

Cronistoria

Chronicles

**of the Institute of the Daughters of
Mary Help of Christians**

edited by Sister Giselda Capetti, F.M.A.

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**The institute of Mornese
The first expansion
1872 - 1879**

**Don Bosco Publication
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**Chronistoria: Chronicles of the
Institute of the Daughters of Mary
Help of Christians in 5 volumes**

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FOREWORD

[p.iii] The second volume of the *Cronistoria* deals with that very important period in the life of the Institute from its foundation to the transfer of the Mother House from Momese to Nizza Monferrato (August, 1872 - February, 1879).

They are years of great fervor and vitality which mark the first bloom of the primitive spirit, the first foundations in Italy and abroad and the first two missionary expeditions for Uruguay and Argentina.

They are fruitful years characterized by frequent bereavements, and by unusual trials which reveal, through the insidious intervention of the enemy, the greatness of the mission entrusted to the Institute, and bring into relief the extraordinary assistance from on high which accompanied it from the very outset.

The narrative proceeds year by year: the various events of simple episodes, as has been already noted in Volume I, are indicated by the marginal notes of the original typewritten copy, so as to facilitate research.

The layout was revised and in some measure reelaborated a few times over the years as further incidents or clarifications of certain facts came to light. The abundant correspondence between Mother Clelia Genghini, and Father Amadei and Father Ceria, (with their innumerable corrections and additions), bear this out.

The compilation was made from documents then unpublished, which were later included in Volumes XI, XII, and XIII of the *Memorie Biografiche* of Don Bosco. It was, therefore, considered opportune not to add to the already extensive bulk of appendices, by always reporting the entire text of these documents, but to refer the reader to the *Memorie Biografiche* with precise indications.

[p. iv] In the revision for printing, the original text was maintained as far as possible with the exception of some touches in the format and some slight transposition required for greater clarity. In an old document still kept in the archives the earnest desire of Mother Daghero and her Counselors of having a simple but complete chronicle of the Institute is recorded: "Avail yourselves of every possible testimony, written or oral, and of all the documents scattered, scrappy, incomplete and sometimes nearly illegible, which can be gradually collected to draw up a narrative as detailed as possible, to witness to the beautiful simplicity and robust paternal and material vigor of the two brilliant figures: Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. "

The present volume seems to answer the criteria.

Rome, February 2, 1976

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

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Volume I of the *Cronistoria* closes with the departure of Bishop Sciandra (September 10) while the school went back to its normal regular, serene activity, sustained by communal and personal duties, fervent piety, and the joys of daily recreation. The Sisters did not yet see the clouds that were already gathering on the Mornesian horizon.

This second part of the *Cronistoria* begins with a formerly omitted detail which may yet throw light on the usual maneuvers of the enemy of all good, bringing into focus the merit of her who advances through the inevitable difficulties of the beginnings, her soul firmly anchored by faith to the work of her Lord.

Trials were not wanting

Ten or twelve days after the joyful August 5, a letter arrived from Mr. Arrigotti asking Corinna, now a happy novice, to return home to see her grandmother who was ill.

"Corinna must return home?! To that home?!... But they will never allow her to come back; she will never succeed to escape from her father's grasp! She will have to take off the religious habit, and dress... who knows how. . . and with what consequences!" These and similar expressions could be heard in the little community of Mornese, and all stormed heaven to ward off a great disaster.

Sister Corinna was disconsolate, knowing what awaited her at home. She dared not disobey her father in view of his irascibility, but repeatedly said between sobs that she did not want to go home unless a Sister accompanied her.

[p. 2]

Naturally the Vicar had consulted Father Pestarino, the Director, who felt it wise to tell the Bishop about the situation. It was decided that Sister Felicina Mazzarello, the Novice Mistress, would accompany Sister Corinna home. They were both to wear secular dress, not to contrast with the Arrigotti family, thus possibly facilitating Corinna's return to Mornese.

August 20 found the whole community astir even before dawn. The Sisters loved one another and this was the first sad departure after the memorable date of Our Lady of the Snow, and it was almost certain that poor Corinna would be obliged to carry out her father's wishes and never again put on the religious habit.

The leave taking was silent and tearful; but the Vicar, in her strength of will, knew how to impose control on her own heart and on the hearts of others, exhorting to prayer and little sacrifices to obtain the necessary help both for those leaving and those who remained behind.

Yes, also for those who remained behind; because though the Bishop's presence had acted like smothering ashes on the fire of Mornesian discontent, there were well grounded fears that after his departure that fire would not remain smoldering for long.

"Let us pray and be cheerful, Sisters; the Lord and Our Lady are with us!" The look and attitude of the Vicar said more than words, and the House became a monastery during the hours of prayer and work as it was a center of joy and happiness in playground and corridors during recreation.

The news which came from Tonco was not very reassuring but on September 17 the unexpected return of Corinna to the school relieved the community of worry, at least for a few days.

Things had gone like this. In the Arrigotti family, presumably on a prearranged plan, everyone surrounded Corinna with all kinds of attention; but no longer finding in her the light, frivolous girl of some time past, and beginning to suspect the cause of the transformation they spared **[p. 3]** no inducement, snide remark nor command to make her return to worldly parties and gatherings and distract her from her practices of piety.

However, there was no denying the fact that she had made great progress in piano playing, singing, household tasks, and social behavior. In fact Mr. Arrigotti boasted to his friends about this transformation. Corinna took advantage of this appreciation to persuade him to send her back

to Mornese soon, so as not to interrupt her studies, and to allow her little sister Ida to accompany her. She also set his mind at ease on the financial side: in view of the lessons she gave to the pupils of the school, her sister's studies would be absolutely free of charge, while she would grow up and be looked after in every way.

Her reasoning was accepted, and the whole school rejoiced at Corinna's return.

But another problem remained unsolved: the attitude of the townspeople was anything but encouraging.

The people of Mornese did not resume their natural goodhumor. As long as the Bishop remained they limited their disappointment to murmuring through clenched teeth: "After the ceremony of August 5 the school will definitely be given over to the Sisters; you just wait and see! You will see how we are deceived!"

When Monsignor Sciandra departed, the Sisters moved into the school, and Father Pestarino went to live in the nearby Carante house.

Then the more daring came out in open, biting satire and offensive words. "How long do you think they will stay up there, shut away in isolation?" they asked. "You will soon see them come back to their families in shame and confusion-driven by hunger if nothing else."

"Now is the time to try the virtue of the poor deluded creatures!"

But the poor creatures were proud of their habit, which made them look like the mendicant Brothers. They loved their blue veil which, worn at mass and when they went out, wrapped them round as with an air of heaven and reminded [p. 4] them of their consecration to Mary.

But from those who had known them as girls working in the fields, and could not accept the idea of their Sister-hood the least they received was a malicious, contemptuous sneer which made them blush red as scarlet.

On this account many would have much preferred a discipline, rather than to go out doors for any reason.

"What they say doesn't matter"

But the Vicar gently but firmly repeated now to one, then to another: "What does it matter what they say? Now we are religious, and must be seen as such without minding all that. The important thing is that we give glory to God and become saints. . ."

Even the cotton habit which Sister Teresa Pampuro and Sister Rose Mazzarello had substituted for the woolen one (on weekdays), because of their occupations gave rise to further sarcasm in the district.

Sister Teresa did the shopping for the community; Sister Rose did the humble, tiring household chores. Both were, therefore, exposed to the gaze of externs, and the workmen who were still coming and going in the school.

"Look there," said friends and enemies alike. "These two are the maids; the others are in command with the whip."

The first weekly conference

On September 15, the first Sunday after the Bishop's departure, the Vicar began to practice the article of the Rule which prescribes a weekly conference for the community .

She introduced it with her usual humility saying that it was not she alone who had to carry on the work according to the Rules and wishes of Don Bosco, but that every Sister [p. 5] should and could help and advise her; therefore, each one could and should express her views and opinions, so that all might proceed in the best possible way.

From this beginning of fraternal liberty and filial confidence it was natural that the Sisters felt free to tell her their feelings and what they saw around them. In this way she knew all that was going on in the House and outside, using her information to promote the general good.

For whoever told her what gossip was saying for or against them, Sister Mary had brief, firm words to inspire confidence, animate to joy, sacrifice and acceptance even if the trial became

more difficult to bear. God and Our Lady would never abandon those who prayed and worked in fidelity to the Rule and to Don Bosco.

The Vicar realized more than anyone else, that Father Pestarino had to bear the brunt of the onslaught. It mattered little what they said about her and her companions compared with the bitter draughts he had to drink daily; he who had been dearly loved by all, was now the target of their contempt and insult. Besides deceiving them about the school he had blundered, he gave his fellow citizens no hope of receiving some part of his legacy; it would all go to those "blessed" favorites of his! He would be so completely devoted to them in the course of time that he would have no interest in anyone else-even for those to whom he was really indebted for the erection of that blessed school . . .

Admirable prudence of Father Pestarino

Poor Father Pestarino sought at first to inspire the less hostile to have faith, repeating that he and Don Bosco had been simple instruments in the hands of God, who had brought the whole affair to a conclusion entirely unforeseen by them. To the most embittered he made no reply-as if he knew, saw or heard nothing. He felt that any explanation would have exasperated them more, while his desire was to [p. 6] pacify all.

Yes, one word would have cleared the whole situation, and removed all suspicion of betrayal. But that word would have meant revealing the veto... and then all the discontent would be turned on the authority which unconsciously had cooperated in the development of the divine plan.

In this case the cure would be worse than the disease, and Father Pestarino preferred to shoulder all blame and responsibility for the affair. God and his Superior knew the truth, and that sufficed for him.

His virtue was understood later but not now. True, all the people of Mornese did not turn their backs on him, but those who were against him were so violent that at one stage they threatened to lay hands on him, and to settle the score with the "traitor." At this point, however, the silent, even the timid came to the fore and formed a group. They took on themselves to protect the person and house of their beloved pastor and kept guard even during the night, thus relieving the hearts of all who loved him, especially the Sisters. Well might they reason in the school that their sufferings were but roses compared with the thorns which pierced Father Pestarino. Hence they increased the fervor of their prayer and determination to do good.

The first school of humility

The discordant note which a few months before had been such a source of annoyance to all was no longer in Mornese. When the Sisters left the *Casa Immacolata* the teacher from Fontanile, whom we already know was most rigid in her ways, had already left Mornese. The cause having been eliminated, so too was the effect.

Then someone asked sadly: "Who will give us a few lessons now?"

Two weeks before Don Bosco had sent a teacher from Turin, Miss Angela Jandet. The Vicar consoled herself and others with the thought: "She will substitute the other."

[p. 7] In fact she had already tested her by giving her charge of some registers, and information regarding the House and orders that were coming in, while at the same time she studied her character and spirit.

But as soon as the House was reorganized after the Bishop's departure, she felt obliged to prepare the Sisters for their new mission of instructing and educating day girls and boarders, as Don Bosco had mentioned. Therefore she fixed the time, place and Sisters who were to have lessons from Sister Jandet, already professed. Among the pupils was the Vicar, Sister Mary.

"Humility is good for everyone, and especially for me," she said to herself.

Neither will it do harm to the new teacher, who despite her good qualities of piety and politeness, sometimes gave proof of a fine pride.

Here we are then faced with a group of students, young and not so young, some in religious habit,

some without it; each with a fair share of good will and of pride. First among them in the battle of self-conquest was the Vicar, who soon found that her hand was slow and unskilled when it came to wielding a pen.

Living beside her, and in the light of her example, who would not feel drawn to the mortification of intellect, heart and will?

This sacrifice too can serve the Lord to dissipate more quickly the bitterness of Mornesian hearts. Therefore, no matter if a tear flashed through the smiles which the teacher's clever remarks evoked when she brought out the worst mistakes in speech or writing.

A further source of humiliation and suffering was added.

Quite a few mothers, fearing that Don Bosco wanted to make Sisters of all the best girls of the district, kept their children home. Therefore the number of pupils decreased, and consequently also the opportunity to do good, as well as to earn a little money to help out in the straitened circumstances of the House. The fact that it was the harvest and vintage season also contributed to the decline in numbers.

[p. 8] New postulants and old poverty

From Turin and elsewhere postulants came, and their arrival was always a source of joy. But. . . they were all poor; this meant the family was increasing as financial resources diminished. The only secure revenue was confidence in Mary Help of Christians, in the dear "economist" Saint Joseph and in the virtue and sustaining word of Don Bosco. The Vicar reminded the Sisters of it, and with great fervor they recited together the daily Our Father to Divine Providence.

"We have no work. Let us go in search of it as we have done before," Sister Mary said; and Sister Petronilla, alone or accompanied, went again to those women who usually gave her some garments to make or alter. She went again to knock at the doors of those homes where she knew there was little or no knowledge of needlework, staying as long as necessary to cut out and tack shirts, skirts and children's clothes, never returning empty-handed to the school. In the meantime she was slowly persuading those families that the Sisters had not ceased and would never cease to love the people of Mornese; they were not enclosed, and were ready to help out in every possible way.

Don Bosco knew the actual circumstances of his Daughters and sent them old and new garments as well as vestments to sew and mend for his Oratories. He also sent linen, sacking and other things he considered useful for the growing needs of the House, always assuring them Our Lady was ever blessing her new Family.

But Father Pestarino, who wished he could give millions to Don Bosco, could not hide his suffering on seeing his concern for the Sisters' finances. His refrain: "Poor Don Bosco has so many needs, and now must he think of us too?" was like a sword thrust in the hearts of the Vicar and her first collaborators.

Heaven must surely have smiled to see such souls suffer with love and through love. For without their knowing it, they and their great future were being discussed far away.

[p. 9]

Consoling prophecies

In fact on November 3 the Marchioness Fassati, nee Da Maistre, wrote to her mother from Turin:

...I wonder if you know that Don Bosco has also founded an order for women. It seems the girls of his area, on seeing him pass frequently, gathered around him and said: "Take care of us also, as you do the boys; nobody thinks of us!"

For the past two years a group of young girls have been formed to the religious life and to the Bosconian spirit. Don Bosco has given them a Rule, which he is still revising and perfecting; later he will build a house for them in Piazza Maria Ausiliatrice; and they will do for girls what the Bosconian priests do for boys. They will also look after the linen in Don Bosco's Houses. At the moment he is responsible for 6,200 persons...

A precious gift from Baby Jesus

Heaven sent a great joy to crown that eventful year: Miss Emilia Mosca, niece of the enterprising architect Charles Bernardine Mosca, who won for himself the title of Count and the friendship of King Charles Albert for building the Mosca Bridge across the Dora River in Turin (1823-1830). On her mother's side she was descended from the Bellegard Counts of Saint Lary.

Emilia's steps were dogged by misfortune from child-hood; now on December 30 she came to the College as a French teacher. She had exquisite gifts which revealed her refinement and education: she bore on her brow the furrow of an habitually reflective mind and in the flash of her eye a swift, sure intuition. Her gentle smile tempered the fire in her glance and said that her will was already in command of nature. Suffering is an excellent mold of noble souls, and to the twenty-year-old Emilia it was no stranger.

She had met Don Bosco at Valdocco when she went to visit her two brothers who were pupils there. Her father [p. 10] had asked him to find her suitable employment, and through Father John Cagliero he had directed her to Mornese.

When speaking to her of the project he had said jokingly: "And you, Signorina, will you go there willingly? Be careful, though, up there a certain breeze is blowing...Go well prepared...Did you ever feel you would like to become a religious?"

In the course of the monotonous journey from Novi to Mornese, on a humble donkey in the company of the father of Cinina, Emilia sadly recalled Don Bosco's words.

"A religious?" she thought to herself, "But I haven't the least intention of becoming a nun. I'm going to teach just to earn something to help my father. "

She arrived at the College and began to teach immediately.

Mother's intuition reads the soul of Emilia Mosca

Emilia was most exact in the performance of her duty and in the timetable of the House: she was always the first in church, and punctual at lessons. Her dress was simple and modest, yet there was something distinguished and refined about her, that made her plain cotton look like silk, giving a note of elegance to the most lowly attire, so that she was outstanding among all the others.

Sister Mary Mazzarello, accustomed to reading hearts, and influencing them—even unconsciously—in a supernatural way, soon understood the depth of that ardent nature and saw that she was capable of scaling the peaks of perfection. So after a few days she suggested jokingly to her that she might dress less formally..."All the more since no one sees you here." The Vicar knew through personal experience what effort is required on the part of a young girl who wishes to overcome the very natural inclination of showing her beauty to the fullest advantage. But as Emilia was docile she easily led her to reflect on the vanity of honors, on the advantage of having faith as the [p. 11] sole basis of one's life, of seeking to do good to thank God for all His gifts.

The young teacher eagerly followed all that the Vicar suggested; she knew how to appreciate all the generous virtue she heard and saw around her, though hidden under very humble appearances.

All this impressed her more than one could imagine and at the end of the month she asked to be accepted as postulant.

When accepted she walked unwaveringly on her chosen way, keeping very close to Mary Help of Christians and "drawing from her the strength necessary for perseverance.

The novice Clara Spagliardi withdraws

The arrival of Emilia Mosca among the ranks of the postulants at this point was providential, for it filled the void left by the departure of the novice Sister Clara Spagliardi.

Like the others this young girl had received the habit from Don Bosco's hands. She saw the virtue practiced at Mornese; she participated in the fervor of the holy Sisters who surrounded her; but she did not work energetically to overcome her nature which was not very docile, and had felt the sacrifice keenly.

Her precarious health eventually made her decide to take off the religious habit and return home. It was evident that her place was not at Mornese.

1873

The Founder's wise project [p. 13]

Even though Mornese was a veritable hive of souls rich in love of God and zeal for youth, the discipline of feminine religious government was known in theory only, even by Father Pestarino, as Don Bosco was well aware.

On the last Sunday of January, he presented himself to the Superior General—Mother Enrichetta Dominici— of the Sisters of Saint Anne, also called Sisters of the Marchioness Barolo. To her he laid open his project: to have two of those Sisters temporarily in Mornese to initiate and guide in the practice of religious discipline, the little community there which was rich in good-will alone. His request was not turned down, and at the beginning of February the Assistant and Secretary General of the Barolo Institute, Mother Frances Garelli, accompanied by Sister Costanza Gattino were sent to Mornese to find out what it involved. They stayed there two or three days without the community's knowing the reason of their presence.

The first "Via Crucis"

Now that the little chapel had the greatest treasure the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament— and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians performed all their practices of piety there, the absence of the *Via Crucis* was felt.

It was keenly felt by all the Sisters but most especially by the Vicar; it seemed to them that Our Lady of Sorrows [p. 14] pleaded from the altar... "Shall we no more walk the way to Calvary together? It gave me such joy when you found ten minutes to accompany me and my Jesus on the *Via Dolorosa!*"

The good Sisters did not wish to let the Sorrowful Virgin tread the path alone, but as they were scarcely able to provide their daily bread they prayed their heavenly Mother to find someone who would meet the expenses connected with the erection of the "Stations."

Their prayer was heard. On February 27, just before Lent began, the Franciscan Guardian, Father Candido, of the Monastery of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Gavi, came to bless a modest but devotional *Via Crucis* which, placed artistically on the walls of the little chapel, centered the hearts of the religious on the sufferings of Jesus. Thereafter all during Lent groups of pupils, boarders and day girls could be seen accompanying this or that Sister in the pious exercise, and Jesus was offered loving reparation for the many transgressions of the commandment to do penance.

During these days too, Father Pestarino told the community that Don Bosco had arranged to send two Sisters of Saint Anne in the near future to remain with them for some time, teaching them how to organize the timetable and religious life in general.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were taken aback and confused at the announcement. But the Vicar, with her usual vivacity exclaimed, "Oh, may the Lord be thanked! Now we shall learn how to be real Sisters." Her words brought them back to peace and serene expectation. The two Sisters of Saint Anne arrived at the beginning of Lent-Mother Frances Garelli, already known and appreciated, and with her, Sister Angela Alloa.

Humble cordiality

They were received with a sense of humble gratitude which became admiration when the community realized [p. 15] that Sister Frances had left her many commitments to please Don Bosco and help his Daughters.

Soon the Sisters vied with one another in asking advice on this or that viewpoint or teaching method, and were taught how the applications of boarders and postulants should be answered; how to arrange their belongings, mark their clothes, organize the girls in the dormitory, refectory, chapel and on walks; how to deal with the pupil's relatives, conduct correspondence and so forth.

The first to seek advice

The Vicar followed everything with keen interest, because it was her duty and Don Bosco was forever reminding her that she was responsible. But above all else she was concerned with her personal growth in sanctity, and never was a pupil more eager in asking questions and obeying her teacher.

Meditation, presence of God, observance of the vows, helps to arrive at humility-these were the lessons that interested her; her attention and that of her Sisters centered on these. All the while she gave luminous proof of her humility and sound judgment. To every new instruction, especially those in the material order, she replied smilingly: "Were we not so backward, we would surely have arrived at this. I would never have known how to do that; it's my fault, I'm so ignorant... Oh, how many follies ignorance leads us to commit!"

She was not aware that the two teachers were in admiration of her humility. It was evident that in her, above all, the lack of knowledge, far from lessening her natural discernment, had sharpened it, raising it to a level sometimes not reached by those who move in a higher social sphere. In Sister Mary piety and innate refinement supplied for the absence of instruction and the conventions of politeness.

The Sisters of Saint Anne saw these qualities, and while they deplored the extreme poverty of life and furniture [p. 16], and the lack of external disciplinary practices, they could not help noticing the moral superiority of the Vicar.

Extraordinary Confessor First Lent in the school

The extraordinary confessor also came in the person of Father John Garino. Don Bosco had sent him, and the Sisters of Saint Anne were deeply impressed by the evident seriousness with which all fulfilled this duty prescribed by the Church. Nor were they surprised at this for they saw them every morning make their meditation in a kneeling posture, ever so recollected, and that during the day they were mindful of the resolutions taken. They saw everybody, including the boarders, assist fervently at holy mass and approach the eucharistic banquet.

They soon realized that this same fervor of spirit was the source of the secret energy which kept these new Sisters serene and happy amid so much work and poverty.

Their Lenten fast was particularly austere. Sister Mary, who ordinarily ate very frugally, now seemed to live on air.

The confidence she gave one day to Petronilla is worthy of note: "During Lent I satisfy my hunger on Sunday only."

For the Sisters of Saint Anne, of course, the food was prepared in a different way and in a greater

quantity, as their Rule prescribed, even though they dined in the same refectory at a table apart.

Holy Week celebrated in the school for the first time

The Sisters of Saint Anne had to return to Turin for their retreat and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians besought them to return quickly for, as the Vicar put it on behalf of all: "We want to learn how to become saints, as [p. 17] Don Bosco, our Father and Superior, wishes."

Therefore they were on their own for Easter, but joyfully celebrated the liturgical functions of the season with their pupils.

The fervor of the little community was most fully expressed by adoring Jesus in the 'Sepulchre' on Holy Thursday night. The Director had permitted, rather suggested, a change in the timetable, so that as he expressed it, the spouses of Jesus could keep vigil of prayer beside His tomb. The novices too wished to participate and then the postulants and boarders joined in.

Thus all remained in chapel for an hour after the night prayers; then the little ones went to bed, then the bigger girls, later on the novices and Sisters. How long did the Vicar stay?

If Father Pestarino permitted the vigil without limiting the time, she felt she might for once give free rein to her desire of remaining in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament. According to some witnesses she stayed all night.

These were days of spiritual comfort for the Director also. "Last year," he thought, "the little chapel was empty, the place deserted, my heart pierced like that of Jesus, as I awaited the outcome of approaching events. Now all is accomplished. Don Bosco's desire has become a reality. The poor girls of Mornese are Salesian Sisters, Don Bosco is a Father to them and helps them with a truly paternal heart. "

The Alleluia was jubilant. Sister Corinna played her most melodious chords, and Louise Arecco's beautiful voice rang out in the canticle of joy. The day-girls who were present thus participated in the joy of the community and experienced a new sense of spiritual well-being.

Father Pestarino so arranged the timetable of the functions that they did not interfere with those of the parish. Without giving a thought to his personal convenience, but only to the good of souls, he hastened to the parish church for confessions and paschal functions, then back to the school to be available for all the needs of the [p. 18] Sisters, as well as the parishioners.

They, on their part, must have realized that their fears of losing him were exaggerated and that their pastor was still the faithful friend of their souls. However, their former affection for him was never restored.

The Sisters of Saint Anne return

On April 15, soon after Easter, the Sisters of Saint Anne returned. In order to help the community in a more systematic way they arranged that one should help train and instruct the postulants in the religious life, while the other attended to the direction of the House.

Thus they had occasion to see at first hand that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were like so many busy bees, striving to earn the wherewith to keep their daily bread on the table. All kinds of work were in progress-including weaving. In the silence of the House the rhythmic sound of the shuttle seemed like a supplicating voice knocking at God's heart for daily bread-material and spiritual.

The loom was on the ground floor, not far from the main door. From the cloth woven there right through to the finished articles: dresses and various garments for every age, cotton coverings and curtains, and even quilts, all was executed with maximum care and the most heartfelt gratitude to God and all those who were instruments of His Providence.

Providential helps

It was good to see Mary's former companions, and those of the other Sisters bring material for a

dress or a pair of sheets, and a small quantity of beans or corn flour hidden in their apron. They would run to the kitchen to deposit their little gift before the Vicar could see it: "Take them, [p. 19] Sister Teresa, they are from the Mazzarelli. I'm sure they will cook well!" Then off to the workroom to place their order.

But Sister Teresa Pampuro had long legs and never failed to get the message to Sister Mary in time to thank personally her kind companion. Her most radiant smile accompanied the query: "Did your angel tell you we were in need?"

Mary's younger brother came sometimes laden with provisions, including bottles of wine and oil. He was so happy when the Sisters ran to relieve him of his burden, and gave him a medal or holy picture. He was still more pleased when Sister Mary herself spared a minute for him and there under the porticoes whispered some little word which filled his day with joy. "But our Mary is always in such a hurry!"

Sometimes she would look at what he had brought from home and say: "But we are many now. This will not suffice for us! Come, run home to Mother and tell her that, . . ."

Her brother didn't give her time to finish; he was off in a flash, across the vineyard, through the little elm wood which stretched from the school to Valgelata Street, and in less time than it takes

to tell, was repeating the message.

Mother sighed: "Oh, poor girls! We must always remember that there are many living up yonder! And to think that at home they lacked for nothing," In the meantime she filled the basket and the little lad's pockets, and having made sure that all was in order: "Run along now, and be careful . . . Give her our love!"

Sister Petronilla's brother also, and the relatives of other Sisters living in Mornese always brought something—especially fresh bread and potatoes. But compared to the need they were but a crumb!

[p. 20] A fear

The Sisters of Saint Anne saw it all. They admired the fervor which reigned in spite of everything, but couldn't help thinking in an anxious kind of way: "Will the good spirit of these dear Sisters of Don Bosco, their desire to imitate their Founder, the natural ability of Sister Mary to transmit his spirit to the growing Institute—will these things suffice to make a success of it? The postulants, especially those from well-to-do families, will find it impossible to adapt to such a simple, rustic life of hard work and sacrifice!" They decided to talk it over with Don Bosco.

First Marian month at the school

Mary's month began. Her picture was adorned with flowers; both bright blooms from field and garden and rich spiritual bouquets. After the spiritual reading Father Pestarino made a point of giving the *fioretto* (virtue to be practiced on the following day). There was keen competition as to who could best enrich her soul with the type of fragrance acceptable to Our Blessed Lady.

There was nothing new, no extra prayers, but everything from the first waking thought to the last breath before sleep, was offered with greater purity of intention, with exactness and punctuality: that was the Vicar's recommendation and she was first among the first in practicing it.

Our Lady was pleased and showed her pleasure by presenting to the House a postulant of rare purity of soul. She was Enrichetta Sorbone from Rosignano, Monferrato.

She herself narrates:

During the month of May a group of us girls were together in a friend's house. This friend had a brother who was a Salesian. Her brother came in and began to tell us about the wonders of Don Bosco, his sanctity, his miracles. I had [p. 21] already heard my mother speak of Don Bosco, and was amazed. I said to myself: "It must be a lovely experience to live so near a saint, because we never get any nearer than hearing about them. It would be a wonderful thing just to see him!"

We all hung on the speaker's words. At a certain point he turned to his sisters and said:

"On such a day Don Bosco will come to Borgo San Martino; if you come there I will show you to him."

"You come too, Enrichetta; Borgo San Martino isn't far away!"
"I? My father doesn't allow me even to go to see my grandfather. . ."

To see a living saint

Yet, the desire to see a living saint was stronger than any other consideration, and that evening I spoke so enthusiastically, so insistently to my father about it that I eventually wrung from him a hesitating: "We shall see!"

We set out, Angelina, Ermelinda and I about 3 a.m., and walking all the way we arrived at Borgo at 7 a.m. We went to mass, received Holy Communion and then had our breakfast. This done we went directly to the Salesian school. Don Bosco was due to arrive at 11:00; Brother Rossi took us into a little room where there were some ladies who looked after the linen for the school. Thinking they were the Sisters founded by Don Bosco, I watched them, but wasn't impressed.

At 11:00 a.m. the joyful sound of the band grew louder and there was excited movement throughout the school, as we were ushered down a corridor.

"Don Bosco," my companion's brother said to us, "will pass this way, so you can see him and kiss his hand."

From where we stood we could see the road and the large Salesian playground crowded with people. Some flung their hats in the air, others clapped and all shouted:

"Viva Don Boscooooo!"

They seemed mad with joy! I looked in astonishment I thought I should see—I know not what?—a miracle; and [p. 22] as Don Bosco approached (slowly because the throng pressed around him, taking his hand to kiss it or raise it in blessing)...I felt deeply moved, thrilled by a strange new feeling, and I was cold all over!

The longed-for meeting

He eventually arrived at the main door. . . then along the corridor where we were standing. I was so overcome with emotion that I couldn't say a word as I kissed his hand. I just looked fixedly at him.

Don Bosco looked at me for a second, and pointing to me said: "Go to Mornese."

"Mornese? What is Mornese?"

"A lovely country, you will see." Then lowering his voice, "Now we go to dinner, and then we will meet again!"

He sent for me at about 2:00 p.m., and as soon as he saw me said:

"Oh! Good! What's your name?"

"Enrichetta Sorbone of Rosignano Monferrato."

"How are you?"

"Very well, Don Bosco."

"How old are you?"

"I have just turned eighteen."

"Do you like to study?"

"Oh! Don Bosco, my mother wanted me to become a teacher, but she is dead and I have to look after my little sisters."

"And how many sisters have you?"

"Four, and two brothers."

"Did you never think of becoming a Sister?"

"Well, really my holy mother offered her life that all her children might be consecrated to the Lord."

"Good, we shall see—we shall see..." and he looked at me as much as to say that he would look after me. And then I said,

"But Don Bosco, my parish priest has promised that if I am good, and mind my little sisters, he will provide for me. You see I don't want to have two irons in the fire!"

"Don't worry, don't worry, I will arrange matters with your parish priest."

[p. 23] "And my little sisters? And my father?"

"Oh, Divine Providence will also think of your sisters! You see, at Mornese we have the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. You can study there."

"Who are the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians? Are they Sisters?"

At this point I thought of the ladies whom I had seen in the morning, mending the linen:

"But I like the Sisters dressed as they are in the holy pictures. "

Don Bosco smiled:

"Yes, yes, those of Mornese are dressed exactly as you say, you will see when you get there. You will study. If you are good you will become a Sister and you will do much good."

He said many things to me, which I did not fully understand at the time and which later I saw fulfilled. Then he took a little piece of blue paper from his pocket and having written something on it gave it to me, saying:

"There, for the moment you will return to Rosignano and take this to your parish priest..But go soon to Mornese; and before you go into that holy House leave your will outside the door."

I carefully took my note and came out, and I cannot say if I was more excited or happy. At the door I turned to greet him again: "Good day, Don Bosco!"

He looked at me paternally, then as if in an after thought, but in a vibrant voice he said: "Let us leave this treacherous world. "

It sounded as if he saw beside me a monster ready to tear me asunder and it seemed to me that the world must be a very ugly thing, when Don Bosco, so gentle and kind, spoke of it in that way.

It was 3:00 p.m.: the conversation had lasted an hour! After me he received my two friends. When they rejoined me I asked them if Don Bosco had given them a note for the parish priest, but on hearing that he hadn't I kept silent about mine.

[p. 24] Consequences of the Meeting

As soon as I got home I naturally went to deliver the note, and what was my surprise when on reading it I saw the parish priest grow serious and heard him say:

"Very well, you wanted to act independently, so I wash my hands of it."

Then I was sorry I hadn't read it before giving it to him! Some days later a telegram arrived from Mornese to the parish priest who called my father to tell him about it: "We are waiting for Enrichetta Sorbone–By telegraph if possible. Father Dominic Pestarino for Don John Bosco."

I think Don Bosco must have mentioned to Father Pestarino all the obstacles that stood in the way of my entering and that Father Pestarino wanted to prevent any delay with a telegram.

My poor mother must have followed all that happened after this from heaven. This will suffice for now, as the essential was achieved: I went to Mornese.

In the meantime Our Lady's month was drawing to a close at Mornese. Souls were overflowing with gratitude to Mary, for having called them, poor, humble, uncultured as they were, to form her crown, when she might have chosen others rich in good qualities and merits.

In June there were no extra practices added in honor of the Sacred Heart, other than an appropriate reading in the afternoon. But like the Founder, so the eldest Daughter was too much in love with Jesus not to find time to honor His Sacred Heart and strive to have it loved by all. So ejaculations frequently sprang to her lips, and from the readings she drew practical applications, to keep the community gathered closely around the Lord.

Enrichetta Sorbone at Mornese

On the 6th, First Friday of June, Enrichetta Sorbone arrived. Her father, a fervent Catholic, did not wish to oppose the vocation of his eldest daughter, since Don Bosco [\[p. 25\]](#) had taken charge of her. He personally accompanied her by train to Seravalle, then by train from Serravalle to Gavi.

On that journey her poor father's heart had fought a love-battle. His eyes filled with tears, and his lips said:

There, you are going to become a nun and you don't realize that on arriving there you will read: "Who enters this door will never go out again living or dead."

Enrichetta looked at him in silence. Let us hear her tell it:

Yes, the idea of never again coming out, dead or alive, made me apprehensive. But from the day I spoke to

Don Bosco I was ready for everything, and anything, even death.

When we arrived in Gavi we stopped at the house of Mrs. Gerolama Verdone. This lady was the sister of the greatest preacher of the age, Father Verdone, who though blind led thousands and thousands of souls along the way of eternal salvation. Those who went to Mornese usually stopped there.

We were received very cordially; then we met Cinin, the man who did all the errands for the Sisters. He was an excellent man, a Protestant, and Father Pestarino had sent him to meet me. My father handed me over to him and went home alone: my poor father!

Cinin placed my baggage on the donkey and set out. We followed on foot. The way was long; my companion did not speak, possibly through respect, and I had lots of time to think over the past.

Reminiscences

"If only my mother were alive," I thought, "how happy she would be!" I can still see her, my poor dear mother, on that day, when on returning from school I ran as usual to greet her, and instead of her welcoming smile found on her face an expression of sadness.

"Take your snack, Enrichetta," she said handing me a bun and furtively trying to wipe away a tear.

I certainly could not eat at that moment!... I just looked intently at that sorrowful face and saw my mother [p. 26] raise her eyes to heaven, join her hands and say in supplicating tones:

"Lord, I am ready! Take my life if you wish, but grant that not one of my daughters will have to stay in the world."

I understood nothing. I only knew that my mother was suffering and that I suffered too, but those words remained engraved in my heart!

I had once asked my mother: "Mamma, what do the Sisters do?"

"They renounce their own will, my child."

"And how?"

"For example: The Superior sends them to fetch water in a sieve or to fill a bottomless sack with stones. . . If the Sister can silence her judgment and obey, the sieve will hold the water and the sack the stones. Or the order might be to carry a very heavy sack on one's shoulder... If the Sister denies herself and tries to lift the weight even the stones become as light as feathers."

As I walked towards Mornese, all this came back to me, and gave me food for thought!

I also recalled Don Bosco's words: "Before entering that holy House, leave your will outside the door!" And I said to myself: "Then that saint agrees with my mother. But... shall I have to carry stones on my back?... I almost felt myself bending under the load .. I felt weak: but... it's worse than dying! And putting water into a can... how much? for how long? Oh, it is far worse than dying!"

We were already in sight of the Sisters' school, even though Mornese was still far away. To reach it we had to climb a steep hill. At last the donkey began to trot, and pulled up at a door. Here we are! I turned to the left and in obedience to Don Bosco murmured in an undertone:

"I leave you here, my dear will, because I intend to enter without you, so as to embrace God's will alone."

But my heart was pounding violently!

The famous door opened, and I entered... Shall I really never go out, living or dead? After a few minutes which seemed interminable to me, three Sisters came towards me, two dressed in black, with a white bonnet, (the Sisters of Saint Anne), the other in brown with a netted veil on her [p. 27] head. What could this difference mean?

As if to relieve my embarrassment, the Sister in brown asked me in a pronounced Genoese accent:

"Which do you prefer: this or that?"

"I like this best," I said, moving close to her, "because they look like monks."

"Good," she said. "Good! You are very welcomed!"

Later I understood that she was the Superior of the House, with the title of Vicar and I soon experienced that she had a big heart.

Mornesian liberality

It was the First Friday of the month; the Sacred Heart of Jesus was specially honored in the school. An air of festivity pervaded the House, for the Vicar wished that the arrival of every new postulant should be an occasion of rejoicing to make her feel at home. Therefore even the silence during dinner was dispensed. For this new arrival a whole egg and some fried potatoes were prepared, which was the extreme of indulgence and gluttony allowed by Father Pestarino.

The Vicar observes Enrichetta's qualities and prepares her

Some days later Enrichetta was given the charge of assisting the boarders. Who could better fulfill this task than she who for four years had been a mother to her sisters and brothers? She had already had her training, and her personal experience in dealing with small children, her exquisitely simple, psychological tact, her pleasant disposition, all showed her to be an educator after the heart of Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello. Mother was sure of her, and in deep appreciation of her openness of soul, observed her from a distance, allowing her complete liberty with both the girls, and the Sisters of Saint Anne with whom she [p. 28] frequently conversed. She had inherited a deep piety from her mother and observing the recollection of the Sisters of Saint Anne, when on various occasions she saw them pray, she asked with characteristic openness:

"What do you do when there in front of the altar with your eyes closed?"

"We listen to the Lord!"

"How does one listen to the Lord?"

Faced with this holy curiosity, which is a means of formation in the spiritual life, they gave her a full explanation so that without her knowing it they were initiating her in the ways of the spirit. With equally maternal interest they followed her in her assistance of the girls during recreation,

in the dormitory, and workroom. They gave her practical suggestions on how to assess temperaments and form characters, and individual norms on attending to the wardrobes, personal cleanliness of the students and the general order of the House.

Richetta-as she was familiarly called-listened to everything, treasuring even the smallest detail, but referred all to Sister Mazzarello, who the better to know the girl's disposition sometimes asked:

"Will you become a Sister of Saint Anne?"

The answer was always the same: "No, no; I will remain with you at Mornese."

The Sisters of Saint Anne would have been very happy to accept her. Enrichetta knew it, even though in their delicate prudence, and religious uprightness they never formally invited her.

They offered, instead, to take her little sisters.

In her work as assistant of the boarders Enrichetta had the thought of her little sisters ever present to her mind and sometimes she said with a sigh: "I wonder how they are? And... is the Lord really pleased that I left them, when they most needed a guide? There are my other sisters, true, but I am the eldest, and perhaps it was up to me alone to sacrifice myself for them."

[p. 29] On one occasion the Sisters of Saint Anne, seeing her more pensive than usual said to her very kindly: "Would you like to give us your two little sisters? Rest assured that we would look after them. Then you won't have to worry about them."

The proposal was tempting, all the more so because Enrichetta in her humility thought: "I am already a burden on this poor House; if these good Sisters take the two little ones it will be a great charity for all." She then referred the matter to the Vicar, who was moved and without allowing her to finish said: "No, Richetta, thank the good Sisters, but your two little ones-as I already told you-are ours. Do not worry, Richetta!"

And Richetta, grateful and happy, ceased to be anxious. Completely conquered by the charm of Don Bosco and the goodness of the Vicar, she was entirely given over to Mary Help of Christians; and an insignificant happening in the eyes of some, but very important for her, confirmed her in her choice.

Spontaneous humility

One evening, after supper, Sisters and postulants were gathered in the garden for recreation around the Sisters of Saint Anne, who were pleasantly entertaining the happy community. Without noticing it they began to recall particulars which gave the audience to understand that they belonged to well-to-do families, with servants to wait on them.

Sister Mazzarello listened calmly. Then, wishing as usual to humiliate herself in the presence of all, she sat on a low stool which made her seem to be sitting on the ground and said slowly: "As

for me, my father is a poor man who works in the fields, and my mother is a poor woman, just about capable of looking after a small house like ours." But such grace accompanied her statement that, without hurting anyone, she gave another turn to [p. 30] the conversation. Enrichetta, who had been listening attentively, felt more drawn than ever to the good Vicar, so simple and humble, like her dear mother.

Preparation for the Bishop's return

Preparations for the arrival of Monsignor Sciandra, who since the previous year had accepted an invitation for another stay in Mornese, brought Don Bosco there also at the request of Father Pestarino, to discuss the apartments destined for the Bishop in the Carante house.

The visit which, due to pressure of business, had to be cut short, nonetheless allowed Don Bosco to gauge the spiritual temperature of his Daughters. On July 3 in fact, writing from Mornese to Father Rua he expressed his impression thus: "Here one enjoys the cool air though the fire of God's love is burning brightly"

It is probably around this time, when Don Bosco made other visits to Mornese, in preparation for and during the retreat, that he recommended that great importance be attached to religious obedience.

The text of his words has not been preserved, but we know that Father Pestarino made it the subject of a special conference, writing the points in his personal manuscript copy of the Rules, in two commentary pages, close beside the articles on retreat.

There were postulants, novices and young Sisters at Mornese for whom the content of the religious life needed practical application as is evident from Father Pestarino's notes:

What advice and counsel did Don Bosco give?

That we need people to obey, not command...that do not show annoyance, but acceptance when admonished for some defect or fault.

In what does esteem and veneration for Superiors consist?

Not to expect them to do as we wish, or give in to our caprices, but rather that they seek to do good to our souls [p. 31] and to keep the spirit of Jesus Christ alive there through mortification. It must be realized that Superiors do not show affection by external demonstrations, by worldly compliments, but in sacrificing themselves for us in every way, having our interests at heart, praying for us, advising us, and giving their life and all they possess for our advancement.

What must one do in the new Institute?

Know and explain the Rules, have a spirit of self-denial, mortification and obedience; be united with one's Superiors, who have to promote the good of the Institute and who know the life of the community while we still have much to learn in that regard. If we are told of a defect, let US take note and give importance to the advice.

In things essential to the progress of the House, in carrying out the prescriptions of the Rule, we must act with a submissive spirit and in union with the Superiors even in little things. The Superiors' way of acting may not be to our liking. This does not permit us either to fail in respect or obedience to them, or to change the Rules to our liking. We would thus risk concentrating on the fringe of the cloak rather than the texture of the material from which it is made.

Retreat preparatory to professions and clothings

Monsignor Sciandra was welcomed with great jubilation about the 15th of the month; and the retreat, preached by Monsignor Andrea Scotton, Archpriest of Breganze, and the Jesuit, Father Louis Portaluri, began on the evening of the 29th. Both preachers had been expressly chosen by Don Bosco.

The participants were the eleven professed Sisters, the three novices who were preparing for vows, the nine postulants who were to be clothed in the religious habit and ten ladies invited by Don Bosco and the preachers.

Every morning the Bishop celebrated mass for the retreatants, and the devotional rendering of the hymn after the *Pater Noster* in preparation for Holy Communion impressed him very much.

[p. 32] "Veni Sponsa Christi"

Father Pestarino wished that the *Veni Sponsa Christi* be sung at the profession, and invited his nephew to be master of ceremonies. Father Joseph himself told us about it:

Regarding the second profession—August 5, 1873—I remember that my uncle asked me to prepare the choir; but what was I to do? The time was short and I had no suitable hymn for the occasion, nor had I time to get one from Turin. Providentially a Communion motet of Father John Cagliero—*Veni dulcis Jesu*—came to hand, and I tried to adapt the words of the antiphon, *Veni Sponsa Christi*, to that music, and to my great satisfaction they fitted perfectly. The choir was, of course, made up of the people at the school (I don't know whether boarders, postulants, or Sisters), but they knew as much about music as I do about Sanskrit.

We know that there were workroom girls, boarders among whom was the velvet-toned, mellow-voiced Louise Arecco and the novice Sister Maria Grosso who, though ignorant of music, was like Louise, capable of putting deep feeling into her singing.

Anguish and triumph of Sister Corinna

One of the three novices preparing for profession was Corinna Arrigotti, who with increasing devotion was exemplary in every way, and had but one desire: to consecrate herself to Jesus. But she was only nineteen and the Superiors would not admit her to profession without at least the implicit consent of her father. While she was about to write asking for permission, not to become a Sister but to spend all her life with the Sisters, her father and sister arrived to take her home. And the Superiors reluctantly told her that she must absolutely obey him.

In the meantime, however, they tried to make him [p. 33] understand his daughter's desire, and they convinced him that were he to yield and allow Corinna to stay on at the College, her health would profit immensely.

The father gave in, and taking a sheet of paper wrote: "I consent to whatever my daughter wishes."

Did he understand what his daughter wished, and what he was permitting? Did he understand that his daughter was already wearing the religious habit? That she was a novice? Perhaps not, but it was enough for Corinna to continue the retreat when he had gone, and to the joy of all, be admitted to profession.

Don Bosco arrives

To add to the rejoicing Don Bosco arrived, accompanied by Father Cagliero. When the prolonged ringing of the bell announced his arrival, the community, not then engaged in religious exercises, came running with all possible haste.

The good Father greeted them all with a smile, got down from the carriage, and surrounded thus by his beloved family went on foot to the house occupied by Father Pestarino, which was at the disposal of the Salesians attached to the school. He went up the incline slowly, addressing his words paternally to all, and showing special deference to the Sisters of Saint Anne, who cordially participated in this reception.

Having arrived at the Carante house, Don Bosco was about to kneel before the Bishop who, to prevent him, embraced him warmly. The Sisters and boarders then returned to their work, their beaming faces revealing the joy of that meeting.

Don Bosco, true Founder and Father, wished to see for himself how things were going; therefore, he went right through the school, and finding here and there some of the Sisters dressed in cotton

habits rather than in the brown wool he said in a pained tone:

[p. 34] "But no, no...it's better that all be the same—all the same!" And this with such goodness in his paternal glance!

He spoke in private to all who wished it and heard confessions. Many wished to make a general confession, among whom was the postulant Enrichetta Sorbone, who was about to be clothed in the religious habit. Meeting Don Bosco at a moment when he was alone, she asked him: "Don Bosco, will I go to heaven?" Don Bosco paused for a second, and then with that sweet smile of his: "You are already in heaven; you are there already... You are there already! "

Also on the face of Emilia Mosca—the young lady who some said could never adapt to the life—the good. Father read the firmness which makes saints, and perhaps saw the path to be trodden by this soul heroic in virtue. Silent and humble Emilia had spent almost all her postulancy giving lessons to Sisters, postulants and boarders, and her spare hours doing the most menial tasks possible, or doing fine embroidery, in which she was particularly skilled, with the intention of contributing to the income.

She had but one aim: to humble herself, become all to all, spend her recreation with the less cultured postulants and the Sisters engaged in the most humble work. She had but one preoccupation: to avoid any marks of special esteem.

The Vicar, who knew her, and did not spare her humiliations, for which she was avid, was anxious that she not overdo things, and not being able to offer her the food that would sustain her in her full time work as teacher, insisted that she should at least take a little wine.

But Emilia was abstemious!

"Overcome yourself in this," Mother suggested and began to give her a little white wine, then gradually red wine—the good wine of Valponasca. Try as she would to get out of this exception Mother Mazzarello held firm and Emilia obeyed.

With his paternal words Don Bosco increased the enthusiasm of that virile character, offering to her as to his other Daughters the gift of his charity.

[p. 35] Don Bosco has to anticipate his departure

But there is no rose without a thorn.

As Don Bosco was about to review the clothing ceremony with the novices and postulants he was recalled to Turin by telegram. Then the conference turned into a farewell. He told them that the preachers and the Bishop would give the so-called souvenirs, and teach them how to live as good religious. To help them to be generous with God and serene in the midst of difficulties they should remember that the world was full of snares. In order to keep themselves immune from it, even in thought, it was necessary to observe the Rule faithfully, pray continuously and practice charity and humility.

Before he left Sister Mary presented to him a young girl from Mornese—Teresa Mazzarello—who was just fifteen and whose health was not overly robust. She had applied for the clothing but Father Pestarino and Sister Mary had opposed it as they both wished her to be better prepared for this step.

Don Bosco looked at her, asked her some questions, asked further particulars of the Vicar, and finally concluded: "Admit her to the clothing; even if she dies soon after, she will go all the higher to heaven."

The crown of roses

The religious habit was soon prepared for her, but the crown of white roses presented a difficulty. Eight had been made already; there wasn't a single flower left and there was no time to go to Ovada to buy some. The solution was reached by taking one rose from each of the other crowns.

Thus for Teresina Mazzarello too, the white diadem of the virgins Christ was ready.

The use of this crown was something new at Mornese.

Perhaps the suggestions had been made by the Sisters of Saint Anne who use a crown of orange blossom inter-[p. 36] mingled with roses in their clothing and profession ceremonies.

Don Bosco went away without speaking for or against this novelty, nor did he again refer to the difference in the habit of those engaged in certain work. Perhaps he found the reasons given him sound, and had left the final decision to experience.

The first anniversary opens with the "sermon of the souvenirs"

Don Bosco and Father Cagliero left on the eve of the closing of the retreat, after assuring the Sisters and novices that he would remember them in a special way in his mass at the altar of Mary Help of Christians next morning. The retreatants, somewhat saddened, went back to their recollection.

August 5 dawned!

Monsignor Scotton gave the closing talk in which, recalling that our hearts are temples of the Holy Spirit, he said we should keep them spotlessly clean, and look well into the corners, with the help of God's light to ensure that cobwebs did not form there so as to befoul them and make them an unworthy dwelling place for the Lord.

Clothings and professions The Bishop's sermon

The Bishop then celebrated mass and distributed Holy Communion. At 9:00 a.m., though tired and weak health-wise, he wished to perform the ceremony, rendered more solemn by his presence.

The nine postulants, having asked in the prescribed formula to belong to the Institute, went out to lay aside their secular dress and put on the religious habit, after which they returned to the altar to receive from His Ex [p. 37] cellency's hands the medal of Mary Help of Christians. The three novices of the first clothing (Sister Rosina Mazzarello, the niece of Sister Petronilla, Sister Maria Grosso, and Sister Coririna Arrigotti) pronounced their triennial vows and received from the Bishop first the crucifix, then the symbolic crown of red roses which made them look like young martyrs ready for sacrifice.

From the choir burst forth the jubilant notes of *Veni Sponsa Christi. accipe coronam quam tibi Dominum praeparavit in aeternum*; and more than one among those present had tear-filled eyes.

When the music ceased, the Bishop, visibly moved, spoke. His text was the gospel of Martha and Mary. He said they too had chosen the better part—that of Mary—leaving the other to the girls of the world.

Sister Mary Mazzarello had an eye to all, partly from the experience of the previous year, under Don Bosco's glance, partly following the advice of the Sisters of Saint Anne. With deep emotion she accompanied every word of the three young Sisters as they pronounced their sublime consecration to Jesus.

Two of them, Sister Rosina Mazzarello and Sister Maria Grosso, she had formed from infancy; they had grown up in her workroom. The other, Sister Corinna, was a recent conquest of Our Lady in whose soul she had seen the workings of grace.

Other novelties

After church the rejoicing with the new novices and newly professed intermingled with exclamations of delight over the novelty that had come to light during the ceremony.

It had been decided that going bareheaded all day was not sufficiently religious. Furthermore, that the netted kerchief used when going out or in church took a long time to make. Besides the blue mantilla faded, and looked drab; therefore it was decided to adopt a black bonnet. and the three novices were the first to wear it.

The Vicar followed suit. than the other professed and novices. The Sisters engaged in heavy work

were to use it on feastdays only. along with the black apron. And August 5 was a feastday!

Another novelty came after dinner!

Wearing the bonnet necessitated cutting the hair; the Sisters of Saint Anne gave them to understand that this was one of the renunciations their state entailed. and first among the detachments from every feminine ornament. And all were ready to offer this little sacrifice to God.

The crowns to Mary Help of Christians [p. 38]

In the evening when prayers were over the Vicar spoke to the newly professed and novices in front of the altar. telling them, as their mistresses in the spiritual life had suggested, to offer their crowns to the Help of Christians. so that the heavenly Mother might adorn their hearts with those virtues dear to the Lord and prepare a garland for them in heaven.

Next day the House was again functioning with its regular schedule. The two preachers signed the minutes of the ceremony before they left Mornese. Monsignor Scotton went to Turin to give Don Bosco as account of the function.

Pastoral visit and Confirmations

The Bishop continued to celebrate mass in the school and when he went to the parish for some celebration the Sisters always participated.

On August 19, the day chosen by him for his parochial pastoral visit and Confirmations. the Sisters took the pupils [p. 39] to the ceremony, where an incident occurred which showed how he appreciated Sister Mary Mazzarello. Those to be confirmed were in line beside their sponsor; for a number forming one group there was but one sponsor, Mrs. Maria Maccagno Roggero. The Bishop, when ministering the sacrament, was struck by the pronounced resemblance between one child and the sponsor.

"Are you related?" he asked. On hearing that they were mother and daughter, he said seriously "This won't do." Then looking toward the Sisters, he called Sister Mary Mazzarello to sponsor the child. The good Vicar obeyed, happy to participate in the sacrament but somewhat confused in her humility to have been chosen before the ladies present, whom she considered more worthy than herself.

First episcopal privileges

On that same day—August 19—the Bishop delivered a decree of the privileges granted by him to Don Bosco, and to the Director *pro tempore* of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese. In this, while clearly defining the rapport between school and parish, he attested again his esteem for the new Institute, for its Founder and the members of the Salesian family.

Examinations and awards in the boarding school, Mornese

At the beginning of September Don Bosco and other priests from Turin assisted at the final exams and awards to the pupils, showing himself more than pleased.

A few days later he left Mornese promising to come back during the summer holidays.

[p. 40] Departure of the Sisters of Saint Anne

Soon after the Sisters of Saint Anne also left.

They went to speak to Don Bosco at Turin, and answered with deference all his questions about

Mornese, without referring to the extreme poverty of the House.

"Oh, Sister Mary Mazzarello can manage everything herself. Rest assured, Don Bosco, she is a saint in her humility. "

Not even a month had passed since Monsignor Scotton had said to him: "But Don Bosco, those Sisters are too backward. Sister Mazzarello is exceptionally virtuous; the others are good also; but too backward. There is no portress in the House where tradesmen are coming and going. . . It is better you not get involved; the project cannot possibly succeed. "

And Don Bosco: "Very well! We shall see what Our Lady will do with it. My Houses are nearly always born in disorder, but then they become organized."

Now two model religious who have lived in close intimacy with his Daughters of Mary Help of Christians assure him that the first among them is a saint, a saint distinguished for humility. And is this not the basis of every work?

Sister Mazzarello insists on asking for a Superior

Sister Mazzarello frequently insisted that Father Pestarino ask Don Bosco to send the Superior: "The Sisters need some one to direct them, and so do I."

But Don Bosco had other ideas.

All were praising Sister Mazzarello. He personally saw her great correspondence to God's gifts. Therefore he believed he could adopt with her the system that God uses with His elect, and which had produced such excellent results among his Salesians; that is, to test her humility.

The first test had succeeded. The Sisters had learned [p. 41] much from the Sisters of Saint Anne, and Sister Mary had given a brilliant example of humble deference towards them, coupled with simple yet prudent submission.

Therefore he informed Father Pestarino that a lady would soon go there. This lady, he said, was rich in virtue and merits which could help much in the formation of the Sisters.

Sister Mary immediately thought this was the Superior and preparations were made to receive her as such. Father Pestarino, without giving many explanations, allowed her to think as she would, but told her to continue, as Don Bosco had directed, to act as Vicar, just as he continued to act as spiritual director.

Mornese boarding school becomes better known

In the meantime the *Unità Cattolica* carried in its issue of October 1 the following advertisement:

A GOOD SCHOOL FOR GIRLS—In the healthful climate of Mornese, in the Acqui diocese, Don Bosco, in his great charity, last year opened a boarding school for the Christian education of those girls who, through straitened circumstances, are not in a position to avail of high-class establishments. The results surpassed all expectations, as the professors, who went from Turin to conduct the examinations there at the beginning of last month, can testify. Monsignor Sciandra, Bishop of Acqui, honored the Institute with his presence, examined the pupils in French and assisted at the awards ceremony. All enjoyed the poems, songs, and music rendered by the pupils on this occasion, which gave proof of their progress in these branches of culture. The Institute remains open during holidays. The monthly fee is L20. For further particulars apply to the Director, Dominic Pestarino in Mornese (Acqui).

"To whom could this be attributed, but to Don Bosco and his paternal concern for his Daughters? It was surely from Turin that this further proof of heavenly blessings [p. 42] came so that we poor Sisters of this remote place..." Thus did the Vicar and her Sisters think, and they were not deceived, because to him they were also indebted for the prospectus of their boarding school which he had widely diffused among the parish priests and clergy of the surrounding area and of Piedmont. An accompanying circular bore his signature.

Very Reverend Father,

I take the liberty of sending Your Reverence a copy of the *Prospectus of the Girls' Boarding School* established a year ago at Mornese.

You understand that the scope of the Institute is to train Christian girls in religion and morality. Therefore I am fully confident that in your goodness you will publicize the enclosed program and thus get some pupils for the new House.

Counting on your support, I thank you in anticipation and wish you every heavenly blessings, while I remain,

Yours very respectfully,
Your much indebted servant,
John Bosco, Priest

Mrs. Blengeni

While the number of boarders increased during the month of October the long-promised and much-awaited lady arrived from Turin. She was accompanied by her maid. She was the widowed wife of the lawyer, Mr. Blengini, a very refined and pious lady who wished to belong entirely to God.

For this reason Don Bosco sent her to Mornese, not exactly to become a Sister, but that the experience she had of religious life—having been educated in a convent in [p. 43] Turin—and her bearing, so modest and dignified, might be helpful to the Sisters. He knew well that the first to profit by it would be the Vicar.

She was cordially welcomed and one might say that the House was handed over to her. The good lady soon felt that she was mistress of the situation. The best and most advantageously situated rooms were for her and her maid; for some days they were served apart, "wining and dining" as Sister Petronilla put it. Sister Mary treated her with every consideration, while she awaited precise orders from Turin with regard to the extent of her authority. She asked her advice for all that concerned the exterior management of the House and with word and example encouraged Sisters and postulants to approach her with confidence.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the lady got the idea that her role was that of spiritual directress.

She really had a good spirit. Father Cafasso, her confessor, had helped her grow in virtue and piety, (not, however, entertaining the thought of her becoming a religious) after the Lord deprived her of her husband.

As an educated person she didn't impose herself; she spoke little, was not importunate in her questions, but observed closely and after a few days, began very gently to tell Sister Mary that perhaps it would be necessary to introduce some changes, to make some improvements.

More time for prayer?

She found the prayers of the community too simple, and recommended some extra practice. She spoke with such amiable authority as to make one believe that in Turin she had been invested with certain powers. But how could they spend more time in prayer? Don Bosco had said continuous prayer, but explaining the phrase he gave them to understand that it consists in having the right intention and doing all for God, to please Him, with thought and heart fixed in Him, with frequent burning ejaculations. [p. 44] and he had also fixed the time to be spent in community prayer. Besides, if one doesn't work, he doesn't eat. Alas, even now all the goodwill of Sisters and postulants, combined with the tight economy of Sisters Joan Ferretino and Teresa Pampuro—who helped her in business affairs—were not sufficient to ward off a poverty which bordered on misery .

Sister Mazzarello consulted Father Pestarino, and as he said to continue doing as heretofore, the lady had to be content with having made some good suggestions—no more.

And the food?

Next it was the question of food. In the refectory the good Vicar had readily renounced her place at table in favor of the lady, putting Sister Emilia next to her that she might be served properly. The lady wanted Sister Emilia to eat chicken and fine vegetables, but did not succeed. The Sister loved common life too much to renounce it so easily. Thus the lady couldn't help seeing that the young Sisters especially rose from table without having satisfied their appetite.

Breakfast still consisted in a thin slice of polenta... made of corn flour. Sometimes when the flour ran short there wasn't even this, and one had to be satisfied with just bread, soaked in water overnight to swell it, or with a boiled potato. At dinner 'some good polenta gave the illusion of a meal and at night vegetable soup, some fruit when in season, and a very small quantity of well-diluted wine. But all was seasoned with the greatest cheerfulness.

Mortification and charity

The extreme mortification of the Vicar, who sometimes gave her soup to the poor at the door; her great charity which strove in every possible way to make the privations of [p. 45] life less painful for others, by stealthily bringing a piece of bread to those she knew needed it—all this drew the Sisters to imitate her. Hence the ingenuity of those who found secret ways and means of making their poor fare less appetizing by adding some ashes—when no one was looking—and the virtuous indifference of those accustomed to better food, who now serenely adapted to the Mornesian kitchen. It was a competition in mortification which completely ignored the requirements of nature.

While she admired such fervor, Mrs Belgini was perplexed. When a postulant or novice, encouraged by the Vicar, went to consult her on the ways of the spirit, she saw traced on her young face the first marks of malnutrition.

She, therefore, spoke to the Vicar, who on this point shared her preoccupation but could not remedy the situation.

She could do nothing and she thought that since Providence left them in this penury, it was perhaps, intended that they sanctify themselves by means of it. Therefore, she didn't worry even though the lady showed herself very anxious.

The Vicar enters fully into Don Bosco's views on instruction

Making her own Don Bosco's will on the necessity of instruction, the good Vicar disposed that all, herself included, should have some lessons, as before. The pupils, intern and extern, should have regular lessons while Sisters Emilia Mosca and Enrichetta Sorbone should prepare for the Examinations for the Teachers' Diploma. Sister Jandet and a teacher, Miss Rose Sala, who had been sent purposely from Turin, and received a salary, would prepare them. Sister Mary saw to it that all was done in an orderly way, and that studies did not interfere with the material, disciplinary, and moral business of the House.

[p. 46] A surprise

"One morning, without any warning," Sister Petronilla relates, "Mrs. Blengini came into the workroom dressed as we Sisters were, but with a slight modification: her bonnet was white instead of black. What a surprise, and what an effort not to laugh! Sister Mary, however, controlled herself. She just smiled so respectfully that we all kept silent. "

The lady was not offended, but after a few days she resumed the secular dress. Perhaps the experiment was made to see how she would be accepted if one day she expressed a wish to become a religious.

Mrs. Blengini and Don Bosco

However, feeling convinced that she could and ought to help the new Institute by introducing some reforms she found it necessary to discuss the matter with Don Bosco. She wrote to him but on getting no reply, she went to spend Christmas in Turin. Indeed she may have decided to spend the winter there to escape the rigors of a Piedmontese winter, and the still greater rigors of Mornese, in a House which knew no heating other than the love of God.

She went to Don Bosco with her proposals. He graciously listened to the end. But he concluded by saying his Sisters had to be simple in everything, also in piety so as not to tire the young people with devotions more suited to monks than to religious of active life; that they must be simple and humble so as not to cause embarrassment to the poor children they were educating in Christian virtue.

He did not, therefore, approve of the good lady's ideas. She went away, but not disposed to see things his way.

[p. 47] The first midnight mass in the school

On Christmas Eve, in a letter written by Father Rua, signed by Don Bosco and sealed with the approval of Monsignor Sciandra, Father Pestarino received permission to celebrate the three masses in the school on Christmas Eve. The joy of the community was indescribable. Since childhood almost all had assisted at this annual festal celebration in their parish churches, and were already thinking wistfully of its loss which they had experienced the year before.

The girls especially were overjoyed at the news and the most festive *Deo Gratias* found an echo in every heart.

Sister Mary did not stop short at the privilege. When Father Pestarino had finished his comment, she drew the attention of her Sisters to the Founder's fatherly goodness, who having obtained for himself and all his Houses the precious faculty of the three midnight masses, quickly thought to obtain a similar privilege for his Daughters. Therefore the *Deo Gratias* of the Sisters assumed the double character of filial thanksgiving to Don Bosco and gratitude to God.

1874

The first grave [p. 49]

On January 29, when ordinarily they should be celebrating the feast of Saint Francis de Sales, for the first time, the Sisters were instead asking the saint of sweetness to help them bear meritoriously the first break in their ranks: on that day Sister Maria Poggio, the humble cook, who though often lacking necessities, had never been upset but had welcomed and edified all with her patient smile, was no more. She was a quiet Sister, generous and most exemplary!

The funeral mass in presence of the remains was celebrated in the school chapel, thanks to the decree of privileges granted by Monsignor Sciandra the previous August.

His charity had thus provided in time for a very special solace for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in this their first bereavement.

Anxious doubt

The death left the Vicar in a state of anxious doubt. She had cared for the dear departed one with the tenderness of a mother; but... her premature death...did it not prove Mrs. Blengini right regarding the insufficient food?... She wept in her heart with an anguish bordering on remorse, and spoke of it to Father Pestarino, who was as afflicted as she, and equally concerned about the actual poverty of the House.

From then on a little milk was provided every morning for the Sisters who were not too strong, or for those less used to the climate and that type of life. However, the fear [p. 50] was still there and she again proposed to the Director that a little coffee and milk be served to all the Sisters at breakfast, to prevent others becoming weak to the point of exhaustion.

Trustworthy particulars on the subject and opportune additions are available in the report prepared by Father Pestarino probably during the first week of February. In fact the number of professed, novices, and postulants mentioned in the account corresponds exactly to the number present in Mornese that week after young Pauline Guala had entered (February 3) to replace, numberwise, the deceased Sister Maria Poggio.

Father Pestarino's report

In the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese there are thirteen professed Sisters (there were fourteen: one we have every reason to believe, passed to the life of the blessed in heaven) eight novices, eight postulants, seventeen boarders. In all we have reason to bless and thank the Lord.

It is a great consolation for me to find in the professed Sisters and novices, according to capacity, the true spirit of the Lord and the endeavor to form themselves to the spirit of Rules according to the norms given by Pius IX through the Major Superior Don Bosco: uniformity in dress, food, sleep, work, permissions, and seeking no exceptions personally.

But some weeks ago Sister Mary asked me if I considered it advisable to serve some coffee and milk, fearing that those postulants who were accustomed to it would suffer from want of a little hot milk. I accepted the proposal, and she brought it up at the conference in the presence of all. I then gave them to understand that I was not in the least opposed to it. Rather it had come to my mind more than once, and I thought it would be good.

The teachers first, and then all besought me to wait yet a little while, for they felt well in health, and had rather too much rather than too little appetite. At breakfast they [p. 51] didn't leave even a crumb of bread. All would rather I arranged for polenta and cooked chestnuts which they say is a good breakfast for everyone.

I did not say much; I told Sister Vicar to wait, that later we would see if it was convenient or not.

What one cannot help noticing is the union of spirit, of heart, of joyful harmony and holy cheerfulness among them all at recreation, where they are fraternally united, and enjoy being together for a game or quiet conversation.

Their piety is edifying for me, whether in recollection or their manner of approaching the sacraments, in meditation, in their recitation of the Divine Office and other prayers and functions. Their funeral procession to the cemetery with their departed Sister was most touching.

Many people cried; even the young men said that their composure and unaffected modesty was most extraordinary, so much so that the young girls said with a smile: "We all want to go to the school."

One notices in them all a real detachment from the world, from relatives and self, as far as human frailty permits. They are so diligent in their work that I have never heard the least complaint from anyone; and all spontaneously wish to help with the housework.

It must be said that the teachers give very good example even though one is a lay person who instructs the pupils and prepares the Sisters for exams: she too is exemplary in piety, humble and respectful to all. It would seem that she would like to remain with the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians even though she came with the intention of staying but a short time; in all the other convents where she taught she never even thought of entering. They are all well in health, although Sister Maria's death was a great loss. The boarders also leave little to be desired. They are all virtuous and respectful. Some are outstandingly pious and wish to become Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

I must repeat that they are content and happy and that I am greatly consoled to see them so cheerful always and desirous that I go to give them talks. Even the little ones do not want to go to bed when they hear there is to be a good-night, for they wish to hear what the Director has to say to them.

[p. 52] One sees clearly the fruits of the Lord's blessings, and of the care of Our Lady and the Superiors.

They long just for one thing: a visit from the Major Superior.

The only thing that gives reason for anxiety is the financial situation. The boarders are few and, therefore, we are in debt; on this account they live very simply, though the food is very good.

It seems their debts are always in excess of their income. We hope in the Lord that this too will change through the goodness of Don Bosco and Father Rua....and the other schools with which we are more or less in contact for debts contracted.

A significant episode

Father Pestarino said they all liked chestnuts for breakfast. Sister Enrichetta relates:

The odor of polenta, of well prepared bread porridge, or boiled, dried chestnuts that greeted us on coming out of chapel was very tempting! We kept as far from the kitchen as possible so as not to succumb to the desire of indulging. And when we went to the refectory the smell of the chestnuts especially made our mouths water, but then there followed the inspiration of going without, to mortify our greed. And to be candid, we often came out as we had gone in, that is without touching a thing. The Vicar wasn't blind though

...One morning, I had just come out of the refectory when she called me:

"Richetta, were the chestnuts good?"

"Good and delicious!"

"Did you eat any?"

"Oh, ...what a lovely prize for the best of our little *biricchine* (pranksters)."

"But, did you taste them?"

"No, Sister."

"Well, since you are the greatest little *biricchina*, you will go back to the refectory and... I wish you a good breakfast! " I didn't have her repeat it; but I said to myself: "She wants us to be mortified, and then she does not want us [p. 53] to suffer!"

It was exactly so: Sister Mary was strong and wanted to make her Sisters strong too by giving them the example of mortification. But then she was so tenderhearted that she suffered intensely when she wasn't able to give to each one what was necessary and convenient.

The Holy Father's "keepsakes"

January and February went by. Don Bosco was still in Rome on important affairs concerning the Church and the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales; it seemed indeed, that he would not be back in the Oratory for some time.

"Let us pray much for him," Father Pestarino and the Vicar suggested to the community. "Let us also pray much for our Holy Father, that God might comfort him in the midst of the many trials he has to sustain in these difficult, stormy times. Who knows if Don Bosco will speak to him of his poor Sisters in Mornese!"

Will he speak of them? He had already done so. From Rome—as we know—he had sent the precious "keepsakes" of the Holy Father precisely for the dear Daughters of Mary Help of Christians:

Uniformity in food—uniformity in dress—uniformity in permissions—avoidance of exceptions—practice of the Rules! To the delight of the Sisters, Sister Mary decided that they be written on posters and hung up here and there in the most frequented parts of the House: workroom, stairs, refectory, dormitory and corridors, to serve as reminders and continual stimulus to religious perfection.

But that repetition of "uniformity... uniformity" how many doubts it awakened in the Vicar! Therefore the cotton habit was out! Therefore certain little concessions to the most vivacious. . .

Enough, Sister Mary! For the present do as the Director tells you to do, then when you see Don Bosco ...or when the Superior comes,.. Will that blessed Superior come soon or not?

[p. 54] Father Cagliero's visit

"Father Cagliero will come soon," Father Pestarino announced. "Don Bosco is sending him as extraordinary confessor, since the Ember Days have already passed, and for a triduum for the boarders in preparation for Easter, as is the custom in Salesian Houses. He may be able to tell us other things: for example, if Mrs. Blengini will come back to us or not. "

Don Bosco had written to Father Rua from Rome: "If Madam Blengini has not yet returned to Mornese, tell her not to worry; that little by little things will be adjusted. I have already written her to this effect. A letter awaits her there."

Father John Cagliero arrived the second week of March. He was joyfully welcomed.

Professed Sisters and novices, [narrates Sister Enrichetta) gathered in separate groups to receive him, "for a special presentation," the Vicar said.

We were all in perfect silence when Father Pestarino, Father Cagliero and Sister Mary came in.

Father Pestarino was moved; Father Cagliero just moved his fingers as if to overcome embarrassment, and Sister Mary looked as if she didn't know whether to smile or be serious. Father Pestarino broke the silence.

In Don Bosco's name he presented Father Cagliero as Don Bosco's lieutenant, to better and more quickly provide for the needs of the Institute. He added that now each one could tell Father Cagliero just what we would tell Don Bosco himself. And concluding almost with a sob: "I can now die with no loss to anyone," he went away leaving us alone with Father Cagliero.

To distract us from that last expression and unexpected departure of Father Pestarino, Father Cagliero looked around at our groups-novices and professed-and said jokingly; "True! You are a lot of *masnà* (small children). Still, to give advice even novices will do!"

The Vicar smiled, and then we too chased away our tears. Then Father Cagliero, looking at me and Sister Emiliawhom he had not recognized before–began to tell us about [\[p. 55\]](#)

Turin, about Don Bosco and all that he considered helpful to the community.

First spiritual exercise for the boarders

It was the first time the girls made a retreat but they were soon convinced of its importance and did not waste time.

The arrival of Father Cagliero marked a new conquest: young Rosalia Pestarino, the well-known niece of the Director. She had been in Mornese for some time, still uncertain as to what path to choose. Father Cagliero's talks confirmed the words that Don Bosco had said to her in 1870: "Become a Sister." She was shaken by them; went to consult him, and then entered as a postulant on March 15, to the great joy of her uncle, who was consoled by it in midst of sufferings.

To her brother, Father Joseph, who asked her in surprise: "But why do you want to stay with those who are not even nuns in the full sense of the word?" she answered simply, "They are so fervent!"

From the first day, however, she declared that she would never go to confession to her uncle; otherwise she adapted herself relatively well to the religious life, although from time to time she laughed heartily about things she couldn't yet understand.

God is the confessor

For some weeks the Vicar asked the parish priest to come to the school so Rosalia could go to confession to him; but then... "Do you think to go on in this singular fashion? Be strong; stir up your faith; think that God is in the confessor and go to the Director as we all do. If then you have other needs we will provide."

[\[p. 56\]](#) Confession day came; Sisters, novices, postulants and boarders went but Rosalia didn't budge. The Vicar had seen all; she approached the postulant and said; "Come, present yourself; if you do not want to confess, very well. You may go to another priest, but in the meantime you will have conquered yourself in this; the Lord will take account of it."

Rosalia went but when she was about to speak she ran off. Seeing that there were no more for confession Father Pestarino went into the sacristy.

The Vicar drew near the confused postulant: "A half victory is not enough. Now I will call Father Pestarino and you will go back." Rosalia bowed her head. To open the slide, make the Sign of the Cross and then forget completely who was on the other side, was all one. It was all so easily done that having finished her penance in tears she said to Sister Mazzarello: "It is really true, God is in the confessor! I am so happy!"

Paternal dispositions

The novice, Sister Enrichetta Sorbone, who on the recommendation of Don Bosco and Father Pestarino had been assigned for study with Sister Emilia Mosca, didn't stand up to the life of concentrated application. Although she could easily succeed in the sciences, in which she surpassed Sister Emilia, she asked insistently and obtained permission to return to her girls and the workroom, where with less difficulty, she could make herself useful. The Vicar, in her maternal goodness had not forgotten the anguish of this young girl over her two little sisters, who had remained at home without her care. She spoke with Father Cagliero about it, and then invited the novice to go and speak with him. He questioned her paternally, and realizing her suffering said:

"Would you like to have your little sisters here?"

"Yes, Father."

"And if I have them brought here will you promise [p. 57] me to become a saint?"

"Yes, Father."

"But you will really, really become a saint?"

"Yes, Father, really."

Father Cagliero promised to bring the two little ones.

Instead of Sister Enrichetta the postulant Rosalia was assigned to study. When it became clear that the new secular teacher, Miss Candida, who succeeded Miss Sala, was not capable of preparing the pupils for the Teacher's diploma examination, he promised to send them detailed programs and corresponding textbooks from Turin. Seeing that Sister Corinna was excellent at the piano and that Sisters Grosso and Arecco were capable of sustaining the singing in chapel in a masterful way, he agreed with Father Pestarino and the Vicar that music lessons should be given, not only to the boarders but to those Sisters who showed themselves capable of succeeding in it. On other points he waited to consult Don Bosco. On hearing of the original clothing ceremony of Mrs. Blengini, he gave them to understand that the introduction of a white bonnet would be in keeping with his own idea: "Really something white would take away the black look from you!" . At the request of Sister Petronilla, in one of the instructions Father Cagliero clarified the Holy Father's third keepsake: "Uniformity in permissions."

"This," he said, "regards the Superior, who must not permit one to do what she forbids another. For example, one of you would like to go to visit your family: if in the same circumstances the Superior would give that permission to another, she will say yes, otherwise no."

Having interviewed all who wished to speak to him and informed himself of all the particulars and necessities of the House Father Cagliero felt that he had fulfilled his commission. But as he said good-bye the Vicar was at his feet and in the presence of all she asked him to beg Don Bosco to send the Superior soon, that he now knew how little she was worth, and how on account of her great ignorance she [p. 58] could not be in charge of an Institute which was founded for education.

"Do you know the mysteries of our religion?" he asked her.

"Oh, yes, by the grace of God; I have been taught these since childhood. Who doesn't know them?"

"Then you know enough. For Don Bosco at the moment this is enough; this, and that you obey."

Sister Mary understood that she could not expect support for her request from Father Cagliero and was almost mortified. The Sisters instead felt their hopes revive that they would definitely have her as Superior, especially as they had heard him answer during these days; "But yes, yes, call her Mother Vicar! And if it escapes you, only Mother! "

Don Bosco and the approval of the Constitutions

When Father Cagliero had gone, a letter arrived from Rome, from Don Bosco. We quote it.

Beloved Daughters in J.C. and Mary Help of Christians,

The 24th of this month will be a memorable day for our Pious Society.

Our Congregation was definitely approved in a decree of March 1, 1869; now there is the question of approval of the Constitutions.

To this end the Holy Father has chosen a Congregation of Cardinals who will be asked to give their views on this subject, which is of greatest importance for our present and future good.

Prayers have, heretofore, been frequently directed to this end. We must, therefore, redouble our supplications before the divine throne, so that God may graciously dispose everything for His greater glory and for our particular spiritual advantage.

Let us be united, therefore, in the spirit of faith and let all the Salesians, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and [p. 59] the pupils whom Divine Providence has entrusted to them, be of one heart and one soul to implore the light of the Holy Spirit for their Eminences the Cardinals, with a triduum of prayer and other Christian practices. So that there may be uniformity in our requests for divine mercy it is established as follows:

1) – Beginning on the 21st of this month the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will fast rigorously for three days. Those who for reasonable motives cannot fast, will recite the *Miserere* with three *Salve Reginas* to Mary Help of Christians with the versicle: Mary Help of Christians pray for us. Each one will add those prayers and mortifications which she judges compatible with her strength and with the duties of her state.

2) – The beloved pupils will be invited to approach the sacraments with the greatest possible frequency.

In the morning begin by singing the *Veni Creator Spiritus, Emitte Spiritum tuum* etc., and with the *Oremus*:

Deus qui eorda fidelium.. The prayers, rosary, holy mass, and meditation will all be directed to this need.

3) – During the day all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will spend as much time as they possibly can before the Blessed Sacrament. The spiritual reading and the ordinary prayers will be offered in chapel.

4) – In the evening at the most convenient time all will gather in church and with the greatest devotion will recite the *Veni Creator* as in the morning; the usual practice of reparation for the outrages that Jesus receives in the Blessed Sacrament; then after singing the *Ave Maris Stella*, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

These, our humble prayers, will begin on the 21st and will continue until the morning of the 24th of this month.

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Rome, March 16, 1847

[p. 60]

N.B. – Reverend Father Pestarino will read and explain this to our Sisters, and then to the pupils, in the way and words he judges most opportune.

A noble competition

The letter arrived just in time so that each one could do what was ordained by the Founder and never did obedience find hearts more desirous of fulfilling it:

"What are three days fast for us? What a comfort it was to do all that was prescribed to obtain special blessings for Don Bosco." The visits to the Blessed Sacrament then...It was already a praiseworthy habit of all to go frequently to Jesus and remind him of Don Bosco, of benefactors, to pray for sinners, for all in need. Just two minutes only in these usually spontaneous little visits, not to take any time from the obligation of work and community recreations. But if the time was limited, the measure and degree of fervor was not. Sister Mary Mazzarello set the example. During the day she stayed all the time possible in adoration before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament still, motionless, without moving her lips. Outside church she gave expression to spiritual joy exclaiming often with great simplicity: "It is so wonderful to spend a few minutes all alone with Jesus."

On these days the prayers were longer; it was a noble competition even among the girls, as to who knew best how to insist with the Sacred Heart of Jesus. They joyously awaited March 24. In the assurance that their prayers would be heard they held a happy feast.

Poor Corinna!

But on that very evening, Sister Corinna's father arrived, impetuous and as always seething with anger. He had written that he wanted his daughter home, and as she had answered begging him to leave her where she was happy, [p. 61] he came bringing a secular dress, so that she might put it on and leave immediately.

The poor girl was like one in a trance. She cried, she begged, but infuriated, he wouldn't listen to reason; he used harsh, brutal words, threatening aloud, and only at Father pestarino's insistence did he resign himself to wait for two days.

To pacify him the good Director, with his characteristic kindness, gave him lodging, invited him to dinner with some good people from Mornese and all surrounded him with attention and advice to induce him to think things over. But to no avail; he wouldn't listen to reason. He said there had never been religious in his family, and that he would prefer to see his daughter dead than see her a Sister.

Father Pestarino thought it advisable that Sister Corinna obey him, and when she told him of the difficulties she would have at home in the observance of the vows, he explained that she could be released from them. Sister Corinna, however, was too jealous of the vows that bound her to Jesus to consent to their being dispensed.

With the Virgin of the Annunciation she abandoned herself to God's providence and repeated: *Ecce ancilla Domini! Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum!* Even death, then! Really it seemed as if she were going to her grave, and the entire House mourned with her.

Sister Felicina, the Novice Mistress, and Sister Joan Ferrettino tried to inject a little courage in her poor heart. The Vicar spoke to her in these moments of trial all that her experience of life and her love for the poor victim suggested, but at this time she was so wrapped up in her sorrow that she seemed to understand nothing.

When she had to take off the religious habit, she didn't move a finger. She allowed them to undress and dress her. She permitted them to fix on her head a tress of hair, which a novice had

kindly cut off for her so that her father might not rebuke her for having cut her own. She didn't object to their winding a silk handkerchief round her head... They could do just as they liked. She seemed to [p. 62] be miles away.

When the moment of departure came, she followed her father accompanied by the tears of her Sisters, and for quite a bit of the way by her novitiate companions.

She had spent two nights weeping and praying; now she had scarcely the strength to walk. In spite of this, when the party had left the village her father and little sister Ida mounted the donkey which Father Pestarino had kindly rented for the feverish Corinna, and the poor thing had to follow on foot.

This day, March 26—Thursday of Passion week—was more sorrowful for the school than that in which death had come to take from them dear Sister Maria Poggio. She went into the arms of divine mercy. Good Sister Corinna was going to a home where false paternal pride wanted at any cost to dispute God's rights over her.

A tearful "Via Crucis"

The community had made the *Via Crucis* instead of the spiritual reading every Friday in Lent; on this last Friday before Holy Week, Father Pestarino guided the function in surplice and stole to make it more solemn. He began with apparent calm, but very soon was touched. His voice trembled at the fourth station, a sob choked his words and he had to do violence to himself to restrain his tears. By the end he could do so no longer because his vivid image of the divine Mother on the slope of Calvary moved him so that the novice Sister Enrichetta Sorbone had to take over from him. All present were touched and so was she.

This year also the community took turns during the day and night of Holy Thursday in adoring Jesus in the Eucharist; the Vicar was the most constant and fervent in keeping company with Him and His sorrowful mother on Friday night also. The fervor of her childhood and youth all came back to her.

[p. 63] Corinna is not forgotten

Easter was tinged with sorrow. The vacant place of Sister Corinna cast shadows on the joy of the feast with its little extra in the line of food and drink. Every heart ached for that dear Sister whose surreptitiously written letters brought desolating news.

A martyr to paternal tyranny, she was firm as a rock, and never gave in on a single point of the program of retirement she had set herself in Mornese, ready to die rather than fail in her religious vows.

The Vicar answered her letters through Sister Corinna's aunt, to spare her the violent outbursts of her father. Among other things she encouraged her as follows: "We are all praying for you here to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, before whom there is always someone supplicating for you." She also told her how Saint Philomena conquers and changes hardened hearts; the Sisters made a novena to the saint and some had even fasted to obtain the conversion of her father, so obdurate and hard.

Family news

On Easter Sunday, April 5, Teresa Laurantoni of Massignano (Ascoli Piceno), came to swell the ranks of the postulants. She had been living at Mornese for some time, first with the boarders, and then with the community, to experience the life. She was the daughter of a pontifical colonel, and had an ingenuity of soul which made her sincere, open, and pleasant, and a vivacity so exuberant that it would give her plenty to do!

On the 6th Father Pestarino went to Valdocco and on the following day the postulant, Rosina Daghero, arrived from Cumiano (Turin). She was accompanied by the Salesian Coadjutor

Scavini, attached to the school in the quality of carpenter. They brought a letter from" Father Pestarino saying he would return in two days.

[p. 64] Father Pestarino left Mornese again on the 16th to be at Alessandria to meet Don Bosco on his way back from Rome, full of joy on having attained the approval of the Constitutions of the Pious Salesian Society. Due to the delay of the train the meeting did not take place and the Director wrote to that effect to his nephew, Father Joseph, who was substituting for him at the school.

Approval of the Salesian Constitutions and consequences for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Turin, April 17, 1874

My dear nephew,

Don Bosco reached Alessandria at 6:00 a.m. and arrived unexpectedly in Turin. I was waiting for him at 8 o'clock in Alessandria, with the Director of Sampierdarena, Misses Pastore and Farina from Valenza and Guala of Acqui. We waited there until 1:30 p.m. after which I left for Turin where I found Don Bosco in his room with all the directors. When he had finished speaking to them, we spent a long time together.

He said that the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was included in the approved Congregation of Saint Francis de Sales. There had been many obstacles, contradictions and terrible opposition that would be unbelievable if one didn't see them written down. The Lord helped his work: suffice it to say that the goal was reached. Before leaving Rome he (Don Bosco) went to the Holy Father to thank him and take leave. On seeing him Pius IX began to clap his hands exclaiming: "Evviva Don Bosco!" Then he asked him: "Don Bosco, are you happy?" "Entirely so," Don Bosco replied.

"I too am happy: Evviva Don Bosco!" the Pope repeated.

I will tell you the remainder when I get home. I got Cilin's paper; nothing yet from Corinna. I shall write to her tomorrow. Don Bosco and all the others spoke to [p. 65] me of her; they are praying and hoping. Mrs. Blengini hasn't turned up yet. We shall see. I shall write again soon. Sunday the 19th is Don Bosco's feastday. Greetings to everybody,

Your affectionate uncle,

Father Dominic Pestarino

P.S. Remember the message for Lerma. If there is anything, write.

Therefore the second family of Don Bosco, that is, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, was included with the Salesian Congregation as a single unit.

It is impossible to describe the consolation this was for all at the school. Father Pestarino's return was an occasion of great rejoicing: he told them of the arc of light seen by all, himself included, over the Oratory on the day of Don Bosco's return, and gave them the long-awaited news that Don Bosco would soon come to Mornese. He had formally promised: "I shall come and we shall form a real Chapter."

At these words while every Sister gave free vent to her joy, Rosalia Pestarino returned to Sister Petronilla and said: "Then the Vicar will be Superior, and you will be Vicar. "

But nobody seemed to hear the expression, because the Sisters, curious to hear how the Blengini affair had gone in Turin, were bombarding the condescending Director with questions.

Mrs. Blengini will not return to Mornese

Despite the fact that very few, if any, of the Sisters would have wanted Mrs. Blengini as Superior, the community never thought of slighting the personal merits of the dear lady, especially her good will to help the young Institute in every possible way. It is, therefore, easily understood that she would have liked to return to Mornese, where she had left her little niece, a real angel of goodness and [p. 66] piety. On this account they desired to know more about her, a desire which, after all, stemmed from the gratitude, affection and esteem in which they held her.

Thus they came to know that she found the time very long in Turin, and when Father Cagliero, after having given Don Bosco an account of Mornese, and having made some new arrangements with Father Pestarino, went to thank her in Don Bosco's name for what she had done for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, saying that she shouldn't think about it for the moment, she took it badly—in fact she was deeply grieved.

"Mrs. Blengini's stay with us," Sister Petronilla said, "was not without its benefits; she made us understand the advantages of education in behavior and in speech. She helped us appreciate more the spirit of Don Bosco, binding us more closely to him and to our Institute. Perhaps too he will give us something white, so that, as was recently said partly in joke, partly in earnest, we may not look so black!"

Father Pestarino informed the Vicar privately that Don Bosco too would not disapprove of a little white in the habit of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, so that it would not look so black, as Father Cagliero kept repeating to him. Also, after the latest news from Mornese he would not think it a bad thing to introduce—and with a certain liberality—some coffee and milk for breakfast, if not for all, at least for those of weaker and more delicate constitution.

With regard to the Superior he thought the Vicar could and should order and dispose things for each Sister and for the House, as it seemed best to her in the Lord, allowing herself to be called "Mother" by those who already did so spontaneously. Then when Don Bosco came all would be definitely arranged.

[p. 67] The letter of humility

When Father Pestarino had left, the Vicar, following the inspiration of the moment, banished all promptings of self-love and gave full reign to humility. She sent the first sample of her epistolary

correspondence to Father Cagliero, writing:

This letter of mine will tell you in a few words that I am not suitable for the office of Superior as our Reverend Father Don Bosco wishes. You can judge from this letter, which I am even ashamed to send you. My education, my writing, which is like the scratching of a hen, the grammatical blunders and spelling mistakes are really worse than those of an ignorant peasant. I am not capable of expressing my thoughts in a way fit to be sent to a Superior. Tell Don Bosco that I am not capable of directing myself, still less others.

More postulants and the Sorbone children

While she confidently awaited for the reply the family increased: on the 25th the two Rossi sisters, Angelina and Ermelinda came.

These two girls had gone to see Don Bosco at Borgo San Martino with their friend, Sister Enrichetta Sorbone.

As has been said Don Bosco did not urge them to enter as postulants; rather, on being asked he said to the elder sister: "No, not yet, stay with your mother." Then through the good offices of their brother Marcello, the time had been shortened.

They arrived at Mornese accompanied by that same brother and their mother. They also brought along their little sister, Cecilia, who went with the boarders, and the two little Sorbone girls, Marietta and Angelica. As is evident, Father Cagliero had not forgotten the promise he made to Sister Enrichetta; in fact as soon as he met Don Bosco he spoke of it like a champion of the cause. Marcello Rossi [p. 68] was then told by Don Bosco himself to go to Rosignano and take the whole company to Mornese as soon as possible. But the two sisters needed a little time to prepare and the departure was delayed by some days.

Papa Constantine Sorbone had also accompanied the group as far as Serravalle Scrivia. He was pleased to send the little ones to Richetta, but naturally felt sad parting from them. A donkey had been hired to carry the children from there to Mornese. Cecilia Rossi and Marietta Sorbone were fixed one on either side of the packsaddle; Angelica in a little basket safely fastened in the place of the saddle. The others followed on foot, and Marcello kept an eye on the beast lest he throw his precious burden.

When they arrived Sister Enrichetta was speechless, as were her little sisters who scarcely knew her dressed like a monk and with a black bonnet. Soon however, the heart found words, and the Sisters, who greatly esteemed Sister Enrichetta, always cheerful, always active, dedicated day and night to the good of the children, smiled to see such tenderness on both sides.

Thus the reception given by the community to the party, especially to the little girls, couldn't have been more cordial.

The Vicar will take care of the little ones

Sister Enrichetta could again be a mother to her little sisters. But it was not to be. Fearing that sentiment might lead her to overindulgence and also perhaps be a cause of jealousy for the other little ones she said to the Vicar: "I do not look after them, do I?"

The Vicar approved, took on herself the responsibility of the two little sisters, and began at once to look for a bed for Angelica, so small and lively that she needed a crib.

Therefore she took a kind of washtub found among the disused furniture of the Pestarino house. She covered the sides of it completely with padding, prepared a mattress [p. 69] to size, and before evening her skillful hands had produced a soft, safe bed for Angelica.

Corinna returns

Eventually heaven gave ear to the prayers offered by so many and led back to the fold the little sheep that had been so violently carried away, but in what a state!

All the hardships that a hardhearted father could inflict on his daughter had been tried: beatings, humiliations, coarse words, hunger, prohibition to go to church, to pray, to write to Mornese. In truth, were the trial to continue a little longer, he would have accompanied the victim to the cemetery.

Sister Corinna hadn't put a foot outside the door to go for a walk; she was not allowed to have visitors; she was ostracized by the other members of the family, and people asked in wonder why Sister Corinna didn't even go to mass. In the meantime God gave her the consolation of assisting her dying grandfather, and inducing him to receive the Last Sacraments with transports of love before he died.

Above all, and for her it was above all else, her father had brought her back to her beloved Institute through the intervention of the same uncle whom he had used to have her accepted at Mornese in the first instance.

Informed by Father Pestarino of how much the poor Sister was suffering he went to Tonco, and succeeded in freeing her from her father's clutches by condemning his inhuman treatment, and then by introducing economic motives. The father in yielding declared that he no longer recognized her as his daughter, nor was he moved to see her kneel at his feet asking pardon and promising to pray always for him. Now the poor martyr was back, pale and emaciated: the picture of suffering.

In her joy at being once again in the convent she did not take account of the illness which was reducing her to a skeleton, and on hearing that the Sisters were preparing [p. 70] the mass of the Holy Childhood she went at once to help them. Hers was but a pious desire! She could not stand, do the least work, or eat; it was necessary to support her in the short walks the doctor had ordered. She was in a kind of torpor out of which they tried in vain to shake her. Suffering had more than half killed her. but her Sisters hoped that Our Lady Help of Christians would restore her to health during the month of May. They prayed earnestly for this and went all out to offer sacrifices and flowers of virtue for that intention.

A postulant very dear to Jesus

Our Lady gave a sign of her pleasure by sending another postulant, Elisa Roncallo, who arrived on May 12, accompanied by Father Augustine Mascardi.

This good friend of Don Bosco brought a set of purple vestments which the school needed, and readily accepted the invitation to dinner extended to him and the new postulant by the Director. The young girl, timid and preoccupied, scarcely opened her mouth; perhaps she was still recalling her mother's parting words: "There you will find a Superior, but will she understand you? But Our Lady is above you, she will be a Mother to you!" When on meeting Sister Mazzarello soon after, she experienced her kindly interest, she was assured that the new Mother below would understand her too.

An indescribable joy

May 14-feast of the Ascension-took on a new solemnity. The Sisters sang the mass of the Holy Childhood and Father Pestarino was deeply moved. In his sermon he spontaneously referred to the speedy expansion of the Institute, (although there was yet but one House there was already a Director General) and to the earnestness with which all [p. 71] the Sisters and girls attended to their duties so that there was all-round progress. He repeated with unction a favorite expression: *Flores apparuent in terra nostra*, applying it especially to the Sisters whom he called "flowers of his immortal crown." At this point his voice was choked in a sob; he interrupted the talk and, more touched than on any other occasion, he went before the Blessed Sacrament to pour out the fullness of his affections.

Father Pestarino leaves this world for heaven

May 15.-Yesterday, festal joy; today, general mourning. The good Director, the father of Mornese, had gone to heaven to receive the reward of all the good he had done here below.

That morning he had gone as usual to the parish church soon after the *Angelus* had rung to hear confessions and give Communion to those whom he knew would be waiting. Then he went back to the school to say the community mass, and had read the short meditation on the *Month of May* by Muzzarelli, as he usually did during the novenas. It was a passage on death and in reading it the words, "It can be me, it can be you," were interrupted by a sudden gush of tears. He mastered himself and having given the blessing with the relic of Our Lady, he went home to write a letter, which he gave to the errand-boy who took the post to Castello d'Orba; and most unexpectedly asked for some coffee, while his breakfast ordinarily consisted of dry bread and polenta.

About 10:00 a.m. he returned to the school, and went through the boarders' classrooms, the workroom and the garden. He gave the Vicar to understand that he had something to say to her;

and after looking all around he went to the ground floor where the two Salesian carpenters Scavini and Vigna were working. Having exchanged a few words with them he stopped to read a letter, but suddenly he staggered and fell heavily into the arms of the two men [p. 72] who ran to support him.

The cleric, Joseph Campi, also ran to the scene and sent immediately to the Sisters for a restorative. Father Pestarino who heard this, murmured:

"Don't say who it's for, or they will be scared," but his tongue could scarcely articulate the words. Not to say who it was for! The request was so unusual, that the cook, Sister Rosina Mazzarello, wanted at any cost to know who was ill, while the carpenter's agitation, together with the order that everyone else withdraw left no doubt about the gravity of the case.

Father Joseph, his nephew, came running, realized at once that it was a stroke, and had him carried in an armchair to the reception room on the ground floor of the Carante house. Then he sent for his father, who was a doctor. He was out in the country visiting a patient, but summoned hastily, he flew to his brother's side.

He ordered the application of leeches behind his left ear, ice to his head, and mustard plasters to his feet. Doctor Paul Parodi, the most reliable health officer of the area, came and confirmed diagnosis and treatment.

"All that could and should be done has been done!" He said that later they would see if it had to be repeated. The news spread rapidly and caused consternation on all sides. Some Sisters ran to chapel to pray, while others went to see if they could help or render him some service. They sought to make him understand that they were praying for him, that the community was before the Blessed Sacrament.

The poor Director could not speak but when he heard the voices of Sister Mary Mazzarello and Sister Petronilla near him, he opened his eyes again, looked at them in a bewildered way and asked: "Where are my little Daughters?"

"In church; they are praying for you, Father."

"Good, pray, pray."

In a short time the parish pastor, the priests of the neighboring parishes, the attorney Traverso, and many [p. 73] close friends were gathered around him. But there was no improvement; rather his speech became more and more indistinct until it ceased completely. About 3:00 p.m. when the blood was again drawn off the brain his body trembled all over as if under a heavy weight, and his generous soul flew to its Creator.

It was three o'clock on Friday, the day associated with the dearest mystery of our faith; and the hour in which the departed priest was wont to shed tears in company with Our Lady of Sorrows, at the remembrance of the last hour of Jesus.

And on that day too the novena to Our Lady Help of Christians began. For her, the sweet Madonna of Don Bosco, Father Pestarino had worked and suffered much, forming hearts that would praise her eternally.

Besides, the novena to the Holy Spirit also began on that day, which was, therefore, connected with all the devotions dear to this zealous priest, and on it he went to his reward. Sisters, postulants, and boarders wept and prayed; the Vicar asked in anguish: "How is he? Can he speak?"

Is there any improvement?"

No one had the courage to tell her the truth, and her tear-dimmed eyes could not read it in their faces.

But at a certain moment the bells gave the dire news: the good Director was there lifeless, serene as in a refreshing sleep. Sister Mary went, looked at him as one in a dream, turned her tear-filled eyes to heaven and silently adored the will of God.

When the first dismay caused by the calamity had passed, his nephew and the cleric Campi took charge of the remains. There under his cassock was a nail substituting a missing button and telling of his spirit of poverty and mortification.

Yet so perfectly clean was all he wore that it wasn't necessary even to change the garments.

Having completed this act of filial piety his nephew dispatched a telegram to the bishop and one to Don Bosco, asking the latter to send a Salesian priest as soon as possible [p. 74] to make the necessary arrangements. He also sent for a photographer, to have at least one photograph for him, as his departed uncle in his humility never thought of having his image fixed on canvas or paper

for those who loved or esteemed him.

Around the holy priest death seemed to have lost its terror and even the boarders were allowed to spend some time in prayer beside that bed which was like an altar.

Beneficent even in death

The Vicar felt that at that moment more than ever she could ask the Director for help. Therefore she took with her little Marietta Sorbone, whose eyes had been swollen and inflamed since she came to Mornese, so much so that she had to be kept in complete darkness.

"Let us go to Father Pestarino," she said, "that he may cure you." She took her near the railings and weeping and praying, she gently rubbed that holy hand, which in life was always raised to bless and to do good, across the child's eyes.

The swelling went down immediately; it even disappeared. And Sister Mary, sure of her ground, took a bit of linen soaked with the blood drawn from Father Pestarino in the vain attempt to save his life, and bandaged the child's eyes with it.

"You will see. Father Pestarino will cure you."

As if lightning had struck the House the poor Sisters asked: "What will become of us now that our first Father has died? He was so patient with our ignorance and under a somewhat rough exterior he had so much compassion, so much fatherly foresight!"

Even the boarders were dismayed. When the sad news ran through the House little Angelica—alone on the steps outside church—was humming a song probably learned at Rosignano. Even though she had no concept of death, she understood that something awful had happened to the good [p. 75] Father Director and she burst into long disconsolate crying. Were not all her companions crying? And they were saying to one another: We will never again hear him call us! We will never again hear him knock at the window at lunchtime when with his fatherly words for his 'little girls,' he gave to our assistant, Sister Enrichetta, the fruit that he had denied himself that we might have it. We will never again be able to surprise him by jumping out all of a sudden to thank him when he knocked, instead of Sister Enrichetta. How he enjoyed that! But now our kindly Father is gone forever.

The first photograph of Father Pestarino Funeral arrangements

On May 16 the photographer arrived from Ovada and did his difficult job excellently.

He took the deceased in two positions, profile and front view. For the latter he had the bed with the remains transported to the window, and raised the pillow about eighteen inches. Father Pestarino was taken in the abandonment of death, but the picture resembles him perfectly.

Father Bodrato, whom Don Bosco had sent, arrived the same day. He was an ex-teacher of Mornese, a friend, confidante and ex-secretary of the dead priest. In a moment such as this no one more suitable could have been chosen, for he was acquainted with all Father Pestarino's affairs

and was capable of dealing tactfully with the business.

The various papers lying on the dead priest's desk passed through his hands and under his eyes. The letter he was reading when death struck was there. It was from Sister Jandet, ever ill at ease with herself and others and always needful of special consolation. Another brought the latest request from the Oratory at Turin for a good advance on the most outstanding debts of the Sisters, as the Superiors were in dire need.

This had arrived the day before, but Father Pestarino hadn't yet mentioned it to the Vicar, whom he knew to be [p. 76] as bereft as he was of money, and like himself praying to God for Divine Providence to help clear the debt due Don Bosco's Oratory.

With Father Bodrato funeral arrangements were made. Don Bosco wished it to be as solemn as possible, and was sending Father Cagliero to preside.

Father Cagliero arrives

Father Cagliero arrived on the evening of May 17, bringing with him Fathers Lazzero and Gastini to sing the mass and obsequies.

He had the consolation of viewing the remains; the fear of not arriving in time had been painful to him. Father Pestarino didn't seem dead. As soon as he expired he resumed his naturally pleasant appearance, and looked like one enjoying a peaceful rest after prolonged work. By this time he had been dead more than forty-eight hours.

Father Cagliero was also very sad, yet he had been sent expressly by Don Bosco to bring the condolences of all the Salesians, who admired the deceased Director.

"I am here, Sisters; I am here, sent expressly by Don Bosco," he told the first group of Sisters he met.

When he met the Vicar, and saw all those faces disfigured from weeping, he understood the anguish of the Sisters left so unexpectedly without their Director, and added: "Courage, courage! Don Bosco wishes me to tell you that he shares your sorrow; but he also wants you not to worry. Isn't Don Bosco your Father? Have no fear! The Institute will go forward. Don Bosco will take care of it. And for any need whatever, I am here. I will always be here, every time you need me, and a priest will be sent just for you. "

He encouraged them with thoughts of faith. Then when he saw them more relieved, to help restore their serenity he said that as "Jesus, when He saw the apostles too attached to His humanity, had left them and gone to heaven, [p. 77] so He had taken Father Pestarino from them as He wished them to be religiously detached from everybody and everything, entirely abandoned to Divine Providence."

Funeral

On the morning of the IB-the fourth day after the demise-the funeral was held. This last tribute was most solemn. Father Cagliero was at the organ playing his *Funeral Mass* and singing the second tenor voice.

Sisters, boarders, pupils of the workroom for externs, Oratorians—all hearts guided by Father Pestarino in the ways of the Lord, took part.

The New Ursulines were also present; they had always remained most affectionate to their Director and to the Sisters. Scarcely anyone from the parish and the surrounding areas were missing, with people and clergy from Ovada and Acqui. Were it not for the general sorrow, one would consider it more a triumphal procession than a funeral.

Having fulfilled his mission, and again comforted and encouraged the Sisters, Father Cagliero set out for Turin promising a speedy return, but he was far from thinking or foreseeing that very soon the angel of death would again enter the House.

The boarder Emilia Chiara dies

After a few days' illness, which was apparently not serious, the boarder Emilia Chiara, niece of Mrs. Blengini died, on May 22.

Her relatives, summoned urgently when the illness worsened, arrived after her lovely soul had already gone to God.

When she came as a boarder she had given, as a gift to the Vicar, a relic of the true Cross in a silver case. Father Pestarino had it mounted for benediction but had not yet [p. 78] used it; thus the reliquary remained in the school in memory of two fervent hearts, who were already enjoying their reward.

The new Director

The new Director arrived on May 23, vigil of the feast of Mary Help of Christians. He was Father Joseph Cagliero, cousin of the Director General.

The Sisters were glad, but his delicate appearance aroused some apprehension. Could he resist the strong air of Mornese?

However, he set to work at once with great zeal. There was indeed, great need of his help: poor Sister Corinna declined more and more each day and no remedy was of any avail.

Sister Corinna goes to heaven

Her torpor was in reality a sleep out of which she woke but for a few minutes and then only with great effort. Sometimes the Vicar gave her little things to do just to keep her awake but it was all to no avail. She fell asleep in the act of passing something to another Sister; and once in the kitchen, in the middle of Sister Pampuro's question. The doctor said she had suffered too much and would not get better.

She had written home as soon as she returned to Mornese. The Sisters wrote again later to give news of her health condition, but no answer came.

Our Lady's feast was devoutly celebrated, but full of sorrow with three graves on which no flower had yet bloomed, and another to be opened soon.

Sister Corinna was always calm. Happy to be back in the school, glad to die and to go to Jesus, to Our Lady, and to her mother, she asked only that her father be told [p. 79] that she had forgotten everything and that in heaven she would pray for him. She still tried to get up every day although she could not take a step without help. Hers was a long, distressing agony with occasional convulsions that caused her much suffering, but she did not speak, gave no sign of understanding except when the priest brought her Jesus or the Vicar or Mistress gave her the crucifix to kiss, and when she was anointed.

On the 5th, she was unconscious all day. Finally towards evening the convulsions ceased, a great peace descended on the waxen face, the lips formed a smile, the head rested lightly on the right shoulder, as with a scarcely audible sigh Sister Corinna passed into the arms of her God.

The day-girls sang the Mass of the Requiem, because no one from the House could emit a note. Sisters and boarders couldn't help weeping and the parish priest, Father Valle, who celebrated was also moved.

On this occasion too the entire parish turned out for the funeral procession of Sister Corinna, known to all for her kindness, her angelic virtue, and her sufferings.

With her death the community lost its first music teacher, and its first accountant, for she had kept the finances of the Institute.

Don Bosco comes in person to comfort the Sisters

The ever-merciful Lord sent comfort in their sorrow. Don Bosco came to Mornese, accompanied by Father Cagliero, some days before Father Pestarino's month's mind.

His friends came there in numbers to greet him, as a good father, but the meeting was charged with emotion, and words were few. Silently they proceeded to the gate of the school. On the entrance door hung a big shield bearing the inscription: "Enter, Father, within these walls; your Daughters welcome you like sunshine after a terrible storm. "

[p. 80] In the playground, too, various inscriptions told of the gratitude and suffering of all: "Come, come, beloved Superior and like a good shepherd bring joy to our hearts which for some time have groaned under the weight of affliction, and need help and comfort!"

"Viva Don Bosco! Long live our Major Superior, who comes to console his afflicted Daughters!" Don Bosco read them with emotion, turned to the people who accompanied him, sadly bowed his head and said; "Is anything beautiful left in this House?" Many eyes, like his own, shone with tears: the good Father greeted all more by gesture than by words, and withdrew. A little later he was among the Sisters.

This visit was a great consolation for them. He knew how to find strong yet gentle words to make them appreciate sorrow and to assure them about the future. But in his humility and ever faithful

to his program of not giving prominence to himself he said to the Sisters: "I came to entrust you personally to Father Cagliari here present, who is now your Director General. From the time Father Pestarino presented him to you in my name he took your interests completely to heart.

"And now, as I already told you we shall have the clothings and professions. Several bishops are asking if our Sisters are ready to do good to young girls: we must hurry so we can answer yes. "

During those days, apart from the brief conversations with friends who came to see him, Don Bosco was entirely at the disposition of the Sisters. He took note of the playground where the songs, games and competitions between girls and Sisters assured him that the aim of the Institute was being realized and that feminine youth was receiving the necessary formation. He visited the workroom, and the school; approved, consoled, consoled and encouraged.

[p. 81] First reference to Borgo San Martino and to the election of the Superior

During this time, the spiritual exercises were held. When circumstances permitted, Don Bosco found time to assemble the professed Sisters. He told them, that since they were already a good number, the time had come to open their wings for some short flights. To begin with they could go to Borgo San Martino, where the Director had asked for their help in the kitchen and linen room.

And as there and elsewhere, [he said with fatherly kindness,] you will have the charge of the linen I pray you to prepare yourselves well, to arm yourselves with patience so as not to do like hired women who tear and destroy every garment as soon as it is worn or threadbare. No, no! You must never do that. You will patch and darn where necessary. Sometimes mended garments are more durable than new ones; and then too we must observe the vow of poverty.

So we will soon go to Borgo San Martino, [Don Bosco continued,] but first we will do what I promised you last April through dear Father Pestarino—that is, we will elect the Superior and others to help her in the government of the Institute. We shall form your first Chapter so that all may proceed as the Church prescribes.

Therefore all the prayers, mortifications and work of these days will be offered to God to obtain an election according to the divine will, and which will redound to the good of the community.

The Sisters were moved. The idea of an approaching departure dismayed them; who must go? Leave this dear House where they were all so happy and united to the Lord? Even those who remained, how they would feel the absence of their Sisters!

The thought of elections cheered them. They were sure that all would vote for the Vicar, who by her words and looks repeated: "At last things will be fixed and we shall have someone who can guide us!"

[p. 82] The enemy does not sleep

Something new at the school happened during those days. A lady who went every year to spend the summer at Mornese, enjoying free access to the House, having been recommended by some priest, heard that the postulant, Teresa Laurantoni, was to be clothed on the next Sunday, June 14. She felt sorry for her. "Poor girl! She will never be able to resist the privations of this Institute!» Following the promptings of her heart, she sought out the postulant, spoke to her in secret, advising her to wait and consider entering another congregation. She made her a gift of a watch and other precious objects. She insinuated that Don Bosco attracted youth to get work out of them, that he was all out for money and that she should not allow herself to be ensnared, etc. Although she did not believe her the young girl did not dare to contradict her allusions and accusations. She accepted the gifts, thinking that she could always give them back, and came away from the encounter having made no decision, but promising not to repeat a syllable of what she had heard.

Soon after she left her she met the Vicar, who spoke to her about the clothing. The postulant, still under the influence of her recent conversation, showed herself perplexed and asked for time to think about it. What was her surprise to hear the Vicar repeat the very arguments and words she had just heard from the lady. Sister Mary, however, made no comment but without further ado, accompanied her to the Director General that he might speak to her.

Father Cagliero listened, smiled, and advised her to take the gifts she had received to Our Lady's altar, repeating very slowly and deliberately: "World, you are no longer for me, nor I for you." Then he told her to prepare herself for her clothing, and to promise Our Lady to become a true religious.

The postulant obeyed, and the peace promised to the simple of heart returned to her soul.

[p. 83] Simple souls .

Two other postulants, Rosalia Pestarino and Angela Rossi, were to be clothed with Teresa Laurantoni. Angela had come from Rosignano only two months before, and therefore, had no idea of being admitted to the clothing, even though she had been told to attend the preparatory sermons given by the Director General.

Therefore, she still continued her work, which was to supervise the builders who were finishing a wing of the house. Unexpectedly she was summoned to prepare her best dress for tomorrow's function. A Sister lent her a brown habit for the ceremony, then hers would be provided later. In the meantime she would dress as best she could. The directive on uniformity of dress could not yet be carried out because funds were so low. Besides some Sisters necessarily did work that would destroy the woolen fabric, so delicate in shade and so costly to them.

The little ups and downs of Mornesian life

Thrilled at the idea of the gift Our Lady was making her, Angela ran where she knew there was a new, well-made dress, ideal for the function. But search as she might, she found no sign of it. She went to the economer to ask its whereabouts, and was gently told: "Have patience dear; we sold it to buy bread." Without a word a crestfallen postulant went to dress as best as she could. Our Lady would be more pleased with her in her poverty.

Rosalia Pestarino too had reason to remember the occasion. She narrated:

I was all alone trying to concentrate on a book, to distract myself from a thought which at that moment I did not wish to entertain, when the Director, Father Joseph Cagliero, came up to me and asked:

"What are you doing here all alone?"

"I'm thinking!"

[p. 84]"Quick, quick! Go into the chapel for your clothing; the others are already there!" I saw it was a command from God, and without delay I went in chapel just as I was. I had not practiced answering the questions of the formula even once, but with Sister Felicina's help, and my self-love I succeeded in getting through it like the others. Oh, if only my uncle Father Pestarino had been there! But he surely was, and in heaven he must have been happy about it!

The new novices were thirteen; there were only eight professions. There should have been nine, but one of them, Angela Porotto, had returned to her family. Among the newly professed were Sisters Emilia Mosca, and Enrichetta Sorbone: two completely different characters, on whom the Vicar worked assiduously to form them to her own spirit of work and mortification.

Don Bosco's talk

Don Bosco performed the entire function assisted by Fathers John and Joseph Cagliero. When the singing of the *Veni Sponsa Christi* died down, Don Bosco gave a short talk for the occasion. He took as his text the passage of the Gospel: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is worthy of the kingdom of God," and from it took occasion to encourage his Daughters to continue with fortitude and serenity the way of life they had embraced. Incidentally, with the prudence and sweetness which characterized him, he refuted the accusations that had been insinuated in Teresa Laurantoni's innocent soul.

Further changes in the habit

This ceremony, too, marked a slight change in the habit: the black "mourning" bonnet was substituted by a white one, gathered in front to frame the face and covered [p. 85] by a black rectangular veil. When they came out of chapel there were congratulations on all sides for the new Sisters, novices and postulants, and the novelty of the headdress was a source of admiration. Don Bosco's smile seemed to say of the veil: "You won't be there long!"

Teresa Laurantoni's "counselor" again found an opportunity to speak to her alone, this time accusing her of having broken her promise. On hearing from the novice that the Vicar had repeated their exact words spoken in secret, before Teresa even opened her mouth, the lady exclaimed: "Then she must have been hiding in some corner and was spying on you!" She went at once and carried out the most minute investigations, but her findings served only to increase her confusion. She was eventually convinced that Mother Mazzarello knew of her behavior through divine inspiration, showing that God was on her side.

In the afternoon Don Bosco went into the playground for a little while and was pleased to see some New Ursulines among the Oratorians. They had come to see their old companions, and the reception they gave him persuaded him that they too revered him as a Father.

Don Bosco and the Mornesians

On Monday the 15th—the month's mind—Don Bosco went to celebrate mass for Father Pestarino in the parish church. It was attended by all the parishoners, mourning the death of their beloved pastor, whose image was as dear to their hearts as when he was among them dispensing his benefits. They were moved and comforted by the fact that Don Bosco did not abandon them but came to comfort them in their sad trial, always ready to encourage, cheer and help wherever possible.

Every visit of his resulted in the acceptance of a boy *gratis* either at the Oratory in Valdocco as an artisan, or as a student in one of his schools.

Therefore when mass was over they crowded around [p. 86] him and accompanied him to the parish priest's house; all wanted him to visit their homes where they could thank him and ask him to remain with them longer. They realized that he loved them as much as their deceased Father Pestarino and that he helped their children all he could.

Don Bosco writes to Mrs. Pastore

Back at the school, his soul full of sad memories, he wrote the following letter, very revealing of his affection for the departed priest.

Very esteemed Mrs. Pastore,

May the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always with us! I am here at Mornese, trying to fill the void left by the late lamented Father Pestarino; but that is very difficult. He did so much; now there are many doing little. Let us trust in God.

However, there is great fervor among the professed, the candidates and even the boarders, which gives us hope. The present Director, one of my priests named Joseph Cagliero, is a man of excellent qualities. He was spiritual director for two years in our school at Varazze, and all are satisfied with him.

I really need to speak to you. Should you be in Turin for any reason, let me know; I shall make a point of being at home. Otherwise we shall have to postpone everything to the spiritual retreat, to which I hope you will come, won't you?

I am engaged in this work and with God's help I hope to stabilize it, but I need your support, both material and moral, and especially the help of your prayers. May God bless you, and grant you good health and grace of happy days. Believe me always to be with esteem and gratitude,

Mornese, June 15, 1874

Your humble servant,

John Bosco, Priest

P.S. Yesterday there were thirteen clothings and nine professions.

[p. 87] First elections and first Chapter

That same day Don Bosco assembled the Sisters announcing that this was the moment he had referred to and promised: the moment of proceeding to elect the Superior and her assistants. All had had time to see who could best direct them. Therefore each one should reflect seriously about her choice; then one after another they would approach him and whisper a name.

He had a crucifix and two lighted candles placed on a table; the *Veni Creator* was recited. The Sisters went to him one by one and spoke in an undertone (because they could not write) and he wrote it down. Mary Mazzarello was elected Superior, with all votes except her own.

The Sisters were radiant with joy. Only Don Bosco's presence restrained them, else their expressions of delight would have been beyond description. And when they were told: "Now you may call her 'Mother,' " it seemed the fulfillment of their every desire. As mentioned before, many already gave her that title, following the promptings of their heart rather than imitating the Sisters of Saint Anne for whom it was a Rule. Nevertheless. . . it had not yet been established by obedience. Now instead they felt consoled in saying it, and thanked God. Only the newly-elected was barely resigned; she looked at Don Bosco as if pleading for pity. She turned to the Sisters with a weak voice: "Well, if you want it . . . you know well what I am worth!"

The other elections were carried out in the same way: Vicar, Sister Petronilla Mazzarello; Economer, Sister Joan Ferrettino; Assistant, Sister Felicina Mazzarello, the Superior's sister; Mistress of Novices, Sister Maria Grosso.

Don Bosco, satisfied at the unanimity in the choice of the Superior, said with a smile: "I am delighted with the unity you showed in the election of your Superior. It is evident that such is God's will, and I could not be more pleased. "

[p. 88] Directives and disciplinary norms

Don Bosco then gave some practical norms.

"I think it's a good thing," he said, "that the Superior General be called 'Mother' by everyone, and that this same title be used for the others you elected, but in their case allowed by the baptismal name, or better still that of their office. Thus you will say: Mother Vicar; Mother Economist; Mother Assistant; Mother Mistress. "

Lastly he established some offices. Sacristan: one alone should be responsible for the vestments, sacred vessels and needs of the priests. Portress: only the one in charge would receive those who came, and inform the person concerned. Wardrobe attendant: this included the general order and hygiene, so that the House might take on the appearance of a religious house in every way.

It is good also that provisions be made for confessions during the day. When it is necessary to continue after dark during the winter or because of the number of penitents (during the great solemnities of the Church or for the feast of Mary Help of Christians) there should be sufficient light to read comfortably and to see one another.

When the bell rings for supper, nobody should stay in chapel; and after the evening prayers, no one should speak except in very exceptional cases. I must tell you of an experience I had.

On my way back from Rome I was charged by the Holy Father to bring important commissions to the Superior of a convent in a certain city through which I was passing. I knocked at the entrance door; it was almost night and, therefore, I was told to come back next day, because they could not receive anyone in the parlor at that hour. *As* I had to leave early in the morning I asked to be received anyway. Then the Superior assembled her Chapter to decide if the exception could be conveniently made. The answer was no, and I admired those religious, so observant of their Rules.

Therefore I wish that after night prayers, strict silence be observed; no one should speak unless the Superior en- [p. 89] trusts someone with a task, in which case she will speak in an undertone. Apart from this case, never.

The precious conference ended with the *Te Deum*. Then it was time for dinner.

A conference for Superiors only

In the afternoon he held a meeting for the Superiors only. He told them not to allow themselves to be disheartened by the recent deaths, but to regard them as a trial from God and a source of further consolation for the House. He expressed his pleasure in finding in all a great desire and will to become saints. He gave them wise counsels, stressing the following very much: "I recommend to you to consider the inclinations of Sisters and novices, with regard to occupation, wherever that is possible. Sometimes it is thought virtuous to deny one's will by taking on a work entirely contrary to one's inclinations; instead it can be harmful both to the Sister and the Congregation.

Rather it will be your duty to help them sanctify and spiritualize their inclinations, aiming to please God alone."

He repeated that since it would be impossible for him to follow up the needs of the community, especially now that the Institute was expanding quickly, he had deputed Father John Cagliero in his place. The Superiors should turn to him, and have the Sisters do the same directly, and give him work without fear of disturbing him.

Don Bosco was about to leave; the community including the boarders assembled to kiss his hand and receive his blessing. The good Father smiled, recommended them all to prepare well for the retreat, and having imparted the blessing of Mary Help of Christians, he returned to Turin with Father Cagliero.

[p. 90] **To Turin for the exams**

Two days later, on the 17th, Sisters Emilia Mosca and Rosalia Pestarino, who had spent only three days in the novitiate, went to Turin. They were to stay with the Sisters of Saint Anne, and prepare for the teachers' examination. They were accompanied by a good lady from Mornese, who held innumerable recommendations in their regard. They were really the first to leave the nest and the first members of the Institute to sit for a teacher's qualification examination. They went in the name of obedience, entirely abandoned to God.

They were met at the station by some lady cooperators, among them, Countess Corsi of Nizza Monferrato.

At the Oratory Father Cagliero met them, presented them to Don Bosco, then had a good dinner served to them while he gave them some hints as how best to spend their months in Turin.

As the Sisters of Saint Anne had no accommodations for the next few days due to a retreat, they stayed with the Countess Corsi at night. Later they went to the Sisters.

On their return to Mornese they couldn't find words to praise the Sisters of Saint Anne, who helped them with their studies, leaving them free for their own community practices even though in refectory the so-called "penances" were observed. They told of Don Bosco's kindness in receiving them frequently with touching consideration.

"You should have seen him," Sister Emilia said, "stand and come to greet us, making us sit on the sofa. You should have heard him ask about our needs and recommend us to Father Cagliero, to Countess Corsi, and our professors. And we, happy and touched by such goodness, felt like confused little chicks. Whenever we passed through the playground, all the boys greeted us and often we heard them say: 'There go our Sisters!' "

The supervisor of the exam was Professor Cavalleri, whose history book they had fortunately studied. All went well with the exception of mathematics, for which their [\[p. 91\]](#) preparation had been very short and they had had to study without help. But Don Bosco had told them not to worry. He would provide a Salesian during the holidays to prepare them for the autumn repeat.

New anxieties

Don Bosco thought of other things too. He left nothing undone to publicize the ladies' retreat scheduled for Mornese during the second half of August. He also wrote Father Rua from St. Ignatius, to send someone to Mornese, where the new Director, Father Joseph Cagliero, was already ill.

This new sorrow for the House and community alerted the civil and sanitary authorities of the Province, and offered a pretext for a general inquiry to the Mayor of Mornese about the school, its origin, courses, dependence on Don Bosco, etc. Luckily, it diminished in proposition to a mere formality, but it meant extra worry to those who already had enough of these, and sought only to do good.

A gift from Our Lady on the feast of her Assumption

On August, a gift from Our Lady arrived: another postulant from Cuminana, Catherine Daghero, cousin of Rose Daghero, who had entered in April.

Her mother was dead, and she had grown up under her father's wise guidance. She was rather reserved in her ways, deeply pious and very competent in household affairs. Her father accompanied her, and also her uncle, a Salesian priest; therefore the Director invited her to dinner with them.

This was the first postulant Mother Mazzarello received after her election as Superior, and she took special interest in her. From the time that Don Bosco had spoken of the great good the Institute would do, Mother had in her heart [\[p. 92\]](#) and words an even greater zeal for the

conquest of souls and the glory of God.

The spiritual exercises

The retreat began, as Don Bosco had promised, on Saturday the 22. It was preached by the Director General, Father John Cagliero and the Rural Vicar of Canelli, Father Mallarini.

The retreat was really for the Sisters. However Don Bosco, with his letters of invitation, had reached a good number of ladies, both to do them good, and to acquaint them with the Institute, that they might become its protectresses and propagators.

The House was ready to receive them.

It mattered not that for this the Sisters had to sleep on the floor. Prompted by Don Bosco's words, Mother animated all to greater sacrifice. Her longing for ever greater discomforts for the sake of souls seemed to enkindle afresh every time Don Bosco expressed or even hinted a desire. Our Father's will became her own, which she passed on to the Sisters.

The ladies came from Acqui, Turin and even Milan. Even though the talks were directed to the formation of the Sisters the two preachers frequently addressed the ladies. They clarified the duties of a good Christian living in the world. Then during recreation one of the Superiors, most often Mother herself, chatted with and entertained them.

The family increases

The closure of the retreat on August 29 brought with it the joyful function of two professions and four clothings. Among the newly professed was the vivacious Sister Teresa Laurantoni, who had lost nothing of her humor and joviality, even though she sought to modify it with a certain air of religious gravity.

Her youth and cheerfulness were so communicative that she won all hearts.

The Director General gave the habit, received the vows in the presence of the ladies, and gave the talk for the occasion. His counsels, given with great unction and force, made a deep impression. His repetition of what Don Bosco had said in June: "If the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were not founded for other motives, I would have founded it for ladies' retreats," rang true and gladdened the hearts of all present. .

The Director is very ill

But all their joy was shrouded in sorrow. The health condition of the good Director of the House, Father Joseph Cagliero, caused deep concern. All had hoped he would grow stronger in the healthy air of Mornese. Instead, its vigor overwhelmed his weak organism. Soon he was not only obliged to stay in bed, but the doctor gave him at most a few weeks to live—in fact the end was to come in a matter of days.

His cousin, the Director General, was there but would leave very soon.

During his stay he had spoken to the Sisters and postulants.

A vocation resisted

Mother Petronilla, who in her office as Vicar had an eye for everything, wished to take the postulant Catherine Daghero to see the Director General. She was different from the others and caused concern.

She was only known superficially as yet. Was all that silence the result of recollection or a closed spirit? That [p. 94] humility which kept her in the background on occasions when she was expected to come forward, while she could be so pleasant and witty when she wanted—was it a good sign? And then her difficulty in adapting to the new life! Would she succeed?

To be frank, in her timidity and silence Catherine seemed lost among the others, and repeatedly asked to go home, saying she already felt she wasn't called to the Institute. Everybody was always in motion, so much so that one couldn't pray as she liked. Oh, she prayed much more and better at home!

During the first few days, to make it clear that she did not intend staying, she contrived to keep her suitcase in the entrance foyer. Nobody touched it. Mother, who through a special gift from God had an eye to discern a true vocation, tried in a thousand ways to make her understand that God wanted her precisely at Mornese.

"Did you not come to be a religious?"

"Yes, but not in this place."

"Instead, shall I tell you something?"

"By all means."

"Well, I think that the Lord really wants you here in the House of Our Lady Help of Christians. If you go away, you will lose your vocation, and one day you will have to account for it."

"But I don't want to stay here for many reasons. "

"Take no notice of those 'many reasons' for the present; don't even think that you are here to stay, but imagine you are here for a month's holiday. "

"A month? That's too long!"

"Long? Well, just think of staying until evening. A day passes quickly, and one by one the others will pass without your noticing."

After a few days Mother returned to her charge.

"Catherine, do you want to write to your father?"

"Yes, Mother, if you think I should."

"Well, sit down and write that you are well and happy."

"But that's a lie!"

[p. 95] "A lie? Then you are not pleased to do what God wants from you? And the Lord wants you here! Now you cannot see it clearly, because your heart is still at home, but. . . write as I tell you and you will be happy to have obeyed me."

After a short while the postulant tried again to let her father know she wanted to go home. But Sister Rosalia Pestarino, who was now in charge of the postulants' classes, informed Mother and gave her the letter:

"Come in two weeks time? No, no, after three months," Mother said with a smile, and Catherine made the correction, sighing heavily.

Speak to Father Cagliari now? She was willing to go, but as soon as the door opened she fled!

The Director too was perplexed, and didn't know what to say, seeing her trunk still in the entrance foyer. On leaving for Turin he simply told Mother: "Time and prayer will decide."

Father Joseph Cagliari dies The Director General returns to Mornese

Father Joseph Cagliari died on September 5, leaving luminous examples of virtue in Mornese as in Varazze.

The Director General was summoned urgently, and though he came at once he was not in time to assist Father Joseph in his last moments.

The opening of yet another grave made the Sisters feel the loss of Father Pestarino more than ever. Even in his own personal sorrow, the Director General sought to comfort them, promising to remain awhile at Mornese. He had been elected to the office of Catechist of the Pious Salesian Society but a short while before.

And the good Vicar, Mother Petronilla, said to him in all simplicity: "You could stay altogether and be our Director . . ."

Father Cagliari looked at her with his kind yet mischievous smile: "I would have to neglect other duties. Be content with what I can give you. . . We shall do many things, you will see!"

And in reality he did just that. He arranged the offices as Don Bosco intended. He assessed the studies, interested himself in the music, and concerned himself with everything, even recreations.

Indeed he often went among the Sisters or girls to keep them cheerful, as Don Bosco did with his boys. Nor did he fail to put in an appearance even when he gave the community a free half hour to go into the vineyard of Father Pestarino.

On one of these occasions, [Sister Enrichetta narrates] , he made us sit on the ground and began to tell us stories. Among other things he told us that during the first year of his priesthood, he noticed while saying mass one morning,
that the little altar boy who served him was very pale and trembled all over. When he went back to the sacristy, the
little lad, all agitated, took him by the hand and said:
"Father Cagliero, are you ill? At the moment of the elevation blood flowed from the chalice and blood dripped from
your hands."
"This is every morning, and you saw it only today?
If you were better you would see it every day!"
The boy regained his composure without any act of pride.
We wanted to know who the server was, and we guessed various names, but he always answered: "No! No!"
Finally the name Joseph Cagliero came up, and the Director General stood up abruptly saying: "Sisters, Sisters!"
From this we understood that we had guessed correctly, and that from childhood Father Joseph Cagliero had been a little saint!

Father Cagliero admires Mother's spiritual intuition

Dealing thus affably with the Sisters Father Cagliero had an opportunity to gauge more than ever the gifts of Mother Mazzarello. Besides her natural piety and educa- [p. 97] tive intuition, he realized that here was a definite studious effort to imitate Don Bosco in everything.

He understood clearly what Mother had said one day when the Institute was still in its cradle and most uncertain of its future: "If, and I suggest the impossible, Father Pestarino were to leave Don Bosco, I would stay with him." He also understood how Father Pestarino rejoiced in that detachment, foreseeing the great good it would lead Sister Mary Mazzarello to do in Don Bosco's hands, having so fully penetrated his spirit.

But in spite of all his good will Father Cagliero could not stay long in Mornese, especially in this time of retreats. Therefore Don Bosco sent Father Cipriano, the professor of mathematics, to replace him. Like a true Salesian his "holiday" was a change of occupation, and while he breathed the pure, exhilarating air of Mornese, he filled in the gaps in his subject for various people in the school. He taught the cleric Campi, and the two students Sister Emilia and Sister Rosalia, every day for several hours.

As the Director General was leaving he said to the Sisters: "For the moment you have a chaplain; for the future-I will pick one from the bunch just for you! Pray, pray and you will see that Don Bosco will find one that answers the needs of this House."

The new Director, Father Costamagna

On October 6—the first Tuesday of the month of the Holy Angels—the new Director, who was to be the guardian angel of the school, came. He was Father Costamagna.

In the chapters which the Salesians had held during the year at Lanzo, Don Bosco, from time to time, interrupted a train of thought and said: "We must provide for Mornese." When he went to Lanzo for the retreat and took stock of the fervor of his sons he had called one of the Directors and said to him: "What do you think of Father Costamagna? He would do excellently for Mornese."

[p. 98] "Do you think so? But he is so full of life! And to stay up there all alone . . . However if you send him he will surely go. He is doing well here. He is a much-sought after preacher in the surrounding area, and the Vicar of Lanzo, the theologian Albert, a wise judge of men, uses his gifts to great advantage."

Don Bosco listened and brought it up at the chapter for decision. Yet, in a matter of such importance he also wanted to hear what Father Costamagna had to say. One day while strolling along one of the beautiful walks that overlook the Sturo Valley, he stopped short, turned to Father Costamagna beside him, and said:

"Father Costamagna, would you go to Mornese?" "What for? To die? (Because of the deaths of Fathers Pestarino and Cagliero in such proximity, they jokingly said: "Oh, what do we do at Mornese? Nothing but die!")

"That will happen when God wills. For the present I tell you that you still have many battles to fight! Have you already been to Mornese?"

"Ten years ago, when we went for our first outing; then for my first mass with Father Fagnano. Finally in May, 1870, for the first mass of Father Joseph Pestarino."

"What if you were to go as Director?"

"Well! I think that would create difficulties here." "Lanzo would be easily provided for; but the important thing now is to send someone sure in every sense to Mornese. I think you would do well there."

"If you think so, I believe it, and I won't put any difficulty in the way."

Don Bosco heard these words with pleasure—they were resolute and submissive. Then, recommending him to pray, he advised him to be ready.

Now Father Costamagna came from Becchi, where he had gone for the novena and feast of the Rosary. He accompanied a grandniece of the Founder, Maria Bosco, who became a boarder.

"Let us hope," they said at Mornese, "that he's coming to live, not die."

[p. 99] Poor Sister Rosalia was greatly taken aback. How could she ever face the new Director? He was the very Father Costamagna to whom as a child she had given the famous packet of "coal-caramels" and who was heard to say: "She will pay for it!" Now he was her Superior. She ran off as soon as she heard him arrive. Her fears were soon laid to rest. The Director either heard of her embarrassment or noticed it; later, when he went into the classroom where she was studying he handed her a picture of the Good Shepherd and said to her: "Look, that little sheep is you!"

With others, too, he had to exercise his office of consoling angel.

Father Bonetti at Mornese

Father Bonetti, Director of the Salesian School at Borgo San Martino, came to Mornese to see if the Sisters assigned to that House were ready. Don Bosco had mentioned opening this first House, showing in his kind, fatherly way how useful the Sisters' presence would be in a Salesian House, and how happy the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians should be to work for souls by relieving the priests of material concerns. Mother Mazzarello had chosen the Sisters and done all she could to furnish them with the indispensable wardrobe.

Now everything was ready, but the moment of parting was sad, for all regarded the first foundation as a great event.

Father Bonetti said all he could to encourage them: that the kitchen was big, well lighted, and well ventilated, that the economer, Father Bodrato, had prepared a nice apartment for the Sisters and that this House would be the first link to a chain of which no one could foresee the end.

Those destined to leave wept, and all the others were on the verge of tears.

On leaving, Father Bonetti recommended them to come soon, for he wanted the boys to find all ready on returning to school.

[p. 100] To the new hive

Father Cagliero, who came to take the Sisters to their destination in person, cheered them up saying: "There are far too many of you here. Those destined for Borgo are the first swarm of bees going in search of a new hive. But the hive is prepared for them, and with such care! You know Father Bodrato, he is from Mornese. And you will have an excellent spiritual director in Father

Bonetti. You will have charge of the linen, the kitchen for all, including the boarders. But you can open a workroom for girls, and a festive Oratory; you will also teach catechism. Come, come. I will accompany you all the way."

The chosen were: Sister Felicina Mazzarello, Superior; Sisters Felicina Arecco, Angelina Deambrogio, and Carlotta Pestarino. As soon as these were settled and oriented, others would follow.

Mother Mazzarello's example at this time taught how a religious should act in a time of separation: "Does Don Bosco want it? Then we do too." And the departure was fixed for the 8th.

Mother led the Sisters out of the school accompanying them as far as the road to the *Madonna della Guardia* at Gavi. She was moved but kept repeating her recommendation to respect all Superiors, seeing Don Bosco in each one, to work and suffer willingly and to maintain the spirit of simplicity and poverty.

As he had promised, Father Cagliero accompanied them to their destination, and with his goodness and attentions tried to make up to them for having taken them away from Mornese. Father Bonetti was waiting for them at the station, and served them refreshments when they got to the school. Then, as it was already late, he showed them their apartments. The Director General had supper with them.

[p. 101] More departures

The void left by the Sisters of Borgo was deeply felt. Relations with them had been close, continuous and fraternally affectionate. Thus at Mornese, where even the departure of a postulant was felt, their going left sad hearts.

No sooner had the first work of organizing in Borgo been done than the Superior wrote asking for Sisters to cope with the heavy workload. Mother assigned the novice, Sister Agnes Ricci, as helper, and went with her in person at the end of October. The two Sisters destined to Turin for the repeat examination, also went with them as well as the Director, Father Costamagna.

Owing to delay in the trains they arrived at the school when all were sleeping the sleep of the just and Father Costamagna had to knock repeatedly and make a din to wake them up. What joy for the Sisters to hear Mother's voice below!

Mother's first visit to Turin

Next day the little party, excepting Sister Ricci, set out for Turin. The two students were anxious to get the examination in mathematics over with as soon as possible.

Thus Mother went for the first time to see Don Bosco's beautiful Madonna, her Mother and Mother of the Institute of whom she had so often dreamed in her filial prayer. She spoke to the Founder, who showed her around the House, then stayed with her two Daughters in Saint Anne's Convent. She had not seen the good Sisters of Saint Anne since they left Mornese and they gave her a warm reception.

She would have liked to have all her Daughters with her in the sanctuary of Valdocco. With all the fervor of her soul she presented them to the Holy Virgin there, in the very place of her prodigious apparitions to the Founder; site of the touching manifestations of her power and maternal goodness.

[p. 102] On her return to Mornese, she was affectionately welcomed by the community, which for the first time had experienced what it was like to be without her for a few days. It was likewise the first time they could applaud two of their own number, the newly graduated teachers. Mother Mazzarello's soul was full of all she had seen and heard. She told them all about it, distributing to each a souvenir of her visit to Turin—a medal which Don Bosco had provided and some sweets from the good Sisters of Saint Anne.

Joy beamed from her eyes at the sole mention of the Church of Mary Help of Christians, the Oratory, Don Bosco and his wise dispositions, revealing what she had drawn from her visit to Valdocco.

The examination had gone very well; the two teachers attributed this to Mary Help of Christians, and set to work organizing the school as the Director wished.

The First Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to be appointed for a public school

Sister Mosca was entrusted with the convent school, with its boarders and Sisters preparing for examinations. Sister Jandet took charge of the students with little background. Sister Rosalia Pestarino was given charge of the day pupils, and was in fact, the first public school teacher in the Institute. Miss Maccagno was no longer able to cope with the numbers in that sector. Recognition of Sister Emilia Mosca as a public school teacher of the obligatory classes was applied for and obtained.

Solemnity of All Saints: Mother's exhortation

The feast of All Saints presented Mother with another occasion to exhort her Daughters to sanctity. "We, too, my dear Sisters, will be in glory one day," she often said, [p. 103] adding, "What a joy for us to have a heart to love the Lord, showing Him our love by bearing patiently and willingly the sorrows of life. "

The Sisters were so completely conquered by Mother Mazzarello's enthusiasm, that they in turn communicated it inside and outside the Institute, repeating her very words. In a letter to her mother, Sister Elisa Roncallo referred explicitly to Mother's words: "It is really true, Mamma. Look, you can show Jesus your love by suffering willingly and with patience all the pains He sends. Yes, unite them always to the sufferings of Jesus on Calvary and at the end of life you will find yourself laden with merits for heaven. "

An Episcopal Decree

Before the end of the month, the Director, Father Costamagna, informed the Sisters that through a kind decree of Monsignor Sciandra dated November 15, the parish priest of Mornese could also hear the confessions of Sisters and boarders. Therefore should anyone wish to prepare better for the feast of Mary Immaculate or Christmas, by going to another confessor, she had but to mention it to Mother, who would immediately provide one.

Mother used the occasion to point out for all the goodness of Divine Providence, which always goes beyond our needs and desires. She thus awakened sentiments of gratitude to God and the Superiors.

Novena and feast of Mary Immaculate

The novena of the Immaculate was most fervent. Mother Mazzarello reminded the Sisters, that since Our Lady was the real Superior of the House, all should dispose themselves to celebrate her first privilege in a manner [p. 104] worthy of such exceeding excellence. Her love for the Immaculate thrilled Sisters and girls, complementing the work of the Director, who enkindled holy resolutions in the hearts of all.

The celebration had to be postponed awaiting Father Cagliari, who was scheduled to come for the clothings.

When he arrived on December 10, the preached triduum began. Addressing the Sisters particularly, the General Director developed the three concepts: to do; to suffer; to be silent.

On the feast, December 13, the little church donned its richest ornaments. Beautiful flowers from the altar smiled. They seemed to spring, fresh and perfumed, from the able hands of the novice Sister Teresa Preda, a florist by profession.

The General Director performed the clothing ceremony for seven novices; among them was

Catherine Daghero.

Mother Vicar and Mother Mistress were not averse to allowing her go home, in view of the fact that she was still very closed up in herself. But Mother Mazzarello, when questioned by the Director and Father Cagliero, had replied: "I have already said it more than once: this girl has to remain here, because she is called to do great good to souls".

Father Costamagna then told her to get ready. Next day, silent and humble Sister Catherine donned the holy habit and immediately regained that same serene expression she had had when she came, before doubts and perplexities began to torture her soul.

The closing discourse brought out Don Bosco's conviction that the real Superior of the House was Our Lady. Therefore all should live in loving dependence on her, showing themselves to be her tender, docile Daughters who try to represent her in purity of heart and humility of spirit.

[p. 105] Novena and feast of Christmas

Father Cagliero departed. His golden counsels—to do, to suffer, and be silent—were printed on charts and hung here and there in places where they would act as continuous reminders of the good resolutions of these days. Father Costamagna continued his ardent work on the souls entrusted to him.

The Christmas novena, too, marked an increase in fervor. Sisters and girls prepared with little sacrifices the flowers that were to adorn the crib of Baby Jesus on the holy night. All were animated with holy affection. The little statue that for so many years had been the object of Father Pestarino's loving attention was to be exposed. It was the statue which the dear deceased used to take in procession through the parish on the feast of Holy Innocents following Holy Communion, when all members of the Association of the Holy Childhood assembled and took part. It was he who introduced the practice in Mornese and how many devices he tried to make his "little Jesus" loved and arouse zeal for the salvation of souls! Now it was up to the Sisters!

In the short novena sermon every evening the Director developed the following thoughts: "If Our Lady is the Superior of the House, then Jesus is the Director. Let us allow ourselves, therefore, to be entirely guided by Him. Let us all allow ourselves to be formed to the simplicity of the shepherds and the innocence of children. Is not the kingdom of heaven for them? And since He must be absolute Master of our hearts to bring this about, let us love Him. Yes, may Jesus be blessed and loved by all, but with a love of preference; rather, loved in such a way that every other love is extinguished in our hearts."

With this preparation and the three masses of the feast, Christmas was most joyful even though thoughts often turned to the dear Sisters of Borgo San Martino.

[p. 106] Creativity of Sister Enrichetta and charming episodes

To increase fervor among the boarders and in reward for good behavior, Sister Enrichetta in agreement with Mother, allowed them to take their sweets and fruit (they all had some during these days) to the crib of the Infant Jesus. The angel of the crib would then present them to Him in their name. A Sister later took the gifts away to distribute them again among the boarders, or as a gift for the Oratory children.

There emerged a charming little episode. One evening little Angelica had been very capricious, and suffered the greatest punishment that could be given to a boarder: she was forbidden to take her gifts to Jesus. Then there were tears, and purpose of amendment.

When sorrow was at its height, and descended to promises, Sister Enrichetta was moved to forgiveness and accompanied the little one to chapel with the offering. The little gifts of her companions, who were already tucked up in bed, had already disappeared from little Jesus' feet. The child was more mortified than ever in her fear that the angel would not come back for hers, because she had been naughty. She remained praying at the back of the chapel until the sacristan—the angel without wings—went to fix things up, and finding one sweet still in the straw, removed it. Angelica opened her eyes wide and began to cry. "A Sister? Then it isn't true an angel comes to

take our gifts? . . . it isn't true he offers them for us!"

Mother came on the scene. She looked seriously but kindly at the tear-stained face of the disconsolate Angelica, and whispered in her ear; "The angel offers Baby Jesus the offerings of good children, not those of the capricious. Jesus weeps when little children behave like that!" A big sigh, a sincere promise, and faith was saved!

One evening, at the end of the year, the boarders wanted to go all together like the shepherds to bring their gifts to Jesus. The Director caught on to the idea, and [p. 107] wishing to take part in their act of innocent homage, as soon as they intoned a hymn he added the accompaniment with the sweetest notes of the harmonium.

The Director knew how to take occasion from everything to refine the spirit and make the school like Valdocco. Young, cultured, full of life, yearning for sanctity and apostolate, he had an eye for everything: piety, study, work, religious formation.

Mother saw Don Bosco in him, as she had in Father Pestarino and Father Joseph Cagliero, and respected even his desires. Yet if at times she saw that he was over-zealous, with the simplicity of the saints and the respect of a very humble Sister, she did not fail to draw his attention to it.

1875

Our religious greeting [p. 109]

The New Year brought a novelty.

A mendicant Friar from Voltaggio had told the Director that when the Brothers met they greeted one another: "Vivat Jesus!" And the reply was: "In cordibus nostris semper. "

The Director liked the greeting, and since it was also an ejaculation of Saint Francis de Sales, Don Bosco's great model, he urged the Sisters to adopt it as their own, modifying it or substituting it with other expressions more or less similar in meaning, and accompanied by a bow of the head, as Don Bosco had already suggested. Therefore on meeting one another:

"Viva Gesù," one said.

"Ever in our hearts," the other replied; or: "May Jesus live in our hearts!"

"Viva Maria, our hope!"

Or, more simply still: "Viva Gesù!" "Viva Maria".

The feast of the Holy Name of Jesus was chosen as the day on which the practice was to be introduced, as a sign of mutual respect and in homage to the Divine Director of the House. The Sisters took immediately to the suggestion. As usual, Mother was the most enthusiastic, for she found in the greeting as easy means of reawakening divine love in hearts.

As she went everyday to visit each Sister at her work, she had the occasion of using the greeting: "Viva Gesù." The Sisters of the workroom, with heads bent over their work, were always glad when she opened the door, looked at them for a moment and drawing near to this or that one, [p. 110] said: "Viva Gesù! Viva Maria! Have you done anything today that was not for Jesus?"

Similarly in refectory, kitchen or garden. . . through her the "Viva Gesù" made the rounds of the House, restoring serenity sometimes in a mind somewhat tired or preoccupied.

To win over the hearts of postulants and novices the greeting "Viva Gesù" served her admirably. As soon as they answered her salutation in words or with a filial smile, she continued without hesitation, and came straight to the point of what might be uppermost in their minds, especially if they were lonely or sad in the memory of their dear ones.

"What are you thinking about just now? Do you remember anything about this morning's meditation? And your resolution?"

The postulant was preparing to reply but Mother had already passed on without waiting for an answer; her intention of turning the mind of the other to God had been achieved. Sometimes she asked: "What time is it?" On receiving the reply, "Mother, I don't have a watch," she responded with a gentle smile: "Say it is time to love the Lord." If one then answered as she desired she finished with: "Let us love Him even more."

Mother sees, works and consoles

Having seen them all at work, as a good mother would her family, she took her place in the workroom and plying her needle swiftly she was plainly seen to be the same Mary of the Bodrato workroom: quick, exact, and recollected.

She stitched cassocks, dresses, jackets, piling work on top of work and thanking God for this means of providing her Sisters with bread! As she had not yet a room at her disposal she continued to receive at this place of work all those who wished to speak to her, or who needed a word [p. 111] of encouragement, especially the postulants.

Poor girls! They had left their mothers and she would have them understood that in religious life too they can experience true affection.

One of them, astonished at having found such comfort and relief in a brief chat with Mother, spoke of it to Sisters Maria Gastaldo and Carlotta Pestarino. Then she heard from both of them:

"I too found it very hard at the beginning to adapt to religious life; indeed I was often tempted to go home. Then I opened up with Mother, and a few words from her restored peace to my soul. Like the postulants and novices of my time, you will find that to confide your troubles to Mother is equivalent to being freed from them."

During this month three new postulants arrived. From the time Don Bosco had said that they should go into the apostolic field as soon as possible so as to fight sin, Mother had prayed and invited all to pray for postulants. She continued to surround them on their arrival with special marks of kindness and so arranged things that they soon forgot their loneliness in exchanging experiences with their companions.

But the girls found it hard to adapt; some expected a less laborious life, more prayerful, more monastic. Others, and these were the majority, suffered from the scarcity of the fare, and wanted to go home. If however, they approached Mother, saw her at recreation, heard her kind but incisive words, they remained, convinced that it was worthwhile suffering hunger after all, to stay close to such a holy and profoundly serene Superior.

She usually asked them: "How did you come here? Who told you about our Sisters? Have you had the idea of becoming a Sister for long? What work do you like best?"

The postulant spoke, took courage and without even noticing it revealed a lot about herself, her habits, and inclinations. Mother knew how to take her and helped her to love the new life and draw all the fruit possible from her activities. She recommended the same line of action [p. 112] to Mother Petronilla, who had charge of the postulants: "Allow them during the first days to talk of their family, of what they did at home; rather, you can ask them about their parish church, if they have processions, who their patron is. Let them talk, invite them to talk and be a good listener. "

Fruits of holy rivalry

The girls, determined, soon began to compete with those who had been there for a long time.

As a postulant Sister Rosalia Pestarino admired the fervor of the Sisters, but couldn't help feeling hungry. Once she had succumbed to temptation and stolen a piece of bread, and then had to fight "like a lion" with herself as she described it, to accuse herself of it to her uncle, who was confessor to the community.

Poor man! To think that his niece was hungry!

"Yet, when I told him, he pretended not to understand; poor old saint that he was!" Well, at this

point Sister Rosalia was not satisfied with what she received; not only that, she had begun to imitate Sister Enrichetta Sorbone. The latter ate like a little bird and always left a little piece of bread, as the Director General had recommended. Sister Rosalia, who was served more generously than the others in consideration of her long teaching hours, felt it her duty to leave a larger piece, not to be, as she said, out of line with the general mortification.

Naturally she sought to hide her act of self-denial, and thought she was not observed, because everyone in the matter of mortification was free to act as she thought best once she had general permission. It was a usual thing to put water in the soup to make it less palatable, or add a little ashes from time to time to make up for some personal failing.

To put cold water in the soup was the mildest form of penance practiced. Mother did it every day on the pre- [p. 113] text that she couldn't drink it hot; and if she did it why should Sister Maria Grosso and her novices refrain?

To drink water in which the dishes had been washed? Something very repugnant indeed. But Sister Enrichetta had done it, with Sister Emilia, who seemed oblivious of what was served her, following suit.

With people of this caliber, Don Bosco could well prophesy that the Institute would spread and do much good.

Poor but happy

Our Lady permitted her Daughters to feel the pinch of poverty but she did not abandon them. It sometimes happened that Mother said to the community: "Sisters, we have neither bread nor work in the House: let us pray to God to send us both." Almost on the same day or the next, she would announce joyfully; "My Sisters, Providence has arrived; let us thank the Lord."

Sometimes the work was urgent and one Sister or another would ask to absent herself from recreation to go ahead with it, but Mother wanted them all to take an active part in this relaxation. At other times Providence left them in suspense; the bread, which had to be brought from Gavi, didn't arrive in time for dinner. Mother was grieved at this, and recalled with such efficacy the words of Saint Teresa: "And suppose you went to table and found no bread?" that she aroused in the Sisters the desire to suffer hunger rather than see her in anguish on their account.

As in a good family all helped to wash dishes and clean stoves and sinks after dinner, singing and laughing. The refectory was prepared and then all went out under the porticoes if the day was fine or to the corridor on the ground floor to jump and play. Mother was always first. One day a novice was leaning against the wall which leads to the chapel; she wasn't taking part in the game. Mother approached her and asked:

[p. 114]"Oh! What are you doing here?"

"I'm thinking that Jesus is all alone in chapel."

"Alone? Not at all. There are hosts of angels adoring Him; there are all the saints, and is Mother, Mary. For us at the moment He has ordered recreation, and He wants us all to join in. Come! Come along with us and do as we are doing. "

The power of a Rule! She who as a "Daughter of the Immaculate" sacrificed not only recreation but her very sleep to spend time with the Lord, now forms others to renounce those joys, in favor of a community act.

The Director's action

Conscious of the gift God had given to Mornese in the person of Mary Mazzarello, the Director proposed to treat her like a diamond.

Knowing her thirst for humility he didn't spare her humiliation. For a mere nothing he rebuked her in front of the Sisters, with a vivacity that would irritate any other character, even those already tempered to reproach, but not so Mother, who was always most respectful to authority and the priesthood.

But the Director made it his program to harp continuously on strong and simple humility,

demanding it from girls and Sisters. His refrain was: "All for the Lord"; and when he thought that lips found it hard to say the words with his own abandon and enthusiasm, then "down came a solemn harsh pronouncement," Sister Rosalia Pestarino said, "to make us understand that all, really all, must be for the Lord."

He took a special interest in Sister Rosalia. As mentioned before, she had become, in fact if not in name, a teacher in the public school, that functioned in the school. She found it anything but easy to remain in close contact with those little children, who were not overclean and who often had nests of parasites in their hair. She remained at a [p. 115] safe distance from her little pupils those first days, but then moved by remorse she told the Director. "You must overcome yourself in this," he said. "These are the people you should seek out! Woe to you if you show yourself fastidious in things like this. What do the insects matter? Those are beautiful souls! You must seek the souls and not think about the rest. "

However to compensate her for the sacrifice this entailed, which was not a light one for her, he taught her to speak like a child with the Madonna. To make her more sensitive to this devotion, every morning before school he had her open the door of a little shrine of Our Lady, and recommend her little pupils to her. Later during the day she would offer a certain number of spiritual Communion in gratitude for the sacramental Communion of the morning. In the evening, she was to greet Our Lady and close the niche. "Our zealous Director wanted us to make many spiritual Communion," adds Sister Rosalia. "Woe to us if the day passed without making at least five in the morning, and another five or more in the afternoon. According to him, even during the night we should wake up and unite ourselves. . . spiritually with Jesus and he told us

how. Thus I too put little sticks in my bed; and Sister Teresa Laurantoni even put a row of bricks in hers to serve as an alarm clock! "

Father Costamagna overlooked nothing. Active, full of exuberant life that needed expansion, he came from a boy's school to direct Sisters full of good will but very inexperienced. Thus he threw himself into everything: practices of piety, school, hygiene, politeness.

Up until now on rising the Sisters said the *Te Deum* in gratitude for the gift of life and all the graces sent from heaven. Now the Director taught them a shorter prayer: *Benedicamus Domino*.

[p. 116] Variations in community practices

The custom of reciting three *Hail Marys* and at one's bedside before retiring was abolished, much to the regret of some. To make up for it, the Director arranged that in the dormitory at night the following chaplet be recited aloud in alternating choruses, for ten consecutive times: "My God, I offer myself to You that You may do with me as You please." The other chorus answered: "May our hearts be entirely Yours." Instead of the *Glory Be* the ejaculation: "Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception, etc.," was repeated for five decades like a rosary.

The prayerbooks used were: *A Little Book of Treasures, (Un libretto ed un Tesoro)* or *The Devout Daughter of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Most Holy, and Seeking Her Own Perfection, (La figlia devota di Gesù Sacramentato e di Maria SS.ma e amante della propria perfezione)*, by Carlo Fogliano. It was used for the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. Its instructions and intentions, already learned by heart, were easy for those who still found reading difficult.

With Don Bosco's permission, a slight change was made in the practices of piety: in the morning, prayers in common as soon as the community assembled in chapel followed by holy mass, heard in silence until the *Pater Noster*; then a hymn in preparation for Holy Communion. After mass, meditation concluding with the first Sorrow of Our Lady and singing of the ejaculation: "Unto thee my heart is given, Mother of my Jesus, Mother of love."

Mother Petronilla says: "At Mornese we always attached great importance to the commemoration of the sorrows and joys of Our Lady at the prescribed times, because Don Bosco said he had fixed them for special hours with the intention of uniting us with Church's canonical hours. In this way this prayer acquired greater value, in union with priests, the canons of cathedrals and monastic religious. "

In the afternoon the visit to the Blessed Sacrament [p. 117] was made immediately after midday recreation; spiritual reading was made in common at 4:30 p.m. and the rosary recited before

supper. The Director was always present, and if a mistake was made in a prayer, or the tone of voice was not as he wished, the correction was immediate, in the presence of Jesus. That of course, made all more attentive. Even the girls became more recollected and pious, without losing any of their liveliness. The "little daughters" as Mother called them, could all have been postulants, so closely did they live the family life and take part in every work.

Laundry at the river

Once a month they went to the Roverno for the washing, thrilled with the novelty of it. They were delighted when they could be near Mother, who guided the donkey laden with linen if Cinin was not available. She was always first to begin and last to leave the work, unless of course, she prepared dinner and then there was a feast!

In the country round about nobody objected.

From the farmhouse near the mill the Sisters borrowed saucepans when necessary, a pot for the polenta and the rolling pin for the dumplings. Yes! Mother's goodness arrived even to that: not only did she endure the same long, uneven track, with her Sisters, and the weariness of a morning's washing bent over a stone in the riverbed, rubbing clothes under a blazing sun: but she would restore her Sisters' strength with an unusually appetizing and substantial lunch cooked in the open air. The boarders poked the fire, peeled the potatoes, helped Mother knead the dough, singing with her the lovely hymns the Director had taught them.

In the evening they returned happily to the school preceded by Cinin, who guided the donkey loaded with dried and folded linen. The Oratorians accompanied them, for they too had heard of the outing and had gone to the [p. 118] Roverno to help. Some of them came to meet the procession hoping to have a word with Mother and the Sisters, and would accompany them to the school. Often they would then enjoy a game in the school playground, off-schedule.

Sanctifying Mardi Gras

Like everything else in life, Mardi Gras was sanctified in a special way. Dancing was ruled out! Instead the young folks' hearts and minds were directed to Communion, prayers and adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. In the afternoons, songs and games at the Oratory was always well attended together with comic skits and "sack races . . ."

Anything will serve to keep a simple heart cheerful. A mere nothing will satisfy one who feels really loved and the children of Mornese were so sure of their Sisters that they preferred even the meat pies prepared at the Oratory to those prepared at home. The older group, the New Ursulines, who had contributed more than others by bringing something to help keep the younger children happy would joke with Sisters Teresa Pampuro and Rosina Mazzarello (the cooks); "Those meat pies are no good. You put too much cabbage in them." Sometimes they went to Mother, their companion of days gone by: "Main, (Sister Mary,) Mother, why didn't you make them put eggs in the pancakes?" Meanwhile, they were busily eating them, then singing and helping to keep the exuberant joy of the younger generation within limits.

More postulants Vocation of obedience

March began with the arrival of a postulant: Anna Tamietti, sister of a Salesian. It was good to see the relatives of Salesian come to Mornese. Wasn't this another sign that [p. 119] the Madonna considered her two Institutes one in which both branches were especially dear to her heart?

On the 10th Teresina Mazzarello, Sister Rosina's sister and niece of Mother Petronilla, came to swell the ranks of the postulants.

Teresina was a flower gathered by the Director General, Father Cagliero. One morning while in

Mornese for the feast of Mary Immaculate, he was passing in front of Petronilla's house, and saw her brother Stephen standing at the door with his daughter Teresa. Jokingly he said to him: "Stephen, give us too this daughter for Our Lady." Stephen answered humbly: "Yes, Father. . . if Our Lady wants her."

When he got back to the school, Father Cagliero called Mother Petronilla:

"Go down to Stephen's and bring your niece here."

"Teresina? What for?"

"To make her a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians."

"She is very young! She is not yet fifteen years old."

"Go and bring her here as soon as possible!"

Petronilla went and found her watering the cows.

"Leave them there and come to the school."

"To stay?"

"To stay. Father Cagliero said so."

The young girl put down her pail and went inside for a minute to get ready. Meanwhile her aunt asked permission of Teresina's mother and went to get her some linen from the trunk.

On the way Teresa had only one objection:

"I come willingly but I'm ashamed. You now know so many things... I don't even know how to behave at table. "

Since the previous December (1874) she had been staying with her aunt at the school, helping the Sisters here and there; by now she knew the ways of the Institute and brought her sincerity and obedience to the postulancy.

[p. 120] Novena to Saint Joseph A rose for heaven

On this same day—March 10—the novena to Saint Joseph began. Mother asked the community to make it with all fervor for two intentions: the recovery, if such were God's will, of Sister Rose Mazzarello, who was very ill; and the provident assistance of Saint Joseph in paying off the debts, which were ever on the increase.

On Monday the 15, dear Sister Rose Mazzarello went to heaven, which had been her sole desire. During her long illness Mother had been beside her with all the care and attention of her maternal heart. She would gladly have provided anything to allievate her suffering, but the dear invalid needed nothing. She always said she had too much and that their care for her was excessive. Yet she had come from a relatively well-to-do family!

She had been a Daughter of Mary Immaculate, one of those who, attracted by *Main*, had followed her in the name of Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians. Humble, very active while she enjoyed good health, she was always the right hand of Mother and the community. In her illness she was an example of how to sanctify sufferings and of how a good religious looks forward to death, which will unite her to Jesus. Hers was truly an enviable death, but these summons from on high were too frequent, and those left behind suffered.

The people of Mornese felt this death, for all of them knew and loved Sister Rose.

New perplexities

In the House it was being asked if these deaths were not due to scarcity of food. From Turin Don Bosco wrote to suggest that more and better food be provided for all.

The Mother Superior didn't question the wisdom of Don Bosco's advice, but neither would she open the door **[p. 121]** to a seeking after material things that could weaken the spirit. Hence she had recourse to an expedient, which would show Don Bosco the disposition of the Sisters without diminishing her own obedience.

She drafted a letter to Don Bosco, then questioned every Sister, inviting her to sign it if she approved. She then sent letter and signatures to Turin.

Feast of Saint Joseph

The feast of Saint Joseph found the community still weighed down by mourning. However, the liturgy was very solemn, and prayer to the powerful saint was full of love strengthened by faith and necessity. A like fervor characterized the Holy Week ceremonies which were performed by the Director assisted by the cleric Campi, and tears flowed in abundance when he led the *Via Crucis* on Good Friday. Every heart remembered Father Pestarino, while the recent death of Sister Rose increased their sorrow.

March brought five postulants, raising the number to nine, but the Director said that Don Bosco needed many more, for there were many works awaiting the Sisters.

Maria Belletti enters

A boarder for whom the community had feared and prayed much, entered on April 3: sixteen-year-old Maria Belletti. She had come most unwillingly as a boarder on November 3 of the preceding year. Her heart was already full of other ideas. An orphan, who through an inheritance became rich overnight, and gave herself up completely to pleasures and enjoyment, she went in for luxury in a big way. Very soon her affections had been won by a person taking advantage of her situation. But God had fixed His gaze on the orphan girl and providentially disposed that [p. 122] her people, anxious for her future, bring her to Mornese, to further her education and withdraw her from danger.

Her worldly ways showed how much effort her formation would cost. Though her heart was still unspoiled it was closed to prayer and to an orderly, virtuous life. School discipline oppressed her: in the workroom she wasted time wholesale. At the approach of the Assistant she would hide the trinkets that had been occupying her attention, and resume her work. She had no interest in study. She went to church against her will and was distracted while there. The food was not to her taste, but she made up for it with all the fruit that a certain person claiming to be her cousin, continually sent her in huge baskets, and which were a real boon to the scant supplies.

She was treated with every attention, as her guardian, who paid a high monthly fee, had requested. But in spite of all it seemed wiser to send her home lest she harm others through her example.

Sister Enrichetta, who had charge of the discipline of the boarders, followed her day and night, and won her affection, while the Superiors asked prayers to Saint Joseph to obtain light in her regard. The Director too had his say: "Saint Francis de Sales says that when the house is on fire, everything is thrown out of the window; let us try to enkindle the love of God in that heart, and victory will be ours."

Miss Belletti knew nothing of this conspiracy and went on as usual in her superficial way. But one night she wept in her sleep and when awakened began to shout loudly, frightening both companions and Sisters. She wanted the confessor immediately.

She had dreamed she was being strangled by the devil for her sins, and nothing would pacify her except confession, even though the time was unsuitable.

She confessed at length and wept the remainder of the night.

Next morning Mother spoke to her kindly, succeeded in calming her, and from that point began to guide her in [p. 123] self-formation, still making concessions for her and allowances for her vanity as far as possible without any detriment to others.

Maria obeyed and worked energetically on her character, so that shortly she abandoned her luxury, vanity, and foolish imaginings through her own conviction and turned over a new leaf.

She avoided the Sisters because (as she confided to someone), "I might get a vocation and that I do not want. To be good and serious, yes; but to become a Sister-no, never!" The fear was already a call and Mother made a novena to Saint Joseph with Mother Petronilla, that she might receive light and strength.

One day she told the confessor that she felt called to religious life. But as she later told her assistant, the answer was: "Don't even think of it. You are too ambitious; you could never be

accepted."

All the better! That was exactly what she wanted. But the interior voice spoke more loudly and insistently. Still the confessor repulsed her a second and third time, giving her, however, a ray of hope on the third occasion: "Make a novena to Saint Joseph and then talk it over with Mother."

The novena was begun. On the third day Maria confided her desire to Mother in a way heretofore unknown in the school. She entered the room where the Superiors were having a meeting, knelt in tears in front of Mother Mazzarello and said: "Mother, I know I am unworthy, but I beg you to accept me among your Daughters. Be a mother to me also, please; you will see that I will make up for the past, and I will try to glorify the Lord as much as I have offended Him."

Before a very surprised and undecided Mother had time to say a word, with one clip of the scissors Maria had cut the beautiful locks of hair that hung over her shoulders. The Mothers were moved. Mother Mazzarello kissed the little Magdalen on the forehead saying affectionately: "If you wish to be my daughter I will be a real mother to you. "

[p. 124] This young aspirant was tested in every way and on April 3 the long-for favor was granted her. She was, therefore, a gift from Saint Joseph.

The keys of the House to Mary Help of Christians

The Director wished this month to be a preparation for the month of Mary and for the solemn feast of Mary Help of Christians.

He wanted Mornese to compete with Valdocco. He ordered a statue of Mary Help of Christians to be placed on the pedestal erected by Father Pestarino on the little lawn among the flowers in front of the chapel. He disposed the Sisters to receive her as a queen, while Mother invited them to have the key of their heart in readiness as a gift to acclaim her Superior of the community. She would personally present the keys of the House, so that Mary Help of Christians would be completely in charge. As if to show her approval of these plans Our Lady gratified the general desire for many postulants.

Postulants from Sondrio and Turin

Quite a group arrived from Sondrio. They were young, reserved, good girls directed to the Institute of Don Bosco by the holy priest, Father Guanella. Never before had such a number come together, nor from such a distance. Mother regarded it as a blessing.

The new postulants relieved the material hardships of the moment to a certain extent.

From Turin came a lady of sixty-three years, Maria Bacchialoni. Don Bosco couldn't refuse her when she asked to try, as bonds of friendship and gratitude bound him to her brother, a kind and outstanding professor. A niece came with her. The boarders looked at her in amazement. . . the [p. 125] people smiled when they saw her on a walk accompanied by fifteen-year-old Marietta Rossi. Would she last. . . at her age?

Don Bosco's reply

During those days Don Bosco's reply to the letter about breakfast signed by the Sisters, arrived. Mother Mazzarello said: "Don Bosco is pleased to see the Sisters' goodwill about maintaining their state of mortification. However he is paternally and strongly in favor of coffee and milk for breakfast! Is this what Don Bosco wants? Then we will have coffee and milk. In fact, if Don Bosco so wished we would all be ready to have chicken or anything else he commanded. We are very poor but if we obey, Providence will never abandon us."

She, therefore, began to think how to get the money for a cow, because the one they had on loan from evening to morning would no longer suffice.

Providence of God! The little contribution of the postulants from Sondrio provided the necessary sum. After paying eleven *marenghi* for the cow, Mother wanted to give it a festal reception. She

entrusted the preparations to a postulant, Anna Succetti, who would also help Sister Assunta Gaino to look after the cow. Thus there was milk for everyone at breakfast. In this instance Mother was true to character. There were some delicate people in the House. She took some cream off the milk to make butter for them. The community did not suffer any deprivation. Charity and mortification were safeguarded and obedience was saved.

[p .126] Mornese's first statue of Mary Help of Christians

Toward the end of April the box containing the long-awaited statue of Mary Help of Christians arrived. Sisters, postulants, boarders, all gathered round for the opening ceremony. She had to be reverently taken out of the packing straw, and there was keen competition about who would first see her face.

There she was! It wasn't what you would call beautiful, no: but that didn't matter. A loving heart saw perfection, found queenly grace, and loved it, not for what it was, but for whom it represented. All together welcomed her in song, formed a procession, and accompanied her to her flower adorned niche.

The best practice

May as usual brought an increase in fervor and joy. Asked for a practice (*fioretto*) Mother said:

"The practice that will gladden Our Lady most during her month is to renew oneself in spirit like the plants in spring. It means performing the daily practices of piety with greater attention and earnestness without adding anything; from the first Sign of the Cross in the morning until the last in the evening. . .

The Director suggested that during mass they sing the motets he had composed, and was teaching them.

Serenading the Help of Christians

Instead of the spiritual reading in the evening, he gave a short talk on Our Lady, and after benediction, if the weather permitted, the entire community went to the playground in front of Our Lady's statue. There they sang a hymn to the accompaniment of the harmonium hidden [p. 127] under the trees which overshadowed the pedestal. Sometimes while the Sisters' choir sang in front of the statue, the boarders answered from a distance, and the sweet melody re-echoed in the valley below in beautiful harmony.

Thus the novena assumed great importance and aroused new fervor, serving also as an immediate preparation for the fortunate ones who, on Our Lady's feastday, would be clothed in her habit.

No longer like monks

The clothing brought an innovation. When Father Cagliero had seen the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with the big black bonnet he had, like Don Bosco, smiled faintly as if to say; "Umm-I wonder how long that will last!" When he saw that it had been changed for a white counterpart, he had said in an undertone: . . . "Well, that's an improvement!" But when the bright sun worsened the situation by fading the coffee-colored habit, he could not refrain from saying to Don Bosco with his customary humor: "Oh, Don Bosco, if those Sisters are as ugly inside as they are outside, heaven help us! Practically all the Sisters here at Turin wear black!" Don Bosco, with a good-natured smile, and his habitual nod of the head, had answered: "That could be tried." Father Cagliero had referred the matter to Mother Mazzarello, who naturally offered to try it. Extra expense was out of the question, so she chose to experiment with the habits for the clothing.

She used the black material still in reasonably good condition from the postulants' dresses, dyed other, colored dresses; then taking some gabardine from the better trouseaus, she succeeded in making the habits for the new novices.

[p. 128] White gowns for the clothing

Now that the postulants' dresses had been dyed and cut up, how were they to appear in chapel for their clothing?

Father Costamagna said that most Orders dressed their postulants in white for this function, and Mother Mazzarello solved the problem with her resourcefulness: "Oh, a nice white underskirt perhaps even with lace, can always be found-and also a pretty night jacket! A little white veil and the crown will put the finishing touch. Everyone knows we are poor, and then we live in Mornese! . . . Let's try it!"

A tonsure and a first mass (May 23)

The vigil brought a joyous ceremony with the tonsure of the cleric Campi and the first mass of Father Modesto Davico, who had come from Sampierdarena.

In the evening in front of Our Lady fireworks were let off and star shell flares told the country round about that Our Lady's feast was next day, and to prepare for it. The Director wanted it to be unforgettable!

Next morning during mass the choir was at its best, and all, including girls from the workroom and Oratory, went to Communion.

Then Father Davico sang mass, accompanied by the richest chords the Director could produce on the harmonium, with the choir of boarders and day-girls sustained by the voices of Louise Arecco and Sister Maria Grosso.

Even in the midst of such joy it was impossible to forget Father Pestarino, who had enjoyed so much the first mass sung in that chapel of his. And a year had already passed.

[p. 129] The black habit

The twelve white-robed postulants aroused general admiration. As it was Sunday a large number of people were present, and the recollection and happiness on the faces of the young girls being clothed added light and dignity to their dress and bearing. When they reentered dressed in black a tremor of emotion passed through the crowd, and from the whispers a phrase came through; "They look better like that!"

The parish priest, Father Valle, assisted by the Director and Father Davico, performed the ceremony, because neither Don Bosco nor Father Cagliari could absent themselves from the feast of Mary Help of Christians at Valdocco. Among the privileged ones who that day became part of the family of Mary Help of Christians were the happy Maria Belletti, Miss Bacchialoni, again beside Marietta Rossi, and a certain Louise Bagliardi. The latter was good and prudent, but at the same time a bit mysterious and sad, for which Don Bosco had simply said: "Try her, try her!" The young protegee of Monsignor Sciandra, Louise Arecco, was among them too, determined to work on her difficult but generous nature, to correspond to the care of Mother Mazzarello.

A wonderful evening

In the evening the ceremony of the vigil was repeated, with the addition of colored balloons containing little letters written by the Daughters to their Mother, Mary Help of Christians. People had come from far and near, and the memory of this festive evening lived long in their minds.

[p. 130] Mother's work on souls

For Marietta Rossi the clothing ceremony marked a considerable victory over self. She received a habit with a skirt of many joinings, a bodice of half-wool half-lining material, and a short black apron with a discreet floral design under a relatively long new veil. Two hours later Mother called her, and presented her in substitution for this latter, an old darned threadbare veil which just reached her shoulders. The novice didn't lose her joy or serenity of spirit over the exchange, which was a great consolation to Mother. Sister Marietta herself narrates:

I owe my vocation to Mother Mazzarello's goodness. My two sisters were already professed at Mornese and I had seen them a few times. One day I wrote asking Mother if I could visit them. Having received an affectionate reply I went there with my mother. When we were about to come away Mother invited me to stay on for a week. "Then," she said, "if you like it you can still remain with us; if not you can return home." I spent the week there, and experienced kindness on all sides. At the end of it Mother asked me:

"Would you like to stay?"

"Very much," I answered, without having at the time any idea of becoming a Sister; just happy to be with my own sisters. But not so for Mother, who without my noticing it, was studying me all the time, and from time to time tried me on a few points. Some months passed like that; then one day she called me, had me sit beside her on the steps and asked me:

"Are you happy here?"

"Very much so."

"Would you like to stay forever?"

"Oh, yes, willingly!"

"Well then, listen, I will now give you the vocation test; if I were to send you to a distant House far from your sisters, would you go?"

"Yes, Mother, I would."

"And what if . . . if . . . if."

"Yes, Mother," I answered to all her questions, some of which were demanding.

[p. 131] "Well," was the conclusion, "get ready, you will be clothed. "

For Mother it was sufficient that I be ready for anything.

Sister Emilia Mosca was the best-educated Sister and all went to her; now to write a letter, now for advice as to how best correct such and such a girl. This greatly pleased Mother Mazzarello and was acceptable to Don Bosco also because it showed that the Sisters were eager to progress. However, the ever-attentive Mother Superior (this was the title most frequently used since the elections of the previous year), asked herself: "Should not such brilliant gifts be kept more in the shade?" Therefore while entrusting her with delicate situations, and asking her to do her private correspondence, Mother never addressed words of praise to Mother Emilia; never showed that she was conscious of her value, the help she gave, or the hopes she had placed in her. Rather it wasn't rare that having perused a letter written by her, she murmured: "You didn't understand my idea." Then she had someone else draft the letter, which she eventually asked Sister Emilia to copy. Sister Emilia did so serenely, as if she weren't the least hurt. This produced a double advantage; an increase in humility for her, and the edification of the community. This, because everything took place in a corner of the workroom, where Mother's presence was for all a motive of joy and serenity and a reminder of the duty of being united with God.

In her candor and judicious activity, Sister Enrichetta, ever ready to serve Sisters and girls, had become the soul of the boarding school. She had a hand in every kind of work, and also in teaching. Without losing herself in lace and embroidery, she made her girls neat, orderly lovers of humble housework chores, willing and capable of cutting out and making their own linen and dresses.

In this way she was unconsciously carrying out Don Bosco's recommendation of preparing industrious, realistic, prayerful young people for society and the Church.

She never left the girls alone when they were out of school: in the workroom, refectory or

dormitory, she was [p. 132] always with them, like an interested big sister with the little ones, who came and went, worked, studied and prayed with no other desire than to do their duty. Sometimes Mother would call some Sisters, especially those who found it hard to assume the cheerful yet authoritative way proper to a Salesian educator, and near the workroom would say: "Just watch how Richetta manages it." But then, knowing with whom she was dealing, and what she could expect from Richetta she made very strong observations to her and frequently even in the presence of the pupils. She reserved to herself to say to them and the Sisters afterwards, "Learn how to take corrections. "

A "postulant" turned down

In June Mr. Constatino Sorbone brought little Cesare to see his four sisters. He was a lovable little boy, and they were delighted to see him.

When it was time to leave he couldn't be found: they searched, they called him, they looked everywhere until they eventually found him crying in the dog's kennel. To the surprise of his sisters and Mother he said he didn't want to go as he too wanted to be a Sister!

They had difficulty in persuading him! Mother succeeded at last by telling him that a little boy could not become a Sister, and calmed him by saying that she would ask Don Bosco to receive him at the Oratory, and that he might become a priest.

Two other student Sisters at Turin

After a year of private study under the guidance of the Director, Father Costamagna, and of Sister Emilia Mosca, Sisters Enrichetta Sorbone and Elisa Roncallo left for Turin when the Teachers' Diploma Examination was coming up.

They went to try their luck, as the saying goes. How- [p. 133] ever, with the good Sisters of Saint Anne, always so kind to the poor Daughters of Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians, they could continue their studies with more tranquility and perhaps even be rated above their deserts.

The hope didn't, however, exclude the fear of failure, which was shared by Don Bosco who, while he encouraged them, used expressions like: "If this isn't the moment of success for you, it just means there will be another chance."

Father Rua's first visit

They were also cheered by his promise to go to Mornese for the retreat and that Father Rua would also go for a few days.

This was communicated at once to Mother, in the knowledge that no news could be more welcome.

Father Rua arrived, and in his quality of prefect of the Salesian Congregation took a special interest in the material concerns of the House. He looked at all the registers, which after Sister Corinna's death were the responsibility of Sister Jandet, helped by the postulant, Adele David, who had a special flair for that work.

Father Rua examined the accounts page by page, property, income through dowries, work, and other sources; expenses on food, buildings etc. He even drafted a prospectus for the acceptance of postulants and boarders.

When necessary he gave directions and corrected. His spiritual help was also called into play: he heard confessions, spoke to the Sisters, sometimes gave a talk for meditation and gave a few words each evening in the chapel after prayers. His words were practical and made a great impression on the Sisters!

[p. 134] Welcome visitors

During Father Rua's stay the Director of Sampierdarena, Father Paul Albera, arrived, accompanied by Father Guanella, who came to see his little colony of postulants. Though good and docile and very simple in their ways, they were still finding it difficult to settle down. Perhaps the air? Or was it the food?

The two priests took turns giving talks to the Sisters on devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, giving benediction every evening, and keeping Don Bosco's custom of the "Good Night."

Then they all departed; and why not mention what happened on their arrival? On seeing them hot and perspiring, Mother in her goodness of heart, had spontaneously asked, "What can we offer you?" Overcoming his shyness Father Albera had said, "Well—er ... perhaps some coffee!"

The coffee was served, the very best in the House. However it was neither the Moka nor like that of Puerto Rico, but the product of Mornesian fields: legume leaves and roast barley, and not too good at that. They drank it but couldn't dissimulate the effort it cost to swallow that hot colored water. Later, telling Father Rua about it they repeatedly said, half in fun and half in earnest, "Poor coffee; and poor Sisters!"

An outing

The month of June closed with a lovely outing to the sanctuary of the Guardia at Gavi.

Mother's devotion often inspired her to visit Our Lady's sanctuaries, in which respect also she resembled Don Bosco, who always chose a Manan shrine as the goal of his outings with his boys, and on entering a city made a point of visiting a sanctuary or church dedicated to her. This was by no means the first time the Director was there to celebrate mass. The outing then was prolonged for a whole day, spent [p. 135] in singing hymns and canticles which resounded through the hills, while the hands of the more active plied the knitting needles or stitched or mended some garment in between walks.

The Sisters of Borgo San Martino

The Sisters of Borgo were fortunate in having a visit from Don Bosco on the occasion of the feast of Saint Aloysius. He didn't have much time but he celebrated mass for the Sisters, and before leaving came to say good-bye to them. A Sister had mentioned to the Director of the House that she wished to speak to him, but it had not been possible to arrange a meeting. Don Bosco read in her eyes the spiritual problem which troubled her, and without saying a word, he cured her with his fatherly glance.

"When he looked at me every cloud disappeared," the Sister said, "and peace flowed into my heart."

Difficulties in community

In the midst of fervor in prayer and work, discomfort and uneasiness were not lacking because of living conditions.

There were a number of little things, such as ill concealed disapproval, which did not cease even after the food improved. Mother did not get upset; and since most of the insinuations, hints and whispered counsels had a tone of intellectual superiority they evidently came from the novice Bacchialoni, a woman of the world and experienced in many ways. Mother actually thought Don Bosco had sent this elderly lady with the view to making her Superior, and followed her in everything compatible with the Rule.

The two Arecco sisters, Felicita who was professed and Maria who was still a novice, did their share of grumbling. They found defects and shortcomings in the Superior's [p. 136] arrangements and sowed discontent all around them. The older, more mature Sisters were not influenced, but those not fully formed were.

The Hail Mary for peace in the House

Something had to be done, and help from on high was sought.

Therefore, on hearing from the Director that on similar occasions Don Bosco had the entire community say a "Hail Mary for peace in the House," Mother decided to make this important addition to the daily prayer. Our Lady, as true Superior, would provide.

On her part Mother did not fail to speak of the necessity of humility and submission. She recommended it at the Sunday conference, which she never omitted, and during which she wished that each one would freely say what seemed useful to her for the running of the House and the good of souls.

The 'Good Night' outdoors

Besides, she now began to give a short talk regularly to the Sisters before the night prayers, whereas the priests usually had their "Good Night" in chapel after the prayers.

Now that the weather was fine, as soon as the after meal tasks had been done and recreation was over she gathered the Sisters around "Our Lady of the Little Wood." She gave directions for the following day, spoke of the most urgent needs, asked prayers for benefactors, and reminded all of some point on which to be especially vigilant. She insisted, above all, on devout preparation for Holy Communion, correspondence with the grace of vocation, and the desire that should animate every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to become daily more capable of fulfilling her mission with youth.

[p. 137] Spared a humiliation

About mid-July Sisters Enrichetta and Elisa came home, very dejected over their failure but still serene.

"Oh, you are home? How come? Are you bringing us a fine fiasco or the palm of victory?"

The two told the news to the joyous group which had immediately gathered round them.

"Forgive us, Mother," the humble Sister Enrichetta began, "we did all we could to bring you the joy of two diplomas. ..." "But Don Bosco," continued Sister Elisa, to give a chance to the other to dry a big tear, "sent Professor Dogliani to tell us not to present ourselves for examination, because the Commission wasn't in our favor."

"And so," concluded Mother, "Don Bosco spared you a humiliation. Oh, what a good father Don Bosco is for us! Did you at least go to thank him?"

"Oh, yes, yes! And he repeated that we were to keep cheerful, that all was for the best; and when giving us this letter for the Director he said: 'I'll see you soon.' "

Spiritual exercises

Don Bosco had written the Director to prepare the Sisters well for the retreat and to invite many ladies. He also included the names of the preachers.

The Director General arrived on August 21 with the Carmelite priest, Father Emiliano, to begin the retreat.

The Sisters of Borgo San Martino also participated and there were many ladies.

Don Bosco announces perpetual vows

Don Bosco also came when the retreat was drawing to a close, and his paternal goodness heard

confessions and received privately all who came to him. Then he gave some [p. 138] great news. Though it was not yet written in the manuscript copy of the Rule, it was the intention of the Church that after a trial period of three years or so, the Sisters should bind themselves to God with vows in perpetuity. Three years had already passed since the first profession in Mornese. Therefore, at the end of the retreat, to the clothing and profession ceremonies, that of perpetual vows would be added for those who wished, and whom the Superiors considered fit for this step. The others could renew their vows, unless someone..

It was evident that Don Bosco knew of the restlessness in the House, and wanted to help those present understand the value of religious life, the sacred vows and authority.

The Sisters who were professed three years went to ask him if they could be admitted to perpetual vows and having expressed his opinion he told Mother Petronilla: "However, you should consult your Mother Superior."

On Saturday, the 28th, assisted by Father Emiliano and his two Sons, Fathers Cagliero and Costamagno, Don Bosco performed the function most beautifully. He gave the black habit to fifteen postulants, among whom were Adele David, Teresina Mazzarello, whose touching example of prompt obedience Father Cagliero recalled. Madelene Martini whom Don Bosco knew and who possessed the following autographed letter, was also in the group:

Beloved Daughter in Jesus Christ,

Your going to Mornese was such a rejection of the world, that the enemy of our souls was sent to trouble you. But you must listen to the voice of God who is calling you to salvation through a safe and easy way, and despise every contrary suggestion. Rather be pleased to accept the annoyances and worries you suffer because the way of the cross is that which leads to God. On the contrary if you were immediately content and joyful a deceit of the enemy might be suspected. Therefore remember:

1) We don't go to heaven without great effort.

2) We aren't alone: Jesus is with us and Saint Paul says that with God's help we become omnipotent.

[p. 139] 3) Whoever leaves relatives, country and friends to follow the Divine Master has secured a treasure in heaven, which no one can take from him.

4) The great reward prepared in heaven should animate us to bear some suffering here below.

Take courage, therefore: Jesus is with you. When you have some thorns to suffer, put them into Jesus' own crown of thorns. I commend you to God in holy mass, and ask you to pray for me, who am in Jesus Christ,

Turin, August 8, 1875

Your humble servant,

John Bosco, Priest

First final profession and other temporary professions

After the clothing there were fourteen professions: Catherine Daghero was one of them and the touching joy that vibrated in her voice told of her happiness at having followed the call of the good God. Nine of the original eleven made perpetual vow. Sister Jandet renewed her temporary vows, while Sister Felicita Arecco was not admitted. Also making perpetual vows were Sister Maria Grosso, the Novice Mistress of the first clothing, and Sisters Virginia Magone, Teresa Mazzarello, Emilia Mosca and Enrichetta Sorbone, of the second clothing.

The Sisters of the second group were not yet professed three years. However, Sister Maria Grosso was Mistress of Novices. Sisters Mosca and Sorbone held very important offices, enjoyed great moral ascendancy in the community and helped their Superiors considerably. The other two were exemplary in every way, and besides there was such need of fully professed members the Institute could consider absolutely its own, that Don Bosco thought fit to admit them by way of exception.

Mother Mazzarello was delighted. Long years before she [p. 140] had given herself to God forever, but to proclaim it before the community made the bond closer and more sacred.

Don Bosco's souvenirs

Through the open windows the joyful news echoed in all directions that the Help of Christians had a goodly number of new Daughters. The Founder gave the closing talk which was the highlight of the retreat and of the whole ceremony.

He spoke of the gift of peace, developing the thought that to be at peace with God we must first be at peace with ourselves and others. To succeed in this he exhorted his listeners not to wait for an hour of great agitation or need to ask advice, give warning, or manifest a sorrow. Rather, Superiors with Sisters, Sisters with Superiors and Sisters among themselves should speak as the occasions arose with respect, calm and serenity.

The Founder on enclosure

Before leaving Don Bosco assembled the entire community, as he had done on other occasions, and said that it seemed to him the time had arrived to recommend the exact observance of enclosure.

Until now we have had no set procedure regarding en. closure, because you were more of a family than a community in the strict sense. Besides, you had to attend to work, men, etc. Now it is time to become regular in this too. From now on the main door should be always closed, and the Sister in charge should keep the keys and receive any persons who come to visit the House. This is necessary considering the number of pupils you have now and its increase in the near future.

No one enters a monastery without special business and permission. Even when the confessor comes for a sick Sister, [p. 141] another Sister goes before ringing a bell. You are not bound by monastic enclosure. You must always be in contact with young girls and often with other externs as well. However, in those rooms reserved for the Sisters as your Constitutions say, no extern may be admitted except for a real necessity, and even then a Sister should accompany him.

No one should go out alone for any reason, nor remain after nightfall. No visitors may be received after the

evening *Angelus*.

Those of you who have been at Borgo San Martino saw that the so-called turn is used between the kitchen and the dining rooms of Superiors and boys, and also between the linen room and distributing room. This way the Sister can perform her duties in these areas without seeing anyone or being seen.

At Mornese no turn exists for the service of priests, but as I said some time ago to the cleric Campi, it may be necessary to install one. In the meantime, however, be careful to observe "enclosure" which means a shutting off: a separation.

Your Rules also state that the Sisters will not frequent the houses of parish priests or other priests, nor render service to them. You have not yet faced that situation, but were it to arise, do as the Rule prescribes: the Rule is the voice of God.

Don Bosco did not object to the new black habit. He recalled Father Cagliari's arguments in its favor as well as Mother's while in Turin, adding:

Yes by all means, adopt the black little by little without too much expense. The Sisters who are not in contact with externs can finish off the brown habit.

We must aim at uniformity in the habit, yes, but keeping accounts straight with Lady Poverty. Then little by little you will all wear the same color . . . Do you agree?

[p. 142] Don Bosco revises the Rules of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Ovada

Don Bosco left Mornese with Fathers Cagliari and Costamagna. They spent some days at Ovada for the centenary of Saint Paul of the Cross, where Don Bosco kept Father Costamagna with him to help revise the Rules of the Institute, intending to present them to the Bishop of the Diocese for approval.

Back in Mornese, Father Costamagna told the Sisters that he had spent the 29th, 30th, and 31st at Ovada with Don Bosco, as guests of Father Tito Borgatta, and he wished they could see how Don Bosco had occupied every minute in their interests.

"While the people were busy entertaining the nine bishops present for the centenary celebrations of Saint Paul of the Cross, we returned to the House when services were over, and taking advantage of the quiet, worked indefatigably revising your Rules.

I read them slowly for him, article by article; he corrected, developed, added. . . then I read the new version to him. Now your Rules correspond more than ever to the Salesian spirit. You will see."

Angelina Sorbone won over by Mother's kindness

October brought the fifth member of the Sorbone family to Mornese.

Angelina Sorbone found it hard to forgive her sister Enrichetta for leaving home, and drawing Caroline after her. In this way she had obliged Angelina not only to look after the family but consequently to relinquish a long cherished hope of pursuing her studies. She refused to go to Mornese and tell Enrichetta all about her disappointment, even though her sisters and even Mother Mazzarello had frequently invited her. Eventually the parish priest of Rosignano had intervened with his authority and Angelina [p. 143] had decided to spend a few days there. When she found that she could freely enjoy her sister's company she stayed longer than she had intended. She really was treated very kindly! Mother allowed Sister Enrichetta to share a room with her, and every mark of sisterly affection was shown her to remove from her heart the fear that she was not loved, and the idea that becoming a religious meant losing all love for one's relatives.

When she saw that her sister Caroline had been assigned to study, and on hearing from her that

she too could study if she wished to become a teacher, she realized that the Institute, far from frustrating the inclinations of its members, rather sought to develop them and orient them to the apostolate. At this point she decided to listen to the intimate call she was hearing, and accepted Mother Mazzarello's invitation to become a postulant.

Thus all five Sorbone girls were under Our Lady's mantle and Sister Enrichetta was extremely happy.

November: departure of Father Cagliero for America

Everyone took part in the functions held in the cemetery for the faithful departed in November. Several beloved members of the family of the school already rested there, and Mother would have wished to go there frequently—even once a week—to pray at the gravesides and take flowers as a sign of gratitude, especially for Father Pestarino. But the cemetery was usually closed.

The unexpected departure of Father Cagliero for America was an added cause of sorrow.

When the priest chosen to lead the first missionary group was prevented from traveling, Don Bosco was at a loss to substitute for him on such short notice. The problem did not escape Father Cagliero, who offered himself to Don Bosco with characteristic generosity and was accepted, although for our good Father it was like amputating his own right hand.

[p. 144] Furthermore due to time limitation it was impossible for him to go to Mornese to say good-bye. He was already on the high seas before they even knew he was gone.

Mother goes to Borgo and Turin in connection with Mrs. Bacchialoni

Mother felt his departure more than all the others. More than anyone else she had experienced his moral support, and at that moment she sorely needed it.

Sister Bacchialoni could not adapt herself; she sought to win over some lightheaded persons to her way of thinking. Not finding support from those who in conscience refused it, she asked to go to Borgo San Martino in the hope of finding Don Bosco there for the annual feast of Saint Charles. She went to Borgo, and returned with even worse dispositions.

"We must come to a decision," Father Costamagna said. "We too will go to Don Bosco. If he is not at Borgo, we will proceed to Turin. We will bring joy to our Sisters there, and return prepared to take the necessary measures."

Mother agreed, and returned with the word of the Superior: "Those whom I send to Mornese, I send to obey, not to command."

The builders withdraw

December brought relief. The builders who, one might say, had never left the place since '64, finished and departed.

There were mutual expressions of thanks, but the Sisters were the most pleased. The men had worked willingly, even until midnight to complete the wall surrounding the play-ground; they had built the entrance archway, the boarders' section of the chapel, the refectory adjoining the sacristy, the stairway and the two top floors. Some Sisters had [p. 145] worked side by side with them, just like laborers would. The foreman told Father Costamagna:

I've never seen Sisters like the ones Mother sends us.

You should see them!

What do they do?

If we ask them: "What's your name? Where do you come from? Do you like it here?" they either pretend not to hear or answer with a little smile that says nothing. But if we ask for stones, bricks, water, they seem to fly, so prompt is their obedience. We have never met people like them. They never talk, never look around, they never know anything that's happening, but work all day as if they never grew tired.

The Sisters who worked at this job were indeed exemplary in virtue, as well as physically robust and strong-willed: Sisters Assunta Gaino, Angela Denegri and Angela Rossi. Yes! It was a relief to be finished with workmen. Now enclosure could be more easily kept as Don Bosco had recommended.

Feast of the Immaculate Father Rua becomes Director General

The feast of Mary Immaculate, scheduled to be again solemnized with professions and clothings, was postponed. On December 9 the Director began the retreat which was an immediate preparation for the future novices and Sisters. The enthusiasm of his words was so communicative that Sisters, postulants, and even the boarders looked forward to the closing function with eager anticipation.

Father Rua arrived on the 10th. He visited the House, received the Sisters and took note of everything. It was obvious that he was taking the place of the absent Director General.

Sunday the 12th was a success in every possible way: [p. 146] the music taught and conducted by Father Costamagna at the organ was truly beautiful.

In Don Bosco's name and assisted by the Director, Father Rua presided at the ceremony in which fifteen novices, among whom was a boarder at the school, Joan Borgna, (native of Buenos Aires), were received. There were also six triennial professions, one of whom was Sister Rosalia Pestarino.

After speaking about Mary Immaculate, Father Rua finished his discourse by recommending the Sisters to be prudent virgins who every moment go to meet their heavenly Spouse, through the exact and loving fulfillment of their duties, detachment from the world, and the thought of death as the day of entrance into eternal life.

A defection

Father Rua departed on December 14. The same day Mrs. Bacchialoni, who had laid aside the religious habit, also left for Turin.

The Areccos, too, had not improved their ways. All the solicitious attentions of Mother towards the two unfortunate sisters were of no avail. One was professed: what would be said in Mornese, in case of a defection?

On the 21st, while the community was out for a walk Maria Arecco laid aside the holy habit and returned home, charitably supplied with a little bit of everything to tide her over the first necessities.

Father Campi's first mass First Communions at Christmas

Father Campi's first mass and preparations for the First Communions scheduled for Christmas happily distracted all from the sad events of the last few weeks.

The two Bosco girls, Maria and Eulalia, boarders at the [p. 147] school, wrote to their parents on December 22: "We are delighted Christmas is here. The birth of Baby Jesus is a great joy and consolation for us all.

On that day we will visit the crib, and prostrate at Jesus' feet give expression to all that is in our heart. We shall ask graces for our dear father and mother, our sisters, brother, in a word for everyone. Our little Baby Jesus is so gracious that He will refuse us nothing; therefore we hope He will grant our petitions. We will ask Him to help us grow in virtue, that we may be your consolation. We will also pray Him to give you a long and happy life."

On Christmas day Sister Enrichetta came up with a new idea: the boarders each read a promise in chapel, then placed it at the feet of the Child Jesus, asking Him to bless it and to grant her the

grace to practice it during the coming year.

The promise regarded correcting the child's most frequent defect. They were made with all seriousness and love.

The Sisters were somewhat mortified to find themselves outstripped by the girls in such a useful practice. So the Director suggested: "Oh, well, you can do it another time, at the end of the year, for example. Yes get ready, and we shall all make it in solemn ceremony at the year's end: postulants, novices and Sisters."

Then he taught the choir the following ejaculation:

*Infant Jesus, Spouse of love,
Come and rest within my heart;
Consume with love, O Holy Child,
My soul, from You never to part.*

The other Arecco sister

It would seem that the Divine Infant was pleased with the fervor of the community, and withdrew from it anyone that hindered its peace. On the 27th, Felicina Arecco followed her sister and left the Institute.

[p. 148] At war with their conscience the two sisters sought support for their behavior from their cousin, Miss Maccagno, who was still in charge of the New Ursulines. But, displeased with their conduct, she refused to receive them. Rather, she made them feel all the responsibility of having betrayed their vocation, and informed them that they would not be accepted in the Casa Immacolata either.

The two imprudent virgins were then provisionally given hospitality by a former companion.

The amputation of a diseased organ is, of course, the salvation of the body, and a renewal of its energies! However the operation is always painful and the departure of these sisters was more keenly felt at the school than laying to rest any of the loved Sisters who had died.

The year ends happily

The year had seen a considerable increase in the number of postulants and boarders. The Oratory too had taken on new life: the beautiful singing under the Director and the solemnity of the liturgy attracted young people and stabilized their attendance. The Sisters rejoiced in all this, and Sister Elisa Roncallo, professed on August 28, wrote about it all to her mother.

Hail, Baby Jesus!
(Viva Gesù Bambino!)

My dearest Mother,

. . . our community is always on the increase. We are already more than 130, not counting the thirteen Sisters the Superiors sent to Borgo San Martino to found a new House. Next month two more will be established: one at Turin and the other near Ventimiglia; and probably within a few months a third at Alassio . . .

[p. 149] Mother writes to Father Cagliariro

A letter written by Mother to Father Cagliariro, and a little note from Father Costamagna supply precious information about the atmosphere reigning in Our Lady's House in Mornese at the closing of the year.

Viva Gesù Bambino! And those who love Him! Wherever they may be!

Reverend Director General and my good Father,

Were I a little nearer, I would wish you a happy feast, but all the way to the New World! . . . By the time our greetings from Mornese arrive, Christmas will be a thing of the past. However, this does not prevent our sending them anyway, and even more fervently, if that was possible. Oh, yes, may Jesus bless your sacrifices and labors with such blessings as to make them bear abundant fruit; so that, on entering heaven (which we hope will not be until you have reached a ripe old age) you may be accompanied by thousands and thousands of souls whom you have saved. Not only in these days of grace, but everyday we offer prayers to God for our brother missionaries, and in a special way for the speedy return of our good Father.

It already seems a century since we saw or heard from you; every day we followed your journey on the map, and we imagined you, now here, now there on the restless ocean. Now we hope that with God's help, you have safely landed, and we anxiously await a long letter from you, giving us the details of your journey. Tell us how everybody is over there, and when the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians can expect to go. Tell us also if you don't find it strange to celebrate Christmas and New Year's in summer! It seems to me that the feasts could never be as nice in that season, could they? The snow that covers our country. side and the silence that reigns everywhere, give a clear idea of the Infant God lying in a stall, abandoned by all, shivering with cold. Still, if God wanted any of us to go celebrate the birth of Jesus in that far-off region called America, we would all go willingly.

Now I will give you the family news. Some of it is con-[p. 150] soling, some not. I will begin with the happy items: on the Sunday after the Immaculate Father Rua came to give the habit to fifteen postulants, namely: Beatrice from Pocapaglia (the only one left), Maria and Louise (from Alessandria), Celestina Riva, Justine from Mornese, Orlandi, Ursula, Lucy and Lucrecia from Caramagna, Vincenzina from Santa Margherita, Joan Borgna, Mina, Louise from Lu, Carmela from Ovada, Domenica Roletti also from Caramagna. On the same day six professed: Sister Rosalia the sinner (writer of the present), Sister Tamietti, Sister Clare, Sister Nasi, Sister Louise from Valenza and Sister Josephine.

Now the sad news: a few days after the clothings came the defections: Sister Angela Bacchialoni was the first; on the 14th she left for Turin with Father Rua. On Tuesday, the 21st of this month, Sister Maria Arecco laid aside the religious habit and went home. Sister Felicita is still here, but before the end of the year she will follow in her sister's footsteps, and then to the Cottolengo, if they accept her. All this was done very calmly, without causing any upset; the first two left very peacefully, and the third is disposed to do likewise. So much for the defections.

Because the Infant Jesus loves us very much, in addition to the above-mentioned "treats," He gave us two seriously ill: Sister Teresa Laurantoni, who has been in bed for a month and grows worse daily, was anointed on Tuesday the 21st.

The other is Sister Cassini, who is also very low. However there are some hopes for her recovery at yet, whereas we are expecting Jesus and Mary to come for Sister Teresa any day. Both are resigned to the will of God, and die willingly. They have good reason to be happy; who wouldn't? Prepared as they are, and consequently sure of heaven, who would fear death? The only thing that troubles them is not to have loved the Lord in time. Please remember them in your masses.

A few days ago I received a miracle: I had become so deaf that no matter how near I went to the altar I could not hear a word of the sermons about Baby Jesus. I felt keenly being deprived of this consolation, and asked Father Director to bless me. No sooner was I blessed than all my trouble vanished, and I could hear the

sermons; kindly [p. 151] thank Jesus for me.

I began this letter before Christmas, but did not have time to finish it. I do so now that the feasts are over. I assure you, they were a great success. The mass at midnight was sung, with Father Joseph Campi celebrant. Five boarders made their First Communion. Oh, how many things we said to little Jesus on that night, and it goes without saying that we all asked Him for very special blessings for you, and all our missionary brothers.

On the feast of Saint John Sister Felicita laid aside the holy habit and abandoned our Congregation. There is nothing else new, I think, except that we have two postulants from Castelnuovo: one is the sister of dear Father Cagliero, the other is Clotilde Turco.

I forgot to tell you that Sister Cassini's illness is a gastric fever, which seems to be improving. The doctors cannot diagnose Sister Teresa's. Two months ago she began to have severe nose bleeding several times a day. She became so exhausted that she has been confined to bed for a month, and looks like a lifeless corpse.

With the exception of these two all are well physically and spiritually too, I hope. During these days the Child Jesus has kindled the fire, and I am confident He will keep it burning. In the meantime remember that you have a hundred Daughters or so in a certain place called Mornese, and that among them there are some (especially the writer) who are mischievous. So when the obedient Christ descends into your hands, offer Him one of those prayers that can obtain so many things. Beg Him above all that in this House He may never be offended, even in little things.

As it is now only 10:00 a.m. you may still be in bed. The boarders laugh when they hear this; they want me to write you something for them. In the first place let me tell you they are twenty-five, good beyond all expectation. By that I mean they are full of goodwill and wish to be remembered in your prayers while they promise not to forget you in theirs. Prepare a really big house for us as they too want to become missionaries.

Still more news: since everyone was talking about the goodness of the Holy Father we sent him our Christmas wishes.

[p. 152] Will you kindly send us the Spanish books as soon as possible, so we can begin to study and be ready for the call? I would like to send you some of the cool weather we are enjoying at present, but as I cannot, we will wait for you to send your Guardian Angel with some of the warmth that Baby Jesus radiates.

Write us soon, come back quickly, do not forget us in your prayers, accept our respectful greetings and convey them to all the other little missionaries, and believe me, in the Heart of Jesus, yours respectfully,

Mornese, Dec. 29, 1875

Your humble Daughter in Jesus and Mary,
Sister Mary

In her native simplicity, Mother Mazzarello reveals the treasure of love that burns within her. A true Daughter of Don Bosco, she felt the need of presenting Christmas greetings to the Holy Father, as a spontaneous expression of the devotion of the community.

Mother burned with zeal for the propagation of the faith in pagan lands, where God was not yet known and loved. She wished her Daughters to burn with that same fire, and become capable of participating in this glorious work. Convinced that speech is the first means of communication, she asked for the Spanish books.

Who are the little missionaries she refers to? Perhaps they are the children of Italian emigrants, who through a knowledge of both Italian and Spanish helped the Fathers to establish contact with the local children. It is a mark of delicate interest and an expression of gratitude on her part to all who work in any way, big or little, to spread the kingdom of God.

Regarding this letter, Sister Rosalia Pestarino remembers that, as on other occasions, she wrote at Mother's dictation:

...As usual, Mother, not having time during the day, was obliged to call me in the evening. She felt she could no longer [p. 153] postpone writing to Father Cagliero. She wanted a letter which would make him feel he was still with us. I was terribly sleepy, and it was very cold. At the end of December as we know, the temperature is no joke. . . I mentioned it to Mother, and she: "Do like this: take off your shoes, sit on my pillow and put your feet under the bed clothes. You will see that they will soon be warm." I did exactly as she told me and finished the letter.

Father Costamagna's postscript

Before the letter was mailed the Director added his postscript.

Dear Father Cagliariro:

We heard the good news of your pleasant voyage, with the masses and surprising sermons your Reverence offered the multitudes under the blue skies; but there are still thou. sands of things that we long to hear. How we wish we had a means of communicating directly with you. If only we could rise above the clouds to look down on the work of our dear confreres!

Were I to say that we forgot to pray for you it would be a lie. Come back soon! Come soon. Here all is going well, in fact as smoothly as oil; such was the fervor of love during the Christmas festivities that I am at a loss to describe it. The news items can be summarized as follows: clothings 15–professions 6–defections 3. Miss Bacchialoni gave me a tough time for a few days. . . she had a fine pride which was very subtle. . . You can imagine... I do not wish to say more. *Deo gratias!* In *saecula saeculorum!* Father Campi was ordained. Sister Rosalia is completely changed and gives me much consolation; may God keep her always so.

In a short time the House will be opened in Turin: Superior, Sister Elisa; teachers, Sisters Rosalia and David. Father Cibrario will be going to Bordighera (later), with Sister Orsola from Caramagna and Sister Daghero from Cumiana. The two sick Sisters seem to have taken a turn for the better.

[p. 154] Now four pages would not suffice to describe everyone's feelings when the news of your departure came through in the papers; or to send on their good wishes, from the Superior down to Cinina, so also the parish priest of Tognin, Father Campi, Cravero, Father Joseph, etc., etc. We are daily watching for a letter from Buenos Aires telling us many things, among them that you are coming back soon.

N.B.: The post is being collected. That person, Angela Poggio of Venice, whom you recommended to me, cannot be traced. I have written three letters to her. I am now waiting for an answer to my third letter. She had some family troubles. I will write you again on this subject if you so wish.

Will you do me the favor of greeting all, all . . . tell them to write. May the good Jesus bless you always.

Your confrere, Father J. Costamagna

[p. 155]

1876

Decree of approval of the Constitutions "ad experimentum"

Don Bosco's work at Ovada produced good fruits; the Constitutions with his last precious paternal touches, accompanied by his humble request for approval, obtained the decree, which filled every heart in Mornese with joy.

The decree bore the date: January 23.

On receiving the news, and a copy of it, the Director commented on it in such a way as to fill the Sisters with enthusiasm.

The Bishop—he said—has approved the Constitutions of the Institute; therefore, he finds them suitable for your sanctification, and for making you fit instruments to do good among the young. . . and he recommends the Institute to other bishops! See how the words of Don Bosco are being fulfilled: "I assure you that the Institute will have a great future. . . " But. . . attention. . . Don Bosco immediately added: "If you remain simple, poor, mortified." . . . And you are, and wish to continue to be so, is that not so? . . . and then, oh, then what things, what wonderful things are in store for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians!

The fervor of the Sisters naturally spread to the boarders: in fact the two little sisters, Eulalia and Maria, wrote to Don Bosco (whom they addressed as "Very Reverend Uncle") :

...we are happy here in this holy House. But what shall we say to you? Dear Uncle, we are in search of

something and we cannot find it: will you be so good as to help us? [p. 158] But—you will say—what are they looking for?

We will tell you: we are always longing to find Jesus, and to enter His heart, not only we your nieces, but our companions and the Sister who is always with us. Yes, we are all eager to find Jesus. Therefore, we ask you to say one word on our behalf to the Madonna, so that she may help us to know her dear Son: tell her also to take our hearts and keep them pure as lilies, to fill them with a sincere and holy love, so that having loved Jesus and Mary very much in this life, we may all united, and without a single exception, go to meet them in heaven.

Mornese, January 25

Your humble nieces,
Eulalia and Maria

Sister Laurantoni has a relapse; others get ill

On the 29th, feast of Saint Francis de Sales, the community went back to work after evening devotions, each thinking presumably, about the degree to which she imitated the saint whom Don Bosco had taken as his model. At that moment, poor Sister Laurantoni, who had made a marked recovery after being anointed, was suddenly struck by a strange illness.

The doctor was called immediately, and declared she had had a stroke, which paralyzed both legs. She was thus immobilized in bed—for a long time, if not forever—she who had been the life of the community.

The Mistress of Novices too, was definitively confined to bed. For some time she had been visibly growing weaker and less energetic, without, however, taking care of her health; she thought it unnecessary.

Also Sister Antonia Cassini, a dear novice not yet seventeen years old, was battling the angel of death.

[p. 159] To prevent the spread of Protestantism

February brought a further expansion of the Institute with its attendant excitement. This time the wings had to be strengthened for a longer flight, and the necessary help had to be implored from heaven.

It was a question of pushing the frontier to the boarder of France, to Bordighera, a small city on the western Liguria Coast about five km. from Ventimiglia. To Mornesians it seemed like going to the end of the earth . . .

It has a mild climate, and the palms which grow in abundance give it the appearance of an Eastern country. Even in the depth of winter flowers of brilliant hue grow there in profusion. At this time it was a favorite resort for the English, who introduced Protestantism there.

Monsignor Biale, Bishop of Ventimiglia, anxious for the spiritual welfare of so many souls, had repeatedly turned to Don Bosco for help to dam this wave of heresy. Eventually the Salesians and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians went there.

The first "Forty Hours" at the school

In view of the difficulty of the mission about to be undertaken Father Costamagna arranged that on the 6th, 7th and 8th the "Forty Hours Devotion" be held in the school. It was the first time this devotion was held there, and the day-pupils readily participated.

The 7th found the House enveloped in a cloud of sorrow; Sister Cassini lay dying, and consecrated herself to God by vows on her deathbed.

On the 8th the novice, Sister Orsola Camisassa was admitted to triennial profession, for which

she had prepared with a three-day retreat. She had been a novice for 56 days only, but in view of her age—34 years—her virtue and experience, and above all the urgent need for Sisters, an exception was made in her case. She had been chosen to be [p. 160] Superior of the group destined for Bordighera: it was, therefore, necessary that she be admitted to profession.

An extraordinary happening

So as not to interrupt the work, and above all to ensure the continuity of the adoration, groups of Sisters took turns in chapel, at appointed times. All went well, but one certain day it must have cost good Sister Assunta Gaino, the simple, fervent Sister who looked after the cow, dearly to abide by the fixed timetable.

Happy to be in the presence of her dear Jesus, she had never taken her eyes off the Sacred Host. When the signal for change was given, she stood up with visible effort, prostrated to the ground, and without taking her gaze off the monstrance, walked backwards out of the chapel, so as not to turn her back on the altar. When she reached the door she was seen to spread out her arms in an act of leave taking.

She went to dinner with the others. On reaching the refectory, she burst into tears and fainted. The community knew nothing more.

Departure for Bordighera

The departure' for Bordighera was fixed for the 9th: three Sisters—Sister Orsola Camisassa, Superior, Sister Rosalia Pestaririo, teacher, and Sister Agustina Calcagno, novice, for the housework.

Mother Mazzarello had already prepared them for their mission with little private' talks; now she and Mother Petronilla accompanied them as far as the sanctuary of La Madonna di Gavi, even though the road was covered with snow and the cold was intense. Her love would have taken her to Bordighera, but poor Sister Cassini was really at death's door.

[p. 161] As she went along she gave final recommendations to the three Sisters, on the observance of the Rule, and the necessity of safeguarding the religious spirit. She gave little things on how to attract the girls in order to do them good, and how to courageously but prudently oppose the action of their Protestant neighbors, who were using every possible means to prevent the children attending Catholic schools.

The good Mother did not fail to recommend reasonable care of their health, so necessary for any kind of work. She reminded them of their duty to send news to Turin, so Don Bosco would always be kept informed of everything. When the sanctuary of La Madonna della Guardia came into view Mother said resolutely: "As we have to separate, let us do so here under the gaze of Our Lady, the real Mother Superior, who comes with you. Let us ask her to bless us, say some Hail Marys together, and take courage."

The three Sisters were weeping; Mother was also moved. She turned to see them for the last time, and then hastened back to the school to resume her vigil beside dear Sister Cassini.

Death of Sister Cassini

But the angel of death had come during her brief absence and taken this good Sister to the eternal espousals.

She died as she had lived in such an attitude of love, reverence and joy as to make those present suppose that a supernatural presence had come to accompany her to the throne of God.

Once again Mother could only repeat: "You gave her to us, Lord, You have taken her from us; may Your will be done eternally."

[p. 162] A half-revealed secret

At Sampierdarena Father Costamagna presented the three Sisters to Fathers Cibrario and Albera. In their presence he took advantage of a propitious moment to say: "Now that you are going far away, assuring that you will not say it in Mornese for some time, I can tell you the great grace that God gave your House yesterday. During the Forty Hours adoration, Sister Assunta Gaino saw the Divine Child in the Host. This was why she fainted on leaving the chapel. You see, Sister Assunta is the most humble of all the Sisters. The world would call her the least concerned with self, the most indifferent to what goes on around her, yet God really chose her to show her His mercy. Treasure this event!"

He then left them, promising to see them in the morning, but he was already on the road to Mornese when the community went to prayers next day.

Sister Madelene Martini authorized as a public school teacher

On the 10th Sister Madelene Martini replaced Sister Rosalia in the public school. She had already given proof of special aptitude in dealing with children, as well as teaching ability.

The new teacher was initiated in the art by Sister Emilia Mosca and Father Michael Fassio, Salesian, who was himself a public school teacher.

The Director, returning from Sampierdarena, brought news of the three Sisters, whom he had left serene and disposed to suffer anything for the glory of God. They were to begin an Oratory and free elementary school immediately at Bordighera.

[p. 163] At Bordighera

News arrived from Bordighera after a few days.

The Bishop, Monsignor John Baptist Biale, invited Father Cibrario and the three Sisters to dinner in his palace. He showed interest in everything concerning them, and was profuse in his expressions of gratitude to Don Bosco for having sent his Sons and Daughters to Bordighera.

In the afternoon he personally accompanied them to Torrione, where they were to live in a house rented from Mr. Francis Lavagnino for 700 lire a year. It comprised a little chapel, and space for the school; and the people of the area gave the Sisters a great reception.

On February 13 Canon Viale, the Bishop's secretary, blessed the little provisional chapel, absolutely unsuitable for divine cult, but very dear to all; he dedicated it to Mary Help of Christians.

School began on the 14th; the only children who did not attend were those whose parents were Protestants, or whose dependance on Protestant money made them forbid the children to come.

The Oratory too was started. There was neither garden nor playground: the Sisters repeated, as in so many places since then, what Mary Mazzarello has done as a young girl at Mornese. They gathered the children, gave catechism lessons, took them for a walk, stopped at some suitable place for singing and games, then back to the poor little chapel for the Sunday devotions. As

evening drew on they sent them home happy with the gift of a little booklet or a holy card .

The most elderly citizens assured them that the place where the Salesian church stood and the site of the Sisters' first House was blessed by Pope Pius VII, as he passed through Liguria on Feb. 11, 1814.

In front of the Lavagnino house the people had assembled to receive the Pope with all possible solemnity, and to receive his blessing.

He had asked them:

[p. 164] "What town is this?"

"The main part of the town is in the valley yonder, Your Holiness," they had answered him.

His Holiness turned in that direction, and blessed it paternally.

Mr. Battista Aprosio, who was present on that occasion, asserted that the little Church of Mary Help of Christians was built on the exact spot blessed by the Holy Father. The Sisters of Bordighera recalled this incident in giving the news and drew from it great hopes for the future. To them it was a pledge of the constant protection of Mary Help of Christians, even though they foresaw that they would have to face difficulties and privations.

An experiment that failed

A letter of quite different nature arrived to tell of the serious illness of the ex-novice, Louise Bagliardi, who had gone home for health and other reasons. She had lived with her husband for about seven months while he was affected by tuberculosis, and after his death, she had obtained from the great charity of Don Bosco, the permission to try the religious life as a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

Don Bosco wished to try the experiment, to see if he could imitate his patron, Saint Francis de Sales in this matter; but he kept it a secret.

Later, due to difficulties which had arisen! the novice told Mother about the whole matter, and returned home. The Lord must have been pleased with her devout aspirations and shortened her exile: having received the Last Sacraments she departed this life, and is now, we hope, enjoying the merit of having desired to give herself entirely to God.

On March 8 grateful prayers were offered to Saint Joseph for the departure of the novice, Catherine Canale of Cumiana, sent home for not being open to formation according to the spirit of the Institute. It was a painful detachment, but necessary.

[p. 165] A lucky escape

On the morning of March 20 Mother set out for Gavi accompanied by a group of Sisters. On the return journey, precisely at a point where there was little possibility of escape, they saw a runaway horse gallop wildy towards them.

Petrified with fear they invoked the aid of Saint Joseph, and to their great relief, the horse careened madly past them, without hurting anyone.

The Valdocco girls have a house at last

From January to July of 1875, Don Bosco had fought against terrible odds to acquire a property a short distance from the Church of Mary Help of Christians. It was a real hellish den, which for twenty-five years had prevented any work from being started in front of the basilica.

Now Don Bosco was in a position to tell Countess Callori that he had signed the purchase contract.

Don Bosco's idea was to substitute for that house an institute of reparation and salvation on behalf of the girls of the Valdocco area.

How often had they stopped him on the way to ask: "Why don't you take thought of us as you have done for the boys?"

Therefore, having obtained the necessary authorization from the competent ecclesiastical authority, Don Bosco wrote to Mother telling her to send six or seven Sisters for the work already discussed, and which he had very much at heart.

An important foundation

On Wednesday, March 29, a group of five Sisters left Mornese for the new foundation: Sister Elisa Roncallo as [\[p. 166\]](#) Superior, Sister Catherine Daghero as Vicar, Sister Carlotta Pestarino as cook, Sister Adele Ayra as housekeeper and Sister Louise Rubassa, to supervise the laundry of

the Salesians. Sister Enrichetta Sorbone joined them to retake with Sister Elisa Roncallo, the examination for the teacher's diploma. Sister Josephine Pacotto, destined to be Superior of the House soon to be opened in Alassio, also formed part of the group. Sister Adele David, a novice from the area, and who was home for health reasons, was considered capable of helping with the school, while she impatiently waited to be readmitted to the community.

This departure did not cause the least sadness in Mornese, because in every heart was the conviction that Turin was at the hub of all future development, and all were envious of those going so near Don Bosco.

News from Turin

News from Turin came quickly. Sister Catherine Daghero wrote:

Father Rua's mother and Sister Adele David met us at the station. They accompanied us to the Salesians at Valdocco, where our Father, Don Bosco, came in person to welcome us, and present us to his benefactress, Countess Callori di Vignale.

At dinner we were served by the Countess, in the presence of Don Bosco and the prefect of Valdocco.

After dinner the Countess accompanied us to our poor little House, where the tenants were at the windows "to see the little Sisters."

The Salesians will take thought of giving us all we want for the present, even dinner, for there isn't even a kitchen. Don Bosco, in his fatherly goodness, has already assigned Father Rua to be our Director and confessor. Don Bosco himself hopes to give us the monthly conference. We shall begin the school, the Oratory, the workroom and catechism lessons at once.

[p. 167] Poor Sister Catherine Daghero will be the first teacher; I leave the rest to your imagination! She will be initiated by Miss Cherubina Sala, sister of Father Sala, the Salesian! This lady will have meals and a room with us, but she is not the type to cause embarrassment or annoyance.

Our House is called Saint Angela Merici, because it is said Don Bosco wants to show his gratitude to Mrs. Angela Bianco, the wife of his benefactor, the Lawyer Bianco. In the little chapel there is a large picture of Charles Borromeo, which Don Bosco has put there to honor Countess Callori di Vignale, who is called Carlotta.

Thus our House can be called: "the House of gratitude." Our little chapel was blessed the morning after our arrival; in it we spiritually meet our beloved family of Mornese.

The Sisters of Saint Anne could not possibly do more for Sister Superior and Sister Enrichetta. The latter, with the thought of the examination looming large in her mind, went immediately in search of a cubbyhole, where she can attend to her books undisturbed. More than once she has said: "Blessed study that gives me such a headache! But if obedience wants it so do I."

Departure of Sister Jandet

The departure of the Sisters for Turin and the report of their doings filled Sister Jandet's cup to overflowing. On the morning of March 30, while the community was going to Holy Communion, she stealthily left the House, and went as far as Gavi. . . to the house of Mrs. Momina Verdonà, from whom she asked money on loan to enable her to continue her journey. The good lady sent word immediately to Mother Superior, who soon sent someone to bring back the straying sheep, who was already penitent, though not converted.

Having asked Don Bosco to be freed from her vows she didn't even wait for the dispensation; she laid aside the habit and left.

[p. 168] Mother Mazzarello writes to Father Cagliero

Mother Mazzarello gave Father Cagliero a short but very expressive account of all these

happenings in a letter dated April 5, 1876. In it, besides the heart of a Superior we discern that of a Daughter who tells her Superior and Father about herself and her own concerns with that respect which does not impede those typical expressions of her sharp wit. The letter was written by Sister Emilia Mosca at Mother Mazzarello's dictation.

V. Gesù, in Italy, in America and all over the world!
Reverend Father Provincial,

What a joy to be able to spend a little while with our good Father! Oh! How many things we would wish to tell you! But is it not true that when the heart is full one does not know where to begin? Did you receive the letter I wrote you at the beginning of this year? I hope you did, even though you did not answer. The things that happened before then I will not repeat. Shall I begin with the sad or joyful news items? ...

As it is better to keep the sweet wine to the end I will tell you the unpleasant things first.

1. On February 9 dear Sister Cassini died of consumption. Her death was a night to heaven. Now Mother Mistress is down with the same illness; the doctors have no hope of her recovery, so that when this reaches you she will probably have left this exile. Who would ever have dreamed it? She who seemed to be the personification of health already finds herself at the portals of eternity! How true it is that death is like a thief, and comes when we least expect him. It certainly gives food for thought. Poor Sister Laurantoni is still in bed; on the feast of Saint Francis at 8:00 p.m. she had a stroke, which left her semiparalyzed. She may live for several years, but will always be confined to bed. She and Mother Mistress recommend themselves to your prayers, so that they may be perfectly resigned to God's will.

Sister Louise from Alessandria had to go home as she also has T.B.; she has written to me to say that she is now very bad, and has received the Last Sacraments. However it isn't surprising that she got this disease, as her husband died of it, and she had been looking after him for seven months. [p. 169]

Now for the really sad news: on March 30 the Sisters were searching all over the place; guess for whom? Sister Angela Jandet. She had run away from the convent while we were all in chapel. When she got as far as Gavi she asked Mrs. Verdonà for a loan of money to take her as far as Turin; but she kept her in her house. I really cannot tell you what was the reason for her flight; the usual caprices caused by pride I suppose.

In the meantime Father Director, who was going there for Lenten duties, persuaded her to come back. She returned, but wasn't the least bit penitent for her action. In short, after a few days, she laid aside the habit, and without waiting for the dispensation which she had requested from Don Bosco, she left for Turin. She was accepted at the Cottolengo, but left there after three days saying she could not take it.

Now she is asking to be readmitted. Don Bosco told me to call the Council, and let it decide; however I think the decision will be negative.

Mrs. Bacchialoni too would like to come back under the mantle of Mary Help of Christians, but... there are buts! . . . Sister Canale too went home.

Thank God that is the end of the bad news. Pray the Lord to grant the grace of perseverance to all, as we have had enough defections; were we to continue at this rate Our Lady's House would be deserted in a few years.

Therefore, ask Jesus over there in America to give us all the virtues necessary for a good religious, especially humility and obedience. Let Him do with us as He likes, but not allow any Sister, especially if professed, to lay aside the habit, and abandon Our Lady's House.

On the day Sister Cassini died Sisters Rosalia, Agustina and Orsola from Caramagna left for Bordighera. The last mentioned is Superior. They are happy to have such a field of apostolate. From the very first day they had many pupils. All the people are delighted to have the Sisters, and appreciate [p. 170] them very much.

As the premises are not yet ready at Alassio the Sisters haven't gone there yet; but I think that by the end of May all will be in order.

Instead the group left for Turin as planned: Sister Elisa (Superior); Sister Enrichetta (both will study; after the examination, Sister Enrichetta will, I hope, return to Mornese); Sister Catherine Daghero and Sister David for the school, Sister Carlotta for the kitchen, Sister Adele Ayra to patch for the Sisters (wardrobe Sister), Sister Louise from Lu to supervise the laundry.

Sister Mina has taken Sister Enrichetta's place with the boarders. She is very good, always cheerful and happy to be a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

Cagliero and Turco are also serene and happy. We have twenty-five postulants and all are very promising.

Next I will give you the names of those who want to go to America: I would like to be there already, also Mother Vicar, Mother Economist, Sister Mina, Sister Maria Belletti, Sister Josephine, Sister Joan, Sister Emilia . . . (really, Sister Emilia). . . I'd never finish if I were to write the names of all who wish to go. Prepare, therefore, a little place for us, then come to fetch us, because we cannot go on our own, and it could happen that were we to go alone, some sea monster yet without his dinner would make a meal of us.

Remember that we expect you for the retreats; do not disappoint us! During these days we have had Father Ghivarello as extraordinary confessor, but this summer we really must have our own Father Provincial. I forgot to tell you that Sister Madelene now teaches in the village school; she is also very good and thanks God for having called her to this state. She is another applicant for the American missions.

In general all are good, cheerful and serene. There is just one thought that worries us: Father Director has applied to go to America. Now that he knows the House, knows all the Sisters so well, to have him changed would be a bit hard. Will you show your paternal goodness in this circumstance, and not let him go?

True, we are not worthy of such a good Director; notwithstanding, have compassion on us and do not take him [p. 171] from us. Kindly remember us your Daughters sometimes; recommend us to Jesus and Mary, that we may truly love God.

I wonder if you still remember Mornese in the midst of all that work. We hope so. Take good care of your health; do not waste it uselessly; remember you are the Father of many Daughters who eagerly await your

return. Every day we ask Jesus to preserve you for many years, to give you strength and health so as to bring many souls to Him, and of course, we ask Him to bring you back soon as it seems a thousand years since we saw you.

Each Sister would wish to say many things to you; but so as not to waste your time reading it all, I will finish here, asking your blessing for each one, and recommending myself in a special way to your prayers, which, I assure you I need very much, now that the number of Sisters is daily increasing.

Bless me, therefore, and believe me

Mary Help of Christians House, April 5, 1876

Your humble Daughter in J.C.

Sister Mary Mazzarello

Todas las muchachas quieren venir con usted en Buenos Aires. [All our girls want to come to Buenos Aires with you.]

(P.S. written by Father Costamagna)

We received the letter you wrote to us; if you have time, write again; it gives us much pleasure to hear from you.

Sister Maria Grosso goes to heaven

The death of Sister Maria Grosso was a new cause of suffering in the House. Her bed was a school of sanctity. No word of complaint or suffering ever escaped her lips: she was happy to suffer and longed to suffer more as to be more united with her heavenly Spouse, and to obtain favors for her dear Institute. She simply longed for heaven.

The Sisters, and more especially the novices kept on [p. 172] telling her that they were praying for her recovery; and she: "But why would you wish to prevent me from going to heaven soon? Are not all our desires centered there?"

Her parents had already come to see her several times: she was always so happy to see them; thanked them for all they had done for her, especially for having permitted her to live from childhood beside Mary, her good Superior, to whom she attributed all the merit of the calm she now enjoyed on her deathbed. She encouraged all to be constant in faith, and to practice charity to the best of their ability for the love of God.

Sometimes, the Superiors made her feel that, perhaps, she had shortened her life by not taking sufficient nourishment, so as to give this or that novice some part of her food already so finely measured. The dear Sister answered: "No, no: I never deprived myself of what was necessary. Would that I were dying in the interest of charity! I would be a martyr; but I am not, alas! I had to do a little penance, I have committed so many sins!"

There was an intimate understanding between these two privileged souls of mother and daughter. The dear invalid was one of the first pupils of the tiny workroom, and she was so small and yet so affectionate that when her mother would ask her "What will you do when you are big?" she answered resolutely: "I want to belong entirely to God with Mary Mazzarello."

With Mary Mazzarello she had entered the *Casa Immacolata*; with Mary Mazzarello she read and embraced the Rule of Don Bosco; with her she was among the first fifteen Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

From that day how many graces God bestowed on her, and on the person who was her guide and teacher in the religious life!

Holy Week occupied the time and thoughts of the Sisters, but Holy Thursday, so much looked forward to, brought more tears to the school: Jesus called to himself, on the day of the Holy

Eucharist, the beautiful soul of Sister Maria Grosso (April 13.)

[p. 173] She kept calm and serene to the last minute, and received all the comforts of the Church. At 6:30 p.m. she felt life ebbing away, and turning to Mother said to her: "Mother, it is getting dark, I no longer see anything... patience... may God's will be done!" Then with characteristic fervor, she repeated several times, but in an ever weaker voice: "Thy will be done... Thy will be done.." until with this ejaculation on her lips she went to Jesus.

We should not weep when an elect soul goes to God, yet in Momese all were weeping.

Maria Grosso was known in the country round about, and her death caused much sorrow; her relatives and friends came from San Stefano Parodi for her funeral, which was a triumph: a pure life totally consumed in love before it reached 21!

Visible proof of heavenly protection

The month of Our Lady opened with a visible proof of Mary's protection of her Daughters.

On the first day of the month while the economer was tidying up the playground a builder's heavy trestle fell on her and knocked her down. Her crucifix, which was bent in two by the fall, showed that she could have been badly injured. But the Sister, who had invoked Mary Help of Christians, got up unhurt.

Mother goes to Turin

Mr. Sorbone wrote to say that Cesarino absolutely refused to stay at home alone any longer, and that without any of his sisters to look after him, he was a continual source of worry.

Mother Mazzarello sent him word to be at Valdocco between the 18th and the 20th. She would be there also. Accordingly she left for Turin with the novice Sister Caro- [p. 174] line Sorbone, who had to stay for her studies.

Mother had some important problems to submit to the Founder: the admission to clothing of some postulants, about whom there was some uncertainty. Also the acceptance of the seaside holiday camp at Sestri Levante, which was extraneous to the usual apostolate of the Institute, caused some anxiety.

Great was the joy of the Sisters to welcome her to Turin. In less time than it takes to tell Sisters and girls emerged from a variety of places, and happy exclamations of *Viva la Madre* echoed through the House.

There was a little girl, Felicina Gastini, who on her mother's death during Holy Week had been received temporarily into the House, until her relatives could make other arrangements for her.

She was at the Oratory all day long and just could not understand what all the rejoicing was about. She went from one Sister to another looking for an explanation, but got the same answer from all: "Because Mother is here."

Eventually she too opened her mouth and shouted: *Viva la Madre!* then stood beside her to have a closer look at this person who meant so much to everyone.

Mother was anxious to see the House, expecting to learn many things there. She always kept the

eyes of her soul fixed on Don Bosco, seeing in him the will of God.

It goes without saying that Mary Help of Christians was the first one she greeted, and she was lost in admiration of the beautiful decoration of her church for the month of Mary!

In the evening, greatly relieved after a long conversation with Don Bosco, from whom she received directions on the above-mentioned points, she joyfully participated in the sacred functions. She knew the Turinese frequented the church but she never dreamed of such a congregation. She knew that Don Bosco loved to solemnize the devotions in honor of his Madonna, but such splendor, such order among the acolytes, such care and precision of cult surpassed all she had imagined. Deeply recollected, with hands [p. 175] joined and heart in a tumult she seemed intent on absorbing all she heard and saw so as to treasure it forever.

Coming out of the church she expressed her happiness in a single phrase: "How lovely heaven must be, if even here below there are such wonders!"

When she was alone with the Sisters she asked:

Does Don Bosco come to see you often?

Not really Mother. A little more frequently during the first month; since then on exceptional occasions only. He prefers us to depend on Father Rua, and the other Salesians he has appointed now that Father Cagliero is in America; but if we need to see him he receives us with every consideration!

He really listens to us like a father. Inexperienced as I am,—added Sister Elisa—he gives me many recommendations, and is forever telling me to love the Sisters, to look after their health and my own, because he says that we have lots of work to do, and without health we can do little.

He interests himself in everything: knowing that some stayed up late to study, he told me to limit the time to an hour and never to stay up later than 10:30 p.m.

"The same goes for you," he said. "Do exactly as you would do for any of your Sisters with regard to food and sleep."

Mother, you should see how he treats benefactors! He gives me the names and addresses of those ladies who in the least way interest themselves in us. And when one of their feasts occurs, he lets me know, asking me to have her remembered in the prayers of the community, pay her a visit, or send her a little letter or present with a suitable gift—some flowers or fruit from our garden. He is a saint, a real saint, very kind and thoughtful.

He has a special remembrance for our relatives too. When my mother sends me oranges, lemons, or figs, and we have Don Bosco sample them first, our good Father shows his appreciation very much and never ceases to repeat: "They were good and sweet like Sister Elisa's mother."

And as he knew her great desire to come to see me, imagine Mother, he even offered me tickets at half price, so that she could come with less expense and greater spiritual delight for the feast of Mary Help of Christians. He does this [p. 176] for all the parents of the Sisters and the Salesians. He interests himself in their health, their occupations, in the number of children they still have at home, in everything. He invites the father to dinner, sends the mother to us, recommending to us to treat them well and accompany them to see the basilica... Then he comforts them, blesses them as our benefactors, so that they go away happy in the thought of having given a son or daughter to God and Don Bosco.

Mother listened attentively, her glance revealing how deeply she was impressed. All she heard of Don Bosco corresponded exactly to her concept of him; his norms gave her much light for the government of the Institute in his own spirit. She often came out spontaneously with: "How fortunate you are, Sister Elisa. You Sisters of Turin are fortunate indeed. Be careful not to waste any of the graces that are yours; then you will share them with us too! "

Mr. Constantino Sorbone was also touched by the affectionate reception the Sisters gave him, especially his daughters, of course.

When Mother Mazzarello assured him that at the Oratory they were waiting for him, he presented himself at Valdocco. At dinner Cesarino was sent to the refectory to the Superior's table. The boy's ingenuous manner made him acceptable, and someone said jokingly to him: "Let us see if you can guess which of us is Don Bosco. If you can you will stay with us; otherwise...!"

Cesarino glanced around and, perplexed, looked at Father Rua, who made a sign towards Don Bosco. Don Bosco laughingly turned to the Prefect General and said in an undertone: "Catch him, catch him!"

The boy was completely thrilled, and didn't even wish to go back to Rosignano. But it was arranged that he would enter as a student at Valdocco the following July.

[p. 177] Mother returns to Mornese

On her return to Mornese, Mother was received as if she had been away for a long time; the House was full of joy and all waited eagerly for news of the Sisters in Turin.

In Turin? All are well! They already have the Oratory full of children, the free school, daily catechism lessons, a well-established workroom; and as you know, the student Sisters.

Oh, Don Bosco's kindness to his Daughters! He taught them how to contact the children, introduce a topic of conversation, give them a little gift—a holy card, sweet or medal—then invite them to the Oratory.

Our dear Sisters took Don Bosco's words literally, and at first had some very amusing experiences! Sister Elisa, the Superior and sometimes the others too, stood just behind the front door. If there was no one passing by, or adults only, they immediately withdrew. But if children were passing they threw the door

wide open, and stood there. The children were naturally surprised to see a Sister for the first time and stopped to look at her. The Sister then began a conversation, offering them a little gift, asked them questions and invited them to come in. In a short time they were friends.

Those children came back next day and the following Sunday, and spread the news.

Some Salesians from across the street, who had watched the little game said the Sisters were "hunting" for girls. Already a good number of girls come whenever they wish especially at midday and evening recreation time. They chat with the Sisters, stop to greet them on the way to work, and tell them their problems.

All the Sisters who are free, especially the Vicar, Sister Catherine Daghero—because the Superior is studying—go to entertain the girls, who, now that the evenings are long, stay almost until it is time for the Sister's night prayers.

Don Bosco is so good and fatherly that he always sends them his best priests, and has appointed Professor (Father) Cipriano to teach mathematics to the students.

For the other subjects they do what they can with a **[p. 178]** little help from Miss Sala. How much we owe to Don Bosco and the Salesians!

Instant cure

On Sunday the 21, Mother assisted poor Sister Laurantoni, still paralyzed, to take part in the triduum to Mary Help of Christians. She had her brought into chapel, dressed as well as possible, in a little wheelchair of sorts which was put at the back of the chapel, near to the door.

Mother remained beside her with Sister Agnes Ricci, who would keep an eye on both the patient and the door, as portress.

While the priest was exposing the Blessed Sacrament the handle of the wheelchair fell off and Sister Agnes fearing for the invalid, hastened to pick it up. After a few seconds the incident was repeated, and again for the third time. The sick Sister became agitated, blushed and trembled all over. Sister Agnes, frightened, called Mother repeatedly. Mother merely turned as if to say: "Don't disturb while the Blessed Sacrament is exposed," but Sister Agnes refused to give in and called loudly: "Mother!"

Mother turned to Sister Laurantoni and said in a resolute tone: "Quick! Get up, go upstairs and dress." Sister Teresa got up without help and went upstairs unaccompanied by anyone. The wonder of all present can easily be imagined when she reappeared joyful, full of life and health just as before her illness.

Feast of Mary Help of Christians

The 24th was a feastday of indescribable joy!

The mass was sung by the octogenarian Canon Fossati, benefactor of the Institute; the clothing and profession ceremonies were performed by Canon Agustino Carozzi, another benefactor, assisted by the Director and Fathers **[p. 179]** Joseph Campi and Michael Fassio.

There were seven clothings and five professions.

The postulant Agustina Simbeni should have been among those who received the habit, but she was not admitted.

Agustina Simbeni

This girl had been recommended to Don Bosco by a very influential person whom he could not very well refuse. Some said she was the daughter of a political offender deported to Siberia. It seems she originally came from Rome, spent some time in the *Rifugio* of Turin, and had already tried her vocation in another institute, which she had left due to extraordinary events.

She claimed to be acquainted with many prelates, and boasted that she had drunk coffee from the Holy Father's cup.

She seemed intelligent and healthy, had a good voice and pleasing manner. She was slender, with blond hair, and there was something indefinably attractive about her whole personality.

As stated she had been recommended to Don Bosco, but not presented to him in person. When she arrived at Mornese, she was put to study, but wasn't satisfactory, even though it was difficult to pinpoint where she failed.

She was loved by all, and as she seemed to have extraordinary piety some Sisters thought her a saint. Good Sister Teresa Pampuro, pained by the Director's absence from the school for most of Lent, (he had gone to Gavi for missions) even said: "Thank God for consoling us with a saint in the House."

She was a poor student, however, had no energy for work, and could not possibly stoop to the menial tasks some of the Sisters were doing. Mortification, too, in matters of food especially, was not her line. Indeed every day she went to Mother Petronilla for a little something to [p. 180] make the *merenda* (afternoon snack) more palatable.

This negatively impressed some, and young Sister Marietta Rossi accused herself of having mentally criticized more than once the new arrival saying: "But if she is so good, instead of sympathizing with me for sweeping the stairs and porticoes (after all, I do need to move a little), why doesn't she envy me the merits and give me a hand!"

Neither was she interested in lively group recreations: she preferred to walk with just one companion and speak words full of unction, and enthusiastic fervor. This particular attitude of hers didn't appeal to Mother, who watched her attentively, and recommended Salesian-type recreation.

To build her strength with some fresh air and to test her will, she was given charge of a lamb to pasture on the College grounds.

One day while shepherding the lamb the parish priest of Rosignano, Monsignor Bonelli, came to see his parishioners. He talked with them awhile in the little grove. Agustina was only a short distance away so that it came natural to the Rossi girls to tell him about her sanctity, and the esteem in which she was held. Noted for his prudent charity, he said only, "Ah, yes!" Later he called the Vicar, Mother Petronilla, and told her to be very vigilant with that postulant, whose attitudes he judged were not all that holy. He then justified the Director's high opinion of her saying: "He has always lived in a holy atmosphere, and can't possibly have the experience of an old man... "

That was enough for Mother Mazzarello, who was already ill at ease about Agustina. From then on she made a point of being near her often, seeing to it that the others not seek her company too much.

The little boarders fear her

The Rossi sisters, who had heard all, were careful not to speak lest they run the risk of being reproached by the Director, who would not tolerate sinister judgments about [p. 181] anyone. They knew it: the younger boarders who in their innocence feared Agustina's presence and avoided her like the plague, had been rebuked.

Worse was in store for Angelica Sorbone. She was the youngest of all, felt most at home, and had said openly what they all felt: "We don't like her. She has wicked eyes. She frightens us." When they tried to persuade her to change her mind she would not, but continued her affirmation. Then

her little belongings were bundled up and she was shown the door.

In this way the Director thought to change the little one's mind. However, it was only a trial for the child was stopped a short way from the door, and persuaded to apologize.

She asked pardon for having displeased God, but would not modify in the least her statement about not liking Agustina.

Try her in humility

When Sister Maria Grosso died, Agustina seemingly participated in the common sorrow; but it was obviously a pretence. She opposed the general persuasion that this beautiful soul had quickly been admitted to heaven.

Did she realize that her doubts were turning everyone against her? We only know that one day in

the workroom she became very agitated; turned alternately deadly pale and scarlet red, then began to thrust out her tongue, like one who, burning with thirst and fire, longs for a drink.

Sisters and postulants looked at her in awe. Some asked her what she wanted. She refused every attention, threw herself on the bench in a faint, then softly whispered: "I am suffering purgatory for Sister Maria Grosso."

The incident was repeated several times, causing deep anguish in the community. Mother feared for the young Sisters and the postulants, whom she sought to keep from seeing such scenes. Then one day full of joy, Agustina [p. 182]shouted triumphantly: "Sister Grosso is in heaven! And Father Pestarino too! There! I see him, I see him!"

Her reputation for sanctity grew, as a result: the Director was delighted. Mother distrusted anything extraordinary and warned Agustina that if she went on like this she would be sent home. Agustina begged for another chance and promised to do all in her power to become like the others. She would make every effort to spend Our Lady's month fervently, asking her for the grace of perseverance.

Mother gave in and Agustina prayed, worked, observed the Rule, and was all interest in the coming clothing ceremony.

On the day the House Chapter met to decide those who would be admitted to the novitiate, Sister Emilia Mosca was assigned to substitute the deceased Mistress, Sister Maria Grosso for awhile. She made no secret of the fact that she was entirely opposed to Agustina's strange behavior. In the meantime, Agustina was in a very agitated state in the workroom, begging those near to her to say three *Hail Marys* that she would be admitted. She seemed very anxious to remain.

However, as she was not admitted, Mother obtained the consent of the Chapter—and consequently, of the Director—to send her away.

Agustina left, but after twenty-four hours came back happy. She said she met Don Bosco who had sent her back because she must become a saint.

She behaved so well as to remove every doubt and to reawaken admiration for her virtues in those who already regarded her with awe and holy envy.

It was during this time that the administration of the seaside camps of Liguria was offered to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. This entailed a summer hospice at Sestri Levante. Mother explained to Agustina the difficulties of the new undertaking, and the subsequent dangers in which the Sisters might find themselves asking: "What does your 'little child' think of this project?"

Who this "little child" was we don't know; Agustina [p. 183] seemingly took orders and counter orders from her.

Owing to the concept of sanctity Miss Simbeni had fabricated about herself, together with the undeniable proofs she gave of knowing in advance things hidden from the others, it had become customary to consult her in matters of importance.

This explains Mother's question. Besides, we know that Mother frequently consulted even the boarders, especially the best ones, saying to one or another: "Go ask Our Lady if she would be pleased that we do such and such a thing." Therefore no one was surprised that on this occasion she should ask the inspired postulant, retaining the liberty, as always, to abide by it or not. Agustina took time to reply, then pronounced with authority that the 'little child' wanted the

Sisters to go.

Mother went to Turin and heard Don Bosco's views, then told the community the names of the Sisters chosen for the camp. Agustina approved of the first two but declared that her "little child" absolutely did not want Sister Enrichetta Sorbone to go.

No one took notice of her, but her furious reaction made Mother Mazzarello reflect seriously on Don Bosco's advice regarding the visionary: "How do we know we should believe her? Try her in humility. If she resists. . ."

Sister Mina goes to Turin

When the feast of Mary Help of Christians was over, the clothing and profession ceremonies duly finished, and the month of Our Lady closed, the Director went to Turin accompanying the novice,

Sister Domenica Mina, who was suffering from tuberculosis.

"For three years I haven't been well," the dear Sister said, "even before I entered, but I wanted to be a religious, and . . ."

Mother, deeply grieved by the illness that threatened this promising young Sister, thought to isolate her before [p. 184] it became serious, for Sister Maria Belletti, stricken with the same malady, slept next to her, and seemed to draw steadily nearer the grave. A single hope remained: "Perhaps her native air...the excellent Turin doctors...stopping the disease before it can progress..."

Sister Enrichetta chosen for the Sestri camp

Don Bosco listened to the Director's version of the Mornese news, and was about to confirm the choice of Sister Enrichetta Sorbone for the Sestri holiday camp. However, he decided to visit the Institute of Saint Anne, first, convinced that a word from the Superior there would help towards his decision.

He found himself surrounded by those good Sisters and, seeing Sisters Elisa and Enrichetta among them, (they were there for a simple examination) he said to the latter: "Do you know? God asked from you only the sacrifice of your will. In fact, even though you are very near the goal – He is calling you for something else. The best of it is that you must leave this very day, because Mornese has another sacrifice lined up for you. God loves you, very much Sister Enrichetta! For the present Sister Caroline will stay here in your place."

The latter had just arrived accompanying her other sister and Sister Elisa. On finding her long-cherished hope of spending some time with her Enrichetta fall to pieces, she said disconsolately to Don Bosco: "Don't ask me to study, Father. I won't succeed; it will be just a waste of time and money." But he, indicating Sister Enrichetta: "Let her go. Hers is not the ordinary way. You study and be in peace."

[p. 185] Departure for Sestri

Sister Enrichetta had a general reception at Mornese: "Here I am," she said. "Once again Don Bosco has saved me a humiliation, taking me away from Turin to the amazement of the Sisters of Saint Anne and the other students."

The House was agog with preparations for the departure for Sestri: Sister Enrichetta had a lot of work to do. Agustina was in the worst of moods, because her advice on the choice of personnel had not been followed, and no notice was taken of her "little child" who definitely did not want Sister Enrichetta at the camp.

The Sisters left for Sestri on Tuesday, June 5, accompanied by the prayers of all at Mornese and the anxious recommendations of Mother.

Further proof of Agustina's strangeness

Agustina worried everyone more and more. She fasted rigorously and no authority could make her desist. She said her "little child" nourished her with heavenly dew, and the fact that she retained her health, energy and normal color was most extraordinary.

Then suddenly she declared that she was ill. She went to bed, and in a short time was at death's door. She seemed immobile, pale and rigid as a corpse, unconscious, without pulse or breath. The doctor from Mornese came, as also from Lerma, both of whom said they knew nothing of Agustina's strange symptoms, following careful examination. Seeing her in such a state they said that her death was imminent, inevitable.

When the doctors had gone, Agustina remained for some minutes in that state of coma, then in a barely audible voice she said: "Within a quarter of an hour you will see a miracle." In the presence of Mother, the infirmarian and some other Sisters, Father Costamagna took out his

watch and waited: precisely fifteen minutes later the dying girl suddenly raised herself up and shouted: "I am cured!" She immediately recovered her color and vivacity.

"Very well, if you are cured," the Director said, "we shall withdraw, while you dress and come downstairs."

In a matter of minutes Agustina ran downstairs as if she had never been ill.

She said her "little child" had cured her. Some thought it was Our Lady, while others said it was Saint Sabina.

It would seem that the gifts of prophecy and ecstasy accompanied the cure.

The Director had to go to Lanzo one day. "Do not go," she told him. "There will be a train collision." The Director went just the same, to show that he did not attach any importance to her words, but changed his itinerary. The train on which he should have traveled actually had a collision, and there were several victims.

One day the Director called Agustina and asked her at different times: "What are they doing now at Sestri?...And now... and at this moment?" He took note of her answers, as he had the daily timetable of the holiday camp.

He went to visit them, interrogated them in detail, and found that every word the girl had said was true.

The Director had also asked her:

"Who is the Sister most acceptable to God in the Institute?"

"Sister Rosalia Pestarino," was her answer. "

A Sister had to go to Serravalle. The weather was mild and the sky beautifully clear. But Agustina said: "In two hours there will be a storm." All laughed at the idea. Then thunder, lightning, hailstones: a pandemonium.

Sometimes this prophetic gift of hers was the cause of pain to others. A Sister's father had been killed, and the poor creature turned to Agustina to ask if he were at least saved.

"He is in hell," was the answer, without the least pity. What heartache and tears these words occasioned! Others too cried on account of Agustina. The idea of her sanctity was by now well-established, and she affirmed [p. 187] that her "little child" was displeased because there was sin in the House—that Sisters or girls had committed this or that fault, then concealed it in confession.

Poor Sister Teresa Laurantoni became a special target; one day during the conference the Director publicly threatened to expel her. The poor Sister humbled herself and knelt in the presence of all.

It goes without saying that Sister Emilia Mosca was never in Agustina's good books, just as faith in the strange sanctity of the visionary never entered Mother Emilia's mind.

One day after accusing herself of this she received two resounding slaps for her pains.

Yet Agustina did wonderful things. At mass she was raised to the level of the candelabra, and during Communion sang with heavenly sweetness:

*Come, my beloved;
leave the treacherous world.
Happy is he who throws himself
into the arms of the Lord.*

*(Vien-mi disse-o mia diletta,
Lascia il mondo ingannator.
Oh, beato chi si getta
Nelle braccia del Signor!)*

Sometimes her hair which hung loose around her shoulders grew very, very long; her face grew deathly pale, ethereal, and she fell into a deathlike swoon. When she came to, she would prophesy.

On one of these days it was rumored that Agustina—to make up for not admitting her to the clothing—would instead be espoused to Jesus; but in great secrecy, the Director, Mother and Mother Emilia alone being present.

Sister Marietta Rossi and another, wishing to see the marvel, were on the alert, and at a propitious moment, without saying a word to anyone, went into the sacristy to see without being seen, careful to take off their shoes, so as not to make noise. But no sooner had they hidden [p. 188] in the most suitable corner than Agustina shouted: "Father Director, the Lord cannot give me the nuptial ring, because there are people spying."

Imagine the fright of the "spies" and the agility of their retreat. . .

In the meantime preparations were being made in the school for the feast of Corpus Christi (June 15).

At the stroke of midnight on the previous night Agustina had all the community go in chapel shouting that her "little child" would have it so, that God wanted it. The boarders were told to remain in bed, but the Sisters and priests assembled, having been expressly called. Even the witty shoemaker Cravero turned up, who having once contemplated the words of Saint Teresa: "Always! Never!" had come up with his own application to daily life: "The same at Mornese; *always* potatoes, *always* potatoes, *never* meat, *never* anything new!"

After a short prayer Agustina went into ecstasy, was lifted from the ground and began to sing in French, such a melodious song that all felt they were in heaven.

When she finished the song she shouted: "The saint, the saint: I see the saint! The "little child" is looking at me and speaking to me."

The postulant Felicina Masera, already fifty-five—another fruit of insistent recommendation—was all for Agustina; she was always beside her. All of a sudden she too began to shout: "I see her too . . .oh, how beautiful she is!" The Sisters stood up to look; in all the whispering, there was agitation, and a paralyzing fear made it impossible to feel God's presence.

The only person who remained unmoved was the cobbler, Cravero, who was not the emotional type. During the ecstasy and singing he had resumed his interrupted sleep; and now wakened by Agustina's shouting, he muttered dryly: "Isn't the comedy over yet?" In the same way his reaction to Agustina's swoonings at mass was always: "Oh, what a show! Will it never end?"

In the morning the House was all decorated for the [p. 189] procession in which Sisters and boarders took part. Agustina also presented herself dressed in white, her hair in ringlets, and a cross on her shoulders.

The task of dressing her and doing her hair had fallen to the lot of the by-no-means devoted Sister Emilia, according to the order given by her "little child." In her goodness Sister Emilia had done the task with grace and elegance, but not without growing in humility. At a certain point when the visionary's hair refused to fall into the desired curl the good Sister exclaimed: "Oh, patience!" She turned to Agustina at once and said: "I did wrong to say that, didn't I?" The reply was: "Well, it would have been better not to say it."

Agustina seemed as pious as an angel during the procession. Everybody saw that the cross, though not supported by her or any human hand, remained in place, barely touching the shoulder. The whole countryside, therefore, rang with the news of "the saint," and the strange phenomenon was spoken of in every home.

On returning to the school she continued to wear her processional dress, and at lunchtime went into the boarders refectory to give a white carnation and a kiss to each one. In the evening she appeared in the novice's habit. The Director, convinced of her sanctity by the happenings during the night before and at the procession, had held a special clothing ceremony for her.

Mother, however, did not allow her hair to be cut. No sooner was she dressed in the habit than she said she had a mandate to convert a certain gentleman in Gavi, a well known atheist. The Director ordered the Superiors to accompany her. He too went along. All were guests of Mrs. Verdone. Here Agustina saw the person in question and spoke to him several times, giving an account of all to Father Costamagna. The atheist was courteous, respectful, but obdurate and the party returned without accomplishing anything.

Agustina wasn't embarrassed in the least on this account, and as they went along told them that during their [p. 190] absence Saint Joseph had come to the convent, but had not been well-received by the portress.

When they reached the school the Sisters had already retired, but Father Costamagna immediately sent for Sister Agnes Ricci, and said pointblank:

"Well done, Sister Agnes! Do you know that you sent Saint Joseph away from the door?"

"Saint Joseph? I didn't see him."

"But you did," piped in Agustina. "He came three times to ask for alms."

"Ah, was he Saint Joseph?"

And Sister Agnes told the whole story.

An old, poorly dressed man came to the door. He was spotlessly clean, and had a calm, placid appearance. He asked me for something to eat. I told him that neither the economer nor any Superiors were home, and that I couldn't give him alms. He came back a second and a third time. Finally he said, "Can you really not give me anything? Patience!" And he went away mortified, yet without showing annoyance. Who could have known it was Saint Joseph? If only I knew, I certainly wouldn't send him away, with all our prayers to him and all our needs!

The Director smiled and the matter ended there.

Don Bosco, once again informed about what was happening, repeated: "Try her in obedience."

Obe! The Simbeni girl hadn't acquired the art, and seemed little disposed to learn.

She vilified the priestly character with base references; she broke iron chains and put them back together perfectly; in her ecstasies she said words that didn't bear repetition. She made Sister Emilia Mosca the special target of her gossiping, trying to frighten her even to the point of entering her room through the keyhole in the form of a large fly, and then assuming her own appearance once inside.

She pestered Sister Teresa Laurantoni instead with her attentions. She was forever asking her how she felt, how the miracle took place, then commenting on it in such a way as to raise doubts in the Sister's mind about the miracu- [p. 191] lous nature of her cure. Sister was then assailed by the fear of having sinned, deliberately entertaining her doubts, and not satisfied with the advice of the Director and Mother Mazzarello she turned to Agustina. "She knows everything," she said to herself, "therefore she will know this too." Having taken some days to think about it, Agustina told her to go to the Sanctuary della Guardia at Gavi, that very evening, and to recite a *Hail Holy Queen*; in this way her doubt would be forgiven.

Mother naturally refused permission. Then Agustina advised her to take an elderly Sister as companion, but it was urgent that she go that evening. Mother again refused and told Sister Teresa to be at peace and stop thinking about the past.

That same evening five persons passing near the sanctuary at Gavi, were attacked and beaten.

But Agustina wanted to win over Sister Laurentoni at any cost. Next she appealed to her self-love.

"You are the favorite of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," she said to her one day.

"And you are a devil," the Sister answered, without hesitation.

Agustina was furious, and Sister Teresa, rightly fearing the consequences of her anger, ran to Mother to accuse herself and ask her what to do.

Mother did not disapprove of her saying what seemed to be the prompting of an interior voice,

but advised her to be more prudent. She ordered her never to remain alone with anyone who so disturbed her soul.

Some days passed and Agustina, seeing Mother about to leave for Gavi with Mother Petronilla and Sister Laurantoni, begged to go also. Mother chose the least of two evils and took her along. They called on Mrs. Verdone, who as always, offered them refreshments before continuing on their journey.

Contrary to her custom Agustina was extremely polite and helped the lady of the house mix some white wine for each of them and serve it in glasses. Mother never took her [p. 192] eyes off her and whispered to Sister Teresa who sat beside her:

"Don't drink it!"

Sister Teresa did not understand, and since the two Superiors and Agustina drank theirs, she too was about to sip the beautiful golden wine, but Mother, with a resolute glance pushed her hand: "Don't drink, Sister, you know that white wine is not good for you!" And she took the glass from her.

Agustina was hurt, but kept silent; later it was known that the wine was poisoned.

By this time the Director passed her by when distributing Communion when he could do so without being noticed.

One morning Sister Emilia Mosca, Sister Teresa Mazzarello and Agustina were seen going away very early. The latter was dressed in lay clothes. They took her to Serravalle and put her on the train for Sampierdarena, where the Salesians were to see her aboard the ship for Rome. The community was delighted.

The Sisters bought the ticket and saw her seated in the compartment. They stayed with her until the train, non-stop to Sampierdarena, left the platform. Then without delay they returned to the school. There they found Agustina in her bed, resting tranquilly.

Her "little child" had brought her back; "because," she said, "I don't want to go away, and many others must leave before me."

She then came and went about the House as if it belonged to her, but never did any work. The Sisters were terrified of her; the Director decided to bless the whole House.

What grieved Mother Mazzarello was the bad impression the postulants could get from it all, and this year they were fully eighteen.

[p. 193] How Mother Mazzarello looked after the postulants

She had already shown herself a tender mother towards the new arrivals; but now the fear that through the machinations of Agustina the working of God's grace in their young souls could be frustrated, was an added motive for her solicitude. She doubled her vigilance, therefore, and so surrounded them with goodness and affection, as to leave no room for other impressions.

She received them when they came, and let them talk and cry beside her, over all they had left behind. Without insisting on their duties, she presented them in her own life an example of what they would later be asked to do; observe the timetable and Rules of the House, even at the cost of sacrifice. She was first as usual in the humble and menial jobs, and joined with them in animated recreations, during which she chatted pleasantly with them. Thus she spent the greater part of the day with them, won their affection for herself and for the Institute, while she studied them carefully, so as not to err in judging them later.

With what goodness, even good humor, she excused their failings! The postulant, Domenica Telinelli, was drawing water from the well when she let the pail fall in. All upset she went to tell Mother of the mishap. Mother began to laugh and: "Are you crying about that?" she said. "The pail is safe down there and we shall fish it out."

But in spite of all her affectionate solicitude, some were frightened by the happenings and wanted to go home: they said that in the school, besides short rations and overwork, they were continually out of their wits.

Truly the sight of Agustina when it was time to go to chapel was enough to strike terror into any heart. She fell to the ground, rolled about as if convulsed, then became slim and supple as a snake.

[p. 194] Mother takes Agustina to Don Bosco

Mother wanted to consult Don Bosco once more. Therefore she seized the opportunity one day when Agustina said she would like to speak to him. He happened to be at Borgo San Martino for the feast of Saint Aloysius, so they went to see him there.

The Director too went with them to Borgo; Mother Petronilla as far as Gavi only. While they waited there for the train, they were hospitably received as usual by Mrs. Verdonà.

This dear lady gave them lunch, then they rested awhile. Agustina really lay on the bed, asleep to all appearances; while Mother Mazzarello and Petronilla went into the corridor to speak of their business. At a certain point Mother Petronilla said, in a whisper, for she knew with whom they were dealing, and without even mentioning her name: "It seems impossible that we cannot get rid of her!"

She hadn't yet finished with Agustina flung herself on top of her as if to strangle her. They had to call help to set her free. At Borgo San Martino, Don Bosco did not even need to speak to her to understand who she was.

Her way of introducing herself sufficed for him. At the door of his study Agustina pushed Mother out of the way, went boldly into the room and slammed the door in her face.

Don Bosco did not entertain her for long, then he told Mother to send her away: "Get rid of her, get rid of her as soon as possible. I will write to Father Albera to help you do it."

Mother thought it better than not even to bring her back to Mornese, and to avoid unpleasant scenes, entrusted her to the Sisters of Borgo, who were to accompany her to the train, and dispatch her by the Casale-Alessandria line, directly to Sampierdarena.

[p. 195] Mother goes to Mortara by mistake

Mother left at once for Mornese, but mistook her train, and discovered too late that she was on the way to Mortara. When she got there, it was already dark; there was no hope of another train and—worse still—poor Mother had no money left. She went to the parish priest's house to tell him her story, asking for hospitality in the parochial house, or a recommendation to some good family for a night's lodging.

The parish priest was suspicious; he did not want her in his house, nor did he want to compromise himself by directing her anywhere. There was a night shelter he said, where the poor of the locality sometimes stayed, as also people who were passing through. And Mother Mazzarello was obliged to spend the night seated in a secluded corner, but the hours she spent in prayer there didn't seem long!

Early next morning she went to mass, received Holy Communion, and went again to the parish priest to ask for the train fare, assuring him she would return it as soon as she got home. She told him who she was and where she was going. She even mentioned Don Bosco's name much against her will... The poor priest would not believe, wouldn't be convinced, and only when she went on her knees to ask the favor did he give her the small sum of money that was indispensable.

The "little child" brings Agustina back to Mornese

Mother's thirst for humiliation had surely found a gushing fountain on this occasion. She took the train back, but when she arrived at Mornese in the afternoon, her Sisters' hearts were in a state of turmoil. They told her that Agustina had arrived before her, towards noon. And Agustina, fresh as a daisy, greeted her with the usual refrain: "The little child I brought me back!" Mother said to herself: "The devil played a big one on me this [p. 196]time! All this on top of Mortara!"

She told the whole story amid the "ohs!" and "ahs!" of the Sisters, who were all sympathy for her,

whereas she laughed heartily at it all.

While she hastened to make good her debt to the parish priest of Mortara, she took in the missing details of the story: when Agustina came to hear of her departure from Borgo she flew into a frenzy, threw a knife at one of the Sisters and disappeared.

Free at last

The month of the Sacred Heart saw the end of the Agustina episode.

The whole community prayed for the desired favor; Mother gave minute directions for having Miss Simbeni ready very early next morning, in time to catch the train for Genoa at Serravalle.

She went herself to call her: "No, I won't get up. I'm not going, I must stay here."

They helped her dress, but that done, no one could move her. Then two men came: Cravero, who had always thought her an imposter, and the builder, Vallino. With a variety of tactics, sometimes gentle, sometimes anything but, they succeeded in bringing her downstairs. Then between her two sturdy, watchful guards, the "rare subject" journeyed to Sampierdarena, where Father Albera, in receipt of Don Bosco's letter, lost no time in booking her passage on the steamer bound for Rome.

This time she did not return: perhaps her "little child" too lost her way!

Mother's feast

Now that they were free from the nightmare that had weighed upon the House for months the Director wished [p. 197] Mother's feast for July 5, the feast of Saint Domenica. Besides mass and Holy Communion as on other years, there would be songs, poetry and compositions, which had been maturing in the Sisters' hearts, but prevented by the circumstances.

Sisters and boarders were delighted; Mother was not. So much so that when all was ready, search as they would they could not find her. She did not feel obliged to go through with this new kind of mortification, and felt entitled to withdraw from it, hiding in the attic.

She was eventually found and became the object both of the most affectionate demonstrations of her Daughters and a good scolding from the Director for having hidden.

The day finished with a pleasant walk to the sanctuary of the Rocchette, honored by the company of the parish priest and the Marquis and Marchioness d'Oria of Mornese.

Mother's third letter to Father Cagliari

On July 8 Mother wrote again to Father Cagliari.

Very Reverend and good Father,

If I remember well, we said before you left: 'When he is in America his work will surely make him forget the poor Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.' It would seem that we were right, because you never answer our letters, and as you know we have already written several! If you knew how much we long to get news of you, you surely wouldn't make us wait so long.

We heard, from what sources I don't know, that you have been ill; that news indeed was very unpleasant; we hope that by now you are well again.

Will you please write to us at least once; give us this consolation. We look forward to it.

Unfortunately, I must once again give you news of a bereavement. I am sorry, but what can we do? The Lord seems intent on filling the House of heaven. On April 13—Holy Thursday—at 6:30 p.m. our dear Mother Mistress [p. 198] died. She was conscious until the very end and died repeating: *Fiat voluntas tua*. She edified us all by the resignation she showed during her illness which lasted three months.

No Sisters left, thank God, other than those about whom I already told you. Instead extraordinary, spectacular things happened, which would take two weeks, non-stop-telling to describe... to write about

them is impossible! You would have had to see them for yourself. . .

But I will try to write something as well as I can. We have had ecstasies, raptures, revelations of hidden, real matters of conscience which were buried in the depths of some hearts. All this through a girl from Rome whom Don Bosco sent to save her from the lion's mouth. I will not stop to tell you all the things she did; suffice to say that she was sent away because she was so wicked. She prayed so fervently to Our Lady during her month that she obtained the grace of returning after an absence of but one day—(Chow that happened you will hear on your return). She then began to speak about a little child, visible to her only, who was always beside her. In the beginning we thought she was mad; then she fell very ill, and was restored to health instantaneously by the Madonna (or so she claimed).

After this miracle she began to reveal hidden things, and it can't be denied that she did much good to some souls in the House. Next came the ecstasies, black fast for many days in succession, during which her "little child" nourished her with heavenly food. She said she saw Our Lady, and several times she had us all kneel, (the Director included) to receive her blessing. She gave such assurance on all these things, that all believed them to be true, even Don Bosco.

Then the scene changed and we became aware that she was possessed by the devil, and nothing more could be done for her. So we followed Don Bosco's orders and sent her to work her miracles in Rome. Come home soon and we will give you all the details of this comedy; for the present I will say no more on the subject.

The clothings took place May 24, but I already wrote you that.

Sister Teresa Laurantoni is perfectly cured; now, Sister Mina is down with lung trouble. That is not surprising.

[p. 199] She admits having had it for three years, and naturally a change to the strong air worsened it considerably. I sent her to Turin and from there Don Bosco sent her to Piedmont, to Sister Elisa's mother.

She is dressed as a Sister and completely resigned to the will of God. Sister Maria Belletti too has the same disease; the others, thank God, are well, cheerful, and good, as far as I can judge.

At the beginning of June we opened a House at Sestri Levante, not really a House. It is a matter of seven Sisters who have gone there to assist the boys and girls who go for seawater treatment. The Sisters in charge are: Sister Enrichetta, Sister Angelina (Secretary); the other five you would not know. They will come home in September.

And you—when will you come home? We expect you very soon. You should see how the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have increased in number. There are thirty postulants, about ten novices, some thirty-six professed and thirty boarders. You could come and choose a good number for America; almost all want to go. Hurry up then and come, we all desire it greatly.

Now listen to what I want to tell you personally. Will you keep a place for me in America—but really? True, I'm not good for anything, but I know how to make polenta; then I can see to it that soap is not wasted in the washing, and if desired I can learn to cook—in a word I'll do anything and everything to satisfy, as long as I am accepted.

To please the Sisters I should give a message for each of them: as that is impossible, I leave you to interpret them all, and I recommend them to your prayers. Therefore, they all send you their greetings, and assure you that we ask Our Lady to bless your labors and give you a long life.

Will you pray for me in a special way? I remember you every time I go in chapel. Please send us your blessing, and believe me,

Your humble Daughter in Jesus,
Sr. Mary M.

P.S. Kindly give the enclosed note to Mrs. Borgna; in the meantime ask her to pay something. There are three girls who have absolutely nothing. The youngest isn't yet eight [p. 200] years, consequently she can do nothing; they really should pay for her at least.

Here it is hot. If only you could send us some of the cool breezes you enjoy over there, and we could send you the heat waves. Instead you have to continue to blow on your fingers, while we fan the air for ourselves—but such is life! We are always in search of what we can't have, but in heaven it won't be like that will it? Oh! What a joy! Shall we go? There we will really love Jesus!

Do you still remember that a certain Sister—Sister Emilia—exists? Please have the charity to pray for her. If you knew how much she needs prayers! All the others are saints already, or nearly so; she is still wicked, for she hasn't yet learned to love Jesus! The others are on fire with fervor, while she is always frozen. I wonder how I will finish up! Do pray for me, please. The boarders too would like to write to you, but this time it is out of the question; accept their good will and bless them. Of course they have written several times, and like ourselves, never got an answer!

The ghost of Agustina

It almost seemed as if the turbulent spirit of Agustina returned to Mornese from time to time to

amuse itself and disturb the tranquillity of school life. After she had gone a huge cat began to haunt the place. He would vanish whenever anyone approached: at night there was ringing of bells, mewing, howling from strange voices, that frightened all who heard them.

The Director blessed the House but without result; the parish priest came to give a solemn blessing, but the nocturnal visitations continued; all thought it was the sequel to the Simbeni episode, possibly the "little child" seeking her to give her orders.

[p. 201] A thorny question

This happened within the House. What about outside of it? . . . And in the town of Mornese? Sad to say, a certain Mr. Pastore, who had already benefited by Don Bosco's charity in the Oratory of Valdocco, returned to his native town feeling qualified for special, important offices.

He had actually reached the status of communal counselor, but insisted on recommendations for further promotion. Don Bosco had done his best for him, but without avail. Pastore then determined to have revenge by proposing to the Council to remove the Salesians and the Sisters from their school, substituting them with seculars, over whom he could more freely exercise his authority. He was about to have his way in the matter, when Father Bodrato, who had been sent purposely to Mornese, told his fellow towns men quite clearly that this would be the last straw which would decide the patient Don Bosco to transfer his boarding school for the girls elsewhere—even to Gavi, Serravalle or Novi, all more important centers than Mornese, which was so small and out of the way. This of course would be a big loss to the countryside and town, which showed so little appreciation of the advantages its own educative Institute brought it.

Even before this threat came from the disillusioned Father Bodrato it escaped the lips of the ever-faithful solicitor, Traverso, communal counselor of Gavi. His letter to Don Bosco, dated July 3, is proof of this. In it he suggests that a better center be prepared for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians: he would contribute to the project in every way possible. Father Costamagna also wrote on the subject on July 2. His letter has Don Bosco's comments written in the margin, on which to write a reply to the same.

Father Bodrato's frank, candid statement seemed to ward off the crisis. However it can easily be imagined what a thorn the whole business was in Mother's side.

[p. 202] The Director's feast – a walk to Tobio

The community had learned to celebrate the Superiors' feasts and decided to honor the Director on Tuesday, July 25, feast of Saint James.

There was the solemn liturgical celebration, the reading of an address and recitation of poems by the boarders. These were little things in themselves, but rich in real, heart felt gratitude.

Then all went for an enjoyable walk to Tobio.

The Sisters and girls set out with Mother early in the morning. Having blessed the outing the Director and parish priest went under their own steam.

They rested at the foot of the mountain where the senior group stayed to prepare lunch, while the more daring did not hesitate to face the peaks.

Sister Macario, climbing the slope on all fours, broke the only bottle of wine they had brought with them. The incident didn't detract from the good hum or and joy that prevailed. From the very topmost point Father Costamagna and those who were with him shouted: *Viva Gesù!* From below came the answer, *Sempre nei nostri cuori*, (Ever in our hearts.) When Father Costamagna added, *Marmotte!* (lazy-bones), the same answer came back from below: "Ever in our hearts!" Laughter echoed down the valleys and even dispelled the habitual seriousness of the parish priest. Then they descended or rather, slipped down the other side, to be met at the foot of the mountain by the jubilant Sisters who presented them with a beautifully prepared dinner. To recover the loss of the broken bottle, Sister Tersilla disguised as a beggar woman in a shabby dress and a headscarf borrowed in the Romiti farmhouse, and approached the Reverend Fathers for alms. Not recognizing her they gave her some coins.

After lunch the priests went away. Mother entertained the Sisters and girls, and had them all rest under the bushes while she kept vigil.

Here again she gave proof of her kind heart. On the [p. 203] return journey a Sister missed her footing and lost her balance at the top of a precipice that plunged into a ravine. Without a moment's hesitation, Mother flung herself through a thorny thicket by sheer force of her maternal love, and managed to stop her in her fall and bring her up with minor injuries only.

Nothing else happened on the homeward journey, which was continued in joyful recollection accompanied by the singing of hymns and the recitation of the holy rosary. It was a memorable day in which unity of heart and soul was much in evidence.

Exercise of poverty and religious kindness

On July 9 the Sisters celebrated Sister Elisa's feast in Turin. Sister Catherine Daghero sent the news to Mother:

In preparation for the Superior's feast we Sisters have collected two and a half lire as offering, but being in doubt if we could keep it for some days, and then dispose of it according to our wishes, we consulted Father Rua who said: "You know that the vow of poverty doesn't permit you to have (deposits of) money hoarded up!" So that evening before retiring, and without saying a word I threw the purse to Sister Laurantoni who sleeps in the same room; she threw it back to me. The little purse judiciously finished up under the bed, where it remained overnight, removing our remorse for having money with us. In the morning we went early to buy canvas and wool for a pair of slippers and a watch case. But to do even that much, how many subterfuges, how much contriving! The Superior seemed to have the knack of coming to surprise us here or there when engaged in the operation, so much so that I took a firm resolution: I will never be a Superior. But were I ever to be so unfortunate, I would let the Sisters do what they want in peace.

From Sestri came very heartening reports. Boys and girls who were uncontrollable at first responded in a big [p. 204] way to the Sister's training. They ceased to answer back, to speak and act as they liked, began to learn catechism, prayers, hymns, and while they benefited physically from the treatment, the walks and good food, their souls were reinvigorated with the love of God and Holy Communion.

Don Bosco had sent to those fortunate children a huge packet of rosaries and medals, more than enough for all.

How beautiful it is to find people ready to work in the interest of souls, especially when powerful help is needed to safeguard them in dangerous surroundings where insidious temptations beset them on all sides, as the Riviera is said to be during the tourist season.

The ladies' retreat

The month of August brought a novelty: instead of a single course of spiritual exercises there were two: one for the Sisters, the other for the ladies. It was a providential arrangement, because besides offering the best opportunities of addressing the most appropriate words to each sector, it gave Don Bosco the most favorable occasion of beginning to work among the seculars, according to the Salesian agenda of action.

In fact, when Don Bosco had presented to Pius IX the program for Salesian Cooperators in March, the Pope remarked that there was no mention of women in it saying: "Why do you not aggregate women also in the work? No, No! Don't exclude anyone. Admit also women cooperators. Women have always played a leading part, even through natural inclination, in good works and in the Church itself for the conversion of souls. They are often more ready to undertake works of charity, more interprising in seeing them through, than men.

By excluding them you deprive yourself of a very valid help. "

Don Bosco received the authoritative and paternal injunction with devoted and unconditional obedience. This [p. 205] retreat for ladies, which gathered so many good people under the mantle

of Mary Help of Christians for their own spiritual advancement and consequently for that of others, was to be his introduction. No better moment or means could be devised for a fruitful diffusion of Salesian life in families and in society.

The first course began on Tuesday the 8th, and as the preachers, Father Ascanio Savio and Monsignor Scotton, were anxious to do a lot of work, and the ladies were few in number, the postulants were added, more than thirty of them, together with some Sisters from Turin who were changing community.

It must be understood that these retreats for ladies—whether well-to-do or not—were vitally important for Don Bosco. Rarely did one of them go to speak with him without hearing, especially during Mayor June:

"And this year are you going to Mornese?"

"What for?"

"A short holiday! You should see what an enchanting place it is!"

"But I already go to the country in Monferrato."

"Precisely, precisely! You go as far as Novi or Serravalle, and then you go up, up. There's a kind of carriage service, and in no time you are at Mornese. It's a sort of spiritual holiday you will have there. There are other ladies and gentlemen going, and you will be in good company."

The ladies and gentlemen came in fact, but Mother found that they were very few. Basing her calculations on her ardor and zeal, she had already disposed the Sisters to leave their beds and sleep on the floor. As usual she was first among the generous ones, and to please the Sisters who were absolutely opposed to her sleeping on a sack, she fixed a mat of bean stalks, claiming she

had never slept so soundly.

Father Rua arrived for the closure of the retreat and the clothing on the 14th to represent Don Bosco, who couldn't possibly leave Turin. Vitally important matters [p. 206] for the entire Society held him there: the organization of the Pious Union of Salesian Cooperators and the work of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in favor of which he had received special Pontifical Briefs, dated May 9, 1876. There was also on hand the initiation of a periodic publication which was to be a fraternal bond among the Salesian Cooperators. Besides, there was the question of an Italian colony in Patagonia, choice of personnel, and collection of material means for the second missionary expedition to South America.

A further variation in the habit

On the morning of the 15th, seventeen postulants received the novice's habit which was again modified.

The veil, no longer rectangular but curved slightly at the bottom, was cut to fit the wearer's head and securely pinned to the bonnet. The front was folded to make it fall better and frame the face, while it fell neatly to the shoulders. The cape was round with a little white collar as had been adopted in the clothing of 1875; a larger and longer sleeve was added, duly folded back at the wrists.

This type of sleeve had been adopted by the community of Mornese the previous June, for the procession of the Blessed Sacrament; the idea had come through observing that all the religious in the city, from a certain sense of religious modesty, went out with their hands hidden in their long sleeves like this.

The ladies assisted at the clothing function, and were deeply moved by it and by Monsignor Scotton's closing discourse.

He warmly invited all to serve God with fidelity so as to reach the end for which we were created; turning especially to the new novices he concluded:

Become saints, because this is the first aim of every religious; never say: "I became a Sister to save my soul": that would be too little!"

On coming out of the church among so many young people Monsignor Scotton too was moved. He expressed again and again his wonder at the progress the Institute had made, openly declaring that his doubts of three years before had changed to a firm conviction that it would go a long way. During the past days he had taken every occasion to speak of the good spirit reigning in the House.

The Director, Father Costamagna, animated by his customary zeal for the perfection of the souls confided to his priestly ministry, and by an admirable simplicity not yet matured by personal experience, treated Sisters and girls with paternal freedom, no matter who was present. This did not appeal to Mother, especially in view of the future. However, she considered it irreverent to speak of it; it might even arouse unwarranted suspicions. She was on the alert, therefore, to prevent in the best way possible the occasions when some inconvenience might be anticipated. In doing so she held her heart in her hands and questioned if her action was right or wrong.

The wise and deep experience of Monsignor Scotton did not fail to observe this, and Mother was aware that he did. Moved by a combination of simplicity and humility she said to the vicar of Turin, who had come for the retreat: "Would you accompany me to the parlor?" And there, in the presence of the Sister, she exposed to the distinguished priest the problem which was troubling her, with a delicacy which set more in relief the virtues of the Director and the community, than her secret maternal fears. She concluded: "You know, Monsignor, I would not like that through my fault, certain things which at the moment have no significance, but which in the future could become an abuse and danger, should creep in."

Thus the prelate came up close against the moral value of the woman whom he had considered incapable of governing at the beginning of the Institute. Also the large number [p. 208] of Sisters, so active, pious, observant, heroic in daily sacrifices, persuaded him that Don Bosco was reading the future, when in response to his pessimistic forecast for the Institute he had answered: "We will see what Our Lady does with it."

Awards day

On the next day, the 16th, the House was festively decorated as for big occasions; the boarders in their best uniform, waited anxiously in the hall for the Superiors and ladies.

For the first time the school held a solemn awarding of prizes to those pupils who had been outstanding in good conduct, religion, study and work during the year.

The Director had prepared everything in Salesian style: hence there were recitations, dialogues, compositions and at the end a book prize more or less elegantly bound.

The pupils and their relatives were pleased; the ladies promised to return the following year with their friends. The preachers left for Turin with Father Rua.

Father Rua's paternal interest

Father Rua had worked intensely at Mornese: he had heard confessions, he had passed on Don Bosco's ideas on various points of the Sister's life in community and outside of it, and accepted all the work proposed by Monsignor Leto in Biella. He then gave some guidelines about the advisability of transfer of certain personnel. He looked into the moral state of the community; its financial position, from the accounts to the kitchen, laundry and vineyard. He visited the schools and workroom, encouraging and explaining at length how to meet their major difficulties and uphold their morale in their persistent state of poverty.

He must have understood well the penury of the House, since when he was presented with an egg-flip flavored with [p. 209] wine he excused himself from indulging, and expressed regret that any special preparations were made for him.

Another Sister in heaven

Father Rua had also gone to see Sister Louise Giordano, prostrate with typhoid; he gave her the consolation of making her final vows and bringing her holy Viaticum.

It must have cost Mother dearly those days to maintain a constant cheerfulness and serenity with the postulants and ladies. Her heart bled for Sister Louise, who had been full of life and energy only a short time ago, and was now rapidly approaching the tomb.

Now Mother could sit beside her and watch for any easing of the delirium. That delirium was a revelation: Sister Louise had frequently made spiritual Communion day and night, when well. Now in her raving she repeated nothing else but invitations to Jesus to come spiritually.

Towards evening of the 16th she died.

The Sister, characterized by observance and good example, remained so to the very end: she expired making a spiritual Communion.

Ever vigilant paternity

Preparations for the funeral and other urgent business kept some of the Sisters up later than usual. Naturally Mother remained with them, and while they worked she felt the need of giving them some directions, allowing them to exchange their views in an undertone.

The Director saw the light and his step outside revealed to the Sisters that the irregularity hadn't escaped him. His correction would be strong! They looked at one another in fear: he was so exacting in the matter of silence! . . . Once due to the pressure of work in the vineyard the moderate recreation at 4:30 p.m. wasn't held, and Mother, [p. 210] to compensate, had allowed a half hour's recreation when the work was complete. She hadn't informed the Director of this. Hearing talk outside the established hour, he had charged into the playground and reproached Mother so strongly that she fell on her knees before him to ask pardon and penance.

On another such occasion his words to her had been so strong and incisive that some of the Sisters had expressed disapproval. Poor Mother had then flung herself in front of her Daughters, and fearful of the possibility of sin, exclaimed in anguish: "For charity's sake, Sisters, for charity's sake, let us not murmur!"

What would happen then at this belated hour, when the "Great Silence" should prevail? The Sisters were terrified more for Mother's sake than their own, while she wished to prevent any lack of respect on their part, another infuriated outburst of his, which might well be given from the playground, for the door was closed. Therefore she signed to the Sisters to be silent and with a mischievous smile blew out the light. Silence on both sides! After the echo of footsteps had died away on the playground Mother lit the light again, and restraining her laughter said to the Sisters: "Poor Father Director, how dearly his efforts to form us into good religious cost him!"

Retreat for Sisters only

The Sisters from the other Houses arrived on the 22nd, and all were joyfully welcomed. Mother said: "The poor things have worked far away from us and must have felt it. Let us receive them well so that they find us true, affectionate Sisters, and if need arises let us be ready even to give up our beds." Naturally she was the first to give her poor bed to a Sister.

One of the preachers, Father Belasio, also arrived. Father Costamagna was the other preacher, and before evening silence reigned supreme.

[p. 211] Even the boarders who had remained in the school came and went in silence. Either they went for a walk during recreation, or retired to a part of the grounds far distant from the retreatants, who were all Sisters this time.

No Superior came for the closing function and Father Belasio, assisted by the Director and the other priests, received the fifteen professions.

Exchange of news: from Mornese

Coming out of church there were expansive sisterly exchanges. There were questions and answers and accounts of happenings in the Houses called forth by filial devotion to Mother and fraternal interest in the apostolate.

"Does Mother still go to the Roverno for the washing?" "Whenever she can, and even more often; she guides the donkey and prepares dinner when she doesn't do the washing with us.

"Also in recreation she is ever the same. She wants us to participate in lively games, and always plays herself. You know the games she likes: carrying the key, broken ranks etc. Sometimes she even pretends to fall over so as to get a chance to kiss a Sister's feet. Then you should hear the exclamations—asking questions during the game—quite unexpectedly—now to one, now to another, about the morning meditation; and then of course, she often intones a hymn with such fervor as to help us all leave recreation with uplifted minds."

A young vivacious Sister often slipped out of the work room to go on the swings. One day when Father Costamagna came looking for her for singing practice she was not to be found. . . Mother Mazzarello left them looking all over the House for her, and went to call her off the swings.

"Get down quickly, come along behind me to the workroom. Make yourself as small as possible beside me."

[p. 212] Father Costamagna returned:

"Where is that imp?"

And Mother Mazzarello:

"But she has been close to me until now!" looking to the right and left. Seeing her quattung on the floor, she tried to prevent a scolding by saying to her,

"Stand up quickly,"

The accused stood on tiptoe, arms upraised:

"Here I am, Father Director, don't you see me?"

"Ah, you little rascal, you had everyone searching for you and you were there all along!"

Everything passed with general laughter.

"Do you know what Mother said the other day? That she would like to preach and confess saints! To preach, imagine! She already preaches, and how . . . with regard to confessing the saints, I think she would profit for she would find some sin to confess as her own. I'm convinced she has a hard search to find one on her conscience.

"She accuses herself of lack of mortification, you know, because she hasn't succeeded, as many others in this House have in swallowing. . . worms!"

"What? What's that you say?"

"Of course, I forgot. You are no longer at Mornese.

Since Father Albera passed here and saw the abundance of good things in this House he must have spoken of it to his community at Sampierdarena, telling them to send us some vegetables from their garden from time to time. And sacks full of cabbage, lettuce, beets and spinach come once in awhile.

Naturally the vegetables are not washed, and the postulants are not always careful in doing that job; consequently certain things get into the pot that shouldn't. Then when all is cooked. . . best wishes for a good meal! Happy are the eyes that see not and the mouths that do not reject.

Herein lies Mother's sin! She hasn't yet arrived at the point where she can swallow this combination of meat and vegetables! When she hears that Providence has come [p. 213] from Sampierdarena she asks with all simplicity: "Who prepared the vegetables?" If she knows it is Rosina Mazzarello, she has no difficulty taking her dinner; if not she says laughingly: None for me! and to punish herself goes without. "

From Borgo San Martino

"And is Mother Felicina as holy as ever down there at Borgo San Martino? Did she go without meat again all this Lent? I remember it well; we Sisters were all very pleased; the Director Father Bonetti, was even more delighted than we were, though there were tears in his eyes. What a fervent, holy priest he is!"

"Always the same: Mother Felicina is like a seraph. Father Bonetti is all afire with fervor that fills us with heavenly joy when he comes to visit us and speak of the Lord, while we mend the linen."

From Bordighera

"Also at Bordighera Mother's constant recommendations to observe the poverty of Mornese have been fruitful.

People often give us gifts of vegetables and fruit, then we stay in the pantry every evening to store or preserve them conscientiously, to avoid waste, setting apart for immediate use those no longer fresh.

Then we go out to gather what will conveniently serve for the kitchen fire; reeds, sticks etc., and how we appreciate gifts of any kind! Just imagine, we tried to cook with sea water so as to save..."

[p. 214] Even the crumbs

"I will tell you a good one! You know of course that on fast days such as Saturday, no one goes to the refectory in the morning. And you know also-and I'm telling those who don't that Mother gave me the charge of emptying the sacks of bread into the bin when it arrives from Ovada. Well, one day when I was desperately hungry, I felt sorry to give the crumbs at the bottom of the bag to the hens as I usually do. I thought: Why not eat them? I am, after all more than a hen. . . but later, to be at peace I went to tell Mother, who instead of scolding me showed herself tenderly sympathetic and said to me; "But dear child, do that every day and if you haven't enough in the crumbs, you can take some also from the sack." It's a joy to live with such a motherly Superior!"

With the postulants

"The postulants too understand that Mother's charity goes all out to meet them on their arrival. That doesn't mean that she uses kid gloves when dealing with them, when something absolutely has to be corrected.

For example, she often says: 'As long as there's vanity in speaking and dress, there will never be true piety. Don't envy those who in chapel sigh aloud and shed tears before the Lord, and then can't make a little sacrifice, nor adapt themselves to humble work. You should instead envy those who with true humility adapt themselves to everything, and are pleased to be like the kitchen broom.' "

"Of course, in all this Mother is only insisting on her very own virtues: humility, mortification, the spirit of sacrifice: and if she succeeds in making us all like herself Don Bosco can be really at ease."

[p. 215] From Turin

"Don Bosco comes when he can to say a few words to us by way of exhortation, leaving to Father Rua, our confessor, the thought of guiding us in everyday matters.

We have gone to him for our private interview. He receives us with great kindness, and in a few minutes leaves us serene and happy.

One day our good Father asked me what I gave the Sisters to eat. I answered: "Some soup; a portion like we had at Mornese," and he: "But make some egg flips in wine (*zabaione*) for them sometimes."

Don Bosco is a real Father to us: he came at once to give us the good news of Sister Elisa Roncallo's successful examinations, wishing us all to share her joy especially as it came on the

24th.

Mother too was pleased.

For one in charge of a House like that of Turin it is no small thing to hold an extra diploma on a higher level."

This exchange of news drew the bonds of fraternal union ever closer, while family life lightened every sacrifice embraced for the love of God.

Transfer of personnel

While the Sisters were pleasantly exchanging news and views, helping one another in household tasks, and relieving one another in their spontaneous visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the Superiors met in Council studying the destinations and arranging dates and times of departure for those Sisters who were to change House.

The following day the typical Salesian flavor of unexpected changes could be tasted.

Sister Felicina Mazzarello would not return to Borgo, but would remain at Mornese until the House at Biella opened. Sister Orsula Camisassa would replace her in the office of Superior at Borgo. The Sisters, nine in number, [p. 216] were already doing much good there. Sister Rosalia Pestarino would go to Bordighera as Superior.

Father Fassio's first mass

On September 3, Father Fassio celebrated his first mass. He was the communal school teacher at Mornese, so he was no stranger in the school, and all shared his joy on this happy occasion. Then as the boarders were few and the day pupils were busy helping in the fields, a time of great peace and recollection followed in Mornese.

Return from Sestri

The Sisters returned from Sestri at the end of September. They were pleased with their work, and never tired telling of the responsiveness of those poor children, who had become as affectionate to the Sisters as if they had always been with them.

The administrators of the camp-most competent in their job, and systematically opposed to religion-invited them all to their Council room, thanked them cordially for their care of the children and served them sweets and white wine. But with a polite sarcasm they had repeatedly said to Sister Enrichetta: "Come on, Sister Enrichetta, take some; it is not a sin! "

Sister Louise Gallo said that once at Sestri, it had dawned on her why Agustina so obstinately insisted that Sister Enrichetta not go there: without her vigilant observant eye, and her simple but prudent courage, the Sisters would have really found themselves in grave moral danger.

[p. 217] The haunting spirit of Agustina

Evidently Sister Enrichetta's presence at Mornese perturbed the evil spirits; on her return the fury of the nocturnal visitors reawakened.

The young niece of Mrs. Bacchialoni, a fearful and nervous boarder, was forever seeing animals and hearing noises. To prevent her getting ill in consequence, and communicating her impressions to others, she was sent home. Even Sister Enrichetta said that in the dormitory she and the girls had heard loud rumblings like thunder, and seen a great red light go right across the room. The parish priest came again to exorcise the place, and it was hoped that peace would ensue.

Sister Mina dies

On October 2 Sister Domenica Mina, whose end was fast approaching, made her vows in the presence of the Director, Father Costamagna, who was passing through Turin. Nothing had availed to stem the tide of her malady—neither her native air nor the freedom which life at home afforded her. She was ready for heaven.

In fact on October 5, the news of her death on the previous day came to Mornese. Dear Sister Mina had died as she had lived: without a complaint, rather trying to hide from all—even from her mother—how she felt her life slip away!

At twenty-one she had already won the palm of victory.

The foundation at Biella

A further expansion of the Institute! In one of his journeys during the year Don Bosco had met Monsignor Leto, and on hearing that he was in search of Sisters for the kitchen and linen room of his seminary, had said:

[p. 218] "I will send you mine!"

"But do you have Sisters?"

"Yes, Monsignor; and I think they will be ideal for your requirements. "

Thus did the project begin, and plans for the foundation went ahead.

On October 7 all was ready: the seven Sisters left the school for Biella, ready for sacrifice, determined to steer clear of anything that would withdraw them from the spirit of Mornese.

Attached to the episcopal seminary, they would have no contact with the Salesians. For this reason Mother entrusted the group to Sister Felicina her sister, who already had had some experience at Borgo, giving her well-formed Sisters: Sisters Rosina Mazzarello, Carlotta Pestarino, Angela Denegri, Maria Maccagno, the novice Sister Teresa Moretta and the postulant Martha Vietti.

Monsignor came in person to meet them at the station; he welcomed them kindly and assured them that he wanted to be a real father to them. He himself supervised the preparation of the house assigned to them, taking care that it be hygienic, bright and provided with all they needed, even a little internal chapel, just for them alone.

The Sisters were touched by such goodness, but on looking around and finding that the sweet image of the Help of Christians was missing, they wistfully exclaimed: "Oh, Monsignor! In the midst of all these lovely things, there is no picture of Our Lady!"

Monsignor found their complaint justified, and to restore their serenity said: "You are right! I know a young painter, who is taking his first steps in the artistic world. I'll send him to you. You can explain to him how your Help of Christians should look, and he will make a nice painting on canvas for you. I too love Don Bosco's Madonna, you know!"

This promise, and Monsignor's kindness above all, greatly comforted the Sisters, who immediately began their work with earnest dedication.

[p. 219] The foundation at Alassio

Mother had not yet finalized arrangements for Biella, when she had to turn her thoughts to the foundation of Alassio, which had been envisaged for some time. It was a Salesian House in the Diocese of Albenga, whose Bishop was Monsignor Peter Siboni. Reverend Father Francis della Valle was parish priest and the Director was (Professor) Father Francis Cerruti.

Sister Josephine Pacotto was to be Superior. Mother had given the assignment in a novel way: "Sister Josephine, come with me at recreation today." The Sister was pleased with the invitation, and made a point of keeping close to her. While the game was in progress, Mother turned to her:

"Sister Josephine, will you do me a favor?"

"Yes, dearest Mother."

"It is a bit difficult, but God will help you. I have been thinking of sending you to Alassio as Superior."

The blow had fallen; the Sister looked, believing she had not heard properly; but Mother said, "Come, come play the game!"

The poor Sister was stunned, yet continued to play while her heart beat violently.

When the moment of parting came she cried unrestrainedly, so affectionate was she with Mother.

The new platoon left Mornese on October 12, accompanied by Mother Mazzarello and Mother Petronilla as far as Gavi, then by Father Costamagna to journey's end. The other Sisters chosen for this House, which Don Bosco and consequently Mother Mazzarello had very much at heart, were Sister Catherine Mazzarello, Vicar; the novices, Sisters Maria Cappelletti, Philomena Bologna and Josephine Brunero; and the postulant, Rosalia Ronchail.

The House was small, unsuitable, without any conveniences. They were even without a dinner table, so that each one had to take her plate, then find where to rest it.

Little wonder then that the poor things, despite all their good will, had eyes filled with tears, and hearts at Mornese.

[\[p. 220\]](#) News for Father Cagliero

Mother wrote another long letter to Father Cagliero; Mother Emilia Mosca and Father Costamagna added postscripts as usual.

Viva Gesù, Maria e S. Giuseppe!

Very Reverend Theologian and our good Father,

With the help of the others I'm going to scribble a few lines. Yesterday I at last received your note. I am indeed sorry that you have received little news from this House because I have written to you several times, informing you of everything that happened since your departure, about the clothings and professions and all the news in detail. But while I am sorry as I say, I also feel consoled, because I see that you are still interested in us, your poor Daughters. I had begun to think that finding yourself immersed in so many affairs, you rarely gave us a thought; I arrived at this conclusion from your long silence.

Now I see I was wrong and am pleased. First of all I will tell you that up to now there has always been peace and happiness and great good will to become holy in all the Sisters, for which I thank God.

To be candid I am amazed and confused at the same time to see all these Sisters cheerful and serene all the time.

It is really evident, that in spite of my great unworthiness, our dear Mother, Mary Help of Christians gives us many and great graces. Please be so good as to pray that this spirit may continue and increase, and also that those virtues which are seen to blossom may be more interior than exterior.

We now have six Houses, that is: Mornese, Borgo San Martino, Bordighera, Torino, Biella, Alassio and within a month or two we shall open one at Lanzo and another at Mathi.

I forgot the House we have in heaven, which is always open. Its Director has no regard for Superiors or Chapters, and takes whom He wills for it, and He has already called seven. He took Sisters Louise Giordano and Mina after Mother Mistress. Sister Louise died on August 16 of ty-[\[p. 221\]](#) phoid, which she had for only seven days. Sister Mina, who had gone to Turin to study in the hopes that her native air would benefit her health, died of consumption on October 4, a few days after her profession.

We are about seventy-six, between Sisters and postulants. I can't give you exactly the number of boarders, because the majority haven't yet returned from their holidays. Last year there were twenty-nine: we hope the number will increase this year, but the distance from the railway station is a great drawback. Mother Vicar has taken over Mother Mistress' charge for the moment; her office as Vicar left her a good deal of free time. Therefore, we gave her the thought of the postulants also, which enabled us to send Sister Pacotto to Alassio. There she is doing very well as Superior, and the community is very pleased with her. We have added another member to the Chapter: Sister Enrichetta has been appointed second Assistant, while Sister Emilia continues to be first Assistant. When we have suitable people later on, everything will be adjusted.

There are twelve at Borgo San Martino: the Superior is Sister Orsola Camisassa from Caramagna. The cook for the school is Sister Angelina (the former servant of Secretary Traverso). Everyone is pleased with them. At Bordighera there are three: Sister Rosalia is Superior, Sister Anna Oberti and the cook Sister Justine; the

good they do there is enormous.

We have a postulant from there. The daughter of their landlord came here for retreat; she loves our spirit and I feel she will be happy with us. There are seventeen Sisters in Turin, among them Sister Laurantoni. Sister Elisa is still Superior, but poor thing, it looks as if Jesus will need her to take charge of the House on high, and I fear we must let her go and resign ourselves to His will; she too has tuberculosis.

There are seven at Biella; my sister, Felicina, is Superior.

At Alassio there are another seven: Sister Josephine Pacotto is Superior there. Sister Angelina Deambrogio and a certain Sister Margaret Sacco from Caramagna will probably go to Lanzo.

Sister Tamietti will go as Superior to Lu with Sister Vincenzina Razzetti as teacher of the kindergarten and that Sister Maritano from Cumiana, who came back to us in April,

[p. 222] will go as assistant. Sister Maria Belletti is preparing to go to heaven, and perhaps will have arrived there before your Reverence gets this letter.

We have had two retreats: Monsignor Scotton and Father Savio's brother came for that of the ladies—unfortunately they were very few. Father Belasio had complete charge of ours. There were seventeen clothings, fifteen professions, and no defections. We hope we shall have no more of them. The Sisters who went to Sestri came back none the worse in soul or body, and left everyone pleased with their work there.

Sister David, whom Don Bosco advised to go home, obtained her cure from Our Lady and came back to us. She is very well physically and otherwise too, I think.

Do you remember to pray sometimes for your Daughters in Mornese? Pray especially for me, who have more need of it than all the others; I won't tell you all my wickedness because I would need more than this page. . . Pray to the Lord to make me once for all what I should be. . . We always pray for you, that God may bless you and bring you back soon. Oh, if you only knew how much we long for that! I think we couldn't desire it more: a day doesn't go by without hearing: "When is Father Cagliero coming? Oh, I hope he will come soon!" and other similar exclamations. Come soon then and satisfy this ardent desire of ours.

There are many Sisters who ask you to keep a place for them in one of those nests you have prepared. Among them are Sisters Madelene Martini, Celestine, Turco, David, Cagliero, etc. and also a postulant, a primary school teacher. She has been here but a few days, but seems to have goodwill, and is young and strong; we will prepare her for America.

Enough! Take courage; look after your health. I hope you will come soon, eh? We expect you in January.

The Director is well, though some time ago he was indisposed. He would like to see us all holy, but we are far from it. We annoy him and he gets ill. This however, doesn't mean that we give him permission to go to America; besides the air there would be bad for him. Finally remember you are our protector, and if the Director should go to America, it would be up to you to return to Mornese.

[p. 223] At the moment we feel safe because the personnel destined for the next expedition has been fixed; but we were very much afraid.

He learned Spanish, then went to Lanzo and was never coming back.

I really must conclude. Now we wish to get down to the business of really loving Jesus. You will help us with your prayers to Him, asking that He may enkindle that love in our hearts.

Accept the greetings of Father Director, the community, and especially my own. Please send a blessing to each one individually. Lastly bless me; who respectfully kiss your consecrated hand, and am

Your humble Daughter in Jesus and Mary,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù!

My good Father,

Do you still remember Mornese? and that there is a certain Sister Emilia there? Well, she would like to tell you that she is almost a saint, having put your counsels, etc. into practice; but instead she must confess, to her confusion, that she is always the same, if not worse. What can be done about it?

But I don't want to lose heart. You be so good as to pray especially for me, and I will begin now to really love the Lord. Oh! If only I could love Jesus as much as I have offended Him! Will you love Him a little for me, and pray Him to draw me to Himself in the stable of Bethlehem, there to learn humility, contempt of self, simplicity and many other virtues which I don't have, and which He teaches so well.

Be so good as to return soon to beautiful Italy. It is time you should, don't you think? Is it fitting that a father should stay so long away from his daughters? *Ruegue por todas las monjas*, and for me who need it so badly. (I can't say this in Spanish.) If you want me in America, I must tell you that I know how to eat polenta. That's something. [p. 224] isn't it? I don't know how to do anything else, but now I want to learn to love Jesus.

In the meantime bless the last and most mischievous of your Daughters.

Sister Emilia

My very dear Father Cagliero,

Just a few words!... I have just finished bringing your Sisters—our Sisters—here and there. Last week I presented myself with seven of them to the bishop of Biella. I wish all bishops and archbishops were like this one. Oh, what a heart! This morning I arrived here after [illegible] of the Sisters of Alassio. Before long, we will see another House in Lanzo and in Mathi. Everyone will talk about them. Be so kind as to write me some news from there. And don't think that my heart has grown cold toward my brothers in America. I would leave for America right now if our father Don Bosco had not sent me to stay here. So be it. Amen.

It's only right, since no one (any place in the world) has more sins than I have, in proportion to the graces I've received. So, I have to do penance.

Now here is some news from here. First, you should know that Tunin Traverso's daughter died, and the whole family is deeply grieved.

Second, the shoemaker, Mr. Craver, has gone insane, and is more or less crazy, depending on whether the moon is increasing or waning. I've just finished seeing him totally demented. He yells and shouts in a loud voice. Oh, Tonin! It makes my head spin!

Then, your brother, your nephew, and your mother, whom I had the pleasure of seeing again in Castillo when I was in Becos, greet you with all their heart. The Turco, Bosio, Callero families, etc., do the same.

Pray for my soul. Really remember me, because there is no one who needs your prayers more than

Your affectionate

Father "Yago"

Regards to Father Barena and Father Belmonte.

[p. 225] Other changes of personnel Two new Assistants General

Having heard from the Director on his return from Alassio of the need the Sisters had there of reinforcements, Mother sent Sisters Agnes Ricci, Catherine, and Maria Succetti, and Catherine Nasi there on the 19th.

The Vicar, Mother Petronilla had taken on the assistance of the postulants on the departure of Sister Pacotto. With Don Bosco's approval Sister Emilia Mosca definitively assumed the charge of First Assistant of the Superior Chapter, and Sister Enrichetta that of Second; this meant they too could be given the title of Mother.

November brought a change of Superior for Biella: Sister Felicina Mazzarello found the air too strong. Therefore Sister Orsola Camisassa replaced her, and she went back to Borgo, where the Sisters were happy to see her return. Father Bonetti in his paternal goodness, when he saw her so tired and run down, availed of a quiet moment to say to the Sisters: "You too should take the two courses at dinner, as the Salesians do." He wouldn't listen to any arguments to the contrary, because he realized that the workload they were carrying required sufficient nourishment.

"Vocations, even poor..."

As some extra help was needed at Borgo, for the approaching feast of Saint Charles, Mother sent some Sisters there accompanied by Mother Petronilla.

Don Bosco never went to Borgo without going to see the Sisters. He always went down to the kitchen and back up to the linen room to greet them at their work and to apologize, as it were, for the extra fatigue these festive occasions entailed: "All the pleasure for others, is that not so? But we shall get it all back in heaven," he repeated in one way or another. He never realized that the Sisters [p. 226] had already received their great share of joy in just seeing and hearing him.

The good Father was pleased to see Mother Petronilla; he asked her for news of Mornese, and if there were many postulants. Mother Petronilla, encouraged by his goodness, answered: "Father, the postulants are coming, but all with nothing or nearly so. How can they be provided for?"

Don Bosco looked at her thoughtfully, raised his eyes to heaven and, as if inspired answered: "Oh! If you knew what a great thing a vocation is! Let us never reject anyone on account of poverty. If we think of vocations, Divine Providence will think of us. Perhaps we shall sometimes be in want, but God will never abandon us. Say it in Mornese. Say it to everybody: Vocations, even poor, will enrich the Institute."

Combining the two courses

The Sisters availed of Don Bosco's presence to consult him on the problem of the "two courses" the Director had imposed on them, expressing their sorrow over an attention which seemed superfluous.

Don Bosco smiled, and thought awhile before answering. Then: "As you have to work hard, and often cut short your hours of repose, I think it is better that you take the same as the Fathers. But do like this: put the two courses in the same plate and consider them as one. Say this also to the Sisters of the other Houses who are, or will be, in conditions similar to yours."

Mother was informed immediately, and though the ruling did not conform to her spirit of heroic mortification she said: "If it is Don Bosco's order, so be it!"

The "dream of the diamonds" had been told but shortly before. In it the motto of "work and temperance" was stressed. But Don Bosco was well aware of the fidelity of his Daughters in its interpretation.

[p. 227] The House of Lu Monferrato

Wednesday the 8th saw the departure of still another group of Sisters, this time for the new foundation of Lu Monferrato: Sister Anna Tamietti, Superior, Sister Adeline Ayra as mistress of the workroom; Sister Teresina Mazzarello as kindergarten teacher.

As far back as December 26, Mary and Joseph Rota had gone to Don Bosco, who was passing through Borgo San Martino, asking him for some Sisters to open a kindergarten, workroom and Oratory at Lu, their native town.

The Sisters were to live in a section of their house which was practically independent from the rest, and two halls would be rented for the workroom and Oratory close by. Don Bosco had acceded to their wish.

As usual the Sisters were accompanied by the indefatigable Director. Although they keenly felt the detachment from Mornese, they were consoled in their sacrifice by their proximity to Borgo.

The good Rota couple received them affectionately and, from the care taken in preparing their accommodation, and the attentions lavished upon them, we can conclude that they regarded them as daughters.

For three years the rent of the two halls was paid by Mrs. Pastore, the ever-faithful friend of Mornese, and the Sisters began at once to receive little girls and boys.

Death of Sister Maria Belletti

On Saturday the 11th, Sister Maria Belletti left this exile. It was understandable that an existence which suddenly passed from intolerance of any kind of restraint to humble obedience, with a transformation so complete as to show no trace of former habits could not bear the strain for long. The body was not equal to the energetic demands of the generous spirit and was obliged to give in.

A dream had induced her to change her life; now a [\[p. 228\]](#) dream warned her that the end was near at hand. She thought she saw Jesus as a very severe judge, showing her all her sins written on two large sheets of paper. The three raised fingers of His right hand gave her to understand that her span of earthly life was over.

Sister Maria was terrified. She did not understand exactly what the three fingers intimated, and asked for pardon and time to do penance. Jesus then changed completely and appeared as a kind Father, placing the two sheets on which her sins were written, now perfectly clean, in her hands. Exactly three months had elapsed since the night of that dream. They were spent in such heroic charity as to merit for the good Sister the grace of closing her life in a final gift of obedience.

The Director was due to give a sermon at a distance from Mornese, but hadn't the heart to leave the dying Sister unassisted. He came near her and partly in joke whispered: "Sister Maria, I shall be away all day, will you wait until I come back to go to heaven?"

"I will wait!"

And she did, even though her agony was prolonged, and every moment seemed her last.

She was just eighteen.

The effects of her charity continued after her death.

By the end of that year, in fact, the economic situation of the school was greatly alleviated. Up to then debts had been oppressive; even the baker refused to give further credit, and the balance of the Valdocco account weighed heavily, causing added worry.

By means of Sister Belletti's property, which she had deposited in such a way as to facilitate for the Institute the relative procedures, it was possible to clear practically all the debts to those who supplied provisions from the country round about—a providential help indeed.

[p. 229] The Sisters go to Lanzo

Don Bosco also wanted Sisters for the Salesian House at Lanzo. The house was not ready yet, but in view of the urgency, he disposed that at least two go at once, and stay with a local benefactress. Sister Angela Deambrogio, a professed member, and the novice Sister Margaret Sacco, were the pioneers here.

Lanzo is so near Turin that the two Sisters could go there rather frequently, even weekly, and hence feel less their isolation, which of course, was greatly compensated by the thought that they were taking one worry from Don Bosco and the Salesians of that House.

Feasts of Mary Immaculate and Christmas

December charged the air of Mornese with an electric current of spiritual joy.

The novena and feast of Mary Immaculate were most beautiful, nor were those of Christmas less so! It was for all a time of renewal in divine love, and a course of spiritual exercise for the eleven candidates for clothing.

The ceremony took place on the vigil of the great solemnity: the Director, assisted by Father Joseph Campi, performed it.

There were some First Communions at the first of the three masses, celebrated at midnight; on the following day the long line of boarders, postulants and Sisters filed past the manger to kiss the feet of the Child Jesus, promising to correct that defect which was most displeasing to Him. This was now adopted as a Christmas practice.

The Director said that victory was ensured if every year one enemy was overcome.

[p. 230] Further news for America

Before the end of the year Mother Mazzarello wrote again to Father Cagliero: the simplicity and humility of this document merits its reproduction.

Reverend and good Father,

I waited to write to you to give you news of the Christmas festivities. Before going on to other things I shall tell you about them to the best of my ability.

We should have had the things on the feast of the Immaculate, but as the Director had to preach a retreat at Balangero we had to postpone them. They took place on Christmas Eve—eleven postulants received the habit. Five little girls made their First Communion at midnight mass and we all prayed to the Divine Child for our dear Salesian missionaries: we asked Him to bless their labors and give them as consolation the conversion of all the souls in America.

The day was passed in holy joy in the company of the Baby Jesus.

Now that I remember, do you have the Infant Jesus over there? If you haven't we will bring Him. Don't think however, that we pray for you on rare and special occasions only; I can assure you that every time I go before the Lord I pray for you, my good Father, and so do all the others. And you, do you still remember your Daughters at Mornese? We really thought you would come for Christmas, and then they told us that. . . it is unknown when you will come. It is really time you came; it's so long since you went away. If you knew how many Sisters and postulants don't even know you! You should really come to see them.

At least if you cannot come, you can call us there soon. There are many among us who really want to go, but seven are already prepared. They are: Sister Madelene Martini, Sister Emilia Borgna, Sister Adele David, Sister Celestine Riva, Sister Carmela from Ovada, Sister Clotilde Turco, and Sister Mary Mazzarello, the undersigned.

The Director always says that we are still too young; [p. 231] but it seems to me that we are already old. I am almost toothless, but I still have two that are frightening, you know—they are so long—and I have many grey hairs. To frighten me they tell me there are cannibals in America, who eat Christians, but I'm not afraid because I'm so dried up that they surely won't bother eating me. It is true we are good for nothing, but with goodwill and God's help I hope we shall succeed in doing something.

Hurry up then, and call us. If you write to tell us when we must leave, we shall prepare something beautiful to take to you. One more thing; you will have to send us the fare, because we have nothing. Oh! What a joy if the Lord were to call us to America! If we only won one soul for Him we should be sufficiently repaid for our sacrifice.

Now it is time I thanked you for your dear letter which I received at the end of November. You cannot imagine the pleasure it gave us. We regret that you write so rarely; in fact, I can almost say that it is the only one we received. Don Bosco too never writes a word to us... Will you write to us occasionally, and don't make us wait so long to hear from you?

At the beginning of December we opened a new House at Lanzo, with just two Sisters: Sister Angelina Deambrogio of Valenza and Sister Margaret Sacco of Caramagno. Almost at the same time another House was opened at Lu, where there are three Sisters: Sister Anna Tamietti, Superior, Sister Teresa Mazzarello and Sister Adelina Ayra, who teach the boys and girls. It is not really a kindergarten, but something of that nature. They also run a workroom, and have many pupils and much work. Thus we now have eight Houses, counting this one, and thank God, so far everything is going very well. The Rule is being observed, and your souvenir talks are remembered, especially "don't offend or take offense." Charity reigns everywhere; God grant the grace that it may continue; rather, that we may acquire much virtue, especially His love.

My sister is no longer at Biella, because the air was too strong for her there. She returned to Borgo, and Sister Orsola, who was Superior at San Martino, exchanged places with her.

We have many postulants, and have wonderful plays [p. 232] and comic sketches on the stage. One, a teacher, does the ventriloquist and we all enjoy her. Another teacher came but she is very, very slow, and has hardly scarcely any voice.

I have to tell you of another death: on November 11, feast of Saint Martin, Sister Maria Belletti died after a long illness, during which she edified us all with her patience and resignation.

At the moment all are well: who knows who will be summoned next to the House in paradise? Will it be me? How fortunate I should be!

But I am not ready, and I don't want to lose my way, as I did at Mortara. I want to go directly into that delightful House. Do pray that I may become worthy, by dying to myself and my self-love. I have so much of it that every minute I stumble and fall like a drunkard.

Pray also for all the Sisters, who recommend themselves most earnestly to you, and all, from the professed to the boarders, ask me to send you greetings, and to tell you lots of things.

I forgot to tell you two things: one, we have at last paid the debt to Turin, and that our change from twenty thousand lire was but two or three thousand. The other: there were no professions because they were not yet mature.

I now unite my respects to those of the Director, and while I kiss your hand I ask you to impart to me your paternal blessing. In the Heart of Jesus, I profess to be, Very Reverend Father,

Your most humble Daughter in Jesus,

Sister Mary Mazzarello

P.S.
My good Father,

Mother sent you the names of seven Sisters: I too greatly desire to go there; two things are missing however, humility and love of God. If you only knew... I can't tell you anything because I have no time.
Pray for my conversion and call me also to America.
Viva Gesu!

Sister Emilia

1877

Every religious a copy of the holy Rule

There was a considerable number in the House: Sisters, novices and postulants made a total of seventy. The poster prepared by the Director with its challenge: "Every religious should be a copy of the holy Rule," and exposed under the porticoes and on the stairway, contributed to the exemplary regularity of the life.

His paternal scoldings and certain "shock" techniques which he used to form the Sisters to piety and inspire them in the practice of virtue, revealed his desire for their perfection, and won their hearts. All the more so because at this stage he was continually talking of the missions, and using expressions in Spanish, which, while they exhilarated, reminded all that fortitude of spirit was

necessary for those who wished to cross the ocean.

Mother had an eye for everything. Leaving to Sister Emilia the responsibility for the schools and studies, she aimed at the preeminence of piety over knowledge or manual work, and studied the best solutions to the new problems of personnel, which the Houses of Alassio, Lanzo and Lu presented.

Mardi Gras time in the school: entertainment and mortification

In the meantime the approach of Mardi Gras gave reason for anxiety.

Those who ran the dances at Mornese knew from past experiences that they couldn't count on many young girls [p. 236] because the majority frequented the Oratory, or stayed home to rest; therefore they thought up the new formula of a charity ball. Who could resist such an extraordinary novelty in a country town? After all, wasn't it in aid of charity?

Mother immediately sized up the danger but didn't know how to prevent it. But the Director, whose zeal was revived by news of the exceptional undertakings of Don Bosco in Rome, reassured her:

"Have no fear: put on a play yourselves. Invite relatives free of charge to accompany the girls. You will see how many people that will bring!"

"But what shall we present?"

"Comical sketches, farces. I'll prepare them for you."

He immediately set to work composing funny songs and humorous playlets for the stage.

On February 10 Angelina Jandet returned as a postulant. The effort she made to overcome her innate self-love, was worthy of admiration and consideration. There were grounds for hope, yet there were doubts: if she hadn't been able to "take it" at the Cottolengo . . .

In the meantime the girls and the Sisters were busy practicing for their first experience of variety show, with music and drama. How many new faces on the school stage, how much undreamed talent! Above all the aim was achieved: not a single girl went to the charity ball.

But, to ensure the success of the initiative, Mother suggested, and the community accepted, that the already scarce ration of food be reduced in some way. For example a little less fruit, which when sold, allowed for a mass to be said for the souls in purgatory. This was one way to follow Don Bosco's habitual teaching while the little mortification was intended to offer the Sacred Heart of Jesus an act of reparation for the excesses ordinarily associated with Mardi Gras.

The offering was surely pleasing to Jesus and joy reigned in the school.

Outside, however, all the old bitterness towards Don [p. 237] Bosco for having given the school to the Sisters rather than the boys, surfaced anew: anger, triggered off by the failure of the charity ball. The angry feelings found expression in petty insults which continued all night under the school windows and those of Carante house.

Mother suffered, not for herself, but for those poor young men who showed themselves so averse to good, and for the disrespect leveled at the Salesian name.

Ash Wednesday brought the petty conflicts connected with carnival to an end. Sisters and girls were rather tired, but happy in the realization that they had worked for the glory of God.

Don Bosco's idea on house visitation

March brought an increase in devotion to Saint Joseph: this year everyone felt that he had corresponded so well to his entrusted responsibility as "Economer" that special thanks were due. In the meantime, Mother prepared for her first visit to the Houses of Biella and Borgo San Martino.

She had already informed Don Bosco, through the Director, Father Costamagna, that Father Bonetti had invited her for a long visit to Borgo. However, she had passed through there while traveling, returned once with Agustina, and felt she shouldn't stay when the Sisters had a father and guide in the Director.

On his part Don Bosco advised her to go for a few days. When, in the course of time, there would be more Houses she herself would realize that the Houses of the Institute would go well as long as the Superior had her suitcase very often in her hand like a commercial traveler. She was the Mother Superior and it was only right that she saw how her Daughters were treated, if they needed anything, were content, and worked as the Lord wished, without wasting time or neglecting the practices of piety and their health. She should see if the timetable was convenient, and so forth. "Go, go, Father Bonetti will be very pleased; and if on his part, he has some difficulty, advice or desire, he can express it. Mutual understanding always brings good results for soul and body. Take Don Bosco's greetings to all, and tell the Sisters that he blesses them from his heart. "

Don Bosco visits the Sisters of Alassio

Towards the end of February the presence of Don Bosco at Alassio brought a great spiritual uplift to all, and injected new energy into the Sisters there to continue the daily exercise of every virtue. They couldn't refrain from writing about it to Mother:

Our dear, good Father, Don Bosco, didn't forget to visit us even though the time at his disposal was very limited. Perhaps he knew that we had three sick Sisters: Sister Catherine Mazzarello, Sister Maria Succetti and Sister Maria Cappelletti.

As soon as he came to us he said:

"How many are you?"

"Thirteen, Father."

"Oh, what an unlucky number! One of you must die or go away!"

He said this in fun; but we didn't fail to tell him that we were thirteen because we had a Sister on loan who had come to do the work of the three who were ill. But he, as if he didn't understand, continued:

"Have you much work?" And all of us together:

"Ohhh . . ." which meant: a terrible lot!

"Well look: When I go in the House and they tell me they have a lot of work to do, I am at ease; where there is work there is no devil. Now may I see those sick Sisters?"

Of course, Father!"

We all followed him upstairs, to the three poor Sisters, who really did not expect such a visit. Father said a few words to them and then:

"What virtue would you like me to speak about?"

We, who in the midst of all our work, have not yet learned [p. 239] to remain in the presence of God, as the Rule suggests, almost with one voice answered:

"On being perpetually in the presence of God!"

And our good Father:

"Truly it would be a beautiful thing if the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians were always to live in the presence of God. But my good Daughters, we can do it like this: renew our intention of doing all for the glory of God every time we change occupation."

He said other beautiful things to us on this point, and concluded:

"As you see it isn't difficult to form the habit of living always in the presence of God. "

As he was about to leave the Superior asked for his blessing, especially for the three who were ill, particularly for Sister Catherine Mazzarello, whom she really wanted to get better soon. And Don Bosco:

"But do you know, you are a mother without a heart?"

"Why?"

"Because mothers make many sacrifices for the happiness of their children, and you are not capable of making the sacrifice for the love of God, of allowing one to go to enjoy true happiness."

The poor Superior insisted humbly, and brought forward several arguments. But Don Bosco, still calm, added:

"Well, send her to Mornese, so the matter will be finished!"

On his way out he passed by some women who were ironing the linen of the boys from well-to-do families.

He asked them what they received in wages daily:

"Five lire, Father."

And he, turning to us:

"Five lire! You learn to iron also and thus we shall be spared the expense."

Then he added:

"You see, Don Bosco has to travel around France to get bread! If we didn't eat he could stay tranquilly at home. Instead, he has to go!"

When Don Bosco was gone, we commented on those words: "Send her to Mornese, and so it will be finished," and if the Director hadn't intervened we would have arranged for her return to Mornese.

[p. 240]Once at Marseilles, between March 1 and 12, Don Bosco noted a practice among his Daughters, which he would have them avoid in the future. He made it point six of a letter he wrote to Father Rua: "When Sisters have to be sent to some House they mustn't all be taken from the Mother House. As we do in Turin, look out for someone in the Houses already opened, capable of doing the work in question. Then have her replaced by a new member, and send her to direct the work in the new House. We will speak further about this when I get back to Turin. . ."

Mother at Siella

About mid-March, sustained by the word and blessing of the Founder, Mother began her visitation of the Houses, starting with Biella.

For fear of demeaning the Institute with "a Superior like me"—so she said—as there was question of going to see a bishop, she took as companion Sister Emilia Mosca, who knew everything about the Institute as well as herself. She also took Sister Madelene Martini, with the partly formed intention of leaving her there if necessary. Provision could always be made for the school of Mornese.

Oh, the joy of the Sisters at Biella, the only House not sustained and guided by Salesians!

While at Biella she took the opportunity of visiting the sanctuary of Oropa: it was windy and cold and they had to stay overnight not to miss Holy Communion next day. Mother went quite naturally to get a bundle of sticks to heat the room a little. Sister Emilia looked at her in

amazement.

"So big," she said. "And who will bring it home for us?"

"We will."

"We, Mother? With all these people? If we were dressed as seculars, but as Sisters. . ."

"And what about it? What do the people matter to us?"

[p. 241] We are not harming any of them. Here, I can carry it without embarrassment better than you two."

Sister Madelene Martini came forward to take it, red as scarlet, but Sister Mosca, overcoming her natural reluctance, took hold of it.

The next day, after a fervent Communion before the miraculous Madonna of Saint Luke, Mother let the two Sisters visit the various chapels while she remained praying in the shadows of the silent church.

Back in Biella, while the Sisters were in the garden for recreation, Mother was inquiring when she might conveniently pay her respects to His Excellency. Just then Monsignor Leto entered the garden, without any previous notification. He had heard from the Sisters of the Mother General's arrival and wanted to greet her first. Mother apologized for having involuntarily slipped up in the matter. Monsignor praised the Sisters, so full of good will; then he asked her:

"And so Mother, how many Daughters have you?"

"Your Excellency, we are a hundred or so Sisters, counting professed and novices, living and dead."

Monsignor looked at her: her humility didn't escape his experienced eye.

Mother Mazzarello left Biella with a sad heart. It presented too many comforts to her Sisters. True the work was heavy but the food and the House were so elegant that she feared the spirit would lose thereby. In fact some had already lost out there, for some Sisters would have to be changed.

Mother at Borgo San Martino

From Biella she went to Borgo and in keeping with Don Bosco's directions stayed two days. Here too she spoke to every Sister, visited everywhere, shared in every task, in kitchen and linen room; in a word she saw everything, took interest in everything and recommended cheer- [p. 242] fullness and sincerity of heart.

She encouraged Sister Robustelli, still new to the House and very timid; she raised her morale immensely: "I know that you get along very well with my sister, and I'm very pleased. Go ahead with great courage. Be punctual for every task, and you will please God first of all, but also your Superiors. "

She made the same recommendations more or less to all the Sisters, for she was wont to say: "If one is sincere, when she happens to fall into some fault, it is never hard to get up and begin again."

This House, poor as any Salesian House, yet very comfortable by comparison with Mornese, confirmed the fear she had already grasped from the Sisters' letters—that the spirit could be lost through easy circumstances. Exemplary religious and Superior as she was, she couldn't conceal it; therefore in public and private conferences she repeated her recommendations about the observance of the Rule, especially the part which regarded the spirit of poverty which must be kept as it was at Mornese. Mortification in the matter of food, at least not taking anything between meals; working with zeal at one's allotted task, and with the children of the Oratory and workroom, but always and only for the love of God; loving and helping one another reciprocally. These were approximately the recommendations she wrote in every letter to the Superior, with whom she could speak more freely than with the others; but how willingly the Sisters listened to her and with what sincere affection they promised to do better in future!

Mother returns to Mornese Sister Anna Succetti falls ill and dies

Mother would have gone from Borgo to Lu Monferrato; but Sister Anna Succetti's state of health deteriorated suddenly, and she decided to go back to Mornese.

When she got there she wrote to her sister, Felicina, [p. 243] stressing her recommendations on mortification even in necessary things. . . obeying the doctor and the Superiors, but also doing for our souls what is pleasing to the Lord.

In giving news of Sister Anna Succetti's serious condition she used it to further boost the exhortation she had given: "At our death we shall be all the happier, the greater our mortification has been."

Sister Anna Succetti was the Sister of whom it was said: she spoke little, never said a useless word, worked hard, and prayed constantly. Companion and helper of good Sister Assunta Gano, she had been living in a setting that seconded her natural inclination to silence, work, humility, and she succeeded to the point where she kept at her work in spite of not feeling well. She didn't even think she needed the cures and attentions given her. But in the end physical weakness got the better of her will and the poor Sister saw that the hour of her eternal repose was fast approaching.

On March 24 death won the battle, and Mary Help of Christians came to take this humble Daughter with her on Saturday, vigil of the Annunciation.

A little while before she died, in her delicacy of conscience, Sister Anna had a moment of sadness, then in the presence of many Sisters had said: "Mother, once when I was milking the cow, I took a sip of milk in the palm of my hand, and drank it. The day was very hot, and I was terribly tired, but I had no permission. Please forgive me!"

She had already confessed it several times, but she wished to take leave of the surroundings of her life here below with an act of humility.

Sister Pauline Guala is next for heaven

Not even a fortnight had passed since the death of this dear Sister, when on April 9, she was followed by Sister Pauline Guala. She was the picture of health. Whenever heavy work required two strong arms, Sister Pauline was [p. 244] there. Whenever obedience presented difficulties, Sister Pauline seemed to get new energy, so that she might have been called the personification of obedience. Yet in spite of such activity she was ever recollected and devout. Cheerful and vivacious by nature it was she who as a novice often slipped to the chapel door, as it pained her to think that Jesus was all alone. But from the day Mother told her Jesus had the company of the angels, she joyfully participated in the recreations.

How often Mother Mazzarello had kissed her feet, when she was but a postulant or novice!

The community had never seemed to notice this very much, but to Sister Pacotto, who had been bold enough to ask Mother why she performed this act especially to Sisters Assunta and Pauline, Mother had replied: "Because they are the humblest Sisters in the House."

Even in her brief illness Sister Guala was avid for mortification: burning with thirst from fever, she drank only when the glass was presented to her lips. The House would miss such examples of sanctity!

New novices and Sisters

On the 12th Reverend Father Ghivarello came as extraordinary confessor, and for a triduum of preparation for clothings and professions.

On the 15th, assisted by the parish priest of Mornese, he gave the habit to sixteen postulants and received in Don Bosco's name the triennial vows of three novices.

In his sermon for the occasion he said that the frequent deaths afflicted not only them, but Don Bosco, who next to divine grace considered health a gift of God indispensable for accomplishing the duties which were part of a religious vocation.

When health is weak, exceptions must be sought. Both the Rule and the spirit suffers without

regaining health in most cases, for it is a treasure which, if lost, can only be [p. 245] recovered with difficulty. Then he gave some practical norms which Don Bosco had told him to pass on to the Sisters. For example, to use every means at their disposal the religious to avoid the most common illnesses; to remember that after profession health is no longer a personal thing, but belongs to the Congregation, and should, therefore, be taken care of as something which is not ours, and must not be wasted through imprudence or melancholy.

Father Costamagna had gone to Bordighera as extraordinary confessor. He preached a short retreat there and on the 15th received the vows of Sisters Anna Oberti and Agustina Calcagno.

Modification of the habit: the guimp

A welcome novelty from Turin! Persons of authority were saying that the habit of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was too black. Some white was needed to relieve its drab effect. Therefore, the Superior, Sister Elisa, wrote to this effect to Mornese. There it became a subject for study and consultation among the Superiors of the House, as well as an interesting topic of discussion for all during recreation, without all the Sisters' knowing the particulars.

One day Mother said jokingly to the professed:

Our grandmothers say when that Saint Vincent de Paul instituted the Daughters of Charity, not knowing what form their veil should take, he said, "Let us throw it in the air; the shape it takes on falling we shall regard God's choice." And thus the Sisters wear the beautiful wings which make them look like doves. Shall we try it? This short veil of ours, with its two folds is said to be unsuitable; it really never stays in place. Let us take a bigger piece of material and throw it in the air.

They tried it, but the material took no special shape when it fell—now on a Sister's head, now on another's [p. 246] shoulders, now as if it hung on clothes pegs without any grace. But it had amused them and in the end Mother concluded: "It means that we must modify it ourselves. We shall begin by removing the two pleats, and make it longer and wider." When the new model was finished it was sent to Sister Elisa in Turin, to judge if it was presentable to Don Bosco who had come back from France.

On her part, Sister Elisa had been taking stock of the "something white" the other Orders in Turin were wearing, with a view to leaving freedom of movement in work and games. When she received the veil from Mornese accompanied by Mother's little note, she cut out and stitched a wimple to order. Then she looked for a Sister to model them for Don Bosco and get his opinion. But who wanted to present herself to the Founder to model the innovation? And in Turin! And at the Oratory?! Someone had to do it. The humble Sister Catherine Daghero, deeply self-conscious, put on both items and went. Don Bosco looked, smiled; moved his head and looked again, and after a moment's silence: "Well, it's not too bad; you can try it. After all it's you who will have to wear it! "

Sister Elisa wrote to Mornese, sending back the veil and wimple accompanied by Don Bosco's tentative approval.

Mother then arranged secretly that the black habit, the new veil with band and starched wimple be placed on every Sister's bed the Thursday before Pentecost. On Sunday the Sisters of Turin and Bordighera, to whom the items had been sent, would dress in the new style: Mornese must precede the other Houses, therefore . . .

All went to the dormitory to put on the new habit, (which was more or less black, at least so it pretended to be) and they tried on the band and wimple.

Sister Enrichetta, who was alone assisting the girls, invited them to chapel before the Sisters, a few minutes before the bell. She recommended them to behave in their angel's company, then ran upstairs to "make herself look white." Then in her own original way she filled a pail with water, put it in the middle of the playground, and called: "Sisters, Sisters, come, today we can look in the mirror!"[p. 247]

All ran, including Mother, pleased with the general good humor. When the bell rang for the visit, somewhat late of course, the Sisters filed in chapel without the least embarrassment, under the

eyes of the boarders, who now understood Sister Enrichetta's hurried departure, and were delighted with the novelty.

When Sister Rosalia Pestarino came for the retreat, she described what happened at Bordighera: "We were astonished to see a habit arrive for each Sister with a note: 'To be worn beginning Pentecost Sunday, May 20.' To put it on was one thing, but to appear before all the people in church with the new habit. . . and be seen on the streets by those Protestant ladies who...love us so much! Oh, the laughter behind our backs, and the comments! But obedience..."

The convent of Nizza is purchased

But May, 1877 brought far more important novelties: Don Bosco wrote of it in a confidential letter to Mrs. Pastore on the 6th:

Esteemed Madam Frances,

...you know that the House of Mornese, while suitable for some reasons, was both very uncomfortable and expensive to acquire. Now we have bought another at Nizza Monferrato where you can go whenever you like, with easier traveling conditions. The old convent and church of Our Lady were reduced to a horrid wine cellar, and where Mary's praises were sung, libations were now being poured out to Bacchus, to the accompaniment of blasphemies, etc.

After long and difficult negotiations we have at last succeeded in buying it... (here the original is torn)

I am sending this letter under the inspiration of Mary Help of Christians; please be careful not to let her look bad [p. 248] in front of ... (illegible)

Will you come to spend the feast of Mary Help of Christians with us? Your room and place at table are all prepared in the Sister's House.

God bless you, and all your family. Please pray for this poor creature, who will be ever in J.C.

Your humble servant,
John Bosco (priest)

P.S. At Mornese they know nothing of this purchase, which was definitively concluded only yesterday.
And say nothing about it in Mornese.

Sister Catherine Mazzarello dies at Alassio

On the 14th news arrived that death had found the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians even at Alassio, and had taken with him dear Sister Catherine Mazzarello.

Mother wished she had wings to take comfort to those good Sisters. As this wasn't possible she sent them help in the persons of the novices Sisters Maria Fiorito and Teresa Gedda, with the promise of going to visit them soon.

Missions planned for the Sisters

With the Director's return from Bordighera came the news that at Turin preparations were being made for the next missionary expedition to which the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians would also be called: Father Cagliero had already requested them several times.

Don Bosco, therefore, asked that at least a few begin to learn Spanish and whatever else might be useful for the greater good of souls. All—one might say—wanted to study, for the missions presented a sublime idea, but until the voice of obedience spoke they prayed and hoped.

On May 24, feast of Mary Help of Christians there was [p. 249] inexpressible enthusiasm at Valdocco over the instantaneous cure of a paralyzed child, who had been presented to Don Bosco and blessed by him on the vigil of the feast.

Even on the outings Mother is true to character

In Mornese circumstances postponed the feast until later, to coincide with the closing of the month of Mary.

To give the actual feastday a note of family joy, Mother Mazzarello took the Sisters of the community on one of those much longed-for outings: to Lerma, to the sanctuary of Graces.

While the Sisters were sitting in a little wood resting, singing hymns and enjoying both the beauty of nature in the country and this hour of sisterly affection, a ragged, unkempt little girl, the very picture of misery, appeared. Mother Mazzarello called her, asked her questions, gave her some bread, then turning to the Sisters:

"Shall we do an act of charity?"

"Yes, Mother," they answered in chorus.

Then she said to one of them,

"Take this little one to the stream over there, wash her well, and then bring her back. "

Then, turning to the group:

"Let us see which of you has the nicest underskirt to make a little frock?"

Looking around she chose that of a novice; and amid general rejoicing she cut out and stitched the little dress with the help of several of the best seamstresses. No one was without scissors and the other requirements for sewing, even on this day, for it was understood that during their outings, rest time was to be profitably employed in some little work.

When the child came back, Mother made her sit beside her. Then as she worked, she asked her some questions on catechism, and taught her some prayers, thus keeping her happy until the work was finished. Then she dressed her [p. 250] beautifully. She gave her the piece of material left

over to help her out when needed, and some bread and butter for her little brothers. Then, with greetings for her mother, she recommended her to be good, to love Our Lord and Our Lady, to make the Sign of the Cross well, to say over and over the Hail Mary which she had just learned, and sent her home full of joy.

Feast of Mary Help of Christians - clothings

On the 28th after a triduum of preparation, the feast of Mary Help of Christians was celebrated. It was crowned with nineteen clothings. The Director performed the ceremony. An atmosphere of serene joy pervaded the House and it seemed that a bit of heaven had descended on Morrinese as on Turin.

The school celebrates the Episcopal Jubilee of Pius IX

June brought a new feast.

Acting on Don Bosco's wish, the Director took occasion of the Episcopal Jubilee of Pius IX, and of the prayers being offered for him in every Salesian House to explain the devotion to the Pope. It should characterize every Christian, more still every religious, and most of all every Son and Daughter of Don Bosco, who should nourish filial tenderness and unlimited respect for the Holy Father.

The month of the Sacred Heart, with its practices that preserved and increased the fervor of May, was in itself a time of great devotion. The Director's sermon in preparation for the feast of Sunday the 17th awakened in all new love and devotion to the Pope. Sisters, boarders and day-girls of school, workroom and Oratory were all intent on the general Communion, hymns and prayers for the Holy Father's intentions.

In the evening the windows of the school were décor- [p. 251] ated, there were fireworks, and the day was concluded by the launching of a balloon. While the balloon went up and up carrying into the blue the echo of the feast, Sisters and girls alternated in the singing of hymns with acclamations: "God bless our Pope! God bless the Holy Father! Long live the Vicar of Christ!" As a souvenir of the feast a picture of Pius IX was distributed to all participants.

Mother goes to Alassio

Mother's thought was ever for the Sisters farthest away. Now Don Bosco asked her to go comfort those of Alassio. Accompanied by Father Costamagna she went to visit them, for they were still weighed down by the sorrow of Sister Catherine Mazzarello's death.

She had been one of the first eleven to profess. She was deeply devoted to Mother even as a girl, when with generous supplies from home, she greatly helped out the Daughters of the Immaculate. Beside, she had been the first to play that famous organ, whose music kept the girls from the public dances.

She was well on the way to recovery from an erysipelas which, all during the month of April, had kept her wavering between life and death; later, certain that she would soon be well, she had returned to the common dormitory .

During the night of May 13-14, she was heard to sigh; then in a sublime whisper: "Oh, Jesus, take me with you." The next morning she could not rise, and was in such an extremity of weakness, that the Last Sacraments were administered. While apparently dozing a sudden fit of coughing took her away, while she was alone with Jesus.

Don Bosco had sent words of sympathy and consolation to the Superior, promising that Mother would come. Now that promise was fulfilled: Mother was here.

She spoke to each one individually, encouraging them [p. 252] to look after their health, not to yield to discouragement and to do all they could calmly and without agitation. Finding one very tired she assured her she would send her to a House in the mountains to recuperate after the

retreat.

Back in Mornese Mother announced that she had a lovely gift for them. After lunch she distributed some nice white sweets from Alassio. The first to sample them found them so hard and sugarless that they named them "pebbles from the beach."

Mother whispered to Sister Joan: "Keep them for when you are in America," although Sister Joan had not known she was among those chosen.

The feast of gratitude

July celebrated two family name days at Mornese, those of the Director and Mother.

This time Mother did not seek refuge in the attic to get away from her Sisters' demonstrations of affection, but simply hid in the confessional. Surely no one would think of looking for her there. Once discovered, however, she again received strong words from Father Costamagna, who would not permit any such acts of humility, especially when the Sisters needed to express their gratitude and filial love.

Between the feasts of Saint Domenica and Saint James there was just enough time to prepare some festive items. In order that the two big days might be long remembered, the outing to Tobbio was repeated.

The long mountain trek and warm weather caused great thirst. Mother solicitously sought and found a clean spring from which the Sisters might drink, but she didn't take a drop of it, very cleverly avoiding the drinks offered her.

As usual when she met any child on the way, she drew near, spoke to her, asked her about God; if she didn't know the simple answers she taught them to her as she walked along, and then invited her to come to the Oratory.

[p. 253] Joyful news

The six Sisters of Turin, Catherine and Rosina Daghero, Carolina and Angelina Sorbone, Joan Borgna and the postulant, Angelina Buzzetti, who presented themselves for examination for Elementary Teacher's Diploma at Mondovi, all passed successfully. Therefore on their return to Turin all the Sisters offered their *Deo Gratias* as the sweetest expression of community gratitude to the Lord. Sisters Rosa and Caroline with the postulant returned immediately to Mornese, where they entertained the community for days recounting their experiences in the process of becoming teachers. But the Sisters of Mornese wanted to know all the Turin news.

Then Sister Caroline told in detail about the miraculous cure of Josephine Longhi, the paralyzed child presented to Don Bosco for his blessing on the vigil of the feast of Mary Help of Christians. She described the applause and general rejoicing when the community came to know of the miracle. She was almost overcome by emotion when she said that on seeing Don Bosco after this, all had the impression of seeing Jesus who went about healing souls and bodies.

Next came an account of Don Bosco's feastday while the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Monsignor Aneyros and his secretary were at the Oratory. She finished off with an enthusiastic: "*Evviva noi!* How lucky we are to be Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and her apostle Don Bosco!"

Mother was so touched that she barely managed to say, "Yes! Happy are we: let us repeat it aloud. Those who will come after us will sing it, if we make ourselves worthy Daughters of such a Mother, and of such a good and holy Father. "

[p. 254] Father Bonetti and Monsignor Ceccarelli preach the retreats

August began with the retreat for ladies and teachers, from Wednesday the 1st to Sunday the 5th. The ladies were many. This year too they again participated in the pupils' simple Awards festivities.

There was just sufficient time to reorder the House before the next retreat began on Wednesday the 8th. It was preached by Father Bonetti and Monsignor Ceccarelli, parish priest of San Nicholas de los Arroyos, who had come to Italy with Monsignor Aneyros, and was a guest at Valdocco.

After welcoming the Argentinians Don Bosco had asked Monsignor Ceccarelli to remain for awhile to teach Spanish and give some idea of the new work to the personnel destined for the missions.

All the Superiors made the retreat together with many Sisters from Mornese, all those of Borgo and Lu, and half the personnel from Biella, Bordighera and Alassio.

Those not making this retreat were to go to Turin. Such was Don Bosco's arrangement, so that all could enjoy the retreat without disrupting the activities of the Houses.

Father Bonetti's sermons were a hymn of love to God, while the missionary enkindled in all hearts an enthusiasm for evangelization. They were days of grace and fervor at Mornese.

Austere yet amiable virtues of Mother and Daughters

Everyone of the Sisters who came from other Houses, especially the Superiors, made a point during recreation of finding out if life at Mornese was still the same. Was there still the same atmosphere of poverty? Was Mother still as mortified as ever, and as maternal with the Sisters? Were the Sisters the same as they had been at the beginning, [p. 255] etc. etc.

Yes, poverty was unchanged: at table more appetite than food. On fast days and Saturdays, not a bite to eat until noon, unless Mother's hand was moved by pity to distribute some pieces of bread among the youngest and weakest, or those engaged in heavy work. And when nothing else was offered, she cooked dinner with beans, peas or string beans boiled and flavored with salt and vinegar to make them more tasty and appetizing.

Poor Mother, how much she must have suffered from such penury!

One day, weak with hunger, she had gone to the kitchen and accepted an anchovy and a piece of bread. Then, fearing to scandalize others she had gone under the stairs to eat it.

Another day she was very weak and tired, and just smiled when asked if she was not well. Finally she had to admit it: she was hungry! She had looked for a piece of bread but there was none. Then the economer and another Sister went to borrow some from a neighbor. They hurried back and gave it to Mother, who ate it and drank some water.

She felt the effect of this poverty personally, but suffered keenly from the hardships it entailed for others.

As there was never the least bit of food left on the table after meals, she was often assailed by the fear that her Daughters had gone away hungry, and told the economer: "We must increase the portions, you know." But it was always the same: sometimes when she approached the Sisters at table, she said with sorrow: "You have no longer anything in front of you! Tell me, tell me, do you still need more? I do not want to see you sick and suffering. If you want more I'll get it for you. "

But all knew that in the House there was nothing but poverty, and therefore, rather than increase Mother's suffering, the answer came readily from her Daughters: "Don't worry Mother; we don't need any more."

Often the Sisters came back tired from having washed [p. 256] all day at the river, and made trips there and back. They would go to the refectory to refuel. However, after the grace before meals, they simply added the prayer of thanksgiving and came away without eating anything, either because it wasn't there, or was so scarce that they left it for others, who might need it more. They surely remembered the words of Saint Teresa, which Mother frequently repeated when the need was great: "Oh, if only you went to table and found no bread!"

One day the cook forgot to put salt in the soup, which was a broth with onions. Mother Emilia, like the others, did not say a word. When Mother, who had come a little late, tasted the first spoonful, she exclaimed: "Oh, dear, no salt! Sisters, Sisters, wait; don't finish that soup, it will give you indigestion! Then she sent for the salt so that those who still had some to finish could take it, while as usual she waited to the end.

From the flour supplied to the community, the best and finest was naturally put aside for the sacred particles; then some was set aside for those that were ill, and the chaplain; the remainder was just bran, and was described by that name: "bran bread."

One morning the batch had come so temptingly. from the oven that between the hunger and the delicious smell a little loaf mysteriously disappeared. In the evening the question arose if it were permissible to go to Holy Communion encumbered with that "sin," for the guilty one had not accused herself to Mother!

At this sad story confessed with such humility, instead of scolding the culprit, Mother smiled and said: "You did quite right, poor child. If you are hungry, eat by all means. I give you permission, only keep quiet about it. Don't tell it to anyone now or later."

A few days later, one of the Sisters accidentally let a piece of linen, which was used to cover the loaves, fall into the fire. She was greatly worried as she feared there was no more of that type of material in the house. But having recourse to Mother, as usual, she received words [p. 257] of consolation, rather than blame, and material to make good the mishap so that no one knew of it.

When Mother went to the river to wash, and returned home with her clothes damp and sodden, she never changed until she had provided the other Sisters with all they needed, and personally assured herself that they lacked for nothing.

She was equally solicitous for her Sisters' spiritual needs, especially the youngest and the newly arrived. She listened to them kindly for as long as they wished to speak, especially if they were upset, oppressed by scruples or melancholy. She taught them to discover in everything the adorable hand of God, and to practice the religious virtues. She wanted to see them smile and knew how to make even mortification and suffering sweet.

Someone made bold to ask her how she had the patience to listen to those who always told her the same things. "You see," she answered, "the things that seem small to you, can actually cause great suffering when one keeps them closed in her heart."

One of these overanxious, ever-agitated souls, went one day when her skies were more than usually overcast, to prepare for confession in the darkest corner of the church. Mother, who knew of her state of soul, not finding her here or there had silently been searching for her everywhere.

On finding her she asked her:

"Where were you? I've been looking for you every where, even in the well!"

"In the well, Mother?"

"Eh, yes, you see, when scruples really get one down, the temptation could come to throw oneself in the well, to be finished with it all!"

"Oh, Mother, I'm so afraid of death, that rather than go seeking it in the well, I would like to find the means of sending it from me for another hundred years!"

The meeting finished with a hearty laugh, which brought much-needed relief to both.

She gave ever greater importance to little things, and when she found this virtue was missing she expressed her [p. 258] thoughts without preamble or ambiguity.

A postulant, on being sent to fetch something, had gone by another route than that indicated to her; and Mother said, "How quick you are! Yet what a wonderful obedience yours is! It is obvious you are not the type to be a Sister, so you can get ready to go home. We wouldn't know what to do with the likes of you!"

The poor thing then asked pardon so humbly, that all was quickly forgiven; but she had learned to obey.

If certain episodes about poor postulants who could not readily adapt themselves amid such privations, were dramatized, they would make us laugh and cry. But they would also bring into relief Mother's ascendancy over hearts and wills.

Whenever the hunger temptation assailed a newly arrived postulant Mother was alert to the signs and intervened resolutely, once she knew she was dealing with the stuff of which true vocations are made.

Do you want to go home? What will you say to those who ask the reason for your return? Your confessor, who sent you here, in the belief that you were so good and so generous with the Lord, will say to you: "How mistaken I was! What a vocation!"

In this way a sense of responsibility induced reflection on what might have been an impulsive

resolution to go home; then came admiration for Mother's virtue, then affection: the love of God triumphed and vocations persevered.

Mother's virtues were all expressions of humility.

She answered those who made faces on seeing her recreation-penance of kissing the feet of Sister Assunta Gaino or Sister Margaret Ricci on their return from the poultry yard or garden with: "These souls are always united with the Lord. Their virtue draws God's blessing down on us. I am not worthy of such Sisters!"

Convinced of her unworthiness to belong to the Congregation which counted so many holy Sisters and amazed [p. 259] that the Superiors did not send her away, more than once she knelt in front of them saying: "I am the least among you, the most unworthy of all. I did not deserve to stay in this House. Sisters, pray for me!"

When she read in public she begged them to correct her mistakes then and there. When she read privately in the workroom without understanding the book, she would ask this or that novice, Sister or postulant to explain it to her. When she had to write a few lines, she did not mind getting help in the presence of her Daughters, both the educated and the very young. When she dictated to others, she would not permit the use of big words; she took no measures to hide her ignorance of many of those things a Superior should know. Whenever she made a slight mistake or fault she unhesitatingly made it known with an attitude that was most touching.

One evening while recommending fervor and humility at Holy Communion she inadvertently said of herself: "I imagine I am a poor worm, which crawls about striving to unite itself to the heavenly spirits in adoration of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; then it seems to me that my acts of adoration and of reverence are more acceptable and my requests more easily answered."

When speaking of Holy Communion, she always revealed special fervor. One never tired of hearing her say that going to Jesus in a spirit of humility and love, considering oneself a little worm in His presence, was the best way to get anything from Him. This is because humility is silence, is hiddenness, is sacrifice; virtues so similar to those of the Blessed Sacrament in our tabernacles.

Closure of the spiritual retreat

On the 15th the retreat closed with the solemn ceremony of eight clothings and fourteen professions. All were sorry that the Founder was absent. Now that they knew of the striking prodigy he had worked on the vigil of Our [p. 260] Lady's feast, some thought they would see him with a halo. But all knew that he was very busy at Turin and overwhelmed by the work involved in the opening of new Houses, the preparation of another missionary expedition and other serious business. Therefore filial devotion found expression in prayer and the spontaneous offering of secret sacrifices to the Lord.

On leaving Mornese the Sisters took with them renewed holy impressions of their first religious House, and a resolute will to continue to live in the spirit of the Rule, in the practice of poverty ever more loved, and of work and sacrifice for God and souls.

Those who left Mornese for the first time greatly felt the detachment from Mother Mazzarello.

"How sorry I am to leave you so soon," said Sister Domenica Telinelli in tears, "I thought I would always remain with you!" Mother laughed at this ingenuousness, but she consoled her with equally simple affection, and with a dear promise: "My poor child, I am sorry to know that you suffer! But in the new House you will find yourself at home with the Superior—my sister Felicina. I will come to see you soon. . . Go cheerfully and contentedly: the Lord will bless you. "

Waiting to cross the border

Don Bosco had brought news from France for those Sisters who must prepare to cross the border. For the moment they will be established at Nizza-mare. If at the next General Chapter of the Salesians Father Cagliero is not missing, they can be sure of a first expedition of Sisters for America. The most deserving ones will be chosen. With her faith in God Mother would lay this

new cornerstone. What matter that her Daughters are not prepared by study or experience? "If Don Bosco has spoken," she said, "Our Lady has inspired him, and she knows that her Daughters are ready [p. 261] to do the works of her Divine Son; therefore..." Some meetings with her Council, some advice from Father Bonetti, who passed onto her the ideas of Don Bosco; some transfers of Sisters here and there; some names proposed that Don Bosco might choose and bless, and...forward in the Lord's name.

The first retreat at Turin

Monday the 27th opened the first retreat for Sisters in Turin. Father Ceccarelli and Father Bonetti were again the preachers. All the Sisters who had not participated in the first retreat took part in this one, happy to come to this House, which, after Mornese, was the one most desired by all.

Mother Mazzarello too was there: she wished to refer personally to Don Bosco what she had noted during the visitation of the Houses and to meet all her Daughters, and see how they would manage in that House where there was not much material possibility of hospitality yet.

On her arrival she was agreeably surprised to find it equipped to the tee, for beds, chairs, stoves and other necessities had been lent by Don Bosco's House, with the accompanying assurance that anything else they might need was available.

The Sisters joyfully surrounded Mother, who in turn was cordially expansive with all. She was particularly solicitous in showing maternal affections towards the newly fledged teachers who were in real need of physical and mental rest, yet showed themselves so generously available for the most humble jobs of the House.

From their account of the refined reception given them by the Dominican Sisters of Mondovi, whose guests they were during the examination, Mother drew a practical conclusion. Let us also act like that always. Let us remember that if they treat us well it is because we are Sisters and Daughters of Don Bosco.

[p. 262] Even though the retreat was in progress, the preparations for the First General Chapter of the Salesians at Lanzo necessitated the departure of some extra Sisters to attend to the kitchen of that school.

Therefore, on September 1 the regular organization of that House was finalized, with Sister Deambrogio as Superior, five other professed Sisters, and three novices.

First foundation in France

Departure for Nizza-mare also had to be expedited: Mother sent Sister Rosina Fechino there as Superior. She had been professed but a few months but was already mature in age and virtue. With her she sent two novices: Sisters Teresa Guglielmetti and Rosalia Ronchail.

The departure for Nizza-mare followed that of Lanzo by a few hours; the retreatants were confirmed in their disposition of being ready to follow the divine will.

In Mother's exhortations during the happy recreations of those days, the predominant thought was the necessity of doing one's duty well, and not losing time and energy in what is not necessary.

The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,—she recommended,—must not take on too many devotions but rather be careful to do everything with love. For example, when we go upstairs let us renew our desire to draw even closer to God; when going down let us ask the grace of going down into the awareness of our own misery.

Seeing other Sisters more virtuous than we, let us propose to practice their virtues. If we have committed some fault let us quickly renew our resolution not to commit it again.

Then when we go to confession let us examine ourselves on these points without losing ourselves in fears and fantasies with no foundation. We must always be sincere and simple, especially when we speak with Superiors, and above all in confession.

If we have charity towards one another; if we are mortified and animated by a spirit of sacrifice and remain faithful to our Rules then we can truly say we are devoted Daughters of Our Lady and win have no difficulty being sincere in confession and out of it.

Return of Father Cagliero

The retreat finished on September 3, with the profession of thirteen Sisters received by Don Bosco himself. While he was crowning the newly professed Father Cagliero arrived for the General Chapter: he peeked out from the sacristy and looked complacently at his Father, surrounded by such a big group of Sisters. Aware that he was becoming a source of distraction to those who saw him, he quickly withdrew.

But as soon as the function was over nothing could withhold the Sisters from going in search of him. The whole topic was who could form part of the next missionary expedition for America. It was an explosion of gratitude and apostolic ardor which must have been pleasing to God. Mother looked on and smiled, as she interpreted all their desires for Don Bosco. But it was just a brief encounter as the good Father soon left for Lanzo with his beloved mission-chief.

Spirit of observance at Turin

On the next day, Sunday, Mother was welcomed with jubilation by the girls, whose number was ever on the increase. She was happy to see the House thrown open to the poorer-class children, and noted with pleasure the assiduous, charitable, spontaneous, serene work not only of her Daughters, but also of some of the girls themselves.

In her conversation with individual Sisters she was able to gauge the light which came to her Daughters through their nearness to the Founder, from his formative action [p. 264] and that of his collaborators.

Religious observance in the House was most consoling: simplicity and goodwill shone in the Sisters who responded to the radiation of sanctity and untiring zeal of the Director, Father Rua.

One day the Superior had asked him:

"May we continue to take fruit at breakfast? We get so much of it as a gift, that we have in abundance."

"What does the Rule say?"

"That we can take coffee and milk or fruit."

"Ah, it says 'or' not 'and'; therefore. . ."

"But it will go bad, Father!"

"It is better that the fruit go bad than the Rule be broken. And then with the extra fruit can't you relieve some misery, or help a girl to be good?"

Mother's recommendation was: "Do you see how the saints act? Woe to you in Turin if you do not know how to profit by all these helps and pass them on to us, who haven't the good fortune to live at Valdocco!"

No one is forced to stay in Don Bosco's Houses

While giving Don Bosco an account of the House of Biella, Mother had expressed her doubts about continuing that work because the Sisters were not very happy to stay there. "Nobody stays in Don Bosco's Houses through force. If the Sisters there do not wish to stay, change them. The House will not close," was his reply.

Mother grasped the admonition and frequently used it, as a gentle reminder: "Let us not forget, Sisters, that God loves a cheerful giver; a Sister who wishes to be a true Daughter of Mary Help of Christians must be happy in both the House and the occupation in which she is placed: and every House of Don Bosco should be a House of holy joy. "

[p. 265] Sister Elisa Roncallo and the Sacred Heart

To unite the most willing girls among themselves and arouse emulation among the others, Sister Elisa started the Association of the Sacred Heart, which was already functioning.

Mother, who had been informed about it, appreciated the initiative and had taken it to heart as her own, supporting it in every way. Sister Elisa herself gave an account of the Association, its development, and the fruits it was already producing.

To animate our girls to piety we needed something extra special. Seeing that Don Bosco had organized various associations and companies among the boys of the Oratory-especially that of the Blessed Sacrament-I thought to draw up a simple rule-just a few articles suitable for our girls-and called it the Association of the Sacred Heart. I then presented it to Father Rua, who spoke of it to Don Bosco, and Don Bosco approved.

Then I took courage and one day this spring, assembled all the best girls, and the oldest ones under the roof where we keep the wood. There seated on the woodpiles I began to speak of the necessity of making reparation to the Sacred Heart for all the offenses which the wicked commit against Him; the obligation good people have to console the Heart of Jesus by avoiding sin, good frequent Communions, and efforts to collaborate in the salvation of souls for whom He gave His life.

When I saw those girls so easily moved, so well disposed, I then revealed the secret: I told them that the regulations had just been written, but were already approved by Don Bosco. I said I proposed to try it out at once if they accepted, promising to have it printed, if it was successful, and perhaps send it to Rome later for the Holy Father's approval.

I must say, in the interests of truth, that the ground was prepared.

The novice, Sister Adele David, who came back from Mornese to Turin for health reasons, did not stay at home [p. 266] doing nothing, but guided by the Salesians, became a real apostle among the girls of the area, so that my idea was readily grasped and accepted by a large number of girls capable of following me in the realization. Therefore, to work immediately! Now among the more promising we have real helpers for assistance inside the Oratory and out. If it continues like this I think that within a year the Association will be fairly well established.

Mother Mazzarello, who was of one mind with Don Bosco, rejoiced very much in the fruits already being produced by the Association among Sisters and girls.

A little letter from the school

On returning to Turin, Mother communicated to her Daughters the good news of Valdocco. At Mornese the usual rhythm of fervor and active zeal was in full swing; Mother Enrichetta, in her office as Assistant, was so dedicated and creative that she knew how to obtain such a serene discipline as to make her charges seem like so many little novices.

The day pupils and Oratorians also gave proof of goodwill, and their families were happy about it all. There was an atmosphere of prayer and serenity pervading the school, which was open to all wishing to attend right through the autumn holidays; the girls in fact stayed on willingly even during this period and it was they who invited friends and little sisters, telling their parents how happy they were to be at Mornese.

The following little letter from the Bosco sisters to their parents is an example:

Viva Gesù!

Dear good parents,

What ever will you think of our long silence? However we know that you realize that we haven't forgotten you, even though we have not written. The first explanation is [p. 267] that we are very lazy; the second that we are empty-headed. Our health, thank God, is excellent, and we sincerely hope the same holds good for you.

Be sure, dear parents that we do not let a day pass with. out saying a little word for you to the Heart of Jesus and to our Mother, Mary Help of Christians.

Also you, dear parents, will do us a great charity if you daily pray the Heart of Jesus that He may make us all His own, so as to be up there with Him for all eternity (with you, of course).

In the meantime do us the favor of praying for us, for the exams are near, and we are not sure of passing them. Oh, please do pray that we may pass them, first to give glory to God, then to give consolation to you and to our Superiors.

Pray also that God may give us the will to study and to progress in virtue every day.

In conclusion, we wish to say that our companions send their greetings, and tell Joseph to write sometimes. Within the Sacred Heart of Jesus we are,

Mornese, July 12, 1877

Your affectionate Daughters,
Maria and Eulalia

Don Bosco announces the first departure of missionary Sisters for America

On September 8—feast of Our Blessed Lady and a Saturday—the decision of Don Bosco to send the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to South America in the near future, was communicated to the Sisters. Their destination was Uruguay.

A hymn of gratitude went up from every heart on hearing the thrilling news. All were grateful to Our Lady for having chosen such poor Sisters to send them across the ocean to many souls thirsting for light, truth and eternal life.

The joy was, however, somewhat clouded by another [p. 268]news: Father Costamagna had been chosen for the American missions!

He himself wrote to this effect: "The reverend theologian Cagliero, having obtained the first expedition of missionary Sisters, also succeeded in dislodging the thrush of Mornese to accompany the Sisters to Montevideo. Thus the sad story finishes: Isaac walks to Mount Moriah!"

If every Sister wished to be among the number of the missionaries, with much greater reason did she wish to be in the group led by the Director; but Mother repeated the extract from the letter which clearly expressed Don Bosco's thought: "Those who wish to give themselves to the foreign missions, to cooperate with the Salesians in the salvation of souls, particularly those of young girls, should make their application in writing: then a choice will be made."

There was keen competition in wording the application. Each one expressed herself as best she could in the hope of being among those chosen.

With Father Costamagna back in Mornese after the Chapter, the study of Spanish was intensified. Others were studying French because the House of Saint Cyr was a priority on the foundation agenda, and they were preparing for that departure also.

In the meantime the continued service of a Salesian and a Sisters in the communal school of Mornese was still a burning question in certain quarters. Some who still kept the old resentment against Don Bosco alive in their hearts were insinuating hypotheses and considerations which were most pessimistic. They had no difficulty in forecasting the death or transfer of those priests and Sisters of Don Bosco...Yet the municipality compromised its authority by giving the teaching posts to them and allowing them to hold their classes in the school!

"Let us keep silent and pray," Mother said, to those who confided the rumors to her. "Our Lady and Don Bosco know all; we will trust them, and be in peace."

[p. 269] The first missionaries

Eventually on September 27 the names of those chosen for America were announced: Sister Angela Vallese from Lu, Superior of the fortunate group; Sister Joan Borgna, a native of Buenos Aires; Sister Angela Cassulo of Castelletto d'Orba; Sister Angela Denegri of Mornese; Sister Teresa Gedda from Pecco (Turin) and Sister Teresina Mazzarello—known as Baroni.

The chosen wrote home at once to get permission from parents or family, as it was Don Bosco's wish that parents participate with full Christian acceptance in both the sacrifices and merits of their children.

Sister Madelene Martini goes to Biella Sister Catherine Daghero to Mornese

When the changes of personnel were made early in October, Sister Madelene Martini was sent as Superior to Biella, and the Vicar of Turin, Sister Catherine Daghero, returned to Mornese, for a year's teaching practice in the communal school, now operating in the school.

Simultaneously Sister Catherine would give some lessons to the boarders, some review lessons to the postulants to help Sister Emilia, and assist the postulants in the dormitory to help Mother Petronilla. Finally, almost as an afterthought, she would study French under Mother Emilia.

Happy in her chosen state Sister Catherine was also happy with either Sisters or girls, and was characterized by her calm, controlled way of acting, and an uncommon practical sense, clothed in great humility.

Mother Mazzarello's clear intuition had truly seen beneath the surface when she would not allow her to go home.

[p. 270] Mother's forecast of vocations

The echo of the future missionary departure reached Alice, a village near Gavi. The Director, Father Costamagna, was mown there as also some Sisters. Therefore, during the vintage season a group of girls, out for a walk, came to greet those Sisters whom Divine Providence destined for the American missions.

There were six of them: the two sisters, Adele and Rosina Gemme, two other sisters, Violante and Agnes Caratto, and two friends, Catherine Grosso and another.

Chatting with them for awhile Mother smilingly asked: "Which of you would like to be a Sister?" She looked into their eyes; then indicating them individually: you, you, you, you—precisely those who had the germ of a religious vocation.

Mother at Lu Monferrato

The novice, Sister Vincenza Razzetti, teacher in the nursery school at Lu Monferrato, was due for religious profession. The Director of Borgo, Father Bonetti, was going to receive her vows. Mother took the opportunity to visit that House.

It was October 24. The parish church was full of people, even though it was not a Sunday, who were assisting devoutly at a function which was entirely new for them. Mother had taken her place between two Sisters in the sanctuary. Sister Vincenza wore her crown of roses; all present were intent to catch every word of the ritual dialogue between priest and professed. Then from the pulpit Father Bonetti commented on the gospel, drawing from it an appeal to young people to be generous in accepting the divine call. The first fruits—the early years of adolescence—are dear to the Lord.

In complete consonance with this message Mother enjoyed it immensely and accompanied it with her prayers.

[p. 271] She then hastened back to Mornese, where preparations for the departure were daily gathering momentum.

Arrival of the new Director, Father Lemoyne

On the 25th the new Director of the House arrived: Father John Baptist Lemoyne. His mind must surely have gone back to that day in 1864 when he had accompanied Don Bosco to Mornese for the first time. He had known Don Bosco then but a very short time, yet had chosen him as Father. Who could have told him then that after thirteen years he would be sent by Don Bosco to be spiritual director to those girls who had become Sisters?

He came from Lanzo, where as Director he had been dearly loved, and his departure keenly felt. But Father Costamagna was bound for America, and Mornese was so vitally important in Don Bosco's mind, that he did not hesitate to send there another Son among those most devoted to

Mary, one of his most trusted men, who having lived so close to his heart, would form the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to his spirit.

Departure of Father Costamagna

On the 28th in what must have been a supreme act of will power, Father Costamagna gave his farewell talk to the Sisters, developing the following points: the world beneath their feet; Jesus in their hearts; eternity in their minds.

Everyone should be a living copy of the Rule; the shortcut to heaven is obedience; pray for one another so that all may be eternally united in paradise.

On the following day (the 29th) he left for Turin, hence to Caramagna to say good-bye to his mother.

His going was more a hasty flight than a departure: his heart could not take or give farewells. In the humble [\[p. 272\]](#) pages of the chronicle he wrote: "Today is the day of detachment. May God give me strength to do in everything His holy will: and I after singing with Job: *Sicut Dominus placuit, ita factum est. Sit nomen Domini benedictum* (Ch 1 Job 1:31), take the first step and say a sad good-bye to the holy House where for more than three years the mercy of God has been pleased to put under my eyes such good example, from which I did not profit.

Addio, then.

<i>I leave for America</i>	<i>Across the vast ocean,</i>
<i>But I will not forget;</i>	<i>I shall pray Almighty God for you.</i>
<i>I go but my heart</i>	<i>You will ever be engraved</i>
<i>Remains...</i>	<i>in my soul,</i>
<i>Good-bye Sisters!</i>	<i>Good-bye, Sisters, good-bye!</i>

Don Santiago Costamagna!

The Sisters were in tears, and prayers of deep gratitude were offered to God for him.

Humble competition for the trip to Rome

As the 9th was already fixed for the papal audience the missionaries had to be in Rome the day before. This meant they would have to leave Mornese the evening of the 6th, so it was time to see who would accompany them.

As Mother could not because she was suffering from acute rheumatic pains in the head with severe earache, it would be Mother Petronilla's privilege. Never having traveled, she yielded the place to Mother Emilia Mosca, who was more suitable for this occasion. However, Mother Emilia—who would have flown to Rome—felt sorry for the missionaries who would thus be left alone to her care.

In the midst of this humble competition Mother Mazzarello said resolutely: "I will go: it is up to me and the Lord will provide," and without listening to the counsels of human prudence, she prepared to leave.

[p. 273] Farewell ceremony

Of the six departing missionaries two only would go to Rome as representatives to receive the Holy Father's blessing: this was a measure imposed by economic conditions.

Since Sisters Angela Vallese and Joan Borgna would not be returning to Mornese, it having been arranged that they remain in Genoa for the embarkation, Father Lemoyne suggested a farewell ceremony like that performed for the Salesians. Therefore on the afternoon of Tuesday, the 6th, the little chapel was crowded with relatives and friends. Vespers were sung as on the great solemnities. Inspired words of greeting and encouragement on the part of the Director comforted both those leaving and those remaining home. To all he recommended prayer, that the spirit of union and charity be preserved.

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was followed by the singing in choir of the prayer for missionaries.

When it was finished Mother rose and moved towards the door. The Sisters followed, and the tears suppressed until then flowed freely.

Everybody was crying, and crowded around to say a last word to their daughters, teachers, Sisters or friends. The missionaries' serenity in this moment of sacrifice was truly admirable, as was that of their relatives, who even through their tears blessed them and thanked God for having given them such a grace.

Mother and the two missionaries leave for Rome

Towards evening the two missionaries left Mornese to go to Sampierdarena and join the Salesians who were going to Rome.

They passed the night with the kind ladies in charge of the kitchen and linen of the hospice where they were warmly received and served with all possible attention.

[p. 274]What a joy for Sister Vallese to meet Father Cagliero, whom she had not seen since his return from America!

At supper while making the last arrangements for the journey, Mother Mazzarello said to Father Cagliero: "Father Director, do you not think that my going to Rome will cause the Holy Father to lose his esteem of the Institute? He will expect to see in the Superior General an educated person and instead he will see before him a poor ignoramus."

Father Cagliero smiled and encouraged Mother to go just the same. Then turning to the two Sisters, and the others who were present, including Fathers Costamagna, and Paul Albera,

Director of the House, he said in an undertone: "Let us learn the lesson."
On the next day they set out for Rome with Father John Cagliero.

In Rome

In Rome they took comfortable quarters in the pilgrims' hospice, in apartments separated from those of the Salesians. However, the hospice served only one meal at 2:00 p.m., so they had to provide some food.

What could they do? The Salesians had more hunger than mere appetite; and the Sisters were silent, but... Mother Mazzarello, fearless of the dark, the newness of the place and so forth, took Sister Borgna with her and, as if in Mornese, went into the shops nearby to buy fruit, bread and cheese for all.

Next morning—Friday the 9th—the Sisters were well rested, rose early and heard several masses in the hospice chapel. Then they had breakfast and went to see Saint Peter's Basilica, before ascending the steps of the Vatican for the papal audience.

Just before noon they were eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Pope.

Preceded by gendarmes, pontifical guards and prelates [p. 275] His Holiness was brought in on the *sedia gestatoria*. His face bore the marks of suffering, for his health was anything but good.

Taking his cue from the liturgy of the Dedication of the Lateran Basilica, which was the feast of the day, he spoke of the goodness of the Church towards its obedient children, and of the divine severity towards the rebellious ones who He spoke at length of Don Bosco, and of the great grace it was to be children of such a father. He showed pleasure and surprise on hearing that all the crowd prostrate at his feet were bound for the missions of America and asked Father Cagliero:

"Where does Don Bosco get all these people?"

"Your Holiness, Divine Providence sends them to him."

The Holy Father closed his hands, looked heavenward, and exclaimed, "Oh, Divine Providence!" At this point Mother Mazzarello humbly ventured in a prayerful tone, without taking her eyes from the venerable figure of Pius IX: "Oh, Lord, bless your Vicar!"

Father Cagliero then presented the Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. The Holy Father congratulated her and the Sisters, adding that they were fortunate and blessed by the Lord in being Daughters of Don Bosco; that they too would have a vast field of evangelical labors, and that as true, loving, solicitous mothers they would do much good, preserving from evil many young girls neglected by their parents. They would save many souls in the missions, by teaching poor savages to know God, love and serve Him on earth, so as to enjoy Him forever in heaven.

He finished with this blessing: "May our Apostolic Benediction descend on you, my dear Sons and Daughters, on your parents and relatives, your confreres and Sisters, so that you may extend God's glory, the good of the Church, and the salvation of souls. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen!"

Then the Holy Father allowed those present to kiss his ring.

[p. 276] To the two missionaries he gave as a parting thought that they should be like great fountains that receive water, and pour it out on all: fountains of virtue and knowledge, for the benefit of others. Then, placing both hands on the head of each, he added paternally: "May God bless you, that you may do much, much good!"

The missionaries were astonished and deeply moved. Mother did not speak. Her recollection of soul beamed from her eyes; and even on coming out, when the Sisters insistently questioned her on her impression, she merely expressed her admiration for the Holy Father's great goodness.

Then back quickly to the hospice for dinner. The carriage which a Cooperator had placed at their disposal to visit Rome, was waiting. They were accompanied by the Salesian, Brother Musso, a teacher in the professional school, now bound for the missions.

In the afternoon they all went to visit the catacombs of Saint Callixtus. Although the climate of Rome is ordinarily mild, the cold was intense and poor Mother, who had no relief from the rheumatic pains, wrapped her shawl around her head.

On visiting the catacombs, however, she became aware that the Salesian cleric, Carlo Pane, was

shivering with cold from an attack of malaria which had bothered him for months: she, therefore, took off her shawl and put it around him, begging him to use it, so as to avoid a worse disease.

The poor feverish Brother excused himself at first, then overcome by Mother's insistence and the cold, he put it on.

The shawl had, therefore, changed owners, and the Sisters looked sorrowfully at Mother who was evidently in pain. She smiled at them, drew from her pocket a big handkerchief of black silk with a purple stripe, and covered her poor aching head with it, nor did she take it off when later they went around Rome.

They got back to the hospice at nightfall. Mother [p. 277] thought that Salesians and Sisters would both like some refreshments. She again went with Sister Borgna to do the shopping, providing also for breakfast. Thus the beautiful streets near the hospice saw a Superior General, her head covered with a black and purple handkerchief, laden with bread and fruit. She hadn't a thought for herself; all her solicitude and attention was for others. It was good to have comfortable pillows at the hospice, to ease her head at least at night: at Mornese she didn't have that luxury! When the rheumatism attacked her there, and her ears made her suffer so, she used a small wooden stool, to raise her head a little. If anyone looked for something a bit softer she always answered readily: "No this is sufficient for me: we are poor people! "

The remaining days were spent visiting the basilicas, and monuments of Christian Rome.

They had the fortune to assist at the consecration ceremony of some bishops in the Church of Saint John Latem and to hear a mass in Gregorian chant. Mother knew how to draw motives from everything for an increase in filial devotion to the Pope, of deep veneration for the apostles and martyrs who confessed Jesus Christ in Rome by shedding their blood for the faith. Then, confronted with so many treasures of religion and art she often exclaimed: "Oh, how beautiful heaven will be!"

Waiting at Sampierdarena

On the evening of the 12th they left by train for Genoa, and on the 13th they reached Sampierdarena.

Mother feared some mishap on not finding the others from Mornese there.

However they arrived later, accompanied by Mother Emilia Mosca and Mother Enrichetta Sorbone.

[p. 278] "Why are you so late?..."

"We would have come yesterday evening but the weather prevented us. From dawn there was such a thick fog that we could see only a few yards in front of us, and then a continuous downpour of rain flooded all the roads. Finally such a terribly strong wind blew that all our insistence was in vain, for Mother Petronilla and Father Director would not let us move.

Then as the time was short, we tried to get a carriage at least as far as Ovada, to stay overnight and start out early this morning.

But no one would move in such weather, for any money; they all said it would be suicide. Yet we had to go, at least during the night. What do you think Mother Economer did? She borrowed an ox-drawn cart, had it brought under the portico, then with great bars very well tied in an arch in the cart she made a kind of tent, sewing some good quilted coverings over the arches which fell on either side forming a newstyle carriage, comfortable and solid, with chairs and straw for seats. To set out in it without having tried it would be imprudent. Therefore some climbed into the new Noah's ark, while others got lanterns and singing hymns to Our Lady they lined up around the car for its trial trip. It was a much enjoyed recreation which, being such a special evening, continued until 10:30 p.m. Then prayers and all to bed; we too went for a few hours.

The downpour continued, and the Director couldn't decide what to do. That carriage was too poor a shelter in such weather. The gushing waters could easily overturn it and fling it anywhere; working on the best hypothesis the slow pace of the oxen would probably cause us to miss the train.

Then the secretary Traverso arrived. He had heard of our plight and offered to take in his little carriage at dawn the weakest Sister that wouldn't be able to walk. That was already something!

We rose at midnight, and went to chapel to pray and receive Holy Communion. There was no time to lose. It was still raining but not with the same violence as before. Having said farewell in silence to our beautiful House in Mornese, and after another blessing from the Director, [p. 279] we lit our lanterns and set out.

A good Salesian Cooperator came to meet us and said: "I am here to accompany you. Don't be afraid: and you, Father Director, don't worry, I'm used to the roads and we will make it all right."

We left under the care of this new Archangel Raphael, who really was experienced and sure, and by dawn the little carriage caught up with us. Now we are here.

Oh how good the Salesian Cooperators are! Mother, tell Don Bosco that they also got us out of a fix about the passports and even supplied us free passes for Novi and Genoa!"

In the hospice all were busy with the missionaries and preparing for Don Bosco's arrival. The Sisters too buried themselves in preparations, packing what would be needed for mass on board ship.

The picture of Mary Help of Christians goes with the missionaries

Before Father Costamagna left Mornese the picture of Mary Help of Christians had disappeared from the school chapel. It was the one Father Pestarino had asked Don Bosco to present and bless for his dear little church.

It was one of the first and few reproductions of the Madonna of Valdocco, the first picture that represented for the Daughters the divine Inspirer of the Salesian work. Everyone thought the Director had taken it to Carante house for consolation in the sorrow of departure and expected prompt restitution. Instead Father Costamagna now gave it to Sister Teresa Mazzarello, with the injunction not to give it to anybody, but keep it for him until he arrived in America. There he intended taking it to his new destination, keeping it as a souvenir of Mornese. Who could prevent him? On the other hand, the missionary Sisters would also enjoy it and keep the picture as a precious remembrance, almost as a talisman.

[p. 280] A little later, while all were gathered round the Superiors for those last moments of farewell, Father Cagliero appeared carrying another beautiful representation of Mary Help of Christians painted on canvas; she held in her arms a beautiful smiling Infant Jesus. "I stole it from the sacristy of Valdocco for you," he said jokingly. "It was painted by an artist who was losing his sight, and in actual fact was going blind. He had recourse to Don Bosco, who having guided his brush for a few seconds on the canvas, blessed him. From that point he was completely cured, and he made us a gift of this beautiful painting."

It was, therefore, a miraculous picture, and gave joy to all who saw it!

Don Bosco had blessed it again and again and sent it to the missionaries.

"Take it to them, and may the Madonna bless and accompany you on your long journey."

Souvenirs, blessings, tears of farewell

When bedtime came the room which had served a few days ago for the few going to Rome, had to suffice for all nine of them. There were only two beds, but they laid two mattresses on the floor and arranged things as best they could, taking off habit and shoes only. No one slept. These were the last few hours they would be together.

On the morning of the 14th Don Bosco celebrated very early; he then heard the confession of the missionaries, who went to him for a last absolution and a parting thought.

As soon as she came out of chapel and as though to keep back her tears, Sister Joan Borgna said to the quiet, recollected group:

Don Bosco said this to me: "Remember you go to America to fight sin." And again: "Say the prayer to your Guardian Angel three times every day during the voyage, until you reach your destination." Don't you think it was a beautiful penance for my sins?

[p. 281] It was still raining heavily and a strong wind was blowing, but by 9:30 a.m. the Sisters and Salesians were already on board. Mother Mazzarello visited the cabins one by one: berth by

berth, to insure that nothing was missing that would alleviate the Sisters in the hardships of the journey. Then as if her heart prompted her to give still more to those Daughters, whom she felt she would not see again, she spoke to each one individually, then as a group. She also managed to guide them herself to where Don Bosco was, that he might say some of his inspired, efficacious words to them. Don Bosco smiled, spoke, comforted, while Father Cagliero tried to keep them all cheerful with the promise of a rich harvest of souls, and a speedy reunion. But eventually they had to go ashore—the order to do so had been repeatedly given: "All non-passengers ashore," and it had to be obeyed.

Salesians and Sisters knelt around Don Bosco, who raised his hand in blessing.

They regretted not having a camera, but knew that Father Costamagna would only object as before when leaving Mornese, someone had proposed to photograph the missionary Sisters: "Yes, yes, leave that for when we are fifteen feet under ground! "

The Founder's eyes were full of tears; he hastened to the gangway, not to be seen drying them. His hand trembled so, that when putting his handkerchief back in his pocket he let it fall. Sister Borgna, quick as lightning, replaced it with one freshly ironed, while she kissed the one which was wet with her Father's tears: she knew they were the tears of a saint. That handkerchief would dry many another tear in America. . .

Mother too said her last farewell. The Sisters responded with a suppressed sob, "Mother, Mother!" But she was already at the bottom of the stairway, boarding the little boat where the other two Sisters were waiting.

They were all seated, and the boat had pulled out on the agitated waters when the wind blew off Don Bosco's hat. Luckily Mother Emilia, who was attentive to his every movement, succeeded in snatching it, as it floated by her.

[p. 282] From the bridge the group saluted. Don Bosco turned towards them a last long look; Mother Mazzarello barely succeeded in keeping back her tears. Father Cagliero tried to joke to

cheer them up but couldn't.

"I want to love Mary"

At a certain point a wave of sound reached them from the ship: Father Costamagna was accompanying the missionaries singing: "I want to love Mary." The sound was lost in the distance.

What a sweet memory! The day Father Costamagna composed it at Mornese, he had stayed in the sacristy, for there was no musical instrument in Carante house. There he played and repeated especially the first notes, which didn't want to come: "I want to love Mary . . . " The House was so impregnated with that sound that in the workroom they couldn't hear one another except by raising their voice. Mother who, while working was talking to the postulants and novices, had changed position a few times, but the refrain: "I want to love Mary," seemed to pursue her everywhere. Finally with a smile and expression of humorous impatience she had said: "Will you go and tell the Director that he is not the only one that wants to love Our Lady; so do we—and tell him to have pity . . ."

"Father, will I go to America?"

The return to Sampierdarena was mostly in silence: understandably, the hearts of those who didn't go were with those on board ship.

As their tram came through a small tunnel, Don Bosco said with a smile: "It's easily seen that we are made for the light. "

Then Mother Mazzarello, following her own thought sequence asked him:

[p. 283] "Father, will I go to America?"

"You? You will go when I go!"

The question stimulated her two young companions, and Mother Emilia asked in her turn:

"And I, Father, shall I go?"

Don Bosco answered quietly something the others didn't hear; then Mother Enrichetta followed suit:

"And I, Father?"

"You? We will send you to the Indies!"

"Yes, you will be saved and so will they!"

Before leaving, Mother and the two Sisters went to greet Don Bosco once more. Mother Emilia remained alone with him for a moment, and with filial confidence asked him: "Will I be saved?" Having reflected an instant, Don Bosco answered: "Yes, you will be saved." Then after another moment's thought he added: "Not only will you go to heaven, but all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who die in the Institute; and all their relatives to the fourth generation." Then after another minute: "And all the boarders that die in our Houses will be saved."

Had the missionaries heard this consoling assurance, they would have rejoiced all the more in the sacrifice they offered to the Lord. But they would hear it, they too would hear it in the first letters from Mornese to America.

First news of the voyage

November closed with good news from the missionaries, still in the Strait of Gibraltar.

They had experienced the first tricks of the angry seas, without, however, being deprived of daily Communion. They had participated at Sunday mass, celebrated by Father Costamagna, below deck and assisted by the Catholic [\[p. 284\]](#) passengers of the *Savoie*.

Through the kindness of some gentlemen, practically all Spanish, they were put in first class towards the stern where they were free to recreate and talk among themselves, with the usual good humor of Mornese. Already some good ladies had approached them, and everyday—many times a day—they approached the children, entertained them with some game, taught them how to do some little handiwork, and above all, catechised them.

When in the evening they retired to the little parlor which was placed at their disposal, and sang the hymns of Mornese, especially *Solchiamo un mare infido* . . . the passengers assembled in groups outside to listen to Mary's praises.

Amid the many kind attentions lavished on them, they felt the presence of all those dear ones left behind, and all was an incentive to reap an abundant harvest of souls in "the promised land!" How many warm greetings to Mother, the Sisters and their dear ones!

What begging for a remembrance in the prayers of all, especially in those of the holy Founder and Father, Don Bosco.

Don Bosco blesses and cures Sister Josephine Quarello

From Turin, too, came very pleasant news. The novice, Sister Josephine Quarello, had been sent to replace Sister Catherine Daghero in the school. Sister Catherine, as already stated, had gone temporarily to Mornese. However, her substitute fell ill almost immediately and was given up by Doctor Albertolli. While she prepared for the next life she asked to be taken to Don Bosco for a blessing which would help her at the moment of death.

They gratified her, and she arrived as best she could in the Father's room. She hadn't time to express her wish, when Don Bosco forestalled her: "Do you wish to go to heaven? I hope to go there too, if God's mercy wills it.

[\[p. 285\]](#) But you have still a lot of work to do."

In saying these words, which were pronounced very slowly he raised his hand to bless. . . but with the palm turned towards his heart-Sister Quarello added. She thought within herself: "This time Don Bosco has made a mistake!"

The facts, however, proved that he made no mistake, because Sister Quarello recovered and was soon back in school.

Feast of Mary Immaculate clothings and professions

Besides the feast of Mary Immaculate, December brought the clothings and professions. The community was very recollected. In the preparatory triduum Father Lemoyne treated the themes: Let us go to Mary; let us love Mary; let us imitate Mary. Thus every heart was disposed to receive the graces of this feast.

On the morning of the 8th, after mass and general Communion, the Director, representing Don Bosco, gave the habit and received the religious vows.

Those clothed were fourteen including Sister Aurelia Barisonzo, who had been clothed already on August 15, 1876. She had been sent home for ill health but had returned to try again.

There were six professions; to them was added Sister Catherine Daghero, who alone made final vows.

As she was only two years professed she hadn't the least expectation of this grace. She had put on her white apron, and was preparing the refectory for the feast of the newly professed, when Mother ran to her, showed her a telegram and said: "Quickly, come: Don Bosco has sent this to the Director telling him to receive the final vows of Sister Catherine Daghero. Hurry to chapel—they are waiting for you, Sister Catherine."

Sister Catherine smiled, took off the apron, and ran to repeat in the presence of the community the holy vows, [p. 286] which had already been offered to God many times as a voluntary and

total gift. She returned among the Sisters wearing her crown of pink roses. Now she smiled at her past fears, and from her personal experience knew how to draw the most efficacious arguments to console and encourage those in doubt.

In the evening, after Vespers, the Director, Father Lemoyne, gave a talk on Mary Immaculate, and spoke with such ardor that he brought the community and the whole Congregation into his wave length of Marian love. "How he loves her!" was the exclamation on many lips.

There were tears of emotion when he referred to the missionary Sisters who were spending the feast on the high seas.

A boarder causes grave concern

On the vigil of Our Lady's feast two sisters, Emma and Oliva Ferrero came as boarders. Don Bosco had sent them.

Emma was already eighteen and very beautiful. She had been very well educated in a religious institute in Turin, and on returning home had enjoyed dances, operas, plays and every pleasure in the company of high society, until, through a reverse of fortune, everything changed and her father came to Don Bosco for help.

Don Bosco had offered to take the three daughters: the youngest in Turin under the care of the Superior, Sister Elisa Roncallo; the other two at Mornese.

Emma had obeyed, pleased to get away from the shame which the misery of her changed conditions entailed, but her soul was in a state of rebellion. Invited to go to confession, that she might too fully enjoy the blessings of Our Lady's feast, she answered with a disdainful ironic smile. The same attitude marked her participation in church services. At dinner and during recreation she showed an impertinence never known before at Mornese. Mother [p. 287] Mazzarello, Sisters Enrichetta and Emilia had tried to approach and pacify her, but she had rejected them with a shrug of her shoulders.

Things went on like this; she ate little, slept little, would not work or pray. She was always irritated, always upset and sharp, and interested in nothing but her trunk.

To prevent her from influencing the other boarders, Sister Enrichetta surrounded them with the most vigilant affectionate attention. Without losing sight of those who were playing she entertained her with questions and stories, but nothing seemed to penetrate the contemptuous soul of the young girl, who did nothing but awake the envy of her companions.

Sister Enrichetta suffered very much, because she felt she was in the presence of a soul who was resisting the grace of God. Everybody was praying for Emma, who was agitated by thoughts no one could divine.

One of those mornings the mail was brought to Mother Mazzarello in the kitchen with Sister Enrichetta. There was a letter for Emma. The writer was a teacher in Turin who sent her her photograph, with such sentimental words that Mother said: "I don't think we should give her this," and she threw it in the fire, following it with a glance to see that it was destroyed. Instead... on contact with the heat the photo ruffled up, revealing a paper which, white at first, changed color and showed neat, legible writing.

Mother quickly withdrew it from the fire, sure that she had in it the key to the mystery, and read with Sister Enrichetta a strange letter written with lemon juice; it was proposed for an escape, with explicit directions for effecting it.

It was a cause of suffering, but thank God for having brought the scheme to light. The first knot of the intricate skein having been discovered, and the providential way in which the plot was revealed, were incentives to increased vigilance and prudent patience. They must overlook the inevitable annoyance and angry frustration of Emma and her accomplices; but with prayer they could still hope for [p. 288]an intervention of God's grace. Christmas was approaching. Perhaps...

Mother writes to Mr. Francis Bosco

The serious concern which the poor girl caused did not prevent Mother from relieving other hearts of their worries; she wrote as follows to the father of the three Bosco girls:

Viva Gesù Bambino!

Dear Sir,

I do not wish this occasion to pass without giving you news of your daughters.

Clementina is really well and none the worse for the journey. She is happy here; in fact it would seem she had been always here. Tell her mother not to have any fears for her, that we are looking after her well so she may grow up healthy and holy. So also for Maria and Eulalia who are both well. They work and study well, and daily pray for their parents. They are always cheerful and look forward to a visit from you. If all three continue like this, they will be your consolation one day.

In the meantime, I wish you a happy Christmas, a happy ending of the year and an excellent start for the new one. May the dear Infant Jesus bless you along with all your family, and at the end of a long life have a splendid throne prepared for you in heaven.

Pray for me these lovely days and believe me,

Your humble servant,

Christmas festivals – ardent prayers

Christmas passed in an atmosphere of serenity and recollection for the community; uselessly for the recalcitrant young girl however, and very sadly for Sister Enri- [p. 289] chetta who saw not the least sign of repentance in this object of so much prayer and attention. Emma wasn't even touched by the singing of Sister Louise Arecco, whose voice was so expressive even though Father Costamagna's master touch was lacking at the harmonium.

The community prayer of intercession was directed to this one grace, and became daily more confident and ardent.

Christmas Day closed as it had the previous year. The Sisters first, then the novices and postulants, and lastly the girls passed the crib one by one to make their silent promise to Jesus. But Emma was an impassive spectator. She still shrugged her shoulders at every suggestion and acted like a despot in a stranger's house.

1878

A time of trial for Sister Enrichetta

Sister Enrichetta, a soul of prayer and totally dedicated to her girls, could no longer hide the frustration that Emma Ferrero's willful behavior was causing her.

The young girl apparently sought to become more and more hardened to the attentions of those who tried to form her. She would not even answer a question, or if she did it was with insolence, even in public. To excuse and forgive her did not make the least difference; rather, it made her more defiant. Acts of kindness and preference made her laugh contemptuously. Her companions, through envy or through their affection for their assistant, who was treated so scornfully, did not hide their ill hum or. The Sisters said in private and in public that the situation should not be tolerated. Mother therefore intervened, now with words of kindness, now with acts of dignified authority. She knew Sister Enrichetta's virtue, and could treat her freely. Seeing her constantly worried over the capricious young girl, she frequently reprovved her, even in the presence of the

boarders. She wanted moderation in everything; therefore she wanted her more balanced in her care of Emma. On her part the girl abused Sister's kind concern to the general detriment of authority and discipline.

Sister Enrichetta accepted the admonition humbly, even through her repressed tears, and soon after when Mother came to see her with signs of affection and esteem, the humble Sister received her gratefully as if nothing had happened, showing by her filial attitude that she appreciated Mother's treatment.

But we can well imagine what poor nature suffered [p. 292] under this trial.

Sister Enrichetta's health began to fail under the strain; in her visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and especially after Holy Communion, she was frequently heard to sigh. Finally one day she unconsciously began to talk aloud to Jesus, so that those near her could not help hearing her supplications for help and generosity.

From Mornese to Nizza-mare

Mother had recourse to an expedient, prompted by her understanding heart and practical pedagogical wisdom: "Do you know what we will do, Richetta? You will accompany me to

Bordighera...and we shall leave Emma for a few days in Sister Emilia's care. Perhaps the change will make her wish for your return."

They set out in mid-January, but not before Mother had a long talk with the recalcitrant girl.

After a short stop at Alassio, Mother proceeded to Bordighera. Everywhere the Sisters received her with marks of tender affection. She left Sister Enrichetta there to enjoy the mild climate of the place. Besides she knew that at Nizza Marittima, where she was going, there was accommodation for only one extra Sister. The House, as we saw, had been open but three months, and was in great straits: one had to make as few demands as possible.

Mother, received as a bearer of light and joy, was quick to detect an atmosphere of anxiety and preoccupation among the Sisters, and soon discovered the cause: "Oh, my good Sisters, you haven't a bed? But I don't want one; I don't need one. No, no, no mattress on a table; no asking a loan of anyone. Each of you will go to her own bed, and not a word. You already know I never sleep as well as when I can fix my bed to my own liking. Tomorrow you will have to work all day while I have nothing to do."

And no one could shake her resolve. The Superior General passed the entire night seated on a hard high- [p. 293] backed chair with her head resting on a little table; and next morning she assured her Sisters she had slept and was quite well.

Return through Bordighera-Alassio

She left the House, happy in the knowledge that the Sisters were good, active and pious, that the Superiors appreciated them and would like to have more.

The community at Bordighera too she found to be according to her heart. It was very poor but intent on doing good to souls, and trying not to make too many demands on the poor Salesians.

The Superior, Sister Rosalia Pestarino, taught in the sacristy: it was more a stretch of corridor, really, long and narrow, with absolutely no equipment. When asked about her timetable by the scholastic inspector, who had come on an official visit, she said:

"Timetable? I am here for them all day long, and according as one comes in prepared to stay for a little while, I teach her something. Poor things! Were I to attempt to take them all together, no one would come. Should I change my system?"

"Not at all, poor little Sister, continue as you are. Yours is the method of charity."

Don Bosco too had gone to see them on his way to and from France the previous summer. He had visited the House from dormitory to kitchen and pantry. He had smiled with evident sorrow when the Sisters told him of their minute care in examining the fruit every evening lest some of it go bad. He recommended economy, by all means, but warned them against overtaxing their energy, and ruining their health. To him, their Father, they had revealed their secret of charity and

mortification: set the best aside for the Salesians always, keeping what was left over for themselves. He also heard them express their gratitude for every little gift received.

[p. 294]Don Bosco approved and encouraged them to show appreciation to all, rich and poor.

Sister Rosalia, who had a special talent for entertaining and giving a cheerful tone to the conversation, was at her best, cheering Mother's sojourn with stories seasoned with good humor. She had several anecdotes about Don Bosco's visit.

You know, Mother, how Don Bosco uses every means to convey his gratitude to his benefactors? While he was here we got the gift of a huge head of cabbage; it was so big and white that it looked like a big bouquet of flowers.

Don Bosco looked at it and with a smile, said to me: "Would you like to do me a favor?"

"Certainly Father, with pleasure."

"Take this visiting card and send it with this beautiful cabbage to Turin, to Countess Corsi. Thus she will know Don Bosco remembers her."

What a wonderful Father we have. We showed him everything; we told him everything, even that we do not write to him because we think it would disturb him too much, and also because we know he gets ail our news, good and bad, from the Salesian Superiors. In fact, they pass on his greetings and advice to us;

however, we write to the Director of Mornese, making our *rendiconto* to him every month. And Don Bosco seemed pleased with our simplicity and filial confidence and-why not-also with our cordial respect.

With her companion Mother proceeded to Alassio, where she found her Daughters still badly accommodated, but with so much work they scarcely had time to notice it. And their spirit of mortification gave grounds to fear that in this matter, the Superior, Sister Pacotto, went a little too far.

But Mother was not the person to refrain from telling her. In the evening, seeing her suffering from a severe headache, she sent her to bed. Vain were the remonstrances of the Superior: "There is work to be finished. You are going to give the conference, and don't you wish the Superior to [\[p. 295\]](#) be present?..."

Next morning she said to her: "Do you think you are obliged to bear a headache to such a degree? No, no; you do no good acting like that. The Sisters suffer in consequence. Your sad face brings on melancholy, whereas you should do everything possible to keep them cheerful. Are you, perhaps, afraid of not giving good example? But don't worry; all the Sisters are pleased and are very good."

Emma promises at last

Mornese was waiting for Mother. She too was anxious to get back, and was cheered on arrival by consoling news.

Sister Emilia had been able to reach Emma with so many human and divine reasons, that she promised to give her good assistant, Mother Mazzarello, and above all her own soul, the lovely gift of a good confession.

Mother rejoiced at the news, and Sister Enrichetta was relieved to find even a faint glimmer of heavenly light appearing in that poor heart.

More news from the missionaries

News had also arrived from the missionaries. The voyage had been excellent. Naturally the sea was rough, but the Sisters had maintained their cheerful spirit, and taken it with them to America, to continue being serene, happy Daughters of Don Bosco.

On the way they had the good fortune of being able to devote themselves to the children of the Italians traveling on the same ship, who had crowded around them for catechism, even without

the incentive of a medal or holy picture.

On December 12 the *Savoie* cast anchor in the port of Montevideo, and the Sisters were eager to land and kiss the soil of the country to which God had called them to be [\[p. 296\]](#) His collaborators. Then the order came for all to spend nine days quarantine in Flores Island, as some passengers had gone ashore at Rio de Janeiro, where the yellow fever was rampant.

"Quarantine is a very tedious and expensive thing," the Sisters wrote, "but also this entered into the divine plan and we have used it as a step to get a bit closer to Him. "

The picture of Mary Help of Christians too spent its nine days in quarantine, for Father Costamagna, fearing to lose this precious property, did not consign it with the Salesians' baggage. The quarantine was reduced to five days, and caused no inconvenience other than the bother of disinfections and the expense which was out of all proportion with the poor pockets of the missionaries. However Mrs. Helen Jackson had generously contributed to this and all the other expenses connected with the journey. This kind benefactress so desired the Sisters in her native Uruguay that she had advanced the cost of their tickets to Father Cagliariero on his departure for Italy.

The Sisters landed, and after a renewal of their detachment in saying farewell to the Director and the sacred relic of Mornese, were taken "in comfortable carriages to the episcopal palace." There

Monsignor Vera received them with kindness, informing them they would be staying at the "Visitation" for some time as their house was not ready.

The Sisters of the Visitation treated them with every consideration, but reading between the lines of the Sisters' letters, their desire to have their own house soon comes to the surface. They longed to have that house, however poor it might be. It could scarcely be poorer than they who had all their worldly belongings in two trunks—which had already been brought from America to Italy by the Borgna sisters—without the addition of any hand luggage. Here everyone was thinking of them, whereas they wanted to think of others. In this forced wait, they concluded the letter thus:

"On the ship we understood how necessary

[p. 297] it is to know and love the good God. Now we burn with an ardent desire to give ourselves to souls."

First visit to the ex-monastery of Nizza Monferrato

About the beginning of February another favorable occasion for a short outing with Mother came for Sister Enrichetta. It was a visit to the ex-monastery of Nizza Monferrato.

As we saw from his letter of May to Mrs. Pastore of Valenza, in buying it Don Bosco had in mind to send the Sisters there and establish a boarding school for girls. However, he had kept his project secret up to this point to avoid obstacles and proceed with the relative arrangements with all possible serenity.

In the meantime he had asked the necessary faculties of the Holy See; and obtained the decree signed by the Bishop of Acqui, as Delegate of the Holy See, dated September 27, 1877.

The preliminary negotiations—from the deposit of April 30 to completion of the deed of purchase at Savigliano on October 12—were carried through by Don Bosco with courageous prudence and solicitude, sustained as always by trust in Divine Providence. We have proof of this in the letters he wrote to friends and outstanding benefactors, and the circular distributed to Cooperators to obtain the necessary aid for conclusion of the purchase.

Therefore after almost a year of negotiation and documents, the affair could be publicized, and the works of restoration and adaptation planned and undertaken.

In February Don Bosco sent word to Mother from Rome to go to Nizza, and arranged that the Salesian Economist General, Father Sala, meet her there.

All the Superiors were uneasy about the poor health condition of so many Sisters and attributed the cause to the air of Mornese, too strong for those with little appetite and who were engaged in hard work. Besides, [p. 298] an ever-increasing number of boarders' parents found the journey to Mornese most inconvenient and assured them that the numbers would multiply in a more accessible place.

Therefore Don Bosco wished to profit by the coming spring season to begin the operations which would enable him to transfer the personnel of Mornese to the ex-monastery by the beginning of the new scholastic year.

Some good ladies sent by the Rural Vicar Father Bisio, were waiting for Mother at the station of Nizza. They took the Sisters to the prelate's house where Father Sala with Father Bonetti, some other priests of the city and the Attorney De Vecchi were already waiting. A cordial, informal lunch followed at which the attorney's daughter served at table. There was no cause for embarrassment, but the two Sisters, not accustomed to this type of reception did not feel at ease; they were almost afraid to breathe. Fortunately the Salesians did their share and with their ease and self-possession helped dissipate the embarrassments of the moment.

The subject of conversation – the convent

Naturally the conversation turned to the convent.

The Sisters came to know the whole story: the monastery was built in 1476 by the Friars Minor of the Observance. Later it passed to the Discalced branch of the Order. It was destroyed and rebuilt in the middle of the eighteenth century.

On hearing that the actual building dated back to 1700, Sister Enrichetta whispered to Mother: "Let us look well at it to see what architecture was like in '700!" They both laughed. Their concern up until now had been the way the saints lived.

But the story became tragic: the friars had been banished from Nizza in 1802, by decree of suppression promulgated by French law, and the place was like a desert for fifteen years. It was given back to the friars—this time the [p. 299] Capuchin branch of the family, who were in turn driven out of it in 1855. The poor convent became state property and was sold to the wine company of Savigliano, after which it was put to profane use.

Here Mother sighed, but without missing a syllable of the eulogies paid to Don Bosco, who with incalculable sacrifice and incurring big debts had withdrawn chapel and convent from such unworthy usage to restore divine cult in the one and offer the other to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians!

"La Madonna"

After dinner all went to the convent or "The Madonna" as the people of Nizza called it, because Our Lady of Graces was venerated there.

They first visited the former chapel. It made one weep to see the marks of the wine vats where the altars had been! The inscription which read: *Terribilis est locus iste* made one think of divine retribution, and threw a terrifying light on the beautiful angels painted on the great vault.

The picture of Our Lady of Graces venerated there was a beautiful and very valuable painting, they say, though only a simple reproduction of the first canvas painted and ceded either to Charles VIII or to one of the dukes of Mantova or Monferrato. It measured 2.7 meters by 1.75, and occupied the whole space of the inner angle of the wall. When the municipality granted the convent to the wine society the picture was transported to the civic hospital, along with a beautiful picture of Saint Joseph, which was attributed to Caccia, sometimes called Moncalvo.

"What a beautiful church it must have been!" Mother said sadly.

"It was indeed beautiful, and well kept," Father Bisio replied, "but Don Bosco will now restore it to its former glory—at the cost of much time and money."

From the church they passed to the adjoining corridor.

[p. 300] The lawyer, who knew the place, showed them the place of the room where on July 14, 1495 Charles VIII had stayed on his way to conquer Naples. The incident had been commemorated in writing. Now the room and inscription were destroyed to make place for the wine carts.

The corridor led into the open towards the former cemetery of the cloister, across the vineyard.

The priests and attorney stopped here and there to discuss and decide on restorations, while Mother Mazzarello and Sister Enrichetta had, no doubt, their own subjects for discussion.

The good mother of the Salesian, Father Branda, was in charge of the workmen, and the House. She stayed on even after the Sisters came. Don Bosco had arranged this so as to ensure an occupation for this dear lady who was living alone, and provide the Sisters with a trustworthy, affectionate person who knew the place.

To Lu Monferrato

After a brief visit and exchange of ideas Mother went to visit Lu Monferrato.

There she saw the flourishing Oratory and the girls of the workroom to whom Mother said among other things: "I know you come willingly to the Sisters, and this is fine. I know also that the Sisters keep you happy with games and plays, also to help you avoid other dangers, especially dances. But you really don't go to dances do you? They are the devil's invention to ruin bodily health and still more that of your soul. Oh, how many young people lose their most precious treasure at dances: the gift of their innocence and purity."

Her words must have made an impression, because Mrs. Rosta's niece—Garolina Rota—who avoided meeting the Sisters on every occasion, for fear they would "stick" a religious vocation on

her, took courage and accompanied her mother who went to offer a basket of fruit to the [p. 301] Mother General.

She ran into Sister Enrichetta and entrusted her gift to her. She, always joyful and enthusiastic, looked the young girl right in the eyes, and asked without preamble:

"Would you like to become a Sister?"

"Oh, no, no!"

"Well then: take one of these figs and eat it and it will give you a good vocation!"

From Lu they returned to Mornese, where Mother tried to explain all the advantage that would be theirs in the new House. Each one, however, while appreciating the dispositions of Divine Providence, said in her own mind: I hope to die at Mornese!

Universal sorrow and mourning

On February 7 a telegram from Don Bosco brought to Turin the news of the fatal illness of Pius IX. The echo of universal mourning entered the Salesian Houses with the paternal recommendation to offer special prayers to the Lord.

The news of the Holy Father's death arrived before the evening.

In Mornese visits to the Blessed Sacrament and *Via Crucis* were continuous. Carnival ended in mourning; Ash Wednesday was a day of prayer, penance and suffrages.

Emma begins to take a saner view of life

At last Emma Ferrero began to respond. After Mother's experiment, that is, on the return of Sister Enrichetta, she showed that her heart was not as hard as her disposition seemed to indicate; and even though she did not show any special joy on her assistant's return, she at least came forward to greet her. Then she behaved a bit better, without showing the disdain of previous months. She still spoke [p. 302] little, but readily complied when asked for a favor. She was still most interested in the contents of her trunk, and spent much time bending over it, taking out little trinkets, handling them reverently as if they were the most treasured souvenirs; then, as if overcome by a sense of revolt, she flung them all into the trunk, grumbling aloud to her sister. She didn't participate much in the games and amusements the boarders organized for carnival, but at least the contemptuous attitude of the past was gone. On some occasions she actually smiled. But there was still a long way to go.

Joy in the universal Church

The *Salesian Bulletin* of March brought, in its first pages, the sad news of the last hours of Pius IX, and Don Bosco's direction for a day of solemn suffrage in all his Houses. The great merits of the deceased Pontiff made very touching reading.

The same *Bulletin* gave the news of the election of Leo XIII, briefly presenting his life story.

Before Easter's joy came to the universal Church, therefore, all hearts shared in another joy from God: the appointment of His Vicar in the brilliant figure of the new Sovereign Pontiff.

The first Houses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in America

March brought the good news that the Sisters in America had at last opened their House at Villa Colon, in a villa given them by Mrs. Jackson.

On February 3, the Salesian Director of Montevideo's Collegio Pio, Father Louis Lasagna, had

accompanied them from the Visitation convent to the little house prepared for them. It was a tiny house, poor, very poor, but rich in the [p. 303] Jesus came to take His abode in its little chapel. That was sufficient to make even a hut beautiful. They already had much work, and as soon as their knowledge of the new language permitted, they were to open a school and Oratory.

A month with the Visitation Sisters

The missionaries could not find words to describe the kindness with which the Daughters of Saint Francis de Sales had treated them, for which they were deeply grateful. In Sister Joan Borgna's account of it, there were some amusing incidents.

We were the nieces and the good Mothers the aunts; and like very lively inexperienced nieces, we gave some cause for anxiety occasionally to our beloved aunts.

The first worry was caused by Sister Teresa Gedda, with her headache, a gift received from the strong sunshine, while we were being taken in an open boat to Flores Island. The second trouble was the thick, heavy footgear we had brought from Mornese, little suited to the angelic step of the Visitandines. The third anxiety was occasioned by the suppressed laughter which escaped us, at most inopportune moments, when a phrase in the new language was not understood or badly pronounced. Lastly there was the daily Communion which we, poor little Sisters as happy as larks, received with such youthful ardor, which was the thoughtful admiration of the serious but most loving Mothers of the Visitation, not yet used to such Eucharistic frequency.

But, when one or other of our Salesian Fathers came to see us, to get us out of embarrassing situations and relieve both their Sisters in Don Bosco and the devout, holy contemplatives of Saint Francis de Sales of every scruple, then indeed we kept a feast in our hearts.

A few short visits to the city were afforded to each of us. However, we returned with sorrow, realizing that this wasn't the type of mission we had imagined! Well, if we [p. 304] are not yet missionaries among the savages of Patagonia or the Pampas, we shall begin—as Don Bosco said—to consolidate the kingdom of God among the faithful; to revive it in hearts that have abandoned it, then extend it among those who have not yet heard of it.

Father Cagliari at Mornese: more clothings

April brought Father Cagliari to Mornese on his first visit since returning from America.

The Sisters had made all sorts of preparations but it was evening already and hope of his coming began to wane. It was really terrible weather; the roads were covered with mud, and it was growing cold! Of course, they must have dissuaded him from the journey in Turin!

When it was already dark, and the boarders had been sent to bed earlier than usual to prevent

colds resulting from an unexpected fall in temperature, the Director General arrived. He came all splashed with mud and very tired. When he was somewhat restored he began to look around him, and then asked: "But how's this? Are there no longer any girls here?"

Sister Enrichetta ran to the dormitory and in a few minutes the lively girls, new and old were all around him anxious to meet him or see him again.

Even Emma was interested; she had heard so much about him from the Sisters and others.

A short, cordial exchange of greetings and the announcement that he had come as extraordinary confessor to prepare everyone for a holy Easter; then his usual refrain that he wanted a lot of work. as he had come for that. He added that they would have a beautiful clothing ceremony, postponed since Saint Joseph's feast owing to the absence of Don Bosco; and after a "Good Night" thought. all we to bed.

Father Cagliari's stay at Mornese brought blessing on the entire House. Emma went spontaneously to him. spoke to him for a long time and heard him say energetically: "Come, come, child, we are still in time!" She confessed as if in preparation for death, and received Jesus with visible emotion.

Father Cagliari's conferences to the Sisters were a commentary on the words the new Pope had addressed to Don Bosco in an audience on March 16: "Tell all the members of your

Congregation, in my name, that they should never forget the great grace God gave them in calling them to it, for in it they can do immense good for themselves and others."

He enkindled a fire of apostolic ardor in their hearts: all wanted to become really holy instruments of universal salvation.

He had many missionary stories to tell too, and from his audience there was a unanimous response: "We are ready to go to the ends of the earth!"

On the morning of the 4th he performed the clothing ceremony: the family of Mary Help of Christians counted thirteen extra novices.

In his closing talk to the community Don Cagliero wished everyone a happy Easter, in other words a happy Resurrection, though for the soul that communicates daily, every day is Easter.

Mother at Biella with Sister Emilia

After Father Cagliero had gone, Mother too left Mornese to visit the Sisters of Biella with Sister Emilia. Her visit was welcomed by all including Monsignor Leto.

The following day, on her return from Oropa, she received His Excellency, the Bishop, who came to return her visit. They were in the garden with the Sisters when he asked:

"This time, Mother, did you visit all the chapels of Oropa?"

"Yes, your Excellency."

[p. 306] "Also that of Sasso?"

"That one no, it's too far away for me, and I've got pains here," and she humbly indicated her sides.

This familiar gesture made the Sisters and Superiors slightly embarrassed, but the Bishop said jokingly: "Well, Mother, had you gone and leaned against the wall of the Sasso Chapel, your pain would have disappeared immediately. "

Later, alone with the Sisters he said: "What a good Mother the Lord has given you; imitate her, imitate her simplicity! "

You are right, you are right, Monsignor, someone answered. Our Mother is really good and simple; if we only knew how to imitate her in her least acts of virtue, we would certainly be very different. Last year, for example, coming from the station she didn't want to allow Sister Carlotta, who had gone to meet her, to carry her little suitcase: "Am I not a Sister like you?" she said. But Sister Carlotta having repeated her request, Mother replaced her humility with charity, and said: "Well then, take it... since you want me to give you this pleasure!"

Mother always made allowances for a Sister who was run-down in health, but became really serious when she saw some *grissini* (little biscuit-like sticks made of fine flour) being brought to table for the little community. The Sisters pointed out that they had not bought them; the economer of the seminary ordered all provisions. Mother held firm, and persuaded them not to introduce such delicacies: "How can I maintain the Sisters so delicately?" she said.

Again this time she found that the Sisters were not really happy, and complained about having too much to do. Sure of Don Bosco's idea, she said with a combination of goodness and firmness: "Dear Sisters, there is really a lot to be done, but work never frightened a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. If, however, someone has real difficulties she can express them freely. Our Father, Don [p. 307] Bosco wants this House to continue and is disposed to charge any Sisters who are not happy here. Courage, therefore! The retreat is not far off and the Lord counts every effort and sacrifice made for His love."

From Biella to Borgo San Martino

Mother was visibly tired on leaving Biella, yet her heart would not permit her to pass near her Daughters at Borgo San Martino, without stopping to greet them as she had promised.

She went to bring the light of her word, and the fire of charity with her example. She paid her

respects to the new Director, Father Belmonte. She spoke to each Sister individually and went to the kitchen for a moment to help the Sisters.

Sister Orsola Robustelli was head cook and had little time to speak to Mother but to relieve her disappointment Mother told her: "I've had a very good account of you from the Superior, my sister Felicina. I am very pleased with it so you can be at ease. Be very grateful to your Superiors who try to lessen the difficulties of your charge, and treat them always with the greatest respect."

In the conference she recommended piety and humility, and insisted on the necessity of being cheerful and sincere: "If we are sincere," she concluded, "even should we happen to commit some fault, it will be remedied easily."

The three days fixed for this visit simply flew, and Mother left for Mornese, where she found some Sisters ill.

Always attentive to the Bosco family she wrote to the father of the three girls: Maria, Eulalia and Clementina:

Dear Sir,

It is some time since you had news of your daughters, and as I know you would like to get news of them, I write these few lines.

[p. 308] Maria was in bed for eight or ten days; now she is better, but is slow in recuperating. Her appetite isn't good, and she has always been somewhat delicate.

Eulalia had erysipelas a few weeks ago, and is now better but not quite cured. They are both up, however, and continue their studies and their work. Clementina is well, keeps cheerful and studies hard.

You can rest assured that we are taking good care of them with regard to food and treatment. They unite with me in wishing you and your wife a happy Easter and all the choicest blessings of the Lord.

Believe me, in the Heart of Jesus,

Mornese April 17, 1878

Your humble servant,

Sister Mary Mazzarello, Superior of the Daughters of Mary Help of
Christians

The novice, Sister Teresa Guiot, dies

Sister Teresa Guiot, sister of a Salesian cleric, prepared the community for a new bereavement. She had been clothed in the previous December, and seemed called to more than ordinary virtue. Perhaps the flower had already beautified the earth sufficiently, and God saw fit to transplant it to the heavenly garden.

Mother was always beside her as if she hoped by her vigilance and attentions to infuse into Sister the life that was ebbing away.

But nothing availed: the dear novice went to heaven on Easter Sunday, April 21, to celebrate her eternal nuptials with the Risen Jesus.

To reawaken courage in depressed spirits the Director gave a splendid discourse at the Communion of the mass, on the love of God in the Blessed Sacrament. Recalling Father Cagliero's conference, he said that the life of every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians should be a continuous [p. 309] Communion, an uninterrupted union with the good God.

Early on the morning of the 23rd the community accompanied the remains to the last resting place, not to disturb the paschal joy of the people of Mornese, and to prevent as far as possible their noticing the frequency of these deaths in the school.

Month of May: "The Twelve Stars"

The month of Mary Help of Christians opened in an atmosphere of intense fervor.

The practice of the "Twelve Stars" in honor of Mary, introduced among the best boarders, was, on Sister Enrichetta's part, a happy expression of gratitude for the workings of grace in Emma Ferrero. She was now running with great strides along the way of the Lord. She was most attentive to the assistant's exhortations, who in each Good Night prepared the girls for another day of practical love for the Blessed Virgin. Her words had a warmth, her instructions an efficacy, which did not come from human wisdom, but from that which God gives to the simple and humble of heart.

The Sisters of the House were almost envious of the girls; and Mother: "If it is possible for you to go, do so by all means; go and hear her, then come and tell me what you have learned. Then, without Sister Enrichetta's knowing it we can compete with the girls as to who can give the most and the best to Our Lady."

They had in mind to do marvelous things for the feast of Mary Help of Christians but the prospect of Mother's departure for France on an uncertain day in the near future, prevented their fixing the date of the solemn celebration of Mary Help of Christians feast in the school.

[p. 310] Mother's letter to Maria Bosco

A reference to this intense Marian preparation is also found in Mother's letter to Maria Bosco.

Dear Maria,

Oh! How happy I was to receive your letter. May Our Lady be blessed for having restored you to health. She is a really good Mother, is that not so? Continue to pray to her with all your heart, especially during these days; we too shall pray for you, hoping that you will soon receive the grace of returning to the cozy nest of Mornese. Eulalia and Clementina are well and happy. Please tell your parents so. They are waiting for you, and everyday they go to find you in the Heart of Jesus; be careful that they find you there. All the boarders shout a cordial *Viva Maria*, to you; answer them aloud, so that they may hear you.

Your school friends thank you for remembering them; they are waiting for you to help solve those fraction

problems.

At the moment they are all very busy studying poems, etc. for the feast of Mary Help of Christians. The date of the celebration is not yet fixed.

Be good always, Maria. Be good to all: your parents, your sisters and brothers. Give good example to all that see you and pray with all your heart. Do you receive Holy Communion? Receive it with great love because Jesus loves you very much.

Take courage, look after your health. Get well soon so that you can return to us. Just one more advice: Be cheerful. If you are cheerful you will get better all the quicker. Courage, therefore!

Please greet your dear parents and tell them not to worry about Eulalia and Clementina, who are both well. They send you their greetings and ask you to tell your parents lots of beautiful things for them.

Sister Enrichetta and Sister Emilia greet you cordially and ask you to say *Hail Mary* for each of them, and three for me.

p. 311] It is within minutes of 10:00 p.m. so I will say "Good Night" and leave you in the Heart of Jesus, where I will always be

Mornese, 5-23.'78

Yours affec. in the Lord,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

From Mornese to la Navarre (France)

May was not gone yet when Mother left Mornese and, traveling by train, made brief visits to Alassio, Bordighera and Nizza-mare. She would proceed from there to La Navarre (France), regarding which Don Bosco had already been enlightened from on high.

Sister Emilia, who spoke French perfectly, accompanied her.

At Alassio she did not need much time to see to her relief that improvements had been introduced in the Sisters' poor apartments; they had been really necessary. But she found her Daughters overburdened with work, with a heavy timetable, owing to anticipation of rising time, and the hour of retiring often pushed as late as eleven o'clock and even midnight. Then taking in both hands her two characteristics of respect and humility she approached the perfect of the house and asked: "Does Don Bosco know about this timetable? If Don Bosco knows, well and good; otherwise see that it is readjusted."

Don Bosco too had passed through Alassio on the occasion of his last journey in France, and just as he talked to his Sons, so he did not neglect his Daughters. Animating them to strive for sanctity, he had told them: "The world expects us to be holy and if we commit a fault, does not readily forgive us, precisely because it expects us to be holy. Let us not make it think it is deceived, and let us try to sanctify ourselves really! Oh, yes, have a holy pride and say to yourselves: I want to be better than all the others. I don't **[p. 312]** want to demean myself by committing sin, no. Rather if necessary I want to die at work!"

So Don Bosco knew that the Sisters were overburdened with work and might have mentioned it to the local Superiors.

Before leaving Mother left her thought to the community: "We are still in the month of May, dedicated to our dear heavenly Mother. I feel we would be doing something acceptable to our heavenly Queen by reminding one another of the confidence and sincerity we should have towards Superiors, especially the confessor, precisely because confidence and sincerity are sure means of correcting our defects and advancing in virtue. Here too you have not yet celebrated the feast of Mary Help of Christians; prepare well for it, so on that day you may receive the grace of perfect sincerity and growth in perfection."

Father Ronchail was waiting for her at Nizza-mare. He was the Director of that House and Don Bosco had arranged that he accompany the Sisters to La Navarre.

This visit was considered necessary before deciding which Sisters would be chosen to do the work connected with the orphanage, and look after the Salesians engaged in the agricultural colony there.

It was a kind of orphanage for children of both sexes, and as there was plenty of land, the children could learn to be good, intelligent farmers. The founder and director was the beneficent Father Vincent, who for some time now had taken on as collaborators some good girls, making them "Tertiaries of Saint Francis of Assisi" with a monastic type of habit.

He had then divided them between La Navarre and Saint Cyr, the second center of his work, so they might be mothers to his poor adopted children.

Now, however, Father Vincent was old; his tertiaries had not found other companions and the Bishop of Frejus had asked Don Bosco to take charge of these abandoned children.

At La Navarre Mother was cordially received by Sister [p. 313] Maria Charles, one of Father Vincent's tertiaries, who had remained behind to keep and console the miserable House, even when an outbreak of typhoid had decimated her dear orphans and nearly all had been admitted to the public hospitals in the two cities nearby.

Poverty reigned supreme in that House, but if, as already stated, Don Bosco had been taken in spirit to La Navarre and Our Lady had confided this field of labor to him, it was a sign that it would be a blessed foundation and produce abundant fruit for heaven.

Having gone from La Navarre to Saint Cyr, where Father Ronchail stopped to direct the works of adaptation of the locale, Mother suggested separating boys from girls in these orphanages, to facilitate organization. True, it was a question—as she was told—of brothers and sisters; of poor children who had never known family affection, and who would never enjoy it. In any case the decision rested with Don Bosco.

Mother did not hide the fact that the Sisters would have to face the difficult situation of living with those who had always been in charge of the House and would still remain there. But if Don Bosco wished it...

Return to Mornese

Returning to Mornese by the same route, she called to greet the Sisters of Nizza-mare, Bordighera and Alassio. Here, obliged by doctor's orders to eat meat on a day of abstinence, Mother begged the Sisters not to be scandalized, but the Sisters found in her only motives of edification.

The ringing of bells greeted her return to Mornese: anything that could peal or tinkle, was used to express the joy of her Sisters on seeing her return. She was besieged with questions about the Sisters in faraway places: Were they keeping well? Were they becoming saints?

[p. 314] Conclusion of Mary's month anticipation of the Director's feast

It was already far into June, and Mother was surprised that Marian functions associated with the month of May still continued.

"Mother," they answered her, "how could we close the month of Our Lady without you? Could we celebrate the feast of Mary Help of Christians while her vicar was away? Besides the Director wanted to finish his program. He intended to comment on the invocations of the litany, one each evening. So he continued up to this point saying that Mother would not return until he came to: *Sub tuum praesidium*, (We fly to your patronage) or perhaps the *Oremus*. Now that you are back we shall see! He will probably unite the remaining invocations, and give a global explanation of the lot, without forgetting to introduce a thought of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in his own inimitable style. "

On the 18th the whole House was jubilantly ringing with festal songs for the Director, as he had already announced that he had to be in Turin for the actual feast day—June 24—on which day Don Bosco's feast was kept there. Mother too had been invited.

Fervent prayers were offered for him; and in the afternoon a simple, well-performed entertainment told him how much his work was appreciated by all at Mornese, and the immense good he was doing among the Sisters and girls.

On the following day the month was closed with the celebration of Our Lady's feast. Fervor was at a high pitch and found expression in an immense desire to console our heavenly Queen and through her the Sacred Heart of her Son.

[p. 315] Emma Ferrero becomes a consolation

During the months of May and June, Emma Ferrero had made real progress in piety and good example. She went to Communion frequently. Caprice was a thing of the past; no more grumbling. She spent all day in the weaving room, active and serene. In recreation she chatted good humoredly with her companions and with Sister Enrichetta. Visits to the trunk and contemplation of its idols were completely cut out. In fact she had begun to humiliate herself in front of her companions.

Some days previously she had seen a big hole in the orchard. The gardener had evidently uprooted a tree there. It looked like an open grave. The boarders passed by. Emma became pensive, went down into the hole and stretched out in it, telling her companions: "You can cover me with earth: I don't deserve anything else."

Some had tears in their eyes; and all understood that the poor girl was not speaking in jest, but from intimate conviction.

Jubilant departure for Turin; foundation of Chieri

On the 22nd, Mother, the Director and the Sisters destined for the foundation in Chieri set out for Turin.

For the present the Chieri foundation would have only an Oratory or workroom for the children of the working class people; Sister Felicina Mazzarello was to be the Superior.

The girls had already begun to assemble every day in the playground of the House now destined for the Sisters, where two good ladies, Carlotta Braia and Madelene Avataneo, looked after them. As it was Saturday it was considered advisable not to delay too long in Turin but to proceed to Chieri, and begin the work as soon as possible. Sister Elisa Roncallo who, at Don Bosco's request, had already gone to see the House, and arrange with Father Sala about the necessary **[p. 316]** changes to make it suitable for the Sisters, accompanied them.

The reception was most cordial, not only on the part of the two good and faithful ladies, but also on the part of a multitude of lively, well-disposed girls.

Sister Elisa returned quickly to Turin, for Mother Don Bosco 's feast. In her affectionate, filial, effusive way she gave a detailed description of their arrival in Chieri, their reception, and the outstanding features of the new House. She finished by saying: "Oh, no Mother, my name will no longer be Sister Elisa if I don't succeed in taking you to Chieri before you go back to Mornese."

To make her invitation attractive she touched on various points of history already mentioned in the *Salesian Bulletin* of the previous August:

They have put us, [she said,] in an ancient palace, and remember, Mother, that it was once the property of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga's mother. In one of its beautiful halls, it is said the angelic Saint Aloysius was invited to dance. On the other side of the street, beyond the garden, one can see the room where the saint went to hide and discipline himself rather than participate in the feasts. They say the marks of that innocent blood can still be seen on the wall; just imagine if you don't go!

The palace of the Marquis of Castiglione did pass to the Bertinetti family, but this makes it doubly sacred for us. Those good people, who loved Don Bosco very much, had frequently invited him to stay at their house, when as a student and seminarist he lived in Chieri. He also stayed with them on the occasion of the examination preceding his reception of the cassock, and later still as a highly respected, dearly loved priest. Then as they had no children, and were forever giving to charity, they decided to provide in a big way for Don Bosco, as they had already done for Cottolengo.

Another thing you must remember, Mother: Cottolengo made a prophecy about us once while he was staying in the Bertinetti home, saying: "Here I see Sisters with many young girls... and they will have many, many vocations!"

[p. 317] Mother at the Valdocco feast

Mother didn't say no, but in the meantime she remained in Turin where she could hear good news

of both past and present.

Besides, on the very next day the Salesian Oratory celebrated the feast of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, and she was interested in how they would keep it. On the same evening the Salesian family would begin the festivities in homage to their Reverend Founder and Father. She could not and would not be missing, no matter how humble and—according to her—how insignificant her presence. She wanted to show Don Bosco that this year she was near this dear father not just with her heart and soul and small gift. She wished to be present in person representing her Sisters far and near, with the individual and collective offering of all their good works according to his intentions.

From the place assigned her among a group of Sisters, she had a good view of all the filial, enthusiastic demonstrations of the Oratory. It was evident from her attitude that she participated intimately in the common joy of Don Bosco's Sons.

Mother reveled in the poetry of it all. She said she had learned much, especially simplicity of spirit, openness of affection, and the principle of using everything as a means of doing good, so that her Sisters actually fed her enthusiasm by their non stop questioning.

The Sisters of Turin tell of their contacts with Don Bosco

The Sisters, in their turn, told with joy and enthusiasm of their contacts with Don Bosco:

You should have seen, Mother, when Don Bosco returned from France. He had never been away from home for so long from December to April!

Then we learned that he had had great trials in Rome, and [p. 318] the wonderful things Our Lady did here and there through him and his prayers.

How great were our fears when they told us to pray because he was very ill at Sampierdarena! They were beside themselves with sorrow in the Oratory. Many remained in church all night praying to the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians for his recovery. They told us that many offered their lives to save Don Bosco's. Then we learned that he had been cured almost instantly! Even the memory of such events is touching.

In our little way we too wanted to express our great joy for his recovery, so we prepared our tiny parlor to receive Don Bosco and show him the things that "Madam Charity" had sent us . . .

We don't know how Don Bosco came to know of our preparations; but we do know that through it we learned a good lesson: "Oh, no, no! I won't go there where there are drapes, curtains and a sofa." Then we quickly reverted to Franciscan Salesian poverty!

When Don Bosco actually came he didn't even remember this fact; he seemed as fatherly as ever and asked us: "Have you many girls at the Oratory?"

And to our 'Yes' chorus he immediately added:

"How beautiful! We exist precisely for this great work; but be careful! To do good to the girls you must be always cheerful. You must love and esteem them all, even if one or other among them does not deserve it."

"Do they still come," he asked, "everyday after dinner, and in the evenings, when the factories close?"

He was delighted to hear us answer in the affirmative, and told us that there were many sins less, less evil learned in the streets, many good thoughts sown for the night and following day. Nor was this only among the girls themselves, but also the members of their families, because girls of any age love to tell everything they hear at home.

While we listened to those words, each of us repeated to herself one single conviction: our father is a saint! The Lord has really created him for the good of youth and to help Our Lady triumph in the hearts of all Christians.

[p. 319] To spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians

Once—in fact many times—we asked him how to make Our Lady Help of Christians more known and loved. And Don Bosco: "Speak opportunely about her to the young people Providence entrusts to us, and to others who approach us. Write a few words about her in every letter to relatives and acquaintances, inviting those who need special graces to pray to her. Tell of the favors we receive from her, distribute pictures and medals that bear her image. Recite and have others recite frequently the ejaculation: Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. Sing her hymns by preference during recreation, in church, and especially during the month dedicated to her. Advise parents to give the name Ausilia to babies in baptism. Solemnize her feast, not only in church but where possible with an entertainment or procession. Make gifts of her pictures to families,

parishes, and give her title to new foundations. . ."

Those answers, as you can well understand, were a real light and definite point of reference for us.

The *Bulletin* of June brought a description of the feast of Mary Help of Christians as celebrated this year: the illumination of the cupola, many pilgrims from faraway places, many confessors, yet still insufficient for the need, thousands of Communion, heavenly music and singing. Those who were not there to see and hear have no idea. How much good, how much good is done in our sanctuary in Valdocco!

Even in our own little chapel, the power of Mary Help of Christians is felt. We could not celebrate the feast before June 2 (first Sunday of the month), but on the two previous days we were all busy searching for whatever could serve for the feast in church, in the playground, on stage, and so forth. It was a question of celebrating three feasts in one; closure of the month of May and solemnity of Mary Help of Christians, feast of Saint Angela Merici patroness of the Oratory, opening of the month of the Sacred Heart!

[p. 320] **First members of the Sacred Heart Association**

Also on that day the first members were inscribed in the "Daughters of the Sacred Heart." There were just five: the very cream of the Oratory girls knelt before the tiny statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus all adorned with lights and flowers on His little altar.

The Director General seemed inspired by the Holy Spirit and spoke penetrating words: "The elect are but five," he said, "five drops of balm on the sacred wounds of Jesus." He animated those who were thus consecrating themselves to the Sacred Heart with holy enthusiasm that awakened emulation and desire in the others.

The Daughters of the Sacred Heart had followed a formula for their admission to the "Company," something like our own for clothing and profession. They too have a badge to distinguish them: a medal with the Sacred Heart on one side and Mary Help of Christians on the other, attached to a red ribbon. They have a rule or rather a few pages of regulations; in these are expressed the principal obligations of an associate:

- exemplary attendance at Oratory, catechism and religious functions;
- an earnest desire to improve one's conduct at home and outside of it;
- approach the Sacraments at least once a month, on the first Friday or first Sunday for a Communion of reparation;
- presence at the monthly meeting for the conference given by the Director or Superior of the Oratory;
- strive with true sisterly interest to lead as many children as possible to school, to the Oratory, etc.;
- love and sympathize with one another, help one another in charity, avoid evil and do good.

Any girl who really committed herself to all this and was faithful to it, could certainly be a great help in the Oratory and outside. She would become a precious element, even perhaps for the Institute.

[p. 321] **little Mother Roncallo**

Mother listened to these enjoyable accounts; and her eyes even more than her words revealed her maternal participation in the happy experiences of her Daughters.

Someone suggested:

What a pity Mamma Roncallo went away before these last wonderful days. When May came nothing could detain her even for a little longer. Her help was so useful! She worked all day cleaning, removing stains, mending the habits of the Superiors and other Salesians. She kept us cheerful, and if she saw anyone looking worried, she had grandmotherly ways that were so funny, one simply could not resist laughing.

But if, which rarely happened, she didn't at once attain her object a good pinch of her snuff ensured the victory. Don Bosco made much of her whenever he met her. Several times he dissuaded her from leaving.

When she went to say good-bye, he said: "But no, no! Stay yet awhile with your Lisa that we all love so much!" And the dear old lady obeyed, until the temptation of her dear Genova lured her from Turin! However, we often write little letters to her.

Mother at Lanzo

To satisfy her Daughters, and encouraged by Don Bosco, Mother finally went to Lanzo, and thence to Chieri. The heat had set in and Mother's physical weakness called for a tonic. She certainly never asked for it, but the hearts of her Daughters, especially in a House like Lanzo, were quick to see her need, and offered her a glass of good lemonade. "Is this drink for me? I'm

not used to it; it would do me harm. Consider it as though I had taken it, and may the Lord reward you." When at last she yielded to the Sisters' insistence and took it, she began to offer some of it to this Sister and that, and finished by barely tasting it. Thus her first lesson at Lanzo was the exercise of mortification, so frequently inculcated in her private and [p. 322] public instructions. She didn't leave the House without asking if they had the possibility of meeting Don Bosco when he came to see his Sons.

We meet him, yes, as much as we can! [Sister Saettone said.] As I was doing my work in the refectory he addressed me, saying: "Very good! But remember, you must give good example to all your sisters."

Coming to the kitchen, [added Sister Caspani], he said to us: "Martha and Mary! You are Marthas but you should also be Marys; and do you make the meals you serve them heavenly meals? It is not difficult, you know? It is sufficient that you sanctify them with right intention, with acts of union with the Lord and Our Lady, doing everything the best you can."

The Superior was shy of seculars. When on certain days such as feasts, they came to the school and also into the kitchen, workroom, or boys' linenroom, Don Bosco intimated there was nothing to fear-and that in fact, these were good opportunities to invite them to do good, if in no other way than by good example.

Mother drew the conclusion: "From all you tell me we can only conclude that our good Father is forever doing good, and we, who by a special grace of God, are His Daughters-shall we not do likewise? Yes, yes, let us live to become holy and win many souls for the Lord."

Mother at Chieri

On June 28, feast of the Sacred Heart, Mother went to Chieri for a pilgrimage. It did not seem real to her to kneel where dear Saint Aloysius Gonzaga had shed the first drops of his innocent blood. In her own heart she felt a renewed desire for mortification. Her Sisters, however, received her as a pledge of heavenly blessings. The day had been chosen for the inauguration of their work in this new field of labor, and they presented her with 250 working girls, a ripening harvest for Mary Help of Christians.

[p. 323] Emma Ferrero celebrates Mother's return to Mornese

Mother's return to Mornese marked the triumph of God's grace in Emma Ferrero. No longer able to resist the heavenly call to a perfect life, she made her decision with an act worthy of a saint. "What a strange way to celebrate Mother's return," some whispered. But those who were accustomed to the nobility and absoluteness of grace inspired behavior were not surprised.

Emma chose recreation time for her dramatic surrender. She dragged her famous trunk into the middle of the playground, and there, one by one she set fire to her letters, photographs, souvenirs, all her beloved trinkets . . . She was calm and serene as one obeying an interior voice.

Her companions looked on amazed, enthused. The Sisters could not guess the motive behind the action; the assistant looked on and encouraged her.

July 6 – Mother's feastday

Mother's feastday was celebrated soon after her return, and the postulants went into the boarders' refectory for the occasion. Before that large group of young people Sister Enrichetta dropped the bombshell saying: "What if tomorrow Emma should be among the postulants?"

On all sides there were exclamations of joy, but not of surprise because Emma had become so good that all the more serious-minded understood that something big was maturing in her.

On the following day in fact, when they saw her in chapel wearing the cape, they said with conviction: "She will be a holy Sister!"

The tradition of the outing to Tobio was honored after the feast of gratitude, the weather being

favorable. It was a day of great joy and family unity. Nevertheless, at the "Good Night" Mother manifested a suffering that the day had brought her: "Today, Sisters, we met a little girl, so [p. 324] ragged and dirty as to excite pity, and not one of you seemed to notice. We let her go on her way. That will not do; we are here for the poor, and when we meet them, we should be the first to offer them something, if only a good word or a thought of faith to help them bear their lot."

Mother's everyday charity

After resuming her ordinary work, Mother soon saw that Sister Enrichetta had not really recuperated. While she recommended her to prepare the girls to change schools, encouraging them to find more boarders during the holidays for Nizza Monferrato for the coming scholastic year, she asked her with maternal solicitude: "Is there no way we can cure your gastric illness?"

Always more solicitous for the good of others than for herself Sister Enrichetta answered: "And if I find it, will you send me to America?"

"No, Richetta, you stay here with me! But think if there is anything that will do you good, and tell me!"

Next morning Sister Enrichetta passing by the kitchen smelled something delicious frying. It seemed to be the very thing she needed. Meeting Mother soon after, she told her. Mother looking her straight in the eyes, and said good naturedly . . . "Go on with you! . . . that is just greediness, not the answer to a sick stomach! You take what they give you..."

Sister Enrichetta smiled as if to say: "You really caught me that time!" As she went away she told herself: "This severe goodness on Mother's part is better for me than all the fried food in the world. "

In her spare moments, Mother placed herself at the disposal of those who wished to confide to her their heart's secrets and problems. She showed ever greater affection, prudence and zeal for the glory of God, the religious perfection of the souls confided to her, and the salvation of young people.

[p. 325] She remained the same with no show of superiority. Still sitting on a bench in the workroom or on the stairs, she received all who came to her, listened and encouraged, incited the weak and uncertain to good, and those of generous will to greater good.

She knew what each one needed: "This defect costs you much effort and suffering to overcome it. I have it too, and know the strain of it! But let us take heart. Let us strive to fight it mercilessly. The Lord is so good, that he will let us into heaven, in spite of it!"

"Look, speak to the confessor only about this and such and be at peace with what he tells you, without thinking back on it anymore."

"You have told me things of this nature several times: I think it is better you finish with it. Take your courage in both hands, be on guard. Pray better, and you will see that you will no longer have the humiliation of falling so often. Here, take this nut and keep it in your pocket, to remind you that you should avoid the ugly habit of excusing yourself so often."

"But have a little more confidence in the goodness of our heavenly spouse! Of course, you should be more careful about silence! Do you remember what Father Cagliero told us? Without silence there is no recollection, no interior life; and therefore, no religious life! Also as you know, before leaving, Father Costamagna left us silence as his souvenir, saying to us: 'Think of it as a dear old friend who holds a gnarled stick in his hand to chase all the devils away!' Shall I make you a confidence? This thought remained so fixed in my mind, that one morning, not finding my bonnet, and not wanting to break the silence, I simply used a big handkerchief."

"Even if you see fruit go bad, it doesn't matter; it is better to let it go bad than to stain your soul by an act of gluttony. "

"Oh, my dear, you forgot what Father Lemoyne told us in a recent conference: 'Don't ask Jesus for tender love; ask Him for strong love.' "

[p. 326] The Sisters came away from a chat with her as from a well-made confession and with the sincere resolve to improve themselves and sacrifice themselves still more for the Lord.

After the last recommendations made by Don Bosco about the foundation of Nizza Monferrato, Mother felt that it would be a House very different from the others, one that would determine great events.

She spoke of it often among the Sisters, and said in public and in private that they must be ready for anything, even to leave Mornese. Some were pleased with the prospect, others suffered. She was working the land, straightening pathways, building character, strengthening wills and hearts, preparing people to carry out the big things Don Bosco had in mind, so as to give a sturdy, healthy, and secure foundation to the new House.

During her conference, as in the past and even more so, she asked one or another Sister to freely state the general failings of the community. She exhorted all to sisterly correction, to the perfect observance of the Constitutions, which were still in manuscript form only, and which she reverently kissed. She explained them in a simple, practical way, with frank, clear words, without fear of offending anyone, and without hurting anyone. She fought energetically against insincerity, excuses, superficiality, defects contrary to fraternal charity. She reminded all of their duty to live in the presence of God, right intention, avoidance of sin, even if it seemed inconsequential. She had moments of such holy unction and radiated such a heavenly light, that hearts were touched, and heads were bowed in the acknowledgement: "It is really the Lord who puts the words into her mouth."

Retreat for the Sisters

In August came the usual preparations for the Sisters retreat, excluding the ladies for it would entail too much work and delay the transport to Nizza of the poor furniture - [p. 327] it would require. The ladies would go to Nizza too next year, if the good Lord so provided.

In the meantime the Sisters who could be spared from the various Houses, and all the Superiors arrived. Besides the retreat there was to be a General Assembly. On the 12th Don Bosco arrived accompanied by Monsignor Belasio, a great admirer and benefactor of Salesian work, along with Fathers Cagliari and Joseph Leveratto, the preachers for the retreat.

The Sisters were thrilled to hear that Don Bosco would stay at Mornese for the eight days, and would preside at the closing function.

The retreat began on the evening of the 13th. Father Leveratto preached the meditations, then while the priest celebrated mass, Monsignor Belasio explained all the liturgy in such a way that the Sisters understood better than ever how precious the divine sacrifice was. He also found means of introducing the Madonna (whom he called the Madonnetta), proposing her as a model when assisting at mass.

Speaking of the gravity of sin he exhorted his listeners to repeat often, "Lord, cover me with Your cross; hide me within Your wounds." He repeated this as an introduction to his talks.

He occasionally threw out some questions, and waited for the response.

In his instructions on religious life, which were both theoretical and practical, Father Cagliari explained the little daily duties:

"He who despises little things, shall fall little by little," he repeated forcefully, and the intonation of "little by little" was a sermon in itself.

Don Bosco was constantly in poor health. Now very tired and exhausted he could no longer hear confessions or take on anything that required sustained effort and attention. Yet he took interest in everything. He spoke often with Mother Mazzarello, and with the Superiors; received the Superiors of the Houses individually, and the Sisters who were making their profession. More than one among them said she did not need to speak, because she felt that he read into her intimate needs. His words of peace freed herself immediately from every anxiety or perplexity of soul.

Special general meetings of Superiors

During the retreat Don Bosco had arranged that the Superiors of the Houses and others holding positions of authority—about thirty in all—should hold some special meetings to treat of the particular needs of the Institute. Father Cagliero presided at these meetings. After previous consultation with Don Bosco, he fixed the subjects for discussion and gave guidelines to the assembly for the most necessary and opportune deliberations.

In the first meeting they established norms of hygiene conducive to the preservation of health, for Sisters and boarders.

In the second the vital subject of self-sanctification, and cooperation in the sanctification of others was studied in depth. The means that most conformed to the end were indicated according to the spirit of the Institute.

The third determined the condition for acceptance into the Institute, with norms for the postulancy and the novitiate.

The fourth treated of the Exercise of a Happy Death; moderate silence during the day; suffrages for deceased Sisters; the part of dowry to be given back to professed members who left or were dismissed from the Institute; greetings and gifts to be sent on feasts and other occasions; deportment in chapel; and politeness as an effective means of doing good.

The last meeting established the personnel for the House of Nizza, to be opened in October, and for Chieri, where Don Bosco wished to establish a boarding school similar to that of Mornese.

The prospectus for the acceptance of boarders in both [p. 329] schools was drawn up.

Father Cagliero also mentioned a second missionary expedition. He gave them to understand that this would necessitate further changes of personnel and animated all to be generous for love of God and the Institute.

The minutes of this meeting marked an important point in the general organization of the life and activity of the Institute.

No slack in Mother's dedication

On days of such abundance of heavenly graces, Mother did not economize her spiritual treasures. In every free moment she was available to the Sisters. With no thought for self, she listened to all who came to her, encouraged the timid to approach her and gave them proof of her maternal goodness. Whether she was the center of a group of retreatants during recreation, or with the community assembled for the "Good Night," she was ever prepared to give of her best to all.

She was very conscious that she had before her a good group of Superiors and availed of the opportunity to stress some important points:

At different times and places we find ourselves in a situation where we have to deal with the confessor of the House, and the devil, who is very experienced, could use this to hinder our openness in confession. For heaven's sake dear Sisters, let us not be deceived! Let us accuse ourselves of our sins simply, without studying our way of expressing them, with the sole intention of revealing our state of soul to God's minister and to humble ourselves.

I have this very much at heart because I dreamed I saw a very sad looking angel. I asked him who he was. I had courage to ask this because it was a dream, you understand. . .

He answered: "I am the Guardian Angel of Sister ...who is in purgatory for having studied her words too much when going to confession .."

It was a dream, I repeat, but let us be careful!—In her witty way Mother tried to divert the attention of those who were too impressionable and continued— otherwise

Father Costamagna will come back from America and send us to hell!

Yet I feel the necessity of saying: Let us make good use of time, let us not lose a minute of it. Let us work with all our heart to earn a good place in heaven. Let us work for Jesus only. True religious piety consists in doing all our duties at the time and in the place assigned and only for love of God.

Let us practice virtue to be true spouses of Jesus, true Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and of Don Bosco.

The retreat finished on the 20th with twelve clothings, ten first professions, four renewals and eight perpetual professions.

"Everyone the same!"

The twelve new novices appeared with a beautiful white wimple and a longer veil. The others, under the porticoes—because the chapel was crowded—asked one another: "Are they making their profession? Are they all going to America?"

Mother smiled and: "Quickly, go to the dormitory and put on what you find on your bed."

In a matter of minutes a radiant group reappeared: they had each found a wimple and veil like the others. Don Bosco had asked one day why the novices did not have "the white thing." He had said: "Oh no, no. Everyone the same; everyone the same!" Now in obedience, the uniformity of form and color he had desired was in fact reached. Even the Sisters engaged in heavy work wore

the new veil and wimple on Sundays.

[p. 331] Precious fatherly souvenirs

Monsignor Belasio performed the clothing ceremony, assisted by Fathers Cagliero, Leveratto and Lemoyne. Among the new novices was Emma Ferrero, who seemed more in heaven than on earth.

Don Bosco received the vows. In his closing talk he spoke of holy obedience: "If you take the stitching from a sack, all the contents will fallout. So it is with a religious; if she hasn't the stitching of obedience she cannot keep any virtue, and ceases to be a religious. But if you are obedient, you will sing victory over all your other passions and you will hold the eternal palm in heavenly glory."

After the "souvenirs" the *Te Deum* was sung. Then, at the suggestion of Father Cagliero and with the wholehearted approval of the Founder, all the professed Sisters renewed their vows before the Blessed Sacrament exposed.

On coming out of chapel Don Bosco said to Mother Mazzarello who humbly approached him: "I would like to have two big posters under these porticoes: 'Mortification is the ABC of perfection' and 'Every minute of time is a treasure.' "

Before Don Bosco left they were already in the place he had indicated, to be read by the Sisters and serve to stimulate them to sanctity.

The Founder, the holy Father whose very shadow consoled and fortified, left Mornese. Would he come again? some were asking. Some were moved to tears at the mere possibility of its being his last time. All knelt for a blessing which could well be the last he would impart under the skies of Mornese.

Transfer of Superiors

While they were still making filial comment on the affectionate, significant farewell of Don Bosco, the rumors circulating about the change of Superiors were confirmed.

[p. 332] Sister Rosalia Pestarino already so happily settled in Bordighera, would yield her place to Sister Adele David, and go to Chieri. Sister Felicina Mazzarello would return to Borgo San Martino. Sister Madelene Martini was to stay on at Mornese, destined for the next departure for America. Sister Maria Maccagno would replace her as Superior in Biella. In communicating this news to her, Mother simply said: "You know the House already. You will remain in your Superior's place."

She told Sister Elisa Roncallo: "Stay here in Mornese for the moment. Your health will be the better for it. Then we shall see if the Lord wants you in Nizza. Turin will have Sister Catherine Daghero."

Nobody doubted that Sister Elisa would be sorely missed in Turin. However all were equally sure that Sister Catherine would be joyfully welcomed. Therefore, while the by-no-means light sacrifice had to be sweetened for the former, Mother sought to fight the humble timidity of the latter, who presented her inability to govern, especially in a House like that of Turin. Mother said to her: "You only have to continue Sister Elisa's work of depending for every thing from Don Bosco, those he appoints to direct you just as she did. You too will see what miracles Mary Help of Christians works."

The spiritual exercise at Turin

On the evening of the 24th the retreat, preached by Fathers G.B. Lemoyne and Savio, began at Turin. Mother was there; and to avoid possibly negative comments on the change of Superiors she did not give that news immediately, but in the private interviews and "Good Nights" disposed the Sisters to accept any House, Superior, or work, like good religious.

At the closing of the retreat on September 1, Don Boseo himself received the five temporary and the four perpetual professions, and again assisted at the collective renewal of [\[p. 333\]](#) the holy vows by all the professed Sisters on retreat.

In his short closing talk he again touched on the subject of religious obedience, adding the comparison of the handkerchief: "As it allows itself to be used when and how one wishes, accepting to be washed, ironed, crumpled up with. out protest, so must we in virtue of our obedience.

Do we want to be always cheerful? Let us be obedient. Do we wish to advance very far in sanctity and attain to a high place in heaven? Let us be always faithful to obedience, even in little things."

On coming out of church after the ceremony, silence was dispensed, so that the joy that was pent up in hearts might overflow. Sisters and girls gathered spontaneously around Sister Catherine who thus found herself taken into the office of Superior, amid tears of emotion and smiles of filial acceptance of the ever blessed will of God.

The Superiors and Mother were consoled, regarding it as a good portent for the future of the House and the Sisters.

Deep gratitude

Before the retreatants returned home the *Salesian Bulletin* carrying the program of the two new boarding schools for girls at Nizza and Chieri, was circulated among them. Mother availed of the occasion to express her profound gratitude to Don Bosco. "Dear Don Bosco!" she exclaimed, "He and his Salesians consider us part of their family! Our works would have neither life nor luck without Don Bosco and his Sons. Woe to us if pride ever makes us think we can do without them! We would be like a branch cut off from the vine, nothing more. "

[\[p. 334\]](#) Apostolic development of the Daughters of the Sacred Heart

A few days longer in Valdocco gave her a spiritual uplift, encouragement for the new Superior and the Sisters, and an opportunity to see the wonderful progress of the "Association of the Sacred Heart" among the Oratorians.

In her zeal for souls Sister Elisa Roncallo had proposed to imitate Don Bosco as far as possible. Having heard of his paternal interest in the poor youths detained in the Generale (prison) she had gone to speak with the Superior of the Sisters in charge of the feminine detainees of the city.

She then obtained permission to visit them, to relieve their unhappy lot with a kind word. She had imagined they would be miserable in every way. But when she found each one distinguished by a number on the cap, with a badge that indicated her crime, she could not restrain her tears.

She had words of sympathy for those who seemed least rebellious. She received confidences from some others; and on hearing their cold, or passionate recital of certain wrongdoings she exclaimed: "But how could such a thing . . .? No, no. You will never do it again, will you? And when you leave here, come to Saint Angela's Oratory in Valdocco. We will find a job for you, teach you to live like good Christians, and you will be a different person!"

Back home it was only natural that she should manifest her sad impressions, exhorting Sisters and girls to help her save so many poor adolescents already on the road to evil, or about to fall prey to the most devastating immorality.

The Daughters of the Sacred Heart were always ready to offer themselves for any work of salvation. Hence the spontaneous initiatives of Christian apostolate both within the Oratory and outside it, and the rapid increase in the membership of the Association. It was like the growth of a good seed under a soft spring rain.

The weekly conferences of the Superior, and the monthly and occasional ones of the Director to members only, [p. 335] were an exchange of news, of intentions, of proposals for the good of souls. The leaven was producing good bread and Don Bosco, from his little room and from his sanctuary encouraged and blessed it.

How consoling to *see* among the Daughters of the Sacred Heart the disinterested, dedicated effort to orient the best among their companions to high ideals and prevent the more dangerous from becoming a source of scandal to the unwary.

The secret of success lay in their weekly Sunday evening meetings where in chapel they renewed their consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. At those meetings they heard the divine appeal: "I thirst" and lived it during the week, in their apostolic activity.

Although Sister Elisa had sown the first seeds of this good harvest, Mother, in her profound humility added: "Yes, yes! All this is most consoling, most consoling, but let us remember that we owe it all to the teachings of Don Bosco and his Sons. Let us never forget to thank Our Lady that on making us her Daughters, she confided us to a saint like Don Bosco."

From Turin to Mornese and on to Nizza Monferrato

Mother left Turin in mid-September wishing to be back at Mornese before the transfer. She cheered the hearts of Mother Petronilla and Sister Elisa by arranging for them a shopping trip to Genoa, and a visit to Mama Roncallo. They would then go to Turin for spiritual refreshment before proceeding to Nizza.

Monday, September 16, was doomsday for Sister Enrichetta Sorbone, the Economer Sister Joan Ferrettino, Sisters Ermelinda Rossi, Maria Fiorito and Teresa Moretta. All were in tears at the thought of leaving Mornese and all it held for them of sacred and desirable. "Why are you crying?" Mother said, bravely struggling to keep back her own tears, "I too will come to Nizza and then we [p. 336] shall be together as long as God wishes."

They went to put the House in order. They would wage the first battle with its interior chaos—and with unknown surroundings.

Don Bosco was waiting for them at the station. He accompanied them to the convent and provided them with the strictly necessary, while they awaited the arrival of their scarce furniture from Mornese.

A little more than a week later Mother Petronilla and Sister Elisa Roncallo arrived from Turin. Mother Petronilla, usually very staid, came alive to tell of all their experiences:

This time I'm going to talk! At Turin we saw and enjoyed all we could and traveled with Don Bosco from Genoa to Turin. Yes, my dears, really with him and the other Superiors who accompanied him! True, we didn't get to speak to him except at the station at Alessandria, but anyway we felt him near. Father Rua and even Father Cagliero and Father Cays behaved as if they didn't recognize us, but we took courage, and went

to pay our respects to him while waiting at the station. He showed his appreciation, like a kind Father. He made us come into the waiting room with them, and chatted with us until the train arrived, interesting himself in everything, especially in the new House and the work waiting there. Among other things he recommended us to pray for our benefactors, and on arriving at Nizza to pay a visit as soon as possible to Countess Balbo. I asked him:

"Father, how shall we visit a countess?"

And he, laughing:

"Go, go; she is one countess that won't cause you embarrassment; she is very good!"

When the train arrived, naturally we went towards the same compartment as Don Bosco, not to lose a minute of his company, but the Superiors with him signed to us that it was not opportune. Don Bosco caught on, and immediately invited us into his compartment. When it was time for us to alight, he gave us his blessing, also for all of you.

Mother Petronilla and Sister Elisa soon set to work, with the group of Sisters that had preceded them. They kept an eye on the workmen, cleaned up after them as [p. 337] much as they could, and cleared up the playground so they could begin at once to receive the girls of the place and of the surrounding locality.

They came to see the Sisters, to enjoy themselves with them and learn something useful, and proved more than willing to give a hand, so that both sides profited.

After the indispensable cleaning up, Mother Petronilla and Sister Elisa remembered that visit recommended by Don Bosco, to the Countess Balbo. He had said to go soon, and in any case, it would be one thought less.

First visit to Count Balbo

They presented themselves in Don Bosco's name, asking to be introduced to the Count and Countess. The Founder's name caused them to be received not as poor Sisters, but as important people, and with touching, humble goodness. "Don Bosco remembered us!" the Countess kept repeating.

They also met the Mother Countess, widow of Count Bosnasco, always most generous to Don Bosco and a mother to his orphans. She was the first to ask them how they were getting on in the ruins of the convent, how the people of Nizza were taking them, and how they would manage to have things ready for the beginning of the scholastic year.

Still timid yet encouraged by her motherly interest, the Sisters answered with charming simplicity:

The first night we were really afraid in the place, and without the Branda family, who surrounded us with all sorts of attention, we would certainly have been in a state of nerves!

The work load too was discouraging—enough to make us weep. But after a while we took heart and then somehow our strength multiplied. Then the girls and some ladies from the city came and still come to spend recreation with us: that jli to sweep, carry away the rubble and so on—all of us work happily!

[p. 338] At night while we wait for the furniture from Mornese, we make do with what Don Bosco sends us from Turin and whatever good people donate.

"And for your meals, dear Sisters?"

Oh for what! We have what we need. Providence knows

that we are in the world and inspires Father Bisio to send us something, and other persons too. Other unknown people lower gifts over the vineyard wall. They seem really heaven sent!

A return visit

The two Sisters did not return empty-handed, and within a week the Count and Countess Balbo came to visit the convent. They went through the whole place and saw everything, especially the poverty which bordered on misery. The Countess remarked to the Count: "The poor things, they really haven't a thing! At breakfast, they eat polenta to save bread! Look, that's all they have for a bed!"

The Count lowered his eyes and didn't answer, perhaps not to make the Sisters blush. For them this state of poverty was as natural as comforts are to the rich.

When taking leave the Countess said to Mother Petronilla: "Order anything you need to my account in Mrs. Cairo's store in the city. We will pay the bill." And shaking hands, she slipped her a hundred-lire note.

The work is speeded up

Next day some strong fanners came to work the land. They were tenants of Count Balbo, who did not consider it beneath him to supervise the work himself, ensuring that all was done to the advantage of the House. His thanks? A nice letter from Don Bosco, which was so appreciated that the Countess told the Sisters about it immediately.

Almost at the same time the architect Buzzetti arrived [p. 339] from Turin to direct the work on the House. He was charitably assisted by the consulting accountant, Louis Terzano and some good workmen from Nizza. A new reinforcement of Sisters arrived at daybreak from Mornese to

increase the workforce. Everything contributed to step up the work of restoration.

Foundation of La Navarre and first news

The new House at La Navarre, France opened on October 2. For the moment Sister Rose Fecchino as Superior, and Sister Maria Gariglio were sent from Mornese to staff it. The already mentioned tertiaries of Father Vincent were on the spot and could be considered part of the community.

News arrived soon in Mornese and Mother did not withhold it from the Sisters. At La Navarre the Sisters slept under a roof which often dropped huge lumps of mortar on their heads, as well as rain when the weather was bad. Instead of the happy sound of children at play, they heard the wind whistle through the cracks in the walls. Mice and bats come out of their holes at night to play about in the cracks around the rooms and chase each other up and down the rickety stairs—in a word they took over for the night! Try as they might the Sisters couldn't clean up all the rubbish and the sight of those poor ragged, hungry orphans, moved them to tears. Yet they did not wish to bother the Superiors for the bare necessities. They too must get used to begging.

First clothing in America

News came to Mornese that at Villa Colon they had had the first clothing on December 8: it was the Uruguayan novice, Sister Laura Rodriguez. They wanted to dress her in white as was now the custom at Mornese, and not having the wherewith they had surpassed anything Mornese had ever done, putting on her a brand new. . . petticoat.

Hopes from overseas were beginning to look bright.

News from Nizza

Application had been made to the scholastic authorities for permission to open the school at Nizza Monferrato but was initially turned down. The request was renewed, but the answer was long delayed, causing much frustration. Prayers were multiplied for this intention, because October was fast approaching and the boarders had all been notified.

In the midst of these difficulties thoughts naturally turned to the Sisters of La Navarre: "They are worse off than we," the Sisters of Nizza said, "and they are more generous. Oh let us go forward joyfully; we are in Our Lady's House, and soon things will take a turn for the better! "

Don Bosco in fact, sent from Turin some good iron bedsteads; some Sisters offered to go to the nearby farms to shuck corn, in return for the husks. To get the sacks for the mattresses they accepted the kind offer of the Countess. More than once she had repeated: "Tell Mrs. Cairo to

send whatever you need, and I will pay for it. "

Finally, the young ladies of Nizza graciously offered their services to stitch the mattresses, bed curtains, etc. Outstanding among them were the Terzano sisters. The Sisters had borrowed a sewing machine which was always working feverishly.

With such proofs of the intervention of Divine Providence, who could slacken in the work or complain about the inevitable discomforts?

The strongest Sisters were still helping the workmen to repair the rooms, especially the chapel, which Don Bosco wanted readied as soon as possible. Then it would be blessed and so relieve the community of the grave inconvenience of having to go to the parish for mass.

It was indeed an inconvenience: the Belbo quite frequently overflowed forcing them to climb the steep hill to the top of the vineyard, take the Vaglio road, then descend from there by a roundabout path to the Church of Saint John for Sunday mass.

Welcome visits

From time to time one of the old friars came back, to see his old home being restored. He rejoiced to see it, and evoked many memories of the past.

On the branches of the huge elms in the avenue little birds flew about and chirped. For a quarter of a century they had not been heard there. Now when the Capuchin passed they seemed to intone the *Gloria Patri* with him at the end of each psalm as he said his Office.

Sister Elisa wrote to her mother from Nizza on October 18: "Our Lady's House is most beautiful; the church is splendid; the people so kindly, that the Countess Balbo, while staying in her country house actually gives them French lessons in return . . .

We are doing well then, and the church is ready!"

Mother Mazzarello goes to Nizza for the blessing of the church

Of course, no artistic decoration embellishments had been done; for that there would be another time! It had been put in order, for Jesus to come and take possession of His own. The solemn blessing was arranged for Sunday the 27th.

Mother Mazzarello arrived for the occasion. She would willingly have remained in her dear Mornese, but the Sisters insisted, and Father Cagliari told her that Don Bosco would want her at Nizza on that day.

She arrived on Saturday with Sister Emilia Mosca, who for good reasons had persuaded her to take a carriage from [p. 342] the station to the door of the convent.

At the meeting of the two avenues, which lead, one to "La Madonna," the other to the so called Bruna, Sister Emilia put out her head and looked about as if to find her bearings. Two cordial and very polite little girls drew near to ask: "Are you going to 'La Madonna,' Sisters? We are going there too. We go to 'La Madonna' everyday!"

They were the two Cairo girls, Angelina and Sophia. Once at the entrance to the ex-monastery, they gathered from the reception given the two new arrivals, that they were Superiors. They ran home to their mother with the news. With characteristic generosity, she immediately dispatched two mattresses. Later she sent their dinner, already prepared, to the convent.

The ladies in the House gave Mother a reception that showed how greatly they desired to meet her, for the Sisters had spoken of her with such affection. The reality far surpassed expectation when it came to the Oratory girls who accepted the Sisters' invitation to assemble outside the parish church to greet her. Almost three hundred of them came.

The young girls of Nizza were won over by Mother's simplicity, by her very austerity, and continually sought her company.

Blessing of the church and feast for the people of Nizza

The Director General solemnly blessed the church, then sang mass, assisted by many Salesians who had come from Turin.

The *Schola Cantorum* of Valdocco and the band also came: serene, happy young boys, who after singing to the glory of God with exemplary fervor and recollection, swarmed joyfully among the vines enjoying the liberty of a day in the country.

There was an immense crowd from the parishes round about. There were also some rowdies, unused to the company [p. 343] of good, simple Sisters. Forgetting that they were on other peoples' premises, they caused such commotion on the square that Father Cagliero was forced to raise his voice to keep them in check, even during the sacred function.

Along with the authorities, the Countess Balbo was among the invited. After mass she withdrew, perhaps in fear of being thanked publicly. In fact she had been extremely generous also on this occasion.

On hearing from Don Bosco that several priests would come from Turin, and that the clergy of Nizza were also invited to dinner, she sent all they might need in the matter of tablelinen, cutlery, serving dishes, food of every kind, even to the details of fruit, sweets and dinner and after dinner wine. With her encouraging smile she said to Mother Petronilla: "Serve plenty of everything, you can send back to me anything that won't be of use to you." In the evening, they held Vespers, solemn benediction and a very simple program which everyone enjoyed.

The people of Nizza were delighted with it all, and praised Don Bosco to the skies. They were particularly happy with the pamphlet of Father Francis Arrigotti *History of the Convent and Sanctuary of Our Lady of Grace* published for the occasion. They recalled the beautiful circular of the preceding March written by Don Bosco to the Salesian Cooperators, and the sad impression left in his mind by the sight of the profanation and derelict state of God's house. It drew from him the exclamation: *Misericordia!* (Lord, have mercy!) Then he had added: "Yes, yes, but the good people of Nizza will again have their church dedicated to Our Lady."

At the end of the day they expressed their regret that Don Bosco had not been present for the feast. They would have wished to express a thousand times to him their deep gratitude. They were grateful also for his having kept the title "Our Lady of Graces" which their ancestors had treasured, for the convent from which so many blessings and consolations had come to their city, especially in times of disaster.

[p. 344] First vocation from Nizza

On the 29th Miss Maria Terzano entered as postulant. She had come to the workroom on the pretext of learning to sew, but in reality had spent all day sewing for the Sisters. To know good and love good, to experience the goodness of the Sisters and feel attracted to it had been one and the same for her. When she met Mother Mazzarello, she spoke to her, held her hand and heard her say in a tone of deep conviction: "So you love Jesus? Do you really love Jesus very much?" From that point one thought predominated in her mind-to consecrate herself to God without delay and without allowing herself to be influenced in the least by the opposition of her relatives.

Their prayers and tears, the authoritative words of the family doctor, who considered the resolve far too hastily taken, her delicate physical constitution and tender age, the wise reasoning of her mother, all, all were of no avail in dissuading her from her intent: "Jesus wanted her, and she wanted to belong entirely to Jesus."

The first flower of the House of *La Madonna* bore the holy Virgin's name. Wasn't that a good omen?

The Mornese boarders go to Nizza; the new Director

On Thursday, the 31st, a little after sunrise, a carriage took a joyous lot of young girls from Mornese to Nizza. Only those who could pay the fee or were destined for a regular course of study were in the group. The others, the so-called *figliette di casa* or "house daughters" remained at Mornese.

Thus it had been arranged at the recent meetings. Their arrival was a jubilant occasion.

"We must give a good breakfast to these little pixies," the Sisters who accompanied them said. "They lost their sleep, felt cold during the journey, and spared themselves no laughing or chattering all the way; therefore a hot [p. 345] breakfast and off to bed until noon."

Breakfast was served immediately; but they wouldn't hear of going to bed. There were things to see and places to explore in the new House—the blessed House of Nizza, so desired and feared at the same time!

The supplications and promises of the lively boarders were indulgently met and the House rang with their laughter and exclamations of delight.

Through the garden, up the uncultivated land, across the vineyard they filed, chattering, laughing and singing. But they went in groups, just for safety and in case they met "something dead."

"Watch out! This was the cemetery!"

"But didn't they exhume all the remains in '71? . . ."

"Yes, but something always remains, and excavating . . ."

"I heard that the dead monks here had been removed when the monastery was taken over by the wine people. All the city turned out for the removal to the cemetery. The parish priests, the municipality, the various religious organizations and corporations—in fact all the people."

"Just imagine, how impressive it must have been! The old people say that many were crying, and some even foretold that misfortune would fall on Nizza."

"Oh, but now it has all been remedied by Don Bosco and our Sisters! " "Listen, don't go over there to disturb the workmen. Don't you see they don't want to waste a minute!" "Be careful yourself, going in there amidst all the rubble!" "Look, look how solid the walls are!"

"Oh, unless they were, no stone would have remained of them."

"They say the church looked like a den: the altars destroyed, the floor tom up and the walls and dome all musty!" "But let us not think only of the ugly things: let us rather think that now we have a beautiful church, big [p. 346] enough to seat all the Sisters Don Bosco ever saw or counted."

On November 5 Don Bosco sent the Salesian, Father Stephen Chicco, to exercise his sacred ministry in the school, with the title of local Director. The cordial reception given him made him feel at once that he was in a family where formation would respond to the hopes of Don Bosco.

Other problems solved

The scholastic approbation, anxiously awaited, also arrived. Mother didn't need to exhort the Sisters to thank God for this. They all were very much alive to the fact that all their good fortune derived from being Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco.

The family had grown; the needs had increased. From the farm of Count Balbo came a big cart of wood, and a fine cow to provide for the breakfast of the community.

Another group from Mornese

In the second half of November, another small group, headed by the Director, Father Lemoyne, came from Mornese. It comprised three Sisters and the boarders Gamba and Pentore. These latter had prolonged their holiday until the feast of All Saints, and so missed the transfer of the school. Finding themselves lost up there, they had begged to be united with their companions in the city.

They arrived at Nizza in festal attire, but the day was so densely foggy and cold, that their companions made fun of their white aprons, which looked out of place in the winter weather. However, they had such joy in their hearts that they took all the teasing in good part and even teased back!

They soon realized that a "new House meant a new life," in the form of certain disciplinary measures which [p. 347] it had been possible to sidestep in Mornese. They studied more in consequence, and talked less. They listened to explanations, more or less correct, given by

companions; they made bold to ask the why and wherefore of things of the Sisters, and if they made some mistakes, they were quick to say: "We do not yet know how things are done at Nizza! We will soon learn, you will see!"

It was really like that: Nizza was not Mornese. From the general meetings held during the last retreat many new rules had been passed regarding the boarders, according to the Salesian system and the requirements of the times.

Besides, the change of House lent itself to the implementation of the innovations considered necessary.

New titles for Superiors resulting from General Meetings

In 1874 Don Bosco had said that the title "Mother" given to those who helped the Superior in the government of the House, could be followed by the Christian name of office. Thus, Sister Felicina Mazzarello, instead of being called "Mother Assistant"—title used by the Sisters of Saint Anne, for their General Counselors—was simply called Mother Felicina. Following her departure to be Superior at Borgo San Martino, and the death of Sister Maria Grosso, who had assumed the title of Mother Mistress, the change of title should have followed for the two substitutes: Sisters Emilia Mosca and Enrichetta Sorbone, since 1876.

Instead, the older Sisters continued to call them by their names: Sister Emilia, Sister Enrichetta. The younger members and the boarders usually called them with affection and respect: "Mother Emilia," or "Mother Assistant:" and "Mother Enrichetta." Mother was always just "Mother" (*la madre*) for everyone.

When Father Cagliero returned from America, and saw the two new Counselors in the Superior Chapter he had said [p. 348] jokingly: "You are really a lot of *masnà* (children), and if the title doesn't give you a bit of importance I don't know where you will get it!"

Then without changing his tone or in the least imposing himself, he again repeated what, as president of the meetings and with the full consent of Don Bosco and the Superiors, he had concluded the previous August: "From now on Mother Mazzarello should be called *Mother* by all, Sisters and girls, or *Mother Superior* or *Mother General*. Also the title *Mother* will be given to the other members of the Chapter, by all, Sisters and girls.

From today on, therefore, we have: Mother Assistant or Mother Emilia and Mother Enrichetta, just as we already have Mother Petronilla and Mother Economer."

Innovations for the boarders too

In the last meetings the disciplinary rules for a House of education were clarified: a well-planned timetable; fidelity and constancy in following it; knowledge and practice of the norms of good manners. These are essential for one consecrated to the Christian and civil formation of youth.

Of secondary importance, but not out of place: the advisability of some modification of the boarders' uniform, to meet with the approval of parents.

All this, expressed authoritatively and accepted in a filial way, was translated into practice with that desire for religious perfection which inspired all the activity of those concerned, and all together seemed to be geared towards a new style of life. The new arrivals, far from losing their way, made the best of it, and in their hearts experienced a foretaste of the advantage it would bring.

[p. 349] Mother Petronilla provisional Superior at Nizza

Mother Petronilla was nominated provisional Superior of the House. Sister Elisa was given the thought of public relations, of the parlors, of correspondence with boarders' parents depending from the Superior, who would not hinder her operations and yet would "keep her humble,!—so Mother said—in view of her youth and inexperience. The general assistance of the boarders and

direct responsibility for their moral and practical formation was given to Mother Enrichetta, who had already given proof of outstanding ability in the exercise of that office, and of winning the affectionate esteem of the girls she assisted. Sister Rose Daghero was for the moment entrusted with the overall thought of the school. There were, of course, many other Sisters of goodwill and exemplary spirit of sacrifice, who were ready to help out in all these areas, and in the order of the House.

At Nizza too they work for Valdocco

Father Rua's mother, who had been a second Mama Margaret for Don Bosco's little urchins, had died in '76. Other pious and noble ladies of the city had continued her work of patching and renovating church linen, and the personal things of the Salesian Superiors, but understandably they couldn't cope with all the boy's garments. The boys were many, in need of everything and seemed made especially for tearing everything they put on.

It was easier to transport things to Nizza than to Mornese. There were many mouths to feed and the big expenses claimed a financial help which couldn't be expected to fall from heaven. Therefore sacks of tom garments were also welcome at Nizza, and expressed Don Bosco's fatherly concern for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and his goodness of heart. Yes, this also was a means of lessening the debt contracted with the Salesian Oratory, from which practically all its maintenance came.

[p. 350] Diocesan approval

The Director General communicated to Father Chicco that he had received diocesan approval for the full exercise of his sacred ministry to the community at Nizza.

Father Chicco conveyed to the Sisters the kindness of the Ordinary, Monsignor Sciandra, in emphasizing catechetical instruction and the Oratory apostolate as an excellent help to parish priests.

Opening of the House of Quargnento

On November 21 the House of Quargnento opened. The Director General accompanied the three Sisters destined for the new foundation: Sisters Anna Tamietti, Superior, Angelina Buzetti and Rose Josephine Tamietti, a novice.

They would begin a kindergarten, workroom, and Oratory .

Mother returns to Mornese

Having set things in motion in Nizza, Mother returned to Mornese with Mother Assistant towards the end of November.

Several young girls of Nizza, already conquered by her goodness, would have followed her. She, however, took only two, one of whom was the already mentioned Maria Terzano.

For the novena in honor of Mary Immaculate, Mother Mazzarello arranged to have a more solemn celebration than ever at Mornese. If the first House of the Congregation had to die--and who didn't feel it?-let it go out singing one final harmonious song of love to Our Blessed Lady. There was to be a solemn novena then, and for it Father Cagliero arrived in the pitch dark "on all fours" (to use his own expression) up through the stony, muddy banks, stumbling **[p. 351]** forward and more often than not mistaking the turnings. But on December 8, there was the most solemn function imaginable with clothings and professions, temporary and perpetual.

Feast of Mary Immaculate The Terzano family at Mornese

On December 7 the Terzano parents, accompanied by their daughter, Adeline, went to Mornese to play the part of the tempter of their beloved. Maria. They were received with great affection and instead of winning were completely won over themselves. They stayed for Our Lady's feast, and another day. They even consented to allow Adeline to remain for a few days, which invitation Mother had warmly extended, that they might be completely convinced that Maria was really happy.

The attention and solicitude of all the Sisters were lavished on the young girl. Mother Mazzarello herself couldn't have done more.

They took me to the Superior's table, [she said on re. turning from Mornese] a table which was exactly the same as all the others. And if at any time something better was served to Reverend Mother: "Take It," she would say, "take It to my Marietta," to my sister, you know, telling her to be obedient and eat It.

Life at Mornese was very difficult, especially in winter, which cut off all means of communication with the towns round about. Often it was a case of making a virtue of necessity, adapting to difficult circumstances and going without many things available in other seasons. But the example of the good Superior drew all after her. The thought of her claimed priority over personal wellbeing for each one of her Daughters. Her glance went from one to the other. She inquired about the weak Sisters, about their appetite, and since love predominated, all accepted willingly the privations of every hour and the sacrifices of every day. The intense flame of divine love that burned in Mother Superior, [p. 352] shone through to the exterior. I noted myself that on meeting anyone in need of a word or encouraging look around the House or at recreation, she would hold her hand warmly in her own saying with special unction: "Do you love Jesus?" On getting an affirmative answer, she would say: "Then shout with me: Viva Gesù!"

Mother studied in depth the characters of those girls whom the Lord had entrusted to her. Hence she became aware of their silent suffering, of their needs and even their momentary difficulties.

That which most cost my sister—a very lively girl, barely seventeen—during the first days of trial, was the observance of silence. She even seemed to suffer physically on its account. Well, Mother Mazzarello had already called her and said: "I see you suffer from not being able to talk a little at your work. I allow you, therefore, to say some words in an undertone to whoever is near you." And my sister: "Oh, dear Mother, it's the greatest gift you could give me!"

I was very happy at Mornese; when I returned, my father had hoped to have Maria back with me, especially as the mountain air wasn't in the least helpful to her state of health. But nothing would move her: neither father's authoritative words, nor the prayers of her elder sister, not even Mother Superior's promise to count the postulancy as already complete, and readmit her after Easter! Her refrain never changed: "Jesus brought me here, and He will think of all the rest. "

This account is but a pale reflection of life at Mornese.

Clothings and professions at Mornese with Father Cagliero

The feast celebrated on December 8 was crowned with fifteen clothings, nine first professions and three final professions. Among the new novices Sister Madelene Morano stands out. Our Lady had preserved her in the midst of the world with a love of predilection, and Sister Elisa Roncallo had hastened to entrust her to the care of Mother Mazzarello.

[p. 353] She was an elementary teacher, already thirty-one.

Family obligations had prevented her thinking of herself before then; but she was a special soul. Superiors of both sections of the Salesian family recognized in her one who could be of great help to the Institute. The town had just nominated her as substitute for Sister Rose Tamietti, who had taught first at Mornese, then Lu and now Nizza.

Among those clothed, four pronounced the formula of the holy vows, being chosen to form part of the second missionary expedition to America: Sisters Victoria Cantti, Catherine Fino, Maria Magdalene and Josephine Vergnaud.

With inspiring words Father Cagliero had prepared them for detachment from everything, for the sublime conquest of souls, far away from their own country among savage peoples. Great was the

enthusiasm awakened in all who assisted at the ceremony.

Little flowers of Mornese

The Mornese community, increasing in numbers, continued its way along the road to sanctity in the footsteps of Mother Mazzarello.

Some episodes bear eloquent testimony to this. A few weeks before, the postulant Rose Cordara, a good simple girl who helped the cook, was told to put a little piece of meat on Mother's plate, as she was anything but well at the time. Mother glanced around and seeing that this wasn't being served to the community told the postulant to take it back to the kitchen. Rose stood there speechless, red in the face, yet lost in admiration of the unexpected rejection which made her think: "What a blessed Mother, why won't she eat it?"

Some days later she came into the refectory with a beautiful apple, sure that this time Mother would accept. Mother took the apple with a smile expressive of her thanks, then divided it into parts and distributed them to those near her. "And you?" Rosa asked in wonder, "nothing for [p. 354] you, Mother?" A smile of comprehension from the Sisters was her answer, and the postulant went to her place murmuring aloud: "She thinks of everyone but herself."

It was bitterly cold. To give Mother some relief in her poor state of health, the Sisters wanted to buy her a pair of shoes lined with fine leather. A great luxury, certainly never dreamed of in Mornese!

Mother looked at the shoes, smiled to herself, called Sister Assunta Gaino, who looked after the cow and the garden and gave them to her saying: "Take them, you will never again get the likes of them!" All the remonstrances of the Sisters were in vain to make her change the destination of those shoes.

Among so many happy faces, the sad, sad expression of a postulant stood out one day in sharp contrast:

"Why are you so serious?"

"I didn't go to Communion this morning, and the day seems very, very long. . . it never seems to end! Last evening Mother wanted to kindle a fire in all hearts! Oh, Jesus, pardon me! In this House one cannot live without Holy Communion! . . ."

For someone she knew was struggling with the Pangs of hunger Mother sent for some flour. When she got it she asked the cook to make some light polenta, which she distributed among the seven present, including herself. The abovementioned postulant, Rose Cordara, was also in the group. After half an hour Mother was back in the kitchen, fearing she had given bad example. She went particularly to this postulant and said: "I did something wrong a while ago! As Superior I shouldn't have acted like that. After all, I'm sure the other Sisters were as hungry as we."

Mother was by nature of very lively character and didn't always succeed in mastering her first reactions. Then words and actions escaped her, which wounded self-love, sometimes even in the presence of the girls. But there was no cause for scandal: those who were humbled were so holy that they became subjects for admiration. Mother herself was so humble that she was first to pour oil on the wound, [p. 355] with such maternal kindness and delicate charity, that no one retired with hurt feelings that might prevent sleep.

And on their part, Sisters and girls did not fail, when in doubt, to approach Mother with filial confidence, or when having committed a fault, they wanted her pardon and to hear a word that would restore serenity and prepare them for next day's Communion.

The Immaculate is honored at Nizza too

At Nizza as at Mornese, Our Lady's feast was a heavenly day: it was the first celebrated by the community in the House of Our Lady of Grace.

The services in church, attended by some outsiders, were devotional and pleasing to all. The prayers were fervent and the singing, though without accompaniment, was melodious. "Next year

we'll have an organ!" the Sisters and girls said, consoling one another reciprocally with great and joyful hopes for the future.

The only cloud on that day's sunshine was the inevitable nostalgia for Mornese, where Mother gave warmth to all their piety.

At Mornese: Christmas novena and feast

The date of the missionaries' depart drew near. This year none went to Rome, for the very good reason that there was no money to subsidize the trip. Only those went to Turin with Father Calgiero who had not yet seen the Basilica of Our Lady of Valdocco, or whose people lived nearby, to whom they went to say good-bye.

The new missionaries, however, were all brought to Mornese for the novena and fervent celebration of Christmas. In holy joy the three masses were celebrated at midnight, but there seemed to be a void there created by the absence of so many Sisters, now in other fields of labor. The [p. 356] thought of the impending departure of others served to accentuate the feeling, although Mother's heart still echoed the enthusiasm of sacrifice, as she repeated to the Sisters: "Do not be too downcast in your sorrows, nor over-exultant in your joys. "

From Nizza they wrote that all was done as at Mornese.

Farewell ceremony at Mornese

In the College chapel the farewell ceremony for the missionaries was held on Sunday the 29th—on the same lines as that held in Valdocco on November 6, 1877 and on December 8, 1878.

Vespers having been sung, the Director ascended the altar and said that the hour had come when the ten chosen missionary Sisters would move towards the New World: "Go," he said "for the angels of America are waiting for you, to take care of many souls confided to their keeping so that you may collaborate with them to save them and make them eternally happy." Comparing the ten Sisters to the ten virgins of the gospel, called to go forth to meet the Bridegroom, he went on: "Let there be no foolish virgins among you; be wise, all of you. You will be so if you keep your lamps replenished with oil—the oil of piety of God, abandoning for love of Him, all that you hold most dear in this world. The oil of charity for your neighbor, sacrificing your life to instruct him, edify him, save him. Courage therefore: go join those Sisters who have preceded you to those regions. And under the banner of the Virgin Help of Christians, whose Daughters you are, obey and work.

Perhaps the voice of the Spouse will not delay. Perhaps you will soon hear the great voice ringing in your ears: 'Behold, the Bridegroom cometh, go out to meet Him.' Then, oh !—then without anxiety or sorrow you will go to meet Him and celebrate with Him the eternal nuptials."

These and other words created great joy and such emotion that at one point free play was given to sighs and tears.

[p. 357] The *Ave Maris Stella* and *Tantum Ergo* were then sung, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament was given. When that was finished the priest read the pilgrims' prayer, invoking on the little group the special protection of God during the long and perilous journey they were about to undertake.

As it was getting late the departure from Mornese was postponed until next day. The remainder of the evening was spent in giving mutual souvenirs, promises of prayers, and pledges of meeting one day in the heavenly country, where every pain and sorrow would be eternally banished.

Parting advice to the missionaries

On saying good-bye to them Father Lemoyne put into each one's hand a little picture of Saint Joseph with the following words:

1 – prompt obedience to the manifest will of God;

- 2 – cheerful resignation to divine will and pleasure;
- 3 – generous indifference to all that does not regard the will of God.

Mother had given her advice to each one individually, according to personal needs. To one who wanted it written she set down in her own handwriting: "Think often, why did I enter religion? I came to become holy and do good to souls. With this thought as guide you will do much good. Heaven is not made for sluggards. We must earn it by doing violence to ourselves. Have confidence in your confessor and Superior. Always be cheerful."

Mother was most anxious to speak to Sister Madelene Martini, who headed the group. In America she would assume the title of Provincial, together with the responsibility for all the missionary Sisters and Houses, including those still to open. She would thus be the first Provincial of the Institute. She had many virtues, but hated to take on authority, and was excessively timid. Mother sought to [p. 358] help her love her new duties, and never finished recommending vigilance to ensure the preservation of the spirit, orderly, untiring work, dependence on Don Bosco, and the Superiors who represented him.

The ten missionaries were: Sisters Madelene Martini, Philomena Balduzzi, Emily Borgna, Victoria Cantù, Catherine Fino, Maria Magdalene, Virginia Magone, Jacinta Olivieri, Domenica Roletti, and Josephine Vergnaud. All were moved, even Mother Petronilla, whom Mother had expressly brought back from Nizza to please Sister Madelene Martini, who loved her very much. Some relatives proposed to wait up until the time of departure, but Mother made them go to rest, even for a short while. The Sisters obeyed even though it seemed a pity "to waste" their last hours in Mornese sleeping.

In the meantime Mother finished her letters for Villa Colon.

Mother writes to the Sisters of Villa Colon

Viva Gesù and Maria!

My ever dear Sister Angelina, [Vallese]

It is already a year since we saw one another. How quickly time passes! We must really profit by it, and acquire many merits, so that when the Lord calls, we may be ready. I am happy that the Sisters there are good and work hard. It is up to us to help them grow in virtue, first by our example, because whatever is taught by example makes a deeper impression, and does more good than any words. Encourage them always to be humble, obedient and diligent in their work; to work with purity of Intention and to be frank and sincere always with everyone. Keep them cheerful. Correct them with kindness always, but do not overlook any defect. A defect corrected immediately is often a mere nothing, whereas if it is overlooked it takes root and becomes very difficult to uproot.

Now you will have Sister Madelene as your Provincial. Keep her informed of all you do, and of how the Sisters are getting on. Ask her advice often, either verbally or by letter. I too shall be looking for news from you. Write to me often. Pray for me. Frequently enter the Sacred Heart of Jesus; I too shall enter there and thus we shall be able to say many things to each other.

Your relatives are well; pray for them always. Mariin's mother died; pray for her good soul. Your sister is keeping well and is always good. Now she is at Alassio, in charge of the kitchen. Pray for her too and for everyone else.

Keep cheerful. Do not worry about not being able to correct your defects all at once. But if you have the good will to fight against them, you will certainly overcome them little by little, provided you do not come to terms with them. Be of good heart. Have great confidence in God and very little faith in yourself, and you will see that all goes well with you.

Give my regards to Father Director: tell him that although I do not know him I thank him very much for all the good he does for each one of you, and I pray God will reward him with graces and blessings. Recommend me to his fervent prayers.

I leave you in the Heart of Jesus, and I pray Him to make you all His own, and keep you always united and cheerful. Pray hard for me who never, never forget you in my poor prayers, and believe me, in the Heart of Baby Jesus,

Your affectionate Mother,

The Sisters will give you the news of our Houses. Get them to tell you everything. Keep them cheerful for me, and encourage them a lot.

Viva Gesù Bambino! Viva Maria! Viva San Giuseppe, and long live all the good Daughters of Mary Help of Christians!

[p. 359]

Viva Gesù, Maria e San Giuseppe!

My good Sister Laura,

I understood all that was in your little note, even though it was written in Spanish, and it gave me much pleasure.

Even though I do not know you, I love you very much, my dear Sister Laura. and pray for you. I hope to know one day in heaven; oh! what a lovely feast we shall then have!

In the meantime, as the first American to become a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, you must become a great saint, so that many others will follow your example over there.

Even though a great distance separates us, we can still be of one heart in loving Jesus and Mary, and we can always see and love one another in them.

I don't think it is necessary for me to recommend to you to be obedient, humble and charitable, and to love your work. It is but a few months since you were clothed; therefore you are still full of fervor. I can only recommend to you never to let the fervor God has enkindled in your heart die out. Think that only one thing is necessary: to save your soul. But for us, religious, it is not enough to save our souls. We must become saints, and by our good works, we must assist many other souls who are waiting our help. Be of good heart then, for after a few days of struggle we shall enjoy heaven forever. Always be cheerful. Have great confidence in your Superiors, never hide anything, keep your heart always open to them. Obey them with simplicity and you will never go wrong.

Pray for me and all the Sisters, because all, Sisters and postulants, thank you for the greetings you sent, and reciprocate them in the Heart of Jesus.

May the Lord bless you, and grant you holy perseverance, and all the graces to be a good religious and a true Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. Adieu, my good Sister; believe me in the Lord to be

Your affectionate Mother,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

[p. 361] From Mornese to Sampierdarena

The first hour of December 30 had not struck when the little missionary group set out in the dark, with only the faint gleam of lanterns to light their way. Mother Petronilla accompanied them, with the postulant, Jacinta Borgna, sister of the departing missionary Sister Emily and of Sister Joan, who was already in Uruguay.

Her young heart was full of sorrow! But she was brave out of gratitude to the Superior, who had her accompany the missionaries so that in the photograph her mother in America could see her two daughters together.

It had stopped snowing but everything was covered with a deep white blanket and the roads were difficult.

The first few travelers had climbed bravely on to the cart, but the others. . . The footboard which was damp was soon frozen, and they had to be very cautious not to slip and crash to the ground trying to get into the crude little fourwheeled cart drawn by horses and mules. But the going was so rough and the jolts so frequent that some preferred to get down again and walk part way, also to warm their feet. However, they couldn't keep their footing on the ice. There was also the Albedosa River to be crossed. It wasn't deep, but wide, and full of flinty stones. It was so dark that they were forced to face again the hard task of climbing back into the cart.

At last they reached Serravalle, Mother Mazzarello, who knew the shortcuts and had left after them, arrived before them, bought the tickets, and was waiting for them.

In the train they met the Director General, who wanted at once to know if they had warm clothes to shield them from the cold; if they had everything, or needed anything. He had thought of everything. In Turin he had outlined and followed their study of Spanish; given them practical norms for the life overseas; recommended Mother to do the same at Mornese, and to prepare the Sisters for any kind of work, including teaching-teaching any subject with trust in God, who would work miracles when the need arose.

Gratitude and prayer [p. 362]

The Salesian missionaries were already at Sempierdarena accompanied by Don Bosco who wished to see them board.

At Mornese the year closed with plenty motives for gratitude and subjects parted, Mother away, the House almost empty. At Nizza the boarders celebrated the passing of the old year around their dear Superiors. But in spirit they were in Mornese with Mother, with the missionaries, as with a hymn of gratitude to God, they offered their wish for a safe voyage for the travellers, and an ardent prayer to the Divine Heart that Mother would soon come to live in their midst.

A missionary New Year

One thought was uppermost in all minds in Mornese, Nizza and Turin: the ten missionary Sisters. It was the second group to go so far away and the family was feeling it. Instead the missionaries were the happier lot.

They had left Mornese; but the silence of evening—end of a day of excitement and deep emotion, with anticipation of still more novel things that tomorrow would bring—lent itself very well as a canvas to young minds on which to sketch what the future had in store. That future had been outlined in the *Salesian Bulletin* of last November and December: to establish asylums of charity and places in which to train and educate the children of their dear compatriots in exile. In the suburbs of the densely populated centers of Argentina they were needed. Then by means of these young people, to open up paths and roads into the virgin territory of the pagan peoples, into the vast areas of prairie and jungle where the names of Jesus and Mary had never been heard, to sing with their neophytes the canticle of faith and love and continue there the work of redemption. The trials would be great, the dangers many, innumerable the sacrifices. But they would not be alone: the Guardian Angels of so many souls would accompany them, and help them spread the light of the gospel.

Thus the ten missionaries dreamed as they spent the night with the kindly housekeeper of the Salesian hospice at Sampierdarena. Thus they reflected, serene in the silent hours which at last ushered in the day of their greatest detachment.

Mother writes to Sister Joan Borgna

Mother did not go to bed until she had written a little letter for Sister Joan Borgna.

My dear Sister Joan,

Your little note gave me much pleasure. I am pleased that you have the good will to become holy. But remember that it is not enough to begin; you must continue, you must strive untiringly everyday. Our self-love is so subtle that just when we think we have made some progress in the path of virtue, we fall miserably. But this life is a continual warfare and we must never grow weary if we want to win heaven. Take heart then, good Sister Joan. Act in such a way that you may always be an example of virtue, of humility, charity and obedience, and since God looks to the heart, you must see to it that these virtues are practiced more interiorly than exteriorly. If then you feel that obedience is a bit difficult, look to heaven and think of the reward that awaits you there . . .

Now you will have your Sister near you; are you pleased? Jacinta is well; pray that she may be good, and rest assured that I will look after her. Is it true that you are run down? (*muffita*) Get better soon, because you have lots of work to do! Tell the Lord to give you time to become a saint, and to win many souls for Him. Always be cheerful. Be good; work with all your heart and only for Jesus, and pray that one day we may all meet in heaven. Courage, pray for me and for all your Sisters. May God bless you, and make you entirely His. I am in the Heart of Jesus,
Jan. 1, 1879

Your affectionate Mother
The poor Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Maria!!! Answer me.

[p. 367] The departure

The missionary Sisters were up early, faces radiant, and hearts singing. At the appointed hour they assisted at Don Bosco's mass, received Holy Communion from him, and also some words of encouragement.

The Holy Father's blessing reached the missionaries by telegram delivered that day to Don Bosco.

Our Sisters would have liked to take with them the first printed copies of the Holy Rule, but the printers did not have them ready. The group photograph too—the first to be taken in the Institute, with their beloved Mother there right in the middle—was not ready! "I am very sorry," Mother Mazzarello said, "to send you so far away without the Rules, but don't worry. The first copies will be for you: you will see, we shall send them very soon!"

Don Bosco whose health was very precarious, could not go to the port. Therefore, before they set out for Genoa where they were to embark, he gave his dear Daughters his last blessing.

Someone said to him: "Father, bless us so that no one of us will die on the voyage." After a moment's reflection he answered: "No, there won't be any such disaster. But were it to happen that someone had to finish her mission when crossing the ocean, she would indeed be fortunate! Purgatory would not exist for her!"

When he saw the priests and Sisters leave the hospice, he was so deeply moved that he decided henceforth to bless his missionaries fifteen days in advance.

Mother Mazzarello and Mother Petronilla accompanied the ten Sisters to the ship, and stayed with them until the last minute.

At 4:00 p.m. on January 2 the *South America* left port at the sound of a canon; the missionaries continued to respond to the Superiors' farewell, until they could no longer distinguish the waving handkerchiefs on the shore.

The ship moved into the distance and the two Mothers returned silently to the hospice, where Don Bosco was [p. 368] waiting for news of the last hour. He listened calmly, then assuming an inspired attitude spread out his arms and said with a joy that was truly heavenly: "Let us be cheerful! Let us be cheerful! The Congregation is expanding!"

Having discussed the evacuation of Mornese with him (it was being depopulated every day), Mother returned from Sampierdarena to take the necessary measures for the definitive transfer of the Mother House to Nizza Monferrato. Already the Sisters who had left the nest at Mornese were assembling there, and the postulants who wished to form part of the Institute were being received there also.

The "Salesian Bulletin" presents the Oratory of Chieri

In an article entitled "A Hope Realized" the *Salesian Bulletin* of January gave an account of the Oratory of Saint Teresa in Chieri.

Among the twenty-two Houses, which with the help of Divine Providence and the support of our Cooperators of both sexes, we have been able to open within the past year, is the so-called Oratory of Saint Teresa, for the children and young girls of the illustrious, industrial city of Chieri.

In our August issue of this magazine we intimated that the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, belonging to the Salesian Congregation, had been invited to take over the direction of that House. We then expressed the hope that God would bless and prosper the undertaking. Our hopes have not been deluded.

The young girls who frequent the Oratory on feastdays, especially in the evening, have increased in number from about 250, who came when it first opened, to 400 plus.

The church is opened early in the morning. Opportunity for confession is offered to those who want it. Mass begins at 8:00 a.m. Many of those girls, helped in their preparation by the Sisters, approach the altar and receive Holy Communion. This same Lord will keep them pure and protect them from the dangers with which the devil and the world try to ensnare their inexperienced age group. A short sermon [p. 369] suited to their circumstances brings the function to a close.

But the morning session of the Oratory does not end here. We must remember that the city of Chieri has many cotton and cloth factories, in which hundreds of children and young girls are employed from morning to night. Because of this, especially in recent years, many of them were not, and still are not able to attend school. Consequently they are completely illiterate, or nearly so. Many cannot even read or write their own name. Now since such ignorance of reading, writing and arithmetic could be to the grave detriment of families today more than ever, the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians have taken measures to remedy this drawback, by opening a free school on Sundays. The school operates from 10:00 a.m. to noon, and is frequented by more than 100 girls between the ages of nine and fifteen years, and about 40 of the more adult group divided in three classes, according to age and background.

This, then, is the other occupation of Sunday morning. The first is exclusively religious, the second literary, which will be of great practical utility to many poor hardworking families of the city.

But the most advantageous occupations and functions of the Oratory of Saint Teresa are those of the evening. What a wonderful spectacle meets the visitor who calls between 2:00 and 5:00 p.m.! He sees in playground no. 1 about 200 children between the ages of seven and eleven years. In a second playground about 150 girls between eleven and fourteen; in a third about 60 over fifteen—all seemingly of one great family, vivacious, cheerful, enjoying themselves to their hearts' content.

Some are running, some jumping, some singing, some chatting in a group. All are assisted in their various playgrounds and games by one or more Sisters, and by the senior, more prudent girls. It is no surprise, therefore, that while these ample pastimes are enjoyed by the girls they are also appreciated by their parents. Knowing that their girls are looked after and safe from danger at the Oratory, they are relieved and happy. We knew of a mother who, on

bringing her daughter there, actually cried for joy on seeing that spectacle.

After an hour's innocent recreation a bell rings. The [p. 370] girls in the various sections get into groups according to age, and accompanied by their teacher or catechist, go to the place assigned them for a half hour's catechism.

The singing of the *Magnificat*, or another hymn to Our Lady brings that to a close, after which there is a short instruction and then benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The needs of the soul having been provided for, games are resumed, to ensure physical fitness. There are continued until it gets dark. Then all go home to their families, tell all they have seen or heard and look forward impatiently to the following Sunday.

As is obvious, two results are thus attained: the girls are opportunely instructed and are safeguarded from the dangers to which many are exposed in these our days.

We will not pass over in silence a wonderful display of piety they gave at the beginning of the month. I refer particularly to the senior girls and others whom their example drew along with them. December 8, feast of Mary Immaculate, marked the second anniversary of the inauguration of the Oratory, which was highlighted by the blessing of a statue of Mary Help of Christians and its installation in one of the rooms of the House.

It was thought opportune to celebrate that solemnity in a special way this year, to thank the great Mother of God for the many favors granted during this time. Hence, that the girls might be prepared, there was a novena with sermon and so forth. Every day at 5:30 a.m., mass was celebrated, then followed the sermon, more or less as in a retreat.

The hour might seem ill chosen, but it was the most suitable for the majority of the girls, who have to be at work in the factories at 7:00 a.m. News of the novena at "Saint Teresa's" spread through the city, and was so favourably received that on the very first morning the little church was crowded. To make way for the seniors we had to announce that on the following days those under thirteen years would be excluded. Notwithstanding this precaution, on the second and consecutive days the number was never less than 400, because the novelty of the thing, good example, or better, the grace of God, continued to draw there the young girls of the city, many of whom had never set foot in the Oratory. In those days they heard maxims and [p. 371] truths suited to their age and condition. Above all they were alerted to the grave dangers into which their inexperience could lead them. They learned that true joy can go hand in hand with solid piety; that only through virtue, submission to their elders, fidelity to work, and the

practice of religion, can a girl arrive at true contentment herself, and bring happiness to her family. The result of the novena was that during It, or on the feast, all approached the sacraments in a very edifying way, so that many people of the city were impressed and still say: "The Bertinetti couple must be delighted to see from heaven, that their house is thus used for the glory of God and the good of souls." But for all this, may God and Mary Immaculate be praised. To finish the picture we should here refer to some opposition which some have recently aroused against the above Oratory; however, should this be necessary we shall treat of it on a future occasion.

In these last words there is an open reference to the painful controversy which had been taking shape over the past months, through the rapport with the ecclesiastical authorities. Mother was not surprised. She prayed and had prayers offered, and recommended an increase in the number of daily mortifications, and spiritual offerings to the Lord, to obtain the victory of Christian fortitude to those most exposed to the contrary winds: Sister Rosalia Pestarino, Superior of the Chieri community, Father Bonetti, the ardent Director of the Oratory there, and indirectly Don Bosco, who was away from Turin just then.

Mornese: the subject of conversation at Nizza

The Sisters who were transferred to Nizza revealed how the fire of the love of God was kept constantly aglow in Mornese notwithstanding the diminution of personnel and the economic difficulties which became more palpable daily. That the House of Nizza began to emulate this enthusiasm transpires from some of the accounts of Sisters and girls, who spoke freely and eloquently during creation.

[p 372] There was no wood for the fire. Mother went with a group of Sisters to collect some in the grove, or else stayed at home alone to make the polenta and take it out to the Sisters. It was cold and wet! That made no difference to her!

There was no one to do the washing. But she could always be counted on! The same applied to all the other housework, which she performed with such spontaneity and ease as to make one realize that for her, superiority didn't enter into her reckoning. This made it a joy to work with her. It made her suffer if for some reason or other she couldn't give a hand with this or that chore.

Her words became ever more animating and forceful: "Let us take heart; come, come the good God is beautifying our souls more and more, and will repay in heaven, and even here on earth, our every sacrifice."

"Have you done anything yet without the intention of pleasing God? For heaven's sake do not work just because there is work to be done or for any other motive whatever. But secure the merit of what you do by directing to God your every action and suffering."

You are perhaps surprised to hear us always talking about Mother, because you don't know her. If she comes to Nizza soon as we hope, you too will see her and know personally many great and beautiful things!"

"Come, Angelichina, tell your new companions what you remember of Mornese!"

"I remember that the Sisters used to put little pebbles in their shoes when they came for a walk with us or went to the river for the washing. They spoke to us very often of the Guardian Angel, and told us to give him a place on our right, and also the most comfortable part of the bed, so that often by dint of giving him more and more we ended up on the floor!"

"Do you remember Louise Verdi?"

"Oh, yes, yes! To imitate Baby Jesus in the cold of the grotto, she often took off her woolen blanket by night, and by day she wore very little. In summer instead, she was forever inventing excuses to put on heavy clothes and so suffer the heat Baby Jesus must have suffered in the sands of the African desert!"

"Was this Louise Verdi big?"

[p. 373] "Not at all! She was about nine or ten years old, like me. Her mother took her home for fear she would become a Sister; and poor Louise cried her heart out! Fortunately Our Lady had prepared her for the sacrifice, the night before, otherwise I don't know what she would have done."

"Our Lady prepared her?"

"Yes, yes; she dreamed that her relatives were coming to fetch her, and that. . ."

"But then you were all holy at Mornese, even you—little girls!"

"Listen listen! In order to make a good confession, Louise learned a piece of exam of conscience by heart, from some book, and then repeated it to the confessor. He must have realized it, because sometimes, after listening to her for awhile he would close the shutter... Then she would cry and cry, and we would all go and console her. She mortified herself so much that if she was thirsty she often asked us for permission to get a drink of water. She went to

the cold water tap but stood there thinking and came back without taking a drop of it."

"Is it true, Angelichina, that at your first Holy Communion Our Lady told you something special, and that you made a wound on your forehead?"

"No, it wasn't I, it wasn't! It was Jacinta Borgna. Seven of us made our First Communion together. We were already at the altar to receive the Lord. Mother had recommended us to keep our thoughts only for Jesus, and should any thought come to dim the light of God in our souls we should chase it away immediately.

Jacinta must have remembered it, because first her feet began to move, then she began to shake her head, and to rub her forehead continuously, and finally to pick and scratch her face until she bled. We saw her after Communion and heard from her the reason of it all when we asked her what had happened. We all laughed, but she very seriously said:

'When Mother speaks, she means what she says and I would go through fire to do what she says.'

Jacinta understood things better than I, even though we were almost the same age."

"It was Christmas night '75 and Father Campi was saying his first mass. I was then seven years and I remember that all [p. 374] of us little ones were near Father Costamagna's confessional. We were all in tears because he had told us that our First Communion was the first link in a chain, and we were afraid we wouldn't make that link well.

I remember still another thing: that day I went looking for a Sister to get a nice picture from her. I met my sister, Mother Enrichetta, and she said to me: "What! On your first Communion day thinking of holy pictures? You should think of Jesus, of Jesus who is in your heart!"

"Misericordia! How serious you all were! I wouldn't have stayed there three days!"

"That's because you were never there; otherwise. We were all very happy, you know? You should have heard the songs Father Costamagna composed for us, and seen the funny sketches of Father Lemoyne! We had a wonderful time at recreation. And then. . . and then you will see when Mother comes here how good it feels to be near her, and how everything takes on a spirit of real joy."

"Really all the Sisters and girls from Mornese say the same thing: Mother is able to make one feel joy even in sacrifice. And it's a mystery where she gets the virtue to seek out all that is distasteful and contrary to her nature, and serves but to mortify body and soul."

"Is it true that a few of the Sisters from Mornese, having to take milk because they were ill, put bitter herbs and vinegar in it so as not to enjoy its purity, and to have some spiritual treatment while providing for bodily health?"

"I don't know if it is true, but it would be the most natural thing in the world for those who lived side by side with Mother."

"What is she doing now at Mornese?"

"I am certain she is doing the parts of Simon of Cyrene and Veronica!"

"But is this really her work to be around helping every one and drying tears?"

"That's what the Sisters say; and here's one who can remove all your doubts!"

"Sister, Sister, is it true that Mother is so wonderful at drying tears?"

"Oh, yes, that is true! I remember as if it were yesterday!

Mother had absolutely nothing for our dinner. A group of [p. 375] us were going to the river with the laundry, and she told us three or four postulants from Mornese: "While we go on ahead, you go to say *hello* to your families. See if they will give you a little flour.' We stopped for awhile to put it all into one paper, and plop went the whole lot on the ground! The path was covered with pebbles and dust, and we felt so frustrated! We gathered all we could, as quickly as possible, and ran off to the river, to tell all our sorrow and disappointment to Mother. She looked at us with that expression between seriousness and laughter said: 'Imagine, if a thing like this makes you cry! You brought the flour. Thank God! There was no seasoning and Providence supplied it on the way. Here, here! Boiling water remedies everything!'

That polenta—I am not exaggerating—I can never remember to have tasted anything more delicious; so well was it seasoned with happy laughter while we ate it: and Mother warned us to be careful when our teeth grated on the stone, repeating: 'Be careful to listen to the music!'

"How can we ever forget the last outing to Saint Sylvester's from Mornese?"

"How lovely! How wonderful! How we sang and laughed and gathered chestnuts, to eat them afterwards, when we had cooked them. Mother cooked them for us herself, didn't she, Sister Enrichetta?"

"Well I'll tell you now what I didn't tell you then. Poor Mother was very worried, because on that day also, she had nothing to give us for supper. Provisions were finished and nothing had come from Gavi!

She said to me:

'What shall we do, Richetta?'

'Mother, let us gather chestnuts. We will spend a long time at it, then a good meal of chestnuts will serve for tea and supper. . . then some prayers and off to bed!'

'Yes, yes, Richetta; we will do that. I'll come with you. . . and may the Lord be good to us!'

"Mother—do you remember?—led the group; she was the quickest to get to a nut-laden tree, the best at choosing the good chestnuts from the worm-eaten ones, the most agile picking sticks with which to cook them in the open air, in the pot we borrowed, and in the meantime to enliven our singing, our games, our sports. Do you remember how [p. 376] tired you were? And how little appetite you had?"

"Yes, yes! When we got home we went straight to bed, all tired and happy, little knowing that the chestnut feast, which we had enjoyed so much, had relieved Mother of a great anxiety."

"We could go on telling about Mother's initiatives forever, but you will soon experience them for yourselves."

Mother on the eve of the transfer to Nizza

Naturally these discussions enkindled ever more the desire of the girls to have Mother at Nizza. On her part, Mother began to feel the need of living with the community, which was now practically all reunited in the new House.

Yet, she felt sad to see the school almost empty, and the end of that work which had cost sacrifices without number. She felt sorry to leave behind children, companions, acquaintances, all very dear to her, for whom she foresaw the loss of moral and spiritual help because of the withdrawal of the Sisters.

She seemed to feel again the anxiety of saintly Father Pestarino for the dying College, which had been built more with prayers and tears than with stones and bricks. Besides, ever present to her mind were her dear old parents, by whom she was ever more loved and appreciated, and whom she would have to leave, precisely when they had most need of comfort and help. But the Lord had so disposed through Don Bosco, and the sacrifice should be made with merit and in a cheerful spirit. For this reason Mother smiled at the thought of Nizza, and helped the ill or weak survivors of Mornese, who remained with her, to smile too.

In the meantime, Sister Elisa Roncallo wrote to her mother about the end of the month from the new boarding school of Our Lady of Grace, that at Nizza they could go out in the open air as much as they liked. The Sisters had a lovely vineyard, a beautiful big church, a Mother Vicar who was full of affectionate regard for every one of them, and very soon Mother would be with them.

[p. 377] First news of the second group of missionaries

At Mornese Mother received news of the missionary Sisters, and sent it immediately to Turin and Nizza.

The letter was posted from Saint Vincent's Island where the ship had anchored on the evening of the Epiphany. It said that after the seasickness of the first days the missionaries were well and happy; that they prayed, and had the good fortune of daily mass and Communion.

They spent the day working, studying Spanish and walking.

With this vision of her Daughters, in mid-ocean by now, who were going serenely and confidently even farther away from the homeland, Mother thought of her own detachment, the

now imminent and definitive departure from Mornese to take up her abode in the House of Nizza waiting to receive her.

It was a great turning point in her life, as also in that of the Institute, which with a wider horizon moved forward to its destiny.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX No. 1

From the Annals and Chronicles of the Institute of Saint Anne Turin Vol 1, 103 - 104: Year 1873

On the last Sunday of January we had the pleasure of hearing a sermon by Don John Bosco, Founder and Superior of the Salesian Congregation, who came to ask our Reverend Mother General for the cooperation of our Institute for the foundation (that is the formation) of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians depending from him—(Don Bosco), This being a propitious occasion to render to others the charity which our Institute received in the early days of its existence, our beloved Mother General, with the consent of her Council, consented to the request and sent to Mornese Reverend Sister Francesca Garelli, her secretary and Second General Assistant, and Sister Angela Alloa as her companion in this important mission.

APPENDIX No. 2

For the Erection of the Via Crucis

Infram-scriptum sacerdos de Ordine Minorum Observantium S. Francisci et guardianus Conventus S. Mariae Gratierum Vallis prope Gavium testatur hac die in hac Ecclesia Collegiali cui titulus Sanctae Mariae Dolorum loci Mornese, sacris stationibus sanctae Viae Crucis benedixisse easque erexisse, servatis omnibus quae per decreta et constitutiones summorum Pontificum praescribuntur.

Datum ex dicto Colleg. die 27 februarii 1873

P. FATHER CANDIDUS A. GENUA

[p. 382]

APPENDIX No. 3

For the Acceptance of Enrichetta Sorbone

The undersigned is prepared to accept the young girl, Enrichetta Sorbone from Rosignano, among the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese, dispensing her from the dowry of fr. 1000; from the annual fee of fr. 30 per month, on condition that she pays 30 fr. for each of the first three months, and provides the small trousseau, which is required. She is to be directed to Rev. Father Pestarino— Director of the Institute, Mornese.

Borgo San Martino, May 12, 1873

Original in Gen. Archives F .M.A. - Rome

APPENDIX No.4

Letter of Don Bosco to Father Rua

My dear Father Rua,

You will see from Canon Mottura's letter how expedient it is that Father Savio go to Chieri. Remember to seal the letter.

Please say a word to Mrs. Vicino that you will go to dinner with Don Bosco to her house. Here one enjoys plenty of cool air, even though there is lots of warmth of the love of God. All send their greetings, and I am in J.C.

Mornese, July 3, 1873

Your affectionate friend,
Father JOHN BOSCO

[p. 383]

APPENDIX No. 5

Minutes of the second clothing

In the year of the Lord one thousand, eight hundred and seventy. three, on the sixth day of the month of August, in the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese, in the presence of the undersigned the following minutes were drawn up.

On the 5th of this current month, after the spiritual exercises preached by Very Reverend Monsignor Andrew Scotton and Father Louis Portaluri, the following made profession with triennial vows: Rosa Mazzarello di Stefano, born in Mornese; Maria Grosso di G. Battista, born in S. Stefano di Parodi and Corinna Arrigotti di Pietro, born in Tonco; the following received the habit of the Congregation: Virginia Magone fu Giovanni; Maria Bodrato di Giuseppe; Teresa Mazzarello di Antonio; Carlotta Pestarino, di Francesco, all born in Mornese: Maria Gastaldi di Domenico, born in S. Stefano di Parodi; Angela Deambrogio fu Basilio, born in Conzano; Emilia Mosca of Alessandro, born in Ivrea; Angela Porotto di Francesco born in Castelletto d'Orba; Enrichetta Sorbone di Constantino, born in Rosignano Monferrato.

His Excellency, Monsignor Joseph M. Sciandra, Bishop of Acqui, who also this year deigned to honor this House by his choice of it for his summer holidays, having said mass and distributed Holy Communion to this religious family in the morning, wished to perform the solemn function of receiving the triennial vows of the professed and clothing the candidates with the holy habit.

To confirm the above, these minutes have been drawn up and signed as follows:

† JOSEPH MARY - Bishop
Father DOMINIC PESTARINO - Director
Father JOSEPH PESTARINO
Father FRANCIS BERTA – Secretary

Original in Gen. Archives F.M.A. - Rome

N.B. In reporting the Minute¹ of the First Profession—Aug. 5, 1872(*Cron* 1,315—1st ed.) the names of: Sister Felicina Mazzarello di Giuseppe, Sister Joan Ferettino fu Giuseppe were omitted by mistake.

[p. 384]

APPENDIX No. 6

First Episcopal privileges granted the Institute

Joseph Mary Sciandra, Bishop of Acqui,

by the grace of God and of the Holy See

In our pastoral visit to the parish of Mornese we have seen to our great consolation that the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, founded there a year ago through the zeal of Reverend Don Bosco, has been blessed by God and has developed extensively.

With a view to avoiding every type of conflict we have established by this present Decree the following norms.

1) The director *pro tempore* of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians founded in Mornese will have faculties approved by us, to administer in the chapel of the Institute the Sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist to all the faithful, to admit to First Communion persons of the Institute or those who reside there as boarders; he may allow any persons living in the Institute to fulfill their Easter obligations in the chapel, as also to give Viaticum in case of illness, the blessing of the sick, and prayers for the dying; when it becomes necessary to administer Extreme Unction to members of the Institute or to those under its care, he will inform the parish priest of Mornese and wait for his arrangements when this can be done conveniently.

2) In the case of the death of a religious, novice or aspirant, the obsequies including the saying or singing of the requiem mass (*praesente cadavere*), can be carried out by the Director or his substitute in the chapel of the Institute; and the remains may be taken directly or privately to the cemetery; the same may be done in the case of a boarder who dies in the Institute; but at this last the parish priest will have the right if he so wishes, to be present at the burial, wearing a black stole.

3) The mass of the requiem may be celebrated in the chapel of the Institute for deceased members of the Institute, religious, novices or aspirants; in the case of a boarder's death in the Institute or outside addition to that celebrated *praesente cadavere* is permitted; to safeguard parochial rights the singing of the requiem mass for persons extraneous to the Institute, without the parish priest's permission, is not allowed [p. 385].

4) With regard to other religious functions the following are permitted in the chapel of the Institute:

a) Then devotion commonly known as Forty Hours—twice a year if so desired, to be fixed for times at least a month before or after the celebration of this devotion in the parish church of Mornese: should the Forty Hours finish with sung mass, the parish priest of Mornese will have the right to celebrate it on the third day (with freedom of application and without stipend) and to impart at the end of the Forth Hours the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

b) The functions of Holy Week, and also the celebration of mass on Thursday for the Communion of religious and persons staying in the Institute (excluding the Friday and Saturday of that week) on an understanding that externs will not be allowed to participate in those functions, and that they be arranged for hours differing from those of parish functions.

c) The Novenas of Christmas and Pentecost; of the Immaculate Conception and of Mary Help of Christians, of Our Lady of Sorrows, always at different hours from those of parish functions in Mornese; also the triduum which may be substitutes for the above novenas and their octaves.

d) The month of Our Lady, with some intentional solemnity in the chapel of the Institute at its close, provided such devotions are practiced in the morning, when in the parish they are held in the evening or vice versa.

e) The month of Saint Joseph with exposition of his relic.

f) The sanctified carnival, in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows, with the exposition of the relics of Our Blessed Lady and the Blessed Sacrament, during the last three days of the carnival.

g) The Octave of Corpus Christi and of the Holy Souls day, with exception of the Blessed Sacrament; these functions will also be held in the morning when they are held in the evening in the parish church and vice versa. [p. 386] h) Low mass with blessing of the relics on the feasts of the apostles.

Therefore in the chapel of the Institute it is forbidden to hold novenas, octaves or tridiums, with benediction of the Blessed Sacrament or with relics at other seasons, for the collection of alms, unless these be consigned to the parish priest *pro tempore* of Mornese, deducting the cost of candles, and carried out with his permission.

i) The singing of mass on the occasion of the Forty Hours in the chapel of the Institute and on the feast of Mary Help of Christians.

l) Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every Sunday and Holy Day of obligation when parish functions are over.

m) With regard to preaching, we grant it only to the Director approved by us, who will preach within closed doors: we grant him permission to invite priests or religious of good repute, for a sermon, to be given behind closed doors, on the special feasts of the Institute or on extraordinary occasions.

The retreats will be restricted to persons living in the Houses of the Institute, and to ecclesiastics with our approval.

n) Should the Holy See grant faculties for the celebration of midnight mass on Christmas night and the distribution of Holy Communion to members of the Institute, we hereby ordain that this function be carried on behind closed doors, observing in other matters the conditions imposed by the Holy See, which conditions will also hold for the faculties already obtained *ad quinquennium proximum* for the preservation of the Most Holy Sacrament.

It is to be noted that the concession of a privileged altar and the faculty to sing mass or requiem twice in succession must be obtained from the Holy See.

Reserving the right to make those changes in this present Decree which we may find useful—saving parochial rights—we send a copy of the same to the parish priest of Mornese and the Reverend Director of the Institute that they may conform to it.

Mornese, August 19, 1873

† JOSEPH MARY - Bishop
Father FRANCIS BERT A - Secretary

Original in Gen. Arch. F.M.A. - Rome

[p. 387]

APPENDIX No. 7

Ecclesiastical Approval for midnight mass at Christmas

The undersigned wishes to extend to the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese the faculty to celebrate the three Christmas masses at midnight on Christmas night and to distribute Communion during the same to all the participants who have the required dispositions, this privilege having been granted to him with the faculty to extend it to all the Houses dependent on him, according to the rescript of His Holiness, Pius IX on November 15, 1872.

Turin, December 18, 1873

Father JOHN Bosco

Having seen the apostolic faculty obtained as above by Reverend Father John Bosco, we hereby permit its implementation in the church of the Institute-behind closed doors, however.

Acqui, December 22, 1873

† JOSEPH MARY - Bishop

It is to be noted that the faculty for Holy Communion is not ordinarily extended to persons other than those of religious institutes; the following year it is advisable that the Indult be presented for our perusal.

† JOSEPH MARY - Bishop

Original in Gen. Archives F.M.A. – Rome

[\[p. 388\]](#)

APPENDIX No. 8

From a summary sent by Don Bosco to the Congregation of Religious on February 23, 1874 for the approval of the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales

16 – As an appendix and dependent of the Salesian Congregation is the House of Our Lady of Christians founded with the approval of ecclesiastical authority at Mornese, in the Diocese of Acqui. The scope is to do for poor girls what the Salesians do for boys.

The Sisters already number 40 and have care of 200 girls.

APPENDIX No. 9

*From the Memoirs of Monsignor Cagliero
- Rome, 1906 -*

On returning from my visit to Mornese (March, 1874) I gave a report of the same to Don Bosco who showed himself very pleased concluding: "Mother Mazzarello has special gifts from God: her virtues, her prudence, spirit of discernment, and her gift of government based on goodness, charity, and indomitable faith in God, more than compensate for her limited instruction."

Therefore Don Bosco sent me to Mrs. Blengini, who loved the Sisters sincerely and was anxious about their future. She asked immediately:

"And now, who will be Superior? Who will form these new religious in the spirit?"

"Don Bosco believes Sister Mazzarello is capable of doing so."

"Sister Mazzarello?! Yes, she is good; she is holy; but she is not educated. . . Her instruction is too limited, too humble !"

"That's what is wanted, Don Bosco thinks, to be a docile instrument in God's hands, through which He can do great things."

Then thanking her in Don Bosco's name for all she had done for the good of the Institute of ours, I left her assuring her that Don [\[p. 389\]](#) Bosco would pray God to reward her with His most copious graces and heavenly benediction.

I then wrote to Mornese that the good Mrs Blengini would not be returning, and that the Vicar would remain as Superior. It was a great joy for the House where the Sisters admired Mrs. Blengini, pious, loving, with lots of gifts for spiritual direction, but where the fervent, humble country girl, who had always been for them a model of every virtue, was preferred to holy replica of Chantal.

APPENDIX No. 10

Invitation to the retreat

Esteemed Lady,

The sad demise of Reverend Father Dominic Pestarino disturbed somewhat the practice introduced in Mornese for the past few years to hold a course of spiritual exercises for ladies. In the desire to continue the pious custom of that venerable priest, I take the liberty of informing you that this year the retreat will again be held. The dates fixed are August 20–29. As many inquire what will be the cost for ten days, it has been decided that a fee of 20-25 lire would cover the expenses. It isn't possible to determine the figure exactly, because it has been considered advisable that the catering should be frugal yet sufficient to satisfy every class of person.

Those wishing to avail of the retreat are invited to contact sometime in advance either the undersigned or Father Joseph Cagliero, present Director of the Institute.

The journey can be made by ordinary transport or by carriage via Novi, Castelletto–Mornese; or Serravalle–Gavi, Mornese.

May God bless us all. Believe me In J.C.

Turin, July 1874

Your most humble servant,
Father JOHN BOSCO

[p. 390]

APPENDIX No. 11

Don Bosco to Father Rua

My dear Father Rua,

Send someone to assist Father Joseph Cagliero, and if expedient and possible, send the infirmarian.

Dispatch the letters for the ladies' retreat and for the teachers.

It is time to pray and pray much.

God bless us all. Until we meet on Friday if God so wills,

St. Ignatius, August 8, 1874

Aff.ly in J.C.
Father JOHN BOSCO

Original in Cen. Sales. Archives – Rome

APPENDIX No. 12

Inquiry into the school of Mornese

Royal Gendarmes
Turin Section

Castello d'Orba, August 12, 1874

To the Mayor of Mornese:

You are requested to submit to this administration information about the feminine religious Institute established in your town by Don Bosco of Turin.

Let me know the cost of the erection of the building; how long the Institute has been functioning; if a doctor is called when necessary to examine and treat the sick; also if a school inspector has ever visited the schools, as is the custom in other institutes of education.

I likewise want to know if Don Bosco goes frequently to Mornese, and in what regard he is held in the area.

The Commandant of Section,
STAMARI CIRO - Brigadier

[p.391]

APPENDIX No. 13

*From the Memoirs of Teresina Mazzarello
(a professed member of the Mornese community)*

I was anything but strong and felt the need of a little milk in the morning, even though I too had signed the letter which was sent to Don Bosco. One day I told my mother, who immediately sent her cow to the school so that Mother Superior might give a little milk for breakfast to the weaker Sisters.

I remember a little episode of those times: In the room where I was three other Sisters slept, among them Sister Teresa Laurentoni.

Hearing me cough loud and persistently, she asked if our cow yielded good milk, and I answered, yes. Then she very silently went down to the kitchen, took a bowl, and went to the cowshed to get some milk from the cow, to stop my coughing. But the stall was closed and Sister Teresa, who was really simple, began to shout aloud: "Cow, little cow, give me a drop of milk for Sister Teresina." She got no response, naturally, and then came back, and rummaging in

the pantry found three cooked apples, and brought them to me elated with joy.

Next day the affair became known and everyone enjoyed it.

Even Father Costamagna came with us to make it the subject of community recreation.

My mother's cow continued her beneficent service until Mother Superior had the money to buy one for the community and then what a feast we had to welcome her in the playground! She was all decked with flowers and passed between the Sisters and girls as a great personage passes through a guard of honor, to exuberant acclamations and applause.

Mornese, 1939

APPENDIX No. 14a [p. 392]

*Application for the first Diocesan Approval
of the Constitutions of the Institute*

January 1876

Most Reverend Excellency,

You are aware that at Mornese, due to the zeal of Reverend Father Dominic Pestarino, of happy memory, an Institute under the title of House or school of Mary Help of Christians was established, with the aim of educating in a Christian way the girls of modest means or those poor and abandoned, to guide them in morals, learning and religion under the direction of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians.

Your Excellency deigned to become the protector of the new Institute and in 1872, on August 5, you kindly read the Rules, wrote your observations and presided at the first clothing and profession ceremonies. A short time after you enriched the Institute with various favors and precious privileges, thanks to which it was constituted a moral body in the eyes of the Church.

Such things were like the mustard seed which your Excellency sowed, and which grew prodigiously. The actual number of religious is at present more than a hundred. The Sisters have charge of the public girls' school of the area. A boarding school for middle class

girls is attached to the Institute, a prospectus of which I enclose for your perusal.

A second House has been opened at Borgo San Martino, another at Alassio; the fourth will be opened at Ianzo, near Turin this autumn. Many requests are reaching us for the opening of Houses in other areas.

But this Institute would certainly lack its true foundation until such time as it has ecclesiastical approval, which marks for religious Institute the sure way that leads to the greater glory of God. It is with a view to obtaining this signal favor that I present to your Excellency the Rules of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, exactly as they have been practiced for some years, begging you to examine them, making those modifications which in your wisdom [p. 393] you may think necessary; then, if God so inspires you, to give to the Institute and to its Constitutions diocesan approval.

United with me in making this request are Father James Costa, magna, Director, and all the religious, who will regard it as a signal favor.

This will be a further motive for undying gratitude and we assure you that daily private and community prayer will be raised to our merciful God and His august Mother, the Virgin Help of Christians, that your Excellency may be preserved in health and happiness for many years and thus may see copious fruits from that work which you deigned to bless, to enrich with spiritual graces, to protect, and we may add, to found and sustain to the present moment.

With deep gratitude I have the honor of being of Your Excellency,

A humble servant,

Father JOHN BOSCO
Father JAMES COSTAMAGNA
Sister MARY MAZZARELLO.
Superior

Copy of the Original
Acqui, January 14, 1876

Father FRANCIS BERTA - Secretary. V.G.

APPENDIX No. 14b

*Decree of diocesan approval
Josephus Maria Sciandra–Episcopus Aquensis etc. etc.*

Miserrimis hisce temporibus, quidibus consiliorum evangelicorum professio tam impiis ac innumeris modis praepeditur, ipsaque iuvenum ac puellarum christiana educatio aut prorsus negligitur, aut scelestè corrumpitur, nulla plane res optatior atque iucundior Nobis offerri poterat quam sacra in hac dioecesi erigenda domus, quae puellis Deo mancipandis ianuas aperiret cui usque ope educationi christiana filiarum populi opportune consuleretur.

[p. 394]

Quapropter vix conseii effecti de proposito ab adm. rev.do D. sacerdote Joanne Bosco Taurinensi piaie societatis salesianae superiore, econcepto, instituendi nempe in hac dioecesi, loco Moronisii, Congregationem Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatrieis ad eum finem, ut in ipsam omnes illae puellae convenirent, quae tum propriae spirituali perfectioni vacare, tum proximorum saluti, filias populi praesertim christiane edocende, promovere intenderent, Nos libenti animo enascentis Instituti Constitutiones, quibus regeretur, as experimentum probavimus, illudque gratis et favoribus auximus.

Quum vero Institutum huiusmodi Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatrieis iam, Deo favente, sub praedictarum Constitutionum regimine adeo feliciter ereverit, ut centum quinquaginta puellis ditetur, vel eidem adscriptis, vel proxime adseribendis, ae praeterea ipsa Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatrieis Domus Gynoeceum agat filiabus populi instituendis, ae in Christi doctrina instituendis, tum ipsae foeminae scholae Pagi Moronisiensis sub Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatrieis disciplina in dies augeantur et floeant:hinc ut novum hoc ae perutile, iudicio quidem Nostro, Institutum meliori modo promoveatur eiusdem Constitutiones iam pridem datas ae iterum Nobis subiectas praesentibus litteris, tamquam ad Dei gloriam et animarum salutem proeuradam et augendam idoneas, firmiter ae stabilius probamus ae econfirmamus, ea innixi potestate, quam vigens dat praxis hoc inducta fine, ut Congregationes ad experimentum aliquod de iis sumendum prius inchoentur, quam sanctae Sed is absoluto iudicio, ab Eaque plenissima potestate cum ipsarum regulis definatur.

Hoc vero dum facimus, potestatem tamen Nobis ac successoribus nostris explicite reservatam volumus, variandi nempe ubi et quoties id expedire videbitur, Constitutiones ipsas, quas praesens probamus et confirmamus.

Jam reliquum est, ut Congregationem Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis, eiusdemque singula membra paternae benevolentiae ac charitati omnium Episcoporum, in quorum dioecesi vel iam operantur, vel in posterum sunt operaturae, commendemus.

Praesens Decretum una cum Constitutionibus praelaudatis, ac praesentibus litteris confirmatis, in Curia Nostra Episcopali asservabitur.

[p. 395]

Datum Aquis dia 23 Januarii 1876

† JOSEPH MARY - episcopus
Father FRANCIS BERTA - Secr.

APPENDIX No. 15a

*First Application of Don Bosco to the Archbishop of Turin,
Monsignor Gastaldi, for the Foundation of the House
in Turin – Valdocco*

Your Excellency,

Father John Bosco humbly presents to you the situation in which the young girls of Valdocco area live. Having no school premises or the possibility of attending if they did exist, neither attending religious functions they live in grave moral danger.

To provide, as far as possible, a solution to this urgent need he would prepare a place suitable for a feminine Oratory, in which those girls could meet on weekdays for school and on Sundays for religious functions and especially for

catechism. The site destined for the church is about a hundred meters from the church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians. The ground floor would be open to the public, and annexed to the building destined to accommodate the religious, who would willingly look after those young girls who live in constant danger.

I, therefore, petition your Excellency to delegate the person you judge most competent that he may come to visit the above mentioned Oratory, and having found things to be according to the prescriptions of holy Church, bless it so that the sacred mysteries can be celebrated there.

Your humble servant,

(no date)

Father JOHN

BOSCO

[p. 396]

APPENDIX No. 15b

*Second application of Don Bosco to His Excellency
Monsignor Gastaldi, Archbishop*

Father John Bosco, being most desirous to provide for the keenly felt need of the poor girls of Valdocco, would wish to establish a free school in the area and entrust it to the direction of the religious known as the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, whose Mother House is at Mornese in the diocese of Acqui.

To this end he asks for Your Excellency's good will. He sends a copy of their Rules and other relevant documents, with a request that you deputize Father Michael Rua as ordinary confessor and Father John Bodrato as his substitute when for some reason he is absent and cannot fulfill the office.

(no date)

Your humble servant,
Father JOHN BOSCO

APPENDIX No. 15c

Conditioned reply of the Archbishop

The Archbishop of Turin is disposed to give his consent to the admission of some Sisters of the congregation existent in Mornese in the diocese of Acqui, that they may attend to the free school for girls on the site belonging to the Salesian Congregation in this city, which is but a very short distance from the Church of Mary Help of Christians, under the following conditions:

1. That they present the Rules already approved for them by Monsignor Sciandra, Bishop of Acqui, and that these be accepted by Monsignor the Archbishop for those Sisters who will reside in his diocese.
2. That they depend from the Ordinary of this diocese, like all [p. 397] the other Sisters resident in the diocese, especially for that which concerns the confessor, ordinary or extraordinary, etc.
3. That they may not have an Oratory in their House, but as they live but a few meters from the above-mentioned church, they will assist at mass, sermons and approach the Sacrament of Penance in it.
4. That none of the priests, clerics or other members of the Congregation visit these Sisters except the Superior General of the Congregation, and the priest that he will appoint specially to look after them and supervise their conduct; their confessor may not come except in the case of illness.
5. That the school open and close at least a quarter of an hour before or after the boys' school if it is in the vicinity.
6. That this be not publicized in the papers, but simply announced from the pulpit of the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

Turin, October 30, 1875

Original in Cen. Sales. Archives – Rome

APPENDIX No. 15d

Decree for the opening of the House of Turin– Valdocco

Viso memoriali nobis ab admondum rev.do sacerdote Joanne Baptista Bosco diocesano nostro, Fundatore et recto re Congregationis Salesianae, die 22 huius mensis martii, quod in archivo curiae nostrae asservari praecipimus, et in quo rogamur de nostro beneplacito ad hoc, ut in hac urbe, in parte suburbii Duriae, quae dicitur Valdocco, non longe ad aebidus in quibus residet dicta Congregatio Salesiana, aperiantur scholae pro puellis illorum locorum et hae committantur curae foeminarum religiosarum sub titulo filiarum S. Mariae Auxiliatricis, quarum praecipua domus est in loco Mornisii (Mornese) dioecesis Aquensis; nos etsi de his foeminis religiosis; quarum institutio refertura ad annum millesium octingentesimum septuagesimum secundum hucusque nullam certam notitiam habuerimus attamen fldentes in [p. 398] singulari prudentia, que insignitur excell.mus ac rev.mus D.D. Joseph Sciandra, episcopus Aquensis, qui consensum suum praestitit institutioni Congregationis harum religiosarum foeminarum in sua diocesi, et eis non dubia signa dedit protectionis suae, consensum quoque damus ad hoc, ut dictae scholae dicto loco hisce religiosis foeminis committantur: eisque benedictionem nostram impertimur, ut reapse et uberrimocum fructu ad Dei gloriam et animarum salutem opus suum aggrediantur et perficiant.

Declaramus vero nos per praesentes litteras dictam Congregationem in nostra diocesi nondum approbare neque esse approbaturus quousque per sufficiens experimentum, quid in Domino hac in re statuendum sit, nos ipsi

persepexerimus.

Concedimus v.ero admodum rev.do rectori' Congregation is Salesianae, ut ipsi liceat at harum religiosarum foeminarum confessiones excipiendas destinare, quos de sacerdotibus professis congregation is suas ipse magis idoneos in Domino judicaverit.

Taurinorum Augustas die Martii 1876

† LAURENTIUM – archiepiscopus
Can.cus CAVIASSI – pro cancellarius

Original in the Can. Sales. Archives–Rome

APPENDIX No. 16a

Traverso – Attorney to Don Bosco

Reverend Don Bosco,

Open, oh heavens I You will shout when you see this letter from me. You are right. I am aware that I have often failed in respect to you. But in the first place your Reverence must know that if I do not write, it's because I fear annoying you. Secondly, your Reverence is so busy that in the end I would surely disturb you by writing. But don't think I have forgotten Don Bosco, because I think of him day and night, and oftener, when I'm talking to Father Costamagna here who has me under his feet like his shoes. [\[p. 399\]](#)

Preamble finished, I come to the subject: You must know that here they are all mumbling because you ceded to the Bishop of Acqui the place where the Sisters are. Well done I These people no longer merit your patience; they make themselves unworthy of it by their conduct. It is said that some days ago they sent you a memorandum, that your Reverence should not do them this wrong: but remember, Don Bosco, that with few exception, that document was signed by people capable of betraying you on the first occasion. It is rumored besides, that your intention is to transplant the family to Gavi, and I shout: Well done I In the first place the population of Gavi from the point of view of education, sincerity and goodness of heart are way ahead of Mornese: rather they are deserving of 90% in all this. The mere mention of this deliberation of yours a. wakened great enthusiasm in Gavi and many persons are disposed to help in the building of the House. As Counselor of the Gavi community I can assure you that the municipal schools of Gavi, and in the not too distant future, the direction of the kindergarten, will be made available to your Sisters.

I must also tell you that a road is being planned between Gavi and Arquata; the engineer has been already appointed to study the project. Finally, I must add that I found a place within a stone's throw of the city which would be most suitable as a school site. Father Costamagna will give you all the details. For want of time I have to conclude at this point. Pray for me and believe me,

Mornese, July 3, 1876

Yours devotedly,
TRAVERSO (attorney)

Say a Hail Mary to Our Lady that she may cure me, because I am not well, by any means.

Original in the Cen. Sales. Archives - Rome.

[p. 400]

APPENDIX No. 16b

My dearest Father Don Bosco,

I am awaiting a reply regarding Sister Teresa. Do what you think best in the Lord; we shall be happy to obey. Now she is disposed to make an all-out effort, but will that be only self-repression?

Nactus opportunitatem, Tognin, who has very strong arguments on this matter, has been pressing me to present it to you. Last week he was deputed to write to the Bishop, and set Gavi in motion. The net result of the intervention is that it became very clear that all in Gavi are favorably disposed towards our Sisters, and that the town would be most suitable for their apostolate in the event of the Bishop of Acqui's buying the premises here at Mornese.

The Canon would receive the Institute with open arms; the four teachers are just waiting the moment to hand over the four elementary classes to Don Bosco. The area of the site is most suitable for the town and for us; it is but a few meters outside the town. The people are prepared to help with the building. In fact according to Tognin, some gentlemen would be prepared to hand over the completed building to you, waiting for the money until convenient to you.

Mornese has asked Don Bosco not to abandon it, but this request initiated by the good parish priest was signed by the majority through human respect, this is certain.

Transport from Mornese to Gavi would not be expensive...

the railway to Gavi is being planned.

In a word, think about it and decide what you think best; we shall be pleased to accept any decision.

I greet you on behalf of the parish priest and all the community.

Pray much for your poor son,

Mornese, July 2, 1876

Father JAMES COSTAMAGNA

[p. 401] P.S. I forgot to tell you I went to Sestri to visit the Sisters. They are well, have a lot of work on hand, live in the midst of dangers, yet the Lord helps them in an extraordinary way.

They have barely time to hear mass and make a little meditation.

The good they do for those girls is something very consoling and would be still more so if it were not prevented by a badly-understood prudence. Poor things, they really feel like fish out of water!

The Canon on the other hand is looking after them and hears their confessions, so that there is absolutely no fear of serious danger. May Jesus bless us all.

Postscript signed by Don Bosco: "Both projects to be promoted—the sale of Mornese and purchase of Gavi."

Original in the Cen. Sales. Archives - Rome

APPENDIX No. 17

Don Bosco's request to the Archbishop of Turin for the opening of the House of Lanzo

Your Excellency,

The great moral and material advantages enjoyed by those who in seminaries or other houses of education have introduced nuns for those works and occupations which are suited to their conditions, have inspired me to do likewise for the boarding school at Lanzo.

Therefore, I beg Your Excellency's permission to allow some Sisters of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians to take over this work in the above-mentioned school. They would reside in separate apartments, subject to the same conditions under which you permitted others of the same Institute to teach the poor girls of Valdocco.

The occupations of the Sisters would be exclusively in the school and for the school. For what pertains to their practices of piety they [p. 402] would participate in those held regularly for the students of the school.

Confident of a favorable reply to this request, with deep gratitude I have the honor to profess myself,

Turin, September 10, 1876

Your Excellency's humble supplicant,

Father JOHN BOSCO

APPENDIX No. 18

Treatment of the Theme "The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians" as taken from the minutes of the First General Chapter of the Salesians (September – October 1877)

VIII Commission formed by Fathers Costamagna, Bonetti, Cerruti, Albera; Reporter Father Cerruti.

The growth of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is truly admirable.

Many Houses have been opened already; they are engaged in various forms of work, and already begin to share the mission with us. The good they can do is very great and they will accomplish and complete work begun by us . . .

Once it seemed that priests only were ministers of the Word of God. But now it seems that there is a tendency in girls' schools to appoint ladies who have little regard for religious principles. Therefore it seems necessary that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians prepare for Teachers College Examinations and qualify to take over the education of young girls, especially the poor and abandoned, in various countries, so that little by little they may do

for them what the Salesians do for boys. Thus they too can be ministers of the Word.

We, therefore, propose that our Sisters work in this direction. . . . As, however, the Lord has disposed that we have the help of [p. 403] so many good Sisters who can look after the linen and the kitchen in our Houses, let us use them for these services, but with the necessary precautions.

Here the commission proposes norms and regulations for the reciprocal relations between the Salesians and Sisters.

APPENDIX No. 19a

Relative to the Communal Girls' School of Mornese

On April 3, 1877 a meeting took place in the Town Hall of Mornese.

Counselor Campi developed his proposal that it would be advisable to entrust the teaching in the girls' school to the Sisters of Don Bosco, who already had their headquarters in the area; that this didn't in anyway cast a slur on the present teacher, Miss Maccagno, as she had on several occasions expressed a desire to be released from that office, due to her inability to cope with excessive numbers, and the possibility of her taking over the mixed school of Casaleggio, which would be equally advantageous to her. Furthermore the spacious rooms in Don Bosco's House and the number of good teachers are other factors which, from a hygienic and educational viewpoint, render the transfer most attractive. He urged that the matter be put to vote under both these heading, observing that in any event the operation would not be put into effect until the school year 1877-'78.

The voting which ensued resulted in eight Counselors in favor and one against the motion, that is Mr. Massa. It was, therefore, adopted; and the Mayor was deputed to notify Miss Angela Maccagno to this effect, and to approach the Superiors of this Institute of Sisters that they might accept the project.

Thus the present minutes were closed, having been read and signed as follows: Signed: Mazzarello –Massa–Traverso (secretary)

[p. 404]

APPENDIX No. 19b

About the Girl's School at Mornese

Town of Mornese - 1877

On September 14, 1877 a meeting took place in the Town Hall, Mornese .

Following the resolutions adopted at the last session the Council met again in the persons of Messrs.: Mazzarello Agustine, Mayor Campi Valentino–Chio Laurence–Pastore G. Maria–Mazzarello John–Arecco John–Mazzarello Joseph–Bianchi Jerome–Bodrato Joseph–Fossati Louis–Mazzarello Dominic–Pestarino Angelo–Counselor, with the undersigned secretary.

The Mayor declared that the deliberation taken on April 3 last had been rejected by the Scholastic Provincial Council on the grounds that it was illegal. The Town Council had entrusted to Don Bosco the right to organize girls' schools, to appoint teachers, to administer and direct such schools, and these were rights invested in the Communal Council which they could not lawfully renounce. It was incumbent on him to clarify this point by reading in the presence of all, the relative communication signed by the subprefect of the Area and dated June 2. Counselor Campi, who had introduced the motion, condemned as illegal by the scholastic authority, stated that in his proposal there was no intention whatever that the town officials renounce the powers invested in them by the law, to entrust them to a private entity, but simply to do what had always been done—for example, by the municipality of Novi—which had entrusted the boys' schools to a religious community, the Somaschian Brothers, on an understanding that the Council would nominate the teachers, and direct and supervise the teaching. He requested the Mayor to write a letter to this effect to the subprefect. He expressed his astonishment that the Mornese administration couldn't do that which the most efficient municipalities in the province were doing everyday; that he had no further suggestions to make in the matter, but that he was fully convinced that given the above explanation the scholastic [p. 405] authorities would annul the forementioned law. Hence he would abide by the Council's decision.

The Council, given the observations of Counselor Campi, declared unanimously by that they would proceed to the nomination of the teacher according to the prescriptions of the Law.

APPENDIX No. 20a

Decree of Monsignor Sciandra as Delegate of the Holy See

*Joseph Maria Sciandra
Dei et S. Apostolical Sedis gratia
Episcopus Aquensis
hac in parte Delegatus Apostolicus*

Viso, et qua est reverentia, excepto Rescripto S.C. Episcoporum et Regularium sub die 14 Septembris 1877, praesenti decreto adnexo.

Quum nobis con stet de veritate narratorum quae laudatum Rescriptum praecedunt.

Visa item declaratione in scriptis emissa ab oratore d.no sacerdote Joanne Bosco Congregationis Salesianae rectore generali, se reddi. turum aedes, de quibus, cum adnexa Ecclesia, Ordini religioso Cappuccinorum, quo casu isti in dictum locum redire valeant, recepto tamen prius pretio pro emptione ab oratore persoluto.

Utentes auctoritate nobis benigne commissa, facultatem damus d.no sacerdotis Joanni Bosco sedes acquirenti juxta preces ab ipso datas S. Sedi, ac servantis lis omnibus quae subsecuto Rescripto S.C. Episcoporum et Regularium praescripta fuere.

Datum die 27 Septembris 1877

† JOSEPH MARIA – Episc. del.ap.
Sac. FRANCISCUS BERTA – Sec.

[p. 406]

APPENDIX No. 20b

Deed of Purchase of "Our Lady of Grace" Convent

During the reign of His Majesty Victor Emmanuele II, by the grace of God and the will of the people, King of Italy.

Sale of immovable property here designated by the Oenological Society of Savigliano to the Reverend John Bosco for the sum of L 30,000; October 12, 1877 –in my study at Savigliano–on the second floor of my residence, No. 5, Saint Andrew's District. Present: Thomas Miretti, royal Notary resident in this city, member of the Notary Council of Saluzzo; Canon Andrew Davicino, son of the deceased Joseph Rossi, son of Matthew (deceased), proprietor, native of Gambarana, and resident in Turin; the former born at Savigliano, where he resides. Both are acting as witnesses, known, qualified and acceptable.

Present also were the following: Messrs. John Bressa, son of Louis (deceased); printer, born and resident in Savigliano, director of the Oenological Society–Attorney Saverio Negro, son of the Notary Francis, (deceased); Lawyer Albert of Pessinetto, son of John Baptist–Solicitor Charles Alphonus Lingua, son of Joseph (deceased)–procurator general in virtue of the Act of Oct. 27, 1869, drawn up by Lingua and registered on the following November 15 No. 997, on payment of L3 c60 in their capacity of heirs of their cousin Francis Lingua, born and resident in Saviglia-Becker Ermanno, son of Louis (deceased) born at Neuwied (Prussia) resident at Turin proprietor–Braidia Bruno, John Baptist, son of Michael, shop assistant in quality of heir of John Derastici (deceased), son of Francis Sebastiano (deceased) by holograph testament of June 24, 1876, deposited to Solicitor Devecchi, with a public act of Dec. 26, 1876, registered in Nizza Monferrato on Dec. 27 of the same year, No. 1636, by payment of L10. The said Braidia Bruno, born in Susa, resident in Nizza Monferrato, represented here by Mr. Steven Lanzelli, son of Steven (deceased), owner, born and resident at Savigliano, in virtue of a special inserted power of attorney on the 9th of the current month into the present act for that effect which, by right all the associates of the above mentioned Society, and thus invested of all rights by the same, [p. 407] awaited the cessation of his own rights and participation made previously by the other associate, Mr. Mazziano Grassi (son of Steven, deceased) with contracts of April 12, 1875, stipulated by Negro, attorney Giacinto on the one hand, and on the other by Reverend Father John Bosco, son of Francis (deceased) born at Castelnuovo d' Asti, resident in Turin, here represented by the Reverend Father Michael Rua, (son of John Baptist, deceased) on the 3rd of the same month No. 31, with L3 c60, known to me, the attorney, in virtue of the present act, they agreed and stipulate the following:

The above mentioned Oenological Society, represented by the forementioned persons has sold, as it is stated by the present deed to Father J. Bosco, here accepting in the person of Father Michael Rua, the following property, which the Society owns in the town of Nizza Monferrato, consisting of an estate composed of a vineyard. . . and a spacious building, once used as a church, of about 196 ares, (1 are = 100 m²) surrounded by a wall, at a short distance from the district of Our Lady of Grace, which has no map, with a road to the south, to the east by the heirs of Count Melchiorre Corsi di Bosnasco, and to the north the heirs of Mrs. Josephine Morino, and the other items which will not prejudice the validity of the contract.

The Society invests the Reverend Father J. Bosco with the above establishment with all its rights, uses and sites passive and active inherent to it and constitutes him proprietor with the due promise of eviction and as free from any mortgages, and consignment of relative certificate.

We declare hereby that the sale is done as a whole, and not as a measure with respective renunciation at every recall for difference of surface, and is the same as the purchase made by it from the municipality of Nizza Monferrato in a contract of June 24, 1871, stipulated by Arrigotti, registered in Nizza Monferrato on July 13, 1871, No. 768 with L988, and thus under all the conditions by the same appearing as if repeated in the present act, having the purchaser take cognisance of them and having received a copy of them.

The Reverend Father J. Bosco will be considered proprietor of the establishment from this day forward, with the charge of paying its relative contributions. The Society reserves the right of taking all the tools, and the funds of any kind in use for the care of the vines, which still exist on the rented grounds as they are not yet included [p. 408] in the sale. The mobile effects alone which being incorporated with the building are included in the sale.

The sale price of the entire property is L30,000, of which L 15,000 are paid here, numbered in legal currency, which having been recognized have been withdrawn by the above mentioned associates in my presence and in that of the undersigned witnesses, and for which a formal receipt is given. The remaining 15,000, the Reverend Father J. Bosco, in the person of the above mentioned, promises to pay to the associates in April of next year 1879, with the annual rate of interest (6%) payable every six months, matured without exception, and under the obligation of goods of the Reverend Father J. Bosco, in legal form, and in case of defect under charge of paying damages and expenses.

For the execution of the above obligations, the Reverend Father J. Bosco, in the person of the above-mentioned and the sellers, elects residence in this town and in my study where they declare valid any demand, quotation, notification and relative proceeding.

The above-mentioned license is inserted into the personal deed. I, attorney, have received the present deed, consent to which, together with that of the insertion, I have read in a clear, intelligible voice to the parties, in the presence of the witnesses, who declare that the script is in keeping with their will, and are here undersigned.

This deed has been written on two sheets by a trustworthy person, and fills seven pages.

Signed: JOHN BRESSA
Notary: SEVERIO NEGRO
Lawyer: ANGELO ALBERTO
Attorney: CHARLES ALPHONSUS LINGUA
HERMAN BECKER
STEVEN LANZETTI
Father MICHAEL RUA
Canon ANDREW DAVICINO (Witness)
JOSEPH ROSSI (Witness)
THOMAS MIRETTI. Notary

[p. 409]

APPENDIX No. 21

*Don Bosco's letter to Mrs. Helen Jackson
Principal Benefactor of the Salesians of Montevideo*

Dear Mrs. Jackson,

.....

Father Cagliero and Father Lasagna have frequently written to me of your piety, your affection for the Pope, and your great charity towards Pius College. The help you so kindly gave for the building of this College. . . (. . .) the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will ensure that your name will be held in veneration while the Salesian Congregation exists, and that special prayers will be daily offered for you. You have been inscribed in the list of our outstanding benefactors, which means that every morning in all our Houses supplication will be made to God that He may pour His blessings on your brother John, and give to dear Clarita the graces she needs (. . .)

The work which will give you great merit before God and man is that of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. Father Cagliero has chosen six for the mission, and they are diligently studying Spanish and preparing for the departure in November.

But all the Sisters of the new Institute are praying for you who are responsible for their first foundation in South America. Perhaps you do not fully understand the excellence of the work you are doing. To found an educational Institute in any country means to confer a signal benefit on all social classes of its citizens, at present and in the future.

.....

Turin, September 13, 1877

Your humble servant,

Father JOHN BOSCO

APPENDIX No. 22a

*Proceedings for the foundation at Chieri
Don Bosco's request to His Excellency, the Archbishop*

Your Excellency

Father John Bosco, in his desire to provide for the moral needs of the poor girls of Chieri, would prepare a house and chapel in Bertinetti house there.

He now petitions your Excellency to allow the religious entitled Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to take up residence there so as to look after those girls, in a manner similar to that of their Sisters in charge of the school at Valdocco.

Secondly he requests that you delegate a person to look at the above mentioned chapel, who, finding it suitably adorned and prepared, may bless it with the formula prescribed by the Church.

Turin, May 10, 1878

Your humble servant,

Father JOHN Bosco

APPENDIX No. 22b

Archepiscopal Decree for the House of Mary Help of Christians Chieri

Laurentius Gastaldi Dei et Apostolicae Sedis gratia Archiepiscopus Taurinensis, Doctor et magnus cancellarius Collegii Theologorum. SS. D.N. Pii Papae IX Praelatus domesticus et Pontificio Solio Assistens.

Dilecto nobis in Christo Reverendissimo Domino Joanni Bosco Superiori Congregationis Salesianae salutem in Domino.

Quum per subannexum memoria le a te nobis exhibitum acceperimus, in districtu parochialis Ecclesiae S. Mariae de Scala Civitatis [p. 411] Cherii te domum, iisdem in precibus expressam, erexisse, ubi puellarum saluti aeternae pro viribus prospicias, tuum studium et pietatem in Domino commendantes, tibi per praesentes, auctoritate nostra ordinaria, concedimus in dicta domo Sacellum Deo in honorem Sanctae Theresiae facultatem erigendi, quod nomine nostro, dummodo in eo omnia ecclesiasticis legibus tum generalibus, tum Dioecesanis conformia reperiantur, a Domino Curato Ecclesiae parochialis S. Mariae de Scala praedictae Civitatis, benedicendum erit.

Insuper tibi facultatem facimus aliquos ex tuis sacerdotibus deputandi qui in hoc Oratorio sacra munia obeant, missas scilicet celebrent, confessiones excipiant, sermones habeant, atque catechesim doceant.

Tandem sit tibi periter facultas destinandi aliquos ex Religiosis quae se devoverunt operibus pietatis et charitatis sub titulo Filiarum Mariae Auxiliatricis, ut illuc se conferant ad curam suscipiendam praedictae domus et puellarum, quae in scholas et Oratorium conveniunt. Dum haec ex animi nostri benevolentia concedimus totis viribus te in Domino hortamur, ut omnia semper fiant cum plena satisfactione superioris Ecclesiastici localis.

Mandamus decretum hoc nostrum cum precibus in Archiepiscopalis Curiae nostrae acta referri, eorumque exemplar tradi ad effectum.

Datum Taurini die decime nonae mensis junii anno 1878.

† LAURENTIUS – archiepiscopus
M. SORASIO – secretarius

APPENDIX No. 22c

The Chieri Oratory Controversy
P. Testa, S.J. writes to Don Boseo - September, 1877

The Oratory was started and your Reverence was contacted relative thereto. As you know the Curate of the Cathedral took over. He elected three foundation members, Braia, Ciceri, and Father Sona's sister. Miss Braia introduced two singing teachers, who as far as I know, disturbed the peace of the Oratory. I strove to have them expelled, but didn't succeed; in the meantime Miss Ciceri withdrew; by indirect means I obtained that the troublemakers be restrained; I also obtained through Monsignor, that the Oratory wouldn't be held during the hours of church functions, because that is prohibited by the Pope. The girls' Oratory, from what I can gather from the curate himself, is not going well; it lacks life; I hope nonetheless, to keep it in existence until such time as I will state later.

On my return to Chieri on holiday, I heard all the details, and obtained a special blessing from the Pope, then drew up a little program for a boy's Oratory, and thus, equipped, approached the Archbishop. On seeing my instructions from Rome he confirmed all, word for word; also the new personnel (those chosen and given me by the Archbishop did nothing but gossip). It is composed of Canon Sona—director; Father Cumino, trained by you—vice-director and treasurer; and Serra—Chaplain and music instructor. With these and a few nominal consultants the work began.

I wanted it to be under Saint George's parish so as not to have trouble with the cathedral or seminary. Therefore we rented a premise at a very high figure from P. Dominic Almando, and invited the parish priest of Saint George's, the abbot Sotto and many others and began the Oratory with 60 boys—all that could be recruited in the area. I read the program in the Holy Father's name and commented on it; I said, of course, that it had been approved by the Ordinary and the parish priest according to the sacred Canons; furthermore that the civil authorities on being informed had promised a subsidy after two months. The boys played, and all sang a hymn in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to whom the Oratory is dedicated; then some little gifts were distributed to the boys. So far all is going well, but the limited space doesn't permit us to accept the 200 boys applying for admission, which they do on special tickets given now and then to those who observe the rules.

A few days later I met the curate of the cathedral, with whom I am on good terms, as with all the others. He complained because I had opened the Oratory without telling him. I told him frankly and fearlessly:

"I am astonished at your statement. You know well that it is fully two years that we are talking of this; and you also know that [p. 413] I have never been able to get any help from you in the matter, therefore, I was constrained to turn elsewhere."

"But," he replied, "Your Reverence knows that the parish priest has the right and duty to give religious instruction; you can instruct those of Saint George's parish, but it is up to me to instruct mine."

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "perhaps you forget that a doctorate was conferred on me in Rome and therefore I know the limits of parochial rights, better than those holding doctorates from the University of Turin, which doesn't enjoy particular fame in Rome, in this field. Therefore I say that you have the right to teach in your church; but the young boys of your parish have also the right according to the Roman Canons, to go elsewhere to sing Vespers and get Benediction (which surely are not obligatory) and to amuse themselves according to the possibilities of an Oratory as promoted by Pius IX. Would you then, through a misunderstanding of your rights, leave the boys a prey to the dangers of the streets and the squares? You should think rather of the grave obligation you are under to guard their moral wellbeing, and to oppose the recent law passed which seeks to prevent religious instruction; to this your care should be directed."

Then, turning this sermon into a joke I said to him: "You should have another strict obligation, which is to give me a drink of your good wine, because you have exhausted me for more than an hour." Thus having drunk with him, I shook hands, leaving him without the desire to repeat his reproof.

I feared opposition on the part of Father Boccardo and the Archbishop over a remark made by Boccardo about the Oratory. To avoid it I wrote him a letter, mostly intended for the Archbishop, saying that I had tried in vain last year to enlist his help in the work of the Oratory; that I had turned to the Holy Father for his blessing, then to the Archbishop and finally to the parish priest of Saint George's, who had responded with the new personnel. I stressed that those who favor this work will be blessed by God; those who oppose it will be severely punished, and I quoted for him the case of three ecclesiastics whom I knew personally. He didn't dare to answer me, but when opportunity offered, expressed surprise that I had had recourse to Rome. I answered: "I know the country and the atmosphere; however, I acted so deliberately and will continue to do so." [p. 414]

Thus far have we arrived with the works, and the others must now sustain them until you establish here communities of your priests and Sisters.

When this happens it has been decided by us and by Reverend Father Pellico, our Counselor, that the boys' and girls' Oratory will be handed over to you with all the equipment. If these are not already paid for with offerings received, you will have to buy them, that is, you will assume the debt, which at the moment is L300. You are requested to use the services of Father Cumino, Vice Director, as long as the Archbishop permits. The hopes of establishing a house of your Society in Chieri without opposition would be optimistic, for the curate of the cathedral has said that he wants the Sisters of Don Bosco but not the Salesians. I still fear opposition from others, especially the Archbishop.

However, I think you should act thus: get a brief from the Pope for the foundation of a house at Chieri. You can request that a copy of same be sent to the Archbishop, for his information. Out of a list of six priests ask for the dispensing of three, or at least two: and indicate that they come with the set purpose of opening Oratories and schools and conducting them according to your Institute. In this way neither the Archbishop nor the curate nor others can prevent them.

Father Rostagno could draw up the brief or the request in Canonical form: you should then go to Rome to deal with the matter directly. Pray therefore, and have prayers offered that *viribus unitis*, all together we may save from ruin our poor country and the faith of our fathers.

Allow me to humbly kiss the hands of the Reverend Founder of the Salesians.

An intimate servant in Christ,
Father LOUIS TESTA – D.C.D.B.

[p. 415]

APPENDIX No. 22d

Canon Oddenino to Don Bosco

Reverend Sir,

Early last week I wrote to Your Reverence requesting a reply about the religious functions, which for some months are being held in the so-called Oratory of Don Bosco erected in the parochial district of this city. My letter was motivated by synodal prescriptions, not by reports given orally to us. As the reply requested has not reached me, rather, seeing that the same abuses are continued, I feel obliged in conscience to inform Monsignor, the Archbishop about everything, and at the same time advise you of my decision.

Certainly agreeing to the advice of my Archbishop, to whom I had to convey the explicit intentions of Your Reverence, exposed to me on various occasions; indeed in enthusiastically soliciting the opening of the Oratory in question for the instruction of the girls of the parishes, in providing them with proper entertainment, I would never have imagined to be obliged to write you such an un. pleasant letter. Had things worked out harmoniously, and within the determined plans and scope, I wouldn't have dreamed that at the very outset, I would have to lament infractions, abuses, produced by whom? and why? But, alas! I was mistaken in my persuasions, and now I am tasting the bitter consequences.

Weighed down by this nightmare of sorrow, by consternation at having to proceed as stated above, I take the opportunity of renewing my protestation of esteem and profound respect to your Reverence.

December 9, 1878

Your most devoted servant,

APPENDIX No. 22e [p. 416]

Reply of Father Bonetti to Canon Oddenino

Dear Canon,

My Reverend Superior, Don Bosco, couldn't reply to your letter because of an eye infection, which obliges him to complete rest. As he has entrusted the task to me, I wish to state that in my opinion the functions celebrated at Saint Teresa's Oratory are not in any way contrary to the synodal prescriptions. In Turin these functions are carried out in all the Oratories simultaneously with those of the respective parishes. Therefore, until competent authority forbid it, we believe we are in order, and are not guilty of any of the abuses of which you accuse us.

Your Reverence would wish that those functions not be held at the same time as those in the cathedral, but would you please tell us when you would have us hold them? If before the time of the cathedral functions, it would be too early, and the girls, once the prayers were over, would leave the Oratory to wander about the city, the seniors among them going to dances, as do their companions who do not frequent the Oratory. If the functions at the Oratory are too late, it would especially in this season be already dark, and in this case would it be possible to keep 400 girls in order to such a late hour?

To send them home after night had fallen would not meet with your approval.

If your Reverence would deign to reflect that the scope of the Oratory is twofold: one is to instruct; the other to entertain the young people in suitable pastimes, so as to withdraw them from those which are not decent. If we do as we have done up to this we shall reap both harvests; if not we shall fail; indeed we run the risk of destroying the work. With esteem.

December 10, 1878

Your humble servant,

[p. 417]

APPENDIX No. 22f

Father Rua to His Excellency Monsignor Gastaldi

Your Excellency,

Some days ago I was summoned by Monsignor Vicar to hear some observations about the girls' Oratory of Chieri. Now for your Reverence's information I consider it advisable to give you a written account of the same.

The girls attending that Oratory are about 400 in number ranging from seven to thirteen years. They are divided into twelve classes. On Sunday mornings they are given the opportunity for confession; mass begins at 8:00 after which a short explanation of the gospel is given, suited to their age groups. At 10:00 about 150 return for Sunday classes, which lasts until midday. The majority of these girls, being poor, go to work in cotton and cloth factories as soon as they are able for any work, hence they are for the most part absolutely illiterate, as they have never been to school.

At 1:30 the three playgrounds are full of girls divided according to age; they recreate with the assistance of the Sisters and the senior and better educated girls, who also help with the religious instruction. At 2:15 they divide into groups in each playground and go to catechism accompanied by their respective teachers.

When catechism is finished the *Magnificat* or a suitable hymn is sung, after which a short easy instruction is given on the Commandments, and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament is imparted. On coming out of chapel they resume their games until late evening and thus they have no time to wander about the city or to go to balls which are organized in every part of the city, where during the hours in which they are open, children of 12 can be seen participating in this entertainment.

From what the Monsignor Vicar has told me, some people in Chieri do not wish these functions to be held simultaneously with those held in the cathedral. I brought to his notice that to arrange otherwise would necessitate having recourse to one or other of the following arrangements: to send away the Oratorians between 2:00 or [p. 418] 3:00 and thus run the risk of their going here and there about the city, because Your Excellency knows well the dangers of the times in which we live, and the liberty which on the main parents give their daughters; or begin our church functions in late evening and send the girls home at night, as the functions of the *Duomo* begin about 5:00 p.m. I note besides that the Oratory functions do not interfere in any way with those of the cathedral, because the former are prepared for one class of people, the latter for another. The Oratory functions are suitable for girls between the ages of seven and sixteen, who wouldn't attend the cathedral celebrations or if they did attend would draw little or no fruit from them, as indeed they wouldn't get the bread with which their teeth could deal.

Before we took over the functions in that Oratory some girls went to the parish and we continued to hold the functions at the same hour.

It is well to keep in mind that the scope of the Oratories is twofold, as are the fruits to be gathered from them: instruction and withdrawal from dangers, which are equally grave for girls and boys. Now this scope and these fruits are being realized in this Oratory, so that many people of the city and also from the cathedral chapter regard the work as a blessing from God. If Your Excellency would care to be informed further on the matter and consult Canon Cumino or Francis, Calosso, or Sona, you would soon know the opinion of the good people of Chieri about this work.

In submitting to Your Excellency's wisdom the foregoing account and observations, I beg you to favor us with your advice about the matter, which we shall always receive with veneration, and where our work does not seem to be pleasing to God, we shall leave off at once.

It certainly is not *ad destructionem* but *ad aedificationem* that we maintain the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in that House, and that every Saturday we send a priest there from Turin.

I willingly avail of this opportunity to express to Your Reverend Excellency my high esteem and deep veneration.

Turin, December 10, 1878

Your most humble and devoted servant,

Father MICHAEL RUA

APPENDIX No. 22g

Canon Sona to Father Bonetti

Dear and Very Reverend Father,

Having heard the news regarding the Oratory and the Salesian House established at Chieri, and fearing that in this very week they may become even more serious and distressing, and trusting notwithstanding in the help and protection of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, who can reduce it all to smoke, I thought it necessary to tell you my opinion in writing, asking you to take it all in good part and refer it to your Reverend Superior.

With regard to what you wrote and expressed verbally up to yesterday and to what you arranged—i.e. to send the smaller girls to the parish, it is not my duty to judge these things, or indicate their consequences. I only wish to recommend you to keep an exact account of everything written or spoken, said or heard from the Curate or Archpriest, as also from the Vicar General and from the most Reverend Archbishop. In a word, of all that was treated of, disposed and done on this occasion, as also on the occasion of the blessing of the Oratory, and of the permission asked from the Curia for the sacred functions.

I am morally certain that you will have to deal with everything either in the presence of the Archbishop or Archepiscopal Curia, since either the curate or the Archpriest V.F. Lione, have given an exact and exaggerated accounts with the intent of closing the Oratory, or preventing by other means the devout and necessary functions and religious practices, and all this during the week.

I warmly recommend to your charity and prudence and much more to the charity, prudence, magnanimity and fortitude of Don Bosco not to lose heart, nor withdraw this great blessing of an Oratory and Salesian House from Chieri on account of these obstacles.

Yes, yes: it is the devil who is behind all this opposition, as he was behind all the obstacles that have arisen in past years whenever there was a question of doing good to souls in Chieri. Therefore, I earnestly pray you, and through you, your very reverend Superior to consider [p. 420] everything calmly, and counting on the help of God, and on the authority and permission obtained from the Holy See not allow the devil to triumph, by closing down the Salesian Oratory at Chieri. It isn't necessary for me to suggest the utmost prudence, but I think it advisable not to hold further discussions, nor to speak further about it with either Canon Oddenino, or the Vicar General, Archpriest Lione.

With regard to the Archbishop I believe that if he were fully informed, by someone who could do it properly, he wouldn't place any difficulties in the way, especially against an Oratory, as we know how frequently he recommends these Oratories to parish priests for the salvation of youth. Here at Chieri there is a crying need for such work for young girls; here there are many dangers and grave scandals for even young girls.

Unfortunately public dances are organized at Carnival time and on the feasts of Our Lady of Grace and during the annual fairs, and indeed on every feast; public dances are held at the city gates and even in private premises. Yes, unfortunately the civil authorities are faced with so many illegitimate births which result from the serious scandals committed against these poor girls, etc. etc.—Obscene romances, obscene conversations, flirtations, and so forth. And then some say that their parishioners do not dance! And on these grounds reject the intervention of outside priests!

Be very careful, because a big story will be made of a very young child who went skipping around the cathedral grounds on her way to the Oratory. Oh, what a scandal! What a scandal! If it is true that a little girl of the Oratory went to skip in the cathedral grounds let it be known to your Reverence, that they learned to skip like that during the course of the year when the vice-curates were running the Oratory, and evidently no one sent them to skip in the square of the cathedral.

Know besides that should some one tell you that the Canon Curate has raised these difficulties after speaking about them with the Reverend Chapter, know that this is not true, because these things were never discussed with the assembled Chapter; besides, it isn't convenient to descend to particulars, so as not to be deceived, or involved in harmful and dangerous terms!

And thus I hope that the Oratory will progress from good to [p. 421] better with the help of the Lord; also Canon Cumino hopes for a brighter future, but you will remember his advice.

May Baby Jesus save us all. I am,

Chieri, Dec. 17, 1878

Your affec. though unworthy,

Can. SONA

APPENDIX No. 22h

The Vicar Foraneo, Can. Lione to Father Bonetti

Very illustrious and very reverend Father,

In the first place I must ask your pardon for not having yet returned your record [a copy of the Pontifical Brief, dated September 12, 1876] intact as I received it. It was accidentally torn as I was taking it from my pocket; the little piece which came away on my fingers I fixed up as best I could.

Coming then to the matters in question, you will have noticed that in the rescript there is a clause: *servatis servandis, et sine ullo jurium parochialium detrimento*; that is the kernel of the question.

The plan which Your Reverence submits seems to confirm the points that give rise to this very question, nor can it be easily accepted, insofar as you would have no persons excluded from the Oratory. It would thus be vague and uncertain, comprising an infinity of persons, who would wish to be in charge of the singing or taking care of the girls; and it states that full liberty will be granted the girls of the Oratory to assist at religious functions according to their wishes which is to say, that henceforth these girls can stay at the Oratory for sacred functions as they do for recreation.

Finally I must bring to your notice that as I had to inform Monsignor about the compromise arrived at last Sunday's conference, and not having received any word from you about the matter in question, I could not accept the plan offered by your Reverence; from all the [p. 422] foregoing you will understand what your duty is in the present emergency .

Chieri, Dec. 22, 1878

Your devoted servant,
LIONE - can. and vicar

APPENDIX No. 22i

Father Rua to His Excellency the Archbishop

Your Excellency,

I have been informed that yesterday you conferred with various members of your esteemed Chapter about the Oratory of Saint Teresa, belonging to the Salesian Congregation, regarding what is being done there for the young girls of the city. I also heard that Your Excellency expressed satisfaction on the good being accomplished there, and that you clearly showed to those not in favor of it what your attitude towards it was. Confident that Your Excellency is pleased to show us further signs of your benevolence, I present you with a copy of a brief from the Holy Father, Pius IX, on which we base the right of holding religious services in this Oratory, as in all our other Houses in Italy, France and America. In the name of Don Bosco, who is at present in Marseilles, I send you the enclosed copy with the sole aim of giving you a further argument with which to persuade the dissidents that what the Salesians are doing is in order, and authorized, not only by you but by the Holy See, so that through a vain fear they do not further hamper the good we try to do.

And as soon as the occasion offers, I wish to tell you that after our private conversation with you about the middle of last month, we presented to Very Reverend Canon Lione, Rural Vicar of Chieri, the following program which to us seemed reasonable and on the basis of which we hoped he would not prevent the work of the Oratory:

[p. 423] 1. The functions will be held simultaneously with the parochial instructions and the married women and the other adults will be excluded.

2. Other girls will be allowed to assist at religious functions according to their choice.

This proposal, contrary to our expectations, was rejected as unacceptable.

In thanking you for the favor you confer on us in allowing us to work according to the scope of our apostolate in the archdiocese, I beg of you to continue your benevolence towards us.

I recommend to the charity of your prayers my poor person, this House and especially our beloved Don Bosco.

Accept the acts of profound veneration and high esteem with which I reverently kiss your ring, and profess myself to be,

Turin, January 1, 1879

Your most humble servant,

Father MICHAEL RUA

APPENDIX No. 23

*Deliberations taken during the general meetings of the Superiors
August 1878*

1 – Cleanliness and the grace of God must walk side by side by side. The exterior must reflect the interior. Rooms, corridors, refectories, kitchens, schools must make religious poverty acceptable by their neatness. While the interior of the House must have what is strictly necessary, the reception room for externs must be furnished in accordance with social requirements.

2 – As the preservation of the bodily health of the Sisters must be among the principal duties of the Superiors, care should be taken that drafts be avoided and that sufficient bedclothes remove the risk of colds which for some could be fatal.

[p. 424] 3 – Care should be taken that the infirmary be supplied with all that is necessary. The way the sick are treated is an indication of the charity that reigns in the House: "I was sick and you visited Me."

4 – Recreation should be lively and cheerful. Running and jumping at this time is conducive to good health, banishes melancholy and makes fulfillment of duty easy. With the same end in view the possibility of frequent walks is offered, when obstacles worthy of consideration do not prevent them.

II

1 – The two indivisible aims of the Congregation are to sanctify oneself and become useful to the Institute, glorifying God. Were a girl to enter motivated only by the sanctification of her own soul, she would not be capable of fulfilling the duties incumbent on the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

2 – Therefore the Superior General will offer opportunities for study to the greatest possible number of Sisters; the others will perfect themselves in needlework and ironing, embroidery, art, so that they may become teachers of these respective works.

Manual work offers occupation to those who, not having an aptitude for the above tasks, have on the other hand health and strength. However, all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, without exception, must be ready to do any kind of work that the Mother Superior thinks fit to assign. Let everyone remember that true humility consists not in fulfilling the lowest offices, but rather in doing that which obedience commands, with a soul ready to renounce this when another order is given.

3 – The study of music and singing must not be neglected. This study is a must for those who conduct educational establishments. Choice must be made of those Sisters who give hope of success and time must be given them to make themselves competent in this art.

4 – For those Sisters who teach, a little library must be provided containing those books which they need for their studies.

5 – Orders will be sought for those Sisters engaged in the work-rooms.

[p. 425]

III

- 1 – Besides goodness, three qualities are indispensable to the postulants who are seeking admission: they must be quick, strong and able to read and write.
- 2 – The postulants will be tried strictly but kindly before admission, and those who have not the moral and physical qualities required by the Rule will be sent home.
- 3 – The postulancy will last at least six months.
- 4 – When a girl is small in stature her admission to the novitiate should be postponed for two or three years, because in general, it may be an indication of a latent disease.
- 5 – Before admitting a postulant to the clothing the parents' consent must be obtained, and if there is no danger of further disturbance she may be admitted to the novitiate. If on the other hand there are difficulties, she can wait until she is 21 years.
- 6 – The clothing and profession ceremonies will ordinarily be held twice a year: coinciding with the time of the "Ferial days," about the month of March, and at the time of the spiritual exercises, in the month of August.
- 7 – In admitting candidates to the clothing and profession, the Chapter will act entirely independent of any recommendation that may come from Superiors. The members of the Chapter are responsible before God for the vote which they give. (The Chapter will meet to deliberate on these matters a month before clothing and profession.)
- 8 – The Chapter will proceed to the admission to the novitiate after mature reflection and fervent prayer. Whenever there is a doubt, even in a little way, about the exterior conduct of a candidate, exact information will be gotten from the parish priest, or from other persons who knew her before she entered—that in view of the great inconvenience which her dismissal from the novitiate would occasion.
When hair is cut it does not ordinarily grow to its former length within ten years, and whatever may be the motive of a novice's dismissal she is looked upon as one who has been a failure in her locality, and generally speaking, won't find it easy to settle down. [p. 426]
- 9 – Novices should not be admitted to the vows until the relatives have paid the dowry agreed upon.
- 10 – Except on special cases professed members will not be admitted to final vows until after their triennial vows.

IV

- 1 – The Exercise for a Happy Death will be held on the first meditation and spiritual reading will be on this very important subject. The rosary will be said in suffrage for the dead and during the time of silence the Sisters will reflect on the last instant of their life. No other practice of piety will be added.
- 2 – With regard to the daily observance of silence it is established that in the workroom only between 10:00 and 10:30 a.m. and 5:00 to 5:30 p.m. are the Sisters allowed to speak in an undertone while continuing their work. The singing of a hymn does not break the silence.
- 3 – The suffrages for the dead Sisters will take place as follows: a) When the Lord calls a Sister to eternal life, a general Communion will be offered at least once for her soul in the House in which she dies; in a House where there are but few Sisters, Holy Communion can be offered for a month for this intention.
b) Every year after the feast of Mary Help of Christians all the Sisters will receive Holy Communion and recite the third part of the rosary of the Blessed Virgin for the deceased Sisters.
c) In every retreat on the day previous to the clothing and profession or on the last day, but one when the clothing and profession ceremonies do not take place, Holy Communion will be offered by all for the departed Sisters.
d) A mass will be sung whenever possible—otherwise said—on the day of a Sister's death, on the day after the feast of Mary Help of Christians, and at the end of every retreat. The particular dispositions regarding the number of masses to be celebrated for the deceased Sisters, as also the manner in which the funeral obsequies have to be [p. 427] carried out, are determined by the Superior General, who is requested to draw up a rule on the matter which will serve as a norm.
- 4 – Should a Sister professed for more than three years decide to return home she cannot expect to have more than a third part of her dowry refunded. If the years of profession run up to ten before she arrives at that decision, she will have no right to any refund of dowry unless it was in excess of L2,000. A Sister who is unmindful of the promises made to God, deserves to be dismissed from the Congregation, and considered as if she had requested to go. For those who as a dowry paid a sum less than L 1,000, all movable goods and trousseau will be considered part of the dowry.
- 5 – The feasts ordinarily held on the occasion of the name day of the Superior and the Director will be reduced to a letter of good wishes or a song which may be permitted in those Houses where music is taught. Gifts of any kind are prohibited. The Sisters do not possess, and those who don't possess cannot bestow. The practice of having recourse to relatives for money to buy these gifts is to be censured. The relatives of religious, while they sometimes respond to such requests do so unwillingly, regarding it as an imposition.
A long experience confirms this prudent decision of the Superior Chapter.
- 6 – In church let exterior recollection correspond to interior devotion: silence must always reign there when prayers are not being recited or hymns and psalms are not being sung; the Sisters should strive to enter the chapel with a light

step, like one who fears to disturb.

7 – Let the Sisters strive to practice those acts of politeness that are so closely linked with charity, and that serve as an opening to apostolic service.

V

1 – The personnel for the two educational establishments of Nizza and Chieri was appointed.

2 – The program was revised and that which regards the trousseau was corrected to ensure that it contained everything necessary. [p. 428]

3 – The boarder's fee was fixed at L24 monthly.

4 – The boarders must pay the prescribed fee, and will not live with those who are accepted *gratis* or at a reduced rate. It will be more convenient to educate the latter at Mornese.

APPENDIX No. 24

Diocesan approval for the Spiritual Director of the House of Nizza Monferrato

Acqui, November 19, 1878

Illustrious and Very Reverend Father,

I am in receipt of your kind letter of yesterday, and I grant to Father Steven Chicco the faculties to receive the sacramental confession of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and boarders of Nizza, as well as those of the faithful of the diocese. I await the certificates of the aforementioned Father Chicco, to set out in them the above faculties, of which, however, he may avail from this point.

I beg Your Reverence to send me with these certificates the decree by which I granted special faculties for confessions to the Very Reverend Salesian Fathers, whom Don Bosco sends to work in my diocese. I cannot find the copy, and I must refer these faculties to my diocesan synod so as to have a rescript for the same.

With regards to preachers, it will be advisable to arrange this with my approval with the parish priest of Nizza in such a way as not to alienate the faithful from their respective parishes.

An excellent service, and one which perhaps is better than preaching: to catechize the boys and girls, on a previous understanding with the city clergy. I would regard with utmost complacency the establishment of an Oratory attached to Don Bosco's church at Nizza, where boys and girls would assemble to learn Christian Doctrine.

[p. 429] Please convey my respectful wishes to Don Bosco, and believe me with affectionate esteem,

Your very devoted servant,

APPENDIX No. 25

*Extracts from the Annual Report of the Salesian Directors
for the feast of Saint Francis de Sales*

a) January 27, 1875—Father Bonetti, Director of the House of Borgo San Martino stated: "In a house adjacent to the school, built for that purpose specifically, twelve Daughters of Mary Help of Christians came to live, to look after the linen and attend to all that pertains to same, which work they do to the advantage of all."

Father Costamagna, referring to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese, where he is Director, praises their perfect and fervent spirit, adding that even the boarders dream of becoming religious, so affectionate are they to their school, which they are reluctant to leave.

He regrets, however, their limited number, due to the fact that the Institute is not well known, and to the difficulty of communication, in an isolated place, without rail or regular bus service.

He points out that the number of Sisters and aspirants continues to increase, and has already reached the eighty mark.

He doesn't forget to mention that Don Bosco was working on a plan to increase also the numbers of boarders. Health is excellent. (M.B., XI 24-27)

b) Beginning of February, 1876—Father Bonetti, Director of Borgo San Martino: "As the teacher of the public school fell ill, our Sisters went from the House they opened here last year to teach the girls, to the great delight of all the people, who earnestly hope that the education of the girls will definitively pass to the Sisters. In the school the Sisters attend so dilligently to the linen that all the parents are very pleased; besides with their prayers they contribute to the [p. 430] good success of the school." (M.B., XII 63)

Father Costamagna, Director at Mornese, entertained his hearers with the rapid progress of the Institute, a real mustard seed that has grown into a big tree.

The Sisters were already more than one hundred; applications for admission were continuous; for their sustenance, however, they needed help from the Oratory. In the matter of humility and abnegation these good Sisters can serve as models. It is foreseen that they will be of enormous help in the missions. Unfortunately health left much to be desired; two of their numbers were seriously ill. The daily Communion might be described as general. Besides the thirty-five boarders they had charge of the girls' school in the town. Monsignor Sciandra had, during those days, approved of the Rules of the Institute. (M.B., XII, 65)

Don Bosco after the reports of the Directors: "There is also an Institute which helps us greatly, established to look after girls, as we dedicate ourselves to the education of boys. It is the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, united to our Congregation, which numbers more than one hundred religious. This, added to our confreres gives a total of four hundred and fifty persons, who work for God's glory and the salvation of souls, animated by the same spirit, under the same direction and banner. The Sisters, besides their Mother House at Mornese, Diocese of Acqui, have another at Borgo San Martino, and this year prepare to extend their work to various other places.

In the near future they will come here to Turin to open a House in front of Mary Help of Christians Church, to care for the many abandoned young girls of the area; girls in need of food, who often roam the streets all day because their parents cannot provide for them. They are in need of moral help, being exposed to every kind of moral danger, without guide or instruction to save them. At Alassio another House is being prepared for the Sisters beside the school. At the moment some further works are being finalized, on completion of which the House can be opened, which will certainly take place within the month of March.

As far back as last year arrangements were made with the Bishop of Ventimiglia to open a Catholic school in Bordighera Torrione. The House is now ready, and within the next few days Father Cibrario will [p. 431] go there in the capacity of Director accompanied by some Salesians to take over the boys' school and some Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to teach the girls.

They will teach catechism to the young boys and girls and the Director will preach sermons to the people, spread the Word of God around the countryside and prevent the people's being poisoned by drinking the deadly water of Protestantism. The festive Oratory is the principal aim of our going to Torrione." (M.B., XII, 76)

c) February 6, 1877—Father Rua: "At Borgo San Martino all is well in the material order. They are not rich, but they go on with economy and to this the Sisters, who have charge of the linen and the kitchen, contribute. . .

At Alassio the Sisters also have taken thought of the kitchen, and catechism for the girls. It must be noted that there are now no complaints about the food in the school, which is no small blessing. In fact in all the other schools it is

the cause of murmuring; and even at the king's table there are some who complain. . ."

"At Bordighera Torrione the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians are doing very good work amongst the girls. With what means?...Sometimes food and wine are missing and they settle for a little poorly seasoned soup. On some occasions they have nothing more. Sometimes they hear a knock on the door. Who's there? A kindly neighbor with some fruit and wine ... And so they go on depending on Providence, for which we thank the Lord. All the people are pleased to have the Salesians and the Sisters. Neither the boys nor the girls frequent the Protestant school any longer... they don't want to hear of it.."

"The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians at Mornese: That House has taken on a marvelous development. Two or three years ago the Sisters numbered only thirty including novices and postulants, and now they are between 170 and 180. Then they had but one House at Mornese; this year they are in seven or eight places: Turin, Lu, Biella, Lanzo, Borgo San Martino, Sestri Levante, Alassio and Bordighera. And this Institute has overcome many difficulties in the care of linen and kitchen in the schools, while they are doing immense good among the girls everywhere. At Mornese they gather them and give them religious instruction. The boarding school is flourishing, in spite of the lack of transport and distance from the railway station. The public schools are also in the hands of the Salesians and Sisters. This year some difficulties arose about this matter, but the people rose up in our defense and the parish priest had to send a letter to Don Bosco inviting him to keep the Salesians and the Sisters in the schools. Don Bosco acceded to their wishes.

I would still have much to tell you about the Sisters' virtue, about the penances they do, but it isn't necessary; they remind us of the ancient monks of Thebaid and other deserts."

"In Turin our Sisters of Mary Help of Christians opened an Oratory for girls. Attendance is so great that there is no longer any room in the chapel; we shall have to attend to it.

Before the Sisters came, in the fields around about them were always many girls; now they are no longer there. The boys go to one side and the girls to the other..." (M.B., XIII, 71.77)