able to prepare himself for death in the most consoling manner. Please pray for his soul.”<sup>2</sup>

May 31, the feast of Corpus Christi, marked the solemn closing of the Oratory’s Marian devotions. The same function, at which the bishop of Casale was to participate, was set for Mirabello on June 3. On the same day, Don Bosco was expected at Lanzo for the closing of the Marian devotions and a commemoration of St. Philip Neri, the school’s patron. In both schools, the customary awarding of prizes to the six best pupils chosen by their schoolmates was also scheduled.

<sup>1</sup> See p. 158. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting the rest of the letter urging him to seek funds for the construction of the church. [Editor]

Before setting off from Turin, Don Bosco again wrote to Chevalier Oreglia to acquaint him, among other things, with some government decrees regarding the war.<sup>3</sup> He also wrote to two lads—Gregory Garofoli and Emmanuel Fassati—pupils at the Jesuit boarding school in Mongré, France:

Turin, June 1, 1866

Dear Gregory,

I was delighted at your letter and passed your news on to the boys you met at Tortona. They were very pleased to hear from you and send their thanks and greetings.<sup>4</sup> I would certainly enjoy a little talk with you, but what I'd like to tell you cannot be put down in writing. Come to see me during the summer vacation, and I will tell you then. As I am very interested in your spiritual welfare, I will give you three most important keepsakes: 1. Shun idleness. 2. Avoid foul-mouthed companions and bad counselors. 3. Go to confession and Communion fervently and fruitfully.

Kindly remember me to your two brothers, to Emmanuel Callori, and to the other Piedmontese lads there<sup>5</sup> who know me. God bless you and keep you in His holy grace. Pray for me.

Affectionately in the Lord,  
Father John Bosco

Turin, June 1, 1866

My dear Emmanuel,

In your last letter you asked me to pray to the Blessed Virgin to give you the will and strength to study. I have obliged most willingly and heartily during the whole month of Our Lady, but I don't know if I have been successful. I should like very much to know, though I have good reason to believe I have. Dad, Mom and Azelia are well. I often see them at half past five in the evening, and our talk is mostly about you. Your family worries somewhat about your progress in school and fears you may add to the sorrow they have already had this year. I always assure them, since I trust in

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> In 1863 nearly a hundred Oratory boys were hosted by Baron Garofoli and family during their yearly outing. *See* Vol. VII, p. 324. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> After the expulsion of the Jesuits and other religious, Piedmont had no Catholic boarding school for sons of noble families. Mongré across the border filled the need. [Editor]

your intelligence, good will and promises. Am I taking too much for granted? I don't believe so.

Two more months, and then what fun if you come through your exams with flying colors! Dear Emmanuel, I will continue to pray for you; on your part, do make some effort. Be diligent and obedient, and do all you can to make your exams a success.

God bless you, dear Emmanuel. Console your parents by your good conduct. Pray also for me.

Yours affectionately,  
Father John Bosco

On June 1, the Oratory theology and philosophy students successfully passed their examinations in the seminary of Turin. The next morning, June 2, Don Bosco went to Lanzo, where he was enthusiastically received. On this occasion, his thoughtful, fatherly amiability was borne out. Remarking that Father Bonetti had been received at Mirabello the past November with great festivities as director, whereas [Father Lemoyne], their director, had taken office on short notice, with no formal reception because of the recent deaths [of Father Ruffino and Father Alasonatti], he declared that this omission would be made up for on this feast of St. Philip Neri.

Meanwhile, he spent the afternoon hearing confessions. That evening the Oratory brass band, followed by the choirboys, marched up to the school, filling the air with music. Don Bosco was waiting for them at the chapel entrance and was frantically applauded by the boys. Then all went in for Benediction. The chapel was magnificently decorated with flowers and lights. The next morning there was general Communion in the school chapel, solemn high Mass in the parish church, and a procession with the Most Blessed Sacrament. At noon the local clergy, mayor and councilmen sat at dinner with Don Bosco. Later that day, there were Vespers, sermon and Benediction, a stage play and fireworks. Everybody had a grand time as song and music filled the air throughout the whole day.

Back at the Oratory, Don Bosco took care of his mail. On June 8 he wrote to Chevalier Oreglia and asked him to thank several benefactors on his behalf. He also informed him that rumors of war were getting stronger and that he had better hasten his return to

Turin. In fact, on June 19, war broke out between Germany and Austria.<sup>6</sup>

Don Bosco wanted Chevalier Oreglia to return for various reasons, but mainly because of his influence over two young Salesians whom Don Bosco had generously assisted in many ways. Swayed by pride and a craze for freedom, they were giving Don Bosco a great deal of trouble at this time, and he hoped they would listen to Chevalier Oreglia and quiet down. Things had gone so far that Don Bosco had been forced to bear with them silently lest they take some ill-advised step. We have a hint of his troubles in an undated letter of his to Countess Callori, who knew them well. "C . . . and L . . . are acting like two maniacs," he wrote. "They say all sorts of things against me and threaten to publicize them. In fact, a few days later, *Il Conte di Cavour* carried an article against the Oratory. Some ascribe it to them. I make allowances for human frailty. I am becoming more and more convinced that we must work for God's glory and not for human praise."

At this time, many mothers, fearing for their sons in the army, wrote to Don Bosco begging him to place them under the protection of Mary, Help of Christians.<sup>7</sup> While comforting the mothers, he also sought, by that wonderful foresighted zeal which he so highly possessed, to infuse into their sons at the front, sentiments of faith, self-sacrifice and loyalty through *Letture Cattoliche*. The July issue, *A Friendly Word to Servicemen*, was a commentary on St. Peter's words: "Fear God, honor your king, love your brothers." [1 Pet. 2, 17]

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting two such letters. [Editors]

## CHAPTER 34

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**B**ECAUSE of the war, all public schools and universities had closed down earlier than usual. Don Bosco, however, did not follow suit. He also strove to keep as many boys as possible at the Oratory during the summer months and even accepted new boys recommended by civil authorities. Notwithstanding financial straits, a decline in orders for the Oratory workshops and the drafting of some craftsmasters, he managed to provide food and work for his young artisans. Fortunately, the carpenters and smiths were kept quite busy working for the new church.

But Don Bosco also had to provide for the clerics whose maintenance was more expensive. Besides feeding and clothing those who had applied for membership in the Salesian Society, he was doing the same for poor seminarians of other dioceses who intended to return home after ordination. On top of that, he was also expecting clerics from the Turin seminary who had begged him to let them stay at the Oratory for the summer because they had no place to go after school closed.

Trying to get some help for all of them, he wrote to the vicar capitular, Canon Joseph Zappata, but regretfully the latter could not oblige because of the current financial straits of the Turin chancery. He pleaded next with Canon Vogliotti, the seminary rector, for a destitute seminarian, and the canon promptly obliged.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, he had been to Mirabello for the solemn celebration of St. Aloysius' feast on June 21. A Latin V pupil named Francis Rapetti lay very ill in bed. On this day the young man insisted on getting up to enjoy the festivities with his companions. He got permission, but toward evening, feeling exhausted, he had to

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

return to bed. Shortly afterward he was assailed by such violent convulsions that he seemed on the point of death. In fact, it was thought that he had actually died, and the news spread. Since the infirmary was next to Don Bosco's room, Mr. Vincent Provera, brother of the school's prefect, offered him a room for the night in his house. Don Bosco accepted. To the amazement of the whole family, very early the next morning Don Bosco was back at the school, although all the doors of the Provera's house had been locked the night before and could not be reopened except with a key.<sup>2</sup>

On recovering somewhat from his crisis, young Rapetti kept insisting that he must speak with Don Bosco, who most willingly obliged after Mass. With fatherly affection he recommended him to the Most Blessed Virgin and warmly comforted him. Before giving the young man his blessing, Don Bosco asked him if he wished to be instantly cured. "I'd rather do God's will," he replied. Don Bosco blessed him and then left for Turin. The good youth peacefully expired that same day, June 22 [1866].

On June 23, telegrams from Florence brought the expected, sad news that the bill confiscating the properties of religious orders had been passed by the Chamber of Deputies on June 19. No exceptions were permitted, not even for the famous monasteries of Camaldoli and Montecassino. Senate approval came on June 23, and the bill became law on July 7 when it was signed by the regent, the prince of Carignano. Thus religious orders were robbed of their houses, revenues and possessions, their only compensation being a scanty yearly pension. Very many churches were put to profane use; monasteries and convents were turned into barracks, prisons and schools; sacred vessels were sold to second-hand dealers and a large number of religious had to emigrate to other regions, especially to Piedmont, in search of an honest living.<sup>3</sup>

Showing his love for religious orders, Don Bosco hastened to their assistance. Father Francis Dalmazzo declared:

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

I remember that Don Bosco offered hospitality in his houses to disbanded religious from every part of Piedmont. As a matter of fact, several religious, including some mendicants, benefited by his charity for some years, and even for life. He provided for all their needs. Likewise, when a number of Jesuits gathered in Turin and were ordered by the government to leave, Don Bosco sent me to their superior, Father Secundus Franco, to offer them hospitality in his name in any of his houses outside Turin for any length of time. I remember that on that occasion Father Franco was moved to tears and exclaimed, "How good-hearted Don Bosco is! He is truly a saint!" He asked me to thank him, adding that, though they were already provided for, he would always remember the charity of this man of God.

## CHAPTER 35

### *Saintly Pupils*

ON June 24, feast of St. John the Baptist, the Oratory celebrated Don Bosco's name day with the participation of the directors of Lanzo and of Mirabello. Each brought a boy along to represent the student body. A program of vocal and instrumental music, prose and poetry was, as usual, presented the night before, but was not repeated on the 24th. This became the practice from then on.<sup>1</sup> On this particular evening Don Bosco sat in his room, pondering a new project—a religious congregation of women to care for girls and collaborate with the mission of the Salesians. He disclosed his intentions to [Father John Baptist Lemoyne] the director of Lanzo, who immediately afterward jotted down what he had heard, as follows:

On the evening of June 24, feast of St. John the Baptist, with a beautiful moon shining brightly and a light breeze cooling the summer heat, I accompanied Don Bosco to his room and stayed with him alone for about two hours. From the playground we could hear the muffled voices of youngsters cheerfully at play. Hundreds of tallow lights twinkled in colored glasses on windows and balconies throughout the house. A brass band, set in the center of the playground, now and then filled the air with joyful melodies. Don Bosco and I moved to the window and leaned against it, facing each other. The charming spectacle filled us with inexpressible joy. We could not be seen from the playground because we were in shadow, but now and again I would wave my handkerchief and the boys, spotting it, would break out into enthusiastic *vivas* for Don Bosco, prompting him to smile. We stood there a long time, silently absorbed in our thoughts. "What a beautiful evening!" I finally exclaimed. "Do you

<sup>1</sup> A description of an episode in the war between Italy and Austria at the start of this chapter has been omitted. [Editor]

remember your old dreams? Here are the boys, priests and clerics Our Lady promised you."

"How good the Lord is!" Don Bosco replied.

"It is now some twenty years since you started, and no one has ever gone hungry! Everything began from nothing! How insignificant man is in these things. If our undertakings had had mere human origins, we would have failed a hundred times."

"True, but that's not all. See how rapidly our Society is growing in membership and houses. Every day we say, 'Enough! Let us pause a while!' But a mysterious hand pushes us on."

Don Bosco fixed his gaze on the rising dome of the new church as he spoke, and, recalling his former dreams, he kept staring at it. Bathed in moonlight, it loomed like a heavenly vision. His appearance at that moment seemed inspired. We fell silent again, prey to a thousand emotions.

"Tell me, Don Bosco," I asked, breaking the spell, "don't you think something is wanting to complete your work?"

"What do you mean?"

"Won't you do anything for girls?" I went on after a moment's hesitation. "Don't you think that a congregation of nuns founded by you and affiliated to our Society would crown your work? Our Lord too had pious women following Him and ministering to His needs. They could do much for our poor boys. Besides, could they not do for girls what we are doing for boys?"

I had hesitated to speak my mind because I feared that Don Bosco might oppose me. He remained pensive for a few moments and then surprised me by his answer. "Yes, this too will be done! We shall have nuns, but not yet. A little later." For the record, the nuns were formally established in 1872.

The following day, Don Bosco wrote as follows to the boys at Lanzo:

Turin, June 25, 1866

My dear sons:

You can hardly imagine how happy I was to see your director, Father Lemoyne, and your representative, my good friend Chiariglione.

I felt all the happier when I read your charming, affectionate letters and those of your assistants, teachers, and Father Prefect. I read them all at

one sitting and was frequently moved to tears of joy. You were even so good as to enclose a donation for our new church. Indeed, this gesture of yours completed my happiness and revealed how good you really are.

My dear children, I am most grateful to you all. True, you have said a few things that exaggerated my merits, but I accept them as tokens of your goodness.

May God's blessing be ever upon you. Father Lemoyne will tell you many things for me. He is your director. Love, obey and trust him as you would me. He works for you wholeheartedly and desires only your good. Oh, how much he told me of you. Let me say then, "Hurrah for your director! Hurrah for all your superiors! Hurrah for all my dear children at Lanzo!"

I hope to see you again soon and tell you some very important things. Meanwhile pray for me. I'll do likewise for you in my Holy Mass.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you. May the Most Holy Virgin help us all walk on the path to heaven. Amen!

Your friend in the Lord,  
Father John Bosco

In those days a Latin comedy was being staged by the Oratory pupils, directed by Father John Baptist Francesia, who for some years had been in charge of dramatics.<sup>2</sup> Don Bosco watched the performance not only to please his pupils but also to do homage to his numerous guests. With him was also Joachim Berto, his young secretary for the year. At the start of his new duties, the young cleric seemed rather apprehensive and concerned about not measuring up to Don Bosco's expectations, but the latter hastened to reassure him.

"One evening in 1866," Berto told us, "I accompanied Don Bosco from his room to the auditorium. On the way, as we were going down the narrow stairway adjacent to the study hall, he said to me, 'Joachim, you are much too afraid of me. You think that I am strict and very exacting. You seem to fear me. You don't dare speak freely, and you are always concerned about not pleasing me. Put aside your fear. You know that Don Bosco cares for you. If your mistakes are small, he ignores them; if they are big, he forgives.' "

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

As soon as he could find a spare moment in those hectic days, Don Bosco wrote to Countess Callori about some business matters. In closing, he asked for her prayers because, though the Oratory was doing well, there are no roses without thorns.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps one such thorn was the death, occurring a few days before, of a twelve-year-old pupil, Louis Borgna, and the very grave illness of another boy at Mirabello, Ernest Saccardi, whom Don Bosco had brought from Florence the previous December.<sup>4</sup> A persistent cough had been racking him for the last two months, notwithstanding the best medical care. He was so exemplary that his companions called him "The Angel," and, later, Father Bonetti wrote his biography. His previous illnesses and frail constitution caused his superior to fear for his life. With medical advice, Father Bonetti decided to send him to Turin for a change of air and better doctor's care. Saccardi was happy to go because he longed to be near Don Bosco, whom he greatly loved and looked upon as a spiritual father. Repeatedly he had said that death would not frighten him in the least if Don Bosco were at his bedside. And so, on June 30, one of the teachers took him to Turin, where Don Bosco was expecting him. The best doctors were called in, but their prognosis was very distressing, especially for those who loved the good lad. His heavenly crown, which he had made rich and beautiful, was ready. Tranquil and joyful with Don Bosco at his bedside, he breathed his last on July 4.

A few days later Don Bosco wrote at length to his mother about his edifying death. [Father Bonetti incorporated the main part of this letter in his biography of Ernest Saccardi, asserting that it conformed exactly to the original, which unfortunately cannot be traced.]

Ernest was on his feet much of the time and went to church for prayers and devotions, but once he took to his bed, he asked to receive the sacraments. His wish was granted. One evening, after confession, he admitted that he was worried about something. "I fear that my illness will drag on," he said, "and that you will send me home. Poor me, if that happens!"

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See p. 137. [Editor]

I hastened to assure him that, no matter what the illness, I would always keep him at the Oratory and would not let him lack anything for soul or body. Overjoyed, he exclaimed, "Then I shall always be with Don Bosco, one of his sons. May God be blessed!"

"Yet," I countered, "should God want to take you to Himself I think I would let you go. What do you say to this?"

"Oh, Father," he replied, "I'd be most willing."

He had no greater fear than to be sent home, and the mere mention of that possibility made him worse. "At home," he would say, "I'd have to face unavoidable spiritual dangers." I omit many things concerning the steady worsening of his illness, his devout reception of the sacraments, his patience, piety and fervor, which could be best treated in a booklet. I only say that when I asked him one day whether we should send for his mother, he replied: "No, Father, she might not get here in time to see me alive. She loves me a great deal and would suffer too much at seeing me dying. I couldn't stand it either."

On the eve of his death I asked him if I could do anything for him. "Tell my companions," he replied, "that tomorrow I shall be in heaven with Our Lady."

"Tonight," I went on, "we shall write to Father Julius Metti [your pastor]. Do you have any message for him?"

"Dear Father Julius," he exclaimed, "thanks for saving my soul by sending me here. God reward you!"

I was at his bedside again on July 4, at nine in the morning. Since he kept saying that he wanted to go to heaven with Our Lady that very day, I asked him what made him so sure.

"Our Lady Herself," he answered. "I have chosen Her as my Mother. She will keep Her word."

I then asked him if he had any message for his mother.

"Yes," he replied, "tell my mother that I thank her for all she has done for me and that I beg pardon for any sorrow I have caused her. Dearest mother," he went on, "you have made great sacrifices for me, but you certainly saved my soul. It is all that matters. You are losing a son on earth but are gaining one in heaven. I know that the news of my death will deeply grieve you, but, as a Christian, offer your sacrifice in suffrage of my soul."

I then told him to rest a while. A little later he continued, "Also tell my mother that I die happy and with no fear of death. My dearest mother, I am going to heaven! Be brave. I shall wait for you there. I will always pray to God for you. Say good-bye for me to all our relatives and tell them that

at death they will reap what they have sown in life." He wanted to say more, but he was so moved that I advised him to rest.

"One more thing I really must say," he insisted. "May I?"

"By all means! I'll carry out all your wishes."

"It hurts me to say it, Father, but I must get it off my chest. Please take care of it. Ask my mother to tell certain friends of mine she knows that I die regretting having ever met them. Before death surprises them, they should make amends for the scandal given me."

Ernest said many more things in his last moments which I hope to tell you personally when I see you next.

Eleven o'clock came, and he was praying and kissing the crucifix with joyful resignation. A few moments later he ceased to speak; he looked at the bystanders, and with a smile his soul flew to God.

Something unusual took place after his death—his body became so beautiful that it seemed like a painted angel. His companions were delighted. Thirty-six hours later it was still as comely as ever, with no unpleasant odor at all.

During his illness and immediately after his death special prayers were offered for him. His companions attended his imposing and devout funeral and accompanied his remains to the cemetery. All the superiors of this house and of the junior seminary at Mirabello, where he stayed a longer time, concur in saying that we have lost a precious pearl.

Two things ought to comfort you in your sorrow: 1. His death was most enviable in God's sight. This is the only thing that matters. 2. He never lacked anything for soul or body. In his last moments, at his bedside he had priests, clerics, and schoolmates praying for him.

Let us therefore submit to the will of God who directs all things to certain ends. Undoubtedly, God wished to take him to Himself lest his heart and mind be perverted by worldly allurements. His soul was ripe for heaven. Let us find comfort in the hope of meeting him again in a better life.

The news of this death was dispatched at once to Mirabello. Their sorrow was assuaged by the alleged repeated occurrence of a very unusual event. One evening during Benediction, Dominic Belmonte<sup>5</sup> and others in the choirloft noticed that the first and second graders

<sup>5</sup> Belmonte entered the Oratory in 1860 at the age of seventeen. After becoming a Salesian in 1864, he was assigned to Mirabello. Ordained a priest in 1870, he filled very important positions in the Salesian Society. He died at the Oratory in 1901. [Editor]

(about thirty in all) were hardly able to control their gestures and whispers of wonderment. Dashing into the playground after services, they excitedly told of having seen the Infant Jesus, most beautiful, in the Sacred Host. This singular incident was repeated the next day to the increasing wonder and joy of the younger boys who alone saw the prodigy.

Questioned individually by Father Anthony Belasio, who had been giving a short talk before Benediction, all gave the same description of the Infant. The priest thus became convinced that the apparition had really taken place. We came to know of this from Dominic Belmonte. Some believed this to have been a mere hallucination because the two clusters of flowers flanking the little stand supporting the monstrance could somehow have outlined the form of an infant. We will not cavil. We only say that, if it was an illusion, it rested on two great truths: that Jesus is really present in the monstrance and that He Himself has said, "Let the little children come to Me" [Mark 10, 14] and "My delight is to be with the children of men." [Cf. Prov. 8, 31]

Don Bosco was told of this occurrence and referred to it in a letter of his to the cleric Francis Cerruti<sup>6</sup> [a teacher at Mirabello] who was now nearing sacred orders:<sup>7</sup>

Turin, July 7, 1866

My dear Cerruti:

I have been given the familiar runaround, and since the end is nowhere in sight, let us take one sure step: at your convenience take a trip to Turin. We will discuss your patrimony and, if necessary, we will go to Saluggia to assure at least a part of it on the property you have there . . . We will talk about the rest.

If you are really happy, try to make the others happy at the junior seminary. You have heard of our dear Saccardi's death. You can tell his companions that they may pray to him because by now he certainly is in

<sup>6</sup> Cerruti entered the Oratory in 1856. He was one of the seventeen young men who joined Don Bosco and his fledgling Salesian Congregation in 1859. (*See* Vol. VI, pp. 181f) Ordained in 1866, he filled very important positions in the Salesian Society. He died at the Oratory in 1917 at the age of seventy-three. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting Don Bosco's petition to the king for financial assistance to him and to another ordinand. [Editor]

heaven with Rapetti,<sup>8</sup> a true copy of Dominic Savio. My greetings to Father Bonetti, to Father Provera *una cum caeteris hic habitantibus* [and to all the residents]. Pardon my Latin. I forgot I was writing to a professor!

If the Child Jesus continues to show Himself [in the Host], tell Father Bonetti to make a record of every least detail, especially by getting all who have seen Him to write their accounts separately. Later we'll take excerpts from all these reports.

Courage, Cerruti! There are battles ahead, but we are not alone. God is with us. His reward will make up for all our toil.

God bless us all and keep us on the way of our eternal salvation. Amen.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

Father Francis Cerruti was ordained a subdeacon on September 20 and a priest on December 22, 1866.

<sup>8</sup> Francis Rapetti, another saintly pupil, who had died on June 22. See pp. 183f. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 36

### *Fatherly Tips*

**I**N the summer of 1866, the war raging in central Europe<sup>1</sup> was also affecting northern Italy. For this reason Don Bosco stayed in Turin. He prayed and had his boys pray for his former pupils in the armed services and for many others who had been recommended to him. Our Lady seemed to be truly spreading Her protecting mantle over them.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile he was kept busy with Oratory affairs and the construction of the new church. From a report he sent to Francis Selmi, the provincial superintendent of schools, we gather that at the Oratory in 1865-66 there were six elementary grades, each averaging thirty-five pupils, taught by young clerics and senior students under the supervision of Father John Baptist Francesia and Father Celestine Durando. Classes were held from November to the end of July. Likewise there were evening classes for young apprentices, and vocal and instrumental music lessons for over five hundred boys.<sup>3</sup>

At this time, Don Bosco went to Lanzo to preside at the awarding of prizes at the Salesian school and to visit the ailing father of one of his clerics—John Baptist Verlucca, later a professor at the Turin seminary and a cathedral canon.<sup>4</sup>

Thursday, July 26, a red-letter day for the Oratory students, marked the close of the school year and the solemn awarding of prizes. At Mass that morning most pupils received Communion and heard Don Bosco's parting words followed by Benediction of the

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting details involving Prussia, Austria, France and Italy. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting a letter of thanks for such protection from a countess to Chevalier Oreglia. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting some requests for government subsidies, two letters of Don Bosco to benefactors assuring them of his prayers on their behalf, and details about a naval battle between Italy and Austria. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Blessed Sacrament. Later in the day, they assembled to hear the results of their efforts and the proclamation of the prize-winners, each pupil eagerly hoping to be one of them. The ceremony was made all the more solemn by the presence of distinguished guests and of Bishop Peter Rota, who preached.

On this occasion Father John Baptist Francesia, the prefect of studies, addressed the students with a sincerity that revealed how much he cared for them. That same day, Don Bosco wrote to the Mirabello pupils offering them the same "Tips for the Summer Vacation" that he had given to the boys at Lanzo and at the Oratory:

Turin, July 26, 1866

My beloved sons:

I had planned to see you this Sunday to tell you a few things, but, regretfully, I have had to change my plans. God willing, we will have this mutual consolation after the summer vacation, when we hope to be together not for just one day, but for a whole week. Meanwhile let me wish you a pleasant vacation and give you some fatherly tips which I deem necessary for your spiritual welfare:

1. I wish to thank Father Director, Father Prefect, and all the teachers, assistants and pupils for the kindness and patience shown me, and for all the prayers offered up for me. Continue to pray for me, my dear children. I assure you that I remember you daily in Holy Mass.

2. Let each of you purify his conscience before leaving, and make a firm resolution to keep it unsullied until your return on the appointed week or day. Do not seek excuses to delay your return, unless you are sick.

3. Upon your arrival home, promptly give my greetings and those of your superiors to your parents and relatives, to your pastor, teacher and anyone else toward whom you have an obligation of gratitude. By fulfilling this strict duty you will please others and will also benefit yourselves.

4. Do at home what you do here at school every day: meditation, Mass, spiritual reading, and the reception of the sacraments.

5. Let your conduct prove that a year at school was not lost on you. Be models of obedience, therefore, to your companions, relatives and friends; bear patiently any annoyance on the part of others; do not be difficult as regards food, rest, clothes and so on.

6. Let it never be said of you that you indulge in or listen to foul conversation. If one uses such talk in your hearing, do as St. Aloysius did: reprove the offender or immediately leave him.

7. Strive to narrate some edifying incident or story you may have heard, read or studied to those who are willing to listen, or else read some good books. Avoid bad books as a deadly poison for the soul.

I should certainly like to tell you many more things, my dear children, if the limits of a letter could allow it. Let me just add that you may come across people more learned and far more virtuous than I, but you will hardly find one more interested in your well-being. Hence, remember me every morning at Mass; on my part I shall do likewise.

How happy I would be and how fortunate you would be if you went home and came back without losing God's grace. As for the rest, relax, have fun, sing, laugh, go hiking, do anything you like, as long as you do not sin.

Have a good vacation, my dear children, and a safe return. May God's blessing accompany you at every step!

The prefect of studies may pass this letter around for reading or copying.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us, and may the Most Holy Virgin Mary assist and help us to stay on the path to heaven. Amen.

Ever yours affectionately in the Lord,  
Father John Bosco

P.S. Father Bonetti, please polish this up, as I had no time to go over it.

At the end of July, the signing of an armistice put an end to the war. While the interested parties met to draft a peace treaty, Don Bosco, in the quiet of his little room, continued to write letters and promote his *Letture Cattoliche*. He considered the spread of this publication as one of his main activities and obligations. At stake was the salvation of thousands of souls, to be achieved either by exposing the pitfalls of heretics or by ridding the market of bad books.

We now report a letter of Don Bosco to Father Raphael Cianetti of Lucca because the advice it contains may encourage timid priests in the exercise of their sacred ministry:

Turin, July 20, 1866

Dear Father Cianetti,

I have duly received the things sent to Mrs. Caturegli and passed them on to her son. As regards your fears in hearing confessions, just ignore them. A penitent will hardly know more than you do. Besides, our fitness

is determined by the success of the examinations and the will of our superiors. Moreover, in working for souls, one ounce of piety is worth more than a ton of knowledge. Have courage, then, and zealously hear confessions as your health permits. I have done, both privately and with our boys, what you requested, and we will continue to pray for your intention. I hope to take a trip to Lucca and talk over this matter when regular train service will be restored.

Give my humble regards to the archbishop, to Father Bertini, to Marchioness Burlamacchi and to her family. Strive to add at least ten thousand subscribers to our *Letture Cattoliche*.

The grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us. Amen.

Pray for us.

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

Chevalier Oreglia, head of the Oratory printshop, had returned from Rome in July and was seeing to the printing of the August, September, October and November issues of *Letture Cattoliche*, respectively entitled: *Biographical Sketch of a Lifer . . .*, *Daniel and His Three Companions in Babylon . . .*, *Life of Blessed Benedict Joseph Labre . . .* and *Life of St. Bernard of Menthon . . .*

## CHAPTER 37

### *First Spiritual Retreat for Salesians Only*

**F**ROM the time Don Bosco started to take in boarders<sup>1</sup> until 1866, the Oratory priests and clerics had made their yearly retreat, with edifying recollectedness, together with the pupils.<sup>2</sup> Except for church-prescribed retreats before ordinations, they had never had a retreat for themselves alone, though Don Bosco would occasionally take some of them to St. Ignatius' Shrine when he thought they might need to have their spirits boosted. This year he decided to gather his spiritual sons apart to meditate with them on the eternal truths and on the duties of the religious life. Thereby he also intended to satisfy those who wished that the [Salesian] Society would adopt some exterior practice proper to religious congregations. It was his policy to do things tactfully, and in such a way as to make them gradually attractive and voluntary rather than burdensome. We must remember that at this time the Salesians were mostly young clerics and priests and that a separate retreat meant sacrificing a few days of their [very short] vacation. These young Salesians, besides pursuing their own studies and taking exams, had taught and supervised classes all year long and would be on the job again from the middle of August to the middle of September, when those who had failed would return for summer courses and join those who had not gone home. During this hot season, these same priests and clerics would find their work even more taxing because they would have to take their boys on more frequent and longer walks to make their stay more pleasant—not to mention that while they were busy winding up the past school year in August, they would have a lot to do in September and October to get things

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. IV, pp. 139-46. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We have omitted the introductory part of this chapter dealing with matters of post-war settlements in Europe. [Editor]

ready for the new school year. A separate retreat raised these and other difficulties, and Don Bosco wanted to avoid them.

He therefore scheduled two spiritual retreats to be held respectively during the first and the last week of August. They were to last only three full days besides an introduction and conclusion, with four sermons each day. Other exercises would include a visit to the Blessed Sacrament before noon, the Litany of the Saints after the noon recreation, private spiritual reading, the Little Office of Our Lady, rosary and Benediction. Aside from the time dedicated to these practices of piety, the retreatants were free to converse and stroll about. It was Don Bosco's wish that while they seriously considered their spiritual life they should also rest and relax, and so he saw to it that appetizers and an extra course were served at dinner. His plans were enthusiastically accepted.

By this wise arrangement he imperceptibly achieved his goal. Then, the following year (1867), he urged them to keep silent from 10:30 to noon. In 1868, silence was introduced also in the afternoon from 4:30 to 5:30; infractions were benignly overlooked. In 1869 subdued conversation was recommended after breakfast and supper, and noisy games were blandly discouraged. Gradually such games were voluntarily given up also after the noon meal. Singing was still allowed after dinner and supper. Around 1870, the three full days of retreat had been expanded to six and even eight, and they were marked by silence and gravity also during recreation periods. The increased number of retreatants made this necessary for fuller spiritual results. The soul needs silence in order to put on that armor of faith which inspires courage and blunts the darts of the enemy.

But truthfully, at the Oratory such benefits were already being enjoyed even before yearly spiritual retreats became routine. According to Don Bosco's educational system the eternal truths were constantly presented to the Oratory boys through the monthly Exercise for a Happy Death and his unforgettable "Good Nights." Moreover, his Sunday sermons were so alive and heartfelt that, though long, they always seemed short. We have heard confreres and boys alike say that they would have joyfully stayed the whole day in church listening to Don Bosco. When speaking of death, of

the particular judgment, of the ingratitude of men toward God, or of those who keep putting off their return to God, Don Bosco would weep and make others weep. Several times he felt so moved that he had to break off his talk. This is why all wanted to make their confession to him.

He was equally impassioned even in familiar conversations and especially in the incessant counseling he gave to his children to remind them of paradise. Father Rua declared:

On hearing someone complaining of some affliction, too much work or the like, he would cheer him up, saying, "Remember that you are working for a good Master—God. Work and suffer for the love of Jesus Christ, who worked and suffered so much for you. A piece of paradise will make up for everything."

If he was told of some difficulty or of some personal opposition, he would say, "This won't happen in paradise." If someone mentioned long summer vacations, he would say, "We shall take our vacations in paradise." When he returned home from town, tired from begging, and his secretary would advise him to rest a while before getting to his desk or to the confessional, he would answer, "I will rest in paradise." After some protracted dispute, he would conclude, "We shall have no controversies in heaven. We shall all be of the same opinion."

He assured us that he had asked for and obtained from Our Lord, through Our Lady's intercession, a place in heaven for hundreds of thousands of his sons. Incessantly he raised his pupils' minds to heaven, instilling into them a most firm hope of one day being there with him. But he would always add, "Woe to him who does not keep this appointment! It may happen if we are not faithful to our religious duties." At other times, wishing to inspire confidence in Our Lady, he would end his advice with, "Do this in Mary's honor, and you will be pleased."

He often said to each of us, "If you are good, I will save you a place in heaven." And this he stated with such confidence as almost to make us believe that he had received a revelation from God.

When Father [Celestine] Durando went to the Mondovì seminary for his retreat before his ordination (he was ordained a priest on May 21, 1864), Bishop [Thomas] Ghilardi, knowing the Oratory well, often invited him to take a walk or a ride with him. "But I'm making my retreat," Father Durando would humbly object.

“Never mind!” the saintly and learned bishop would counter. “You are on retreat the whole year round at the Oratory.”

The Salesians who had chosen to make the first retreat gathered at Trofarello on August 2. Canon Lawrence Gastaldi preached the meditations and Don Bosco the instructions. As he did thereafter, his topics were: vocation and the means to preserve it; temporal and spiritual advantages of the religious life; the three vows, which as spiritual chains bind the religious to the superior, to the Vicar of Christ, and to God Himself. At the close of the retreat on August 6, he offered some thoughts as souvenirs. One of the retreatants, Joseph Campi, summarized them as follows:

*Mandavit illis (Deus) unicuique de proximo suo.* [He gave every one of them commandments concerning his neighbor—Sir, 17, 12]

*Ecce ego mitto vos sicut oves in medio luporum. Estote ergo prudentes sicut serpentes et simplices sicut columbae.* [Behold I am sending you forth like sheep in the midst of wolves. Be therefore wise as serpents and guileless as doves—Matt. 10, 16]

Good leadership requires three things:

1. Doing everything for God’s glory and the salvation of souls.
2. Showing one’s charges (especially at the start of the school year) that our only goal is their spiritual well-being. This must be stressed when teaching, supervising, correcting, rewarding, and at all times.
3. Studying the boys’ characters and striving to improve them. Never clash with them; always help them along. Build up; do not destroy.

The superior must be quick to forgive, slow to punish, and very prompt to forget.

When doubtful in difficult situations, commend yourselves to the love and power of the Eucharist during the Elevation of the Mass.

Have no favorites; ignore natural aversions.

One must learn how to obey before he can command.

Always strive to lessen ill will and to increase good will.

After their pleasant stay at Trofarello, the retreatants returned gladly to their duties. This retreat greatly comforted Don Bosco, though the Lord permitted that this initiative, like all else done for His glory, should be marked with some suffering. In one of his talks Don Bosco had spoken of the vow of obedience and its grave or light obligations as seen also in the light of the Fourth Com-

mandment. One of the retreatants, a priest, rationalized that his triennial vows were invalid because at the time he had taken them he thought that he would be bound only if orders were given "in virtue of holy obedience." He had already planned to leave Don Bosco, and so, after the sermon, he told his fellow retreatants that he did not consider himself bound by his vows, thus considerably upsetting them. They all rebutted his plea of ignorance, because for years Don Bosco had clearly explained the nature of the vows in his many conferences.

When told of this, Don Bosco kindly and prudently corrected the priest's views in the next sermon as dangerously subversive, but he mentioned no names. Foolhardily, however, notwithstanding his good theological background and his indebtedness to Don Bosco who had endlessly helped him for the past ten years, the priest rudely took leave of Don Bosco for good soon after the retreat. At about the same time two clerics also abandoned Don Bosco to seek a more comfortable state of life. In view of their intellectual talents Don Bosco had registered them at the University of Turin for courses in philosophy and literature, and during their stay he had incurred heavy expenses because in his generosity he never did things halfway. Hopefully they might have turned out to be excellent teachers for his schools, but they sorely disappointed him by their desertion.

Don Bosco referred to one of them in a letter of his to Countess Callori on August 10, 1866. After touching upon other matters, he went on:

Another piece of news . . . perhaps not unexpected: the cleric L. . . is no longer with us. The poor fellow let himself be carried away by fanciful dreams. Lured by repeated promises of help and assistance, he decided to leave. I was too easy with him. At any rate, I hope that he will not abandon his priestly vocation. It hurts me too that he involves you in this, saying that Countess Callori had told him that he had made a mistake in joining the Salesian Society and that, once he left the Oratory, the countess would immediately give him the necessary ecclesiastical patrimony, and so on. I believe this is all a fabrication of his fancy; but I thought that you should be informed of this. . . .

Concerning the above-mentioned cleric, Father John Bonetti added the following remarks to his chronicle: "Regretfully, I must state that this very close friend of mine fell short of the most valuable asset—perseverance. He left the Oratory rather uncivilly, to Don Bosco's deep disgust. He lacked humility, and in the last few years before his withdrawal he easily excused himself from every house rule." Father Guassardo, spiritual director of the *Colegio Nazionale* in Turin, who in 1864 had hosted Don Bosco and his boys at Capriata d'Orba, got him a teaching position in that school.

Shortly afterward a third cleric left, quite cordially, to enter the Ivrea diocesan seminary. On going to take his leave of Don Bosco, he saw that the good father was grieved. "You are going to a holy place," Don Bosco told him. "I can't say you are doing wrong. I can't stop you either. But you are not called to that life." Unfortunately this came true. He remained in the seminary for three years and took minor orders, but then, thinking that he had no priestly vocation, he left against his superiors' advice and went to medical school. He became a doctor and successfully practiced medicine for seventeen or eighteen years. Eventually, he tired of this too. Notwithstanding a good income, he fell into debt. Then, in his last two years of life, he fell victim to melancholy and to a persecution mania to such a degree that he had to be confined to a mental hospital, where he died heartbroken a few months later. Regrettably, he had also strayed somewhat from his faith and practices, though he always remained religious-minded and upright. In his last days he took stock of himself, spontaneously called for a priest, and died after receiving the comforts of our faith which he had so much loved and so exemplarily practiced at the Oratory and in the seminary.

After the retreat Don Bosco healed a sick pupil and gave another proof of his insight into other people's conscience, as Father James Bertolotto testified. "I entered the Oratory on August 8, 1866," he wrote. "The next morning, I got up with painful sores over my body which grew in number and intensity in the next few days. Unable to bear the pain any longer, I was taken to SS. Maurice and Lazarus Hospital in Turin for a checkup. I dutifully took all the medicines given me, but in vain. One afternoon, around four, as I stood on the

porticoes, crying, Father Rua, then prefect of the house, came by and suggested that, since Don Bosco was in, I go up to his room and ask for his blessing, I did so at once. Don Bosco made me kneel and then blessed me. The next morning all my sores and aches had disappeared. The previous day I had decided to return home, but through Don Bosco's healing I was able to remain at the Oratory for five more years."

Another former Oratory pupil confided the following to us: "Whenever I went to Turin, I made it a point to call at the Oratory and, if at all possible, to speak to Don Bosco who always welcomed me most amiably. Once I called on him with a sin on my soul. Not only did he not give me any sign of benevolence, but he totally ignored me. While letting others kiss his hand, he gave me neither a word nor a glance."

Toward the end of August Don Bosco got ready to return to Trofarello for the second spiritual retreat for Salesians which he was to preach with Father Bonetti.<sup>3</sup>

During the retreat Bishop [Alexander] Riccardi of Savona, a close friend of Don Bosco, paid him a visit. The bishop used to spend the summer at Trofarello with his sister, Countess Casassa, a generous benefactress of the Oratory, and he frequently went to the retreat house to chat or walk any Salesian who might have gone there for a rest. Whenever he called on Don Bosco in Turin, he would head straight for the dining room and linger after the meal to chat with the boys.

At the close of the spiritual retreat on September 2, the cleric Joseph Daghero made his triennial vows. He was the first to make his vows at an exclusive retreat for Salesians. Don Bosco continued to preach the yearly retreats to the Salesians till the last years of his life.

At the end of August a pupil died at the Oratory. Father Rua made this entry in the obituary: "Michael Ropolo, twelve, from Villafranca (Piedmont), died on August 31. A very fine lad who radiated candor; very diligent and pious; mourned by all. May the Lord send us more such beautiful souls."

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting a brief note from Don Bosco to a benefactress, and a letter to Countess Callori. [Editor]

A short time previously, another lad had been called to eternity. His obituary ran as follows: "Francis Nicolini died at the age of fourteen. This destitute boy was received into the Oratory in a state of extreme physical and spiritual poverty. Very alert and intelligent, he was gradually making progress when a slow disease brought him to death. He died at the Cottolengo Hospital, resigned, and comforted by the Last Sacraments."

## CHAPTER 38

### *The Help of Christians (Continued)*

**A**FTER closing the spiritual retreat at Trofarello, Don Bosco spent a few days at Busca, as he had promised, with Charles Bacchialoni, professor of Greek literature at the University of Turin. This renowned scholar, a fervent Catholic and exemplary family man, most warmly welcomed him.

Everywhere he went, Don Bosco brought joy and God's blessing. This visit was a further proof, as Father John Garino declared: "In September 1866, Don Bosco was a guest of Professor Bacchialoni at his summer home in Busca. One afternoon, the professor's two-year-old daughter Adelaide worried her mother by her cries, but Don Bosco, putting his hand on the child's head, said: 'We will make a nun of this little girl—a nun full of zeal and God's love!' It is a fact that she did join the Nuns of the Perpetual Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament and died at Vigevano in 1889 at the age of twenty-five. Bishop [Joseph] De Gaudenzi, her confessor, told the mother superior that Adelaide was a genuine saint and had died of love of God for whom she so ardently yearned. Mother Superior told me this yesterday, March 3, 1891, adding that Sister Adelaide's former confessor at Vicenza had told her the same thing."

Since Professor Bacchialoni was a man whom he could trust and who always willingly agreed to preside over the final examinations at the Oratory, at Mirabello, and at Lanzo, Don Bosco most probably consulted him about some changes that had become necessary in the Oratory clerics' training. To obviate defections, he was planning to set up philosophy courses for them at the Oratory itself. Accordingly, toward the end of August he wrote to the vicar capitular, Monsignor [Joseph] Zappata, as follows:

Turin, August 27, 1866

Very Reverend Monsignor,

The warnings to the clergy with which you have so wisely prefaced this year's ordo<sup>1</sup> have given me cause for serious reflection and consideration. I was particularly impressed by your deep concern for the steady decline in priestly vocations. Though I can do little, I still am anxious to contribute my little bit, so that my superior's wish may become a reality.

You earnestly suggest that we do our utmost to instill piety in our pupils, so as to fill the regretful vacancies left by priests called to their eternal rest.

In response to your exhortation, we have decided, without public notice, to have our students at the Oratory and at Lanzo formed to piety and a priestly spirit. As a general rule, therefore, from now on no boy will be accepted at the Oratory for secondary school unless he intends to become a priest. Everyone, however, will be entirely free at the end of his secondary studies to pursue whatever vocation he chooses. Each year, so far, fifty to fifty-five boys have continued on to the priesthood; of these, twenty-five or thirty belong to and have asked to stay in the archdiocese of Turin. I have a well-grounded hope that their number will notably increase in the future.

As for those who are now wearing the clerical habit, I must say that trouble has arisen which I am anxious to eliminate. I speak of defections. In past years, very rarely an Oratory pupil gave up his priestly studies, but of late such cases are regretfully becoming more frequent both among those who commute to the seminary and among those who live at the Oratory. There are probably many reasons: our times, the political climate, the slim hopes for a comfortable priestly life, all sorts of reading that easily fall into their hands. Whatever the cause, the fact is that defections among clerical students are, alas, very frequent, as you must certainly realize.

We see them even among our own clerics; although we have for some time now been improving their living conditions and upgrading their teaching. To remedy this evil and promote God's greater glory, I respectfully ask that the clerics attached to the Oratory pursue their studies in this house, as follows:

1. Their curriculum will be identical to that of the seminary. Examinations are also to be taken at the seminary at the scheduled times.

<sup>1</sup> A calendar listing the liturgical offices and feasts for each day of the year. [Editor]

2. If, after one year's experiment as above, there should be no noticeable intellectual and moral improvement, the Oratory clerics will resume attending courses at the seminary.

This arrangement, I believe, will safeguard these clerics from many moral dangers, especially from salacious illustrations, news vendors' hawkings, gibes and insults which especially the younger ones have had to put up with on their way to and from classes.

These things, believe me, have noticeably cooled piety in some, and have led others to give up a vocation which so often makes such hard demands of them . . . .

I submit the names of the professors I plan to assign to teach them, subject to your approval.

I have only expressed my view, leaving the matter entirely to what your enlightened prudence may decide

Your obedient servant,  
Father John Bosco

On September 3, a letter from the pro-vicar, Canon Alexander Vogliotti, informed Don Bosco that his request was denied. Respectfully, on September 6, Don Bosco again pressed for this favor, and some time later it was fully granted.

Meanwhile, the cholera had resumed its virulence and was ravaging various parts of Europe, including Italy. At the same time, confidence in the protection of Mary, Help of Christians was gaining ground.<sup>2</sup> Ever since the beginning of the year rumor had it that contributors to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians would be spared from the epidemic. From Florence, a lady thus wrote to Don Bosco:

Florence, January 7, 1866

Very Reverend Father,

Pardon my daring in writing to you, but I am very uneasy about having misunderstood your words.

In the course of a conversation about contributions being made to your new church, I heard some ladies state that you had assured them that you

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a letter from the future Cardinal Thomas Martinelli sending an offering for the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. [Editor]

could “unhesitatingly say that no one who gave even as little as a *centesimo* for this work would die of cholera.”

That, too, is the way I seem to have understood it. On the other hand, I heard several very respectable priests, well known to you too, deny that you had made or could make such an assertion. Furthermore they quoted you as saying that such claims were the fruit of a lively imagination and had no basis in fact. So I earnestly ask that you kindly write to me soon as possible and tell me whether you really intended to give such an assurance or whether we misunderstood you. I certainly do not want to harm the cause by continuing to spread such claims. . . .

Euphrosine Cavoni

We do not know Don Bosco’s reply to the lady, but that this hope of hers was no illusion can be inferred from the following excerpt of Marchioness Isabelle Gerini’s letter to Don Bosco, dated Florence, September 13, 1866: “I am deeply consoled by your confirmation that we shall be safeguarded from cholera. We will certainly have great trust in Mary, Help of Christians, to whom I heartily recommend myself.”

Several other incidents proved Mary’s motherly protection for those who strove to help Don Bosco in building Her church in Valdocco. Mrs. Caroline Guenzati Rivolta wrote to us from Milan on February 25, 1909:

In 1866 cholera raged over all Italy. Don Bosco had sent my parents a bulk of lottery tickets with a promise that none of those who bought them would die of cholera. As a matter of fact, my mother can confirm that not one of those who bought tickets from her died of cholera. Only one person contracted it, but he recovered and lived.

Don Bosco had also assured his boys that if they kept in the state of grace and wore Our Lady’s medal, their heavenly Mother would protect them from the scourge. Nevertheless, not wishing to tempt God, he prudently took necessary precautions. Father John Garino declared:

In 1866 the cholera wrought havoc in Busca, my native town. Some business had brought me there shortly before the epidemic broke out, and so I hurried to settle my affairs and return as quickly as possible to the

Mirabello junior seminary where I was stationed. Afraid that I might carry the epidemic there, Don Bosco directed me to remain at Busca and help my pastor. Knowing that my financial situation was rather shaky, he generously subsidized me during the two or three months I had to live there. I make this known and testify to it that all may see how charitable Don Bosco was. He provided for all and forgot no one.

I also wish to state that when I was a young cleric at the Oratory, Don Bosco found a rich lady to care for my financial needs. She really was very solicitous for me and sent Don Bosco money for me at stated times. Now and then Don Bosco would ask if I needed anything, urging me to be frank with him. On such occasions, my mind would flash back to what he had told me on the occasion of my father's death in February, 1858: "Remember, Garino, that you will always have a father in me." And such he truly was to the end.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting at this point a digression about revolts, the cholera epidemic, and the confiscation of religious properties in Sicily. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 39

### *The Help of Christians (Continued)*

**I**N September [1866] Don Bosco obtained a further extension on the deadline for his lottery. In the meantime, though scaffolding had been erected for the dome of the new church, Don Bosco hesitated to go ahead according to plans because of a lack of funds. Work came to a standstill for nearly a month while plans were revised. Unexpectedly Senator Anthony Cotta, a great benefactor of Don Bosco, called on him one day to urge him to go ahead with the original plans because funds would not be wanting.<sup>1</sup>

The brief suspension of work had not gone unnoticed. When Paul Albera called at the chancery one day, an official asked him, "How about the dome? Will it ever be built?"

"It seems that Senator Cotta will defray at least part of the cost," Albera answered.

"It would be better if he gave that money to the poor," the official retorted.

But Mary, Help of Christians and the generous senator thought otherwise. The eighty-three-year-old Cotta was nearly dying when, one day, Don Bosco called on him.

"A few more minutes and I'll be gone," the senator whispered.

"Not quite," Don Bosco countered. "Our Lady still needs you here. You must live to help me build Her church."

"I'd gladly do so, but my time is up. There is no longer any hope."

"What would you do if Mary, Help of Christians were to cure you?"

Struck by the question and its confident tone, the senator replied, "If I am cured, I promise your church two thousand lire monthly for six months."

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

“Good!” Don Bosco went on. “I’m going back to the Oratory and will have so many prayers offered up to Mary, Help of Christians that I hope you will be cured. Have trust in Her. She is called ‘Virgin Most Powerful.’” He then prayed for the patient and blessed him.

Three days later, Senator Cotta returned the visit.

“Here I am,” he said. “To the amazement of everyone and contrary to all expectations, Our Lady has cured me. Here are the two thousand lire I promised for this month.”

The same amount he regularly paid for the next five months and lived some three more years in fairly good health, deeply grateful to Our Lady for the signal favor he had received. He often brought Don Bosco other donations, remarking, “The more I support your work, the more my business prospers. God actually gives me back even in this life a hundredfold for what I give for His sake.”

We may add that Marquis [Dominic] Fassati and Baron [Charles] Bianco of Barbania used to say the same thing, according to the testimony of Father Celestine Durando, Father Rua and others.

When the dome was completed Don Bosco mailed an invitation to benefactors and friends to attend the ceremony of the laying of the last brick on September 23 at 2:30 in the afternoon.<sup>2</sup>

That same evening, Don Bosco kept his promise to give the clerical habit to a young man in the Church of St. Frances de Sales in the presence of all the community. We have already narrated<sup>3</sup> that in 1864, Don Bosco, after foretelling the death of two boys—[Paul] Aiachini and [Francis] Vicini—went on to predict that their companion, Dominic Tomatis, would share many a meal with him—that is to say, he would become a Salesian and live a long life. One night Tomatis had an unforgettable dream, which was to comfort him greatly in all the trials of his life. His deceased friend Francis Vicini appeared to him in radiance and beauty. Taking Tomatis by the hand, he led him to the balcony and pointed to the statue of Our Lady on the dome of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Though only the foundations of the church then existed,

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 386ff. [Editor]

Tomatis saw the dome as it actually would be later built in all its imposing majesty. "Do you see Her?" Vicini asked him. "This is your life. Faithfully follow Don Bosco's advice and you will come to heaven with me." While Vicini was speaking, Tomatis kept his gaze fixed on him, and seemingly he could clearly see how pleased Vicini was with the holy affection he still felt for him.

Some few days later, Tomatis went to Don Bosco for confession and was quite surprised to hear him say the same thing he had heard in his dream. On another occasion Don Bosco narrated a dream in which he saw swords hanging over every boy's bed and a number on each forehead symbolizing the years he would still live. All went to Don Bosco to find out about themselves. Tomatis received this reply: "I could tell you the day and the hour, but it would do you no good now. Do not worry about it. You have yet a long life ahead of you. Be satisfied with this much. Strive to improve yourself because you will be one of Don Bosco's priests and you will have to help him save many souls."

These words were the first seeds of his religious and priestly vocation, for until now he had never even given a thought to it. Earnestly continuing his studies, he ranked first in his third and fourth years of secondary school. Toward the end of his last course, however, forgetting his dream and Don Bosco's advice, he began having second thoughts about his vocation. During his summer vacation at home Trinità di Mondovì, he decided to join two uncles of his in the Society of Jesus. The one he consulted advised him to think it over seriously before taking the step. He complied, prayed, readied the necessary papers, and made his application. He was accepted and prepared to leave for Monaco with another young man from the Cottolengo Institute of Turin. Before his departure, however, he went to the Oratory to make his confession to Don Bosco and bid him good-bye.

After confession Don Bosco asked him, "Has our tailor already measured you for a cassock?"

"But, Father, I have decided to join the Jesuits. It's all settled!"

"Never mind!" Don Bosco replied. "Go to the tailor for your measurements."

"But I must leave today for the novitiate."

“Look,” Don Bosco went on, “in a few days the last brick will be placed on the dome of our church, and we shall have a fine little celebration. On that day I will bless you and give you the clerical habit. Stay for dinner. Then this evening you can go to the tailor for your measurements.”

“But I must leave at two this afternoon!”

With majestic mien Don Bosco went on, “Have you, then, forgotten all we have talked about, all I told you in past years and the many souls you must help me save?” And he repeated what Vicini had told Tomatis in that dream. This brought the memory of his dearest friend vividly back to him. Immediately he changed his mind completely and stayed for dinner. Shortly after, a Jesuit priest, Father Porcheddu, came to fetch him.

“I am not coming,” Dominic informed him.

“Why not?”

“Because Don Bosco made me change my mind.”

“What are you going to do, then?”

“Stay with him.”

“But all your papers have been sent in already.”

“I am sorry, but that’s the way it is.”

“What shall I tell your uncle?”

“Whatever you like, but I am not coming.”

“Very well, have it your way.”

On Sunday, September 23, Tomatis received the cassock. From that moment on he had no more doubts about his vocation, despite difficulties and disappointments. For the past thirty-seven years he has been a Salesian missionary in South America. It is remarkable, too, how Don Bosco’s prediction about Tomatis’ long life came true, notwithstanding his many brushes with death. Once, as he was swimming alone off Varazze<sup>4</sup> [on the Italian Riviera], he was carried far out to sea by an undertow. Exhausted and about to drown, he called on Mary, Help of Christians and managed to stand upright. At that moment his feet touched the submerged point of a reef. Resting a while, he mustered enough strength to swim back to shore. His life was again in jeopardy in Chile when he attempted to wade through a river much swollen by recent rainfalls. Three

<sup>4</sup> The local Salesian school was opened in 1872. [Editor]

gauchos warned him that the current would carry him off, but, trusting in Don Bosco's promise, he waded through the river and safely reached the opposite bank.

Father Dominic Tomatis himself told us of these incidents.<sup>5</sup> They further prove Don Bosco's charism for knowing whether or not one was called to a religious or priestly vocation. On this score Father Francis Dalmazzo<sup>6</sup> testified as follows:

Once I told Don Bosco that a seminarian in Milan—a former Oratory pupil of mine—had written to me that he was going to become a Jesuit and was leaving for the novitiate. Don Bosco was greatly surprised at the news and, to my observation that such a decision seemed but natural since the boy had always been a good though lively student, he replied: "Write and ask him to let you know the day he returns to Milan." I wrote but got no answer. Still, I came to know that after three months he left the novitiate to return to Milan.

Father Peter Gallo,<sup>7</sup> a Salesian, told us that one winter morning in 1866, while he was munching his breakfast roll with one of his friends on the porticoes, he spotted Don Bosco coming out of church to return to his room. Both boys went to greet him. Don Bosco lingered with them and, placing his hand first on Gallo's head and then on his companion's, said, "*Unus assumetur, et alter relinquetur.*" [One will be taken and one will be left—Matt. 24, 40] We all know the priestly zeal of Father Peter Gallo. His companion donned the clerical habit, but later put it aside, went to college, majored in literature, and became a secondary school teacher.

After the September 23 celebrations [of the completion of the dome] Don Bosco went to Bergamo, where Bishop [Peter] Speranza eagerly awaited him. On September 9, 1864, Father Momolo Berzi had written from Chiuduno to the Salesian cleric, Henry Bonetti, "I believe no one in our diocese enjoys such esteem

<sup>5</sup> Father Dominic Tomatis died in Santiago, Chile on October 8, 1912 at the age of sixty-three, forty-six years after Don Bosco's prediction. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> Father Dalmazzo (1845-1895) entered the Oratory as a rhetoric student in 1860. (See Vol. VI, pp. 453ff) After his ordination in 1868 he filled important positions in the Salesian Society, his last assignment being rector of the Catanzaro diocesan seminary, where he died on March 10, 1895. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> Father Peter Gallo died on April 30, 1920. [Editor]

and prestige with our bishop as your most pious and most zealous Don Bosco.”

At Bergamo Don Bosco gave a spiritual retreat to the city’s clergy and to the pupils of St. Alexander’s School. He was hosted by Count Medolago, with whom he had struck up a friendship.

Father Louis Guanella, the founder of the Servants of Charity, wrote, “While preaching the seminarians’ spiritual retreat at Bergamo in 1866, Don Bosco won all their hearts—so much so that when one of them came to Como, he enthused these seminarians by recounting what Don Bosco had said and done. I too developed so strong and ever-growing an affection for Don Bosco that when I became a priest in 1870 I hastened to Turin to see him. I also knew for certain that the superiors of the Bergamo seminary admired Don Bosco’s clear, forceful presentation of any topic, sacred or profane.”

The remembrance of Don Bosco’s retreat of 1861<sup>8</sup> must have been very vivid indeed at Bergamo in 1866, for it is still a fresh topic of discussion now [in 1912]. Concerning that retreat, Bishop Angelo Cattaneo, vicar apostolic of South Honan, wrote to Father Rua on April 5, 1909, from Nou-jang-Fou [China] as follows:

Speaking of Don Bosco, I like to recall (it seems but yesterday to me) that I was greatly blessed and consoled in making my general confession to him when, shortly before Lent in 1861, he came to preach a spiritual retreat to the Bergamo seminarians at the invitation of their rector, Father Carminati. I was then sixteen. Wishing to make a general confession, I began to read my sins from a long list I had written. Drawing me to himself in a warm embrace, he took my paper and threw it into the fire. I was speechless at this unexpected turn of events, but he immediately cheered me, saying, “I will tell you all your sins myself.” To my vast astonishment, he indeed told me all my sins, one by one, just as I had written them down myself. You may imagine my surprise and emotion. I burst into tears of true sorrow and consolation.

Bishop Abbondio Cavadini of Mangalore, India, a former Bergamo seminarian, while visiting St. Thomas Orphanage in Mylapore (Madras) in 1909, told its director, Father George Tomatis,

<sup>8</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 495ff. [Editor]

that he had made the retreat which Don Bosco had preached in Bergamo in 1861. He recalled the efficacy of his words, adding that during the sermon on the Four Last Things Don Bosco broke into sobs and tears and was forced to stop. In the following sermon, he apologized for his involuntary interruption in such a way that he impressed the retreatants even more deeply.

Bishop Speranza, knowing Don Bosco's worth, asked him to investigate the doctrinal orthodoxy of Father Angelo Berzi, a very learned but not equally humble theology professor in the Brescia seminary. This priest so brilliantly discoursed on Our Lady, the Eucharist and the Church that the young seminarians would never tire of listening to him. He exhorted them to make a total oblation of themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to go to the foreign missions if they felt the call, and even to vow such a mission. Nevertheless, he also aired views that did not sound quite orthodox. Some opinions of his, though only privately given, savored of heresy, particularly his opinion that Christ's human nature was *ab eterno* [from eternity]. Bishop Jerome Verzeri, his ordinary, looked into the matter and dismissed him from the seminary along with five or six of his warmest seminarian admirers. Father Berzi went to Rome to defend himself, but he frequently returned to Bergamo. Quite concerned by this, Bishop Speranza asked Don Bosco to investigate his conduct and teachings. It was no easy task because doctrinal innovators usually mask false teachings in ambiguous words. Don Bosco prudently interviewed many persons who had dealt confidentially with Father Berzi and drew the conclusion that his theology was infected with agnosticism or was very much akin to it. He diagnosed perfectly. Years later, this theologian asserted that through Holy Communion one could reach such a degree of sanctity that he became impeccable even if he found himself in the most dangerous occasion of sin and that, furthermore, in this state any sinful act of his ceased to be sinful. To top it all, he even asserted that he was convinced that he himself had reached this pinnacle of sanctity.

Don Bosco reported his findings to Bishop Speranza, suggesting that Father Berzi be no longer permitted to hear confessions. In narrating this incident to Father Albera at Marseilles in 1881, Don

Bosco attributed this priest's errors to softening of the brain, as he had already told the bishop of Bergamo and several prelates in Rome. The poor priest was still living in 1881, and every year he sought relief for his infirmities in sea bathing at Sampierdarena. So sickly was he that he could no longer say Mass or read his breviary.

Toward the end of September Don Bosco wrote to a steady benefactress of his, Mother Magdalen Galeffi of the Oblates of St. Frances of Rome, at Tor de' Specchi [in Rome]. The number of sisters had declined and the superioress, eager to inject new life into her formerly flourishing community, had written to Don Bosco for advice. His reply follows:

Turin, September 29, 1866

Reverend Mother:

I have received your letter and donation (five scudi) for our poor boys. We all thank you and will ask God to reward you abundantly.

Don't worry about the small number of your sisters. Charity and fervor, rather than numbers, give God glory. Perhaps, before the year is over, I shall have a chance to pay my respects personally and discuss the matters of your letter. I will certainly pray for that family who you say is greatly afflicted. Remind them that this life's thorns are changed into flowers in the next.

God bless you and your religious family and make saints of all of you!

I recommend my poor soul and the souls of my boys to your holy prayers.

Gratefully yours,  
Father John Bosco

## CHAPTER 40

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**O**N July 9, 1886, Don Bosco was informed by the Ancona Relief Committee that, as previously agreed, six or eight more orphans would be sent to the Oratory as soon as railroad service between Ancona and Turin was restored. In fact, six lads arrived at the beginning of August and were received by Father Rua in Don Bosco's absence.<sup>1</sup> Some had an insolent, contemptuous, arrogant look about them. Uncouth, hot-tempered and selfish, they were quite unruly, having been left to their own devices for too many months. They carried knives and were capable of using them in a fight. The Oratory superiors were aware of this but did not think it wise at the moment to disarm them because they stayed together and would have resisted any such attempt. The other boys shied away from them for fear of trouble. As it was, shortly afterward, the shoemakers' craftsman was knifed by one of them.

The day after their arrival they were presented to Don Bosco as he was pacing through the porticoes. Though they did not bother to remove their caps, Don Bosco tried to make friends with them.

"How was your trip?" he asked smilingly. "And how are you?"

"No good!"

"Why?"

"Because we don't like it here. We want to go home."

"Why don't you like it here?"

"It's the food. It's plain slop."

"That's no way to talk. You get the same food as your companions, the other boys from Ancona, and your superiors. I eat it too!"

"If you like that stuff, that's your business."

<sup>1</sup> These two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

“Do you know whom you are talking to?”

“We don’t care!”

“In that case, it’s useless to go on talking.”

Calmly, Don Bosco walked away with a very large group of boys who had crowded around him and had witnessed this exchange in shock and anger. One lad was itching to get at those fellows and teach them a lesson, but someone prudently whispered, “Don’t! They carry knives and know how to use them!” Certainly, an attempt of that kind, under those circumstances, could have had serious consequences. On their part, the six young toughs rudely shrugged their shoulders and defiantly withdrew to a corner of the playground.

But Don Bosco’s magic power over youth and his gift of taming the most difficult characters did not fail even in this case. Often enough he had seen violent insubordination of new arrivals during their first days at the Oratory, but he had succeeded in turning wild beasts into docile lambs and in bringing out the good which always lies deep in the heart of the young. He avoided confrontations; instead he soothed tempers, exposed and brought to light the good which is latent in every person, and gradually drew all to God. His method produced long-lasting effects. His all-embracing amiability prepared, even from among street urchins, high-principled individuals for every rank of society.

Taking these newcomers one by one, Don Bosco amiably won them over, for, essentially, nearly all were good-hearted, and he found them willing to fraternize with other boys. Experienced as he was, he studied their talents and aptitudes and then put them to study or to work. The boys cooperated and adjusted to their new environment.

All in all, twenty Ancona orphans were educated at the Oratory and practically all turned out well. Many years later Don Bosco had occasion to visit Ancona and was astonished at the demonstrations of affection and good will toward the Oratory from one orphan who had been rather unruly. The last letter Don Bosco received from the Ancona committee was one of sincere gratitude and thanks.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 41

### *A Mystery Dog*

**A**S was his custom every year, Don Bosco went to Becchi with a group of boys for the feast of the Holy Rosary, October 7, 1866. While there, in full agreement with Father [Anthony] Cinzano, pastor of Castelnuovo, he set up a local center for spreading good books, much like those he had erected in larger cities in 1860.<sup>1</sup> He also paid a visit to the Moglia farm at Moncucco.<sup>2</sup> On the way he met friends and stopped a while in Buttigliera. Then he went on, accompanied a good part of the way by Father [Joseph] Vaccarino, the local pastor. It was nearly sunset when they parted company in the wooded valley between Moriondo and Moncucco. Night was soon on him dark and cloudy, though without rain. The path took him through robber-infested areas where farmhouses and vineyards were guarded by ferocious mastiffs. To make matters worse, he wandered off the path because of hedges and obstacles and had to make wide detours. Heavily perspiring, he came to the foot of a steep hill and plodded upward. Soon he had to halt and catch his breath. "How I wish Grigio<sup>3</sup> were here!" he exclaimed. "He would get me out of this mess!" One would think that the mysterious dog was there listening, for he heard a short bark, then another, and lo, there was Grigio excitedly dashing down the hill and joyfully leaping all over him. The dog led the way for nearly two miles and got Don Bosco to where he was expected. As they passed one farmhouse, two huge dogs furiously lunged at Don Bosco, but in no time Grigio took them on and so badly mauled them that they had to retreat with painful howls

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VI, p. 279. This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> In February 1828, thirteen-year-old John Bosco, forced to leave home because of his stepbrother's harassment, had found shelter and work at this farm. See Vol. I, pp. 143-52. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> Don Bosco's mystery dog. See Vol. IV, pp. 496-502; Vol. VII, p. 85. [Editor]

which brought their masters out to see what had happened. When Don Bosco reached the house where he was expected, all were amazed to see such a handsome dog, and they bombarded Don Bosco with questions as to where he had found him. When they sat down to supper, Grigio withdrew to a corner. "Let's feed Grigio now," Mr. Moglia remarked at the end of the meal, but, to everybody's surprise, Grigio was nowhere to be found, though the doors and windows were closed and the farm dogs had given no alarm of any sort. A search was made of the upper rooms, but Grigio had vanished and was never seen again in those parts.

Don Bosco narrated this incident a few years later when he was asked in familiar conversation whether he had seen Grigio since his last appearance in 1855. "Yes," he answered. "I saw Grigio again a number of times when I found myself out late at night without a companion." We and many others heard this narrative.

In early October Don Bosco informed the pupils' parents that school would reopen at the Oratory, at Mirabello and at Lanzo on October 19. The Oratory's boarding students numbered three hundred and fifteen.<sup>4</sup>

While reminding superiors of their duty to prevent disorders and firmly enforce house rules as safeguards of morality, Don Bosco constantly exhorted all to be charitable, kind and forbearing. To those who were brusque, he would say, "I want you to win your pupils' good will by your manner of dealing with them. If you must talk to them, season your words with kindness." To another: "You can't catch flies with vinegar." One day he took the Oratory's prefect aside and said to him quite seriously, "My dear Father Rua, I suggest you open an olive oil dealership."

"An oil dealership?" the prefect exclaimed in surprise.

"Yes!"

"But, Don Bosco, That's no enterprise for a religious."

"It surely is! You are the prefect here and your duties include maintenance. I think I hear doors creaking. A drop of oil can do wonders."

"Even so, Father, I don't see the need of starting an oil dealership. . . ."

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

“And then,” Don Bosco went on, breaking into a smile and distinctly stressing his words, “your dependents are creaking too in their own way. . . . You know what I’m driving at, don’t you? In dealing with them, use a little oil. . . .”

Father Rua understood. Knowing how good, affable and kind he became—he was regarded as Don Bosco’s double—we can see that Don Bosco’s suggestions were not wasted on him or on others. To those assigned to the festive oratories, Don Bosco also warmly recommended unalterable patience.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting at this point some unimportant details. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 42

### *The Help of Christians (Continued)*

THE Oratory pupils always found a loving Mother in Mary, Help of Christians, and a warm-hearted father in Don Bosco. A past pupil, Dominic Battagliotti, bears this out:

Turin, January 4, 1867

I am an Oratory pupil, and I have been freed from very serious trouble through the intercession of the august Queen of Heaven. Anxious for a good education, I eagerly sought help and advice from my good pastor who got me enrolled at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. I was so thrilled that I could hardly wait to go there for a refresher course in August. However, a serious accident dashed all my hopes. One evening in May, I fell from a hayloft to the cobbled pavement below and remained unconscious for two days. Everyone thought I would die at any moment. My whole body seemed to be broken, but thanks to the doctor and to my parents' solicitous care, I regained consciousness. Gradually my hopes for recovery increased, but when I thought that my troubles were over, I realized that my mental faculties had been impaired.

Grieved beyond words at having all my hopes crushed, I made several attempts to study and learn, but could neither grasp nor remember what I had read. Still, I wanted to learn, and so, encouraged by my pastor, I decided to report to the Oratory and join other companions of mine and give it a try.

There I hit a new despondent low, because no matter how much I studied or paid attention in class, I could neither understand nor remember a thing. Seeing my companions progressing every day, while my mind remained a perfect blank, I spent my days in sadness and tears.

One morning I went into the sacristy where Don Bosco was hearing confessions. "Don Bosco, please rid me of my headache," I cried out, bursting into tears.

“My son,” he said deeply moved, “I wish I could. Tell me: have you prayed to Mary, Help of Christians? Have you faith in Our Lord’s goodness and in the power of His Most Blessed Mother Mary?”

“I have, and I’m doing all I can to increase it.”

“Come, then, hear Holy Mass devoutly, and after that we will have a talk. Don’t lose hope!”

After Mass, he took me to Our Lady’s altar and said: “Recite three times daily for nine days a *Pater, Ave* and *Gloria* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and a *Salve Regina* with the invocation, ‘Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.’ If you are cured, acknowledge it as a favor from Mary, Help of Christians, and make an offering toward Her church.”

“I will say the prayers, but I have no money for a donation.”

“You can pray that the Blessed Virgin may inspire a devotee of Hers to make a donation. You will show your gratitude to your heavenly Benefactress by making known the favor you will have received.”

I promised everything and felt such faith in my heart that I almost believed I was already cured. But it was only an illusion. My headaches got worse, my mind was muddled as never before, and my memory was as bad as ever. I prayed daily and asked my superiors and companions to pray for me, but with no result. By the last day of the novena, I felt much worse. I ached all over and felt as if sharp nails were being driven into my brain. That evening, heartbroken, I again went to Don Bosco.

“How are you? Do you feel any better?” he asked at once.

“No, Father, I feel much worse. I have no more hope.”

“That won’t do, son. Why give up? Go and say your usual prayers, fully trusting in Mary, Help of Christians, and keep hoping.”

I did as he said and went to bed. While I was trying to soothe my pains with hope, I felt as if a hand were pushing and lifting my whole body. I cannot tell if I was awake or asleep, but I experienced a new vigor coursing through my whole body, and I exclaimed, “I am cured! All my pains are gone!” Thrilled with joy, I could hardly sleep that night. This happiness increased a thousandfold when I found that I could learn my lessons, do my homework and clearly grasp whatever the teacher said. I must add that other physical ailments were likewise cured so that I was able to resume all my ordinary tasks, with a well-founded hope of pursuing my studies successfully and, God willing, one day becoming a priest.

My joy must be easily imagined. I cried with happiness as I knelt at Mary’s altar to thank Her. I shall always make known the great favor I received through Her powerful intercession.

If some schoolmate of mine may come across this statement, let him remember in case of need the power of Mary, Help of Christians.

I have written the above account in my own hand for the record and give my permission to publicize it in any way for God's greater glory and the honor of the august Queen of Heaven.

Dominic Battagliotti

The long-desired peace treaty between Italy and Austria was finally signed in Vienna on October 3, 1866. After the withdrawal of Austrian troops, a plebiscite was held between October 21 and 27 overwhelmingly opting for unification with Italy. Meanwhile, a government decree, dated October 22, allowed all exiled bishops to return to their sees, except those who sought refuge in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Among the first to be allowed to return after a six-month exile was Bishop Peter Rota of Guastalla. The Oratory pupils bade him a fond farewell on November 7, happy that his exile was over, but also regretting to lose him. Father Francesia voiced the sentiments of Don Bosco and of all the Oratory residents in a fine poem. Upon his arrival at Guastalla, Bishop Rota, recalling his stay in Turin, wrote to the editor of *Unità Cattolica* to thank all who had kindly hosted him. His letter is a glowing tribute to Turin and to Piedmont. We quote an excerpt referring to the Oratory. The bishop wrote:

I cannot and must not forget that incomparable man who gave me hospitality at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, solicitously looked after my comfort, and edified me with his virtue, zeal and wonders of charity. The seven or eight hundred lads—destitute for the most part—to whom he gives an academic or trade education and brings up in the holy fear of God, the priests and clerics who dedicate themselves to their education and lead a harder life than saintly monks of old, the home which shelters such a large family, and the magnificent church now rising beside it can indeed be looked upon in this day and age as prodigies.

To his flock and to his clergy the bishop repeated what we ourselves heard him say while at the Oratory: that the happiest days of

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

his life were those spent in Turin with Don Bosco. Bishop Rota also wrote several letters to Father John Cagliero which we carefully preserve in our archives. We shall quote from them on occasion. For instance, in a letter of December 4, he wrote: "I cherish more and more my recollections of Turin. When I speak of them, all my listeners are wonderfully impressed. If I did not have witnesses, they would think I am exaggerating." He wrote again on December 9, renewing his thanks and giving Don Bosco sundry news.<sup>2</sup>

The government's hateful, slanderous persecution of the clergy and plundering of church property could not but adversely influence parents of little faith whose sons expressed a desire to consecrate their lives to God's service as priests or religious. To offset this, the December issue of *Letture Cattoliche* entitled *Valentino, or A Thwarted Vocation*, authored by Don Bosco, described the consequences of such opposition and the frightful punishment befalling the ill-advised father. . . . Along with this booklet, subscribers also received *Il Galantuomo*, Don Bosco's almanac.

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 43

### *The Help of Christians (Continued)*

**G**ENEROUS souls never tired of coming to Don Bosco's assistance, often through Our Lady's solicitous, motherly intervention.<sup>1</sup> Father [Caesar] Chiala and Chevalier Frederick Oreglia testified to the following incident:

On December 16 [1866] Don Bosco had to meet a payroll of four thousand lire. In his need Father Rua went to town that morning with some lay Salesians. After climbing many stairs and knocking at many doors, they returned to the Oratory around eleven with but a thousand lire which they had begged with untold trouble. They handed the sum to Don Bosco, apologizing for their scant success; then, dejectedly, they stood silent. "Cheer up!" Don Bosco told them serenely and with great faith. "There is a remedy for everything. After dinner, I'll go out myself and find the rest." He left at one that afternoon, and after wandering about aimlessly for a long time, he found himself near Porta Nuova. Knowing no wealthy benefactors in that neighborhood, he was wondering how he had ever strayed there at all when, to his surprise, a liveried servant came up to him.

"Excuse me, Father. Are you perhaps Don Bosco?"

"Yes."

"Thank God!" he exclaimed. "He has surely guided my steps. My master is very ill and asks you to pay him a visit. He very much wants to see you."

"I'll go at once. Does he live far?"

"No, Father, just up this street"—and he pointed to an imposing mansion.

"Is that his home?"

"Yes, he is quite rich and very generous. He could help you build your new church."

<sup>1</sup> We have omitted some introductory remarks about *Letture Cattoliche* and a letter of a canon promising help for Don Bosco's works. [Editor]

“Wonderful!”

When Don Bosco went in, he was met by a lady who exclaimed in tears, “Oh, Don Bosco, we have been waiting ever so long for you. We sent for you several times but were always told you were out of town. I so wanted you to obtain my husband’s cure from Mary, Help of Christians! I would have done anything for Her new church, but now it’s too late; he is almost at the end. That’s what the doctors told me after a consultation the other day.”

“Was Our Lady at the consultation too?” Don Bosco asked. “If not, the consultation was hasty because the doctor who could cure him was not there. What is his ailment?”

“He has had so many troubles, but for the last few months he has been suffering from dropsy. He has been repeatedly operated upon, but now he is terribly swollen again, and the doctors don’t dare to touch him because he just can’t stand another operation.”

“In that case, if you are willing to help our Lady’s cause, I will try to have your husband cured by Our Lady.”

“We’ll gladly do anything.”

Moments later Don Bosco was ushered into the patient’s room. The gentleman—rather elderly—brightened up immediately. “Don Bosco!” he exclaimed. “If you only knew how much I need your prayers! Only you can get me out of this bed.”

“How long have you been sick?”

“Three years, Father! Three long years of atrocious pain! I can’t move at all, and the doctors give me no hope!”

“How would you like to take a walk?”

“A walk? I’ll never walk again. All I’ll get will be a ride to the cemetery!”

“If you agree with a promise your wife made, you’ll walk on your own legs today and also take a ride in your carriage.”

“If I could only obtain some relief, I would gladly do something for your undertakings.”

“That’s all I want at present. I am badly in need of three thousand lire.”

“Just get me a little respite from my pain, Father, and by the end of this month I will oblige.”

“But I need the money the money this very day.”

“Today? But I don’t have that much money at hand. I would have to go to the bank.”

“And why not?”

“But, Father, it’s impossible! For three years I have been nailed to this bed!”

“Impossible? For us, yes, but not for God. Have faith. Give glory to God and to Mary, Help of Christians. Let’s see.”

After the whole household—nearly thirty people—had gathered in the patient’s room at Don Bosco’s request, he led them in prayer to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, Help of Christians, and he then blessed the patient. Immediately the man began to perspire so profusely that his wife cried out in terror: “He is dying! He is dying!”

“Not at all,” Don Bosco reassured her; “he will come back to his normal size.” He then directed that the patient be given his clothes. More moved than astonished, the bystanders wondered what would happen next. At that moment the doctor arrived. Seeing his patient getting dressed, he strenuously objected and endeavored to dissuade him, but the latter, protesting that he was his own master, determinedly went on. When his valets tried to help him, Don Bosco held them back. In moments the former patient was dressed and pacing about the room, while his carriage was being made ready. Feeling hungry, he first asked for food and ate with rare relish. Then, unaided as Don Bosco had ordered, he walked down four flights of stairs, got into his carriage, and later jubilantly returned from the bank with three thousand lire, which he very gratefully handed to Don Bosco, saying again and again, “I am perfectly cured!” In turn, Don Bosco thanked him and exhorted him to be grateful to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary, Help of Christians, who alone had granted him this extraordinary cure.

Back at the Oratory, Don Bosco found his creditor waiting. He paid him in full, to the amazement of Father Rua and all the superiors. Another incident, quite the reverse, had taken place some time before, as a proof of God’s displeasure at the renegeing on a promise.

One day Don Bosco was asked to visit a noble Turinese family he had never met before. The marquis and marchioness received him very respectfully. “We regret having bothered you,” they said. “We know you are quite busy.”

“Not at all,” he replied. “When a good deed and God’s glory are at stake, I feel duty-bound.”

“We have a great favor to ask of you,” they went on. “We have been married many years and are still childless. Please pray for us and have your boys pray that God may grant us a son.”

Don Bosco replied that he would do so. Then, on their knees, they asked for his blessing. Afterward they went on, “As you see, our

house is lonely. It would be filled with joy if Our Lady were to grant us a son. If we receive this favor, we will make a generous donation to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians.”

“And I promise you, in God’s name,” Don Bosco concluded, “that your request will be granted. Pray and have faith. I shall remember you in my daily Mass.”

A year later they were blessed with a baby boy, but they forgot about keeping their promise. Another year passed, and the little fellow was in perfect health. One day, Don Bosco, pressed for payment by suppliers of material for the church, remembered the marquis and called on him in the hope of a warm welcome.

“What can I do for you, Father?” the marquis coldly asked.

“I have come to see about a promise you made two years ago.”

“What promise? And who are you?”

Without taking offense, Don Bosco identified himself and explained his need.

“I don’t remember any such promise,” continued the marquis.

“Sir,” Don Bosco countered, “keep in mind that you made no promise to me, but to God, and that you cannot deal lightly with Him or His Blessed Mother. Reflect seriously on what you are doing.” He courteously took leave, deeply pained by the ingratitude which he foresaw would be severely punished.

Some hours later, the marchioness ran to her husband to tell him that something was very wrong with their child. A doctor was immediately sent for. The marquis, sensing an impending punishment of God, ordered his carriage and in minutes was at the Oratory. “Don Bosco, forgive me!” he exclaimed. “I was blind when I was so rude to you. My child is dying! Please, come and bless him.”

“Immediately,” Don Bosco replied with a heavy heart. “I told you we cannot deal lightly with God. I fear we shall have to say: ‘The Lord gave him and the Lord is taking him away.’ ”

They hurried to the marquis’ residence, only to be met by weeping servants who gave their master the sad news of his son’s death.

Don Bosco entered the room where the little lifeless form lay and where the heartbroken mother was disconsolately weeping. “What fools we have been!” cried the marquis, bursting into tears. “For a little money we have killed our son! God has punished our greed . . . . Poor us! We have lost the consolation of our life, of our old age

. . . . We are lonely again! Don Bosco, forgive us! Pray that God too may forgive us.”

“God is merciful,” Don Bosco heartened them. “He still loves you and will forgive you. Earn His pardon by practicing your faith more diligently and faithfully and by generously helping the poor. Then you will deserve one day to rejoin your lovely little son in paradise, where he now prays for you. Let us all lead a truly Christian life and we shall all meet again in heaven to enjoy an unending reward.” He then blessed them and left.

In those days the thirteen-foot statue of Our Lady, which was to top the church dome one hundred and fifty feet from the ground, was being exhibited in a suitable hall in town.<sup>2</sup>

On November 18, Don Bosco betook himself first to Murello near Racconigi, where he had been invited to speak on St. Elizabeth, the patroness of a parish sodality, and then to Lanzo.<sup>3</sup> On the stagecoach, a fellow passenger began slandering priests. Repeatedly Don Bosco gently tried to correct him, only to be derided for his attempts. At Lanzo everybody got off. Someone was waiting for Don Bosco and loudly greeted him by name. On hearing that the priest whom he had so discourteously treated was Don Bosco, the anticlerical passenger was speechless and beside himself with shame because he had made the trip to Lanzo precisely to register his son at the Salesian school. Swallowing hard, he approached Don Bosco and profusely apologized. Used to such treatment, Don Bosco smiled at the hapless man’s embarrassment and later admitted his son to the school.

That evening the sky offered a magnificent spectacle. Countless multi-colored shooting stars crisscrossed the heavens for some six hours. According to astronomers, a comet’s tail had entered the earth’s orbit and broken into over thirty thousand meteors. The pupils, coming from singing practice at nine, stood ecstatic at that sight. One of them, a bright lad, exclaimed, “The angels are lighting Roman candles for Don Bosco’s arrival.” At that cry, all the boys sent up great *vivas* to Don Bosco. Certainly his arrival in any of his schools always made the angels rejoice. All the Salesians and pupils

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

wanted to go to confession to him, and he satisfied everyone. Wonderful were the improvements in conduct on those occasions, just as at the Oratory. The next day, Don Bosco wrote as follows to the director of Mirabello:

Lanzo, November 19, 1866

My dear Father Bonetti,

I am writing to you from Lanzo. I am very pleased with these boys and more so with the confreres who are united in all they do or say. They emulate those at the Oratory and nearly match those at Mirabello, the cream of the crop. Amen.

I'll be with you on the 28th with Brother Pelazza and Father Lazzero, who will bring what you asked for. Your frankness has made Father Rua very busy. You are not mistaken when you say, "You are eating everything up." This is an added spur to make him favor your wishes. In this matter, I'll be the third party. As the saying goes, "While two dogs strive for a bone, the third runs away with it."<sup>4</sup>

Drop me a note about those you are sure of. I'll be able to contact them directly all the sooner. I wish that on St. Charles' feast day<sup>5</sup> there will be a real plenary indulgence for all. Let bygones be bygones; let every misdeed be forgiven and everyone make an ironclad resolution to become a saint—myself included, of course.

Peace and God's blessing to your house and to all who dwell therein. Warm greetings to all. May the Blessed Virgin help us all to walk on the way to heaven. Amen!

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

Don Bosco left Lanzo on November 21. On that same day Dominic Savio's remains were exhumed at Mondonio—a desire he had always cherished in his heart. His skeleton, whole and intact, was reassembled in a new coffin, which was placed in a vault cut into the rear wall of SS. Fabian and Sebastian's Church adjacent to the cemetery.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> What Don Bosco is hinting at is utterly unknown. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> The school's patron saint. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> We have omitted details of two previous attempts in 1859 and 1864 and also the official record of this exhumation and reburial. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 44

### *Charismatic Pupils*

**A** government decree of November 16 [1866] struck down a previous ruling which prohibited prelates who had taken refuge in Rome from returning to their sees. All bishops therefore could now freely go back to their dioceses. The only prelate still in exile in Turin was Philip Cardinal De Angelis, archbishop of Fermo. Confined to the Vincentian Fathers' residence since 1860,<sup>1</sup> he had never even gone out to visit the city because he considered himself a prisoner. Scholarly, virtuous and devout, he had polled the largest number of votes next to Pius IX at the last papal conclave. The anticlericals feared him for his unyielding stand against whatever was spiritually harmful to the faithful or contrary to his duty. His exile had been a lengthy one because he had refused to break off relations with [the stalwart Catholic journalist] Father [James] Margotti [editor of *L'Armonia*].

In those six long years Don Bosco had visited him on occasion, and the two had established close ties, the cardinal taking such a keen interest in the Oratory that even on hearing it named he would eagerly inquire about its progress. Don Bosco had spoken at length to him about Our Lady's favors to some Oratory boys, even to the point of revealing future events to them. One day, weeks before the publication of the above-mentioned government decree, Don Bosco paid him a customary visit. At this particular time, contrary to expectations, anticlericalism among certain members of parliament seemed to be growing more virulent, to the point that one deputy wanted to introduce a bill forbidding priests to wear clerical garb. As all signs pointed to renewed harassment, the cardinal's release seemed less likely than ever.

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VI, p. 416. [Editor]

“Well, dear Don Bosco,” the cardinal greeted him, “have you any news of my future?”

“Start packing, Your Eminence, because you will soon be free to return to Fermo.”

“Return to Fermo? There’s no chance at all, especially now with this new wave of anticlericalism.”

“But it is true! Our Lady revealed this to one of our boys.”

“Well, then, once I am released, I will go back to my see, but only after I have called at the Oratory to return your visits and express my gratitude to Our Lady.”

“I promise Your Eminence a rousing reception.”

“And will you show me the young prophet?”

“Certainly! I am watching him lest this go to his head, but you will see him.”

That evening Don Bosco narrated this dialogue at suppertime to Father Francesia, Father Berto and others. All were astonished, but they felt that the fulfillment of that prediction was almost impossible, especially because the boys who were alleged to be favored with special graces were neither particularly talented nor popular among their peers. It is true, however, that humility can screen the rarest virtues, and we should remember that when Don Bosco detected any charism in a pupil, he was wont to deal with him rather curtly, so as to keep him humble. Thus no one knew whom Don Bosco meant when he said he had asked a pupil to pray and the latter had received the communication which Don Bosco had brought to the cardinal.

The prediction was unexpectedly fulfilled some weeks later when the cardinal was officially informed that he was free to return to his see. He remained in Turin one more day, November 23, which turned out to be a solemn and joyful day for the Oratory boys. After saying Mass at Our Lady of Consolation Shrine, the cardinal went to Valdocco and was ushered into the boys’ study hall, where in full assembly Father Francesia read a beautiful poem to the prelate who had endured such a long exile for the love of God and the Vicar of Christ.

The cardinal spoke warmly to all, telling them that he had prayed for them that morning to repay them for their prayers on his behalf.

He also assured them that he would speak of them to the Holy Father and would always help them in every possible way. Afterward, the pupils came up in twos to kiss his ring, while Don Bosco stood by him. The cardinal was anxious to see the boy who had foretold his deliverance, but he did not come up. From the Oratory the cardinal went to the Cottolengo Hospital. The following day he left Turin. At Fermo both clergy and populace received him most respectfully and joyfully. In a letter to his flock, he wrote: "We recall with pleasure the Oratory, a providential haven for boys, established and maintained by a zealous, poor priest under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales and Mary, Help of Christians."<sup>2</sup>

After the cardinal's departure, Don Bosco went to Mirabello to celebrate the feast of St. Charles, patron of the junior seminary, which had been postponed to Thursday, November 29.<sup>3</sup> During his stay a noteworthy event occurred. Mr. Vincent Provera [Father Francis' brother] was, as usual, helping to prepare the guests' dining room. While hurrying down the stairs to the kitchen he slipped, badly sprained his ankle, and had to be taken home and put to bed. His doctor prescribed some treatment. Toward evening, after the guests had left, Don Bosco went to visit him. By now Mr. Provera's foot was swollen black and blue. It must have hurt a lot, but he virtuously made little of it. After blessing him, Don Bosco said, "My dear Vincent, do what the doctor told you. Have faith. Tomorrow you will drive me to the railroad station." Before leaving, he suggested that he recite a certain prayer. The next morning, Mr. Provera arose and happily drove Don Bosco to the station as if nothing had happened to his foot. His sister, Caroline, now a nun with the Faithful Companions of Jesus, repeatedly confirmed this incident.

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting at this point a digression about a complaint from the Department of Railroads that the Oratory's reduced fare privileges had been abused. Don Bosco's reply explained that such abuses had taken place unintentionally and that greater preventive vigilance would be exercised in the future. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 45

### *For God and Country (Continued)*

**T**HOUGH exiled prelates were allowed to return to their dioceses, the Italian government planned to leave vacant most of the sees which had no bishops so as to suppress those it deemed superfluous. However, insistent pressure from Napoleon III, who looked upon negotiations for the appointment of bishops as the next step to trade relations between Italy and the Papal States and eventually to political concessions, forced a change of plans. Accordingly, Michelangelo Tonello, professor of canon law at the University of Turin and twice its former rector, agreed to a request to reopen negotiations on behalf of the government.<sup>1</sup> His instructions were to make no proposals; but to accept or reject those of the Holy See. As regards episcopal revenues, church properties and institutions, current laws were to be applied. Furthermore the government was to be accorded the right to present episcopal candidates to the Holy See. On his part, Pius IX, though anxious to fill the vacant sees, showed no eagerness to reopen negotiations, fearing that they might prove a snare and no more successful than those held the previous year. His misgivings were well grounded, since the Church was still being persecuted by laws designed to harass her bishops and religious and to deprive her of her real estate and rights. Moreover, the Italian government had pointedly neglected to inform Pius IX of its intentions.

Under these circumstances, an unofficial intermediary had to be found, and Don Bosco was deemed to be the very man for this task. Government officials still remembered his suggestions and advice to Minister Lanza the previous year,<sup>2</sup> and they knew how highly

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. For previous negotiations *see* Chapter 6. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> *See* Chapter 6. [Editor]

esteemed he was in Rome and how much the Pope loved him. It was also known that, though he always stood foursquare with the Pope, he was not one to oppose the government as a matter of principle. Though condemning the motivation of certain laws, he knew how to commend those that were praiseworthy, qualifying his praise, if necessary, but always without acrimony. As a matter of fact, in dealing with people—friendly or hostile—Don Bosco always acted respectfully, obligingly, and deferentially within limits. He possessed great tact. Even when he had to reprimand, he knew how to temper his reprimand with praise by acknowledging the good that was in those persons so that they would in turn acknowledge the rights of faith and justice. His loyal and affable ways inspired trust.

We must assume that Don Bosco was apprised confidentially of the government's intention and that he likewise made this known to the Pope. Then, while waiting to hear from Prime Minister [Bettino] Ricasoli, he tranquilly decided to go to Florence where he had several things to attend to. While preparing for the trip, he found himself so short of clothing that he had to borrow a hat, waistcoat, and cassock from three of his Salesians. We witnessed this ourselves. He took this trip alone.

On December 7, Father Julius Metti [an Oratorian] wrote from Florence that Don Bosco had not yet arrived. On the 12th, Father Justin Campolmi sent him a donation of close to forty-six hundred lire toward the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. The donors included some of the most illustrious members of the Florentine aristocracy.

From a letter we received from Dr. Louis Lemoyne, we gather that Don Bosco protracted his stay in Genoa, twice visiting Dr. Lemoyne's home to the great fortune and consolation of that family. Upon his arrival in Florence on December 12, Don Bosco went to give his blessing to a deaf son of Mrs. Louisa Casaglia Fedi, a friend of Marchioness Ugoccioni and Marchioness Nerli. We know this from a letter of that same lady to Don Bosco.

We have no other details about Don Bosco's journey to Florence, where he was once more the guest of his friend and admirer,

Archbishop Joachim Limberti. The prelate, who liked to discuss the problems afflicting the Church with Don Bosco, asked him one evening in Father Metti's presence whether the Italians would seize Rome.

"Yes, they will," Don Bosco answered without hesitation.

The archbishop could not bring himself to believe such a thing and offered many reasons why he held a contrary view, but Don Bosco repeated his assertion.

Meanwhile Prime Minister Ricasoli, informed of Don Bosco's arrival, sent a messenger to invite him to the Pitti Palace. What they discussed and what later happened we ourselves heard from Don Bosco when, on his return to Turin, he gave a confidential account of it to Canon Stanislaus Grasselli of Rossana, a member of the cathedral chapter.

As soon as Don Bosco arrived at the Pitti Palace, he was ushered into Ricasoli's office. The latter courteously came forward to meet him, but Don Bosco, halting in the middle of the room, firmly declared, "Your Excellency, I want you to know that Don Bosco is a priest at the altar, a priest in the confessional, a priest among his boys, a priest in Turin, and a priest in Florence. He is a priest in the house of the poor and a priest in the palace of the king!"

Assuring him that he need not worry on that score, since no one had any intention to suggest anything contrary to his beliefs, Ricasoli offered him a seat and opened the discussion.

Don Bosco did not refuse to lend his personal cooperation to the success of Tonello's negotiations by writing or speaking to eminent persons who valued his opinions, but he also pointed out that it was to the Italian government's interest not to object in any way to the Pope's choice of bishops. The minister agreed, quite sympathetic to Don Bosco's point of view. At that moment, Ricasoli was summoned by the king who was personally presiding over a cabinet meeting concerning this very matter, and Don Bosco was left alone for over an hour. Upon his return, Ricasoli very diplomatically let Don Bosco understand that the government did not object to the appointment of bishops, but that as a first step, it considered it proper to discuss with the Holy See the territorial limits of dioceses, and

the gradual absorption of some smaller dioceses into larger ones, according to pre-established norms. In other words, it sought to suppress unimportant dioceses.

Don Bosco replied that he would not even indirectly agree to negotiate under such a condition, since in no way could he be expected to make proposals or to give advice to the Holy Father. Rather, he would suggest that the government give up such an intent. He added that he was ready to call on the Pope for the sake of the spiritual welfare of the faithful, but that it was not honorable for the government to meddle in matters which would only show the whole world that the [Italian] Constitution, treaties, laws and papal rights were being utterly ignored. He concluded by making it clear that if the ministers thought otherwise, he could not accept the honor of their confidential mission and would immediately return to Turin.

Ricasoli asked him to wait a few moments while he returned to the meeting. The upshot was that the plan to suppress some dioceses was temporarily shelved and negotiations were limited to the filling of vacant sees. Ricasoli also urged Don Bosco to get in touch with Tonello in Rome and lend him all his support. Satisfied with this solution, Don Bosco took steps to ward off difficulties which might arise. His task was not an easy one, but he soon had proof that this mission was entrusted to him by God, or at least was according to His holy will. The incident we are going to report took place in Florence in those very days and has been attested in the diocesan process for his beatification and canonization.

Marchioness Jerome Uguccioni deeply loved her very young godson, who had suddenly fallen victim to a grave illness and was dying. Messengers were at once dispatched all over town to find Don Bosco who was then visiting a boarding school of the Somaschi Fathers. As the superiors were escorting him through the building, the marchioness herself arrived, disheveled and plainly dressed, screaming that her godson was dead and begging Don Bosco to bring him back to life.

The priests were astonished at seeing her so upset, and they feared for her sanity as she kept begging Don Bosco to go with her. Don Bosco obliged. The young boy was lying on a bed—still, ashen, glassy-eyed, and apparently dead. After inviting all the bystanders to pray to Mary, Help of Christians, Don Bosco gave his blessing to

the lifeless little body. He had scarcely finished when the little boy began to breathe, yawned, and, again conscious, smiled at his mother. He fully recovered within a short time.

Deeply grateful, the marchioness became such a generous benefactress of Don Bosco that his Salesians began calling her "our good Mamma in Florence." Whenever Don Bosco was in that city, she claimed the privilege to host him, and showed him her esteem and respect. Both she and her husband remained most grateful to him until their death, as can be seen in hundreds of letters from the marchioness.

Father Berto, who accompanied Don Bosco to Florence several times, declared: "In 1873, I asked Don Bosco why Marchioness Uguccioni and her family were so obliging to him and so generous toward the Oratory. In reply he told me confidentially of her godson's illness and cure. She herself told me several times, 'I am convinced that Don Bosco is a saint.' "

The marchioness never forgot that remarkable incident, and even after 1881 she narrated it several times with absolute assurance to Father Faustino Confortola,<sup>3</sup> whom she greatly trusted. In 1887, during Don Bosco's last visit to Florence, the marchioness one day at dinner described at length her godson's return to life through Don Bosco's blessing. Lowering his head, Don Bosco blushed and kept silent. Father Charles Viglietti was present and informed us of this incident. The better to confirm this prodigious occurrence, we ourselves questioned Don Bosco in his last years. He fully confirmed the fact in all its particulars as described above, but then, after a short pause, he added with an expression of profound humility, "Perhaps he was not dead!" We could not expect a more explicit assurance. In those same days other incidents that redound to the glory of Mary, Help of Christians were witnessed by a staff member of the Florentine periodical *La Vera Buona Novella*.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, on December 10, Tonello, the government's negotiator, arrived in Rome. On the 15th he was received by Pius IX, who in a fatherly way gave him to understand that he would wel-

<sup>3</sup> Father Confortola was already a priest when he joined the Salesian Society in 1878-79. He became the first director of the Salesian school in Florence in 1881. In 1888 he was appointed director and pastor at Parma. He died in Florence in 1913. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

come a workable compromise which would not sacrifice principles. Tonello left the audience very well disposed toward the Holy See. On the 21st he pursued negotiations with Cardinal Antonelli. In Florence, meanwhile, Don Bosco was taking care of several matters of his own, calling on benefactors and on various government officials for subsidies, tax exemptions, honorific titles and the like.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 46

### *Special Charisms (Continued)*

IN Florence Don Bosco was very pleased to see that *Lecture Cattolice* was becoming ever more popular and that his lottery and promotion of memorials in the Church of Mary, Help of Christians were doing quite well. On the morning of December 19 he left for Bologna. After a few calls on benefactors, he went on to Guastalla to join Count [Constantine] Radicati, vice-prefect of the province of Turin, in honoring Bishop [Peter] Rota, the saintly ordinary of the diocese, who was still being harassed for his truly apostolic firmness. It was hoped that Don Bosco's visit might improve the situation.<sup>1</sup> The next day, he was back at the Oratory for the close of the Christmas novena.

Scarcely a week before, one of Don Bosco's frequent predictions had been fulfilled. At the start of the school year he had publicly told the whole community that they should make their peace with God, since one of them would die before Christmas. The announcement caused quite a panic among the new pupils, several of whom wrote to their parents to take them home. They in turn were upset and bitterly complained to Don Bosco and to the police, the latter assuring them that the case would be looked into. One day, in fact, the crown prosecutor himself walked incognito into the Oratory playground and, mingling with the boys, pumped them about the house rules, their schoolwork, Don Bosco's short talks after night prayers, and so on. Thus he quietly ascertained the truth of the complaints.

A few days later a detective called on Don Bosco. "You have quite a number of boys here, Father," he remarked after an exchange of greetings. "One has to be careful not to frighten them. If

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

they are afraid of something, their schoolwork may suffer. And they scare so easily. . . . The cheerfulness that should reign in school would vanish instantly. Moreover, this could be a very traumatic experience leading to insanity and death.”

“Excuse me, sir,” Don Bosco interrupted. “What are you trying to tell me?”

“Can’t you take a hint, Father?” the detective went on with obvious embarrassment. “It’s unhealthy for boys to brood over death.”

“On the contrary,” Don Bosco countered, “it seems that it does them good. The Holy Spirit Himself says so: ‘Remember your last days, and you will never sin!’ ” [Sir. 7, 36]

“Yes, quite right, but to tell the boys that one of them will die within a certain period seems to me. . . .”

“You are referring to my announcement that one of the Oratory residents will die before Christmas.”

“Exactly. And let me add that I come on behalf of the crown prosecutor to recommend that you do not use such wild, dubious means. Otherwise, under certain circumstances, the authorities might be obliged to intervene. Complaints have already been made, though we have not given them much attention. Fright, however, does not seem to be a suitable educational means. Regrettably, we know that this is not the first time you have made such predictions.”

“Well, if that’s the case, why don’t you try to find out whether or not these predictions have come true. If not, Don Bosco is a liar and the seven hundred people living here should by now have noticed it and had a good laugh. But if the predictions did come true, the matter cannot be condemned offhandedly as foolhardiness.”

“But don’t you think it’s imprudent to make public announcements about things that may frighten young boys, disturb their peace of mind and possibly cause other serious consequences?”

“You still haven’t answered my question. Did my predictions come true?”

“Well, let us suppose they did. Then what?”

“Then, don’t you think that saving one’s soul is an important matter?”

“I don’t deny that, but. . . .”

“Suppose I am convinced that it is my bounden duty to warn one who may not be prepared [for death], and suppose I know who that one is. Would I be cruel or merciful in alerting him to the need of preparing himself for God’s judgment? If I said nothing and he died unprepared, don’t you think I would be burdened with lasting remorse?”

“Very well, if you are so convinced, give the warning but don’t trumpet it about.”

“How? Would you want me to call that individual and say to him frankly: ‘You shall die soon?’”

“Of course not!”

“Then what do you suggest?”

“You have a point. Listen, would you mind telling me the name of the one you predict shall die soon?”

“Not at all, provided you keep it secret. Otherwise, your imprudence would be far worse than what I am accused of.”

The detective took out his notebook and pencil, riveting his eyes on Don Bosco, whose mien had become serious.

“His name is John Boggero!” Don Bosco said slowly. The officer jotted it down, excused himself and left.

John Boggero was a twenty-six-year-old priest who had come from Cambiano. Handsome, intelligent and warm-hearted, he was very much liked at the Oratory. After spending his boyhood with Don Bosco, giving him the brightest hopes for the future, he joined the Salesian Society on January 23, 1861, but around the middle of 1866 he grew somewhat lax. Influenced by his parents and ill-advised by injudicious persons, he made up his mind to leave. One day he approached Don Bosco and asked to be allowed to return home to provide for his two sisters who needed assistance. Don Bosco felt quite hurt and endeavored to persuade him to stay because undoubtedly this was his vocation and surely God would provide for his sisters. Seeing that he stubbornly clung to his plan, Don Bosco finally said, “So you want to go! Have it your own way, then. You think you will help your sisters, who I know do not need you, but I tell you that you will not be able to help them!”

Father Boggero went home. To his great joy, he was soon appointed second curate in the parish of Villafranca in Piedmont. Elated over this, he wrote a long letter to Chevalier Frederick Ore-

glia on December 10, 1866 telling him how much he liked his new place, his fellow priests and parishioners.<sup>2</sup> Poor Father Boggero! Four days later he was summoned to God's tribunal! On the morning of December 14 he said his Mass as usual, feeling quite well and cheerful. He then went back to the rectory for coffee. When the housekeeper brought it to him, she found him resting his head on the table as if napping. He had suffered a fatal stroke.

On December 21, a lawyer, having heard of Don Bosco's return from Florence, paid him a business call. He too had learned of Don Bosco's prediction.

"Father," he said, after concluding the business at hand, "I hope I'm not indiscreet, but how is the person everyone talked about so much? We are pretty close to Christmas. . . ."

"He died some days ago."

"He did?"

"Yes, you may ask anyone in the house."

The gentleman remained momentarily silent and thoughtful. Don Bosco, always fond of a joke, asked with a serious mien, "Would you care to know something about your future?"

"Gracious, no!" he replied, jumping to his feet. "I'd rather not!" And he left hurriedly.

The detective too had remained watchful. After the Christmas holidays he again showed up in the Oratory playground. "Hello, boys," he greeted some youngsters. "Having fun?"

"You bet! That's what games are for."

"Anybody sick in the house?"

"No, sir."

"Has anybody died recently?"

"No, sir."

"Oh! I had heard that someone living here had passed away."

"Not among us boys."

"An older person perhaps?"

"No, because we would know it, if anybody died."

"Did anybody who lived here die outside the Oratory?"

"Oh, yes, a priest, but that was over a week ago!"

"What was his name?"

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

“Father John Boggero.”

The officer paled. He took out his notebook. The names matched.

“Was he sick a long time?”

“Oh, no. He died of a stroke.”

“Where did he die?”

“At home. One morning he returned to the rectory after Mass and sat down for his breakfast. And he died.”

“Had he been sick before?”

“Never! He was always in top condition!”

The detective stood pensive a moment and then asked: “Where can I find Don Bosco?”

“In his room.”

“Thanks!” Up he went at once.

“Father,” he blurted, “say what you wish to your boys. You have every right to do so. From now on I’ll know what to say if anyone complains about your predictions.”

Deeply moved, he kissed his hand and withdrew, mumbling, “It’s very strange indeed.”

Some time later, another incident proved to be quite comical. A good priest called on Don Bosco to urge him to stop making predictions about death because in his opinion it was not the right way to help people. “Only a blind man could fail to see through this ruse. It’s rather too much to expect people to believe that you have revelations. Of course you mean well, but believe me, no good can come out of this.”

“So you don’t believe my predictions?”

“What? Humbug!”

“Very well! By the way, how do *you* feel?”

“Fine!”

“Are you sure?” Don Bosco stared straight into his eyes with a sparkle of mirth.

“Why do you ask?”

“Oh, for no particular reason. I just wanted to know how you feel now.”

“I think I am quite well. Why should you doubt it?”

“Well, you do seem a little pale, but if you say you are quite well, it means there is nothing serious. We shall see.”

“Then you know something?” the priest asked with growing anxiety.

“What could I know? The usual humbug? One thing is certain, though: death comes when we least expect it.”

“Please, don’t torment me. Tell me what you are hinting at.”

“Nothing at all. Take care of yourself and God bless you!”

The priest wanted to press the point, but Don Bosco dismissed him, pleading urgent work. Pale and upset at his failure to learn more, the poor man could hardly find his way out. He wanted to play the part of a cynic, but Don Bosco made him realize that he was more credulous than others.

As we shall see, Don Bosco continued to make even more stunning predictions, though always prudently. He gradually ceased to do so only in his last years. Yet even then, certain telltale signs led one to believe that he knew when his pupils were to die, even if he did not predict it. This at times was obvious from the manner in which he reacted to the news of their death.

## CHAPTER 47

### *Special Charisms (Continued)*

**B**UNDLES of letters in our archives show that Don Bosco was corresponding with the most outstanding noble families of northern and central Italy and of the former kingdom of Naples. With filial confidence they turned to him for advice, prayers, blessings, and medals. Many invited him to visit their cities.

Toward the end of 1866, the Romans, especially, were turning to him. By December 10, some fourteen thousand French regulars had been withdrawn from Rome and replaced with twelve hundred volunteers from France and other countries. This small garrison was to depend entirely on the Pope and be maintained at his expense. Meanwhile, Italy had stationed troops along the papal borders, particularly at Perugia, Orvieto, Rieti and Terni, and was sending money and instructions to the revolutionaries in Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Many Roman noble families, fearing an invasion, consulted Don Bosco on whether or not they should leave the city. Don Bosco's reply to Marchioness [Fanny Amat] of Villa Rios was: "The Italians will not enter. It is easier for the cobblestones of the streets of Rome to rise and fight each other than for the revolution to succeed at this time. In fact, I myself will unfailingly come to Rome at the very beginning of January and will stay a long while." He also wrote that nothing would happen before St. Peter's centennial celebrations. The news of these assurances quickly spread through Rome and effectively contributed to allay anxiety, though it also gave rise to a misinterpretation. Even in 1870 many comforted themselves with Don Bosco's assurance "The Italians will not enter," whereas Don Bosco had only spoken of 1867, not of the following years. The calming effect of Don Bosco's words is also

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

evident in many other letters from Rome to Chevalier Frederick Oreglia and to Don Bosco.<sup>2</sup>

While Don Bosco was getting ready to leave for Rome, his third prediction—famine in Italy—was fulfilled. Misery and want had kept increasing and hunger was making frightful inroads. Lack of public funds, a poor harvest and the ravages of war had caused massive unemployment. In its wake there was rioting and looting in Venice, Verona, Turin, Naples and Modena and throughout Sicily and Sardinia.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting excerpts of seven such letters. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 48

### *Don Bosco's Second Journey to Rome*

ON the last day of the year Don Bosco gave the Oratory boys the *strenna* for 1867: "Always wear Our Lady's medal. During the day frequently and fervently invoke this merciful Mother."

As of that date, the Salesian Society numbered about eighty members. Nineteen were perpetually professed, twenty-four had made their triennial vows, the rest were postulants. Fourteen were priests, including Don Bosco.

The January-February issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, authored by Don Bosco, was entitled *St. Peter's Centenary*. While this issue was being shipped out, the March issue—*Life of St. Joseph*—was being readied . . . Don Bosco had left instructions for its galley proofs to be forwarded to him in Rome, where he was going to plead for definitive approval of the Salesian Society, or at least for authorization to grant dimissorial letters<sup>1</sup> to his clerics *titulo mensae communis* [on the basis of common life].

For this purpose he was taking to Rome the Latin translation of the rules which he himself had corrected over and over again to bring them in line with the observations made by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars.<sup>2</sup> He was careful, however, not to jeopardize the future needs of his Society, and not to deviate from an exemplar which had been shown to him in a dream.<sup>3</sup>

He was going to Rome also to raise funds for the interior of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Visitors were amazed at its

<sup>1</sup> Letters authorizing the ordination of the bearer. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 425f. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> For the Latin text of this exemplar see *Memorie Biografiche del Venerabile Don Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. VIII, pp. 1058-75. We are omitting at this point a memorandum giving reasons for his insistence on authorization to grant dimissorials and his petition for such authorization. [Editor]

size and could not figure out where the six hundred thousand lire so far spent had come from. It was obviously a miracle, the result of Our Lady's incessant favors to those who contributed to the erection of Her shrine. Don Bosco kept visiting the seriously or incurably sick in Turin, inviting them to help him as their piety would inspire them. He would bless and cure them. He obtained the same results in the main cities of northern Italy, as evinced by the large and small sums he continually received in thanksgiving for Our Lady's wonders.

Now he was turning to the Romans who anxiously awaited his arrival either to renew or to make his acquaintance. He hoped that they too would assist him in completing the construction. Another most urgent aim was, as has already been mentioned, to contribute to the success of the Tonello mission.<sup>4</sup> Divine Providence wanted him in Rome so that the many dioceses which had been vacant for so many years might again have shepherds.

Before leaving Turin, however, he took the necessary steps with the civil authorities for the official drawing of his lottery prizes on April 1, at ten in the morning.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 45. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 49

### *Don Bosco's Second Journey to Rome (Continued)*

**B**Y early January, Don Bosco's booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* had spread throughout Italy. It prepared the faithful for the solemn centennial festivities of June 29 by fostering in them an increasing loyalty to the Vicar of Christ. A very large supply of copies was stocked in Rome itself.

Before setting out for Rome, Don Bosco visited benefactors and institutions [in and around Turin].<sup>1</sup> He also gave a seemingly prophetic answer to an eleven-year-old pupil, Augustine Parigi, whose mother had asked him to inquire of Don Bosco if Canon [Joseph] Cottolengo, the founder of the Little House of Divine Providence,<sup>2</sup> would be beatified one day. The boy did not know what she meant. Quite simply Don Bosco replied, "Tell your mother that Father Cottolengo will be beatified. Neither she nor I will then be here, but you will!"

The boy's mother died in 1870. Augustine became a priest. In 1892, while an assistant pastor at Giaveno, he fell ill with erysipelas, and within two weeks he was in such bad shape that the doctor despaired of saving him. One morning, believing that the priest would not live till night, he visited him half a dozen times and had him receive the Last Sacraments shortly before noon. Afterward, Father Parigi fell asleep. When he woke up, he felt fine. "During my illness," he himself told us, "I felt at ease by recalling that Father Cottolengo had not yet been beatified."<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco left for Rome on January 7 at nine in the morning. His briefcase contained documents relating to the approval of the

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Now a vast hospital complex in Turin providing for about ten thousand patients. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> Father Cottolengo was declared "Blessed" in 1917 and "Saint" in 1934. [Editor]

Salesian Society and several hundred lottery tickets. He was accompanied by Father John [Baptist] Francesia, whose many letters, written with amiable simplicity and warmth, tell us of Don Bosco's activities during his two-month stay in Rome. They will form the bulk of this and other chapters.<sup>4</sup> We shall fill in, however, what we ourselves heard from Don Bosco, from other witnesses orally or in writing, and from Father Francesia's additional oral explanations.

Here is [an excerpt from] his first letter, dated January 9, 1867:

Marchioness [Fanny Amat] of Villa Rios, Marchioness [Mary] Vitelleschi and other friends were at the station to welcome him. I rode with Count Calderari in one of the splendid carriages that were waiting for us. Don Bosco said Mass in Count Vimercati's private chapel, and I at St. Peter-in-Chains . . . At home many persons were waiting to see Don Bosco. I do not know who they were and I had no time to find out.

At Don Bosco's arrival, the whole city became astir as if a great prince had arrived, and the most illustrious families paid him courtesy calls. His fame as a wonder-worker had preceded him, and many unfortunate people were waiting for him as for a healing angel. What faith! I never saw or ever expected to see such boundless confidence in our Don Bosco.

After Mass, [Anthony] Cardinal Cagiano's carriage arrived to bring Don Bosco to the prelate, who was seriously ill and wished to see him immediately. Some time previously, Cardinal Cagiano had recovered from another illness through Don Bosco's prayers. Now he was again putting his whole trust in God. Don Bosco visited him, blessed him and exhorted him to trust in Our Lady. To the great joy of the Romans who idolize him, the cardinal has begun to improve; hopefully he will soon be out of danger. Don Bosco is now getting ready for his audience with the Pope. This morning the whole city was covered with billboards advertising Don Bosco's *Storia d'Italia*. Wonderful timing!

Father John Baptist Francesia

P. S. Pray hard for our benefactor, Count Vimercati, who is rather seriously ill.

Upon arriving at the count's residence, Don Bosco immediately paid him a visit and greatly cheered him. The count had been

<sup>4</sup> Occasionally we shall omit unimportant details from his lengthy letters. Dots will indicate such omissions. [Editor]

bedridden, racked with pain and dizziness, for a long time. Don Bosco found him in a very poor, hopeless condition, with but a slim chance of even just getting up for a short while. He blessed him and told him that he would soon get up for a brief respite. "I'll take you up on that," the count replied. "Only then will I let you return to Turin." He said this because any relief seemed impossible. But, two or three days later, his pain abated and he was able to get up unaided and dine with his family. "So you want me to go back to Turin," Don Bosco said to him as the count entered the dining room. Remembering his words, the count was quick to declare them null and void. The count's improvement, however, was only temporary. Seemingly the Lord did not want to free him of his cross, but only to lighten it. The fact remains, however, that the count did then and there gain much strength. Our Lady's kind intervention cannot be doubted.

Faithful to his practice of weekly confession, Don Bosco availed himself of the services of Father Vasco, S.J., the count's spiritual director who visited the patient once a week.

We must also note that from the very first day of his arrival in Rome and throughout his stay, Don Bosco carried on a priestly apostolate, preaching, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, institutions, boarding schools, monasteries and convents, counseling till far into the night, and instilling into many sick persons the hope of recovery through the blessing and the medal of Mary, Help of Christians. Very many people recommended themselves to him as to a saint, much to the Pope's delight for the great good being done.

A certain Father Macchi, a young priest who had contact with the Count Callori family when the latter went to Rome, greatly took to Don Bosco from the very first time he saw him. He began to accompany him everywhere and to act as his guide, always ready to go on errands for him and to be at his service during his whole stay in Rome. Father Macchi wished to pursue a diplomatic career but perhaps would not have succeeded, because the Pope thought rather unfavorably of him. Don Bosco, however, so thoroughly relieved the Pope's misgivings about this young priest that Pius IX admitted him to the Vatican and made him his personal chamberlain with the title of monsignor. Unfortunately, Father Macchi's friendship with

Don Bosco later cooled down, as we shall see in subsequent volumes.

On January 15, Father Francesia wrote as follows to Chevalier Oreglia:

Rome, Tuesday, January 15, 1867

My dear Chevalier:

Don Bosco is always very busy, and so is yours truly. Yesterday we were at the Vatican. . . . As soon as Don Bosco was ushered into the Pope's presence and greetings were exchanged, the Pope said, "Well, let's continue from where we left off the last time we saw each other (in 1858)<sup>5</sup> when Cardinal so-and-so came in with papers for me to sign." And immediately he went on talking about our Society as if continuing a conversation held only the day before—a clear sign that he has this matter at heart. . . . Pius IX promised Don Bosco to receive him other times in order to talk at greater leisure. . . . Cardinal Cagiano died yesterday night. His saintly death was mourned by all. . . .

This audience took place on Saturday, January 12 [1867]. That morning Don Bosco had said Mass in the chapel of the duchess of Sora, as we gather from a letter of hers. The first words the Pope really said to Don Bosco were: "Well, did you follow my advice? Did you write down those things which had a bearing in inspiring you to found your Society?"<sup>6</sup>

"Your Holiness," Don Bosco replied, "I truthfully lacked the time. I was so taken up with. . . ."

"Well, then, I not only advise you, but order you to do it. This task must have priority over everything else. Put aside the rest and take care of this. You cannot now fully grasp how very beneficial certain things will be to your sons when they shall know them." Don Bosco promised to do that and he kept his word. The Pope also talked about the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, inquiring about its progress and granting indulgences to its contributors.<sup>7</sup>

Through Marchioness [Amat] of Villa Rios, Don Bosco made the acquaintance of Countess Calderari, whose little girls were com-

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 558-62, 575-79, 594ff. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 577. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

pletely dumb. The countess bared her sorrow to Don Bosco, who assured her that if she would contribute to the building of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, Our Lady would unfailingly console her.

“But don’t you see, Father, that they can’t talk!” the countess cried, pointing to her daughters.

“They will be able to speak,” Don Bosco assured her. And so it was. Father Rua and Father Francesia have testified that in 1870 the two girls no longer had any speech impediment.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> We are omitting a short announcement of Cardinal Cagiano’s death. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 50

### *Don Bosco in Rome*

WE continue our narrative about Don Bosco's activities in Rome by reporting another letter from Father Francesia:

Rome, January 17, 1867

My dear Chevalier Oreglia,

It looks like the Lord does not want Don Bosco to duplicate in Rome the wonders he has worked elsewhere, but even if he did, humble as he is, he would not tell me about them. That's why I am all eyes and ears.

Duchess [Boncompagni] of Sora had a bad time the other day when a mad dog broke into her palace and scared the whole household. She called upon Mary, Help of Christians, and no one was hurt. She brought a donation and promised more. Last Saturday Don Bosco said Mass in her chapel and was given over a thousand lire by someone who had received a favor from God.

Don Bosco went to see a baby son of the De Maistres. The little boy was critically ill and the doctors hesitated to operate on him. Don Bosco blessed him and placed a medal [of Mary, Help of Christians] on the spots where he hurt most. In no time a furuncle ripened, making it possible to operate on him quite successfully. . . . The child is improving and hopefully will be well again. . . .

Eighteen-month-old Paul De Maistre, the son of Count Eugene, had an enormous swelling on his face and neck. On January 16 [1862], Don Bosco blessed him and then went to say Mass in the nearby St. Charles' Church. No sooner had he sat in the confessional than he was surrounded by a big crowd. By the end of Mass the child seemed to be better, and the doctor found that he could now safely operate. We must add that after blessing the child, Don Bosco said to the parents, "He will not die. He has to become a

priest!" Nobody told the boy of this prediction until after he had become a Jesuit and received major orders.

Count [Eugene] De Maistre himself narrated this to us, adding that when he hosted Don Bosco in his apartment at the Quattro Fontane, the stairs were so crowded with visitors that the other tenants could hardly get through. He himself had to let Don Bosco's visitors in through one door and out another.

Father Francesca's letter gives us further news:

The other night (January 15) Don Bosco visited another sick child for whom there was hardly any hope of recovery. On receiving Don Bosco's blessing, he began to feel better. Doctors marvel at the success of this new colleague of theirs. There is not a sick person in Rome who doesn't beg for Don Bosco's visit. Likewise, there is no church or private chapel to which people would not flock to assist at his Mass. He is grateful for what is being done at the Oratory and exhorts all to continue with greater fervor. Oh, if only we could obtain the recovery of our host, Count Vimercati! He is improving, but not sufficiently. He cannot stand on his feet and he cannot sleep. A miracle is needed. Let us pray!

Don Bosco's health is weakening because of so many callers. His legs are very badly swollen and he cannot sleep. . . .

In those days, Don Bosco's greatest preoccupation was the nomination of bishops [for the vacant Italian dioceses].<sup>1</sup> On December 21, Commendatore [Michelangelo] Tonello had reopened negotiations with [James] Cardinal Antonelli, the Secretary of State. At their very first meeting a disagreement arose about the nomination of bishops for territories recently annexed by Italy, particularly the former papal states. Matters had reached an impasse when Don Bosco arrived in Rome. He was much pained at this deadlock, fearing another breakdown in negotiations. For over fifteen years no bishops had been nominated in Piedmont. Providentially, Pius IX sent for him.<sup>2</sup>

"What politics would you adopt to overcome so many difficulties?" he asked him.

<sup>1</sup> See Chapter 45. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

“My politics,” Don Bosco answered, “are the same as yours, Your Holiness—the politics embodied in the *Pater Noster*. When we say it, we daily pray that God’s kingdom may come upon this earth and spread over it, that it may become ever more effective, powerful and glorious. Thy kingdom come! This is what really matters.”

He then insisted that the [spiritual] good of the dioceses be given priority over everything else and that all efforts be directed to this end.

Pius IX accepted Don Bosco’s advice and empowered him to negotiate with Commendatore Tonello, reserving all decisions to himself. As a first step, Don Bosco contacted Cardinal Antonelli and brought him around to his point of view. He then called on Commendatore Tonello. Finally he managed to bring the two together, and eventually an agreement was reached. In the process, Don Bosco had to shuttle back and forth between the negotiators and the Pope. Pius IX took him into such confidence that whenever he called, he was immediately received.

As soon as an agreement was reached, the selection of bishops began. Pius IX had a list drawn up of the best qualified candidates and asked Don Bosco to check the names of those whom he recommended for the Piedmontese dioceses. On his part, Commendatore Tonello presented the government’s list. Obliging, Pius IX acceded to King Victor Emmanuel’s personal wish that Bishop [Alexander] Riccardi of Savona be made archbishop of Turin.<sup>3</sup> We find a reference to these matters toward the end of Father Francesca’s letter of January 17:

Great is the trust that even high-class people have in Don Bosco. He has already had two very long meetings with Cardinal Antonelli, during which he cleared up political difficulties and settled several problems and other very important matters. He also had several conferences with Commendatore Tonello, who received him most amiably and told him he was welcome to return whenever he deemed it useful. He also spoke with the future archbishop of Turin, who had already called on him at the Vimeratis. He will, no doubt, be favorable to us, and, I would say, grateful to Don Bosco.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

The wish has arisen that Don Bosco open a house in Rome. He is dealing with very important people about matters that will greatly benefit the Church. It is said that he sees many future things as already existing, just as he used to see the Oratory before it even came to be. . . .<sup>4</sup>

Father John Francesia

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting other details of no particular importance. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 51

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

**N**OBLE Roman families who had private chapels in their mansions vied with one another in inviting Don Bosco to say Mass for them, and their youngsters longed to serve.<sup>1</sup> On Saturday, January 19 [1868], Don Bosco said Mass at Duchess Boncompagni's home. Later that day he had another audience with Pius IX which Father Francesia described very glowingly in a letter to the Oratory boys in order to arouse their enthusiasm. Though many of them were writing to Don Bosco, they were not quite as many<sup>2</sup> as in 1858 [during his first visit to Rome].<sup>3</sup> Thus stated Father [Celestine] Durando who kept forwarding them. Some of the pupils were cooler to Don Bosco because he could no longer be constantly with them as before, and the newcomers has not as yet really come to know him.

Rome, January 21, 1867

My dearest boys,

I want this letter to be just for you alone. It is such a long time since I have seen and spoken to you that I feel I just must talk to you, especially now that I have great things to tell you.

Last Saturday, a week after his first audience with Pius IX, Don Bosco was again received by the Pope. So that they would be able to talk at leisure, the audience was scheduled for mid-afternoon—a time reserved for important people. If I could adequately tell you how much these Romans are interested in our dear Don Bosco, you would not be at all surprised that the Holy Father sends for him. I went along too. You can well imagine how thrilled I was. . . .

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. V, p. 573. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 523-602. [Editor]

At four in the afternoon, serene and cheerful as ever, Don Bosco walked into the Pope's chambers. "Oh, my dear Don Bosco!" the Pope exclaimed. "Come in! I was longing to see you again."

You well know that I have a keen ear, but that's all I heard, even though the audience lasted over one hour. Don Bosco certainly remembered all of you, and being so close to the Vicar of Christ, he asked for spiritual favors for you, for all the festive oratory boys, and for those at Lanzo and at Mirabello.

Our Don Bosco loves you so much in the Lord that wherever he goes he thinks of you. Remember this well, and even write it upon your hearts: Pius IX grants you a plenary indulgence at the point of death, and once a month as long as you live if you also go to confession and Communion. These are remarkable favors, my dear boys—favors not easily granted! Who knows what people would do to obtain them!

The Holy Father inquired about you with fatherly solicitude; he spoke of Dominic Savio and asked whether you are trying to imitate him. He was delighted to hear that many of you have taken Dominic as a model. Let us fully appreciate the Holy Father's spiritual gifts and make good use of them. Don Bosco also obtained other favors, but he will tell you about them himself.

And you, my dearest friends, are you praying for Don Bosco? You should see how he enjoys your letters. Don't ever think he shoves them aside or gives them to his secretary to read. Not at all! In fact, he's now writing an answer to each letter as a souvenir of his visit to Rome.

Knowing you well, I can guess what you want now: you want me to tell you about the wonders Don Bosco has worked in Rome. In fact, some of you have even taken me to task about it, though in a friendly way. I would gladly oblige, but what can I do if Don Bosco will not cooperate? I must tell you that he has prayed and is still praying that nothing may happen to draw attention to him. The Lord, however, has not quite listened to him; here and there something happens all the same.

For instance, a Neapolitan prince who daily had dizzy spells was instantly cured by Don Bosco's blessing. He came back last Saturday to thank him and offer a donation for the church. I saw him myself. Likewise, a seriously ill child was blessed and fully cured, and he too returned with his father to offer thanks. It looks like diseases fear Don Bosco's hand and flee when it is raised over them. This is what people here firmly believe. Crowds of sufferers flock here from everywhere, sure to be relieved.

Last Saturday I witnessed a most touching scene. Don Bosco was in a hurry to go to the Vatican because he was already late, as usual, but the

porter's lodge was thronged with people who wished to speak to him, receive his blessing, or go to confession. A tearful woman, seeing that Don Bosco was determined to leave, knelt before him and held up a little girl who seemed to be in the throes of death. "She is dying, Father," she sobbed. "She is dying! Please, bless her!" Grief choked her voice, and all the bystanders, including some soldiers, were moved. Don Bosco blessed the child and the woman left in peace. May the Lord reward her faith and cure her beloved little daughter. I recommend her also to your prayers.

You may have seen pictures of Our Lord blessing children. I see similar scenes every time I walk with Don Bosco downtown. It is not only the ordinary people who want to be blessed by him, but monsignors, bishops, and archbishops too. Wherever he goes he leaves people with such a keen desire for him that I cannot describe it myself. "How fortunate," they say to me, "are the Oratory boys in having this holy priest all for themselves." At such times I sadly think of those few at the Oratory who fail to appreciate him.

Don Bosco thanks you for all you are doing for him, especially by receiving Holy Communions in order that everything may turn out well. I know you would like a letter from him, but right now it's simply impossible. He asks me to send you his warmest best wishes.

Count Vimercati thanks you for your prayers. He is getting much better and we hope to see him on his feet again soon. I have lots of other fine things to tell you, but later. I have fervently prayed for you in the little rooms of St. Aloysius, of Blessed John Berchmans,<sup>4</sup> and of St. Stanislaus Kostka so that you may imitate their virtues, especially holy purity.

Good-bye! May the Lord bless you. This is my fondest wish.

Yours affectionately,  
Father J. B. Francesia

Father Francesia's letter mentions Don Bosco's second audience with Pius IX.<sup>5</sup> Nobody could ever imagine how familiarly Pius IX treated Don Bosco. When their conversation turned to the sad conditions to which anticlericals had reduced the Church, to the still worse troubles looming ahead, and to the factors that had contributed to bring about such a lamentable situation, the Pope asked Don Bosco, "What do you think of the amnesty we granted

<sup>4</sup> John Berchmans (1599-1621) was declared a saint in 1888. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> See p. 256. [Editor]

to all political prisoners at the beginning of our pontificate? Some praise me; others condemn me. What is your opinion?"

Don Bosco edged away, remarking that no one could foresee how things would turn out. "Tell me frankly what you think," the Pope insisted.

"Well, then, Your Holiness," Don Bosco replied, "your good heart prompted you to be generous and you hoped thereby to win those felons' hearts, but I am afraid that you acted like Samson of old when he released the three hundred foxes he had captured. They scattered everywhere at once, spreading fire and destruction to the crops."

"The comparison does not fit," the Pope countered.

"Comparisons never fit perfectly," Don Bosco rejoined.

"Be that as it may," the Pope went on, "we thought we were doing the right thing. . . . Anyway, we appreciate your frankness. Yes, we made a mistake. But we believe that this honest mistake suited the plans of Divine Providence. Had we firmly resisted aspirations which had become widespread also among Catholics, the papacy would have been accused of being inflexible and deliberately alienating modern society. This way, by our leniency in granting civil liberties without jeopardizing essential Church rights, we unmasked the hypocrisy of those who demanded such liberties only as a means of oppressing the Church."

After other remarks, Don Bosco was gratified to hear the Vicar of Christ commend him with these words: "Three Popes are indebted to you! You have defended their outraged good name with you *History of Italy*, your *History of the Church*, and your *Letture Cattoliche*."

"Not past popes only," Don Bosco deftly added, thus hinting to his need of some favors.

"I understand! Do you need my signature on some documents?"

Don Bosco presented a petition concerning the blessing of religious articles, retaining or reading forbidden books, and saying Mass before dawn. The Pope obliged.<sup>6</sup>

Don Bosco also acquainted the Holy Father with an offer of buildings and money for a Salesian house in Rome. Pius IX, who

<sup>6</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

would have liked such a foundation, mentioned Vigna Pia, a sort of farmstead and reform school for about one hundred abandoned youngsters that he himself had founded. He had spoken about it to Don Bosco in 1858. It was managed by French religious who would willingly have withdrawn. Pius IX wished the Salesians to take it over. Duke Salviati, who heartily agreed, took Don Bosco to visit it. The plan fell through, however, after several months of discussions because the Holy See's agencies charged with welfare institutions would not give up even an iota of their control over them.<sup>7</sup>

Another most important reason for Don Bosco's trip to Rome was the approval of his Society, or at least its power to issue dimissorial letters for its ordinands. He spoke of this at length with the Pope who was favorably disposed but who understandably wanted things to be processed routinely. "Apply to the proper Sacred Congregations," he suggested. "After they have examined the matter, I shall step in."

But the problem was that Don Bosco had found the Congregation of Bishops and Regulars not too favorable. As regards the vow of poverty, especially, he had had to give lengthy explanations with but scant success. Moreover, at that time, the tendency was to broaden as much as possible the bishops' jurisdiction over religious orders. To top it off, Monsignor [Stanislaus] Svegliati, the Congregation's very influential secretary on whom the decision mostly depended, was adamantly opposed to Don Bosco's plans. It was to him that the Pope directed Don Bosco, giving him to understand that if he won the monsignor over to his side, his request would be granted. Monsignor [Francis] Ricci, who was present at this exchange, kindly escorted Don Bosco and Father Francesia to Monsignor Svegliati's office in the Palazzo della Cancelleria, but they had to wait over an hour because the prelate was out. Tired of waiting, they decided to go home, but while they stood on the porticoes with Don Bosco pointing out to Father Francesia the spot where Count Pellegrino Rossi<sup>8</sup> had been stabbed to death, Monsignor Svegliati came by. Monsignor Ricci introduced Don Bosco to him.

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting a draft of the preliminary negotiations on the matter. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> Minister of the Interior under Pius IX, Rossi was assassinated on November 15, 1848. [Editor]

“Monsignor,” he said, “this is Don Bosco from Turin. It is the Holy Father’s wish that his requests be considered and that some way be found to satisfy him.”

After a courteous exchange, Don Bosco went right into the matter: “Monsignor, I hope you have received the memorandum I sent to the Sacred Congregation along with the rules of the Society of St. Francis de Sales.”

“I have read both, but, if I may say so, I am surprised at the wording of the rules. For instance, how can you reconcile the vow of poverty with the ownership of goods?”

“If you will let me explain, you will see that the two things are not discordant.”

“That will be hard to prove. Anyway, approbation of the rules requires mature study. As for granting dimissorials, that’s out of the question.”

“Yet the Holy Father told me that he desired. . . .”

“The Holy Father! Has he forgotten the decrees he issued himself? Believe me, Don Bosco, it can’t be done!”

“But, Monsignor. . . .” Don Bosco went on, giving reasons, refuting objections, and showing how reasonable and vital his requests were, but it was all in vain. Monsignor Svegliati kept repeating “It can’t be done!” and there was no way to make him change his refrain.

It was quite a strange scene. The monsignor, determined not to yield an inch and peeved by Don Bosco’s insistence, was doing his best to avoid facing him by turning sideways, while Don Bosco, calm and unmoved but equally determined to get a favorable reply, kept following the monsignor’s movements in order to face him. In the process the monsignor several times turned completely around, thus providing some fun for spectators. Finally Don Bosco said, “If you will give me a few minutes tonight at your residence, I may manage to convince you of the soundness of my reasons.”

Monsignor Svegliati, a most accomplished gentleman, obliged. “You are welcome to come,” he replied, “but it will be useless. It can’t be done! It can’t be done! And I regret to make you waste so much precious time.”

“I came to Rome mainly for this. If I am not causing you too much trouble, tonight’s meeting will be most gratifying to me.”

“Very well, then. I shall be waiting for you.”

Don Bosco went. Their discussion was very lengthy and sufficiently satisfactory to Don Bosco. The monsignor was no longer so obstinate with his “It can’t be done.” He thoroughly gave up this pet phrase of his two years later when the blessing of Mary, Help of Christians instantly restored his health.

On January 20, Don Bosco had dinner with staff members of *Civiltà Cattolica*. The conversation eventually got around to the appointment of bishops, and the Jesuit fathers wanted to hear about Don Bosco’s meetings with Minister Ricasoli and with Commendatore Tonello. Don Bosco, who occasionally spoke of things redounding to his honor but with admirable simplicity and quite unassumingly, satisfied their wish in such a way that those highly-esteemed religious could not help but admire his humility, so akin to that of a saint. “Could anyone talk about things as important as these with greater indifference?” Father Francesia heard them remark. Father Oreglia made him repeat these things five or six times on different occasions.

Perhaps it was at this dinner that Protestant propaganda was discussed, with the result that it was agreed that Father Perrone, S.J., should write a popular book refuting their errors.<sup>9</sup> Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J., often stated, “Don Bosco is a saint. He has been carefully scrutinized but nothing has ever been found in him less than righteous. At dinners he never asks or refuses anything, shows no preferences or aversions, and neither criticizes nor praises [what is being served]; he never drains his glass of well-watered wine.” Don Bosco acted the same way in Turin. He would attend lavish dinners in town at noon, but at supper he would eat with relish a warmed-up rice soup like everybody else at the Oratory.<sup>10</sup>

On January 21 Don Bosco paid a visit to the Canons Regular of the Lateran, popularly called the “Rocchettini,” who serviced the Church of St. Peter-in-Chains. Don Bosco occasionally said Mass there and on one occasion struck up a close friendship with a young Jewish convert, Edgar Mortara, who at this time was preparing for

<sup>9</sup> We are omitting a short letter from Don Bosco about this matter. [Editor]

<sup>10</sup> We are omitting repetitious statements about his patience in interviewing people and replying to their letters. On these points see Vol. VII, pp. 12-26. [Editor]

the priesthood.<sup>11</sup> In 1898, Father Mortara wrote to us as follows from Marseilles:

Sentiments of profound veneration link me to Don Bosco's memory and to his congregation whose growth is truly astonishing and admirable.

I first heard of Don Bosco in 1867 when I was a young student at St. Peter-in-Chains in Rome with the Canons Regular of the Lateran. At that time I also had the honor and joy of seeing him and serving his Mass, during which I was repeatedly edified by his profound piety and utterly sincere devotion. . . . After Mass, he always had a kind word for me. He also gave me a medal of Mary, Help of Christians, repeatedly invited me to visit him in Turin, and honored me with special confidences.

Once he called me aside and asked me to write to him in Turin, for he wanted to tell me a secret. The gist of his reply to my letter, which I promptly wrote, was somewhat as follows: "My dear Father Pio (this was the name I had taken at Baptism instead of my Semitic name Edgar), I must tell you something which, presently, I want you to keep secret. On returning to the sacristy after saying Mass, I saw a dark cloud floating over your forehead. When you lowered your head, you looked serene and smiling, but when you raised it, that dark cloud would hide your whole face. Above that cloud stood two angels holding a crown of gorgeous roses. My son, be humble and all will go well with you. Pride, symbolized by that dark cloud, would be your undoing. The Lord will give you a brilliant crown if you persevere. Be always faithful."

In homage to truth, I must say that this secret communication perfectly fits my interior state, my character and temperament, and also my modest life. Faced with most fierce interior and exterior struggles and severe and bitter trials, time and again I found comfort, support, and heavenly peace in God's adorable will, whereas impatience would have filled me with darkness. Many a time, embittered and forlorn, I turned my eyes to Him who heartened us, saying: "Your reward is great in heaven," and I again pictured to myself that beautiful crown of roses which hopefully the Lord will give me if, with His grace, I shall be faithful until death.

I think this incident could well fit into a chapter of Don Bosco's life about his discernment of spirits.

<sup>11</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 52

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

HERE was great emulation in Rome to please Don Bosco, especially by purchasing lottery tickets and contributing to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, whose construction was steadily progressing.<sup>1</sup>

The following declaration which we find in one of our documents illustrates the efficacy of word he possessed:

It is sheer delight to hear Don Bosco's soothing, vivid, penetrating words. His reprimands do not irritate; rather, they draw tears and a sincere resolve to do better. His consoling words turn sorrow into joy. His praises elate and enthuse. His sympathetic words fill the sick with peace and hope. When heartbroken mothers present critically ill children for his blessing, he obliges but does not promise a cure. Rather, he exhorts them to bear their God-given cross. Before leaving, one of them kissed his hand, exclaiming, "I feel as consoled as if I had obtained my son's cure." It is certainly a greater miracle to bring a mother to perfect resignation than to cure her child.

Don Bosco, always calm and self-possessed, could also be outspoken, when necessary, even with high-born people. Once, when a very noble Roman lady recommended her two ailing sons to him, he remarked that she must accept whatever God judged best.

"You did not have to come from Turin to tell me this," she retorted excitedly and somewhat haughtily.

"God resists the proud," Don Bosco answered gently.

The lady, who at heart was really virtuous, realized that God's favors could be had only through humility, and from that time she put on no airs whenever she spoke with him. Enlightening also is

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

this excerpt from a letter of Countess Ann Bentivoglio to Chevalier Oreglia, dated January 27:

Misinterpreting something Don Bosco had told me, I became so disturbed that for a week I feared for my sanity. Last night, however, a visit from Don Bosco, whom I was anxious to see, calmed me down. Now I can again attend to my prayers and my duties. Don Bosco told me that it was the devil, the enemy of good, who had put all those fears into my head. Enough now! Let us hope that such days will never return. No doubt, any other person less virtuous than Don Bosco would have lost patience with me. But he is considerate and ignores my fits. . . .

He is always on the move, visiting the sick and the most distinguished people of Rome, beginning with the Holy Father, to whom, as he told me last night, he has free access at any hour. Such favors are not easily granted, and Don Bosco must be very pleased. . . .

Father Francesia too kept recording these visits. Here is another letter, to which, for clarity's sake, we will add dates within parentheses:

[Rome, January 24, 1868]

Dear Father Rua,

His good will notwithstanding, Don Bosco has been unable to answer those who wrote to him from the Oratory to tell him of their difficulties and of their prayers for the success of his mission. If I said that he can't even find time to eat, people might not believe it, but it's true. Precisely because of his steady and unrelenting pressure, he has not been so well these last few days. Everybody runs to him for a remedy to their physical and spiritual ills. Fortunately he prays—and wants me to pray—that nothing extraordinary will happen. Else, I fear, I could not bring him back to Turin in one piece. . . .

During these days, Don Bosco has made the acquaintance of Prince Torlonia. Poor rich man! He is to be pitied. So wealthy and so unfortunate. . . .

Rumor has it that Don Bosco will take along to Turin as many boys as wish to go with him. What a flood of requests! The Jesuit fathers too are charmed with Don Bosco's sanctity. I believe that his greatest miracle is in being so much honored without having performed any miraculous deeds. A look of his is as effective here as in Turin.<sup>2</sup> A lot of thinking goes on

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 234-36. [Editor]

after a somewhat cold, serious, or even indifferent look of his. I have even seen a lady crying because of a strange look from Don Bosco. "Poor me!" she exclaimed. "He knows that I need to put my conscience in order!" Perhaps she did, because she immediately went to confession.

The other day (January 22) we went to St. Peter's Seminary. A little girl on crutches saw us and hopped up to us. "I have heard there is a saint here who can cure me," she cried. "Oh, please cure me for God's sake." And—mind you—so far there has been no public incident revealing Don Bosco as a wonder-worker.

From morning to night he has a steady flow of callers. On Friday (January 25) three cardinals called at the same time. . . . "What's up?" passers-by asked, surprised at seeing wealthy carriages at the entrance. "Is the Holy Father here?"

"No, not the Holy Father," they were told. "Just a priest from Turin, but a genuine saint, as everybody says."

Don Bosco, already much talked about for his saintliness and his Oration, is now also becoming known for his *History of Italy*.<sup>3</sup> They all say it is a masterpiece. The Jesuits may adopt it in their schools here in Rome.

The past few days we have been visiting [the Jesuit boarding school at] Mondragone, notwithstanding the horrible weather. There were five persons in the carriage besides myself: Don Bosco, [Father De Lorenzi, S.J.] "the Don Bosco of Rome," Duke and Duchess Scotti, and Marquis Cappelletti. . . . At the school we were received like princes, and all honors went to Don Bosco. Those good fathers had him address their pupils who had been divided into three groups. How religiously they listened to him! Gratitude and joy shone in their eyes. He gave them a little miraculous medal for a keepsake and they accepted it with delight. . . . They took to him instantly and could not tear themselves away from him. Among them we found students from Piedmont and one from Turin itself, young Marquis Cantono. What a fine lad he is! Such candor in his face! He is one of the top students in his class and is most popular. His teachers, too, esteem and like him very much. How happy he was to see Don Bosco. . . . Among these students—all from noble families—there are many good boys and several excellent ones, all dedicated to virtue and penance. Their model is St. Aloysius. They also know about our Dominic Savio<sup>4</sup> and strive to imitate him. Would Savio have ever dreamed or thought that he would one day be admired by so many? These boys are a credit to the Jesuit fathers who are always with them in the playground, classrooms,

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 322-31. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See the Index of Vol. V. [Editor]

study halls and dormitories. They find their fulfillment and joy in being among them.

Last Saturday night Don Bosco told me that today and tomorrow (January 26-27) he would pay you a visit and would afterward tell me the names of those who are misbehaving. By the time you receive this letter, his visit will be over, but I'm telling you anyway so that you may know that Don Bosco keeps an eye on the Oratory and does not lose sight of anyone. Next Tuesday (January 29) I shall tell you what our "oracle"—Don Bosco—may reveal to me. And mind you that he spoke of his visit to you as if it were the easiest thing in the world for him.

I have mentioned above a "Don Bosco of Rome." This requires an explanation. Father De Lorenzi, a good Jesuit priest, takes special care of Roman youngsters. He has been and still keeps in close touch with Don Bosco, to whom he has already opened his whole heart. When it pleased the Lord, Father De Lorenzi came across the biographies of our three little saints,<sup>5</sup> as he calls them. He immediately gave copies to his boys and inspired them to imitate their virtues. . . . You can't imagine how good these young lads are; they visit prisons and hospitals, teach catechism to prisoners, and nurse the sick. . . .

The Holy Father has sent word to Don Bosco that when he wishes to see him, all he has to do is contact Archbishop [Joseph] Berardi or Monsignor Pacifici. What goodness. . . .

People greet Don Bosco in the streets as much as in Turin, if not more. Every morning as he goes out, he finds the stairs and porch thronged with people waiting for him. They won't let him through until he has blessed them from the top of the stairs. What pleases everybody is to see him always calm and cheerful. His joviality has conquered many a heart.

I just had an interruption. Archbishop Rossi-Vaccari of Colossi called on Don Bosco, who is now in town visiting the sick. There lives in this building a lady who for the last two weeks has been hovering between life and death. She says that she won't die until she has seen Don Bosco. And Don Bosco has not yet been able to oblige.

I hear that you [Father Rua] are wearing yourself out with too much work. Don Bosco does not like that. He wants you to take care of yourself. . . .

Father J. B. Francisia<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Dominic Savio (*see* the Index of Vol. V), Michael Magone (*ibid*; *see also* the Index of Vol. VI), and Francis Besucco (*see* the Index of Vol. VII). [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> We are omitting a postscript about other distinguished visitors. [Editor]

The dying lady alluded to in Father Francesia's letter was a nun. She insistently asked for Don Bosco, but he was never free. One morning, therefore, the doorman locked the exit door, telling him, "I won't let you out unless you first see that nun." Don Bosco smilingly obliged, to the latter's great joy.

"I have come to give you your passport," Don Bosco said to her. "Now get ready to leave." The nun died that same night.

Another letter, full of important news and of filial enthusiasm, came to Chevalier Oreglia from Father Francesia a few days later. After telling him of Don Bosco's cure of a little boy who was about to lose an arm, of the enthusiasm with which Romans greeted Don Bosco on seeing him, and of the warm reception he received at Prince Torlonia's palace,<sup>7</sup> Father Francesia went on:

On Monday, January 28, Don Bosco went to the Caravita, where the most outstanding ladies of Rome once used to meet for prayer. Their sodality, formerly flourishing, has been steadily declining; at present, only four to six members usually attend the meetings. To their distress, the Jesuits, so influential in Rome, found themselves unable to revive it. Therefore, they invited Don Bosco to say Mass there and give a little talk. He accepted. The news spread quickly. On Monday morning the church was packed long before the appointed time. At eight o'clock, when the Mass was scheduled to start, people had so thronged the church that no one else could squeeze in. Don Bosco was late, as usual. An hour and a half went by but nobody showed impatience. Carriages kept arriving. . . . The only thing bothering the crowd was the fear that Don Bosco might not come. He finally arrived at about ten o'clock. Because of the dense crowd it took him a long time to get to the sacristy. Finally he vested and went to the altar, said Mass, gave many Communions, and then spoke. He began by saying, "Faith, faith, my good friends! This is what we need if we want to succeed." He spoke with such enthusiasm that the congregation seemed electrified. He looked inspired. He reproved them but they listened reverently; he made suggestions, and no doubt they will be carried out. When he was through, nobody made a move to leave. All pressed around him, trying to speak to him. They let him go through only when he promised to return after taking a cup of coffee. People were everywhere: in the sanctuary, in the corridors, in the sacristy. It reminded me of our boys when they crowd around him after night prayers to kiss his hand. All

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

wanted to tell him of their needs and troubles, and of their sick relatives longing for his blessing. Somehow he was finally snatched away, near exhaustion, and brought to the safety of the Collegio Romano. And remember that most of those ladies had been waiting in that church from seven. At twelve noon very many were still there waiting to greet him.

A touching spectacle occurred in the street. As soon as he was spotted, crowds surged toward him: mothers with babies, men and women, priests, Jesuits, all sorts of people eager to receive his blessing. . . . He barely managed to climb into Marquis Nannerini's carriage. . . . Then, all fell to their knees, calling out, "Don Bosco, your blessing!" In papal Rome, Don Bosco had to bless them.

Truly the enthusiasm for our most beloved Don Bosco keeps gathering momentum. . . . He is so busy all the time that perhaps he will not be able to reply, as he wishes, to all those who have written such beautiful letters to him. . . . Don Bosco thanks you all. If he cannot reply to each of you, he will make up for it with a long letter to all.

Before closing I must discharge a duty toward all the Oratory boys who, during Don Bosco's absence, strove to please him by their good conduct. Last Sunday and Monday Don Bosco paid a visit to the Oratory and was not entirely happy. He saw several things which he himself will write about to you as soon as he can snatch a few moments. I don't know how he managed to visit the Oratory because I know that he has never been so intensely occupied as during those days. The mysteries of God and of His servants are unsearchable. Perhaps some of you are already feeling some qualms of conscience. . . . May it be for your good!

Father J. B. Francesia

An indisputable proof of Don Bosco's invisible visit to the Oratory is the fact that he unerringly singled out those who had sneaked out of their ranks during the weekly walk in town, those who got people to buy things for them with money that should have been deposited with the prefect, those who stealthily read unsuitable books, those who in the evening stole away from singing class, and so on.

A Salesian, still living, declares, "The night before Don Bosco had Father Francesia write that letter to the boys, I dreamed that Don Bosco came to the Oratory and that I confided to him some anxieties of conscience. 'Do you know why you have these troubles?' he remarked. 'It's because you have not yet given yourself entirely to me!' I seemed to be standing near a narrow bridge which

spanned a deep and murky torrent at a very great height. I was afraid to cross, but Don Bosco encouraged me and safely led me by the hand to the other side. As soon as he returned from Rome, I told him of my dream, and he said I was not to worry.”

## CHAPTER 53

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

READERS would be wrong to think that Father Francesca's letters [about Don Bosco's stay in Rome] are exaggerated. Many other witnesses have corroborated his reports. We shall also see even more enthusiastic receptions and stunning, undeniable facts during Don Bosco's travels in Italy, France, and Spain. He was the man of his century, the saintly priest sent by God to sanctify others and cooperate effectively in the salvation of society.

We continue with further letters from Father Francesca.

Dear Father Rua,

Rome, January 29, 1867

I know I am repeating myself, but I cannot remain silent because all who write to me tell me that my letters, full of that name which is so dear to you, are most welcome. *Deo gratias*. I am glad and so I'll continue. . . .

Several times already Don Bosco has aroused a degree of enthusiasm that will be hard not only to describe but even to imagine. At all hours, all sorts of people come to speak to him. On seeing him, they fall to their knees asking for his blessing. It looks like idolatry, and yet it is naught but sincere, deep reverence toward a good servant of God. If you could see the crush of people wanting to speak with him, you too would be surprised. Today, for instance . . . some came at half past eleven and waited until after seven in the evening. And Don Bosco? He is always calm, serene, and patient. He listens, consoles, and receives all with native goodness. If for no other reason, all extoll him for his graciousness and kindness. . . . What I see seems incredible and yet it's true. One person, for instance, after fasting the whole day and waiting in vain for a chance to speak to him, left in tears but determined to try again. Pastors invite him to their churches, rectors to their institutions, superiors to their monasteries. It happens every day. I know that I have told you this before, but I also know that you like to hear it again.

People praise the Oratory, but Don Bosco does not seem too pleased about the conduct of some. During those two days when he took a look at the Oratory,<sup>1</sup> he saw things which deeply grieved him. He will give me the full names of those concerned as soon as he has a free moment, and I will forward them for your information. Will you [dear boys] like that? Perhaps not. In any case we shall do what is best for your souls.

Don Bosco admires and thanks Divine Providence for what it has done and is doing for our house. How many people formerly had never heard of us and now are eager to help. . . . It is midnight and so I sign off.

January 30, 1867

Don Bosco is already under siege, and unless he can sneak out he won't be able to say Mass at eight [as scheduled] or even at ten. A marchioness has been here every morning at seven for the past few weeks, trying in vain to go to Don Bosco for confession, but she has not given up. Right now it's only seven o'clock, and carriages are already arriving. All these people want to go to confession to Don Bosco. I doubt that they will succeed.

In case I haven't told you yet, the Holy Father, in utter goodness, has graciously donated a considerable sum of money to Don Bosco for our festive oratories. At one of the audiences the Pope, wishing to give him a donation, opened his cashbox but found it empty. Smilingly, he raised his eyes to heaven, saying, "Let not the world know that the Pope is penniless. Now I am really as poor as St. Peter." Then, turning to Don Bosco, he went on, "Do you see, my dear Don Bosco? There is very little difference between me and your orphans. You depend on Divine Providence; I depend on charity. My children will provide."

I feel like crying as I write this. The Holy Father, instead, cheerfully trusted in God. The next day he handed ninety Roman scudi—about four hundred lire—to Monsignor Ricci, his private chamberlain, for Don Bosco. "From a poor father to his poor children!" he remarked. Providence had again generously provided.

I will add a charming incident that I myself witnessed. Don Bosco was waiting in the papal antechambers for an audience. Presently Monsignor Ricci came out of the Pope's quarters. "Oh, Don Bosco!" he exclaimed. "His Holiness has been asking for you the past four hours. Come in. As His Holiness said, 'Now you are the Holy Father of Rome!'"

[My dear Father Rua], take care of your health. Greetings from Don

<sup>1</sup> A reference to his "invisible" visits. See p. 275. [Editor]

Bosco and from myself to all our dear boys. May the Lord bless you and me and all.

Yours in the Lord  
Father J. B. Francesia<sup>2</sup>

Over Rome, meanwhile, hung an aura of expectation concerning the appointment of bishops for the vacant dioceses of Italy. After the Holy See and the Italian government exchanged their lists of candidates, the Pope noticed that some were unknown to him. He therefore charged Don Bosco with making investigations about them.<sup>3</sup>

One day, Father Francesia, as he himself told us, accompanied Don Bosco to Commendatore Tonello's office. At this meeting, which lasted over an hour, Don Bosco informed Tonello that Pius IX had charged him to present a list of Piedmontese priests for the dioceses of Piedmont, and Tonello accepted it. Father Joachim Berto saw the list. It was written in Don Bosco's hand. The first name on it was that of Canon Lawrence Gastaldi for the see of Saluzzo. Tonello approved him at once, all the more so because he had first practiced law in the firm of Canon Gastaldi's father. Not knowing Canon Gastaldi, Pius IX had sought information from Don Bosco, who gave the canon a most favorable recommendation. He was convinced that the Church would have in Canon Gastaldi a zealous, scholarly prelate, well versed in all subjects—especially theology—and that the Salesian Society would find him to be a strong supporter. Don Bosco also wished to give a token of sincere esteem, gratitude and affection to one who had proved himself a most cordial friend.

The other equally worthy candidates presented by Don Bosco were: Canon Eugene Robert Galletti of Turin for the see of Alba, Canon Charles Savio of Cuneo for Asti, Canon Anthony Colli of Novara for Alessandria, and Canon Andrew Formica of Alba for Cuneo. When the first news of these nominations reached Turin,

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting a postscript about administrative details at the Oratory, a passage describing Don Bosco's frankness in disillusioning those who hoped for the return of the king of Naples to his throne, and a letter to Chevalier Oreglia from a friend of his about Don Bosco's popularity in Rome and the forthcoming appointment of bishops for the vacant Italian dioceses. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Father John Cagliero, who happened to be at the chancery, heard Monsignor Zappata, the vicar capitular, exclaim, "We had better be on good terms with Don Bosco! He hands out mitres!"

## CHAPTER 54

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

ON Saturday, February 2, the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary,<sup>1</sup> many Oratory boys offered Holy Communion for Don Bosco. They had suitably prepared themselves by confession and a novena during which they had daily practiced one of the nose-gays that Don Bosco himself had formulated and had charged Father Rua to announce at the “Good Nights.” They were the very same ones Don Bosco had given the previous year.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile Father Francesia kept sending more news from Rome:

Rome, February 3, 1867

My dear Chevalier Oreglia,

I am writing in turn to you and to Father Rua so as not to arouse any jealousy. . . .

*St. Peter's Centenary* is quite a success. A complimentary copy, richly bound in white cloth, was presented to the Pope. He glanced through it, found it quite timely, and praised the author. . . .

The other day, I too went to Prince Torlonia's mansion. He is really charmed with Don Bosco. I don't know whether he has done anything yet for the Oratory, but I am sure that he will. Not satisfied with enjoying Don Bosco's company for an entire morning, he came here on Friday evening to return the visit. He marveled at what he heard about the Oratory and fully realized its many needs. May God inspire him with some good thought. . . . On the evening Prince Torlonia was here, Duke Salviati also called. It was his second try and he had to wait a whole hour—an unheard-of thing for a Roman prince. It took Don Bosco to start a new custom. Prince Ruspoli patiently waited two hours too. The Romans have really gone crazy over Don Bosco. Some of them are already sad at the thought

<sup>1</sup> Now renamed the feast of the Presentation of the Lord. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See p. 152. At this point we omitting two short letters to Don Bosco from a countess and a nun. [Editor]

of losing him. But they have found the secret of getting him to their homes: they either play sick or promise a donation. . . .

Last Thursday we dined at the Collegio Nazareno. What a beautiful reception those boys gave Don Bosco! They know his books already, particularly his *Bible History* and his *History of Italy* which have been adopted as their school textbooks. They had heard so much about him that when they saw him they were convinced that they had a saint in their midst. Knowing of his visit a few days in advance, they notified their parents and relatives and these came in large numbers. There was great joy at dinner and unbounded enthusiasm at its end when a pupil read a complimentary address to Don Bosco in Latin. The long and loud applause almost brought the roof down. . . .

After a tour of the school, Don Bosco was invited to address the student body and staff gathered in the chapel. He spoke impromptu and most effectively, as usual. All eyes were riveted on him. He was very moved when he took leave. . . .

It is rumored and feared—and it was even in the papers—that Don Bosco may be the future archbishop of Turin! Sheer nonsense! Some newspapers have shown interest in Don Bosco. The *Nazione* of Florence, speaking of the conversion of Father Passaglia<sup>3</sup>—news joyfully received in Rome—announced that before long it would write about the quite “notorious” Don Bosco. It will, no doubt, say something in keeping with its [anticlerical] editorial policy, but anyway it will be free publicity for Don Bosco and his work. At last, this morning I too was able to attend services in St. Peter’s. Huge as it is, it was full of people. . . . I left Don Bosco at the Church of the Stimmate where he was going to say Mass. . . . He was through at eleven and planned to go to Monsignor De Merode’s where he was expected for dinner. He got into a carriage and was taken instead to Villa Pamfili to visit a sick person. . . . I had to wait till after twelve for him, pacing up and down by St. Peter’s. We must take such things in stride. Everybody wants him, and when anyone gets hold of him, everybody else is ignored. Don Bosco has to keep his appointments as best he can. . . .

Tell the boys who want to hear from Don Bosco that it is impossible for him to sit at his desk before ten at night. Often he has to stay up past midnight just to read their letters. He regrets being unable to satisfy their just demands and asks them to be patient.

Greetings to all. Pray for

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Francesia

<sup>3</sup> An unfrocked Jesuit. See Vol. VII, pp. 110f. [Editor]

In another letter, dated February 4, to Father Celestine Durando, Father Francesca wrote:

In the past few days, Don Bosco has been plotting against Canon Gastaldi, our revered moral theology teacher. Tell him about it when you see him. If he asks what it is, say that for the present it must remain a secret.<sup>4</sup>

P.S. This morning Don Bosco said Mass in a private chapel to oblige the king of Naples, who had insistently asked him to do so quite some time ago. Don Bosco could not and would not refuse.

Since Francis II of Naples had left to Don Bosco the choice of a meeting place, the latter opted for Villa Ludovisi. When Don Bosco arrived there, the king, members of the nobility, and the commander of the papal Zouaves were waiting for him. Don Bosco said Mass and gave a ten-minute talk on faith. . . .

After his thanksgiving, Don Bosco told the king that he was at his disposal. They both retired to a room for about three-quarters of an hour. After some preliminaries, the king asked Don Bosco to tell him frankly whether he would regain his throne—as everybody else was assuring him—within a few months. Don Bosco tried to parry the question, saying it was not for him to divine the future, but the king insisted.

“In that case,” Don Bosco replied, “I tell you frankly that you will not return to your throne.”

“On what do you base your assertion? On assumptions or on solid arguments?”

“On solid arguments.”

“Such as?”

“The way the kings of Naples have dealt with the Church.”

“What do you mean?”

“That the Church was treated with scanty reverence.”

“How can you say that? Didn’t the Church enjoy the king’s protection?”

“Protection? For over sixty years the bishops could not administer Confirmation or Holy Orders, hold synods, make pastoral visits, or correspond with Rome without the king’s consent. Is this ‘protection?’”

<sup>4</sup> A reference to Don Bosco’s recommendation of Canon Gastaldi as a candidate for the episcopacy. [Editor]

“But Don Bosco,” the king countered, “this surveillance was a political necessity. It was unavoidable in times of revolution in order to safeguard the rights of the crown.”

“Does Your Majesty really believe that such anti-Church measures were justifiable? How about the infamous royal tribunal of Sicily, which for more than a century strove to keep the Church on that island enslaved, spying on the diocesan and religious clergy and preventing any contact between them and the Holy See? How about the wicked judges who did what they pleased, usurping the Pope’s and even the king’s authority, nullifying episcopal directives and orders, too often persecuting the good religious and favoring the bad? As a result came frightful scandals, immorality, simony, oppression, fraud, confiscation and profanation of church property, and similar outrages. These judges were backed or at least tolerated by the king. Such things called down God’s punishment on the dynasty.”

“But King Ferdinand, my father, in his last years reached an agreement with the Pope about removing many of these abuses.”

“True, but the causes of so many evils were not, or could not be, removed. That tribunal should have been abolished. Instead, it was allowed to retain several privileges.”

At this point Don Bosco became silent and pensive. After a few moments the king went on, “Don’t you think that if I regained my throne, there would be a change for the better?”

“Your Majesty, I know how devoted you are to the Holy See. I know you have given shining proofs of that. You are the son of a saintly mother. But will your power match your resolve? Didn’t certain counselors exercise an evil influence over your father for many years in their efforts to keep alive his mistrust of papal Rome? In some instances, without God’s help, you may do what your predecessors have done.”

The king seemed almost offended by this remark.

“Do you know,” he replied, “that up to now nobody has ever been so outspoken with me? Yet, I am pleased that someone at last speaks his mind frankly. Now tell me, don’t you think that something may turn up to return me to the throne?”

“I can think of one thing only, but it won’t happen.”

“What?” the king eagerly asked.

“Total anarchy, during which your subjects, recalling your outstanding good deeds, would again clamor for you. This would be your only hope, but it is no more than supposition.”

Toward the end of the interview the king entreated Don Bosco to call at his palace, since the queen wished to meet him. It was Monday, and the visit to the Farnese palace was set for Friday. Don Bosco left the king pensive and disappointed, for the latter had looked for a more favorable forecast.

In Turin, Father Durando relayed Father Francesia’s message to Canon Gastaldi, who guessed its meaning and soon received from Don Bosco himself the news of his appointment as bishop of Saluzzo. Shortly afterward, when Professor Matthew Picco congratulated him on his promotion, the canon jokingly replied, “Just when I had nothing to do, the Pope gave me a job.”

## CHAPTER 55

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

ON February 5, Don Bosco said Mass in the private chapel of Philip Foccardi, a manufacturer of religious articles with whom he had become a close friend in 1858.<sup>1</sup> On that same day he wrote to Father Rua about some business matters<sup>2</sup> and enclosed this note for a kitchen helper, identified only by the initial "S." We report it to show that Don Bosco did not shy away from admonishing.

1. Attendance at prayers and Mass with the community.
2. No blaspheming.
3. No handouts of food without permission.
4. Bi-weekly or—at least—monthly confession.
5. More thriftiness in using fuel, seasonings, etc.

Along with Don Bosco's letter came this one from Father Francesia:

Rome, February 6, 1867

Dear Father Rua,

We've had news from the Oratory and are pleased that no one is sick. We are very sorry to hear that the price of bread has gone up. Don Bosco became highly concerned and still is. . . .

How good and kind the Holy Father is to Don Bosco! Last Sunday evening he sent his majordomo, Monsignor Borromeo, to bring him in great pomp a richly decorated candle which will in due time stand out well in our new church. It is almost two feet taller than I, and so large it takes my two hands to encircle it. It is adorned with the image of the Immaculate Conception and other details which at the moment, thrilled as I am, I

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 553, 556, 600. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

can hardly describe. It was the most beautiful of the candles presented to the Holy Father by the pastors of Rome on the feast of the Purification. I have already told you that the Pope has seen and glanced through *St. Peter's Centenary*. He chose to honor its author by this distinctive gift.

The Holy Father likes to hear about Don Bosco's doings in Rome. He is delighted to know that his sermons kindle piety and devotion and hopes that he will stay for a long time. Yesterday evening we went to thank the Pope for his exquisite gift. I saw then how much the Holy Father loves Don Bosco. A cardinal and several monsignori were waiting in the ante-chamber for their audience. To their astonishment, the Holy Father kept Don Bosco with him for over half an hour. . . .

Contrary to expectations, the affairs of our congregation seem to be going on well. To make sure of that, Don Bosco shall have to remain in Rome a few days longer. I regret the delay, though you may not believe me. Yet, it's true. I am often left to myself wandering about Rome and I am getting awfully bored.

Monsignor Moroni, attracted by Don Bosco's reputation for holiness, made a courtesy call a few days ago and was delighted when Don Bosco told him that he would gratefully accept the monsignor's *Dizionario Ecclesiastico*. Two days later the latter himself delivered his monumental work of over a hundred volumes. Count Vimercati, ever helpful, will see to its shipment to the Oratory. . . .

People keep calling on Don Bosco. If he did not try to cut down on callers by eluding them, only God knows if he could ever get out of the house or even have his meals and rest. . . . I know you are wondering why Don Bosco does not write. Today he promises to find some moments for you. . . .

Two men, who could not even stand the mention of religion, heard him only once, but they were so charmed that they will come this evening for confession. I am convinced that if he had the time, the whole city would want him as a confessor. Bearded, frightening men open their hearts to Don Bosco as easily as our boys. His words are then most especially effective because, though these people are perfect strangers to him, he discovers their inmost secrets. Oh, how many wonderful things I shall have to tell you upon my return. . . .

We still don't know when we'll leave, but we hope it will be before the end of February. . . . Remember me to the boys! Tell them I am ever in their midst.

Your friend in Jesus and Mary,  
Father John B. Francesia

P.S. *St. Peter's Centenary* is being read all over Rome and praised. We anticipate a great demand for it in June. . . .

Don Bosco's little book *St. Peter's Centenary* was reviewed and praised by *Unità Cattolica* of Turin and *Civiltà Cattolica* of Rome as most informative and timely for St. Peter's centennial celebrations. In view of this, Don Bosco was planning to have it reprinted in Rome by Propaganda Fide Press.<sup>3</sup> But already at this time, Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J., whose brother was a Salesian, had noticed a sentence in the book which did not sound quite right. On page 192, in reference to St. Peter's arrival in Rome, it read: "I deem it opportune, by the way, to point out to writers and lecturers on this subject, Catholic or Protestant, not to regard it as a point of dogma and religion."

Father Oreglia called Father Francesia's attention to it to relay to Don Bosco. Then, wishing to reassure himself on the matter, he wrote to his fellow Jesuit, Father Valeriano Cardella, a theology professor in the Collegio Romano, asking whether the above-quoted statement by a good Catholic author could safely be accepted. Father Cardella replied at length on February 4, 1867, saying that such a statement needed clarification rather than rectification. He suggested that the author clarify his meaning by adding that, though St. Peter's coming to Rome was not a defined dogma but merely an historic fact, yet it was intimately connected with the dogma that St. Peter was the head of the Church and such are also his successors, the Roman Pontiffs.<sup>4</sup>

Whatever interpretation may be placed on that sentence, taken out of context, the fact is that in writing the book Don Bosco undertook not only to narrate the glorious deeds of the Prince of the Apostles, but also to show to the faithful that the sublime dignity of the Popes stemmed from the fact that they were St. Peter's successors in the see of Rome.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. The full text of Father Cardella's reply may be seen in *Memorie Biografiche del Venerabile Don Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. VIII, pp. 653-55. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 56

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

SHORTLY after Don Bosco's arrival in Rome, Father Lawrence Bertinelli, a Camaldolese monk, hastened to call on him to thank him personally for a favor received. Some time previously he had written to Don Bosco to ask whether he could safely carry out a plan of his. Naturally Don Bosco replied, inquiring what the plan was. "I won't tell you," Father Bertinelli replied. "I want to see if your advice is inspired. Please advise me."

Don Bosco ignored the request until he received this telegram with prepaid answer: "I am about to decide. Answer requested."

"Think it over and pray," Don Bosco answered. "Your decision could be fatal to you."

Don Bosco's advice proved providential because this monk had planned to transfer to a house of his order in Poland and was all set to leave. Some time after receiving Don Bosco's reply, news reached him that the monastery had collapsed and all the religious were buried in its ruins. Full of admiration and gratitude and acting on behalf of his superior general, Father Bertinelli invited Don Bosco to visit their hermitage near Frascati on the feast of St. Romuald, their founder. Don Bosco obliged.<sup>1</sup>

Father Francesia narrates this visit in a letter to Father Rua written at intervals on two successive days. The first part of the letter describes Don Bosco's daily routine in Rome:

Rome, February 9, 1867

Dear Father Rua,

It is ten at night and Don Bosco is going through a pile of mail from Turin and Rome. I am starting on this letter without knowing when I'll be

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

able to finish it. Don Bosco would like to reply to the many boys who have written so lovingly to him, but he simply lacks the time. Let me give you a rundown of one of his typical days in Rome.

He rises about six and visits the count, our host, because he may not see him the rest of the day, though we room and board here. Then he goes to say Mass in places prearranged weeks in advance. Everywhere he finds large congregations who want to receive Holy Communion from him and hear him. He always preaches at Mass and does so in prophetic tones. After Mass, everybody wants to kiss his hand or ask for prayers, medals and what have you. This happens all the time. He is pulled right and left. Then he visits the sick. It takes a lot of time, and I cannot accompany him. Therefore, I go home and wait for him to return for our noon meal. We never manage to sit down at table until about three. By that time, there are more people waiting for him, and he is under siege until eight in the evening. In the city Don Bosco is forever climbing stairs. Seemingly Rome is full of sick people and every one of them wants Doctor Don Bosco! Several times we could not return home till nine or ten. . . .

Therefore, when he finally gets into his room at this late hour, he is handed a bundle of letters marked "Urgent," "Very Urgent," "Most Urgent," or something like that. And woe if he does not read them then and there! By morning nearly everybody expects an answer. Some he answers in writing, others orally. So far he has answered the Oratory boys only orally. How can one otherwise explain the fervor which, I hear, has of late seized our dear boys? Perhaps that is why he still puts off writing to them. This evening I kept pestering him to write to you, and I nearly got my ears clipped. I knew it was coming to me, but I prudently changed the subject and wished him a good night. I feel sorry for him, and you should too, because he really can't find the time.

And now, as we begin to think of getting back to Turin, we experience mixed feelings, even though our dear ones are in Turin and it is there that God wants us. . . . However, I wonder if I'll be able to adjust again to our dear boys, now that I am accustomed to hobnobbing with dukes, counts, princes, and kings. Last Friday, for instance, when Don Bosco said Mass at the Farnese palace, the king of Naples, who had seen me before, recognized me, greeted me by name, and gave me a friendly handshake. In no time there were dukes and duchesses and others of the nobility around me. . . .

At this point, we shall fill in a gap. After Mass, the king of Naples introduced Don Bosco to Queen Sophie, his wife, who was

waiting in one of the halls.<sup>2</sup> After some preliminaries, the king, almost jokingly, said to Don Bosco, "My wife wishes to hear directly from you whether what you told me the other day at Villa Ludovisi still holds."

"What in particular?"

"Whether we shall return to Naples."

"Your Majesty, I am no prophet, but if I must tell you what I believe, you had better forget about it."

"Impossible!" the queen exclaimed excitedly. "All the nobility is on our side, many loyal subjects are there fighting for us, and a merger with Italy is heartily detested."

"May your hopes be realized," Don Bosco calmly replied, "but it is my humble opinion that Your Majesties will not return to the throne of Naples!"

At these words, the queen, struggling hard to maintain her composure, excused herself. . . .

After leaving the Farnese palace, Don Bosco hastened to the railroad station for a train to Camaldoli. On the way, he confidentially told Father Francesca of his conversation with the king and queen of Naples. "Why do you tell them such things?" Father Francesca asked him in surprise.

"Because they ask me," Don Bosco replied.

"I would at least leave them a comforting hope," Father Francesca countered.

"I don't know what you would do if you were in my shoes," Don Bosco went on, "but I know that I must answer as I did. First of all, they have no children; secondly, God has crossed them out of the book of kings!"

We now continue with Father Francesca's letter:

Last Friday, as I told you in another letter, we went to Camaldoli. . . . When the hermits were told that Don Bosco was on his way, they came to meet him a mile from their hermitage. We felt as if we were among brothers. . . . All knelt for Don Bosco's blessing and then, as in triumph, led him into the church. How many things I could tell you! I leave out all the rest and come to the moment of departure. Because of his reputation for holiness and their affection for him, the good hermits had

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

planned to have him stay overnight, but Don Bosco kept objecting that he could not oblige because of a dinner appointment with Prince [Horace] Falconieri. . . . Knowing that prayer is all-powerful, the superior exclaimed, "Perhaps Our Lord will grant us what Don Bosco denies." So saying, he sent his monks to pray before the Blessed Sacrament. With outstretched arms they all begged God to make Don Bosco change his mind while, outside, their superior and others who had stayed with Don Bosco, falling on their knees, entreated him for the love of Jesus and Mary not to leave them so soon.

Moved by this sight, Don Bosco relented. "Let it never be said that I refuse what is asked in Jesus' name!" he exclaimed. He then immediately wrote two letters: one to Count Vimercati not to expect him that night, and another to Prince Falconieri to inform him that he could not join him at dinner because important matters were detaining him at Camaldoli. He then asked me to deliver both letters while he tranquilly remained there. You should have seen how joyful those saintly faces were at Don Bosco's promise to stay overnight with them. . . .

*God help me!* I said to myself as I set off for Rome. *Everybody is expecting Don Bosco, not me. What a pickle I am in!* I arrived at the prince's palace at five—the moment dinner was to be served. The very many guests had already been waiting a long time, so when they saw me they thought Don Bosco was not far behind.

"At last!" they exclaimed. "And where is Don Bosco?"

"Right here!" I answered, showing the letter.

The letter, still religiously kept, read:

Camaldoli, February 8, 1867

Your Excellency:

Several matters concerning the good Camaldolese monks detain me overnight. Regretfully I cannot be with you for dinner, as was my desire. If it is agreeable to Your Excellency, I shall be with you this Sunday at the same hour. In any case, I am very grateful to Your Excellency. God bless you and all your family.

Your humble servant,  
Father John Bosco

All were sorely disappointed because that banquet was to be in Don Bosco's honor. I was promptly shown into the prince's quarters and I

handed him Don Bosco's letter, expecting a formal remonstrance. The prince, instead, after reading the letter, calmly remarked to the princess, "Don Bosco cannot come today. He will be here another time."

"But he knows I'm leaving tomorrow," the princess exclaimed sharply, noticeably irritated.

"Never mind! If you can't see him, I will."

Everybody marveled at the prince's composure on an occasion like this when so many guests had been invited expressly to meet Don Bosco.

The next morning, Saturday, Don Bosco was expected in Rome to say Mass at a certain hour for many guests. He did not dare to miss showing up. There was great trepidation when it was known he was at Camaldoli! Fortunately he arrived on time. . . . He spoke after Mass. I was not present, but those who heard him declared that he outdid himself in heavenly zeal. He lashed out hard, and nobody complained. Rather, they were grateful. "God speaks through him!" they commented. . . .

The date of our departure is still uncertain. . . . Don Bosco plans to leave Monday, February 18, but on that day and the next morning he has scheduled a Mass. We may possibly leave during that week. Meanwhile we are preparing for a farewell visit to the Holy Father. It will be a touching one, I imagine. It could be the last time that these two extraordinary men will see each other on earth. . . .

This morning, Sunday, February 10, the Venerable Benedict of Urbino, a Capuchin, will be declared "Blessed" in St. Peter's. I'm going to attend, but I doubt that Don Bosco will be able to. At any rate I shall see what our future Salesians will perhaps see concerning a person we know very well. I would like to be present then too, but I do not envy them. They may have the celebrations; we have the man. They will have history; we have his very deeds and words. Such thoughts come to me as I write, and my heart is all aflutter. May God grant our wish.<sup>3</sup>

Don Bosco wants me to tell Father Cagliero that, because of his musical talents and the perfection of Rome's music, it is decreed that the next time anyone from the Oratory comes to Rome, if it is two people, one shall be Father Cagliero; if it is only one, it will still be Father Cagliero.

One more thing. Don Bosco wants me to say also—and here I rectify what I said at the beginning—that he will write to the boys, and his letter will follow mine. Hold that letter dear and precious. It will be in his own handwriting. A letter of his is coveted in Rome like gold and kissed like a relic.

I wish you every blessing. Tell the boys that I spoke particularly of them

<sup>3</sup> Father Francesia had the consolation to assist at Don Bosco's beatification in St. Peter's on June 2, 1929. He passed away on January 17, 1930, at the age of ninety-one. [Editor]

to the Holy Father, who was greatly delighted by what I told him. Tell them too that I shall soon be among them again to see with my own eyes the beautiful things Father Durando wrote to me of them and that I shall always be happy to consecrate my entire life to God on their behalf. May God accept my sacrifice and bless it from heaven with His holy grace! *Dominus vobiscum!*

Affectionately yours in Jesus and Mary,  
Father J. B. Francesia

After posting this letter, Father Francesia accompanied Don Bosco to dinner at the home of Prince Falconieri, to whom Don Bosco had courteously sent another short letter in the morning.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 57

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

ROME vied with Florence in helping to build and furnish the Church of Mary, Help of Christians. Since noble Florentine ladies had raised funds for six imposing candlesticks for the main altar, a Roman princess who got word of it decided to outdo them. She interested a group of noble ladies and so enthused them about Don Bosco that they decided to offer a magnificent carpet for the main altar, while another group of ladies began raising funds toward a side altar named for St. Peter.<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to Chevalier Oreglia, Father Francesia gave more important news:

Rome, February 13, 1867

I regret being unable to answer your question about the appointment of [new] bishops. The matter was discussed shortly after our arrival. In fact, Don Bosco mentioned to me that in Rome there were some who wanted this put off to a more propitious time, but that he recommended—and his recommendation was taken—that it be hastened. The upshot was that a few bishops would be nominated in a consistory during the last days of the carnival season, and that the rest would be announced at intervals. I also know that Don Bosco spoke—and was listened to respectfully—in favor of some candidates, and that these were actually approved. I know who they are, but it would not be prudent to disclose their names yet. They will be as much liked in Turin as they are here in Rome. . . . There is a flood of letters for Don Bosco from Piedmont, asking him to have this or that person named bishop or archbishop. Among these letter writers there is even Father Beg . . . from Turin. He is quite a character! He belittles Don Bosco, and yet he believes that he can hand out mitres. Don Bosco re-

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

plied to him that he would be equally delighted whether Canon A or Canon B is made a bishop.

Among the noble ladies who called on Don Bosco was Princess [Teresa] Barberini who had obtained a singular favor, as testified to in writing on January 20, 1887 by Canon John Baptist Grana:

I, the undersigned, resided in Rome from 1850 to 1881, serving as secretary to the late Benedict Cardinal Barberini and then to Prince Henry Barberini who is still living. I say this only to show that I am intimately acquainted with the family and with their keen disappointment of being childless after years of marriage. . . .

When Don Bosco came to Rome in 1867, preceded by reports of his virtues and undertakings, all good Romans vied for a chance to meet him. Princess Barberini personally went to St. Peter-in-Chains where Don Bosco was staying to invite him to say Mass in her private chapel, confiding to him why she was seeking his prayers. Don Bosco agreed. On the appointed day . . . only the noble couple, myself and some other member of the household were present at his Mass. Afterward, Don Bosco lingered for about a half hour and had coffee with the prince and princess in a private room, the door ajar. Then they escorted him to where I was waiting to accompany him to the door. When I was alone with Don Bosco, I said, "I am the prince's secretary, and I know why they have asked you to say Mass in their private chapel. What do you think of this poor lady's desire?"

After a few gracious words to me, he categorically stated, "The Lord wants to console her! Poor lady! She yearns for a son, but the Lord will give her a daughter! She will have to settle for that. But her daughter will be her comfort."

I was quite amazed at these words spoken so assertively—almost under inspiration. The family doctor, after repeated consultations with colleagues, had given me to understand that the princess was barren, and that if she did conceive, notwithstanding this, she would die in childbirth. However, some time later not only did she conceive, but after eighteen years of barren married life she gave birth to a daughter who is still living. She is healthy, strong, and virtuous. The name given her was only one—Mary.

Another prediction by Don Bosco was also fulfilled about this time. In 1866, some busybody had told the niece of Marchioness

[Fanny Amat of] Villa Rios that Don Bosco was trying to arrange a marriage between her and Count Francis De Maistre. It was pure fancy. But since De Maistre, a papal army officer, was young, wealthy and noble, the young lady warmed up to him. In vain her aunt endeavored to persuade her that it was sheer daydreaming. Finally, as a last resort, she wrote to Don Bosco, asking him to send the young lady a few lines to quiet her.

Don Bosco wrote as follows: "Relax! You will find a bridegroom no less desirable than the one you dream of. You have done much for Our Lady, and Our Lady will send you a bridegroom. Furthermore, I will come and bless the marriage."

It happened the following year. A most noble and wealthy gentleman, Marquis Patrizi, the cardinal's nephew, asked for her hand. Don Bosco was in Rome at the time of the wedding. He called on them, and when they returned from their honeymoon, he accepted a dinner in their palace.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting a note from Don Bosco to Father Rua about some business matters and a letter from the pupils of the Collegio Nazareno to the Oratory boys and their reply. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 58

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

ONE of the many who wished to have news of Don Bosco was Bishop Peter Rota of Guastalla, whom Father Cagliero kept informed about Don Bosco's doings in Rome. In grateful acknowledgment, the bishop replied on January 31, 1867, "I have shared your most welcome letter with my priests and had it read also to the pupils. All were delighted and moved. . . ."

He wrote again on February 16: "Your letter finally reached us today and brightened our after-dinner relaxation. . . . It seems that it will no longer be my privilege to consecrate your new church. Rumor has it that the new archbishop of Turin has already been appointed. Patience! I am happier to have this vacant diocese filled than to enjoy the honor of performing the rite myself. . . ."

In the meantime letters kept coming from Rome. They were read to the Oratory boys, and copies were mailed to Mirabello and Lanzo. All were deeply grateful to Count Vimercati for all he was doing for their good father, and so Father Rua made sure that a letter of thanks<sup>1</sup> on behalf of all the Salesian oratories and schools was sent to the count with a gift of books. Father Francesia personally delivered the letter to him on the evening of February 16 as Don Bosco returned from a visit with Angelo Cardinal Quaglia. He had called on the cardinal to dispose him favorably toward the Salesian Society and to ask how he might proceed to obtain its canonical approval and certain privileges.<sup>2</sup>

Father Francesia wrote again to Chevalier Oreglia on Sunday evening, February 17:

<sup>1</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> At this point we are omitting a letter of Father Francesia describing this visit and other less important details. [Editor]

This morning Don Bosco said Mass for the Sacred Heart nuns at Trinità dei Monti. . . . Their Mass stipend was a gift for the Church of Mary, Help of Christians: a magnificent gold and silver chalice. . . . They are also making a chasuble which, I expect, will be very beautiful. Nearly every convent has presents and donations for Don Bosco, but he has to pick them up personally. . . .

Today Prince Ruspoli came to thank Don Bosco for the blessing he gave his wife, who had been confined indoors for several months. To everybody's astonishment, two or three days after Don Bosco's blessing, she was able to go out and thank Our Lord for her cure. Similar incidents occurred in other places too.

Don Bosco spoke at length with the Holy Father about our benefactors, especially about Count Xavier Provana, Chevalier Clement Scarampi, and Marquis Dominic Fassati. At Don Bosco's request, the Pope bestowed the title of Knight of the Order of St. Gregory the Great on them and on three other gentlemen, as you already know. Everybody is surprised how easily Don Bosco obtained these decorations. A greater wonder yet is that the Pope granted these honors to Don Bosco himself and left it to him to choose the recipients. What cannot Don Bosco obtain from our good Pius IX?

Another letter addressed to the Oratory pupils was equally enthusiastic:

My dear boys,

I fear our return may be delayed. You would share my fears if you saw the unending flow of people. How enthused Roman boys are about Don Bosco! The other day he paid another visit to the Collegio Nazareno. A boy read to him a most beautiful complimentary address intended for you. They will shortly mail it to you. How much they envy you, my dear boys! They are wealthy, but they feel that they are poor compared to you who are privileged to possess Don Bosco. How devotedly and trustfully they kissed his hand and spoke to him of their souls! They are already quite convinced that he knows their consciences better than they do themselves. How frank their questions were to him. Even you who have long been at the Oratory could not show him greater confidence. . . .

Last Sunday evening he was again at the Vatican on a visit to Cardinal Antonelli . . . with whom he was closeted for nearly an hour. It goes without saying that the cardinal was most affable and, I should say, reverent. . . . After greeting Don Bosco, he held on to his hand and told

him of his improved health, thanks to Mary, Help of Christians. While formerly he had to be wheeled in a chair from his apartment to the Pope's for his audience, he could now walk with no trouble. After closing the door, the cardinal asked Don Bosco for a medal and his blessing.

"Please, Your Eminence," Don Bosco said. "You are not one of my boys."

"Never mind," the cardinal replied. "Bless me."

To avoid that, Don Bosco knelt to kiss his ring, but when the cardinal knelt down too, Don Bosco had to obey. Afterward, with exquisite characteristic kindness, the cardinal offered Don Bosco a thousand lire for the new church and the Oratory, in gratitude to you, whose prayers contributed so much to his recovery. He also stated that this would not be his last donation.

When Don Bosco took leave, he found the waiting room crowded with distinguished people waiting for interviews with the cardinal, but no sooner did they see Don Bosco than they pressed about him to kiss his hand and ask for a medal or his blessing. They forgot all about their audience with the cardinal. The latter waited a while, and then, coming to the door, he said loudly, "Gentlemen, I am waiting. Won't somebody please come in?"

No one stirred. Rather, each one was trying to pull back in order to be able to talk to Don Bosco. It took him some time to free himself from that crowd.

I have seen many high Roman prelates show Don Bosco the same confidence that you show him at the Oratory. His every word is treasured, commented on, interpreted, and zealously stored up in their hearts. . . .

Let me now rectify what I said at the beginning [about a possible delay in our return]. In Don Bosco's name, I tell you now that next Monday we shall set off for Turin, with some stopovers along the way. Details about the day and hour of our arrival will be forthcoming. I expect that there will be affectionate and sorrowful leave-takings when we go. Many people who had never seen Don Bosco before are now in tears at the thought of his departure. . . .

A good soul who longed to see Don Bosco came to our residence at noon and waited till six just to catch a glimpse of him; then he went away happy, saying, "I have seen him. I am satisfied!"

Often ten, fifteen or more persons—soldiers, businessmen, ordinary workmen and sometimes even priests—stop Don Bosco's carriage to ask for his blessing. They kneel in the street and Don Bosco must agree.

Our residence has turned into an incredible concourse of people. It is really unbelievable that so many should become excited over one person.

Yesterday evening a prince with a most difficult name came and handed me a generous donation, saying: "Since I cannot see this good servant of God, please give him this small donation on my behalf with the sole condition that he pray for me." They have such confidence in his prayers that they are sure they can obtain everything through him.

Good-bye, my dear boys. Soon we shall have long talks about these things, now so badly written. The Lord bless you. Good night.

Father John B. Francesia

Don Bosco's prayers and toils had not only obtained particular favors from God, but—what momentarily was most important for him and filled him with joy—the fulfillment of one of his most ardent desires. On February 22, 1867, Pius IX held a consistory for an initial proclamation of bishops—seventeen for Italian dioceses. A month later, on March 27, at another consistory he named seventeen more bishops. All were able to take possession of their sees. Nevertheless, two-thirds of the Italian dioceses were still vacant. The government had already given its consent for some, but then the whole cabinet resigned for budgetary reasons and all negotiations ceased.<sup>3</sup>

The Church greatly benefited from Don Bosco's interventions, not only on that occasion but in the future as well, because whenever the need and the possibility of appointing new bishops arose, Pius IX could draw upon candidates already recommended by Don Bosco and accepted by the government. Thus testified Father Bonetti. Other sworn affidavits on Don Bosco's part in the nomination of bishops were given by Father Michael Rua, Father John Bonetti, Bishop [John] Cagliari, and Father John Turchi. The last-named received confirmation of this fact from Roman prelates and in 1895 referred to it in a pamphlet entitled *Omaggio a Don Bosco* [A Homage to Don Bosco]. "I know," he wrote, "that occasionally Don Bosco's advice was sought in high ecclesiastical circles in most important matters, and that his views were more than taken into consideration—which perhaps will be better known in due time."

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 59

### *Don Bosco in Rome (Continued)*

**A**T each daily Mass in Rome—mostly in private chapels—Don Bosco seldom failed to give a fifteen- or twenty-minute homily to congregations varying from fifty to over a hundred people, filling them with God’s love and a sincere resolve to better themselves. Father Angelini, S.J., who heard him, used to remark, “What unction! What substance! Our St. Ignatius could not have spoken otherwise.” What made the Romans even more receptive to his words was his golden, simple style suitable to all levels of intelligence. Rome had very few popular preachers. Moreover, the Sunday sermons and catechetical instructions prescribed by the Council of Trent were not given at all.<sup>1</sup>

Pius IX, who had been informed of this, could not believe it. “Don’t go by hearsay,” he advised Don Bosco. “Find out for yourself and then let me know.”

Accordingly, one Sunday afternoon, Don Bosco went from church to church with Father Francesia and found them all closed. At five he arrived at the Church of the Gesù as it was being opened for a short service. After receiving his report, the Pope observed, “But at least the pastor of St. Roch preaches, doesn’t he?”

“He used to, Your Holiness. Last year I wrote to encourage him. He began giving regular catechetical instructions, but after a few months all rose up against him for this innovation and he was forced to stop.”

“I did not think we had come to this pass!” the Pope exclaimed. “Now I understand why the Lord is punishing us. And He will punish us even more because we are weakening the people’s faith. Faith comes through hearing, and what is heard is Christ’s Word.”

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

[Cf. Rom. 10, 17] And he went on, forcefully deploring this state of affairs. Afterward, taking to task the person responsible for the disorder, he kept after him and got some results. But the effort was short-lived.

Pius IX entrusted other confidential roles to Don Bosco. In 1858, for instance, he asked Don Bosco to visit St. Michael's Hospice, an imposing institution across the Tiber, which housed nearly twelve hundred residents.<sup>2</sup> Supposedly it was a poor boys' home, and Pius IX had it very much at heart because he himself had been chosen its president in 1825 by Pope Leo XII and had held that office for twenty months, eliminating abuses, dismissing dishonest employees, balancing the budget, clearing up his predecessor's debts, raising school standards, and bringing the whole institution to a flourishing state. Knowing its old troubles first-hand and anxious to forestall their comeback, he feared that the board of directors might not tell him the true state of affairs because of maladministration, connivance or timidity. Hence his request to Don Bosco, who had already been briefed by the Duchess of Sora and other noble ladies on how things stood at St. Michael's. Don Bosco reluctantly accepted this task, the more so because he could foresee how difficult it would be to remedy certain disorders.

Tactfully, as ever, he questioned various residents of the hospice and found that hardly any of the boys could qualify as destitute. As for everything else, nothing or very little had changed since his first visit [in 1858].

He was hesitant to tell the Pope the whole truth, but the latter, noticing his indecision, clearly stated, "I want you to tell me all. I sent you there for no other reason." Don Bosco then complied. He also voiced his belief that with its ample revenues the hospice could care for many, many more boys. "Holy Father," he concluded, "I fear that St. Michael's will be lost." He meant that it would fall into lay hands. This forecast impressed the Pope. In 1871 he himself recalled it to Don Bosco as we shall see [in Volume X].

Don Bosco's report drew a storm upon him. The hospice's administrators, summoned by the Pope and taken to task, were quick to connect his reprimands to Don Bosco's visit. Determined

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 543f, 549-52. [Editor]

to get even with him, yet unable to impugn his personal integrity, they decided to find some pretext in some of the hundred popular booklets he had published. His popularity was becoming annoying to some, such as Canon [William] Audisio, a Piedmontese,<sup>3</sup> and those prelates who later opposed [the approval of] the Salesian Society. In 1873, Monsignor John Baptist Fratejacci, auditor of the cardinal vicar of Rome and a great friend of Don Bosco, remarked to Father Berto:

I saw Don Bosco in 1867 when he was staying with Father Francesia near St. Peter-in-Chains. What crowds used to flock to him. You couldn't believe it! All Rome seemed to go after him! Men and women, rich and poor, laymen and priests, bishops and cardinals vied with each other to see him and speak with him. But some did not like this and looked askance at his popularity, especially when he one day unguardedly voiced a very unpleasant truth. "The lamentable religious situation [in Rome]," he remarked, "is due to lack of catechetical instruction. Three-fourths of the people receive no religious instruction at all. If this continues, we shall see consequences undreamed of." Now [in 1873] we see with our own eyes what Don Bosco foresaw and predicted, but we can no longer remedy it. In those days his remarks made enemies. "Must we learn from Don Bosco how to instruct our people?" some protested. "Does he think he knows their needs more than we do? Is he the only person who can teach catechism? Are we all imbeciles when it comes to religious instruction? . . ." One of Don Bosco's critics was Monsignor [Raphael] Monaco La Valletta.<sup>4</sup> I managed to approach some of them and tell them that what Don Bosco foresaw would happen. Seeing it take place day by day, they began to think better of him. Monsignor [Monaco] La Valletta eventually became his friend. But at that time I kept warning Don Bosco, "Don't speak out so frankly, or you will be done for."

Such was the testimony of Monsignor Fratejacci. Meanwhile, Don Bosco had decided to leave Rome on February 25 and, after stopovers in Ancona, Fermo and Bologna, hopefully be back at the Oratory by the 28th.<sup>5</sup>

Since these were their last days in Rome, Father Francesia wrote to Turin once more.

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. II, p. 299. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> At this time he was an official in the Sacred Congregation of the Holy Office. He later became cardinal vicar of Rome. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

Rome, [Saturday] February 23, 1867

Dear Chevalier Oreglia,

This morning a young apprentice printer and another youngster recommended by Monsignor Pacifici left by train for Turin. . . . By the time the two lads will arrive, we shall be leaving Rome, though some are plotting to delay our departure by offering twenty scudi for every day Don Bosco remains in Rome beyond Monday. Will he accept? He has to leave because he can't go on like this. He has no time to eat or sleep and he feels ill. This is nothing new, but it is distressing. Needless to say, his fame is spreading ever more. . . .

By this time you must know who the archbishop of Turin is. We sent a telegram. He did not want to accept, but he finally yielded to the voice that came from St. Peter's. We too heard that voice, perhaps for the last time, on Thursday evening. From his heart the Pope blessed Don Bosco, his priests, the archdiocese of Turin, and all its charitable institutions and oratories. The Holy Father feels that he must be the instrument of Providence for the Oratory and is grateful for this mandate. He thanked all the Turinese who came to his aid in his hour of need. He said that he often thought of them. He also mentioned our offering.<sup>6</sup>

Nothing escapes him. Speaking of opening new Salesian houses, he gave Don Bosco this advice: "First, never open boarding schools—trade schools especially—in small towns because envy, gossip and intrusiveness will greatly harm you. Second, do not open several houses in the same town or even in two neighboring towns. Civil and church authorities and other moral bodies might not take kindly to the influence you could wield over a large segment of the population." We came away consoled and moved by the Holy Father's words. . . .

Notwithstanding other invitations and gracious requests, Don Bosco will unfailingly leave Rome on the 25th and will follow the itinerary previously mentioned. I will wire from Bologna the hour of our arrival in Turin. Our boys' longing for Don Bosco is appreciated and praised by the Romans. Many of them almost press Don Bosco to hurry and console his sons. . . .

Father John Francesia

On the evening of the 24th, the eve of Don Bosco's departure, our great friend, Monsignor Fratejacci, presented him with several lottery gifts on behalf of various donors.<sup>7</sup> Don Bosco thanked him

<sup>6</sup> See Vol. III, pp. 357-61, 367ff. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

most heartily and asked him to care for various matters to be handled by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars. He then bid him good-bye and returned to Count Vimercati's residence. The whole household was kneeling in the hall in tears. Don Bosco tried to say something, but he too broke into unrestrained sobs and tears. Unable to stand the emotion, he tore himself away from them and withdrew to the count's quarters. Tearfully, but determinedly, the latter exclaimed, "Don Bosco, you can't leave us yet. Stay with us another day."

Don Bosco could not say no to one who had done so much for him. He obliged. "You did the right thing in keeping Don Bosco here another day," Father Francesca told the count. "I wasn't anxious to leave tomorrow. Besides, Don Bosco is fatigued."

"I regret inconveniencing you another day," Don Bosco broke in, "but I'm glad I can be with you a little longer."

He then went back into the hall. When it was known that he was delaying his departure, all were frantic with joy. Shouting *vivas* to him, they surrounded him like children who had not seen their father for a long time.

The next day, wishing to give the Vitelleschi family one more token of his gratitude, he had dinner with them. In the evening, while he was conversing with his hosts, Ludwig Cardinal Altieri arrived. According to protocol, the butler announced his name three times, after which the cardinal made his entrance. Don Bosco had not found time to visit this illustrious prelate who keenly wished to meet him. Somewhat embarrassed, he stepped forward, and the cardinal coldly responded to his greeting with a curt "Good evening" and not another word. His stay was short and he totally ignored Don Bosco, to the great puzzlement of the Vitelleschi family and especially of the archbishop.

"What could have happened?" they asked one another. "Poor Don Bosco! How can we find out what offended the cardinal? What can we do to appease him and make him your friend again?"

They knew the prelate was rather unbending.

"Don't worry," Don Bosco told them tranquilly. "Leave it to me. Tomorrow I will call on him and all will be right again."

The next morning, in fact, he called on the cardinal as if nothing had happened. As an opener, he offered him five hundred lottery

tickets. The cardinal smilingly paid for them, adding another five hundred lire for Don Bosco's boys. Meanwhile, the prelate's sister-in-law, hearing that Don Bosco was in the house, ran in, exclaiming, "Oh, Don Bosco, Don Bosco! It's four months that I have been longing to talk to you!"

After a most cordial visit, Don Bosco returned to the Vitelleschis where there was considerable anxiety in his regard.

"How did it go?" they asked him. "Did the cardinal receive you well? What did he say?"

Smilingly Don Bosco showed them the prelate's donation and described his visit.

"Wonderful!" they exclaimed. "Only Don Bosco could ride out a storm so well!"

The Vitelleschi family treasured a prophecy of Don Bosco and awaited its fulfillment with confidence. At the start of 1866 the marchioness, who was slowly wasting away with tuberculosis, had requested lottery tickets from Don Bosco. Along with her donation, she had sent him this letter:

I have been blessed by God with wealth, but something troubles me terribly—the fear of death. The thought causes me unspeakable anxiety, which not even my faith can lessen. I would do anything to be freed from this unending frightful torment. I write to you for no other reason. Time flies and my illness may soon bring its frightful results. Please, assure me that Mary, Help of Christians will obtain for me the grace of not fearing death, of being spared this horror at my last moment. I am already helping your works, but I promise that from now on my person and possessions, my good will and whatever remains of my life will be spent for you and your boys. I will leave no stone unturned in order to be an instrument of Divine Providence on your behalf. For God's sake, may Our Lady free me from my horrible terror of death.

Don Bosco's reply was, "I assure you that Mary, Help of Christians has already granted you your request. You will die without any fear whatever, without even being aware of it. Keep your promise; the Blessed Virgin will keep Hers."

The marchioness became tranquil and began to enjoy a deep, unalterable peace. She constantly helped the Oratory. Before leaving Rome, Don Bosco assured her again that she would die

without being aware of it. One day, in fact, toward the end of 1871, the marchioness said to her husband, "My dear, it's a long time since my last general confession. I'd like to give the last days of this year to it. Is it all right?"

"Of course!" answered the marquis. "Do as you wish."

The good lady dedicated several days to this duty, such was her desire to be thorough. Afterward, she returned home inexpressibly happy.

"I feel as clean as if I had just been baptized. Tomorrow I will go to Communion."

Next morning—New Year's Day—she returned home after Communion, exclaiming, "What a Communion! Never has there been one like it before! This is worth more than all the Communions of my whole life." She then sat on a sofa close to a large vase of beautiful flowers. The servants prepared to serve her breakfast there. Several relatives had been invited and the young children were romping about in the room. Presently the marchioness said to the servants, "Open the shutters, please. It is getting dark."

"They are all wide open, Marchioness," they replied.

"Open them, I tell you. It's dark."

When the domestics insisted that indeed they were open, she exclaimed, "And yet . . . and yet!" Then, turning to her husband, as if something had flashed into her mind, she went on with a smile, "Perhaps I am dying. . . ."

These were her last words. She had passed away painlessly, as if falling asleep. Mary, Help of Christians had kept Her promise. In his letter to Don Bosco announcing her death, the marquis wrote, "I do not mourn her passing. Rather, I thank Mary, Help of Christians for this unique favor to her."

Father Rua and Father Francesia have testified to this incident. We must note that other prophecies Don Bosco made in Rome were likewise fulfilled.

## CHAPTER 60

### *Don Bosco's Departure from Rome*

FATHER Francesia's recollections of Don Bosco's stay in Rome, published in 1905 under the title *Due mesi con Don Bosco a Roma* [Two Months with Don Bosco in Rome], marvelously accord with his letters of 1867 portraying the sanctity for which Don Bosco was already renowned during those years.<sup>1</sup>

On February 26, after his visit to the Altieri and Vitelleschi families, Don Bosco returned to the hospitable residence of Count Vimercati to spend his last hours in Rome with him. Obliging, he posed for a photograph showing him blessing Father Francesia, the butler, and his son. A limited number of prints were later given out to close friends and benefactors.<sup>2</sup>

Most cordial and moving were the count's last conversations with Don Bosco, who even in those last hours received insistent callers.<sup>3</sup> [Toward evening] Don Bosco left for the railroad station in the company of Monsignor Emilian Manacorda, whom he asked to mail to Turin for him a copy of a printed circular he had written to benefactors. In forwarding it [to Chevalier Oreglia], the monsignor wrote [among other things]: "I would like to tell you about his departure, but I can't bear to do it. Father Francesia will tell you everything. I am enclosing Don Bosco's circular for an immediate reprint. . . . Some people are suggesting that copies of Don Bosco's photograph be put on sale. I don't wish to interfere, but in filial love and reverence I make free to say that the suggestion is ill-advised, if not in bad taste, at this time. It would make a bad im-

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting a review of the booklet by *Civiltà Cattolica*. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting a letter from a priest who had asked for his prayers the night before Don Bosco's departure. [Editor]

pression in Rome. I would appreciate your siding with me in this matter.”

Regrettably, Don Bosco’s critics were still on the alert, as we shall see. Father Francesia also wrote on the same day from Fermo:

Fermo, February 27, 1867

Dear Chevalier Oreglia,

We just left Rome yesterday, and after a safe though cheerless journey, we arrived at Fermo, very warmly welcomed by Cardinal De Angelis and his household. However, our hearts are still in Rome.

First of all, I must tell you that we were able to leave only on Tuesday, rather than on Monday as planned. There were a lot of tears when we took leave of Count Vimercati. The dear old man knelt on the floor and, crying like a child, asked for Don Bosco’s blessing. Though self-possessed in most instances, he too was in tears, unable to voice his feelings. . . .

There was no less emotion at the station where the Vitelleschi and Boncompagni families were sadly awaiting Don Bosco. . . . After a word or two he had to board the train. . . . Shortly before the departure signal, his friends pleaded for yet another blessing and knelt on the pavement to receive it. May God’s blessing be fruitful and long-lasting!

As the train set off into the night . . . putting an ever greater distance between us and our dear friends, I lowered my head between my hands, pretending to sleep, and wept. Don Bosco too was depressed but not as much. Fortunately we are drawing nearer home. We shall arrive on Saturday morning on the 11:30 express. . . .

Don Bosco has left a great store of affection in Rome. Men of all ranks came to do him homage—even the ambassador of Spain with all his staff.

I shall tell you many more things orally. . . . I’ll see you on Saturday.

Father J. B. Francesia

Arriving at Fermo at 10:30 in the morning, Don Bosco remained there till after dinner the following day to Cardinal De Angelis’ exceeding joy. “I am delighted at your great success in Rome,” he kept telling him. However, Don Bosco made light of it. In all circumstances he was always himself—humble.

On the morning of the 28th he said the Community Mass and preached to the seminarians who, later, gave him a cordial, respectful reception in their various dormitories. One of them,

Dominic Svampa, read him a poem—his own composition—and then handed him the autographed manuscript.

Don Bosco whispered a word in the young poet's ear and affectionately gave him a small medal. In due time the young seminarian became bishop of Forlì, archbishop of Bologna, and finally a cardinal. He always treasured that medal. In April 1895, in opening the first Salesian convention at Bologna, Dominic Cardinal Svampa declared to the full assembly, "Let me say that my remembrance and profound veneration for Don Bosco are of long standing, dating from my early years. I was fifteen when I was privileged to meet that extraordinary man, to hear his fervent words, and to receive Holy Communion from his hands. . . . He also gave me a little medal I still wear."<sup>4</sup> Don Bosco too kept till death young Dominic Svampa's poem, a precious memento we still treasure in our archives.

When it was time for Don Bosco to leave, Cardinal De Angelis knelt on the floor and asked for his blessing. Taken aback, Don Bosco too went down on his knees, protesting, "It's not for me to bless you."

To win his point quickly, the cardinal pointed to a purse on the desk, saying, "Do you see that purse? There isn't much in it, but if you bless me, you may have it for your church!"

"Then I'll have to bless you. You don't need my blessing, but I need your money."<sup>5</sup>

From Fermo Don Bosco went to Forlì where he arrived at 11:30 at night. Its bishop, a great friend of Count Vimercati, had informed the count that he wished to make Don Bosco's acquaintance. Considering it proper to oblige, Don Bosco had written from Fermo about the time of his arrival. However, on getting to the bishop's residence, he found the doors and windows shut. He knocked in vain and had to go to a hotel.

The next morning, along with Father Francesca, he went to the shrine of Our Lady of Fire to say Mass. Learning that he was Don Bosco, the sacristan immediately selected one of the best chasubles, once worn by Pope Pius VII, and had Don Bosco say Mass at Our

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting another similar statement of Cardinal Svampa in 1905. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Lady's altar. Afterward, Don Bosco called on the bishop who had just then received his letter. The prelate hosted him most amiably till his departure at 1:30. After a few hours' stopover at Bologna where he was entertained by Marquis Malvasia, Don Bosco left for Turin, where he arrived about noon on March 2.

It would be a rather lengthy matter to describe the joy of the Oratory boys and the enthusiastic reception they gave him. A huge inscription adorned the front of the main building, proclaiming: "Rome Admires You, Turin Loves You." This elicited friendly protests from several people in Rome who wrote to tell Don Bosco that Rome loved him as much as Turin did. On the next day the feast of St. Francis de Sales was solemnly observed. The celebration closed with a stage play to which Count Xavier Provana of Collegno had been invited. At an intermission, amid general applause, Don Bosco presented him with the papal decoration he had obtained for him from the Pope.

Meanwhile Don Bosco's circular had been reprinted and mailed, drawing many grateful replies and expressions of esteem for Don Bosco and his undertakings.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> The last two paragraphs are condensations. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 61

### *Reminiscences of Rome*

**O**N Sunday, March 3 [1867], Don Bosco held the [annual] Salesian conference<sup>1</sup> after church services. In attendance [besides the confreres of the house] were Father John Baptist Lemoyne, director of Lanzo, Father Francis Cerruti representing the director of Mirabello, and Father Dominic Pestarino of Mornese. Each gave a report on his house. In turn, Don Bosco spoke about the Oratory, his stay at Rome, his hopes for the canonical approval of the Salesian Society, his plans for a Salesian house in Rome, and the spiritual favors granted by Pius IX to all residents of the Oratory and of the two schools at Mirabello and Lanzo.<sup>2</sup> Then, at night prayers, he addressed the boys with expressions of great love for them and for the Pope. Following is a summary of his talk:

Pius IX asked me: “Do your boys love me?”

“Do they? Holy Father, their heart is all yours and God’s.”

Amid the afflictions and sorrows caused by so many Christians who dare to wage war against him, this great Pontiff finds comfort in hearing that you love him! Do you remember the gift of four hundred lire he sent you not very long ago with the message: “From a poor father to his poor children”? Well, to further prove his love, he has now granted you a rare privilege. I asked for a plenary indulgence for you every time that you receive Holy Communion, as well as at the point of death, even if no priest is around to give you the papal blessing. What’s more, I even asked for a plenary indulgence as granted for a jubilee on the occasion of your monthly Exercise for a Happy Death. . . .

At my request Pius IX remained pensive a few moments and then said,

<sup>1</sup> For previous conferences *see* pp. 16, 154f. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting a detailed listing of such spiritual favors. [Editor]

“I am really stretching my powers. I have never granted anyone this, but I’ll make an exception for you.”

Wondering whether the Holy Father had fully grasped the extent of my request, I asked, “Is this favor only for a few?” I wanted to know if it was limited to Salesians or also included their pupils.

“Why not for all?” the Pope replied. . . .

Do you see how good the Pope has been to us? But now you may ask, “What is a plenary indulgence?”

I’ll explain. When you make a good confession and receive Holy Communion, a plenary indulgence will free you not only from sin but also from the temporal penalty due to sin—the pains of purgatory. Go frequently to Communion then. What a great fortune it is to be able, at will, to wipe out completely our debt to God. Therefore, my dear sons, as long as you live, remember that the Pope loves you. Never utter or listen passively to a disrespectful word in his regard; never read publications that dare to scorn his most lofty dignity as Jesus Christ’s Vicar.

Finally, I am pleased to tell you that we have thoughtfully provided a souvenir of the Holy Father’s love and precious gift. It will cost you five *soldi* because the person who made this possible had to pay a considerable sum for it. It is a beautiful photograph of Pius IX, bearing on the reverse side the Pope’s latest favors to you. It will be ready in a few days at the bookstore for those who wish to have it.

The boys applauded and eagerly purchased the portrait. Since his arrival at Turin, Don Bosco had also been thinking of his pupils at Lanzo, whose warm letters to him in Rome had gone unanswered. To make amends, he asked their director to get back to Lanzo as soon as possible and acquaint them with what he had told the Oratory boys.<sup>3</sup> On March 4, Father Lemoyne spoke thus to the Lanzo boys after night prayers:

My dear boys, Don Bosco asked me to address you on his behalf and I do so now. He spoke very lovingly of you, saying that he constantly thought of you and remembered you above all others in his prayers, particularly at the Elevation of the Mass when he invoked Jesus’ blessing upon you. His deepest desire was to return to you and enjoy your company and share your joy. You are his children. How can you doubt his love? In the gilded halls of princely palaces, his conversation always turned to you,

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

his crown and glory. Conversing with cardinals and other prelates in the Vatican, he delighted in praising your piety, your devout deportment in church, and your frequent reception of the sacraments. In his audiences with Don Bosco the Holy Father himself found comfort in speaking of you and in learning that you are good, loyal sons of the Church.

When Don Bosco went to visit schools, he rejoiced at those boys' applause because he saw you in their faces and he heard you in their voices. Don Bosco also told me that more than once he paid you a visit in spirit, walking through corridors and dormitories and observing your conduct. When he comes, he will tell you more about it.

He did not return from Rome empty-handed. He brought a beautiful gift for everybody—medals and perhaps rosaries blessed by the Pope as souvenirs of his visit to Rome. Moreover, he will also give everyone a holy picture listing the special spiritual favors granted by the Holy Father to you. See how much Don Bosco loves you!

He was sorry to hear that you did not get a reply to your most gratifying letter which he was exceedingly delighted to read. He did tell Father Francesca to reply to you but, with so many things to do, he forgot. He did write to Turin and to Mirabello, but he forgot about us. To make up for this oversight, Don Bosco himself will write to you. He will not have his dear children of Lanzo neglected.

Aren't you happy now? And do you know why Don Bosco loves you so much? Because you have a soul redeemed by the Blood of Jesus Christ and are destined to become princes of paradise. One day, if you deserve it, you will share with the angels the Most Blessed Virgin's company. Courage, then! Love Don Bosco and love your soul.

It was carnival season, and at the Oratory games and stage plays alternated with church services. Don Bosco was again hearing confessions to the joy of many pupils who were anxious to open their hearts to him. The monthly Exercise for a Happy Death was held on Tuesday, March 5, and the usual Our Father for the one among them who would be the first to die benefited Cyprian Fogliani of Santa Domenica (Switzerland) who died on that very day at home.<sup>4</sup>

When the carnival season was over, Don Bosco devoted several "Good Nights" to the sights of Rome—basilicas, tombs of martyrs, amphitheatres, memorials of famous miracles—always drawing

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting a letter from the boy's pastor describing his edifying death. [Editor]

moral conclusions that could spur the boys to sanctify the Lenten season. Only the "Good Night" on March 7 was recorded. Don Bosco spoke [substantially] as follows:

There is in St. Peter's a really beautiful holy water stoup whose bowl is supported by a marble ensemble symbolizing temptation. A long-tailed and horned frightening devil is pursuing a boy. The youngster, seeing himself about to fall prey to that ugly beast, reaches in panic into the holy water font. Dismayed, the devil no longer dares to seize him. Holy water, my dear boys, is good for chasing away temptations. Don't we say about a fast runner, "He runs like the devil from holy water"? When tempted, and especially when entering a church, make the Sign of the Cross well, because it is there that the devil is waiting for you to make you lose the fruit of prayer. The simple Sign of the Cross repels him momentarily, but when joined to holy water it keeps him away for a long time. One day St. Teresa was tempted. At every assault she made the Sign of the Cross, but within a few minutes she would feel tempted again. Annoyed by this, she sprinkled holy water on herself, and the devil had to beat a hasty retreat.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile, on March 11, the Lenten catechism classes had started. Among the catechists we wish to single out a young man, Augustine Richelmy, who not only gave his time and talent to Don Bosco's underprivileged youngsters, but also sacrificed his weekly allowance for candy to attract them to his catechism lessons. After completing his secondary schooling, he entered the diocesan seminary. Of him Don Bosco remarked, "You will see what this virtuous seminarian will become one day!" His auspicious forecast could not have had a better fulfillment. [In 1898] Augustine Richelmy became archbishop of Turin and, later, a cardinal.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> At this point we are omitting a brief newspaper announcement about a booklet on St. Joseph printed at the Oratory. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a circular about the lottery and responses from donors and friends. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 62

### *Steps Toward Approval of the Salesian Society*

**D**ON Bosco's lottery—which had started in 1865<sup>1</sup>—officially ended with a drawing at Turin's city hall on April 1, 1867. The results were published in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* and in a circular to organizers and distributors.<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile Don Bosco kept pressing for the Holy See's approval of the rules [of the Salesian Society] or at least for the authorization to issue dimissorial letters. To these ends he had called on several cardinals in Rome, and now he pursued his goals by mail. His request to the vicar capitular of Turin for a letter of recommendation elicited a reply on March 28, 1867 that did not explicitly support either request.<sup>3</sup> A few days before, Don Bosco had also recommended himself to Constantine Cardinal Patrizi, the Pope's vicar general, who graciously replied on March 29, 1867, in these terms:

I concerned myself with your request, and after a discussion with good Monsignor Fratejacci, whom I found already fully acquainted with the matter, I brought it up to Cardinal Quaglia, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation [of Bishops and Regulars]. The major obstacle blocking the dimissorials is that your Society, though praised by the Holy See, does not yet have its approval. Extraordinary privileges and favors, such as the one you are asking for, have never been granted in the past except to formally approved congregations, and a departure from this practice, generally so reasonable, is extremely unlikely. However, the particular circumstances of your Society may dispose the Holy Father to make an exception. This is

<sup>1</sup> See p. 16. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

the favor we are seeking and will do our best to obtain. A letter of recommendation from your archbishop, whose rights are especially affected in this matter, would greatly help.

Let this suffice. If it is God's will and for the good of your Society, things will turn out well. Meanwhile, let us pray and work to hasten a successful outcome.

Kindly remember me in your prayers. With great esteem and affection, I am

Sincerely yours,  
Constantine Cardinal Patrizi

Don Bosco had also asked Archbishop Joseph Berardi of Nicea to use his influence. His reply was substantially of the same tenor as Cardinal Patrizi's.<sup>4</sup>

On April 7, Passion Sunday, Don Bosco told his boys, "Cardinal Antonelli wrote to tell me that he is cured. He thanks us for our prayers and assures us that he will constantly pray for us. Tomorrow Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Saluzzo, a dear friend of ours, will say our Community Mass. I shall be available for confessions. . . ."

Canon Gastaldi came for Mass and then, as he had often done before, lingered with Don Bosco for news about the Salesian Society. Don Bosco showed him the letters from the cardinal and Archbishop Berardi and informed him that the letter of recommendation of Turin's vicar capitular had been sent to the cardinal vicar of Rome. He also told him that, regarding dimissorials, a report was expected from Monsignor Fratejacci. The report, dated April 8, 1867, arrived on the 11th, couched in these terms:<sup>5</sup>

[1] *The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars*. At my last meeting with Monsignor Svegliati, we agreed to postpone action on the approval of the Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales till after the installation of Archbishop Riccardi, Turin's new ordinary, so as to enable you to pay your respects and obtain his recommendation. . . . Let us also wait till Cardinal De Angelis, Cardinal Corsi, and other influential prelates arrive in Rome. Your cause will then stand a better chance. . . .

<sup>4</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> What follow are excerpts. [Editor]

[2] *The Bishop of Savona*. I thought it useful to discuss your rules with my friend, Bishop Cerruti, the newly-appointed ordinary of Savona, for two reasons: to enlist him on our side, and through him to enlist also his predecessor, Archbishop Riccardi of Turin. Both are very close friends. . . . I was delighted to find Bishop Cerruti quite well disposed toward you and your congregation. He considers it a privilege to know you and greatly admires you. He has promised to do all he can for you and to use his influence with the archbishop of Turin. . . .

[3] *The Cardinal Vicar*. Cardinal Patrizi sends his regards. . . . He still thinks that the Holy See will not grant you the privilege of issuing dimissorial letters until a few years after your Society's approval. I did my best with various arguments to change His Eminence's mind, but all I could do was to persuade him at least to cooperate in obtaining this favor for a limited number of ordinands—twenty or thirty for the present. The indult could then be extended year by year until it will eventually become permanent.

[4] *Free Church in a Free State*. To win support for your Constitutions I have argued over this mammoth utopia with the cardinal vicar and am still arguing with others to prove that, should this impossible separation of Church and State be realized, the State, anxious to use all available manpower for war, might make it impossible to have clerics ordained, except for a few allotted to each diocese. In such circumstances, how could the bishops help your clerics? And how could your institute survive if to the hindrances of the State there should be added others from the Church? If, instead, you had the power to issue dimissorial letters, you could choose your ordinands from among the non-Italian citizens with no government interference. . . .

The present situation in Italy and France is worsening daily. May God protect us all and make everything turn out for the good of the Church and of civil society. I remember you and your Society daily in my Mass. Please pray earnestly also for my intentions. . . .

Devotedly yours,  
John Baptist Fratejacci

Though aware of the difficulties, Don Bosco tranquilly left it to Divine Providence to dispose events for God's greater glory.

In those days the April issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, entitled *A Collection of Stories* by various Italian authors, was sent out. The booklet contained also eight anecdotes by the French writer Al-

phonusus Baleyrier illustrating the admirable charity of Pius IX.<sup>6</sup> But Don Bosco's zeal in exalting Pius IX was matched by Pius IX's humility and love of truth, as evidenced [from these words] in a letter Peter Marietti wrote to Don Bosco from Rome on April 18, 1867: "I am writing to let you know that Archbishop Berardi informed me that the Holy Father is not too happy about the publicizing of untrue incidents involving him. He wishes you not to print such things in *Letture Cattoliche*."

Don Bosco of course heartily regretted having involuntarily displeased the Holy Father, who in those very days had given him a singular proof of affection and esteem. A document in our archives, dated April 26, 1867, gives us this report:

A very wealthy couple from Marseilles had consulted the finest doctors to cure their only son, a four-year-old deaf-mute who was partially crippled. Hoping for a miracle from the Holy Father's blessing, the unhappy parents took him to Rome. However, Our Lord and Our Lady had chosen Don Bosco as the healing physician. Pius IX blessed the child but advised the parents to take him to Don Bosco who only a short time before had cured many in body and soul in Rome. They traveled to Turin and brought their unfortunate little son to Don Bosco. The Blessed Virgin could not let Her faithful servant down. Invoking Her, he blessed the child and, taking him by the hand, invited him to walk. The boy did so at once without any difficulty. Then Don Bosco stepped behind him and lightly clapped his hands. At the sound the young boy immediately turned around. "Now call Papa and Mamma," Don Bosco prompted. He did so. He was cured! Who could express his parents' wonder and joy at such a miracle? The child had never before uttered or heard a word, even when talked to loudly. Now he could walk, hear, and speak. Leaving a generous offering for the church, they expressed their envy of those who were fortunate to live near Don Bosco.

Both Father Joachim Berto and Father Michael Rua witnessed this incident, which took place on Wednesday of Easter week.<sup>7</sup> Father Rua also knew the parents' names.

<sup>6</sup> These two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting the announcements of two deaths—one at the Oratory and one at Lanzo—and details about Chevalier Oreglia's business trip to Rome. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 63

### *Special Charisms (Continued)*

**N**OT even weighty problems could divert Don Bosco from his boys' spiritual welfare. We have seen that while he was in Rome, he had Father Francesia inform the boys that he had visited the Oratory and taken notice of what each one was doing.<sup>1</sup> Upon his return, he privately told those concerned how they had behaved, even morally, during his two months' absence. He had watched them from afar, and he was watching them even more now that he was in their midst. Going through this year's records, we came across incidents similar to others of previous years and of future years as well, as we shall see.

It seems incredible that Don Bosco could constantly keep an eye on his large community, whether gathered in one spot or scattered about, without losing sight of anyone. Whenever possible, he said night prayers with his pupils. Pretty often, however, he had to linger in the dining room to discuss some business or go to his room to finish a letter.<sup>2</sup> If a priest or cleric was with him during the community night prayers, he would often tell him, "Right now some boys are misbehaving in this or that place. Go and correct them." Unfailingly they found that he was right. If he was alone, he came down himself and, making his way across the rows of kneeling boys, would go straight to those who were not praying. At other times, the way he pinpointed the time and place of certain breaches of discipline led one to believe that he saw these things in spirit just as clearly as with his own eyes.

Father Anthony Riccardi narrates that one Saturday evening, when he was a young boy, he went to Don Bosco for confession,

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 273, 275. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Supper was at eight, night prayers at nine. [Editor]

and, in dismissing him, Don Bosco said, "Go to the top of the stairs in the artisans' building. So-and-so is smoking up there. Tell him that he had better think about going to confession." Though the stairway was dark, Riccardi went up and at a certain point smelled tobacco. Afraid that the culprit, who was much bigger than he, might resent being caught red-handed, Riccardi called out his name. No answer. He called again. Dead silence. Uneasily he went up to the top. The youth was sitting on the landing, still smoking. Riccardi blurted his message, and then, afraid of a beating, immediately ran down and hid behind a pillar. The fellow stopped smoking and went to confession.

However, Don Bosco's favorite means to promote his boys' spiritual welfare was to forestall breaches of discipline by warning them, counseling them, and helping them with fatherly affection. To a boy who had asked how he could improve spiritually, he suggested these means: blind obedience, observance of all the house rules, good advice to companions, a short daily meditation, doing everything—eating, drinking, playing, studying, resting—for God's glory, and, finally, unlimited confidence in his superior, often discussing his spiritual needs with him and candidly telling him all. He further exhorted the lad to observe silence, meaning that he should avoid frivolous conversation, griping, grumbling, criticizing, and self-praise.

Occasionally he would exhort the boys to manifest to him even in writing any hurt or wrongdoing of theirs as well as any fear that they might not be on good terms with their superiors. One day he urged a lad to resist the inclination to get worked up at directives of superiors by pointing out to him the causes of his uneasy state. Gratefully, the lad wrote a short letter to Don Bosco, concluding: "I tell you sincerely, my most beloved father in Jesus Christ, from now on I will only want what you want." That evening, when the lad approached Don Bosco in the dining room after supper, the latter whispered in his ear: "Your letter pleased me greatly. I will do all I can to help you. I see we understand each other, right?"

"Yes, Father."

"Good, take care."

Once, a youngster who gave in to sad moods greeted him after supper. "Well?" Don Bosco asked, bending down as if expecting the

boy to confide something. "I don't know what to tell you," the boy said. "*You tell me something!*"

"Very well," Don Bosco replied. "Stop worrying and feeling sad. You make me sad too. If you were cheerful, I would feel cheerful. I want you to be always cheerful, laughing, and having a good time so that I may make you happy in this world and in the next."

One day, when it was common knowledge at the Oratory that Don Bosco was heavy-hearted because of some grave opposition, he approached one member of the house who was rather despondent because of trivial difficulties. "You could do much to cheer me!" he told him. The following day, after the same fellow had helped him remove his Mass vestments, Don Bosco said smilingly to him, "Be cheerful. St. Philip Neri called sadness the eighth capital sin."

A haughty individual resented a certain decision of the superiors in his regard, judging it humiliating and contrary to his feelings. "Be at peace and cheer up!" Don Bosco told him. "These things can't last forever. . . . Everything will pass. Let us earn merits for heaven." To another, vexed by various temptations, he gave this counsel: "Often look up to the crucifix, your saving banner."

One day, while with a group of boys, he said to one: "*Ibi . . . ubi!* Do you know what that means? *Ibi vestra fixa sint corda, ubi vera sunt gaudia* [Let your hearts be where true happiness is found]."

Sometimes, lingering with some boys in the dining room after dinner, he would take out his breviary or *The Imitation of Christ* and ask one of them to open a page at random and read the first line. Strikingly, some maxims were quite apropos for the reader or were suitably applied by Don Bosco. A rather negligent pupil, for instance, opened the breviary at random and came across a versicle from the Book of Ecclesiastes: "A time to weep. . . ." [Eccles. 3, 4] Don Bosco looked into his eyes and whispered into his ear. The lad became pensive.

He also reproved tactfully. On the way back to the Oratory one day, he chanced upon one of his young priests who, after discussing various matters, ended up criticizing Father Bardessono's preaching.

"Have you ever preached?" Don Bosco interrupted him.

"Not yet!"

"Well then, wait till you do, and then if you feel up to it, you can criticize Father Bardessono!"

He constantly urged parish priests, whether former pupils or not, to recommend frequent Communion in their sermons, novenas, Lenten missions, catechetical instructions, confessions, and conferences. The good results proved the soundness of his advice. A former Oratory pupil, upon becoming the pastor of a large parish, followed his advice even in the face of opposition from fellow priests and liberals and succeeded in having over two hundred Communions on weekdays and over one thousand on Sundays.

The efficacy of Don Bosco's blessing made his words even more effective. For two years Charles Giachetti, a young cleric, was tormented by toothaches. In April of his third year they became unbearable, notwithstanding the remedies then available. To spend the daytime in pain was bad enough, but the nights were simply frightful and endless. He touched no food for three days. Then, on the night of April 29, he moaned and cried so pitifully that his companions ran to call Don Bosco. He hastened to his bedside with Father Francesia and Father Cagliero.

"I can't tell you how much it hurts," the young man moaned. "Hell can't be any worse!"

"Do you have faith in Mary, Help of Christians?"

"Oh, yes! If you bless me, I hope Our Lady will cure me."

Don Bosco told the bystanders to kneel and recite the Hail, Holy Queen. He then blessed him. Hardly had he uttered the words of blessing when the cleric fell soundly asleep, so soundly, in fact, that some feared he was dead. Lowering a lamp, they saw that he was breathing and let him sleep. He did not awaken until the next morning, when he got up with his companions perfectly cured, as if nothing had ever been the matter with him. He never again had a toothache. He died of typhus some ten years later.

During this year [1867] a pupil named Patarelli suddenly suffered a mental breakdown and a loss of memory. Two weeks later, Father Francesia, the prefect of studies, seeing that there was no remedy and that the boy would have to be sent home, brought him to Don Bosco's room. Don Bosco asked him to kneel and blessed him. Instantly Patarelli shook himself as if from sleep. "Where am I?" he asked.

"In my room," Don Bosco replied. "Why aren't you in school?"

"I don't know how I got here," he mumbled.

“All right! Now hurry to your classroom. You are late!” He was perfectly cured!<sup>3</sup>

No less surprising was Don Bosco’s intuition of whether or not a patient would be healed. John Bisio<sup>4</sup> declared: “Once I accompanied Don Bosco on a sick call to a lady whose condition was not critical. After he had comforted and blessed her, the family asked whether their mother would get better. He merely replied: ‘Let us pray, let us pray!’ His answer and tone convinced the family and me that the lady would not recover. She died eight or ten days later.”

Joseph Brosio<sup>5</sup> recalled the following incident: “In 1867 my daughter was sick. As she had not been confirmed, I was anxious that she receive this sacrament, but the pastor was not in favor, asserting that it was not necessary because the girl was too young. I told Don Bosco. The next day, Bishop Balma came to my house and confirmed my little girl. If Don Bosco had not foreseen her death, he would not have hastened to satisfy my desire.”

Our Lady worked wonders not only through Don Bosco’s blessings but also through Her medals.<sup>6</sup> Usually, however, Don Bosco required petitioners to cooperate:

1. By putting themselves in the state of grace through confession and Communion. Before healing the paralytic, Jesus said to him, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” [Matt. 9, 2]

2. By doing some work of charity. If you will share “your bread with the hungry . . . your light shall break forth like the dawn. . . . Then you shall call and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help and He will say, ‘Here I am.’ ” [Is. 58, 7-9]

3. By praying confidently and perseveringly. “Ask and you shall receive.” [John 16, 24] Those works of charity which Our Lady had clearly shown to be Her desire were those aiding Don Bosco’s boys and Her new church in Valdocco. Our Lady’s wish was also becoming known outside Italy, as is proved by a letter from Paris, dated April 26, 1867: “Hearing that a shrine dedicated to Mary, Help of Christians is being erected in Turin, I am sending fifty

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting two other brief descriptions of similar cures. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Bisio, an Oratory pupil, acted as Don Bosco’s receptionist from 1864 to 1871. He remained a lifelong Salesian cooperator. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> As a young man, Brosio began helping Don Bosco in 1841, and he continued to do so until Don Bosco’s death. See the Indexes of Volumes III and IV. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

francs, and I ask for prayers for my father who has been very ill these past three months. [Signed] Maria de Lorette Gutierrez de Estrada”

## CHAPTER 64

### *St. Peter's Centenary*

SHORTLY after his return from Rome, Don Bosco ordered a reprint of his booklet *St. Pancratius, Martyr*, first published in 1856.<sup>1</sup> He was prompted mainly by his love for this martyr and for the shrine dedicated to him at Pianezza [near Turin], but he also wished to honor that shrine's rector, Father Charles Palazzolo—the former sacristan of the Chieri cathedral, whom Don Bosco, while still a student, had instructed in Latin and had helped to become a priest.<sup>2</sup>

Other reprints followed in steady succession along with new titles. In this task he drew encouragement from the Pope who befriended him and whose mind he knew intimately. Had Don Bosco felt the slightest doubt that any of his writings were at variance with Catholic truth or with the respect and love due to the Pope, he would have blamed and condemned not just one but all of them, and he would have ceased to write. This was always his firm determination.

In Rome, meanwhile, some who were very hostile to him had made common cause with cliques in southern Italy and other regions against his *Letture Cattoliche*. Their goal was to have his booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* condemned by the Sacred Congregation of the Index, and at one stroke to severely hurt his reputation and cast suspicion on his publications. While some trusted friends alerted Don Bosco to this plot, other people blasted him in uncomplimentary terms. Advisedly and prudently he

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 289f. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. I, pp. 219f; Vol II, pp. 28, 135, 178f; Vol. III, pp. 176, 330. This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

promptly destroyed these letters lest the writers be later embarrassed or taken to task by someone at the Oratory.<sup>3</sup>

Even before his departure from Rome, these people had petitioned the Sacred Congregation of the Index to examine the booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* which the Pope himself had praised. The petition was accepted, and Canon Pio Delicati, professor of church history at the Apollinare, was charged to examine the booklet. His report<sup>4</sup> follows:

[Rome] March 21, 1867

Through his booklet *St. Peter's Centenary*, Father John Bosco intends to present the accomplishments of the Prince of the Apostles and to dispose his readers to prepare devoutly for the forthcoming centennial celebrations. Though his goals and zeal are praiseworthy, it seems that this work is not above censure because of certain inferences likely to be made.

First, indisputable facts resting on the authority of Holy Scripture itself are paired off with others which have an uncertain tradition or are based on apocryphal documents, and no clear-cut demarcations or indications are made, as though both carried equal weight and certitude. . . .

A point especially to be noted concerns St. Peter's coming to Rome. Although the writer casts no doubt on it but rather marshals several arguments as proof, he sums up the nature and character of this fact in these terms: "I deem it opportune, by the way, to point out to writers and lecturers on this subject—Catholic or Protestant—not to regard it as a point of dogma and religion." To maintain that the coming of St. Peter to Rome is not a dogmatic and religious point—meaning that it has no bearing on dogma or religion—is a grave theological misconception, and it cannot but go against the ecclesial sense. The fact in question is certainly historical and can irrefutably be proved with sound critique; it is also intimately linked with religion and dogma, since it is the historical requisite or basis of a dogmatic and religious truth, namely, the primacy of the Roman Pontiffs. . . .

The above-mentioned observations seem to be substantial enough to justify declaring this booklet *proscribendum donec corrigatur* [banned until revised]. The author could either correct or, better yet, entirely rewrite his little work.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Only excerpts will be given here. [Editor]

This appraisal, however, is submitted to the enlightened authoritative judgment of this Sacred Congregation.

Can. Pio Delicati, *Consultor*

On this occasion, although Ludwig Cardinal Altieri headed the Sacred Congregation of the Index, the meeting was presided over by Anthony Cardinal Panebianco, of the Order of Minor Conventuals, Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Indulgences and Sacred Relics.

After studying this report, the Sacred Congregation of the Index rejected the consultor's conclusion and limited itself to informing Don Bosco of it through the archbishop of Turin and mandating correction in case of a reprint. It had been Pius IX's order. "This will not do!" he had exclaimed on hearing the suggestion that the book be banned. "Poor Don Bosco! If corrections are in order, let them be made in a reprint."

Returning to this topic in subsequent chapters, we shall have to admire even more Don Bosco's humility and holiness. Meanwhile, he continued to extol the papacy in the May issue of *Letture Cattoliche*, entitled *The Popes' Contributions to Mankind* . . .

During those months many Turinese noble families were departing for Rome to attend the solemn centennial celebrations of St. Peter's arrival. To some of them Don Bosco entrusted confidential letters for distinguished benefactors and prelates. One letter, for Cardinal Antonelli, concerned the Salesian Society and the appointment of bishops.<sup>5</sup> Replying on June 4, 1867, the cardinal commented on the recent appointment of bishops and stressed the need of some acceptable influence to make the Italian government resume negotiations. In due time we shall see Don Bosco reopening them on his own initiative.

In his letter to the cardinal, Don Bosco had also recommended Bishop Balma, titular of Tolemaides, who later became archbishop of Cagliari. He had also proposed other names, since Piedmont too still had vacant sees. Perhaps already in 1867 he had in mind Canon [Peter] De Gaudenzi for Vigevano, Canon [Edward] Rosaz for Susa, and Monsignor [Emilian] Manacorda for Fossano. He

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

wished to keep the attention of the Secretary of State alert to this most vital question, lest any occasion be overlooked which might even slightly help to attain so holy a goal. He thus wished to console the Pope, who ardently desired the salvation of souls, as Don Bosco so well knew.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> We are omitting the reference to an appeal of Pius IX to Napoleon urging him to prod the Italian government to negotiate. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 65

### *St. Peter's Centenary (Continued)*

**I**N May 1867 Don Bosco went to Caramagna [Cuneo] to preach at the solemn feast of the Finding of the True Cross. He was accompanied by James Costamagna, then a young cleric, whose brother Louis had warmly urged Don Bosco to accept this invitation.<sup>1</sup> The young cleric witnessed what we are going to narrate and described it to us the following day. Years later, as a missionary priest in Buenos Aires, he sent us this written deposition, dated November 5, 1888, declaring himself ready to confirm it by oath:

On May 3, 1867, the feast of the Finding of the True Cross, Don Bosco preached a splendid sermon in Caramagna, my native town. Afterward, he graciously had dinner in my mother's humble house. He had come to Caramagna several times before, but this happened to be his last visit. By the end of dinner the upper and lower courtyards were packed with people seeking his blessing. Obliging Don Bosco came out, escorted by my brother Louis and myself.

I eagerly looked forward to witnessing some prodigy. The first person to come forward was a rather elderly crippled woman who dragged herself on crutches. She had heard of the efficacy of Don Bosco's blessing and was very hopeful. No more than three feet away, I kept very alert so as not to miss a thing. I heard the ensuing dialogue and saw the miracle that followed.

"What do you want, my good woman?" Don Bosco asked her.

"Oh, Don Bosco, have pity on me too! Please give me your blessing!"

"Most willingly, but do you have faith in Our Lady?"

"Yes, yes, very much!"

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

"Then pray to Her and She will grant you your favor."

"I'd rather have you pray because you are a saint. I am not too good at that!"

"We must pray together, both of us!"

"I'll do as you say!"

"Kneel down then!"

"Ah, Don Bosco, it's been such a long time since I've done that! My legs are no good anymore."

"Never mind, kneel down!"

Leaning on her crutches, the woman strove to lower herself to the ground. "No, no, that won't do," Don Bosco said firmly, taking the crutches from her. "Kneel properly!"

With baited breath some six hundred people stood quietly watching. As if by magic, the woman found herself kneeling on the ground.

"Don Bosco, what prayers shall I say?"

"Say three Hail Mary's with me in honor of the Help of Christians."

When that was done, the woman, unaided, stood up without any of the pains that had racked her for years. With a kindly smile Don Bosco placed the two crutches on her shoulders, saying, "Now go, my good woman, and always love Mary, Help of Christians."

With thanks to Our Lady and to Don Bosco, the happy woman made her way through the crowd who broke their prolonged silence with long-drawn cries of admiration. They thronged around Don Bosco, keeping him busy for a long time blessing and consoling everyone. From then on, that woman went about cheerfully and freely, supporting herself on a walking stick because of her age. My brother Louis also witnessed this fact.

The enthusiasm and faith that Don Bosco had aroused stemmed from his reputation for sanctity. That same morning [a Friday] Don Bosco had called on another woman who had long been bedridden with cancer. After exhorting her to have confidence in Mary, Help of Christians, he blessed her and instructed her to get up the next day, to go to Mass on Sunday, and finally to travel to Turin at the end of the month to make a thanksgiving offering to Mary, Help of Christians. Moments after Don Bosco's visit she felt so well that she rang her bedside bell and told her family that she was cured. Without further ado, she got up, went at once to the parish church to thank Our Lady, and, to everybody's astonishment, brought to

Don Bosco the three-thousand-lire donation she had promised. Concerning this incident too we have a written testimony from Louis Costamagna, who further adds: "In view of these and other facts I witnessed but omit for brevity's sake, Don Bosco had trouble leaving town that evening because a crowd of admirers kept blocking the road. They would not let him through until he once more blessed them as they knelt down on the ground."

Just before leaving, Don Bosco made a prediction. The local miller, a woman named Allaria, brought her two daughters to him, aged twelve and fourteen. The former was good, peaceable, and very pious, while the latter—a very lively child—seemed less well-behaved and, outwardly at least, rather harebrained and careless. The younger was placed at Don Bosco's right, the elder at his left, and he was asked to bless them. To the mother's surprise, Don Bosco made them change places. Then, turning to the elder one, he said, "She will become a nun and attain a high degree of sanctity!" Among the bystanders was Ursula Camisassa, who eventually became a Daughter of Mary, Help of Christians. She was a friend of the elder girl and clearly heard those striking words. In due time, the Allaria girl joined the Sisters of St. Joseph in Turin. Sister Camisassa was once more present when Father Appendini received a letter announcing Sister Allaria's death. In writing of her demise in Bra, her pastor stated among other things, "Her passing was most consoling because she had attained a high degree of sanctity"—Don Bosco's very words!

In 1893, James Costamagna—then a bishop—after confirming the above, added:

That same evening—May 3, 1867—on the train to Turin, Don Bosco confided his joy to me at the many favors the Lord had granted to him, especially in sending to him such talented young co-workers as Durando, Francesca, Cagliero, Cerruti, Bonetti, Albera, Ghivarello, and so on. "They all excel in some field or other," he remarked—"rhetoric, literature, music, writing, theology, sanctity." Of some he predicted singular abilities that came to light later on, but which nobody could then surmise. When he came to Father Rua, he said, "Look, James, if God were to tell me: 'You are about to die; get ready and choose a successor because I don't want the work you have started to fold up; ask for him whatever

grace, virtue, and supernatural gift you deem necessary for the proper fulfillment of his office, and I will grant it all . . .’ (*after a momentary silence he went on*) “I really wouldn’t know what to ask for Father Rua that he does not already possess.”

From Turin, as we shall see later, Don Bosco went to Saluggia at the request of the local pastor to advise him on some serious parish matter. On May 9, after his return to the Oratory, he wrote to Chevalier Oreglia, who was on his way to Rome, a letter that deserves attention:<sup>2</sup> “I have just received duplicates of letters addressed to our new archbishop, revealing attempts to have *St. Peter’s Centenary* put on the Index [of Forbidden Books]. The Congregation of the Index, however, simply ordered unspecified corrections in a future edition. Threats to have the book placed on the Index were made to me while I was in Rome and also after my departure. A great friend of ours told me why: because in Rome I chose to consort very familiarly with the Jesuits.”

Thus the decision of the Sacred Congregation of the Index concerning *St. Peter’s Centenary* had finally reached the Turin chancery along with the consultor’s observations. Don Bosco was duly informed, but seemingly he did not immediately receive the document containing these observations. When he got it, he tried in vain to decipher the consultor’s signature. After long scrutiny, Father Rua managed to make out the name of Canon Pio Delicati.

The letter from the Congregation of the Index to the newly appointed—but not yet installed—archbishop of Turin read as follows:

Rome, April 29, 1867

Your Excellency:

A booklet entitled *St. Peter’s Centenary* by Father John Bosco has been submitted to this Sacred Congregation. After mature examination and discussion, the sacred gathering of the most eminent cardinals adopted the following resolution: *Scribendum archiepiscopo Taurinensi ut praecipiat auctori novam typis parare editionem in cuius praeloquio moneantur lectores auctorem retractasse quidquid censura dignum a Sacro Concilio deprehensum est prout ex folio epistolae huic adnexo (archiepiscono re-*

<sup>2</sup> We shall report only the excerpt that is really important. [Editor]

*servato) patebit* [The archbishop of Turin is to be asked by letter to order the author to prepare a new edition. In its Foreword it must be stated that the author has retracted whatever this Sacred Council found objectionable, as described in the confidential enclosure to this letter].

His Holiness has officially sanctioned this decision with his signature on the 12th day of this month. By reason of my office I am officially charged to forward the same to Your Excellency so that with equal solicitude and vigilance you may take opportune measures.

I also avail myself of this opportunity to alert Your Excellency that other denunciations have come to us these days concerning a periodical published in Turin, entitled *Letture Cattoliche*, wherein are found, if not manifest errors, at least such phrases and stories as to arouse laughter and derision rather than public edification, at a time when religion—especially when presented in ascetic and mystic publications—is so much discredited . . . .

Your Excellency is well aware of the need of vigilance and accuracy in examining writings of a religious character, in order not to expose ecclesiastical authority to scorn and derision.

With sentiments of high esteem and veneration I am

Your humble servant,  
Friar Angelo Vincent Modena, O.P.  
*Secretary of the [Congregation of the] Index*

This was the result of the intrigues of those who had aimed at discrediting Don Bosco by attacking his *Letture Cattoliche*.

Don Bosco hastened to bring a copy of *St. Peter's Centenary* to Canon Zappata, the vicar capitular, at the latter's request. Speaking of *Letture Cattoliche*, the canon remarked, "I may be mistaken, but after reading several issues I can say that I found nothing amiss, much less anything deserving condemnation!" Don Bosco also gave a copy to Canon Gastaldi for examination. The latter's opinion was that, even if corrections might be in order, the work did not deserve to be condemned. Therefore, while respecting the decision of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, he advised Don Bosco to prepare a defense to be presented if and when the Holy See would permit it. Don Bosco asked and obtained the vicar capitular's consent to this plan and set to work.

The above-quoted admonition with its wording, however, was a most painful blow to Don Bosco's very sensitive heart. Only his

virtue, his devotedness to the Vicar of Christ, and his love for Pius IX gave him strength to bear it. Although habitually appearing tranquil and serene, he must have had his moments of deep discouragement. How many painful thoughts—which he kept to himself—must have come to his mind, fashioning, so to speak, a crown of thorns and giving rise to the doubt, “What if this should become publicly known through indiscretion or evil intent both in Rome and in Turin?”

To him—the founder of a religious congregation—this appeared to be a stigma and perhaps an obstacle to further approvals of his Society and to the granting of those privileges which he so insistently sought. Then, too, wouldn't he possibly lose face with his boys, to the great prejudice of souls and vocations? And would not misgivings also make their way among his Salesians, some of whom were being insistently enticed to join the diocesan clergy? Moreover, what a slur and setback for *Letture Cattoliche*! The Protestants would gloat over the shattering of a formidable weapon which they had vainly attempted to wrench from his hands. But mainly his deepest grief was to have been accused of not having upheld papal authority—he who would rather die than displease the Pope in the slightest!

God permitted this trial but did not allow His servant to suffer discredit. Though Friar Modena's communication to Archbishop Riccardi was dated April 29, no news of it had leaked out at all, even to *Civiltà Cattolica* [some two weeks later]. In fact, Father Oreglia, S.J. [a staff member], writing to Father Francesia on May 14 for news,<sup>3</sup> made no reference whatever to what was causing Don Bosco great anxiety.

Meanwhile, on May 12, the Oratory's yearly spiritual retreat had started and was set to end on the 16th. The clerics and a few priests continued to take part in it, although they had their own regular one-week retreat in the fall. So many boys wished to confide the secrets of their soul to Don Bosco that he was kept busy from morning to night hearing confessions.

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting this letter. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 66

### *St. Peter's Centenary (Continued)*

COMPLYING with the [Holy See's] admonition, Don Bosco suspended the reprint of *St. Peter's Centenary*, as we gather from Father Henry Bonetti's letter on May 15, 1867 to Chevalier Oreglia, whose place he was taking in the printshop. "We have already reprinted two sheets of *St. Peter's Centenary*," he wrote. "The rest will be done as soon as Don Bosco has made some revisions. . . . He looks well and—fortunately for us—is usually at home, save for some short absences."

On the same day, Father [Joseph] Oreglia, S.J., replied to Don Bosco, who had informed him of the received admonition:

Rome, May 15, 1857

Reverend and dear Don Bosco,

My brother Frederick arrived today and I gave him his mail. After reading it, he acquainted me with what you wrote concerning the matter that is disturbing you, of which you also wrote to me. . . .

I must tell you that when you were here, I spoke to good Father Francesca about a seemingly inexact sentence in your booklet. The gist of it, as far as I can remember, was: "As for the rest, I deem it advisable to warn Catholics and Protestants that it is of faith that St. Peter was appointed head of the Church by Jesus Christ, etc.; but that his coming or not coming to Rome is not a matter of faith, but simply of history."<sup>1</sup>

This sentence did not sound quite right to me, and I mentioned it to Father Francesca, asking him to call your attention to it. Then, wishing to ascertain the matter better, I wrote to Father Cardella, a theology

<sup>1</sup> The exact text was: "I deem it opportune, by the way, to point out to writers and lecturers on this subject, Catholic or Protestant, not to regard it as a point of dogma and religion." [Editor]

professor at the Collegio Romano, asking whether such a statement could be held safely by a Catholic writer (I did not mention your name so as not to prejudice his answer). I am enclosing Father Cardella's original reply and authorize you to copy it if you wish, but please return it to me. Since his reply ultimately was that such a statement was defensible, I inquired no further. Neither did I bother to find out whether Father Francesia had spoken to you about it. . . .

Meanwhile, others in Rome were making the same observations. This I found out only today from my brother Frederick. In fact, as soon as he left, Father Piccirillo called on me. He had just had an audience with the Pope, who, he told me, noticing an article in *Civiltà Cattolica* about St. Peter's centennial celebrations, recalled your booklet and remarked that it contained a sentence he did not like because it did not state things properly. He added that Don Bosco should remove it, but said nothing about putting it on the Index [of Forbidden Books] or condemning it, though I believe that someone may have wished just that. Father Piccirillo assures me that, judging from the Pope's remarks, it is impossible for the book to be condemned.

As things stand now, it is certain that the statement—according to Father Cardella—is defensible but inopportune, whereas the Pope—as a private theologian—considers it false and indefensible.

You will have to decide what to do. It is equally certain that the Pope, as usual, spoke very affectionately and warmly of you, adding that he would be very pleased, I believe, to receive a revised edition soon.

I do not presume to advise you, but I believe it would be better still if you would clearly state the reason for this second edition in the Preface. Without censoring your statement, which has not been condemned and is probably defensible, make it known that you have expunged it as being at least inopportune. Father Piccirillo believes rather that you would do better to delete it without mentioning it at all in the Preface.

Since Father Cardella wrote his letter hurriedly without deep study [of the question], he might take offense if he knew that I have passed it on to you, and all the more so if you should make public use of it. I therefore ask you to use it only for your information and not to mention Father Cardella's name.

Pardon my hurry and bad penmanship. Pray for me.

Yours affectionately,  
Father Oreglia, S.J.

Don Bosco made no use at all of Father Cardella's reply. Little of this leaked out in Rome and nothing at all at the Oratory, except for a few Salesians in whom Don Bosco confided. All the others were busy with their studies and with the staging of a Latin comedy for which Father Francesia had written a Latin invitation to benefactors and friends.<sup>2</sup> Among the guests were the bishops of Saluzzo, Alba, and Cuneo and many outstanding educators.

Meanwhile, after much praying and consulting with learned people, especially with the newly consecrated Bishop Gastaldi, Don Bosco drafted a respectful reply to the observations made on his booklet,<sup>3</sup> concluding as follows:

After these explanations, I wish to declare:

1. In writing this or other booklets and in offering the above-stated explanations, I have had no other intention than to do the little I could to promote the greater glory of God and of our holy Catholic religion, and to foster respect and veneration for the Supreme Pontiff. This intent is obvious in the whole series of *Lecture Cattolice* which has been published for the last fifteen years with the approval of practically the entire Piedmontese episcopate and of the Holy Father himself.

2. If anything else need be said or done notwithstanding these explanations, I shall greatly appreciate its being brought to my attention. I shall be even more grateful if whatever concerns the authenticity of facts or the accuracy of maxims will be specifically pointed out.

3. I am ready to modify, correct, delete, or add what may be even simply suggested to me as long as it is clearly pointed out for faithful execution.

Don Bosco had this reply copied in good hand by the cleric Louis Chiapale who also transcribed the letter to the archbishop of Turin and the report of the consultor of the [Sacred Congregation of the] Index. On this score, on August 12, 1889, Father Louis Chiapale, then a chaplain at Fornaca Saluzzo, sent us the following written declaration:

<sup>2</sup> Omitted in this edition. We are also omitting a digression about a request to Don Bosco to accept the direction of the public schools of Chieri. The plan did not go through. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting this lengthy rebuttal which at this time would interest but few readers. The full text can be found in Volume VIII of *Memorie Biografiche del Venerabile Don Giovanni Bosco*, pp. 784-88. [Editor]

The most painful period of Don Bosco's long and eventful life was in 1867. I say eventful because his life was a mixture of roses and thorns, perhaps more of the latter than of the former. He could truly say with Our Lord, "With these I was wounded in the house of my dear ones. [Zech. 13, 6]

One evening near the end of May, if I remember correctly, he said to me, "After supper, please come to my room. I have some urgent work for you."

I went up to his room at nine. In the adjacent room I found on a small table all I needed for my work. "Please copy this," he said, "and do a neat job."

The manuscript was none too clear—what with the handwriting, corrections, and minute marginal additions—but accustomed as I was to garbled manuscripts—such as Father Cafasso's retreat sermons and Father Joseph Ghiringhello's notes on the New Testament—I found no special difficulty.

The manuscript contained the defense jointly prepared by Don Bosco and Bishop Gastaldi of Saluzzo against the grave observations and allegations of the Sacred Congregation of the Index, concerning incidents and statements that were more inexact than erroneous, as it afterward turned out. May I be permitted to add that while I diligently attended to my work, importunate tears would run down my cheeks, hindering my task. This was due to what I had to write concerning our beloved Don Bosco. The charges were grave and couched in severe terms as could be expected from one discharging a lofty duty. What very much hurt the unimpassioned observer, however, was the manner in which Don Bosco was treated, as if he were a dreamer, a spinner of yarns, a nobody. It seemed to me that in so important and consequential a matter, a just and severe censure of errors, if any, could well be balanced by respect for the author, even if he were not in as difficult and sensitive a position as Don Bosco's.

I was also moved by his frequent sighs and exclamations breaking the deep silence of the adjoining room. At the stroke of midnight, he softly opened the connecting door.

"Have you finished?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"Do you have much more?"

"Just a little."

"That will do for now, if we can put it in the mail before eight in the morning."

"I think we can."

While looking over my copy, he led me into his room. I stood beside him

while he dejectedly sat at his desk, his left arm resting on it and supporting his weary head.

"You see how things are?"

"Yes," I replied, dazed at his grief. "I have seen how Don Bosco is treated, but nothing will come out of it."

"And yet, O my Jesus," he continued, looking at the crucifix as tears streamed down his cheeks, "You know my good intentions in writing this booklet. 'My soul is sad even unto death.' 'Your will be done.' I wonder how I shall spend this night. . . . O my Jesus, do help me!"

I tried to comfort him while striving to choke my sobs, but he said, "Go to bed. It's late. Come back tomorrow morning."

"Please, let me stay," I pleaded. "I'm sure I won't be able to sleep."

After a moment's silence he stood up. "No," he firmly said, "go to bed."

God only knows how he spent that night. At five in the morning I went back and found him more serene and tranquil. Leaving me alone at my work, he went down to the church as usual for confessions and Holy Mass. When he returned, I had finished. "Very good," he exclaimed after minutely examining it. "You are the best!"

He had changed altogether from what he had seemed a few hours before. Presently a booming voice inquired, "Is Don Bosco in?" It was Canon Gastaldi, my professor of sacred eloquence at the Oratory. Don Bosco met him at the door.

"Come in, Monsignor," he said.

"Well, Don Bosco, how are you?"

"As God wills, Monsignor."

"Is the copy ready?"

"Yes, Monsignor."

He ran through it quickly. "Very good," he remarked, "quite thorough."

"Do you think there will be any danger of. . . ?"

"Man of little faith," the monsignor interrupted him. "Why fear? I have read your book over and over again. There may be some inaccuracies, but no real errors. Don't worry, Don Bosco. Trust my word."

Don Bosco's explanations were immediately mailed to Rome with this letter to the secretary of the [Sacred Congregation of the] Index:

Your Excellency,

I have received from the vicar capitular of Turin, acting on behalf of the archbishop, the decision of the Congregation of the Council on my booklet *St. Peter's Centenary*, ordering me to prepare a new edition and to correct whatever the Sacred Council judged worthy of censure. I immediately hasten to assure and promise most explicitly that, as a Catholic priest, a director of charitable institutions, and a writer of several little works on religion, I totally and unreservedly submit to this and any other decision that may be taken on this booklet or others already published or to be published.

I humbly and respectfully beg Your Excellency to ask the author of the report to kindly read the enclosed clarifications concerning incidents whose authenticity is questioned. I dare make this humble request because the enlightened and authoritative Congregation of the Index acted benignly on the consultor's report and greatly tempered the recommendation of absolute condemnation of the book. I think that these clarifications will enable everyone to see that the author is unshakably Catholic and that whatever was found or may yet be found worthy of censure is not only unintentional but contrary to his will. I would deem it a fine act of charity if the Very Reverend Consultor will kindly point out the things he considers wrong so that I may unhesitatingly follow his suggestions and make the necessary corrections in the edition I am now preparing.

As a further proof of my good will, I have asked for and obtained the consent of my ecclesiastical superior before submitting these clarifications.

I am fully confident that in this painful matter you will deal with me with fatherly goodness.

Your humble servant,  
Father John Bosco

The two documents were mailed to Father Oreglia for presentation at a favorable occasion.

## CHAPTER 67

### *The New Archbishop of Turin*

REASSURING letters [about reactions to *St. Peter's Centenary*] kept reaching the Oratory from Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J. Though he still feared the worst, Don Bosco was grateful for his friend's comforting words and those of others. He acknowledged his gratitude in a letter of May 21, 1867 to Chevalier Oreglia who was in Rome. "Your brother's letter greatly comforted me," he wrote. Then, passing on to favors to be obtained through the intercession of Mary, Help of Christians, he stated, "I have always said that Mary, Help of Christians has granted and keeps granting extraordinary favors to all who contribute to the construction of this church. I repeat what I have already said: an offering is to be made *after* receiving the favor. . . . You can't imagine the wonders Mary, Help of Christians works! We see them every day."<sup>1</sup>

The next day Don Bosco wrote again to Chevalier Oreglia to tell him that Father Cagliari would go to Rome with a companion to assist at St. Peter's centennial celebrations. . . . In the same letter Don Bosco spoke again of his booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* and of the need to have a good Salesian in charge of litigations. "Upon your return," he wrote, "we shall really have to appoint you our legal representative in all matters of contention. It is no task for priests."<sup>2</sup>

On Friday, May 24, the feast of Mary, Help of Christians, there was organ music and a very large attendance at Holy Communion at the boys' Mass in the Church of St. Francis de Sales, even though

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting at this point a description of the visit of Minister Rattazzi's wife—Princess Maria Laetitia—to the Oratory on May 21, 1867. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

it was a weekday. On that day, Don Bosco sent out a circular<sup>3</sup> to raise funds for a chapel to the Most Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary in the new church.

Meanwhile Turin was welcoming its new ordinary, Archbishop Alexander Riccardi. Born at Biella on May 28, 1808, he had successively been court chaplain, cathedral canon, royal almoner of King Albert, and, since 1842, bishop of Savona, distinguishing himself by his goodness. At Savona he was so much loved for his charity that he wept at the thought of leaving. After praying and appealing in vain to the Pope and to the king, he had to accept his cross and go to Turin. Until then he had been a great admirer and friend of Don Bosco and had exchanged visits with him in Rome. On those occasions the worthy prelate had been very cordial and had confided to Don Bosco his plans which also called for placing the junior seminaries of Giaveno and Bra and the major seminary of Chieri under Don Bosco's direction. To him he was entrusting the formation of his younger clergy. "You can count on me in everything," he had told him at the close of the visit. "I want to be your most trusted friend!" And Don Bosco had returned to Turin with the hope that he had found in him the protector he had lost with the death of Archbishop Fransoni.

Upon his arrival in Turin, Archbishop Riccardi went to stay with his brother. The next day he called at the Oratory in plain clerical garb and asked for Don Bosco, who happened to be out. He waited a while and then said to the porter, who had not recognized him, "When Don Bosco returns, please tell him that his archbishop personally called and wished to anticipate his visit."

Moved by such graciousness, the next day Don Bosco hastened to return the visit and was received with warm joy. After some talk, Don Bosco said, "Your Excellency can help me a great deal in a most important matter."

"I'll be delighted!"

"You may know that I have started a religious society."

"You have?" the archbishop replied in astonishment. Obviously this was news to him. Don Bosco acquainted him with the matter

<sup>3</sup> Omitted in this edition. We are also omitting a letter of Father Rua to Chevalier Oreglia and details about the suspension and restoration of reduced railroad fares to the Oratory. [Editor]

and his present difficulties. Until then the archbishop had believed Don Bosco's institute to be diocesan and under his jurisdiction, but on learning that its scope was worldwide and that it would depend on Rome and not on him, he reacted as to an affront. "I thought you would work exclusively in my diocese," he commented, "and that we would help each other on behalf of souls entrusted to my care!" As though smarting under a bitter disappointment, he coldly dismissed Don Bosco. His coldness increased with time, but only because some people kept making him suspicious of the Oratory.

Archbishop Riccardi's installation took place on May 26 with a great concourse of the faithful. For the occasion Don Bosco had a written address presented to him on behalf of all his Salesians and boys.<sup>4</sup> The day after the solemn installation, at which the whole Oratory had taken part, Don Bosco called on the archbishop. He was accompanied by Father Cagliero, who described this visit to us. Shortly after they had been ushered into the reception room, the archbishop entered, exchanged greetings, and sat facing Don Bosco, but not as close to him as he usually did. *It's a bad start*, Father Cagliero said to himself. In fact, without mentioning the previous day's celebrations and the address he had received from the Oratory, the archbishop dryly asked, "What can I do for you, Don Bosco?"

"I have come to entrust myself and my congregation to your protection."

"Fine!"

"We shall do our utmost to continue working under your directives."

"I have no doubt."

"And we shall never fail in any way in the reverence due to you. We also beg you to believe that we earnestly wish to please you in everything."

"Don't worry. I shall not turn against you!"

Father Cagliero could hardly restrain himself. *It's a bad start*, he kept saying to himself! The archbishop remained cold and curt, and so the conversation was far from cordial.

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting the dedication written by Don Bosco himself. [Editor]

On the way back to the Oratory, Father Cagliero remarked to Don Bosco that those words "I shall not turn against you" sounded like a bad omen.

"Let's hope for the best!" he simply replied. . . .

He felt hurt at the archbishop's uncalled-for coldness, also because the prelate and his noble family [the counts of Netro] had often helped the Oratory. Though warmhearted and unassuming, the archbishop was very sensitive in matters affecting his deep, self-sacrificing love for his diocese. Furthermore, his innate sensitivity had become even more acute with his nostalgic longing for Savona and his concern for his advanced age and ailments. He had been painfully surprised to learn that an institute which he had believed to be diocesan and had loved would not be under his control. The affection that the Salesians belonging to his diocese felt for Don Bosco seemed to him a lessening of the affection due to him, their archbishop—a notion frequently encouraged by some in his entourage. One day, for instance, while he was vesting for Benediction in the sacristy of the Church of St. Francis de Sales at the Oratory with over a hundred altar boys in attendance, these individuals kissed his ring and loudly exclaimed, "Your Excellency, you are our father. We have no father but you!" We ourselves witnessed this scene and made note of this totally undeserved slur upon the Salesians! Archbishop Riccardi, however, was never hostile to the Oratory. The differences which he felt arise between him and Don Bosco were due to his own hypersensitivity. We have expressed these views to make it clear that the new cross Don Bosco had to face was not traceable to the ill will of his new ecclesiastical superiors.

Don Bosco called on the archbishop again but was told that he was busy and could not receive him. Back at the Oratory, he hastened to draft and deliver to the archbishop a memorandum on the Salesian Society in order to acquaint him with its purpose and its present condition.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Omitted in this edition. The memorandum gave the following statistics: nearly a hundred Salesians, three boarding schools (Turin, Mirabello, Lanzo), and three festive oratories in Turin. [Editor ]

## CHAPTER 68

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

THE May issue of *Letture Cattolice* was a three-act drama entitled *Saint Peter in Rome*, a timely homage to St. Peter and to his successors. . . . It was followed in July by *A Pilgrimage to the Apostles' Tombs*, a booklet intended to enhance St. Peter's centennial celebrations.

While Don Bosco thus showed his deep attachment to the Holy See and to Christ's Vicar, the Lord deigned to show several times how acceptable Don Bosco's prayers and blessings were. In May of 1867 Father Rua felt such sharp pain in one of his hands that for several nights he could not sleep. In Father Berto's presence, Don Bosco blessed him and prayed, and he then urged him to make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians and to recommend himself to Our Lord, especially when he raised the Host at Mass. "Have faith besides hope!" he told him. Before the novena was over, Father Rua was perfectly cured, as he himself testified.

John Baptist Revello, a Latin III student, wrote on May 29, 1867:

On May 22, about 2:30 in the afternoon, I had sudden chills. Then, as I left the classroom, an awful headache and fever set in, lasting till night. The next morning I felt better, but the day after, May 24, at about the same hour, the fever returned. The following day I had no trouble, but on the 26th, chills and fever returned. On the morning of the 27th, as I stood by the infirmary, Don Bosco passed by and I greeted him. At once he inquired about my health. I told him that a fever racked me every other day. "Is today a 'fever' day?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "It's tomorrow."

"Then see me the following day and I will bless you."

On the 29th, exhausted by the fever which had racked me the previous day, I waited for Don Bosco in the same place. When he came by, he asked me if I had had any fever the day before. "Yes," I answered.

“Then come to my room and I will bless you.”

Gladly I followed him. He asked me to kneel with him. After a short prayer to Our Lady, he placed his hand on my head and blessed me. At that moment an artisan came into the room. “Pray for this boy too,” he told him. He then said to me, “During these three remaining days of Mary’s month say three *Paters*, *Aves*, *Glorias* and a *Salve, Regina* before the Blessed Sacrament, but with great faith.”

I hastened to do what he had suggested, and I was never again bothered by that problem. I believe it was a favor granted me by Our Lady through Don Bosco’s intercession.

Father Joachim Berto, who was in charge of the boys’ dormitory, testifies to the truth of this statement.

From Villafranca, Piedmont, there came to Don Bosco a couple with their eight- or nine-year-old son badly crippled since birth. Don Bosco blessed him and then told him to stand up and walk. “Have faith in Mary and stretch your foot out!” The boy hesitated, but with his parents’ help he raised himself, took a step, and began to walk without assistance, to their astonishment and joy. Deeply grateful they left, promising to return to thank their heavenly benefactress in Her new church. . . .

[Edward] Donato,<sup>1</sup> a cleric from Saluggia, witnessed this incident in Don Bosco’s waiting room and described it to Father Joachim Berto and Father Angelo Savio, who had seen the boy before the blessing and again after his instant recovery. Father Rua also testified to it.

We read in our chronicle:<sup>2</sup>

June 1 [1867]. Don Bosco said, “How we keep going is a puzzle to me. This week I received thousands of lire in thanksgiving for favors received.”

This evening, at supper, Don Bosco said to Father Berto who was keeping him company: “While I was in town yesterday, an eight- or nine-year-old boy walked up to me and said, ‘Don Bosco, don’t you remember me?’

“ ‘Who are you?’ ” I asked.

“ ‘I’m the one you blessed some days ago. Look! I am cured! I have some money here to give you from my mother. Our Lady has cured me!’ ”

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 168f, 293, 337f. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 466. [Editor]

“ ‘Well, then,’ I went on, ‘show your gratitude to Our Lady by diligently fulfilling all your duties.’ ”

“Not long before, a sister of his, suffering from a severe backache and finding no human remedy, decided to come to the Oratory for a blessing. I told her to pray and make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians.

“One day, while I was in town, a girl ran up to me. ‘Do you remember me?’ she asked. ‘You blessed me one day in the sacristy of your church. When I finished the novena, my backache was gone. Now I feel fine!’

“Then this morning at about ten, they brought a five-year-old boy to me. He was stone-deaf and would not have heard a cannon shot. After blessing him, I softly clapped my hands behind his back. He turned around at once and smiled. How good Our Lady is!”

The Blessed Virgin also saw to it that Don Bosco was relieved of the worry which then most heavily weighed upon him. Comforting news [about *St. Peter's Centenary*] came from Father Joseph Oreglia, S.J., in a letter of May 29, 1867, informing him of the result of a visit he had made to the secretary of the Congregation of the Index on Don Bosco's behalf.

“He received me very kindly,” he wrote, “and told me it would be enough to state that, on the basis of learned counsel, he (Don Bosco) had thought it necessary to issue another edition with corrections of a few inaccurate statements. He twice assured me that this was the only requirement.”

Two days later, Father Oreglia sent Don Bosco another note with an enclosure from the secretary of the Congregation of the Index which specified that Don Bosco's statement concerning the dogmatic or historical value of St. Peter's coming to Rome was to be deleted and that minor corrections were to be made in regard to a few other incidents.<sup>3</sup>

On May 30, Don Bosco wrote as follows to Chevalier Oreglia:

Turin, May 30, 1867

My dear Chevalier:

On Saturday, June 1, Bishop Ghilardi of Mondovì will leave for Rome and take up lodging at Santa Maria sopra Minerva.

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting at this point details about the wedding of Prince Amadeus. [Editor]

Please speak with your brother and let me know through him if what I sent concerning *St. Peter's Centenary* is acceptable. . . . Note that what I sent him was read and discussed with Monsignor Gastaldi, who will be consecrated a bishop next Sunday. . . .

The Community Mass this morning was said by the bishop of Aosta. Tonight the bishop of Mondovì will close our May devotions.

More news on Saturday. All wish to be remembered to you and to hear from you.

God bless you!

Yours affectionately in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco<sup>4</sup>

We now draw from our chronicle:

During May of this year, Don Bosco remained at home most of the time and spoke to us after night prayers. From the many things he told us I shall single out a few points he stressed during our spiritual retreat.

"If any of you has troubles of conscience," he advised us, "let him clear them up without delay." He then gave us a few practical examples each night to help us on the frequency of our confessions and Communions. He urged us to pick a fixed day for confession, as far as possible never to change one's confessor, and to confide fully in him. He also said that confession should be brief and sincere, and that we should blame no one but ourselves.

"Above all," he exclaimed, "always strive to carry out the confessor's recommendations. Then you will have a well-founded hope that God has forgiven you. Go to confession every week or at least every other week, and receive even daily, if your confessor allows you. Be diligent in all your practices of piety. If Dominic Savio were to come back to the Oratory and see how few are now receiving daily, he would certainly ask, 'Is this the Oratory I knew, where the Lord placed me to save my soul? How is it that in my time, when we were but a hundred and fifty boys, almost all went to Communion every day during Mary's month and all behaved so well in church? What has happened?'"

"How sad a sight we see now! You seem so ill-at-ease in church! Barely sixty or eighty out of eight hundred receive the Eucharist daily and only

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting at this point an excerpt from Father Lemoyne's chronicle about Bishop Ghilardi's closing of the May devotions. We are also omitting some lines about his friendship with Don Bosco and a business letter from Don Bosco to Chevalier Oreglia. [Editor]

during this month. Let's do something about it. Let us earnestly strive not to deserve such a reproach. Make a daily visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady that She may help us all to become saints."

As a follow-up to this "Good Night," our chronicle has this entry:

When hearing the confessions of spiritual-minded boys whose only failings are minor shortcomings, Don Bosco usually tells them, "When these are the only things on your conscience, kiss your medal or crucifix and resolve to be more careful; then make an act of contrition and tranquilly go to Communion."

Occasionally he gives them this penance, "Say the *Veni, Creator* that the Holy Spirit may show you the way of salvation and help you to stay on it till death."

He also suggests that they ask God's pardon for time lost in the past and promise to make good use of it from then on.

Our chronicle records also very concise summaries of "Good Nights" of his in May and June:

#### May 28

A few did not honor Mary properly this month, a few others did well, and most of you did very well. Let us all do our very best now to close it superbly because Our Lady wants to do us many favors. More important, one of you wants to go to heaven, perhaps before the middle of June! Let us say an Our Father for him every morning and night. I am not saying that the one who is going to die will go straight to heaven, but we will help him get there more quickly by our prayers and through the merits he will gain during his illness. Pray also for me for a particular need of mine which will redound to your benefit.

#### June 3

Two great events are taking place at this time: the World's Fair in Paris and St. Peter's Centenary in Rome. The former exhibits man's ingenuity; the latter, an everlasting, spotless religion. Great though human achieve-

ments may be, they pale when compared to spiritual things. A breath can wipe them out.

Passing to other matters, I must again tell you that cholera has broken out in the Venetian provinces and has spread to Bergamo and Milan. It has now been reported in a small town of the Canavese region. It is more fatal than previous epidemics. Very few have survived.

Do you want to be spared? Let us rid ourselves of sin and do our utmost never to sin again. The cholera will then keep away from us. Sin brings cholera and death.

June 4

I remember that in Dominic Savio's time, on Saturdays I used to hear confessions till eleven at night and on Sundays until nine in the morning. Now a mere fraction come to confession, mostly the same boys. Some students and artisans have not even yet made their Easter duty. It's time that they settle their accounts with God. There are also some who try to fool me by saying that they have gone to confession to this or that priest on this or that day, but a day or two later, forgetting their previous reply, they tell me they went to some other priest on some other day.

This is very bad! These fellows are fooling themselves! They are like sick people who keep changing doctors every day. How can they ever be cured? A doctor must know a sickness thoroughly to avoid a faulty diagnosis, lest he hurt his patient. Therefore, choose a confessor and be candid with him. This will bring you joy at the point of death.

Meanwhile, Monsignor Gastaldi had been consecrated a bishop in Turin's St. Lawrence Church by Archbishop [Alexander] Riccardi, and his official installation at Saluzzo had been scheduled for Pentecost Sunday, June 9. The day before, he came to the Oratory to say the Community Mass.<sup>5</sup> Afterward, at the close of the reception in the bishop's honor, Don Bosco arose and said, "Your Excellency, two favors I ask of you: that you always befriend our house and that you visit us whenever you come to Turin."

"I heartily grant the first," the bishop replied, "because you all know that I have always loved this house. I cannot grant the second because I don't know if circumstances will permit it. I promise, though, to visit you every time I can."

<sup>5</sup> These two sentences are a condensation. [Editor]

After a few more affectionate words, at Don Bosco's request he blessed the whole community with these words: "May the blessing of Almighty God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—descend upon you, and especially upon Don Bosco, and remain forever!"

## CHAPTER 69

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

ON Pentecost Sunday [1867] Don Bosco addressed a letter to all Salesians concerning the goal a candidate should have in mind when seeking admission to the Salesian Society. He also stated that the Society's definitive approval might not be long in coming. However, pertinent documents on hand give no such assurance. Since Don Bosco's personally written letter is dated "May 24, Feast of Mary, Help of Christians," we feel that it may have been this feast which inspired him to write and perhaps gave him a more vivid vision of the future. Be that as it may, he had several copies of his letter made, and then he himself changed the date and addressed each respectively: *To Father Bonetti and to My Dear Sons of St. Francis de Sales at Mirabello; To Father Lemoine and to My Dear Sons of St. Francis de Sales at Lanzo*. He also signed them himself and added the postscript: "Let the director read and explain as he judges necessary."

Here is the copy addressed to the Salesians at the Oratory:

*To Father Rua and to My Beloved Sons  
of St. Francis de Sales in Turin*

Turin, June 9, 1867

Before long our Society may be definitively approved. I therefore feel the need frequently to communicate with you, my dear sons. Being unable at times to do so personally, I will try to reach you by letter.

First I shall treat of the general purpose of our Society, leaving the explanation of our rules to some other occasion.

The primary aim of our Society is the sanctification of its members. On entering it, therefore, everyone must discard any other intention and concern. It would be wrong to enter in order to enjoy a tranquil life, com-

plete one's education, or free oneself of parental or other authority. This would hardly be a response to Christ's call. Such a person would be seeking temporal advantages, not his spiritual good. Our Savior praised the Apostles and promised them an eternal kingdom not because they had abandoned the world, but because they had abandoned it in order to follow Him through thick and thin; this they indeed did, wearing themselves out with work, penance, and suffering, and finally undergoing martyrdom.

It would also be wrong for anyone to enter or remain in this Society with the notion that he is necessary. From the Superior General down to the last member, let everyone keep well in mind that nobody is necessary to the Society. God alone is its head, its absolute, necessary master. Its members must therefore turn to Him as to their head, true master and rewarder. Those who join this Society should work, obey, and abandon all worldly possessions exclusively for God's sake so that, at the end of their lives, they can tell their Savior, "Behold, we have left all and followed You. What then shall we have?" [Matt. 19, 27]

By saying that one should enter the Society only to serve God more perfectly and do good to himself, we mean his true good, his spiritual eternal good. Anyone who seeks an easy, comfortable life in our Society is not rightly motivated. Our basic motive must stem from Our Lord's words that whoever wishes to be His disciple must sell his possessions, give to the poor, and then follow Him. But where can we follow Him, since He had nowhere to lay His weary head? He explains that we must follow Him in prayer, in penance, especially in self-denial, in accepting our daily crosses. "Let him deny his very self, take up his cross each day, and follow Me." [Luke 9, 23] Till when? Till death and, if necessary, even till death on the cross.

This is what one does in our Society when he wears himself out in the sacred ministry, in teaching or in other priestly work till death, till even a violent death through imprisonment, exile, sword, fire, or water. Then, after having suffered and died with Jesus Christ on earth, he will join Him in the happiness of heaven.

This is how I understand Saint Paul's words to all Christians: "Whoever wishes to rejoice with Christ must also suffer with Christ."

After entering the Society with these good dispositions, a member must be undemanding and willing to accept any task—even the most menial—readily and cheerfully because what matters before God is not the task itself but the intention with which it is done. All jobs are equally noble because they are all equally meritorious in God's sight.

My dear sons, trust your superiors. They shall have to give God a strict account of your actions. Hence they study your abilities and inclinations

and use them in a manner compatible with your strength, but always in accordance with what seems best for God's greater glory and the good of souls.

If applicants enter our Society with these intentions, our houses will certainly be an earthly paradise. Peace and concord will reign, charity will guide superiors, and obedience and respect will anticipate their decisions, their undertakings, and even their wishes. Thus we shall have a family of brothers around a father, all united to promote God's glory on earth so as to be with Him some day and praise Him in the immense glory of the blessed in heaven.

May God abundantly bless you and your efforts. May He sanctify your activities and help you persevere in doing good.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

On that same evening Don Bosco spoke as follows to the Oratory boys:

Exams will soon be here for both clerics and boys. Resolve to do your best, but always bear in mind that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Do you wish to possess true wisdom? Ban sin and its affection from your heart and you will possess wisdom enough to save your soul.

In this short time before exams, make frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary Most Holy. Do you want to do well in your exams? Pray to Dominic Savio and he will certainly help you, if you do your best. There have been boys in this house who felt they were unprepared. They prayed to Dominic Savio and did far better than they expected. In short, with his protection you will have no trouble. Imitate Dominic Savio in obedience and charity, and don't worry.

I suggest that you do not get up ahead of time to study because you may disturb others. Study in bed. On Sundays and Thursdays<sup>1</sup> you may also study in your free time but not during recreation periods. I say this because I value your good health above other things.

Our chronicle records other short talks of Don Bosco:

<sup>1</sup> A weekly school holiday. [Editor]

June 10

This evening Don Bosco told us of a trip he made from Moncalieri to Turin with two fellow passengers. One claimed to be a former Oratory pupil; the other [did not identify himself but] criticized Don Bosco's work, saying that it was a waste to spend so much money on building a church. Unrecognized, Don Bosco joined the conversation. Only at the end did the two discover his identity.

From this incident Don Bosco drew the moral not to speak evil of others: either speak well or remain silent.

"Learn from Dominic Savio, Michael Magone, and Francis Besucco never to find fault with people," he concluded. "If your neighbor has faults, be understanding. Let us bear one another's faults because nobody is perfect."

June 11

Tonight Don Bosco said: "Today began the novena in honor of Our Lady of Consolation. I am sorry I did not think of it before, but practice this nosegay during the whole novena: be very diligent in fulfilling your scholastic and spiritual duties. In other words, use your time well. Remember too that heaven and earth will perish before Mary will abandon those who invoke Her.

"Tomorrow [Wednesday] is a fast day for those who are bound. Let the rest practice some mortification. This Thursday Bishop Galletti, who is widely esteemed as a saint, will say the Community Mass. See that he does not form a bad opinion of us. He will give us a short talk after Mass."

June 12

Lingering in the dining room after supper, Don Bosco told some boys crowding around him: "A mother came yesterday with a donation of a hundred lire in thanksgiving for her son's cure from consumption. A few days ago she had brought him to me for a blessing. I blessed him and told him to make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians. No sooner had they reached home (so the mother told me) than the boy asked for something to eat. For the past five or six months he had had a very bad cough and could not even swallow broth, but from that day on his cough stopped and he was able to swallow. He is now in perfect health."

Don Bosco also spoke at the "Good Night" in these terms: "I will leave you a thought: don't look at the things of this world through a magnifying glass. It can make a grain of sand look like a mountain. All the things of

this world, even when put together, are a mere nothing. After enjoying all the pleasures the world could offer, Solomon was forced to conclude that all is vanity and affliction of spirit. Besides, one day we shall have to leave this world's goods. If we give them up now, the Lord will reward us; if not, we shall have to leave them at death and receive nothing in return.

"Tomorrow Bishop Galletti, the saintly new bishop of Alba, will be with us. Be on your best behavior and pay close attention to his words after Mass."

On Thursday, June 13, Bishop Eugene Galletti said the Community Mass, which was also attended by many admirers of his. Before the final blessing he spoke to the congregation and urged them to a greater love of God and the imitation of Dominic Savio. Afterward the boys gave him a little reception. The bishop thanked them, assured them of a remembrance in his Masses, and gave them his blessing.<sup>2</sup>

Closing the joyful day with the "Good Night," Don Bosco said, "Tomorrow offer Our Lady a fine gift! Give Her a soul from purgatory. Receive Holy Communion, gain a plenary indulgence, and ask Our Lady to free a soul of Her choice from purgatory." He also announced that on the following Sunday he would narrate a dream. On the evening of June 14 he spoke as follows.

Tomorrow is the last day of the Paschal season. If any of you has not yet made his Easter duty or has made it badly, let him settle the affairs of his soul. To those who must soon decide about their vocation I earnestly recommend that they think about it, consult their confessor, pray, and do good works. "Strive by good works to make your calling and election sure." [2 Pet. 1, 10] If you want to be sure not to make a mistake, choose a steady confessor, open your heart to him, go to confession and Communion often, be modest, obedient, and do what you will wish you had done at the point of death. I say this to those who have already chosen their vocation and to those who must still decide. If you do what I say, the Lord will certainly inspire you to know what he wants of you.

In those days Don Bosco must have felt consoled by Bishop Ghilardi's support in the matter of *St. Peter's Centenary*, as reported

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

by Father Oreglia, S.J., in a letter of his to Don Bosco, dated June 10, 1867.<sup>3</sup>

Particularly gratifying was the news from Bishop Ghilardi himself who, in a letter to Father Celestine Durando, dated June 16, wrote: "I am glad that our beloved Don Bosco was pleased with news from here. The secretary of the Congregation of the Index called on me last night and we had a long talk about Don Bosco. Today he will read Don Bosco's explanations and then we will have another conference. The Foreword to the new edition should be sent to me in Rome, but better written. Best wishes to Don Bosco. . . ."

A few days later, in another letter to Father Durando concerning some printing, he added, "Tell our dearest Don Bosco that I have delivered his note to the Congregation of the Index, and that I will soon write to him, etc. . . ."

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. We are omitting at this point a short letter of Don Bosco and a longer one of Father Angelo Savio to Chevalier Oreglia in Rome. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 70

### *A Dream: Countless Lambs*

ON Trinity Sunday, June 16 [1867]—the feast on which twenty-six years before Don Bosco had celebrated his first Mass<sup>1</sup>—the Oratory boys eagerly awaited the narration of the dream he had promised them on the 13th. He took to heart the good of his spiritual flock and always abided by the exhortations of Holy Scripture: “Take good care of your flocks, give careful attention to your herds.” [Prov. 27, 23] He constantly prayed for an intimate knowledge of his little lambs, for the grace of carefully watching over them and providing for their well-being after his death, and for their daily spiritual and bodily nourishment. On that Sunday, therefore, after night prayers, he thus addressed the Oratory community:

The night of the 29th or 30th of May, as I was lying in bed unable to fall asleep, I began thinking of my dear boys. *I wish I could dream up something good for them*, I said to myself. After mulling over this for a short while, I made up my mind to have a dream. Lo and behold, I fell asleep and found myself in an immense plain packed tight with huge sheep. Divided into flocks, they were grazing on meadows which stretched as far as the eye could see. Wanting to get closer to them and marveling that anyone could own so many flocks, I looked for the shepherd. I soon spotted him leaning on a staff and went up to him.

“Whose flock is this?” I asked him.

He did not answer. I repeated my question.

“Is that any of your business?” he replied.

“That’s no answer!” I countered.

“All right! They belong to their owner!”

“Thanks, but who is he?”

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. I, pp. 385f. [Editor]

“Don’t be so impatient. We’ll come to that.”

I then followed him for a close look at the flocks and the land. In places the meadows were luscious and dotted with shade trees. Here the sheep were healthy and gorgeous. In other places the plain was barren and forbidding, bristling with thorns and yellow thistles, and with not a blade of grass in sight. Here a large flock was grazing, but it looked miserable. I kept asking questions about the sheep, but my guide ignored them and simply told me, “You need not concern yourself with the sheep. I’ll show you the flock you must shepherd.”

“Who are you?”

“I am the owner. Follow me.”

He took me to another area where I saw thousands of little lambs so weak that they could hardly move. The land was parched and grassless. Short, withered tufts and brush were the only vegetation because the countless lambs had devoured everything else. It was obvious that the sore-plagued little things had suffered and were still suffering a great deal. Strangely, all sported thick, long horns like those of old rams, tipped with an appendage in the shape of an *S*.

Puzzled and perplexed at this sight, I could not believe that such little lambs could have so quickly consumed their feed and could already sport such thick, long horns.

“How is it,” I asked the shepherd, “that these little lambs have such horns?”

“Take a close look,” he replied.

I did and was surprised to see the figure 3 all over their bodies: back, neck, head, snout, ears, legs, hoofs.

“What’s this?” I exclaimed. “I don’t understand.”

“I’ll tell you! This great plain is the world. The lush meadows symbolize the Word of God and His grace. The parched and barren areas are the places where people don’t listen to the Word of God and only aim at pleasing the world. The sheep are the adults; the lambs are the youngsters. For these God has sent Don Bosco. This area of the plain is the Oratory; the lambs are your boys. The parched soil represents the state of sin; horns symbolize dishonor; the letter *S* stands for scandal. Scandal-giving is the cause of these boys’ perdition. Those with broken horns once gave scandal but do not do so now. The figure 3 stands for their triple punishment—spiritual, moral and material famine: spiritual famine by the lack of spiritual aid they will seek in vain; moral famine by being deprived of God’s Word; material famine by the lack of food. Having devoured all their pasture, the lambs have nothing left but dishonor and the three famines. This scene also shows the present pitiful state of so many boys in

the world; at the Oratory, at least, even the unworthy have something to eat."

While I listened and in bewilderment observed everything that was pointed out to me, a new wonder took place. All the lambs reared up on their hind legs, grew tall, and turned into boys. I got closer to see if I knew any of them. All were Oratory boys. Very many I had never before seen, but all claimed to be Oratory pupils. Among those I did not know were also a few who are now here. They never let themselves be seen by Don Bosco, never ask his advice, always dodge him. They are the boys Don Bosco does not know. But the greatest majority by far comprised boys who will come to the Oratory in the future.

As I sadly eyed that multitude, my guide took my hand and said, "Come, I'll show you something else." He led me to a far corner of the valley where hillocks and a thick hedge of dense foliage enclosed a vast, luxuriant meadow covered by patches of aromatic herbs of all kinds and dotted with wild flowers and shady groves through which limpid streamlets made their way.

Here I found a multitude of very happy youngsters. Using the meadow's flowers, they had fashioned or were still making themselves very beautiful robes.

"At least you have these boys to console you," my guide remarked.

"Who are they?"

"Boys in the state of grace."

I can truthfully say that never had I seen anything or anyone so beautiful beyond compare! Never could I have imagined such splendor. I will not try to describe what I saw. It defies description. But a more wonderful sight was in store for me. As I was enjoying the vision of those happy boys and noting that many were yet unknown to me, my guide said, "Let's go. I want to show you something that will bring you greater pleasure and comfort."

He took me to another meadow carpeted with flowers prettier and sweeter-scented than those I had just seen. It looked like a royal garden. There were but few lads here, yet they were so extraordinarily handsome and brilliant as to outshine and eclipse those I had shortly before admired. Some of those boys are here now; others are still to come.

"These boys have preserved untainted the lily of purity," my guide explained. "They still wear the spotless robe of innocence."

I stood entranced. Nearly all wore floral wreaths of indescribable beauty. Each flower was a cluster of thousands of tiny, brightly-hued disk florets of unbelievable charm, each with more than a thousand colors. The boys wore an ankle-length garment of dazzling white, embroidered with

flowers like those of the crowns. Sparkling light radiated from these flowers to swathe the boys' bodies and reflect its comeliness upon them. In turn, the flowers reflected each other's beauty, those in the crowns mirroring those of the garments, and each throwing back the rays emanating from the others. As the rays of one color hit others of a different color, new rays and new colors were generated in an endless array of splendor. Never could I imagine such a fascinating, bewildering spectacle in heaven itself!

Yet that is not all. The sparkling flowers of the boys' crowns and dazzling garments were mirrored in the flowers and garments of their companions. Let me add that the brilliant countenance of each boy blended with those of his companions and, in reflection, increased its own intensity a hundredfold, so that those beautiful faces of innocence were clothed in blinding light, each boy mirroring the loveliness of his companions in unspeakable splendor. We call this the "external" glory of the saints. There is no way to describe even faintly each boy's beauty in that ocean of light! I recognized some boys who are now here at the Oratory. Could they see but one-tenth of their present beauty, I am sure that they would endure fire and torture or the cruelest martyrdom rather than lose it.

Once I could tear myself away from this heavenly vision, I asked my guide, "Are these the only ones who never lost God's grace?"

"Well," he replied, "don't you think that their number is quite large? Furthermore, lads who have lost their baptismal innocence can still follow their companions along the way of penance. Look at that meadow; it still boasts of many flowers. They too can be woven into most beautiful crowns and garments, and the boys can join their companions in the glory of heaven."

"What other suggestion can you give my boys?" I asked.

"Tell them again that, if they knew how highly and dearly God values baptismal innocence, they would make every sacrifice to preserve it. Tell them to be brave and to practice this fair virtue, which overrides all others in beauty and splendor. The chaste are lilies growing in God's sight.

I walked toward the boys to mingle among them, but I stumbled against something and awoke to find myself in bed.

My dear sons, are you all innocent? Perhaps a few of you are. To them I say: for heaven's sake, never lose such a priceless gem! It is a treasure worth God Himself. If you could only have seen how beautiful those boys were with their crowns! I would have given anything in the world to prolong the enjoyment of that spectacle. If I were a painter, I would consider it a rare privilege to be able to paint what I saw.

Could you but know how beautiful innocence is in a lad, you would un-

dergo the most painful ordeal and death itself in order to safeguard that treasure. Though I was profoundly comforted by the number of those who had returned to the state of grace, I still wished that it might have been greater. I was also very much surprised to see that some boys who here appear to be good wore long, thick horns.

Don Bosco ended his narrative with a warm exhortation to those who had lost their innocence to strive earnestly to regain it by penance. Two days later, on June 18, after night prayers, Don Bosco gave more explanations of his dream:

There should be no further need of explaining, but I will repeat some things I have said. The great plain is the world, particularly the places and states of life from which you were called to come here. The area where the lambs grazed symbolizes the Oratory, and they are its past, present, and future pupils. The arid, the fertile, and the flowery meadows represent the state of sin, of grace, and of innocence. Horns stand for scandal; broken horns symbolize an end to scandal-giving. The figure 3 on every lamb stands for the three punishments that God will inflict upon those boys: famine of spiritual aid, famine of religious instruction and of God's Word, and famine of material food. The boys radiating light are those in the state of grace, particularly those still retaining their baptismal innocence. What glory awaits them!

Let us then, dear boys, bravely practice virtue. Those lads in the state of sin must do their utmost to start a new life and, with God's help, persevere till death. If we cannot all join the innocent ones around the Immaculate Lamb, let us at least follow along after them.

One boy asked me if he was among the innocent ones. I told him no, but that his horns were broken off. He also asked if he had any sores, and I said yes.

"What do you mean?" he insisted.

"Don't worry," I replied. "They are dried up and will disappear. They are no longer a dishonor. They are like the scars of a soldier who, regardless of his many wounds, was still able to overcome his enemy. They are marks of glory. But, yet, it is more glorious to come away from the combat unscathed. To achieve this is truly admirable!"

In the course of his explanation, Don Bosco also said that before long there would be an epidemic, a famine, and a lack of means to do good to ourselves. He predicted that within three months some-

thing would happen. This dream was as impressive and effective as others in the past.

Meanwhile, in Rome, Bishop Ghilardi had given Don Bosco's letter to Archbishop Berardi. It gave news of the Oratory and again pointed out Don Bosco's great need of the Holy See's approval of the Salesian Society or at least of the privilege of granting dimissorial letters. Don Bosco also congratulated Archbishop Berardi concerning rumors that he would be made a cardinal soon . . . .<sup>2</sup> The solicitude of the bishop of Mondovì and Archbishop Berardi augured well for Don Bosco, who had also written to other prelates soliciting recommendations for the approval of the Salesian Society.<sup>3</sup>

On June 20, the eve of the feast of St. Aloysius, Don Bosco spoke again to the whole community after night prayers:

Tomorrow, the feast of St. Aloysius, let everyone endeavor to honor our dear saint. Visit the Blessed Sacrament, receive Communion, and offer some special prayer or the like. Promise to imitate his modesty. The innocent have a model in St. Aloysius; sinners too can imitate his penance and thus regain their virtue. This is the real reason why the Church has named St. Aloysius the patron of youth. Let us ask him to help us detach ourselves totally from earthly things. What made St. Aloysius so joyfully eager to die as he blessed God and asked that the bystanders sing the *Te Deum* in thanksgiving? It was his detachment of heart from all earthly things. I also ask you to pray to this angelic youth for my intentions.

That day also saw the fulfillment of Don Bosco's prediction of May 28.<sup>4</sup> John Baptist Garando, hard-working and devout, died on June 20 at the age of seventy-one.<sup>5</sup> The feasts of St. Aloysius and St. John the Baptist—Don Bosco's name day—were at hand. The Oratory observed them with external solemnities: the former with an imposing procession, the latter with an entertainment in the playground which had been converted into a sort of amphitheater.

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting the monsignor's reply informing Don Bosco that the situation was unchanged and in turn congratulating him on the progress of the new church. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting the recommendation of the bishop of Aosta and some other unimportant details. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See p. 351. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

We will now briefly describe the latter because the former was postponed to July 7. On the occasion of Don Bosco's name day, many people kept asking for a photograph of him. Only a few had so far been taken in Turin and prints were hard to come by because of Don Bosco's reluctance to give them out. Similarly, prints of the photograph taken in Rome by Count Vimercati<sup>6</sup> had not been sent to Turin, and the Oratory possessed only one copy. . . . The celebration of Don Bosco's name day was a splendid success. The evening saw the customary filial demonstration during which, as in past years, Father Francesia read his own poetical composition which, set to music by Father Cagliari, was then sung by the choir to the accompaniment of the brass band. Other compositions were then recited in Greek, Latin, Italian, and French.<sup>7</sup> The entertainment closed with another musical selection and Don Bosco's thanks to all.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See p. 309. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> We are omitting a digression about one of the guests who a year before had been cured by Don Bosco. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 71

### *A Dream: Purification after Life*

ON June 25, 1867 Don Bosco spoke to the forty-four clerics who were then residing at the Oratory:<sup>1</sup>

You must come to a decision about whether or not you will join our Society. Those who have no such intention should tell me; they are free to leave. The others need not even ask to join because this is already their home. The reason I don't approve of vacations away from our houses is that at home material interests and even less seemly matters are always the main concern, to your unavoidable spiritual detriment. I experienced this myself during my own summers in Castelnovo. Hence I always tried to bring along some Oratory boys with whom to converse, pray, visit the Blessed Sacrament, do some spiritual reading, and the like. I suffered spiritually and believe that others will also who are flesh and bone like me. Besides, if anyone needs a change of environment, he can go to our houses in Lanzo, Mirabello, and Trofarello.

"But," you may say, "it would be nice to spend a few days at home with relatives and friends."

Of course it would, but on this score Our Redeemer has taught us a good lesson. When His Holy Mother, His cousins (whom Holy Scripture calls brethren), and other relatives, being unable to get to Him because of the crowd, sent Him word that they wanted to speak with Him, He replied: "Who are My mother and My brothers?" This may have surprised some bystanders, but Our Lord went on: "Whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to Me." [Mark 3, 35] So I say: Those who wish to belong to this Society have father and brothers right here. I'll make an exception, though. If parents should be gravely ill, the superior will see to it that their son may go to their assistance. This is a duty of charity.

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

After night prayers that same evening, Don Bosco spoke also to the whole community as follows:

When I went to bed last night I could not fall asleep directly, and so I began thinking about the soul: its nature, mode of existence, structure, activities after its separation from the body, and mobility. I wondered too how we might be able to recognize others after death, since we would all be pure spirits. The more I thought about it, the less I knew.

Finally I fell asleep and dreamed that I was on my way to . . . (*and he named the city*). After passing through several unknown towns, I suddenly heard someone calling me. He was standing on the shoulder of the road. "Come with me," he said, "and your wish will be fulfilled." I obeyed. We moved through space as swiftly as thought, never touching the ground until we got to some place totally unknown to me. High above us stood a magnificent palace. I can't really say whether it stood on a mountain or on a cloud, but it certainly was inaccessible. No roads led to it and it was far beyond reach.

"Go up to that palace," my guide said.

"How?" I replied. "I have no wings!"

"Go up!" he repeated imperiously. Seeing that I did not stir, he added, "Do as I do. Lift your arms as high as you can." He showed me how, and at once I felt myself lifted into the air like a thin cloud. In no time we reached the palace gates.

"Who lives here?" I asked.

"Go in and you'll know. At the end of the hall someone will give you information."

He disappeared. Left to myself, I went in, walked along a portico, went up a stairway, and entered a truly regal apartment. I passed through spacious halls, richly decorated rooms, and endless corridors at such unearthly speed that I could not even count them. Each glittered with priceless treasures. But what astonished me most was that, although I was going as swiftly as the wind, I never even moved my feet. I was gliding along over what seemed to be a crystal floor without ever touching it. Finally I came to a door at the end of a corridor that opened into another hall even more magnificent than all the others. At the far end, a bishop sat majestically in an imposing armchair, apparently awaiting somebody. I approached respectfully and was extremely surprised to recognize him as a dear friend of mine—Bishop . . . of . . .<sup>2</sup> (*Don Bosco mentioned his name*)

<sup>2</sup> The bishop's name, withheld when these memoirs were first published in Italian in 1912, is clearly indicated in pertinent documents in the order's archives. He was Bishop Clement Manzini of Cuneo who had died in 1865. See p. 49. [Editor]

who died two years ago. He did not seem to be in pain. He looked healthy and friendly and was indescribably handsome.

“Your Excellency!” I exclaimed with great joy. “Is it really you?”

“Can’t you see?” the bishop replied.

“But how? Are you still living? I thought you were dead.”

“I *am* dead.”

“How can it be? You look wonderful! If you are still alive, please say so or we’ll have a problem. At [Cuneo] another bishop <sup>3</sup> has already taken your place. How are we going to settle this?”

“Don’t worry! I *am* dead.”

“That’s good! It would hardly do to have two bishops on the same chair.”

“I understand. And how about you, Don Bosco? Are you dead or alive?”

“I am alive. Can’t you see I am here in body and soul?”

“Bodies aren’t allowed here.”

“But I *am* here in my body.

“You *think* you are. . . .”

At this point I fired off a lot of questions which went unanswered. “How can it be that I, still living, am here with you who are dead?” I kept asking. Fearing that the bishop might vanish, I begged him, “Please, Your Excellency, do not leave me. There are many things I want to ask you.”

“Relax,” he said. “I won’t run away. What do you want to know?”

“Are you saved?”

“Look at me! See how vigorous, ruddy, and radiant I am.” Indeed his whole appearance gave a well-founded hope that he was saved. Nonetheless, I insisted: “Please give me a straight answer. Are you saved or not?”

“Yes, I am in a place of salvation.”

“Are you in heaven or in purgatory?”

“I am in a place of salvation, but I have not yet seen God. I still need your prayers.”

“How long must you yet stay in purgatory?”

“This will tell you,” he said, handing me a paper. I examined it attentively but found nothing on it.

“There is no writing at all on it,” I replied.

“Look carefully,” he insisted.

“I am looking,” I countered, “but I still can’t see any writing.”

“Look again.”

“I only see multicolored floral designs but no writing whatever.”

<sup>3</sup> Canon Andrew Formica was appointed bishop of Cuneo in 1867. See p. 279. [Editor]

“There are numerals.”

“I don’t see any!”

The bishop peered at the paper I was holding. “No wonder you don’t see any. Turn the paper upside down.” I complied and examined the paper even more closely from all angles, but to no avail. The only thing I could make out were floral twists and whorls resembling the figure 2.

“Do you know why you must turn the paper upside down in order to read it? It is because God’s judgments are different from the world’s. What men hold as wisdom is foolishness in God’s sight.”

Not daring to press for a clearer explanation, I just said, “Please, Bishop, do not leave me yet. I have more questions.”

“Go on. I’m listening.”

“Will I be saved?”

“You must hope.”

“Please don’t keep me in suspense. Tell me straight.”

“I don’t know.”

“At least tell me if I am in the state of grace.”

“I don’t know.”

“Will my boys be saved?”

“I don’t know.”

“Tell me, please, I beg you.”

“You have studied theology and you can answer that question yourself.”

“I can’t believe it. Here you are in a place of salvation and you don’t know these things?”

“It’s like this: God reveals these things to whomsoever He wishes. If He wants this knowledge to be imparted to anyone, He gives the necessary command or permission. Otherwise, no one can reveal these things to the living.”

Endless questions kept popping up in my mind and I quickly voiced them, fearing that the bishop might disappear.

“Will you now give me a message for my boys?”

“You know as well as I what they must do. The Church, the Gospel, and the rest of the Scriptures are clear enough. Tell your boys to save their souls because that’s all that matters. The rest counts for nothing.”

“We know we must save our souls. But how shall we go about it? Tell me something special that may remind us of you. I shall repeat it to my boys in your name.”

“Tell them to be good and obedient.”

“They know that.”

“Tell them to be modest and to pray.”

“Please be more specific!”

“Tell them to go to confession often and to make worthy Communions.”

“Something more specific yet.”

“Well, then, tell them this. Tell them that there is fog before their eyes. If they are aware of it, it’s a good sign. Let them dispel it.”

“What does this fog symbolize?”

“The things of the world which prevent them from seeing the things of heaven as they really are.”

“And what must they do to dispel this fog?”

“They must see the world as it really is. ‘The whole world is under the evil one.’ [1 John 5, 19] Only then will they save their souls. They should not let themselves be deceived by appearances. Believing that worldly pleasures, amusements, and friendships will make them happy, the young long for them, while they should rather keep in mind that all is vanity and affliction of spirit. Let them form the habit to judge matters of the world not by their appearances, but as they really are.”

“And what mainly causes this fog?”

“Immodesty and impurity, a sin which, like a murky cloud, prevents youngsters from seeing the abyss toward which they are heading. Tell them to guard jealously the virtue of purity. It is the virtue that shines brightest in heaven. ‘The pure shall flourish like the lily.’” [Is. 35, 1]

“How is it to be safeguarded? Tell me and I’ll repeat it to my dear boys in your name.”

“Four things: flight from worldly things, obedience, avoiding idleness, and prayer.”

“What else?”

“Prayer, avoiding idleness, obedience, and flight from worldly things.”

“Anything else?”

“Obedience, flight from worldly things, prayer, and avoiding idleness. Insist on these things. They are enough.”

I wanted to ask other questions, but I couldn’t think of any at the moment. Besides, being in such a hurry to tell you these things, I dashed out and with the speed of wind found myself at the Oratory gate. There I suddenly felt a sense of regret, thinking: *Why did I not stay longer with the bishop? I could have learned many more things. I really blundered in letting such a good chance slip by.* I immediately dashed back with my former speed but with a nagging fear of no longer finding the bishop. Luckily he was still there—but what a change! He was lying in bed, as white as a ghost, with tears welling in his eyes. He was dying. A slight heaving of his chest was the only sign of life.

I stooped over him in utter shock. “Your Excellency, what happened?”

“Leave me alone,” he moaned.

“I have many more things to ask you.”

“Leave me alone! I am in terrible pain.”

“Can I help you?”

“Pray for me and let me go.”

“Go where?”

“Where God is leading me.”

“But where? Please tell me.”

“I am in too much pain! Leave me alone!”

“At least tell me what I can do for you,” I repeated.

“Pray!”

“Have you any messages? Anything you want me to tell your successor?”

“Tell him this and this. . . .” However, since the things he told me are not for you, my dear boys, I will leave them out. The bishop then gave me other confidential messages. (*Don Bosco did not reveal them. They seem to have been admonitions or measures to be taken for the good of that diocese.*)

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Tell your boys that they have always been very dear to me. I prayed for them during my life and still do. Let them now pray for me.”

“I will surely tell them,” I replied, “and we will begin at once to offer suffrages for you. Please remember us as soon as you reach heaven.”

The bishop meanwhile seemed to be suffering even more. It was heart-rending to see him in such painful agony.

“Leave me,” he repeated. “Let me go where God calls me.”

“Bishop! Bishop!” I kept repeating, filled with inexpressible pity.

“Let me be, let me be!” He seemed to be breathing his last while an invisible force pulled him out of sight into an inner part of the palace.

Frightened and deeply moved, I turned to get back to the Oratory, but in so doing I bumped my knee into something and woke up in bed.

As you see, my dears boys, this is a dream like many others. What concerns you needs no explanation. It has taught me a lot about the soul and purgatory. Things I had never before been able to grasp became so clear that I shall never forget them.

Perhaps in this two-part dream Don Bosco meant to depict the state of grace of the souls in purgatory and their expiatory sufferings. He did not comment on the state of that good bishop.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting a brief digression by the author. [Editor]

Some time later, relying on his trust in us, we asked him if he had delivered the bishop's messages. "Yes," he replied. "I did!"

We will further remark that the dream, as recorded above, omits a detail that we remember but perhaps seemed unclear or unimportant at that time. At a certain point in the dream Don Bosco asked how much longer he would live. In reply the bishop handed him a paper full of scribbles and whorls interwoven into the figure 8, but he offered no explanations. Did these figures point to 1888 [the year of Don Bosco's death]?

Meanwhile, on June 23, Father Cagliero and Father Savio had arrived in Rome, joyfully welcomed by Chevalier Oreglia who had secured lodgings for them. Father Cagliero carried two letters for the Holy Father. One, whose contents were totally unknown to him, was to be delivered immediately and in strict secrecy into the Pope's own hands. Accordingly, on June 25, Father Cagliero entrusted it to Monsignor Pacifici who personally handed it to Pius IX with the required precautions.

On July 6, Father Cagliero met Monsignor Manacorda who told him in utter fright and shock that he had seen a high-ranking Vatican official being led to jail. He then went on, "A few days ago Pius IX received a confidential message. An investigation has disclosed disloyal plots in the Vatican printshop. Several other persons have been arrested." Monsignor knew no more, but Father Cagliero understood, and later he came to know that inflammatory leaflets were being secretly printed at night by disloyal employees and then spread about to rouse the people to rebel against the papal government.

The Pope had a traitor in his own house, one lavishly paid by the revolutionaries. Let an instance suffice. Empress Eugenie, the wife of Napoleon III, twice wrote confidentially to Pius IX to inform him of plots being hatched against the Church, and she had her letters delivered into his hands by a most faithful messenger. Naturally, she requested that the letters be instantly destroyed lest they fall into the hands of Napoleon III. The Pope read the letters and assured the messenger that no one would ever know their contents. He then locked them in his private safe whose key he always carried on his person. Some time later the same messenger delivered a third letter, in which the empress complained that her two

previous letters had fallen into Napoleon's hands and had placed her in a terrible position. What should she do now? Pius IX protested that the letters were in his safe, to which he alone had the key, and, as he spoke, he went to the safe and opened it. To his shock the letters were gone! The Pope nearly fainted, and for several days he was ill. Narrating this painful incident to Don Bosco in 1869, Pius IX remarked, "Do you see? There are traitors even among those around me."

Monsignor Manacorda confirmed us in the opinion that Pius IX did not feel safe even in his private rooms. After ten one evening, the Pope received him in his bedroom for a most important report the monsignor had to make. Before the latter could open his mouth, the Pope looked around suspiciously and whispered, "Softly, please! Walls have ears!"<sup>5</sup>

St. Peter's solemn centennial celebrations began on June 28 with the participation of some eighty thousand pilgrims. In the morning St. Peter's chair was exhibited for the veneration of the faithful in the Gregorian chapel<sup>6</sup> of the Most Blessed Virgin; in the evening, Pius IX solemnly presided at First Vespers. The 29th began with the canonization of twenty-five *beati*, at which the Pope read a Latin homily and then sang the solemn Mass in the presence of fifty cardinals and over four hundred and fifty prelates of the Latin Church and of various Eastern Churches. The majestic ritual, the people's enthusiasm, the city-wide illumination, and all the thrilling civil and military demonstrations of joy defy description.

Don Bosco too rejoiced at these papal triumphs, but in private and, later, at the "Good Night" he remarked: "It's all roses now, but within three months shall come the thorns." Father Joachim Berto took note of these words.

St. Peter's centenary was celebrated at the Oratory as splendidly as possible with balloons, fireworks, and illumination. In former years this solemnity had also been observed in honor of St. Aloysius, but in 1867 Don Bosco wanted it exclusively dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles. At his order the Mirabello and Lanzo schools held similar celebrations.

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting other details on this score and also about St. Peter's centennial celebrations. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> Named after Gregory XIII and dedicated to Our Lady of Help. [Editor]

The Roman festivities lasted nine days. Services were also held in the various basilicas and closed at St. Peter's with the beatification of two hundred and five Japanese martyrs. The most sublime and impressive event occurred on July 1st when the four hundred and eighty-six patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops present in Rome gathered in the great hall above St. Peter's portico to present to the Pope a signed, ringing declaration of loyalty and obedience to the Vicar of Christ. Some of the signers had suffered greatly in pagan lands and bore on their limbs the proof of their heroism. At the Pope's appearance all as one body fell to their knees and cried aloud with one voice: "*Tu es Petrus et super hanc petram aedificabo Ecclesiam Meam, et portae inferi non praevalent!*" [You are Peter and upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it—Matt. 16, 18] There was the true Church, One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic! The Pope and the bishops were moved to tears.

On his return from Rome, in describing this scene to us, Bishop Gastaldi enthusiastically exclaimed, "The bishops pressed about Pius IX as the Oratory boys do around Don Bosco!"

Father Cagliero and Father Savio were hoping to be received by the Pope—not an easy matter, considering the occasion—yet they had this consolation. Pius IX welcomed them with fatherly affection, asked about Don Bosco, spoke of the Oratory, and received with evident pleasure the letter brought by Father Cagliero. It read:

Turin, June 27, 1867

Most Holy Father,

A combination of circumstances prevents me from personally doing homage to the Vicar of Jesus Christ on the occasion of the centenary of St. Peter, of whom Your Holiness is the successor in the government of the Universal Church. Nevertheless, as a Christian, priest, and rector of charitable institutions, I feel it my grave and bounden duty to send two of my priests, Father Angelo Savio and Father John Cagliero, to join the faithful who have come from all over the world to do you homage. They represent all the priests, the clerics, and the twelve hundred boys of our houses in Turin, Lanzo, and Mirabello, and also the priests, clerics, and several thousand youths who attend our festive oratories of St. Francis de Sales, of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, and of St. Joseph. My two representatives

bring also the greetings of many parish priests, canons, curates, directors of educational institutions, rectors of churches, and good Catholics who, because of work and other reasons, cannot come personally to Rome.

All declare themselves to be most affectionate children of Your Holiness, ready to yield their possessions and their very lives in order to live and die in that religion of which Your Holiness is the supreme Head on earth.

I believe that Your Holiness will also be greatly consoled to know that the recently consecrated bishops were received with warmest signs of esteem and veneration in their respective dioceses. . . . The enemy of souls is now raising obstacles to the further appointments of bishops to sees that are still vacant. We pray that God will enlighten the blind and give Your Holiness health and strength so that the good work may be brought to its desired fulfillment.

I keenly regret that a statement in my booklet *St. Peter's Centenary* was interpreted in a sense that was certainly never intended by me. I believe that my subsequent explanation may have removed all misunderstandings about my manner of writing, believing, and acting. In the next edition I shall fully revise the text as directed by the Sacred Congregation of the Index.

If I may be allowed on this singular and extraordinary solemnity to ask of Your Holiness a favor most ardently desired, I most respectfully make bold to renew my petition that Your Holiness graciously approve the Constitutions of the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales, with whatever corrections, variations, and additions may be deemed necessary for God's greater glory and the welfare of souls.

In the meantime, in all our houses we shall continue to pray morning and night for Your Holiness, that God will grant you health and grace to resist the grave storms, perhaps not far off, which God permits the enemies of good to raise against religion. After this last trial, triumph will be yours. It is time for all of us to be one in heart and soul in praying to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and to the Immaculate Virgin, our anchors of salvation in the forthcoming storm.

In the name of all those mentioned above, I kneel at the feet of Your Holiness, asking for your holy and apostolic blessing. With the deepest gratitude and veneration, I am happy to declare myself,

Your most obedient and affectionate son,  
Father John Bosco

In the course of this narrative we shall see thorns, the tempest, the last trial, and finally the splendid triumphs which Divine Providence had in store for Pius IX.

In his many visits during those days on Don Bosco's behalf, Father Cagliero witnessed the veneration in which not only the Roman nobility and people but also many prelates held Don Bosco. Cardinal Patrizi, Cardinal Bilio, Cardinal Caterini, and others insisted that he must remember them to Don Bosco, who, they were sure, would pray for them.

## CHAPTER 72

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

**I**N our human condition there will always be shortcomings and passionate outbreaks, more or less consequential, which can be put to rights only by frank repeated admonitions inspired at all times by charity. “Cry out full-throated and unsparingly,” the Lord said to Isaiah. “Lift up your voice like a trumpet blast; tell My people their wickedness. . . .” [Is. 58, 1] Don Bosco never kept silent when circumstances demanded that he banish from his house or otherwise ward off any offense or displeasure to God.

We have already given instances of his zeal in warning transgressors,<sup>1</sup> and we shall give many more. A “Good Night” of his on the last day of June is one such instance. Other talks he gave in July will follow in the same order as we summarized them in our chronicle, interspersing them with documents of the same period. We must remark here that the holy name of Mary was ever on his lips and that he never failed to make a memorandum of Our Lady’s favors as he came to know of them. Our archives hold more than a thousand such cherished notes in his own hand.

June 30

At the “Good Night” Don Bosco lamented that only a few received Communion frequently and that some young clerics had to be dismissed because of unsatisfactory conduct. He then went on: “The reason why the fervor of the early times of the Oratory has nowadays considerably cooled is that formerly I used to reward those who observed the Six Sundays in honor of St. Aloysius.<sup>2</sup> Unbeknown to them, I noticed them. Later, a single word of praise from me sufficed to please them. In those days the

<sup>1</sup> See Vol. V, pp. 456f; Vol. VI, p. 247; Vol. VII, pp. 16, 159f, 168, 351, 403. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> A devotion then in vogue. See Vol. III, pp. 13, 154. [Editor]

students, artisans, and clerics totaled forty-eight; only three were students. Well, one Sunday, only two out of the forty-eight did not make their devotions, and those two were sick. What's more, they made up for it during the week. What goes on now is a shame! I blush to admit it! There are so many hundreds of you, and yet only one or two hundred go to the sacraments on Sundays and less than fifty or so during the week, and they are always the same ones. What does this general lukewarmness mean? I will tell you. It means that when you obey, you don't do it for God's sake; you don't reflect that by obeying your superior you obey God, and that by disobeying him you disobey God. Some of you obey only for fear of punishment: a bad grade in the case of a student, or less pocket money in the case of an artisan. Some of you obey for worldly, not supernatural, reasons.

"Then, human respect scares many of you away from the sacraments. You are afraid of being noticed. You say to yourselves: 'I'd like to go to confession and Communion, but those friends of mine will see me.'

" 'So what?'

" 'But they laugh and make fun of me.'

" 'Let them laugh! I say: Laugh back at them!'

"What's the remedy for these troubles? We must root out from our house that spreading cancer of finding fault with everything a superior does. If this critical tendency were also to be found among teachers and assistants, the scandal would be very harmful to others. We must root out this spirit of criticism. Then we shall see the Oratory regain its former fervor."

July 2

Don Bosco said to Father Rua: "A lady called to tell me that her daughter, who had been ill for several months, had begun a novena to Mary, Help of Christians at the suggestion of a friend and that she already feels better even though the novena isn't yet over."

Don Bosco also told Father Rua that a man who had been suffering from headaches for two years made a novena to Our Lady and now feels fine.

The novena Don Bosco usually suggests in honor of Mary, Help of Christians consists of saying with lively faith three *Paters*, *Aves*, and *Glorias* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and three *Salve Reginas* to Our Lady with the invocation "Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us."

July 3

After supper Don Bosco told the boys crowding around him in the dining room about a favor of Our Lady. Father Rua, Father Francesia, Father Ascanio Savio, and Joachim Berto were present. Don Bosco said:

“As you see, Father Savio, the church went up entirely because of favors granted by Mary, Help of Christians. Just this morning a lady came to me with a girl and told me: ‘My husband had been suffering terribly from scatica for several months when I came to know that by making a novena to Mary, Help of Christians and promising an offering [toward the church] one might obtain favors. I immediately started a novena and promised a donation. Here it is. My husband is perfectly cured.’ And she handed me a hundred lire.”

At the “Good Night” that same evening, Don Bosco said: “Cholera is raging in various parts of Italy: in Piedmont, Lombardy, and around Naples. Thank God, it has not yet hit Turin. If nobody at the Oratory should sin, I could guarantee immunity for all, as I’ve said on other occasions.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile I will continue to recommend you all to Our Lady so that She may keep us from both spiritual and physical cholera. On your part, say a few *Paters*, *Aves*, and *Glorias* before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and some *Salve Reginas* to Our Lady. If we one and all really resolve not to commit sin, I can assure you that none of us will catch the cholera. Let us also pray that the Lord will keep this scourge from our parents, friends, and benefactors.”

On July 4, Don Bosco wrote to Prince Horace Falconieri in Rome to thank him for his gift of a chalice and his promise of a contribution to the new church.<sup>4</sup>

July 4

At the “Good Night” Don Bosco exhorted the boys to celebrate devoutly the feast of St. Aloysius and to ask for his intercession with God so that their parents, friends, and benefactors might be safeguarded from spiritual and physical cholera, since all evils and scourges are sent by God because of our sins.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 209. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

July 5

After night prayers Don Bosco spoke thus:

“Next Sunday we shall keep the beautiful feast of St. Aloysius. Let us do our utmost to celebrate it devoutly, especially so that our towns may be safeguarded from the cholera.

“I must also tell you about something I have already mentioned to some boys and their parents and relatives. When you have visitors and they are women, try to make their visit as short as possible, even if they are cousins or relatives. Be courteous, of course, but tell them that you have something to do for Don Bosco and politely excuse yourselves. Lingering with them is a waste of time. This is a boys’ school. It’s no place for women and girls. We are all made of flesh and blood. You know what happens if you put fire near straw. Satan is shrewd. He makes you forget that someone is a cousin, sister, or other relation. You see only a person of the other sex. The devil can surely rationize. Remember also that visiting time is only from one to two in the afternoon. In other boarding schools, even those run by laymen, visitors are allowed only on Thursdays<sup>5</sup> at the appointed time.

“Let’s now go back to the feast of St. Aloysius. On this beautiful solemnity give me a great comfort: place yourselves in the state of grace so that I may say to Our Lord in Holy Mass: ‘O Lord, all my boys are in Your holy grace! Please keep them always in this state!’ Do this, my dear boys, first for the good of your soul, and then to give me this great satisfaction. Remember! I am working from morning to night for the good of your souls!”<sup>6</sup>

On Tuesday, July 9, Don Bosco went to Mirabello where he had been expected for some time and where he was to do much good, as we can surmise from this letter [probably written at the very beginning of July 1867]:

[No date]

*To My Dear Children at Mirabello*

I am late in paying you the visit I had promised, but I [further] regret my having been unable to join you in your celebration of St. Aloysius’ feast. I shall try to make up for it by staying longer with you. Please God, I shall be with you on Tuesday by the last evening train. Why do I tell you

<sup>5</sup> A customary mid-week school holiday in Italy and other European countries. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> We are omitting a letter to Don Bosco from a charitable organization recommending two orphans to him. [Editor]

beforehand? Why don't I just drop in as I've done before? I have a good reason, my dear boys. First, I want to speak to all of you assembled together about something that will please you. Then, I want to speak privately of things you need to know even though they are quite unpleasant. Finally, I want to whisper something in your ear in order to crush the devil's horns as he tries to lord it over some of you.

Incidentally, I want you to know that I have recently visited you and am now enclosing a list of boys who especially need to be forewarned about my coming. I am asking Father Director to tell them in my name that I very badly need to speak to their soul, heart, and conscience, and must do so exclusively for their spiritual well-being.

I am delighted to inform you that in my frequent visits I have been very pleased with those of you who exemplarily go to Holy Communion and fulfill your duties. I have also noticed the shortcomings of some, but don't get too concerned about it.

In any event, don't worry in the least. I am coming to you as a father, friend, and brother. Just give me your heart for a few moments, and you will be glad. You will rejoice because of God's peace and grace enriching your soul, and I will rejoice because of my heartfelt and long-desired consolation of seeing you all in God's friendship.

All this concerns the soul. What about the body? We certainly cannot ignore it. So I now ask Father Prefect to see to it that we have a joyful time together with a nice picnic, weather permitting.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with you, and may the Most Blessed Virgin enrich you all with the true treasure of the holy fear of God. Pray for me.

Affectionately yours in Jesus Christ,  
Father John Bosco

P.S. Special greetings to the fathers and brothers and also to the Provera family, particularly to dear Papa.

On Thursday [July 11, 1867] Archbishop Calabiana, newly appointed to Milan but not yet installed, came to the Oratory to spend the day with Don Bosco. Meeting him on the porticoes, he said jokingly in the presence of Father Francis Cerruti and other Salesians, "So, Don Bosco, you are the one sending me to Milan! I was doing fine in Casale!" Indeed, he was dearly loved by the clergy and people of that diocese. After lunch Don Bosco entertained his pupils

at recreation with cheerful conversation and playful palm reading, predicting their life-span after intricate, humorous calculations. At a certain point, the archbishop, who had been deep in conversation with some Salesians, joined the group and held out his hand to Don Bosco. Don Bosco kissed the ring. Then he excused himself and retired to his room with the prelate.

At this time another letter commending the Salesian Society, dated July 11, 1867, arrived from Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Saluzzo. That same day, Father Pestarino wrote from Mornese to Don Bosco, informing him that the number was increasing of those who had pledged tithes of their crops to Mary, Help of Christians if they would be spared the inclemencies of the weather.<sup>7</sup>

Don Bosco returned to Turin on the 13th. Father Cagliero and Father Angelo Savio had just got back from Rome full of enthusiasm about what they had seen there. They handed him a long, very friendly letter from Monsignor Fratejacci, promising that he would do his utmost with influential cardinals and other members of the Roman Congregations on behalf of the Salesian Society, but regretfully informing him that the privilege of granting dimissorials to ordinands could not be obtained for the present.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 73

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

ON the evening of July 14 [1867], Don Bosco was notified by telegram that Father Henry Bonetti had been fatally stricken with cholera in Chiuduno (Bergamo) where he had gone a week before to assist his dying mother. Deeply attached to Don Bosco, whose will he regarded as God's very own, Father Bonetti was a very zealous, hard-working priest who was dearly loved by his pupils. On celebrating his first Mass on October 7, 1866, the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, so elated had he been that he exclaimed that only in heaven could he have experienced greater joy. On Sunday, July 14, 1867 he said his last Mass, for, stricken by cholera in mid-afternoon, he received the Last Sacraments and the papal blessing, dying shortly after midnight. At his solemn requiem Mass at the Oratory Father Francesia read a moving eulogy.<sup>1</sup>

Don Bosco's grief at Father Bonetti's loss was tempered by a note from Bishop Ghilardi, dated July 15, 1867, acquainting him with the final disposition of the controversy over *St. Peter's Centenary*. The directives given by the Sacred Congregation of the Index were as follows:

It is indispensable to correct a grave error on page 217 in the passage beginning with: *La nostra fede deve essere intera. . . .* [Our faith must be all-embracing. . . .] and ending with: *Costui (cioè chi commette un peccato grave) trasgredisce un articolo di fede che lo fa colpevole di tutti gli altri* [Such a one (i.e., he who sins gravely) violates an article of faith which makes him guilty of all the others as well].

On page 192 the whole appendix, which is superfluous in such an acetical work, may very well be omitted. If it is retained, however, the statement that St. Peter's coming to Rome is a fact foreign to faith and

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

open to debate must be corrected as erroneous and repugnant to sound criticism and to religious sentiment.

Briefly, these were the only two corrections that had been considered necessary. Don Bosco faithfully carried them out. Thus had *Letture Cattoliche* weathered a vicious storm stirred up by the rashness of people who had ill-judged Don Bosco's activities in Rome. His defense had been successful. Elated by the results, Bishop Gastaldi gave vent to his joy. Recalling Don Bosco's anguish during the controversy, he remarked to Louis Chiapale, "Anyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus can expect to be persecuted. Tell this to Don Bosco in my name." This also proved Holy Scripture true: "Where pride is, there also shall be reproach; but where humility is, there also is wisdom." [Prov. 11, 2] With a grateful heart Don Bosco thanked Our Lady for having freed him from that cross.<sup>2</sup> He also felt greatly comforted by Pius IX's reply to his letter of June 25, in which the Pope assured him that he was aware of his love and attachment to St. Peter's Chair, and that he heartily blessed him, his Salesians, and his boys.

The school year was now drawing to a close. At this particular time Don Bosco's workload practically doubled as he heard confessions, counseled, held interviews, and gave directives for the summer vacation and the spiritual retreats.<sup>3</sup> Unable to address the pupils at Lanzo personally, he sent them the following letter:

Turin, July 27, 1867

My dear sons:

I have put off writing till today because I kept hoping that I might speak to you personally before the summer vacation, but the pressure of work does not allow me this pleasure. Hence I will endeavor to make up for it in writing.

First, let me thank you for your donation to the Church of Mary, Help of Christians and for the nice letters you were good enough to write me. You cannot imagine how much I enjoyed reading them. I felt as though I

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting at this point requests to Don Bosco for prayers and the admission of boys to the Oratory. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

were with you. As I read them, my heart was sending the reply I was unable to give in writing.

I can assure you, my dear sons, that the fine sentiments you expressed found an echo in my heart. I do hope that your hearts and mine will become one in loving and serving God. My blessing and thanks to you for the charity and benevolence you have shown me. And now, as the holidays draw near, let me say good-bye to you with some friendly advice:

1. As far as possible, unless illness prevents you, come back punctually for the summer session, which I believe will start on August 16.

2. Give my kindest regards to your parents, parish priests, and teachers.

3. If you meet a good companion during the holidays, strive to bring him along with you. If anyone you know doesn't seem good, do not make such a proposal.

4. Go to Holy Communion at least on Sundays and feast days; during the week, don't neglect your morning meditation.

5. Say every morning a *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Gloria* in union with me. In my daily Mass I always pray that every one of you will be spared from the cholera, which already rages in our neighboring villages and towns. Incidentally, if the cholera has already erupted in your hometowns, I suggest that you do not go home for the vacation, lest you risk your life unnecessarily.

In conclusion, my dear children, pray to the Lord for me. Let us all pray for one another that we may avoid offending God and that one day we may all be together in heaven to praise, bless, and glorify God for His mercy.

Your loving friend, father and brother,  
Father John Bosco

P.S. Congratulations to the director, prefect, teachers, and all my children of Lanzo.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting details about the spread of the cholera and requests to Don Bosco for prayers and assistance. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 74

### *Divine Providence*

**D**URING the last days of the school year Don Bosco exhorted his beloved Oratory pupils to make a devout Holy Communion for the successful outcome of their examinations, and to place themselves under Our Lady's protection to ensure a spiritually beneficial rather than harmful summer vacation. Our chronicle records only one of the "Good Nights" he gave at the end of July:

July 27

My dear boys, I am going to tell you what the devil wants of you and what he fears. He wants you to be idle, and he greatly fears seeing you busy. Why? Because if you are idle, he can rest, whereas if you are busy, he too has to work if he wants to get anywhere. When you are idle, he can say to himself, *I can take it easy now. Idleness will work for me with games, grumbling, bad example, bad books, and so forth.*

Privately, Don Bosco told a few boys, "Have deep trust in Our Lady, and during this novena [of Our Lady of the Angels] say the *Magnificat* every day."

On Sunday, July 28, the Oratory held its solemn awarding of prizes with Archbishop Alexander Riccardi of Turin in attendance. Vocal and instrumental music, prose, and poetry expressed the Oratory's common joy and gratitude to the new shepherd. After the ceremony he very graciously toured the premises. Though still unhappy about the Salesian Congregation's independence from him, he kept telling Father Celestine Durando who was beside him, "Don't worry! I will never fight you!"

At Lanzo the awarding of prizes was presided over by Bishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Saluzzo who had been preaching a priests' retreat at nearby St. Ignatius' Shrine.

On Monday morning Don Bosco gave his boys a farewell talk at Mass and closed the services with the *Te Deum*. After seeing them off, he left for Bricherasio where he sent a note to Father Rua asking him to mail him a book. In the book Father Rua enclosed a letter addressed to Chevalier Oreglia requesting Don Bosco's prayers for the recovery of Count Victor Emmanuel of Cambruzano who was dying of cancer. Don Bosco outlined a comforting reply and promised prayers, but he also clearly stated that all hope of recovery should be abandoned. The count died on August 16, 1867.<sup>1</sup>

[As the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians progressed] it was evident that Divine Providence was rewarding Don Bosco's religious poverty and deliberate detachment from earthly things by moving men's hearts to help him. He had made detachment a rule for his followers: "Since we depend on God's daily providence, our Society shall never hold stock or real estate beyond its houses and their dependencies. Should a benefactor leave us real estate, it is to be sold as soon as possible and the money employed in works of charity."

He had unlimited confidence in the Lord. Father Rua testified: "When, worried about debts, I would call on him, he would smilingly remark with absolute calm, 'You man of little faith! Don't worry! The Lord will help us.'" He would often tell the economist, "Remember that Divine Providence will never fail us." Whatever cash he received from benefactors and all other sources, he wanted used immediately for daily needs and to pay off debts. "God will look after our future needs," he would say. "We must see to the present ones."

And God did look after Don Bosco's needs, sending him in extraordinary, unexpected ways the sums he needed, much as if He had put a banker at his disposal. Father Joachim Berto, Don Bosco's secretary, narrates:

Brother Joseph Rossi, our purveyor, needed five thousand lire, I think, for a long overdue debt. I was in my office one afternoon when, around

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting at this point some correspondence of Don Bosco with civil authorities about exemption from certain taxes. [Editor]

three, a tall, rather stout, mustached gentleman walked in. He had a martial, imperious bearing and seemed in a great hurry. As I pleasantly answered his inquiries about Don Bosco's office hours, he warmed up to me and actually broke into a bright smile. We exchanged a few more words, and afterward he remained silent for a short while. Then he became suddenly impatient and, unconcerned about others ahead of him, stalked into Don Bosco's room. "Are you Don Bosco?" he asked brusquely.

"Yes, sir."

"I have something to give you."

He took out a wallet, extracted some bills, and without a word threw them on Don Bosco's desk. Then he rummaged through his pockets and from a second and a third wallet pulled out more bills and almost in a frenzy heaped them on the desk. Don Bosco watched silently. There were bills of 100, 250, and 500 lire. "This money is yours," the man said, pocketing his empty wallets.

"I am most grateful to you," Don Bosco replied. "May I please have your name?"

"No need! Our Lady knows all! Good-bye."

"At least let me escort you out."

"It's not necessary. You are very busy. Attend to your duties."

"Pardon me, but I think I owe it to you. . . ."

"Enough! Stay right here! You have no time to waste." Quickly opening the door, he dashed off.

Meanwhile, Countess Viancino, who was in the waiting room and had courteously let that man go in ahead of her, became suspicious. Undecided whether she should call for help, she peeked through the keyhole. "Did that man give you any trouble?" she asked Don Bosco when she finally entered his office.

"The trouble he gave me is the kind I'd like to have at least once a day," Don Bosco replied, pointing to the pile of money on his desk.

Together they counted a total of 7,500 lire. Don Bosco immediately sent for Brother Rossi. Thus was a debt paid in a truly providential manner. That unknown gentleman returned other times. Finally I discovered his identity. He was Attorney [Nicholas] Galvagno of Marene.<sup>2</sup>

We have another testimony from Father Rua:

One day, in 1867 I believe, Don Bosco had to pay a 300 lire tax bill. Through the forgetfulness or oversight of the one who had received the no-

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. XI, pp. 118f. [Editor]

tification, the day came when a lien was placed upon Oratory property in default of tax payment. I learned of it early in the morning, but my cashbox was completely empty. I went to Don Bosco, but he too had no funds. That very morning, moreover, he had to leave Turin. Fully trusting in God, he said, "Tell whomever you plan to send to the tax office to wait in your room. The Lord will provide." At about nine, Chevalier Charles Occelletti called on Don Bosco. "We have just managed to collect an outstanding debt," he said. "Would you mind our sharing it with you?"

"By no means," Don Bosco rejoined. "Am I grateful! We haven't a penny in the house and must make a tax payment today."

"I don't have much to give you," the gentleman went on. "Only three hundred lire."

"That's all we need! You are truly the instrument of Divine Providence. Please give Father Rua the money. He is anxiously waiting for it!"

The count complied. When he heard the full story, he wept for joy.

I immediately sent my messenger. Later he told us that the order for the lien had been issued but had been cancelled before the tax agent left for the Oratory.

On another occasion, Don Bosco went to town in search of money to pay a substantial baker's debt. A gentleman had a generous donation ready for Don Bosco and had decided to take it to him on Saturday, the day he was wont to call on him. On that particular morning, however, a nagging thought forced him to change his plans. *The Oratory must be in urgent need*, he kept hearing. Unable to rid himself of the idea, he set off for the Oratory and met Don Bosco on the way. We can imagine their mutual surprise.

Thus aided and inspired by Divine Providence, Don Bosco, disregarding his inadequate means, went on multiplying his undertakings. In 1867, meeting a Lanzo pupil, Louis Costamagna, near the Oratory water fountain, he asked him, "Do you see this fountain?"

"Yes!"

"Well, dear Louis, I wish it could throw up a steady flow of gold coins."

"What would you want all that gold for?" the boy asked.

"With that gold I would build schools in every part of the world to save all souls that are in danger of being lost, particularly the

souls of poor, forsaken lads.” So Louis Costamagna testified in writing on March 14, 1891.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 75

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**I**N July 1867 Don Bosco exercised his priestly ministry during a laymen's spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine. From there he returned to Turin before going on to Trofarello for the annual Salesian retreat scheduled to start August 5.<sup>1</sup>

Father Bona of Brescia preached the meditations and Don Bosco the instructions which he punctuated now and then with scriptural maxims about man's eternal destiny. "I remember," Father [Francis] Dalmazzo testified, "that once, when speaking of our appearance before Christ our Judge, he broke into sobs and, notwithstanding efforts at self-control, was unable to continue. He had to excuse himself amid general commotion." His listeners were all priests or young clerics. A manuscript in our archives lists his topics.<sup>2</sup>

In the beginning these spiritual retreats resembled friendly gatherings, but soon they became a very heavy, though sweet, burden for Don Bosco. Admirable was his self-sacrifice in hearing his spiritual sons' confessions during the retreats that were held through late summer for the confreres' convenience. Moreover, he was always available to all who sought a private interview. We must add that he also presided at important, lengthy conferences held by the superiors of his various communities. After thus spending four or five hours in listening, clearing up doubts, and giving important directives, instead of relaxing with the rest of the retreatants he would go to the confessional and remain there several hours, just as he had done in the morning. Such constancy could spring only from

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a thank-you letter from Don Bosco to a benefactress in Rome. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix 3. [Editor]

a living faith. He never spared himself, not even when he was in poor health or running a fever.

In 1867 he was still free to spend the recreation period after dinner with his priests and clerics. One afternoon he sat on the grass in the shade with seven or eight Salesians. Suddenly digressing from his topic and casting a look around, he said: "One of the priests present will one day be a bishop." All turned to Father Francesia and to Father Cagliero. After a short while, the latter excused himself and withdrew. With such predictions Don Bosco also aimed at encouraging his sons to persevere in the Salesian Society by giving them glimpses of its glorious destiny.

At the close of the retreat on August 10, Father Nicholas Cibrario and the cleric Joseph Daghero made their triennial and perpetual vows respectively. Several applicants were also received as postulants.

After the solemn *Te Deum* Don Bosco returned to Turin, while Father Cagliero left for Castelnuovo where cholera had broken out. The fear caused by numerous deaths made it difficult to provide for the sick. In view of this, Don Bosco planned to send one of his priests to help the local pastor and curate, but Father Cagliero volunteered. "I asked Don Bosco to let me go to help my fellow townsmen," Father Cagliero himself wrote, "and he consented, though I was very busy those days. He also gave me a good sum of money for the needy. 'May the Lord bless your ministry!' he told me. 'If you need more money, let me know and I will send it.' "

Don Bosco's prompt aid to his native town and Father Cagliero's zeal and courage in nursing the victims and in promoting necessary hygienic precautions deeply impressed the populace. Gratefully, they awarded him a bronze medal for his heroic services.<sup>3</sup>

Father Francesia remained at Trofarello with several boys whom Don Bosco had sent there for a few days' vacation. One of them, named Fiore, fell into a deep fishpond while playing. Immediately a companion named Finocchio dived to his rescue. At first he did not succeed. He came up to breathe, dove again, and after a few moments reappeared with his unconscious companion. After a while

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting a letter from Father Bona praising the Oratory boys for their piety and diligence. [Editor]

they managed to revive him. The shock and fear and the gratitude of all to Our Lady, Help of Christians, and to Finocchio who later became a Friar Minor, are beyond description.

In mid-August Don Bosco betook himself to Strevi where Bishop [Modesto] Contratto of Acqui was spending the summer. There the bishop told him of a housewife who had shown signs of diabolic possession for over a year. Besides tormenting the woman physically, the evil spirit was preventing her from receiving the sacraments. Whenever an attempt was made to bring her to confession, she furiously erupted into blasphemies and howled like a beast. The bishop authorized Don Bosco to exorcise her, but, with his usual simplicity, he replied that he did not think it was necessary, adding that if she were really possessed, he would give her such company as to force the devil to withdraw. What he did was to exhort her husband and children and several priests present to recite together some prayers to Mary, Help of Christians and to continue saying them privately till [September 8] the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady. Don Bosco then left for Mirabello after writing to Father Rua and to a benefactress.<sup>4</sup>

Back at the Oratory, he found a letter from Count Francis Xavier Provana of Collegno to Chevalier Oreglia, telling him that a curate in Anvers and another in Brussels were interested in having Don Bosco visit them and see about opening a festive oratory in each place.<sup>5</sup> The prospect of expanding his work into Belgium must have delighted Don Bosco, but the request, then premature, was finally granted on December 8, 1887 during Don Bosco's last illness, when he promised to open a house in Liège.

Meanwhile an attack upon Rome seemed imminent, and the cholera was causing havoc in many Italian provinces.<sup>6</sup> Don Bosco was worried. After supper one Saturday near the end of August, while speaking to Salesians around him of the danger Rome was facing, he remarked that, from a human point of view, he feared it would soon fall into the hands of the revolutionaries. "If all the Romans join in making a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament," he

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting these two letters. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

added, “the revolutionaries not only will not enter Rome but they will be thoroughly defeated.”

In the meantime, the cholera, raging more fiercely than in previous years, caused the faithful to increase their faith in the protection of Mary, Help of Christians. As in the past, both bishops and clergy outdid themselves. On his part, Don Bosco accepted several orphans from Sardinia, Sicily, and central Italy. From Rome also, Father Francesia was notified of the death of several of Don Bosco’s friends as well as of the queen mother of Naples. Her death fulfilled Don Bosco’s prediction<sup>7</sup> that she would not return to her throne.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> See pp. 290f. [Editor]

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 76

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

OUR own notes and our archive documents are the sources of the events so far described from the end of 1864 to the middle of 1867. From here on, we shall draw upon a short chronicle left to us by Father Michael Rua and upon other authentic sources which date from the end of 1867 through 1869. Following is Father Rua's Foreword to his chronicle:

Believing that these notes may redound to God's greater glory and the good of souls, and encouraged by my friends, I, Father Michael Rua, have begun today, Sunday, September 1 [1867], to gather material concerning the Oratory and especially its founder, Don Bosco. I will limit myself to being a chronicler and not an historian.

September 1 [1867]. Don Bosco set out this morning for the summer home of Father Margotti, the editor of *Unità Cattolica*. A Franciscan bishop from central China, born in Bologna, visited the Oratory. He was given a cordial reception by the boys and the brass band and showed himself quite pleased with the new church and the Oratory. At the "Good Night" Don Bosco told this story:

"Once, while Emperor Theodosius was in Treveri, two trusted young officers accompanied him to the amphitheater for the games, but for some reason or other, they chose, instead, to take a walk through the woods skirting the town.

"After following a trail to its end, they forged ahead into the deep forest until they reached a clearing dotted with small huts. It was a hermitage. On a table in one of the huts they found a biography of St. Anthony, the hermit. Curiously they began to read it. Moved by the example of such a young man leaving the world to serve God and longing for the peace that shone in the hermits' faces, they decided to quit the emperor's service and start a new life themselves. They exchanged their uniforms for the hermits' coarse robe, persevered in their vocation, and became saints.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

“I’d like to draw a moral lesson for you. If those two officers had not turned their backs on worldly amusements, they would not have become saints. It was a godsend for them to leave the amphitheater and chance upon a good book. Learn to flee from bad companions and bad books. Instead, look for good ones.”

The August-September issue of *Letture Cattolice* was a two-hundred-page biography, *The Venerable Mary Christine of Savoy*. The October issue, entitled *Father Benedict*, was the story of a priest in the French Revolution. . . .

The next item in Father Rua’s chronicle is Don Bosco’s “Good Night” on September 2, the fourth day of the novena of the Nativity of Mary:

A boy, who ever since childhood had daily been reciting *The Seven Joys of Mary*,<sup>2</sup> came to the point of death. As he was about to breathe his last, he suddenly rallied and, looking at the bystanders, broke into a smile. To their surprise, he told them that, a few moments before, he had felt he was about to die and be judged by God. Suddenly a beautiful Lady, dazzling with light, had appeared.

“Why are you so upset?” She asked.

“Because I fear God’s judgment. I am afraid of hell.”

“Why?”

“Because I’d be lost forever and would never see God again.”

“Don’t be afraid!” She replied. “My devotees will not be damned. For years you have daily recited My *Seven Joys*. I will be your consolation at death and in heaven. Fear not God’s judgment because I will lead you Myself to His court and stand by you. Tell everybody that those who are devoted to Me and recite My *Seven Joys* will not be lost. I will console them with My presence at death, at God’s tribunal, and in paradise forever.”

Tomorrow, therefore, as a nosegay, let everyone recite *The Seven Joys of Mary*. I exhort the more fervent ones to say them every day of this novena and every day of their life. If anyone wishes to practice some other devotion, he is free to do so, but let him be faithful to it all his life. Thus you will all be consoled by Our Lady in life and in death.

Tuesday, September 3. Much grieved at the immense harm done by bad books, especially among young students, Don Bosco plans to start a book

<sup>2</sup> A popular devotion at that time. [Editor]

club that would publish expurgated editions of the classics each month. To this end, he called today on Father Matthew Picco, a devout priest and experienced teacher. Some time ago he discussed this project with the archbishop of Turin. After night prayers he spoke thus to the boys:

“I wish we were all merchants, but merchants of souls. We should all strive to ensure our own souls’ salvation at any cost.

“I want you to be as simple as doves but as prudent as serpents. Do you know what a serpent does when it is pursued and cannot escape? It coils itself up and hides its head in the coils. We too should flee from sinful occasions, but when we can no longer avoid them, we should do our utmost to save our souls, even at the sacrifice of honor, possessions, and our very lives. If the soul is lost, all is lost; on the contrary, if the soul is saved, everything is saved. Were we really determined to have nothing at heart but our soul’s salvation, the devil would not be able to get near us.

“Pope Clement VII was repeatedly asked by King Henry VIII through letters and messengers for a favor contrary to God’s laws, but he refused to grant it. When the king insisted and kept sending ambassadors promising peace and prosperity for the Church if his request would be granted, the Pope gave this courteous reply to the king’s messengers: ‘Tell your king that if I had two souls I would sacrifice one and let it go to hell for his sake, but I have only one and cannot sacrifice that. If I lost it, all is lost.’ ”

September 4. During the summer months, yielding to a boy’s insistent requests, in view of his good conduct, Don Bosco transferred him from the artisans’ to the students’ section. A few months later, this lad yielded to doubts about the existence of God, paradise, hell, and so on, but instead of keeping his doubts to himself, he made them known to his companions, thus becoming a menace to them. Don Bosco got wind of it and soon found a remedy for the youngster. When the boy’s benefactor called to make arrangements with Don Bosco to have him continue his studies, Don Bosco replied in the lad’s presence that for the time being it was better not to make any decision, since the boy showed signs of mental weakness and might not be able to stand the strain of studying. The lad understood his error in entertaining and manifesting his doubts to his companions. He amended and thenceforth led a fervent life.

September 5. A seminary staff member wrote to Don Bosco, alleging that his clerics did not know sacred ceremonies and citing the example of the two clerics who had served Mass that morning in the cathedral. We must note that during the summer the cathedral canons relied on the Oratory clerics, since the seminarians were on vacation. Don Bosco replied that he regretted the poor show of those two clerics, but he explained that they were diocesan seminarians whom he was housing during the summer

vacation because they had no place to go and no means of their own. Furthermore, he had deliberately sent them to serve at the cathedral because he thought that they would be better qualified than his own clerics.

On this day, September 5, Don Bosco received news about the possessed woman of Acqui.<sup>3</sup> As he had suggested, on Sunday, September 1, her pastor had tried to make her go to church for confession and Communion, though behind closed doors. The woman's howlings and convulsions, however, had been so upsetting that she had been taken home at once. In view of this, the pastor wrote to Don Bosco that he did not think it wise to repeat such a scene on the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, as Don Bosco had directed. Don Bosco replied that they should do as he had recommended and continue to pray with faith.<sup>4</sup>

After supper on September 6, some Salesians were talking with him about two talented clerics who had left the Oratory and their priestly vocation. "I showed them how they might be happy with us all their lives," Don Bosco commented. "I even told them that if they followed my advice they would go on safely, and that it would be a blunder on their part to do otherwise. Well, one of them left because of gluttony. He could never take our food."

At this point, Felix Alessio, a young cleric, interrupted him: "With their degrees in literature they could now be a credit to the Oratory if they had not left!"

"The Oratory's glory must not be sought only in knowledge, but rather in piety," Don Bosco countered. "A virtuous, humble Salesian with ordinary intelligence will do much more good and accomplish greater things than a more talented but proud one. Not knowledge, but virtue, turns out saints. I told one of them, 'If you want to succeed, make a general confession and put down your pride. . . .'"

Such expressions were familiar with Don Bosco. He constantly recommended humility to his subjects.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See p. 394. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting at this point a short note from Don Bosco to one of his priests and an anecdote about the persecution of Christians in Japan. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> We are omitting an anecdote dealing with the Christians' persecution in Japan. [Editor]

September 7. Surprisingly, beset though he is with grave problems, Don Bosco manages to relax by reciting choice passages from Greek, Latin, and Italian classics. He particularly delights in entertaining us with entire cantos from Dante's *Divina Commedia*. He also takes the opportunity to bring out how fittingly the poet describes the punishments inflicted for various vices.

Asked what he thought of Dante, he answered that as regards literature and scholarship, Dante could not be surpassed, but otherwise his writings were motivated by revenge and by the desire to blame and discredit his opponents while praising his supporters.

## CHAPTER 77

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

ON September 7 [1867], the eve of the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, Don Bosco received a letter of commendation of the Salesian Society from the bishop of Alessandria.<sup>1</sup> Then, on the feast day itself, which was observed with numerous Communion and solemn church services, he spoke at the “Good Night”:

We may say that the cholera has struck nearly every Piedmontese town more or less severely and is beginning to make itself felt here too. Let us remember that sin calls for punishment and death. I wish therefore that we pray not only for ourselves, but also for our parents, relatives, benefactors, companions, and friends. These past weeks I have recommended you and all our pupils to the Lord and to Our Lady that they may safeguard us from this dreadful scourge, but you must help me to keep sin away, the cause of death. How? By going to confession, if need be, or by keeping yourselves in God’s grace, so that I can place you all under the protection of Mary, Help of Christians. Above all, guard yourselves from sins of immodesty.

To this end, tomorrow you will all receive a medal of Mary, Help of Christians that has been blessed especially so that Our Lady may protect us from the cholera. Let everyone wear it and daily recite a *Pater, Ave*, and *Gloria* to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and a *Salve, Regina* to Our Lady with the invocation *Maria, Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis*.

On September 9, a letter informed him that the day before [the feast of the Nativity of Mary] the possessed woman of Acqui had been freed of the devil and had received the sacraments.<sup>2</sup> Not surprised, Don Bosco rejoiced at the event, kindling confidence in Mary in those around him.

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting the official text. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

After supper he lingered in the dining room with some guests. Two of them were visiting priests who were to take examinations the following day along with some Salesians. Turning to Francis Dalmazzo, Peter Guidazio, [John] Garino, and [Felix] Alessio, Don Bosco remarked, "Tomorrow morning I will remember you in my Mass." Then, addressing the two visiting priests, he added, "If you pass your exams, donate a brick for our new church."

"We will," they replied.

"And how about you?" Don Bosco asked an old priest, also an overnight guest.

"I too!" he replied.

Don Bosco then went on:

As regards bricks, listen to this. A certain Father Ghisolfi had been having trouble with his arm for quite a while. Things got so bad that doctors told him it had to be amputated. Alarmed, Father Ghisolfi exclaimed: "Let me try something else first. I'm going to ask Don Bosco to tell me what I must do to honor Mary, Help of Christians and be cured." He did write to me, and I replied that if he was cured he should donate a brick for our church. Shortly afterward his arm was thoroughly healed. Promptly he shipped me a brick. You may imagine my surprise on receiving this unusual package. I had the brick smashed to bits to see if it held any money. There was none! Francis Dalmazzo and others witnessed this scene. I did not know who the sender was because the only information on the address label was "From a Poor Priest," and so I took the whole thing as a prank.

Some time later, Father Ghisolfi himself called at the Oratory and inquired if a brick had arrived.

"Did you send that brick?" I asked.

"Yes!"

"You surely took me at my word!" I exclaimed.

"Well," he replied, "promises made to God must be carried out to the letter." Then, breaking into laughter, he gave me a donation for the new church, though he had already made others before.

At this point Don Bosco turned with a meaningful smile to the visiting priests. "We got the message!" they immediately exclaimed.

Don Bosco then went on: "Our Lady's mercies are countless. Nearly every day letters tell me of favors received from Mary, Help of Christians. Recently I received a donation of twenty-four *soldi* from a poor old man who hobbled into my room on a pair of crutches and walked out carrying them on his shoulders."

After night prayers Don Bosco spoke to the boys about the possessed woman of Acqui, stressing how she had finally been freed of the devil on the feast of Mary's Nativity.<sup>3</sup> He ended up by saying: "My dear children, if Our Lady does so much for the body, believe me, She will do much more for our soul, if we ask Her. I have told you this incident not because I think that you are under the devil's sway—God forbid—but in order that you may see how much we must trust in Our Lady. Let us therefore often invoke Her in our temporal and spiritual needs, particularly in time of temptation, by saying, 'Mary, Help of Christians, pray for us.'"<sup>4</sup>

Father Rua's chronicle also gives us Don Bosco's "Good Night" of September 10:

Tonight I want to give you a tip on how to become saints or at least blessed on this earth. The Lord says that He wants us all to be saints, and so does St. Paul. We read in Holy Scripture, "It is good for a man to bear the yoke from his youth." [Lam. 3, 27] Notice that it says: "It *is* good," that is, right here on earth, meaning that it is a blessing to give oneself entirely to God from one's youth. One who starts on the right path when he is still young will be happy in his old age because he will have no remorse of conscience. He may be poor, but he will be happy because he will have peace in his heart, and will not fear death. . . .

The obedient boy, docile and meek, is truly blessed even in this life. If he dies, he is mourned, praised, and blessed by his parents and acquaintances. On the contrary, when a bad boy dies, hardly any notice is taken, or people may say, "It's good that the Lord took him. Now he won't bother us anymore!"

Without looking for examples elsewhere, isn't it true that here at the Oratory a good boy is loved by all and is even kept without charge if his parents cannot afford to pay? Not so with troublemakers. Everybody is happy when they are sent away. Only the good ones are well liked by their

<sup>3</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting at this point a letter of Chevalier Oreglia on the same topic. [Editor]

companions and enjoy a peaceful, honored, and happy life in this world. When death comes, they willingly accept it because they have given themselves to God from their childhood. If, instead, we have led an evil life, we will feel terribly sorry to realize that we might have been happy in this world but were not through our own fault; we might have done much good for the next life but failed to do so. Being old, I can no longer do anything about my past. You are young and you can start being good. Do so, and you will be very happy at the point of death. Good night.

September 11. Today when we were in town, both Don Bosco and I were twice jeered by street urchins. Don Bosco just pitied them and said nothing. I could see that he was grieved not by the insults of those lads but by their evil disposition.

He also happened to read that at a revolutionaries' convention in Geneva, the Freemasons had set as their goal the destruction of the papacy. This saddened him exceedingly, not because he feared the papacy's fall—for, as Our Lord assured us, it is indestructible—but because he considered it an outrage that the Church's children should propose the overthrow of their spiritual father.

At the "Good Night" Don Bosco spoke thus to his pupils:

"Tonight I want to teach you how to succeed in your studies and other duties. My advice is not really mine; it is the Lord's. He says through Holy Scripture: 'Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin. [Wis. 1, 4] We speak here of true wisdom, that wisdom which acknowledges God as the Creator and Master of everything, recognizes our strict obligation to obey His laws, and enlightens us on the rewards or punishments awaiting us in time and in eternity, depending on whether or not we obey or disobey God's commandments.

"Banish sin from your heart, then, because it prevents true wisdom and God's holy fear from entering it. With this wisdom you will also have God's help for success in life.

"But remember that sin is not like other enemies which, once crushed, never return. We must stay on the alert lest the devil come back like a thief when we are asleep. If we give him an opening through sinful acts, he will come in again as through a gate. He may even sneak in through the windows, that is, through our eyes, if we let them cast immodest, dangerous looks. Let us therefore keep our windows well shut.

"Furthermore, sin—the devil—may sneak in through chinks and cracks, through holes and locks. Shut your ears, therefore, to profane and foul talk. Shut your mouth to cursing, lewd conversation, grumbling, and gluttony. In short, control all your senses.

“Do you wish to succeed in your studies or to learn your trade well? Banish sin from your heart and keep it ever far from you. Then the Lord will help you. The more careful you are in keeping sin from you, the more you will succeed in your studies and endeavors. Good night.”

Seeing how tranquilly Don Bosco spoke to his boys that night, no one could have imagined that he was seriously worried. Archbishop Riccardi, believing that Don Bosco was giving his clerics and newly ordained priests scholastic and administrative duties above their abilities, rated Oratory routine and spirit as not sufficiently ecclesiastic. He also believed that Don Bosco’s clerics and priests did not receive an adequate education. However, Father Ascanio Savio, professor of moral theology at the Convitto Ecclesiastico and at the archdiocesan seminary, thought otherwise. Under oath he testified as follows: “I have always been convinced of the contrary as exemplified in Father Rua, Bishop Cagliari, Father Francesia, Father Cerruti, Father Durando, and many others who distinguished themselves by obtaining degrees in theology, philosophy, and literature!”

The archbishop had also directed that before receiving sacred orders, all diocesan seminarians who were allowed to lodge outside the seminary were to take a year’s residence there before ordination in order to prepare by study and prayer. He wanted the same norm applied to Don Bosco’s clerics, hoping that, once ordained, they would join the archdiocese.

The fledgling Salesian Society had so far received only a “decree of praise” from the Holy See,<sup>5</sup> and since Don Bosco’s candidates were ordained under the same condition as diocesan seminarians, the archbishop planned to use them for his diocesan needs which were then very great because of the scarcity of priests. The archbishop was quite pleased to have Don Bosco train candidates for the priesthood, but he did not seem to realize that, in his desire to keep them for himself, he was really destroying the source producing them. Following is the archbishop’s letter to Don Bosco:

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. VII, p. 425. [Editor]

September 11, 1867

My dear Don Bosco,

I hasten to inform you that I will no longer let diocesan seminarians teach or supervise boys in any boarding school. This directive, which covers all boarding schools within the archdiocese, aims at helping our seminarians in their studies.

I have also decided to give sacred orders only to candidates residing at the seminary. This directive will prove somewhat burdensome to you, but it will benefit the Church and your community as well.

I am giving you advance notice in order that you may conveniently provide for yourself and for the greater benefit of the clerics.

May the Lord grant you every blessing.

Yours devotedly,

✠ Alexander, *Archbishop*

Don Bosco was painfully surprised by this notice. He called on the archbishop several times, telling him again and again, "You want my young clerics in the seminary, my priests in the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and Don Bosco single-handed among thousands of boys. How can I ever comply with your desires?" Since the archbishop would not yield an inch, Don Bosco was forced to say, "Your Excellency, I suggest that you give Rome the reasons for your orders. I will present my side of the story and we will let Rome decide."

"No," the archbishop replied, "we must settle this matter ourselves." As things turned out, it proved a long, thorny matter.

All the Oratory's young clerics were hard put to the test. Some who had no intention of remaining with Don Bosco, and others who were otherwise enticed, left him and entered the seminary. The rest, already bound by vows or about to make them, faced an uncertain future. The crux of the problem was that the archbishop considered as diocesan seminarians not only those who had not taken or had no intention of taking vows in the Salesian Society, but anyone who had been born in the archdiocese. He based his opinion on the fact that the Salesian Congregation was not yet juridically independent of the ordinary. This explains why sacred orders were denied or postponed for Oratory candidates and why pressure was applied to

induce them to leave Don Bosco. We regret delving into these matters, but we find it necessary for the complete account of Don Bosco's life.

Let Salesian readers remember, however, that these memoirs are not for public consumption; otherwise, following Don Bosco's example, we would have preferred to remain silent.

Archbishop Riccardi had meanwhile allowed Peter Racca, an Oratory cleric, to be ordained in the fall.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 78

### *Fatherly Talks (Continued)*

THE Oratory's spiritual and material needs weighed on Don Bosco's mind even more than the difficulties we have mentioned. Among the new pupils were some whose morals had already been impaired at home, while among older students, a few—a mere handful, fortunately—had gradually lapsed from their good resolutions to become a source of scandal to their companions. These were the boys whom “Don Bosco did not know,” as he used to say. They thought that their misdeeds would always remain secret, but they reckoned without Our Lady and Don Bosco. The latter, knowing the importance of discovering any ferment of evil before the start of the school year, invited all to make a triduum to Our Lady. He himself joined the community in constant prayer for the conversion of the wayward, fervently beseeching Our Lady in these terms: *Pasce haedos Tuos quos convertis in oves, et qui in iudicio a sinistris erant collocandi, Tua intercessione collocentur a dextris, O Maria* [Feed Your yearlings which You are turning into sheep; intercede for those who at the Last Judgment should be placed on the left, so that they may be placed on the right, O Mary]. Then, on the evening of September 14, he spoke as follows:

During novenas, triduums, or spiritual retreats, the Lord always exposes some boy who does not deserve to stay in this house because he gives scandal to his companions or for other reasons. A few such boys have just been discovered. Without mentioning names, I assure you that they will be sent away. Let us now go on to something else. . . .

He then went on to say that a member of the community had lost his brother, the innocent victim of a brawl, and urged all to pray for his soul's repose.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

This "Good Night" was but a prelude to a more memorable one given on Monday, September 16. *Extreme evils demand extreme measures*—such was Don Bosco's opinion. His only aim was the salvation of souls. He therefore waged war on sin with regard for nothing and no one, ignoring some prudent people's criticism. He was moved by faith. On several occasions when, notwithstanding his efforts, some boys seemed incorrigible, he gave unforgettably fiery admonitions. The most memorable was that of September 16, 1867.

Calmly he mounted the little stand in the porticoes before the imposing assembly of priests, clerics, coadjutors, students, artisans, and domestics. Mindful of his pronouncement of two days before, they were all on tenterhooks.

He began by describing Our Divine Savior's efforts and sufferings for the salvation of souls and His terrible threats against scandal-givers; he next mentioned his own work, past and present, to carry out the mission entrusted to him by God, and the hardships, humiliations, vigils, and privations he had endured for the eternal salvation of the young. Then he went on to say that in the Oratory there were wolves, robbers, murderers, and demons who tore to pieces, killed, stole, and dragged down to hell the souls entrusted to him.

"What wrong, what harm have I done to these boys to treat me so!" he said. "Have I not loved them enough? Did I not regard them as my own sons? Did I not give them everything I had and my full trust? What schooling, sustenance, training, and preparation for life would they have received if they had not come to the Oratory?"

After detailing each benefit they had received, he went on: "These boys believe they are safe, but I know who they are and I could name them in public! Perhaps I shouldn't expose them because this would be too disgraceful, too frightful a punishment! If I do not name them, it is not because I am not fully aware of what goes on or do not know them or only vaguely suspect them or am just trying to guess. Not so! For if I wished to expose them, I could say: 'You (*and he named the boy*) are a wolf roaming among your companions, weaning them away from their superiors by ridiculing their

admonitions. You (*and he named another lad*) are a thief tainting your companions' innocence by your conversation. You (*and he cited another youngster*) are a murderer, for your secret notes and doings snatch your companions from Our Lady's side. And you (*he mentioned another lad*) are a demon corrupting your companions and, by your mockery, keeping them away from the sacraments. . . ."

Six boys were named. His voice was calm and clear. Every name evoked a muffled cry or moan from the culprit, amid the deep silence of the assembly. It seemed like the last judgment!

When Don Bosco was through, all retired in silence. Only those six remained, leaning against the pillars and the wall, weeping.

Don Bosco stayed on in the middle of the portico. Priests and clerics lingered in a group at some distance. Standing with them, we witnessed a touching scene. The six lads approached Don Bosco; some kissed his hand, others hung on to his cassock. No one spoke. With tears running down his own face, he whispered a comforting word to each and then retired to his room. The next day some left for home and others transferred to the artisans' section, two of whom, after a probation period, were allowed to resume their studies. Those who stayed on at the Oratory so improved their conduct as to rank with the best. Eventually they became upright men, esteemed and honored by all. Don Bosco had spoken in God's interest and defense, and his words had been singularly effective.

While he thus safeguarded his young ones' spiritual welfare, he also saw to their material needs by writing to appropriate government agencies and benefactors for clothing or other necessities.

On September 17 he set out for Casalmaggiore in the province of Cremona. From there he went on to Parma where, we believe, he called on the bishop to obtain a letter of commendation of the Salesian Society and also visited several leading families. On September 20 he was back at the Oratory. That day he called on Father Matthew Picco to wish him a happy name day. He found him vainly attempting, with hammer and pliers, to pull out a nail firmly planted in the wall. "Let me try," Don Bosco suggested. So saying, with two fingers he pulled the nail out with ease. On September 23, a group of Salesians gathered at Trofarello for their spiritual retreat

preached by Don Bosco and Father Rua. On the 27th, the cleric James Costamagna took triennial vows. Four other clerics had taken the same vows at different times, among them Peter Guidazio and Dominic Tomatis.<sup>2</sup>

On the evening of September 28, Don Bosco returned to the Oration. Of his "Good Nights" during the novena of Our Lady of the Rosary, we have a summary of only the one he gave on the 29th:

A certain lad always fell into the same sins. For penance, his confessor told him to say three Hail Marys daily until his next confession. As the boy went back to confession five more times, always for the same sins, his confessor kept repeating the penance. Finally, the lad retorted, "Father, it's no use. I'll never overcome this sin."

"Don't give up, son," the confessor replied. "Keep saying those three Hail Marys. Our Lady and the devil are now at war and She will certainly win."

Eventually that lad had to go on a trip with his parents, and he continued to say three Hail Marys to Our Lady every day. He said them with all his heart and never relapsed into those sins. Back from his journey, he went to confession to the same priest and told him of his success. The priest asked on what occasion he had received such favors from Our Lady. "I began to reflect on the words, "Pray for us sinners," the boy replied, "and from that moment I stopped relapsing into sin."

As a nosegay for this novena I urge you to recite daily before the Blessed Sacrament and Our Lady's altar three Hail Marys in order that Our Lady may obtain from Her Son for you and your parents the grace to be safeguarded from all misfortunes, whether spiritual—such as sin—or physical—like the cholera—and that God may bless their endeavors. Pray also for your benefactors and for the Church.<sup>3</sup>

On October 6, Don Bosco went to Becchi for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary and was most cordially and cheerfully welcomed by the people of Castelnuovo, who were extremely grateful for Father Cagliero's assistance during the cholera.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. We are omitting a letter from Don Bosco to the rector of the Collegio Nazareno in Rome to comfort him on the occasion of its temporary closing because of the cholera, and a letter of the Minister of the Interior recommending a boy to Don Bosco. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting at this point two short letters of Don Bosco to a countess and to a priest. [Editor]

As usual, he entertained himself familiarly with all his fellow townsmen, especially the boys. One boy, who first met him there and observed him attentively, later wrote to us of his impressions as follows: "Don Bosco put into practice the saying *Age quod agis*. Notwithstanding the wide range of his occupations, his mind never left his main goal: boys! Whenever he met a youngster, rich or poor, he stopped to chat and give him a word of advice as courteously as he would speak with some important person. He would gently pat his cheek, give him Our Lady's medal, and often invite him to the Oratory."

The most notable event of that feast was the enthusiastic and deep gratitude shown to Don Bosco by his old pastor, Father Anthony Cinzano, for a most signal grace received from Mary, Help of Christians. Among the many infirmities of his old age, a steadily worsening deafness was preventing him from assisting the sick and hearing confessions. Within eighteen months he became stone-deaf and quite despondent at being unable to fulfill his priestly duties. At this point, Father Ascanio Savio, his curate, informed Don Bosco of the situation. He in turn sent word to Father Cinzano to make a novena to Mary, Help of Christians and to promise a donation after his cure. Father Cinzano agreed.

On the morning of October 2, as he left the rectory for Mass, he felt especially sad, for he had brought his housekeeper to tears because he believed—quite wrongly—that she had deliberately talked softly to spite him. On entering the sacristy he said to himself, *Today I will recommend myself to my good Mother Mary during Mass; and if I, too, like so many others, am cured of this infirmity, I will make a donation for Her church.*

With this determination, he vested and went to the altar for Mass. His young altar boy, Caesar Cagliari—eventually a Salesian priest and procurator general of the Salesian Society—knowing that Father Cinzano was stone-deaf, shouted the responses as usual, but that morning the loud responses irritated the pastor. "What's wrong with you?" he whispered to the boy. "You don't have to shout! You are deafening me!" As he went on with the prayers and the server responded more softly but still quite audibly, Father Cinzano realized that he had been cured. "I can hear, I can hear,"

he excitedly told the boy. "Speak softer." No one can imagine the good priest's emotion during the celebration of that memorable Mass. Tears of gratitude ran down his cheeks as he fervently thanked his heavenly benefactress. Back in the sacristy, his first words were, "I am cured! Mary, Help of Christians has answered my prayers."

In a flood of joy he returned to the rectory to tell Father Savio of his instant cure and of his firm resolve to go to Turin to thank Mary, Help of Christians in Her new church. He did so with great devotion as soon as he could, and on that day, despite his advanced age, he gave vent to his piety after Mass by ascending to the top of the church dome in order to kiss the feet of Our Lady's statue. From that height, looking at the hill of Superga, he turned his thoughts to his beloved parish of Castelnuovo where he had begun his pastoral ministry, helping, advising, and encouraging the little shepherd from Becchi, then a Latin student at Chieri.<sup>4</sup> The remembrance deeply moved him. His cure was perfect and lasting. Even here on earth, he was being rewarded for all he had done for Don Bosco. Father Caesar Cagliero and Father Ascanio Savio testified to this cure, which Father Anthony Cinzano himself was fond of talking about till the end of his life.

<sup>4</sup> See Vol. I, pp. 246ff. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 79

### *Love for the Church (Continued)*

THE feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, which recalls Our Heavenly Mother's splendid victories over the foes of Christianity, was an assurance that She would again come to the aid of the Church and of the Vicar of Jesus Christ if the faithful would have recourse to Her with faith.

The thorns Don Bosco had predicted<sup>1</sup> were beginning to show. Preparations for an invasion of the Papal States were openly and speedily pressed according to a three-stage plan: an insurrection in Rome, helped from the outside by Garibaldi's hordes; an intervention of Italian troops to restore order; a plebiscite to proclaim the union of Rome with the kingdom of Italy.<sup>2</sup>

At the first signs of revolutionary stirrings right after the close of St. Peter's centennial celebrations, Don Bosco was deeply pained. In his love for the Pope and the Eternal City he most intensely longed to help avert the imminent dangers threatening them.

One day [in early August] during the first spiritual retreat at Trofarello, a piece of mail arrived with insufficient postage. The one in charge was about to refuse it rather than pay the difference, but he then accepted it and brought it to Don Bosco. The envelope contained a minute description, on thickly coated paper, of the revolutionaries' plans against Rome. The information was anonymous, but the sender instructed Don Bosco to avail himself of it freely and even send it to the Pope if he saw fit. Horrified by the grave dangers threatening so many of his friends, Don Bosco had the message copied by a trusted person. He then destroyed the original and sent the duplicate to a friend of his in Rome after duly alerting him as to its arrival. The latter made a second copy, and

<sup>1</sup> See p.374. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

after destroying the one he had received, he had that copy delivered to Cardinal Antonelli and to the Pope. Other anonymous letters with minute and exact information about plans against Rome kept reaching Don Bosco, who cautiously forwarded them the same way.

When Archbishop Berardi, by reason of his office, expressed the wish that those dispatches should be sent directly to him, Don Bosco obliged. On October 1, 1867, the prelate wrote to Turin in these terms, "In Rome we are tranquil, even though we are at war. . . . We feel that no harm could possibly come to Rome. 'The just man lives by faith.' Let us hope that this is the appropriate text. The anonymous letters (copies, that is) are excellent and most helpful. I hope they will continue to come."

Besides the above-mentioned anonymous writer, a certain high-placed government official had also been instructed to fulfill this duty. Father Michael Rua testified in writing: "In Don Bosco's name I have myself informed the Holy Father several times, through his high functionaries, of plots being hatched inside and outside [the Vatican]. Though I am not absolutely certain of Don Bosco's sources of information, I think I can say that a well-informed government official now and then held confidential revealing talks with Don Bosco expressly in order that steps might be taken to avert the frightful calamities threatening Rome. Don Bosco solicitously did his part either personally or through me and others."<sup>3</sup>

"Pius IX," Father Rua stated [on another occasion], "was full of admiration for Don Bosco, who had been his salvation in those days."

<sup>3</sup> We are omitting details about a short-lived insurrection in Rome. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 80

### *Heroic Humility*

**A**BOUT this time Don Bosco received news of two extraordinary cures obtained through the intercession of Dominic Savio, his own saintly protector of the Oratory and the model of its pupils. Among the Oratory boys were some genuinely fine lads whom he had accepted without tuition on the warm recommendation of their companions who had written to him about them while home on vacation. Their letters showed their full confidence in their good father—a trust that eventually spread to their companions as well! Boys were captivated by his friendliness, his selfless love for them, and his humility which made him one with them.

Don Bosco's humility was very unique: simple, dignified, and unfettered in its manifestation because his only goal was the good of his boys. On this score, Father Ascanio Savio, professor of moral theology and a former Oratory pupil, testified as follows:

If, as a young student, I occasionally heard Don Bosco speak about himself, his only purpose was to urge his boys not to waste time and to be industrious in doing good. At all times he took no credit for himself and attributed everything to Divine Providence. I recall that he once told me, "If the Lord had not set me on this path (namely, caring for youngsters), I fear that I might have gone astray." It was variation of St. Philip Neri's admission, "If the Lord were not holding His hand over my head, I could lose my faith!"

Canon [Hyacinth] Ballesio, the pastor at Moncalieri, likewise testified:

His profound humility was obvious in word and action, in his whole being, to the extent that it gave him that air of *bonhomie* that astonished people who met the world-famous Don Bosco for the first time, so modest and simple was his appearance.

He sincerely acknowledged that whatever good there was in him came from God; consequently he held himself bound to make the best use of it for God's glory and the good of his fellow men. In all his undertakings, especially most important ones, after striving to know God's will, he would pray and have us pray. If he did not succeed, he took the blame and resigned himself to God's will and to whatever He permitted. If he succeeded, he attributed it to God and to the Blessed Virgin and to the saints whom he had invoked. He gave thanks to God and urged us to do the same. His unalterable calm, courage, and dauntless perseverance arose from this selflessness and humility. His habit of speaking in the third person about things he was trying to do or was doing for the Oratory and his other houses seemed at first hardly compatible with Christian humility. However, to those who knew him well, it was obvious that he was talking as a father, a friend who tells of his ups-and-downs for the edification, instruction, and comfort of his dear ones so deeply interested in his joys and sorrows. This he did also to satisfy their filial, loving, legitimate curiosity, and to show them his appreciation for their prayers and the interest they took in their father's undertakings.

That his humility was heroic is testified to by all who lived with him. Father Rua declared: "He received his pupils' suggestions and observations very humbly. I remember that once after Mass I allowed myself to point out to him some little mistake I thought I had observed. He thanked me and from then on always kept the book of rubrics at hand, referring to it now and again."

Father Berto stated: "He invited and gratefully accepted observations and corrections from even the least of his dependents. He told me several times: 'I wish you would note whatever I do wrong and frankly bring it to my attention.' Several times I did so on trivial, utterly innocuous matters. He not only took them in good part but thanked me for having done him a favor."

Sometimes, hearing praises of himself, he would interrupt the speaker and say, "Let us not be unfair to God and to Our Lady. If we succeeded and if our undertakings are flourishing, we owe it entirely to God and to our good Mother. We would be guilty of ingratitude if we attributed to ourselves the success of any enterprise. We would also make ourselves undeserving of God's help."

At other times he would say—as we often heard him ourselves—"Had the Lord found an instrument less fit than myself, ready to

put full trust in His Divine Providence, He would have chosen him in my stead and would have been served much better than by me. If the Lord had not helped me, I should now be nothing but an obscure priest in some mountain hamlet.”

In his last years he often repeated tearfully, “How many wonders has the Lord wrought in our midst! But how many more He might have done had Don Bosco had more faith!”

Though he had become famous, he always looked upon himself as a useless servant.

“But who is Don Bosco to be so much acclaimed?” he would occasionally exclaim. Convinced of being only a poor sinner, he would add with a sigh, “God forbid that people, believing me to be what I am not, should not pray for me after my death and leave me to suffer in purgatory!”

Father Rua further testified:

If some people attributed to him the marvelous effects of his blessings or prayers, he reproved them and told them that credit was to be given only to Mary or to the saint they had invoked. I myself heard him praying that God would not embarrass him by having him wrongly credited with favors received. He deliberately told of instances when his blessing had produced results totally contrary to what was desired.

He deeply esteemed others and praised them very generously, looking upon himself as a mere beginner in the spiritual life when compared with them. His humility was also evident in the praise he so warmly bestowed on various religious orders. Conversing with us, he would extol the achievements and merits of the Society of Jesus, the services rendered to innumerable young people by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the simplicity and zeal of the Capuchins, and so on. Whenever the occasion presented itself, he extolled the apostolic achievements of each order to the utmost, recalling the many saints they had given to the Church.

Father Bonetti wrote:

Very many times, when faced with unfounded or ill-prompted criticism of what he had said or written or done, he would accept it promptly and humbly, unless doctrinal orthodoxy or harm to a third party were at stake. If truth and charity urged a rebuttal, he offered it so graciously that nearly always ill-will was dispelled and doubtful points clarified. On several occa-

sions, insulted orally and in writing by people who had wrongly taken offense at him or who were being paid to slander him, he bore the affront with deep humility. He would later reply calmly and meekly or he would keep silent altogether, entrusting his cause to God. If he was vilified and insulted because of his work for God's greater glory and the good of souls, he would not desist even at the cost of grosser insults because he was never overconcerned about his personal honor.

He was always unperturbed. Father Turchi said of him, "He was always humble and simple, ever true to himself—just as I had known him in 1851."

Likewise, Father [John Baptist] Piano declared, "I can attest that he constantly practiced every virtue. I never noted anything in him that could in the least tarnish the image of holiness I had formed of him." He also added, "One day I was at the Capuchin monastery for a feast at which Bishop [Edward] Rosaz of Susa was present. Speaking of Don Bosco and his work, the bishop said, 'We must admit that Don Bosco is exceptionally humble because God chose him to be His instrument for works of grandeur.'"

Father Francis Dalmazzo reports: "Bishop [Eugene] Galletti of Alba, while preaching at the Cottolengo Institute and at a spiritual retreat for priests, said on both occasions to his listeners, 'Go to Don Bosco's room and there you will perceive the perfume of sanctity.'"

We now resume our narrative. The school year 1867-68 was about to begin. In assigning his young clerics to their duties, Don Bosco always insisted that mutual charity should always reign among them. He permitted calm discussion but disliked controversies about literary, philosophical, or theological matters because he had observed that ordinarily charity suffered in the heat of the argument.

He warmly suggested that superiors, teachers, and confessors pray daily for their pupils and penitents. He also stressed the importance of obtaining God's help for the success of their mission. If any disorder arose, or if certain unruly boys resisted discipline, he usually asked the complainant, "Do you pray for your boys?"

As the school year opened, the Oratory and the schools at Mirabello and Lanzo overflowed with boys.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> We are omitting several letters of Don Bosco written in October and November. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 81

### *Special Charisms (Continued)*

**M**EANWHILE Don Bosco made sure that letters of encouragement were sent to friends and benefactors in Rome who feared its inevitable fall to Italy.<sup>1</sup> According to Father Rua's chronicle, one evening in early October [1867] Don Bosco said something quite remarkable about Rome's fate. When the conversation turned to the war situation and someone expressed fear for the Eternal City, he light-heartedly but confidently asserted, "If I had time, I would go to Rome and loudly tell everyone to remain calm because nothing untoward will happen. I would urge all to trust exclusively in the Blessed Virgin's protection and have no fear of an invasion."

Events proved Don Bosco's forecast correct.<sup>2</sup> His assertion reminds us of what he had said at the close of 1866, "The Italians will not enter."<sup>3</sup> But this assurance referred only to the attempted invasion of 1867. Far different was his belief as regards future attempts, as we have already seen<sup>4</sup> and shall better see in the course of our narration.

<sup>1</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting the details of an attempted invasion of Rome. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> See p. 249. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> See p. 239. We are omitting details of incidents following the unsuccessful attempted invasion. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 82

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

**I**N the last few months of 1867 Don Bosco did some traveling. Toward the end of October he made a brief stop in Milan. On his way back to Turin he passed through Casale, where he spent a few hours with Count and Countess Callori. On November 13, he left for Mirabello to join the junior seminarians in celebrating their patron's feast. He was back in Turin on the 16th, only to leave again on the 18th for Lanzo, where he was enthusiastically received by the whole school.<sup>1</sup>

Always on the lookout for religious and priestly vocations among his pupils, he would quite often address mysterious words to those he thought called by God. His words required an explanation; if he did not volunteer it himself, he would let the boys try to figure it out, or would send them to a superior. A quite common phrase of his was, "Let me chop your head off!" Obviously it had a hidden message, which the more mature boys grasped as, "Give me your will. Follow my advice. Stay with me in the Salesian Society to dedicate yourself to your own soul's salvation and that of others." One lad had written to him as follows:

Beloved Father,

The next to the last time you came to Lanzo you told me among other things to write you a letter. I do so now to satisfy my own desire and to keep my promise.

During your last visit, if you remember, I asked you several times to chop my head off. I know what that means and again I ask you to do it. Yes, I really want to place myself under your guidance.

Thanks for having accepted me into this school and for the good you have done, are continually doing, and will continue to do for me.

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

Good-bye, beloved Father. I hope to see you again this year and to talk to you at leisure.

Your loving son in Jesus Christ,  
S.E.

This youth and others who had written to Don Bosco awaited his reply. On receiving it, they felt deeply consoled, and in due time that reply produced its desired results.

On November 21, Don Bosco was at the Oratory for the solemn blessing of Our Lady's statue on the top of the dome by Archbishop Riccardi of Turin. Solemn was the moment of the statue's unveiling. It shone brightly in the sunlight while the brass band accompanied a majestic hymn in Mary's honor, sung by hundreds of voices.

Now [in 1912] forty-five years later, the statue still seems to say to its beholders who come from near and far: *Ego in altissimis habito . . . ut ditem diligentes Me et thesauros eorum repleam* [I dwell in the highest places . . . that I may enrich those who love Me and may fill their treasures—cf. Sir. 24, 7; Prov. 8, 21].

This feast solemnly fulfilled Don Bosco's old dream.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See Vol. II, pp. 190f, 232ff, 268. We are omitting at this point inconsequential details. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 83

### *The New Archbishop of Turin (Continued)*

SEVERAL seminarians who were unable to pay seminary tuition returned to the Oratory for the summer. Therefore, in order to safeguard their status, Don Bosco wrote as follows to Canon Vogliotti, their rector, on December 7, 1867: "I enclose a list of clerics who are asking for residence at the Oratory, though they will attend seminary lectures. If you have anything in general or particular to say on this score, I would appreciate your speaking to Father John Cagliero, the bearer of this letter. . . ."

Archbishop Riccardi, while granting the clerics' request to attend seminary lectures, restated that he would never admit to ordination any of his seminarians residing at the Oratory unless they complied with his directive [one year's seminary residence prior to ordination]. This controversy was fairly well known, and both the archbishop and Don Bosco had several level-headed persons on their sides.

Some pastors—particularly those of Caramagna and None—sided with their ordinary because they objected to having young men of their parishes joining the Salesian Society. They even wanted those who had already donned the clerical habit to switch from the Oratory to the seminary. Father Bernard Appendini, the exemplary pastor of Caramagna, regarded Don Bosco as a fanatic who passed his fanaticism on to others. He was wont to say, "Those who remain with Don Bosco are either insane or will soon be so." He was hinting at Father [Bartholomew] Fusero, who had indeed lost his mind but not because of religious fanaticism. He did not pause to think that Father John Bonetti<sup>1</sup> and Father James Costa-

<sup>1</sup> Bonetti (1838-1891) entered the Oratory as a student in 1855. In 1859, along with other young men, he banded with Don Bosco to form the Salesian Society. At their first meeting he was elected to its [Superior] Chapter. (See Vol. VI, pp. 181f) In 1864 he was ordained a priest. A prolific writer, he authored numerous hagiographical, ascetical, polemical, and

magna,<sup>2</sup> his own parishioners, had remained with Don Bosco and were far from insane, as they splendidly proved then and later. However, he began to think better of Don Bosco when Bishop Rota of Guastalla went to Turin in exile.<sup>3</sup> Learning of the Oratory's loving welcome for the bishop, in contrast to other religious houses whose superiors feared government harassment, he immediately exclaimed. "Here is a truly good-hearted man who believes in doing good for its own sake. He is selfless and fearless and does his duty openly and confidently. Don Bosco is not what they have led me to believe. . . ." From then on, for a long time, he began observing Don Bosco's work objectively. Yet, not realizing Don Bosco's need for clerics who were willing to help him, he sided with the archbishop.

Another priest, adamantly prejudiced against Don Bosco, was Father Abrate, the zealous and scholarly pastor of None. First, he tried unsuccessfully to induce Paul Albera,<sup>4</sup> his parishioner, to enter the diocesan seminary; then, when Albera, a teacher at the Mirabello junior seminary, was ready for ordination, he once more attempted to entice him from Don Bosco. His luck was no better. His bias against Don Bosco had been noticed by Father Cagliero some time earlier on the occasion of his visit to None with the Oratory choirboys and band for a religious celebration. From his first meeting with Father Abrate, Father Cagliero realized that the pastor's bias stemmed not so much from the controversy about seminary residence as from some very wrong ideas about Don Bosco's Society and goals. In fact, after Vespers on that day, Father Abrate discussed the Salesian Society with Father Cagliero

Salesian publications, chief among them the *History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory*—one of the sources of these Biographical Memoirs. (See p. x) In 1886 he was elected Spiritual Director of the whole Salesian Congregation. He died in that post at the age of fifty-three, fulfilling Don Bosco's prophecy that Father Bonetti would be the first member of the Superior Chapter to follow him to the grave. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> Costamagna entered the Oratory in 1858 at the age of twelve. He became a Salesian in 1867 and was ordained in 1868. He led the third group of Salesian missionaries to Argentina in 1877, opened the first Salesian house in Talca, Chile, in 1887, and was consecrated bishop and appointed first Vicar Apostolic of Mendez and Gualaguiza, Ecuador in 1895. He died at Bernal (Argentina) on September 9, 1921. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 172ff. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> Paul Albera (1845-1921) entered the Oratory in the fall of 1858, donned the clerical habit in 1861, and made his religious vows in 1862. Ordained a priest in 1868, he filled important positions. Later, in 1910, he became Don Bosco's second successor and remained in office until his death in 1921. [Editor]

for three hours. Father Cagliero, as usual, soundly refuted his objections. After a lively exchange, Father Abrate concluded, "After all, the seminary is for seminarians and that's where they belong. Why does Don Bosco keep them at the Oratory? I want Albera for myself. He is mine!" Father Cagliero pointed out to him that Albera had to stay at the Oratory at least to teach the ten boys whom Father Abrate himself had sent there, adding that, for the few clerics who stayed on at the Oratory, very many were being sent to all the Piedmontese dioceses. Father Abrate was finally reduced to silence by arguments. Sincere as he was, he told Father Cagliero while seeing him off at the railroad station, "What you said makes sense. I'll think about it."

However, Father Abrate still hoped to win Father Albera over to himself. He knew Albera's spiritual and intellectual worth and perhaps sought him as a curate. Unable to resign himself to losing him, he once called on the vicar general, forcefully complaining that Don Bosco was enticing his parishioners, particularly Paul Albera, to stay at the Oratory. The vicar general calmly listened and finally asked, "Tell me, who fed and housed Albera while he went to school?"

"Don Bosco," the pastor replied.

"Well, then," the vicar went on with proverbial simplicity, "if Don Bosco fed the goat, it is only fair that he should enjoy its milk."

Disconcerted by this unexpected reply, the pastor called on Don Bosco to persuade him of the necessity and duty to release Albera. Don Bosco let him have his say but then made him understand that the vicar general himself had already pinpointed the crux of the question.

"But they are my parishioners!" Father Abrate remonstrated.

"Yours? If I had not taken them in at the Oratory, would they ever have become teachers? Would they be educating so many boys, including many of your own parishioners?"

"Well," the pastor replied, "I suppose you are right! Both you and Father Cagliero have made this clear to me. I will persuade my colleagues to help you rather than oppose you."

From then on he left Father Albera free to remain a Salesian. He then called on Father Appendini and told him of his meeting with

the vicar general. "We are beaten," he exclaimed. "Don Bosco is right!" From then on, both pastors became Don Bosco's enthusiastic supporters. Surprised by this change, someone mentioned it to Don Bosco. "Let us thank the Lord," he commented. "Their former opposition hurt us a great deal!"

The archbishop himself had left no stone unturned to entice Albera, but the latter was firmly determined not to leave Don Bosco. In view of this, the archbishop gave him to understand that he would not be admitted to ordination. Seeking to clear up this difficulty, Don Bosco personally called on the archbishop. Albera had taken triennial vows [in the Salesian Society], but the archbishop still maintained that he was subject to the ordinary's jurisdiction. After a long colloquy, Don Bosco left with the hope that the difficulties would soon be smoothed over. Hence he entrusted to Father Cagliero the task of bringing negotiations to a successful conclusion. Following is the report on the outcome of this mission which Bishop Cagliero submitted to the diocesan process for Don Bosco's cause of beatification and canonization:

Although Archbishop Riccardi did not favor our Congregation, we nevertheless always loved him. A certain deference he showed to me in particular emboldened me to speak frankly with him when, on Don Bosco's behalf, I called on him in December 1867 to come to an agreement about Paul Albera's ordination. I immediately realized that the archbishop was opposed to it. He wanted the clerics to live at the seminary, not at the Oratory, and he complained that Don Bosco wanted to break free from obedience to his superior.

"Your Excellency," I protested, "Don Bosco has always taught us to love and obey our superiors."

"If that is so, why doesn't he send his clerics to the seminary?"

"For many reasons, Your Excellency. Most of them are poor and cannot pay their way. Besides, they are members of the Salesian Congregation and wish to remain with him."

"Congregation? I know nothing of that. I only know that one must obey."

"Your Excellency, the Holy See has already praised and commended the rules of our Society. Don Bosco is only acting in conformity with the Holy See's decrees."

"But I know nothing of all this."

“And yet a copy of this decree has been in your chancery since 1864.”

“So what am I to do?”

“Just observe if Don Bosco is doing good or evil. If he is doing good, praise what he is doing; if he is doing evil, then you have every right to prevent it.”

“But I want my clerics in the seminary.”

“Then you may as well say that you want the Oratory shut down. Without these clerics to teach and supervise, how could Don Bosco look after his six hundred or more boarders and thousands of other boys in his festive oratories?”

“Let him use clerics of other dioceses.”

“Your Excellency, their bishops could plead the same reasons as yours for withdrawing them. Then what would happen to Don Bosco’s work?”

“But what am I to do?” the archbishop repeated concernedly.

“Support Don Bosco’s work and you will have the approval of good people and the everlasting gratitude of Don Bosco’s sons.”

Nevertheless, Father Albera was not ordained for another year. Midway in this dialogue the archbishop, playfully holding Father Cagliero by a lock of his hair, had said to him, “So you have come to preach to me!”

“By no means, Your Excellency!” Father Cagliero replied. “I wouldn’t dare preach to my superior, but when Don Bosco is attacked or our Society is ignored, I cannot contain myself as I should.”

The colloquy lasted some forty-five minutes.

On hearing the result of the interview, Don Bosco limited himself to observing that the archbishop was opposing him because of his great love for his own diocese. It was not the prelate’s nature to act rashly; rather, he easily relented because he disliked harsh measures, even when recommended as necessary for the good of the diocese. This accounted for his continual hesitations and his concessions interspersed with unfriendliness for the Oratory clerics.

## CHAPTER 84

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

ON Saturday, December 7 [1867], Don Bosco left Turin for Acqui to visit his ailing friend, Bishop Modesto Contratto, who wished to see him, but unfortunately he got there only on time for the funeral. The seventy-year-old bishop had passed away the day before. Father Francesia gave this news to Chevalier Oreglia, informing him also that Don Bosco would go to Mornese before returning to Turin.<sup>1</sup>

For over twenty years, this rural village—like many others—had come upon hard times because of an uncontrollable vine disease which regularly wiped out its grape harvest. When the rumor spread that in neighboring villages the scourge had vanished after the people had pledged part of their crops to the construction of the Church of Mary, Help of Christians, the Mornese villagers, hoping for similar results and willing to help a good cause, followed suit and pledged a tenth of their vintage. Our Lady's protection was soon manifest to all; in the fall, they gathered the best vintage in years. Joyfully they made ready to honor their pledges, but they wanted to hand them over to Don Bosco himself. Coincidentally, Father Pestarino, their pastor, had a good reason for inviting Don Bosco to Mornese—the blessing of the nearly completed three-story school building and adjacent chapel.

Don Bosco willingly accepted the invitation, but before leaving Acqui he wrote several letters, including one to Chevalier Oreglia, stating among other things: “Tell those who fear for [the safety of] Rome not to worry. Tell everybody clearly that there is no reason at all for fear. Prayer is all that is needed.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting details of skirmishes and plans related to an invasion of Rome. [Editor]

Don Bosco arrived at Mornese on Monday, December 9. Amid ringing church bells, he was warmly received by Father Pestarino, by municipal councillors, and by the whole population, who still remembered his visit of 1864.<sup>3</sup> His three-day stay brought joy and exultation. On his part, he seemed deeply moved at the promptness, generosity, and faith of the villagers in presenting their offerings.

The day after his arrival, a great assembly gathered in the new school for a public declaration of the villagers' gratitude to Mary, Help of Christians for having safeguarded their young men from war, their crops from inclement weather and disease, and themselves from cholera. Afterward, a group of children presented Don Bosco with the tithes pledged by the populace.<sup>4</sup> In turn, he thanked them in Our Lady's name, praised their generosity, and promised to pray for them. The following day Father Pestarino saw to the auctioning of all donations which had been made in kind.

During his stay Don Bosco kept busy saying Mass, preaching, hearing confessions, visiting the sick, giving a conference to the Daughters of Mary Immaculate,<sup>5</sup> counseling, and handing out holy pictures of St. Francis de Sales with the inscription: "To our generous donors, from Father John Bosco." He also called on the pastor at Lerma, had long talks with Father Pestarino in the evening about various projects, and wrote several letters.<sup>6</sup> In addition he blessed with some solemnity the new school building and adjacent chapel dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows. He then returned to Turin. But the enthusiasm he aroused in Mornese irked at least one person who took it upon himself to spread rumors that Don Bosco had claimed to have saved the population from hail and cholera in order to raise funds. Such allegations were also made to civil provincial authorities who in turn directed the mayor of Mornese to make an inquiry. Naturally, the inquiry proved the accusations totally false.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 450-56. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> This sentence is a condensation. [Editor]

<sup>5</sup> See Vol. VII, pp. 174f. [Editor]

<sup>6</sup> We are omitting one such letter to a former Oratory pupil. [Editor]

<sup>7</sup> This paragraph is a condensation. [Editor]

## CHAPTER 85

### *Noteworthy Details (Continued)*

A few days after returning from Mornese, Don Bosco went on another tour, stopping, among other places, at Modena, as we gather from a benefactress' letter,<sup>1</sup> dated December 19, 1867.

He had been at Modena several times before. On one such occasion, he had called on Archbishop Emil Cugini to discuss matters concerning the Salesian Society. In the course of their conversation the archbishop lamented the scarcity of vocations in his diocese and of the means to promote them.

"Your Excellency," Don Bosco remarked, "the means are easy to come by."

"Are they? I've racked my brains to find them!"

"Free your pastors from the obligation of offering Mass for their parishioners' intentions on suppressed feast days. Rather, have them say those Masses for your intention, transferring the stipends to the vocations' fund. I've thought about this a long time, but I never had an occasion to express it."

"That's impossible."

"Why?"

"Because it is a very grave obligation of conscience."

"There is a remedy for this too. He who made the law can also abrogate it. Write to Rome, explain your needs, and ask for an indulgent to change the obligation. Rome will have to answer. What you ask is entirely within its jurisdiction."

"And if Rome says 'No'?"

"There is no harm in trying!"

The archbishop was surprised at this novel proposal. After some hesitation he wrote to the Holy See and received a favorable reply.

<sup>1</sup> Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

Before long, other bishops followed suit, and soon Don Bosco's suggestion became a general practice.<sup>2</sup>

On Christmas night Don Bosco sang the Midnight Mass and then read the other two. A few days before, on December 21 and 22, he had been deeply gratified by the ordination of Father Peter Racca and his First Mass celebrated at the Oratory amid the exultation of all the boys, particularly his pupils. After dinner—as was customary on similar occasions—an assembly, attended by Don Bosco and other superiors, was held in honor of the newly ordained priest with poetry and song.

Afterward, Father Racca left for Volvera, his native place, where he was expected to offer the Christmas Masses. He was very grateful to the Blessed Virgin for the many favors he had received, and particularly for the gift of memory he had been given when he began his studies, as we have already narrated.<sup>3</sup> But he was also grateful for another very recent favor. About the end of November he had been told to prepare for ordination and to take the required test. Exhausted and overburdened with work, he kept saying, "I can't do it! I have no time." However, since his superiors kept insisting, he had no alternative but to get down to his books. He soon realized, though, that he could hardly remember a thing he was reading. Since the novena to the Immaculate Conception was then in progress, he turned to the Blessed Virgin for help in his critical need. Help came, but not immediately. Two days before the exam he was still not ready. More fervently than ever he prayed to Our Lady and again made an attempt to study. Instantly, he became aware that he could literally remember everything he was reading. At the exams, in fact, he astonished his examiners. Overjoyed and unable to keep this favor secret, he first told his pupils without disclosing the identity of the person who had received it, but later, in the playground, he revealed all the facts in order to stir them to be devoted to Mary, Help of Christians, and to trust in Her power.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> We are omitting at this point a letter of Don Bosco to Chevalier Oreglia about some business matters and other unimportant correspondence to and from Don Bosco. [Editor]

<sup>3</sup> See Vol. VI, pp. 450f. [Editor]

<sup>4</sup> We are omitting at this point some unimportant correspondence. [Editor]

At the year's close Don Bosco sent the subscribers of *Letture Cattoliche* his almanac, *Il Galantuomo*. On its last pages, as a parting gift, he offered his readers some gems from Holy Scripture. We report them here as a fitting conclusion to this volume:

*To Parents:* "Have you children? Educate them, make them bow the neck from childhood." [Sir. 7, 25]

*To Children:* "Respect your father in deed as well as word, so that blessing may come on you from him; since a father's blessing makes the houses of his children firm, while a mother's curse tears up their foundations. [Sir. 3, 9-11]

*To Youths:* "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before evil days come." [Eccles. 12, 1] "If you have gathered nothing in your youth, how can you find anything in your old age?" [Sir. 25, 3]

*To the Poor:* "Better a little with the fear of the Lord, than a great fortune with anxiety." [Prov. 15, 16] "Better a poor man living an honest life, than a rich man crooked in his ways." [Prov. 19, 1]

*To All:* "Fear God and keep His commandments since this is the whole duty of man. For God will call all hidden deeds, good or bad, to judgment." [Eccles. 12, 13-14]

## *APPENDICES*



## APPENDICES

### CHURCH OF MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS: LAYING OF THE CORNERSTONE

(See Chapter 8, footnote 7)

The ceremony will take place on April 27 at 1:00 P.M. at a marked site between the existing Church of St. Francis de Sales and Via Cottolengo. Access to it is from Via Cottolengo.

The sacred function will be followed by a short musical program and a tour of the premises. The ceremony will close with the singing of the *Te Deum* and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

#### *Appendix 2*

### NOSEGAYS FOR MAY 1866

(See Chapter 29, footnote 3)

1. When passing before the Blessed Sacrament, genuflect devoutly and reverently, saying a heartfelt "Jesus, I adore and love You!"

*O Mary, I consecrate my heart to You.*

2. Offer a fervent prayer to Our Lady that none of us may fall into mortal sin during Her month.

*Mary, Refuge of Sinners, pray for us.*

3. Ask a companion or some other person to suggest something pleasing to Mary, and then do it.

*Virgin Mary, help me to grow ever more virtuous.*

4. Promise everlasting devotion to Our Lady; wear Her medal and kiss it devoutly every night before going to bed.

*Virgin Mary, receive me under Your mantle and shield me from all evil.*

5. Say your daily prayers with the greatest diligence and attention.

*Virgin Mary, see that I may love You ever more.*

6. For Our Lady's sake, bear patiently your companions' faults, particularly if they cannot easily be corrected.

*Virgin Mary, kindle in my heart the fire of charity.*

7. Offer to Mary all you have done so far for Her, and ask Her pardon for any carelessness in your devotions.

*Virgin Mary, let me always be devoted to You.*

8. Make good use of time. Never be idle even for a moment. Employ all your time for God's glory.

*Virgin Mary, help me to win heaven.*

9. Honor Our Lady by an act of corporal or spiritual self-denial.

*Virgin Mary, give me a pure heart.*

10. Charitably correct a companion whose speech or behavior needs to be improved.

*Virgin Mary, help me to guard my tongue.*

11. On rising in the morning, let your first thought be for Mary, resolving to do something in Her honor during the day.

*How happy I would be if I were as devoted to Mary as I should be.*

12. Offer a short prayer to Our Lady for the grace to love and practice holy modesty.

*Virgin Mary, make me love and imitate Your virtues.*

13. Make a careful examination of conscience and prepare to make your confession as if it were your last.

*O Mary, always safeguard me from sin.*

14. Obey your superiors perfectly, especially your confessor in spiritual matters and your teachers in school work.

*Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for me.*

15. Check your tongue. Don't say anything contrary to charity, modesty, and good manners.

*O Virgin Mary, make my body pure and my soul holy.*

16. Observe strict silence in the dormitory at all times, and keep your voice subdued on the way to it after night prayers.

*Virgin Mary, help me to use my tongue for God's glory.*

17. Always bow your head at the *Gloria Patri* in reverence to the Most Holy Trinity.

*Virgin Mary, Temple of the Most Holy Trinity, pray for us.*

18. Look through your papers, books, and pictures. If you find anything improper, destroy it for Our Lady's sake.

*O Mary, Gate of Heaven, pray for us.*

19. Give serious thought to those duties of your state which you neglect most. Promise Mary that you will correct yourself.

*Virgin Mary, help me to serve God perfectly.*

20. Firmly resolve before Our Lady's altar to correct your secret faults at all costs.

*Virgin, Mary, help me to know myself.*

21. Every time you enter a church, take holy water and make the Sign of the Cross with faith and devotion.

*Virgin Mary, let me never become careless in my acts of worship.*

22. For Our Lady's sake keep your hands off each other at all times.

*Virgin Mary, help me to become courteous and prudent in living with my companions.*

23. Invite a companion to join you in making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to Our Lady.

*Virgin Mary, help me to become a saint.*

24. Give some good advice to a companion. If you receive advice, practice it for the love of Mary.

*Virgin Mary, obtain the gift of piety for me.*

25. Be most diligent in all your duties.

*Virgin Mary, help me to fulfill all my duties well.*

26. At morning and night, take care to dress and undress with the greatest modesty.

*Virgin Mary, Mother of holy purity, pray for us.*

27. Obey all the house rules, particularly those concerning the dormitory.

*Most Holy Virgin, obtain the virtue of obedience for me.*

28. Assist at Holy Mass most attentively and say a short prayer for your companions who have little love for Mary.

*Virgin Mary, grant me the grace to become humble.*

29. Ask the one who knows you best what fault you should correct in order to be more exemplary.

*Virgin Mary, help me to know myself.<sup>1</sup>*

Don Bosco jotted down also some nosegays and short invocations for the Salesian pupils at Lanzo:

TO MARY FROM HER CHILDREN  
AT THE SALESIAN SCHOOL IN LANZO  
MAY 1866

1. Hear Mass more devoutly, say your prayers more attentively, and, as much as you can, keep your eyes on the altar.

*Virgin Mary, help me to guard my bodily senses.*

<sup>1</sup> There are no nosegays in the *Memorie Biografiche* for May 30 and 31. [Editor]

2. Listen most attentively to what Father Director says at the "Good Night," and firmly resolve to carry out his suggestions.

*Virgin Mary, grant that the Word of God may always bear fruit in my soul.*

3. For Our Lady's sake obey promptly the call of the bell.

*Virgin Mary, help me acquire the virtue of obedience.*

4. Promptly obey the bell for rising. On your way to church from the study hall, do not waste time.

*Virgin Mary, make me docile to divine inspirations.*

5. Ask Our Lady to help you firmly resolve always to cherish the virtue of modesty.

*Virgin Mary, help me to become ever more virtuous.*

6. Consider which duties you are neglecting most, and promise Our Lady to correct yourself with God's help.

*Virgin Mary, help me to serve Jesus faithfully.*

7. Apologize if you have offended someone; be particularly kind to those you don't like very much.

*Virgin Mary, grant me always to be at peace with everyone.*

8. For Our Lady's sake, sanctify your recreation by joining, as much as possible, your companions' games and by inviting anyone who may be sad or lonely to join you.

*Virgin Mary, grant that I may never displease Your Beloved Son Jesus.*

### *Appendix 3*

#### TOPICS OF SPIRITUAL RETREAT, 1867

(See Chapter 75, footnote 2)

Need of a spiritual retreat in order to examine one's conduct during the past year.

A priest does not go to hell or to heaven alone, but leads others with him.

Dignity and duties of a priest.

Duty to reflect on what must be avoided, acquired, and practiced in the future.

A priest's enemies and weapons to fight them: temperance, prayer, and work.

**Chastity.**

**Religious institutions in the old and new law.**

**The three evangelical counsels.**

**Purpose of the Congregation.**

**Duties, happiness, and assurance of salvation for religious.**

**Reserve in dealing with the young.**

**Practices of piety, conferences, manifestations, love of Our Lord Jesus Christ.**



## *INDEX*



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### ABBREVIATIONS

D.B.	Don Bosco
D.S.	Dominic Savio
E.H.D.	Exercise for a Happy Death
G.N.	Good Night
L.C.	<i>Letture Cattoliche</i>
M.H. of C.	Mary, Help of Christians
S.C.	Salesian Congregation

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