

Cronistoria

Chronicles

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

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

At Nizza Monferrato

New expansion with Mother Mazzarello

1879 - 1881

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Help of Christians in 5 volumens**

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FOREWORD

This third volume of the *Cronistoria* contains the memoirs of the Institute centered in the Mother House after its transfer to Nizza Monferrato, coinciding with the last years of Mother Mazzarello's life (February, 1879 May, 1881).

They are years rich in the wise teachings of our holy Mother, under whose guidance fervor was

continuous; years of fast growth in the number of vocations, and of further development evidenced by the opening of twelve more Houses.

Trials are not wanting: death is still claiming victims among the young Sisters, yet these occasions bring to light such virtue as to leave no doubt about the supernatural richness of the primitive spirit.

As in the preceding volumes, the narrative follows a year by year pattern interspersed with brief indications of the various events, which, as already explained, correspond to the marginal notes of the original manuscript.

The layout of this part of the *Cronistoria* is again and again elaborated with additional touches of events and clarifications which successively came to light. All this was done with a view to ensure the greatest possible exactness in the facts narrated, and of saving from oblivion particulars which, though seemingly insignificant, deserve to be recorded for their implicit references to Don Bosco and Mother Mazzarello, and for the light they throw on the spirit which was lived in those years.

It has been considered opportune, also in this volume, to limit appendices to indispensable documents and those illustrative of certain points in the text. Others, contained in the *Memorie Biografiche*, published in the *Salesian Bulletin* or kept in the Archives, of secondary importance to the end in view, are carefully indicated.

In the preparation of the text for the press the same criterion was used as in the preceding volumes. Some slight change in the wording, some transposing required for greater clarity was made, but the obligation of never departing from the original text was ever kept in mind.

This is the volume which presents Mother Mazzarello at the height of her sanctity. Her death marks the end of the important historical period of the origins, in which are found the unmistakable characteristics of the primitive spirit of the Institute.

That being so, it offers much to draw from, for the present and the future. [p. v]

Rome, December 8, 1976

Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Sister GISELDA CAPETTI

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1879

Transfer of the Mother House

February, 1879 brought with it a memorable day for the Institute: the transfer of the Mother House from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato. It was far easier said than done!

Twenty days before when Don Bosco's last word on the subject was communicated to her, Mother Mazzarello could not restrain a tear which revealed her heartache.

In Mornese she had learned to love and serve the Lord. Its church and confessional had witnessed her continuous growth in the Spirit. Its little cemetery facing the church contained the remains of

Father Pestarino, Father Joseph Cagliero,¹ and her dear departed Sisters, whose every word and gesture she remembered. She would be obliged to leave behind three seriously ill Sisters, a number of girls who were kept free of charge, some postulants, a limited income and debts to be paid. What suffering! Yet, before her, others had faced it.

On February 4, having said farewell to dearly loved people and places, Mother set out for Nizza, where Sisters and girls welcomed her with joy and a simple entertainment expressive of the innermost feelings of their hearts.

Mother's face bore the marks of suffering, but there was still a smile in the flash of her eye, and a maternal word on her lips.

At Nizza, in her capacity as Superior General, she immediately assumed the responsibility of the House with the help of her Council, which was constituted as follows: Mother Petronilla, Vicar General and local vicar; Mother Joan Ferrettino, Bursar General and local; Mother Emilia Mosca, First Assistant; Mother Enrichetta Sorbone, Second **[p. 1]** Assistant; Superior of the boarding school, Sister Elisa Roncallo.

Brief return to Mornese

On February 11, Mother Petronilla, accompanied by Sister Josephine Pacotto, set out for Mornese. The latter had been appointed Mistress of Novices, and had been substituted at Alassio by Sister Margaret Rasino.

Their stay at Mornese was short, but provided great consolation to those left behind, who sadly waited the closing of a House which was so dear to all. Father Chicco, who had never been to Mornese, also went there to spend a few days with Father Lemoyne, who had remained behind to share cold and poverty with the Sisters.

Mother Petronilla acted as guide from Gavi to Mornese, stamping on the snow, and blowing on the tips of her benumbed fingers. On their arrival Father Lemoyne, with exquisite kindness, brought a good glass of warmed, sweetened wine, taking precautions against the dangers of a cold which could easily result from such a journey.

The visit marked the return of joy and serenity to the little community of Mornese.

First anniversary of the death of Pius IX

The *Salesian Bulletin*² suggested to all the Cooperators some practical directions for the first anniversary of the death of Pius IX. Mother Mazzarello, first among Don Bosco's Cooperators, arranged that the community should take part in the celebrations held on February 7. Her warm exhortation, and the reading of the pamphlet³ published by Don Bosco in the *Catholic Readings* of the previous year, moved all to sentiments of trust rather than suffrage, and the prayers offered for the Pope of Our Lady Immaculate instilled in all the assurance of obtaining special heavenly favors through his intercession. [p. 2]

Nizza welcomes its second postulant

On February 12 Felicina Ravazza, niece of Father Bisio, the Rural Vicar, entered as a postulant. She was expert in needlework, especially in dressmaking and embroidery. Her sole desire was to consecrate her life to God and seek souls.

While still undecided as to what Order she would enter, and having been dissuaded from applying to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians because of their extreme poverty, she had had the good fortune to meet Mother Mazzarello one day. From that moment she had felt drawn to the apostolate of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

To those who later asked her how her vocation to be a Salesian Sister began, she answered with simplicity:

I was at Nizza with my uncle, the vicar of St. John's; he took me to the convent. I already had made up my mind to become a Sister. In fact I had been accepted by the Sisters of Charity, but I could never decide to enter there, although I don't know why.

When introduced to Mother Mazzarello, she asked me some questions. She didn't disapprove of my plans but spoke so enthusiastically of the spirit of Don Bosco, that from that moment the idea of becoming a Sister of Charity vanished. I could not get out of my mind the words I had heard: "Be careful! The heart is enemy number one, and more often than not, it blinds us. Pray to Our Lady Help of Christians, and think well before taking the step you are contemplating."

The words were simple, yet why did they make such an Impression on me? Mother had nothing special with which to win me over so quickly, but she was so good, so pleasant, so convincing in her words, that it seemed I had known her for years, and I loved her very much.

I went back to see her again, and on the third occasion, she said to me:

"Still undecided?"

"Mother, have received the letter accepting me among my Sisters."

"Very well; but we must be generous with the Lord. [p. 3]

Come, come, without further delay, take the step: Mary Help of Christians wants you here!"

To these words, spoken with such firmness, I could only reply: "Yes, Mother, I will come tomorrow." And I came. A few days after Mother asked me:

"Are you still thinking of your Sisters?"

"Yes, Mother, I let them down, and I'm afraid I made a mistake. "

"Go tell Jesus of your sorrow and your fear; tell Him to arrange matters if you have made a mistake, and think no more about it."

I did just that and all my doubts disappeared.

Satan's fury unleashed against the Oratory of Chieri

News drifted in from Chieri and Turin, giving Mother Mazzarello to understand that. Satan had trained his guns on the spiritual director of the Oratory of Saint Teresa in Chieri. She did not mention it to the community. Nevertheless she suffered keenly because of it, and invited the most generous Sisters to offer prayers and sacrifices for Don Bosco and the growing needs of the Congregation.

A visit to Lu

On February 17, accompanied by Mother Enrichetta, Mother Mazzarello paid a visit to the Sisters

of Lu, and returned with a postulant, Maria de Martini. One could not but rejoice in the flourishing workroom in that town, frequented by sixty girls, even though here too there was strife and opposition on the part of the enemies of good.⁴ [p. 4]

First anniversary of the election of Leo XIII

According to the express wish of Don Bosco in the *Salesian Bulletin*, the 20th of the month was dedicated to thanksgiving: mass, Communion, rosary, visits to the [p. 5] Blessed Sacrament, acts of virtue, and spiritual reading were all centered around the first anniversary of the election of Leo XIII to the papal throne. Don Bosco wished it to be a feast in all his Houses. Mother communicated the message to all, so that "the most beautiful flower of the Church,⁵ as the Superior and Father had defined Leo XIII, might be the object of the prayer and gratitude of every heart.

Mother's way of training in the art of needlework

During the short absence of Mother Enrichetta, the novice Sister Olimpia Martini had successfully taken over her task as teacher in the workroom. This inspired some Sisters to suggest to Mother Mazzarello that the assignment be given to her, to relieve Mother Enrichetta. Besides, Sister Olimpia could train the girls in creative embroidery, for which she had a flair.

But Mother's *reply* was firm, even severe: "For the present our boarders do not need works of art. They must *learn* to use the *needle in useful* ways for a *family* of modest means: to darn, mend, make and remake stockings and simple *garments*. Embroidery is over and above this. They will learn it if they have time. Such is Don Bosco's wish and let us not look for novelties. "

Piety and Salesian cheerfulness

The last days of Mardi Gras, the 23rd, 24th and 25th, were days of intense piety, nourished by the customary and much loved reparatory function of the Forty Hours.

That did not hinder the joyful pastimes of the boarders, especially the young ones, who might otherwise be tempted to look back with regret on the happy, carefree days of home and Mornese.

In the absence of a stage and other amenities enjoyed in the first House of the Institute, Mother tried everything [p. 6] at her disposal to keep everyone happy and make them experience that piety, useful for everything, is never a kill-joy.

At an opportune moment, for instance, Mother called Mother Assistant, accepted by all for her gifts of intelligence and refinement, and said to her: "This evening a lady is expected; tell Mother Enrichetta to have the boarders ready to receive her in their best uniforms; and you see to it that the Sisters wear their best habits. "

The Sister obediently carried out the order given her and the House was a scene of bustle and excitement, so that Sisters and girls might be at their appointed place for the "parade. "

With a twinkle in her eye Mother moved about among them, accompanied by the Bursar and followed by Sister Assunta Gaino, dressed more neatly than usual, while those on the sidelines smiled to see her come out for once from her rural department.

Finally, the bell clanged loudly.

In perfect silence, with serious mien and light step, all moved towards the entrance gate, where they lined up in an attitude of expectant anticipation.

And behold, the great "lady": a cow guided by Sister Assunta and decked with artificial red flowers!

Mother Emilia looked at Mother Mazzarello, joined in the joke and bowed profoundly to the new arrival.

Her action was like the touch of a magic wand: Sisters and girls all followed suit. They realized they had been taken in, but far from taking offense, they gathered round the animal, clapped and

skipped, extending her a most cordial "welcome." With songs of homage they solemnly accompanied her to her abode where the humble Sister Assunta completed the honors of the day. This reception was, for the first boarders of Mornese, a joyful return to their "sweet native hills." In reality it was only obedience to a direct order from Don Bosco to add coffee and milk to the established breakfast menu, which in turn entailed the purchase of their first cow.

[p.7] For the newcomers, it was a delightful sample of the light-hearted humor of Mother Mazzarello, who through nature and grace had made her own the motto of the two apostles of youth: Saints Philip Neri and John Bosco: "Scruples and melancholy have no place in my House."

First news from Buenos Aires

The first letter from Sister Madelene arrived from America. After a brief reference to the journey she lingered on the mutual joy experienced on meeting the Sisters of Montevideo, and on the pain of parting again.

At Buenos Aires they had opened the House on January 26. There was much to remind them of Mornese: the poverty that reigned called for great courage, as did the effort to make themselves understood in an unknown language. They needed to learn it in order to fulfill their duties towards the Salesians and lessen the cost of their maintenance. So full were the days that there was no time to think of the victories gained over the snares of self-love and poor human nature. But the Director, Father Costamagna, was still the same, full of zeal for their spiritual and material welfare, and most eager in his charity to teach them that minimum of Spanish which the immediate occasion called for.

For the moment there were no Indians to instruct, baptize and bring to God; they would come later. The Sisters were all cheerful, and if a tear appeared there was always someone with a joke to chase it away. The Salesian Superiors, confreres and boys had given them a cordial welcome, and already regarded them as Mothers and Sisters.

Sister Martini closed her letter with the assurance: "Our House is the home of peace and charity. Our Salesian Superiors have taken innumerable measures to prepare a better one for us. They have not yet succeeded, but they are still on the lookout, and will not rest until they have provided us with accommodations in keeping with their truly [p. 8] fraternal and paternal generosity. Frequently, very frequently, we are back in Italy with our Mother and Sisters. We greet you all with deep affection, and ask for the prayers of all. We are happy to be missionaries of Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians."⁶

Somewhat more detailed news came from the diary of Sister Emilia Borgna:⁷

When we disembarked at Buenos Aires we were met by Father Fagnano, sent by Fathers Bodrato and Costamagna, who were engaged in preaching and hearing confessions. In his generosity and goodness of heart he could not have done more for us.

He took us in two carriages to Saint Charles' School. There Father Provincial was waiting for us. He took us to one of their little parlors for refreshments, to hear about ourselves, and get the news from Italy. We were then taken to the tiny house prepared for us. After crossing the immense playground of the school, we saw, in the wall dividing it from the little house, a small opening through which we had to pass in single file.

We passed through one by one, and found ourselves in our courtyard. The Provincial then explained that this part of the school had been occupied by the novices up until then; that the opening in the wall was a temporary measure, to be closed the next day. As the novices had moved from the house a short time before, on receipt of Father Lasagna's telegram announcing our arrival, there had not been time to clean it. He asked us to excuse this inconvenience; little by little all that was missing would be provided.

The house wasn't rich by any means, but there was a bed for each of us, with mattress and pillow, a wash basin each, some chairs, pictures of Mary Help of Christians, a table and two long benches.

A small stove, the worse for the wear, was all the kitchen offered. For a full two weeks the good Salesians, though very poor, sent us our meals prepared in their kitchen. However as we were not yet used to the food and were still homesick for Italy, we did not over-indulge. . .

We got up at 4:30 a.m. to go to church with the Salesians and perform our practices of piety with them. This was [p. 9] for a short while only, as the Provincial had a little chapel prepared in our own House with all that was necessary

for mass and a tabernacle for the abiding Presence. You can imagine our joy!

For want of space we were unable to start our work for girls, even though this was the reason we had left our good Mother and all we had held dear in the "old world."

Mother Provincial thought it opportune to begin immediately the work of "Mama Margaret" and the good ladies of Turin who helped Don Bosco in his work by sewing and looking after the linen of the Salesians and their boys. So we all found work either in the laundry or workroom, washing and patching well-worn garments, giving glory to God and trusting Divine Providence to come to our aid in finding ways and means of helping poor girls.

Meanwhile, Father Costamagna encouraged us and kept up our hopes for the future.

Very soon the Lord sent us two postulants, who are now Sisters Margaret Bertolini and Rita Barilatti; later, Sisters Mercedes Stabler and Emily Mathis came. They were a great help to us.

The long-awaited news was communicated not only to the community but also to the students. In this way family ties were strengthened more and more.

News from Alassio

More interesting news arrived from Alassio. Don Bosco had passed there on his way to France, and wanted to see the Sisters assigned to the school. First he questioned the Superior, and asked her, in the presence of all the Sisters, to give an account of the material situation of the community, and of the state of health generally: if the arrangements regarding food, clothing and other necessities were satisfactory and if they had sufficient sleep...

He then received each one individually. He spoke of the practices of piety prescribed by the Rule and concluded: "If you really perform them well I assure you that [p. 10] you will become saints quickly, great saints. As for work – yes, work much, but see to it that you may work for many years. That is, be careful not to shorten your lives with excessive work or privations, with melancholy and so forth."

He had then blessed them in his fatherly way.

On his return from France on February 5 Don Bosco had stopped over again, since the Conferences of Saint Francis De Sales were to be held at Alassio⁸ that year.

The Sisters were delighted with his visit, and the extra work in the kitchen and laundry which it entailed were more than compensated by the joy of his presence. The good Father passed through the kitchen several times, taking interest in the Sisters' health, wanting to know if they had time for recreation, if they were free to walk in the garden⁹ at suitable times, if their food was the same as the Fathers'... At this point, remembering the question of the "two courses," brought to his notice at Borgo San Martino, he said kindly: "Yes, by all means, put both courses on the same plate, if you wish, but let the Sisters have two courses. They have a right to that and need it."

Passing through the priests' refectory with a parish priest he said to Sister Maria Succetti, who was busily preparing there: "Oh, here is Martha! Ah, Martha, Martha!" He said it with an expression and tone of voice that recalled to the Sister's mind in a flash the conference given by him a few days previously; and she immediately made acts of union with God.

Don Bosco told them about their Sisters in La Navarre, Bordighera and Nizza-mare. Before leaving he said to them: "I recommend you take care of your health, and write from time to time to your Sisters in America to console and encourage them. This is a great act of charity. If you only knew! When I send even a few lines to our confreres there, they write to me that the sight of the letter brings tears to their eyes and they weep and kiss it. Therefore you too should write often. Though far apart, you should always be closely united. You are already, but you should be ever more so."

[p. 11] Finally he blessed them, encouraging them to new fervor and holy joy.

Mother's visit to Mornese

Lent began at the end of February, ushering in the month of Saint Joseph, which was marked by benediction of the Blessed Sacrament every evening. Mother went to Mornese to see the sick

Sisters, especially Sister Lucretia Becchio who was fast declining, and who wished to celebrate Saint Joseph's feast in heaven.

In her foreseeing charity she arranged that the Director, Father Chicco, should also be there, in case the invalid would like a change of confessor.

All her old friends and acquaintances came to welcome Mother, happy to see her again, but the College would be closed—probably very soon.

"Look, Mary!" her former companions in the Sodality of Mary Immaculate weepingly exclaimed, "Father Pestarino is dead, you and our other companions are gone, we belong to no one! The Sodality will not survive; it will exist only as long as we live. Then, if rumor is right, it will be a case of good-bye to the Oratory, good-bye to everything!"

Mother Mazzarello was moved, but her attitude and words said: "If God wants it that way, if Don Bosco so disposes . . . let us leave everything to God and Don Bosco, in the certainty that they will draw greater good from it!"

Yet the general discontent of the people of Mornese, as they contemplated a bleak future, could not be dissimulated. It assumed greater proportions as the inevitable drew near. Within the House the imminent death of Sister Lucretia was keenly felt. She, however, faced her approaching end with enviable serenity.

Having bid farewell to parents and brothers, greeted the parish priest, visited the church of her early fervor, vows and consecration to the Lord, Mother comforted and consoled the sick Sisters and those at the school. At the [p. 12] railway station she met Mother Assistant and Sister Domenica Telinelli who had been summoned by telegram to leave Borgo San Martino for France. With them she proceeded to Liguria where she visited the Houses.

At Alassio and Bordighera

She did not stay long in Alassio, but went on to Bordighera where the newly appointed Superior, Sister Adele David, anxiously awaited her counsel and guidance.

Mother listened calmly to an account of the oppression, calumnies and vulgarity which the nearby Protestants were leveling at the Salesians and the Sisters because of the good they were already doing in that area, which had been, until then, a little kingdom of the Waldesian sect.¹⁰

She recommended ever greater zeal, characterized by the prudent charity of Saint Francis de Sales and Don Bosco. She spoke to the Sisters individually and maternally corrected Sister Cassulo, who had some difficulties with her Superior: "If you have something to say to Sister Superior, pray and then put the matter quietly, not brusquely before her. Then if she does not see your point, and seems not to understand, consult the Superiors when they come. Be prudent, but tell your troubles always to the Superiors. Pray much for your Superior, regard it as a duty to pray for all the Superiors, who are always in need of special light. And how we need good Superiors!"

11

Death of Sister Becchio

The news of Sister Lucretia's death came while Mother was at Bordighera. She had passed away on the 11th, with a hymn to Our Lady on her lips: "Those who die for Mary will be happy."

Mother took occasion to draw from the news an exhort- [p. 13] tion to fervor, to love of God and of neighbor, to desire of perfection.

Concern for the Sisters of La Navarre

As she was close to the French border Mother felt impelled to go to see the Sisters of Nizza-mare and La Navarre, sorely in need of comfort in their extreme poverty and the dejection caused by the serious illness of Sister Gariglio. True, Don Bosco's visit had cheered them. Nevertheless, some expressions which filtered through in their all-too-rare letters, and the discreet references

made by Father Cerruti, acting Provincial, confirmed her in the idea that the Sisters must be suffering much, and that the poor invalid was consumed with the desire of returning home to die beside her Superiors.

Should she grant her request? She decided to write and ask Don Bosco's advice, meanwhile leaving things in the hands of Our Lady, her true Mother, with whom nothing was impossible.

She gave abundant advice and exhortations to Sister Domenica Telinelli, who would cross the frontier for La Navarre within a few days. Having recommended the exact observance of the holy Rule she encouraged her to make willingly the sacrifice of not returning to Italy for the retreat that year.

Detained at Alassio

On her return to Alassio Mother was received with great joy. The Director, Father Cerruti, had promised the Sisters to detain her until the feast of Saint Joseph so that she might receive the profession of the three novices of that House.

Actually none of them had completed the novitiate, but the Director had already been delegated by Don Bosco to [p. 14] receive their vows. Therefore, even though Mother would have delayed rather than anticipate the date, especially in the case of Sister Catherine Lucca, there was no going back on the decision.

Mother's letter to Father Lemoyne

In Alassio Mother dictated to Mother Assistant a letter to Father Lemoyne, Director at Mornese.

Viva Gesù!

Reverend Father Director,

I am back in Alassio; Father Cerruti has asked me to stay here for the profession of the three novices, which takes place this morning. He gave me the enclosed letter from Father Costamagna, brought by a man who came from America. Pardon my delay in forwarding it, but better late than never!

Tomorrow morning I leave for Nizza, and hope to go to Biella after a few days. It would give me much pleasure if you could come too. I shall wait for you at Nizza and then we can go together. Do come, please. Have you sold the Maccagno house? If you could bring me some money, it would indeed be very welcome!

These novices who make their profession will pray much for you. Are you pleased? The others also pray, and have given me many messages for you, including a request for your blessing.

Will you kindly tell Sister Santina to register the profession of the Sisters made here today?

Please greet Mother Vicar, Mother Mistress and all the Sisters, postulants and girls for me.

Father Director sends his greetings, Sister Emilia asks your prayers and I renew my invitation to come to Biella with me. Asking your blessing, I remain

Your humble Daughter,
Sister Mary Mozzarella

If you come to Nizza don't tell Father Chicco that I asked you to come to Biella.¹²

[p. 15] Professions at Alassio on Saint Joseph's feast

Though the profession ceremony at Alassio was not as solemn as at Mornese, it was nonetheless devotional and impressive. After the three novices had pronounced the formula of the vows the Director addressed them in clear and ardent words suitable to the occasion.

The three newly professed—Sisters Domenica Barbero, Louise Vallese, Catherine Lucca—were all aglow with new fervor. The community was pleasantly surprised; never before had that severe-looking Director spoken like that to them. The Superior, Sister Margaret Rasion, who had always

seemed to carry a load on her shoulders and in her heart since she was put in charge, smiled profusely. Mother was greatly consoled to see that though her Daughters were burdened with excessive work, they enjoyed a superabundance of spiritual blessings through the enlightened and exemplary Sons of Don Bosco.

Mother's conference

Mother listened to the accounts and suggestions of the Fathers in charge. She listened patiently and lovingly to each Sister, took note of everything, and before returning to Nizza, gave a short conference to the community.

She repeated her exhortations on sincerity in confession, simplicity and purity of intention in work, observance of the holy Rule, and religious poverty. She concluded:

I do not mean by this that you should deprive yourselves of what is necessary; by no means. Rather, the Superior should have special care for her Sisters, especially the younger and less healthy. All of you must remember that it is often better to mortify self-love by asking for what we need than to make sacrifices regarding food and other things that are essential to life. I only want to stress that grumbling is foreign to religious poverty, which makes us accept every [p. 16] thing from the hands of God. You probably work as hard here as our Sisters at La Navarre, but you do not have one third of the discomforts and privations those dear Sisters have to suffer continually. Let us rejoice in being members of a Congregation with so many generous Sisters, and let us too become saints in this Congregation which has a saint like Don Bosco for its Founder and Father.

The emotion which came through in Mother's voice drew tears from more than one. In fact the wonderful reception given Don Bosco in France, especially at Marseilles, was known to everyone. The press had given it headlines, and everywhere people spoke enthusiastically of the instantaneous cure effected by Don Bosco's blessing at Nizza-mare on the Countess of Villeneuve who, suffering from acute peritonitis and various complications, had been declared incurable.¹³

Mother at Biella and Turin

From Alassio Mother went to Nizza, where the feast of Saint Joseph, patron of the Institute, had been solemnized. Leaving Mother Assistant there, after a few days she set out for Biella, accompanied by Sister Teresa Maritano, who suffered from depression and scruples. Mother felt a little change would benefit this dear Sister.

From Biella word had been sent to her several times that "the place was no longer the same since Sister Madelene Martini had gone away." Mother wanted to see for herself if this was true, and of course, to help and encourage those in need of comfort.

After an affectionate meeting with the Sisters, Mother went to the sanctuary of Oropa where Sister Maritano whom she took along with her, might ask Our Lady to cure her completely from such uncalled for sadness. She remained there two days.

The Sisters were anxious about this unusual prolonged absence and some of them set out for Oropa to see if [p. 17] something had happened.

About halfway they saw Mother coming very slowly, chatting with her companion and hastily gathering some soft moss from the mountains by the wayside.

"Oh, Mother! We were worried about you!"

"I was with Our Lady-what was there to fear?"

"But...and now you tire yourself bending to collect that moss. What is it for?"

"I promised to bring it to Sister Preda, who takes care of the flowers. She does lovely things with it."

The Sisters wanted to relieve her of her traveling bag and shawl. But she declined: "No, no, I'll carry it myself."

She looked very tired but in her eyes shone the conviction that she was in no way superior to her Daughters.

The Bishop, Monsignor Leto, came to see her also on this occasion, and stayed a long time with her. She still turned red with embarrassment to hear this great prelate address her as "Mother Superior," and was much consoled to hear him repeat: "All my seminarians remember Sister Madelene Martini with gratitude and respect. She is truly a soul that walks with giant steps on the way of perfection. "

Before leaving His Excellency told the Sisters: "Remember well that your Mother is a saint!" Later Mother said, with a deep sigh:

"It was bad enough to hear oneself called Vicar; in fact I almost liked it, but 'Mother Superior!' . . ."

She greatly encouraged Sister Maria Maccagno, who had succeeded Sister Martini in the government of the House. She exhorted all the Sisters to love one another like true sisters and to treat one another with affection and respect. Mother gave special attention to Sister Josephine Quarello, who was somewhat difficult to please.

Having heard that Don Bosco was due back in Turin, she decided to go there as a mark of filial respect, to give an account of the visitations already made, and perhaps proceed from there to Chieri, where rumor had it external conflict was on the increase.

[p. 18] Sad news, joyful news

Her plans had to be changed: Sister Cappelletti was very ill at Nizza, and from there they begged her to return from Turin to console the invalid.

Consigning to Father Cagliero the sum collected by the boarders at Nizza (90 lire, to which the Director General added 10) for the purchase of a statue of Mary Immaculate-the dream of everyone in the House-she returned to Nizza. There the news of the death of Sister Gariglio, April 1, at La Navarre, awaited her together with letters from the dear Sisters of America.

Sister Josephine Vergnaud was among those who remained temporarily at Villa Colon. But she was still so excited from the journey, the detachment and the newness of the whole situation that she merely wrote:

Oh, Mother! Oh, Mother! Oh, Mother!! Oh, Sisters! Come and see how great the Lord is in His creation, in His seas and skies, and how much greater it is to love and serve Him in the land of Columbus!

Sister Martini will give you all the news; Sister Magone has already filled a page. In this House the missionaries of the first and second groups speak of nothing but Momese, Nizza, Italy; I shall write later more at length. For the moment, I will refrain from writing further lest the floodgates be opened. I am, we all are happy!

Sister Virginia Magone, instead, taking advantage of Sunday-feast of the Purification-wrote freely with all the feeling of her child-like soul.

Very Reverend Mother Superior,¹⁴

Am I really in America? Yes, I really am! It is no dream, but reality. I am here at Villa Colon in the Republic of Uruguay with the Sisters who left Mornese last year. It seems impossible that I am so far away from my dear Mother Superior. It seems so long since I saw her! When shall I see her again? When will you come to see us? Remember that point of the Rule which says: "The Superior should *visit* [p. 19] *her Daughters in every House* at least once a year." Oh, Mother, I never knew I loved you so much! Now I realize it, when I can no longer prove it to you. I seem to see you near me every moment, and you tell me: "Sister Virginia, be good, obedient, humble, sincere." I promise you I will, and you go on to say: "You always promise, and never apply yourself." You are right, Mother, in what you say, but now I am determined, and you will see that with God's help, I shall become much better.

At other times all the trouble and annoyance I caused you come to mind. Oh, yes, with all my heart I thank you for all the good you did me, and I beg you to forgive my ingratitude.

What shall I tell you now? I won't say anything about the journey for I'm sure Mother Provincial, (Sister Madelene)

has already told you all about it; but I must say that it was very good. The captain called it the best voyage he ever had. He also said that he never had had such consolation in all his years of seafaring. For many years he had not been to mass, and not only did he attend the Holy Sacrifice with us, but he acted as sacristan; he prepared the chapel on deck, lit the candles and extinguished them in due course.

Every evening he invited us to sing the praises of Mary. All the first class passengers learned the hymn which begins: "I want to love Mary" and the ship's paymaster accompanied it so well on the harmonium that we no longer felt we were on the high seas but at home.

But I must tell you this. Sisters, open your eyes wide! Attention! Are you all ears? Now, Mother Assistant, read in a loud voice so you can be heard by all! The day we crossed the equator line we had a wonderful feast. First, one hundred and one shots were fired from the ship's cannon. All first and second class passengers assisted at mass, and after singing the hymn: "My Soul, Awake," we received Holy Communion. Breakfast followed, then recreation until 11:00 a.m. Then-are you all listening? Silence! The best is to come: a table was prepared on deck, and all the passengers and the crew put something on it, to be auctioned for the hospital at Buenos Aires. We, as passengers, had to give something. Some put a medal, some a rosary, some holy pictures, while Mother put a crucifix of silver cardboard.

[p. 20] Then the auction began. It lasted about four hours. I will not tire you with all the details, but when all had been disposed of they came to the crucifix. Guess what the first bid was. . . No idea? . . . I will tell you: One bid five francs, another ten, a third fifteen, a fourth twenty. Eventually it went at forty-five francs, a little crucifix that would have been very expensive at twenty pence! The patients of Buenos Aires Hospital may thank Sister Madelene Martini's crucifix for their good fortune!

I still have many things to tell you, but I see that my paper is running short and, therefore, I will be brief. After a journey of twenty-four days a cannon boomed out. "What's that?" "We are at Montevideo." At 9:00 a.m. we saw a small boat pull along side. In it were Mr. Augustine Mazzarello and another man. We descended to the boat, and went into the city. We got into a carriage, all eagerness to see our Sisters. At 12:00 noon the horse came to a standstill. "Where are we?" "We are at the Sisters' House," they told us. Then from a little house in the middle of a grove the Sisters came running to welcome us. There were all sorts of compliments in Italian and American fashion, followed by two days' celebration. But enough of this! I don't know if you heard that Mother Madelene Martini did not stay here, but went on to Buenos Aires the same day.

Here the community is formed by Sisters Philomena, Josephine, Victoria and yours truly. Mother, I still have lots of things to tell you but I haven't any more paper! Never mind, I will write again. In the meantime I recommend myself to your fervent prayers, and respectfully in the Heart of Jesus, am

February 2, 1879

Your grateful, humble Daughter,
Sister Virginia

Another letter from Mother to Father Lemoyne

While Don Bosco was returning from Rome to Turin, Mother again wrote to Father who was still alone at Mornese.

[p. 21]

Viva Gesù!

Reverend Father Director,

Thank you very much for the letters from America which you so kindly forwarded to me. I would, of course, have preferred to see you more than a letter. However, a letter is better than nothing. I hope to see you soon; in the meantime pray much for me—I need prayers.

I am glad that your mother is better, and am confident that God will hear our prayers and soon restore her to good health.

The Sisters of all the Houses unite with me in wishing you a happy Easter, enriched with the choicest blessings that flow from the heart of the Risen Jesus.

Will you please, Reverend Father Director, convey my good wishes for a happy feast to Father Joseph and the Novice Master and ask them to pray for me. Father Cagliero is in Turin. I hope he will soon come here or go to Mornese.

Sister Mary is fast approaching the end; the doctor says she will not last the week. I recommend her very specially to your prayers.

The others are well, thank God, physically at any rate; as for the spiritual, there is always some lightheaded one that makes us anxious, but nothing serious. I will tell you the rest when we meet.

Here our Holy Week is a poor one, without ceremonies or anything. The Sisters from time to time come out with: "Oh, Mornese! Mornese!" But the Lord sees the heart, and we will console ourselves by thinking of that.

With renewed wishes for a happy feast, and asking your paternal blessing, I remain,
Nizza, April 9, 1879

Your humble Daughter in Jesus,
Sister Mary Mazzarello¹⁵

My good Father, take courage: be cheerful; I remember you always!...

[The postscript was written in Mother's own handwriting.]

[p. 22] Holy Week and Jubilee Indulgence

For this year, prior to the official opening of Nizza, the Easter ceremonies were not celebrated at the convent.

The Sisters and boarders went to the parish church for the services, visits to the Altar of Repose, adoration of the cross and also for the practices of piety required for the Jubilee Indulgence, promulgated by Leo XIII on the first anniversary of his election to the chair of Peter.

Impressions of the people

The religious deportment of the Sisters and boarders was closely watched and imitated by the faithful during the ceremonies.

The boarders also attracted attention. Their dark blue woolen uniform was the same as that worn in Mornese. A black cape, worn in Turin boarding schools and recommended by Sister Elisa Roncallo, Superior of the boarding school there, had been added.

The cape could be crossed in front and tied at the back like a sash, where a flowing ribbon gave it a finishing touch. A little black cap with a neat turn back, gave a grace and beauty to the whole thing and made people exclaim as the girls passed by: "They are well dressed! See how they carry themselves! They are a credit to the school and the town! It won't be long until we see hundreds of them here!"

Results of encouragement

These forecasts of the people were an encouragement to the Sisters and the boarders, who felt they should merit the praise given them. All were conscious that Nizza was not Mornese; therefore the Sisters gave frequent simple instructions on polite behavior; in conformity with the requirements of the families and of the society from which **the [p. 23]**

majority of the pupils came. The girls on their part willingly practiced the norms given them, which lent them external charm, while helping them to practice virtue and to improve their social condition.

Sister Cappelletti dies

On April 14—Easter Monday—Sister Cappelletti died at Nizza. She was twenty-five. Though very delicate, she was exemplary in her activity during life, and a proportionate serenity characterized her passing away. She left behind a record of joyful obedience and perfect observance!

Hers was the first grave opened at Nizza Monferrato, and the people looked critically and with amazement at the Sisters who wept as they followed her humble coffin. They did not know the perfume of this lily who was still only in the bud!

Mother meets Don Bosco

After Easter Mother returned to Turin. She made her report to Don Bosco and then heard from him an account of the Sisters, particularly those in France.

The saint spoke of his projects for the House of St. Cyr, destined to become exclusively a girls'

orphanage. He repeated the words he had spoken there: "This will be a seed bed of vocations which will one day populate the surrounding hills."

With regard to requests for foundations in Piedmont he said: "For the present the kindergartens can be accepted; but let the condition be that you be allowed to develop the festive Oratory and needlework classes for the young girls of the poorer classes. "

Following directions received, as well as the promptings of her maternal heart, Mother went to Chieri to help and comfort, and then returned to Turin.

[p. 24] In the meantime the details of Sister Gariglio's last hours had arrived. The stay in La Navarre had given her spirit, heart, and delicate constitution the finishing touch, and had been transformed into the palm of a triple martyrdom offered to God with grateful love.

Mother saw Don Bosco again, this time with her heart more at ease. She assured him that the Sisters felt keenly what Father Bonetti was going through. However, since all, including the Superior, were up to their eyes in work for the Oratory girls they were largely oblivious of the "storm" brewing. Mother had left them all reasonably serene.¹⁶

Don Bosco listened and his glance seemed to say: "Let us praise the Lord for that! We too are suffering—suffering very much, but we are in the hands of God, who is our Father!" Then remembering America he asked: "Have you heard from Buenos Aires? Take this letter of Sister Martini; read it to the community; then bring it back to me. Are you staying here for a few days?" With the Founder's blessing Mother returned to her Sisters. She had much to tell them about herself and the ever-increasing apostolate.

Sister Madelene Martini's letter to Don Bosco

The letter from Buenos Aires was read in community. Since it gives an interesting panorama of the missions, we report it in its entirety.

Very Reverend Father in J.C.

How fortunate we are in being able to call you with the sweet name "Father" and to receive from your kind heart such signs of sincere paternal affection.

When we think back (as we frequently do) of that last farewell, and the blessing you so kindly gave us the day we left Genoa for America, we cannot but find in it the great love of a Father, who does everything possible to lessen the sufferings of his poor Daughters in J.C. Oh, may God hear our prayers and preserve him for us for many years!

[p. 25] As you had foretold that last morning, our voyage was a pleasant one, thanks be to God, and to Mary Help of Christians, our powerful Mother. This does not mean it was free from those discomforts to which almost everyone is subject during, these tiring sea journeys. But all that is past history; we arrived at the estuary of La Plata and enjoyed seeing our good Sisters who had come to Villa Colon, near Montevideo, a year before us. We found them happy and content and full of joy. at our reunion. Four of our group remained in the Uruguayan Republic, destined for a new House which will be opened within the next few days in "Pueblo de Las Piedras." We proceeded to Buenos Aires, and are already established in the little house prepared for us beside the school and church of San Carlos.

But what a difference between the church of San Carlos and the Basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin! Oh, how wonderful it was to kneel at Our Lady's feet in that dear sanctuary that we always considered our own! But even here Jesus deigns to live with us in a little chapel in our own House, where holy mass is celebrated every morning.

Thank God we are all well, content and cheerful. Indeed I can assure you we are all delighted to have been sent to this mission, all the more because we have the good fortune to have the good Salesian Fathers to direct us as in Italy, They are really all care and solicitude for us.

Our Sisters in the nearby Republic have a great mission among the girls. As for ourselves, our principal occupation so far is to look after the school linen. Steps are being taken to open a school for children in this densely populated area; the parents, whether Argentinian, Spanish or Italian, are looking forward to that.

Now we have only to correspond to the great grace we received from God: being chosen from among the many who desired it, to come to this faraway country to save many poor girls from the claws of rapacious wolves. We recommend this intention to your powerful prayers, Oh, what a joy for me and my companions to know that our good Father, Don Bosco, even though far away, accompanies us with his prayers, and considers us his Daughters!

Can we really nourish the hope of seeing you again? We long and hope for it though our 'hope is mixed with [p. 26] fear due to your poor health. Yet I hope for the grace of seeing you again in this vale of tears.

With all my good Sisters, I greet you respectfully, and while humbly imploring your paternal blessing, I am, Most Reverend Father in J.C.,

Buenos Aires, March, 4, 1879
Your humble and affectionate Daughter,
Sister Madelene Martini
Daughter of Mary Help of Christians¹⁷

The Sisters of Turin and Mother

After her visit to Chieri, Mother took occasion to ask the Superior, Mother Catherine Daghero, and the Sisters if they had allowed the Sisters of Chieri to surpass them in fervor during the novenas of the Immaculate, Christmas and the first solemnities of the year. The answer was unanimous: if the Oratory of Saint Teresa was aglow with fervor, so too was that of Saint Angela Merici. If in Chieri Father Bonetti had set souls on fire, so in Turin Father Cagliero and his valiant helpers had set aflame just as many. The number of Oratorians was ever on the increase and the "Daughters of the Sacred Heart," who must surely be very dear to Him, were of great help to the Sisters. They assisted their companions in the playground and kept order in the church. They often succeeded in dissuading the girls from attending public dances and attracting them to the Oratory; they worked with zeal to prevent bad conversations, dangerous reading and bad companions. The Sisters thought that some among them would, one day, make excellent Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

"Have you told all this to Don Bosco?" Mother asked.

"Oh, yes! Of course! And he was delighted. We saw it clearly in his eyes. Once when our girls saw him pass with Father Bonetti, they ran joyfully to meet him, and our good Father stopped for awhile right under our door to tell [p. 27] them: "My children, Our Lady loves you. Rest assured that many, many girls will come here to join in your games and more than that!"

Don Bosco loves us and our Superior, you know, Mother? Just imagine, near the feast of Saint Catherine of "the chestnuts," preparations for a big celebration were being planned; we were staying up late nights, in fear and trembling lest we be discovered. Father Cagliero came to know of it and went to Don Bosco to tell him we had gone crazy and to ask him to forbid us to keep the feast, adding, "There's so much work to be done in the House and so little health!"

Do you know what Don Bosco answered? "Eh, poor Sisters, let them go ahead with it!"

And so on Saint Catherine's feast, Don Bosco also sent his little gift and his good wishes to Sister Superior.

Besides this, other news brought consolation to Mother: the union of the Sisters among one another and with their Superiors, the earnest desire to progress in perfection and to learn from Don Bosco and his Sons the art of leading many souls to God. Moreover, there was Don Bosco's triumph in France, Lucca and Rome, and the participation of the humble Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in the glory of the Salesians who had recently been given a Cardinal-Protector.

Mother at Lanzo, Turin and Nizza

Charity urged Mother to undertake another journey. This time Lanzo was the destination, and her companion was Sister Maria Cagliero, who was not at all well.

As in all the Houses of this type, the Superior and Sisters were busy in the kitchen all morning. Mother stayed with them helping wherever she could, then went to the workroom to do their mending. How eagerly she stitched, knowing that she was thereby lessening the workload of these dear Sisters!

In the afternoon she interviewed the Sisters individually [p. 28] when their chores were finished. In her conference she recommended the practice of charity, sincerity, unity and mutual understanding.

Having seen that they were very well provided for, she insisted on the observance of poverty. She told the cook, Sister Catherine Saettone, not to put cheese in the Sisters' soup for love of poverty and mortification.

The three days scheduled for Lanzo simply flew for Mother and for the Sisters. They, happy in

the goodness and example of activity which Mother gave them; she, on her part, sorry that she could not give all the help and comfort she wished to bring them. She did not delay in Turin on her way back but returned immediately to Nizza, where she finished the following letter to the Sisters in Villa Colon, begun on April 9.

News for Sisters of Villa Colon

Viva Gesù!

Dear Sister Angelina (Vallese),

I can imagine your joy on seeing the Sisters the Lord sent you. I am sure it was great indeed, and made you think of the feast we shall have in heaven when we shall all be re. united. True, we are now far apart but let us take heart: this life is short, and the day will soon come when we shall meet in eternity if we have observed our holy Rule. Although the sea divides us, we can see and draw near to one another in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. We can pray for one another and so we will always be united in spirit.

I have many things to tell you, but to be brief, my first news is that Sister Lucretia died at 8:00 a.m. on the 11th. I had been at Mornese some days before, and I assure you I was edified by her patience and resignation.

They wrote to me from Mornese that she died an enviable death. But I must say that she was always patient and resigned, which is why she had such a beautiful death. If we wish our death to be like hers, let us prepare now.

Some of you knew the shoemaker at Mornese (Carlo [p. 29] Merlo); he also died on the 20th of this month. Sister Maria Cappelletti is here at Nizza with us now. You might say she is in her agony; the same is true of Sister Maria Gariglio, at La Navarre, France.

When you get this it is almost certain that they will both have joined Sister Lucretia and the other Sisters who await them in heaven. They will pray for us all.

As you have already heard from the Sisters, I am no longer at Mornese but here at Nizza. While we are in this life we must make sacrifices. Let us make them willingly and cheerfully; the Lord will take note of them and in His own time will give us a rich reward.

I have been to Alassio, where I saw your sister. She is in excellent health and is also very good; she told me to send you her greetings and give you all the news for her. Now I would like to say a word to each Sister, but I don't know if I should begin with the first or last arrivals. What do you think? I shall begin with the new ones.

I began this letter at Nizza, and now I must finish it in Turin. Here I found the Sisters all well, and they wish me to send you their affectionate greetings. Sister Mariuccia Mazzarello is not well. At Chieri I found Sister Carmela a bit run down; the others are healthy and cheerful, as are those at Lanzo and Biella. They ask me to tell you thousands of things on their behalf. Sister Rosina sends a special greetings to her sister.

Now I am back in Nizza, and I must really finish this letter. I will not say anything to Sister Virginia, as I will answer her letter apart.

I begin with Sister Philomena. Are you cheerful? Be so always! Keep close to Jesus, work to please Him only, try to become more holy every day and you will always be cheerful. Viva Gesù! Don't forget to pray for me.

Sister Victoria, they tell me you are always out for fun!

I'm very pleased to hear it; work hard to win heaven. Never get discouraged, and never say 'but.' You are professed, but remember you should also be a novice. You must unite the fervor of the novice and the solid virtue of the professed. Pray for me, and be sure I never forget you in my poor prayers.

Sister Josephine, do you still remember the resolutions [p. 30] taken on the feast of the Immaculate? Never forget them; Strive every day to be truly humble, pray well, and work with a right intention. Speak little, very little with creatures, and very much with the Lord. He will make you truly wise. Pray for me.

Are you still cooking, Sister Angela Cassulo? You must be on fire with the love of God by now, aren't you? And what about poverty? Do you observe it always? Your sister is very good. She is in the kitchen at Torrione and prays all the time. I hope she will make her profession this year. Pray for her and for me.

Sister De Negri, are you proficient in French yet? As you study the languages of this world, study also the language of the soul with God. He will teach you the art of becoming holy, which is the only worthwhile science. Your parents are both well; they gave me some salame to send you, but as you are so far away I thought to keep it for the Sisters here. Write soon and thank them. Become a good Daughter of Mary Help of Christians; pray for me, for your Sisters, your parents and all your relatives.

Are you a saint yet, Sister Teresina Mazzarello? I hope you are at least halfway. Always work to please Jesus only, think of heaven and give good example in everything. I already told you that your sister is well and sends greetings.

How are you, Sister Gedda? I hope you continue to keep well, to work and become holy. Keep all the Sisters cheerful, and pray for me.

Sister Joan, you are still studying, aren't you? I'm sure you will also learn how to become holy. Remember that to be holy and wise, one must speak little and reflect much. Speak little with creatures, very little of creatures and say nothing about self. We must be recollected in our hearts if we wish to hear the voice of Jesus. Be recollected,

therefore, and humble, and you will become a great saint. Do not forget me in your prayers.

And now there is still dear Sister Laura: What shall I say to you? I will say that since you are the first American Daughter of Mary Help of Christians, you must, through your prayer⁵, obtain for many other Americans the same grace which the Lord gave you. If we do not see one another in this world we shall meet in heaven. In the meantime let us [p. 31] live united in the Heart of Jesus, and pray for one another.

How many boarders do you have? Greet them on my behalf. Tell them that though I do not know them, I love them very much and pray they may grow up good, docile, obedient and so forth, so as to be a consolation to the Heart of Jesus, their families and teachers. On my return to Turin I received word that dear Sister Gariglio had died on April 1. She had a very happy death.

Each Sister would have me send a message for her, but as that would be too long, I will ask their Guardian Angels to take their messages and you can answer by the same post!

Always be cheerful, love all in the Lord, pray always for all your Sisters. I'm sorry not to have written personally but this time it was quite impossible. I have written to Sister Virginia. Another time I will write to the others, but each one of you should write to me sometimes. When Sister Superior writes, enclose a little note. [To this point, the handwriting is Mother Emilla Mosca's.]

Take courage, my good Sisters! Jesus must be your strength. With Jesus, burdens become light, fatigue is easily borne and thorns are turned into sweetness. But unless you conquer self everything becomes unbearable, and wickedness will break out again in your hearts like boils. Pray for me, who am, in the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Nizza Monferrato, April 9, 1879

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,
*Sister Mary*¹⁸

The agony of Sister Ricci

Mother's presentiment was realized: Sister Margaret Ricci was dying at Nizza and Mother hastened to see her before she set out on that journey from which there is no return.

She was buried on April 21—a dear young Sister of twenty-seven, who was professed just six years, a soul of prayer, silence and humility.

[p.32] The sorrow and preoccupation of the Superiors for these frequent deaths can easily be imagined.

Saddened, but not frightened, the Sisters said: "If God, wanted to take them to Himself it must be for the best!"

Then from Sister Josephine Vergnaud came a serene letter that returned the blue tint to the skies of Mornese.

Sister Virginia reports from Buenos Aires

My dear Mother Superior,

I am no longer at Villa Colon, that is, Villa of Columbus. I have moved to Buenos Aires, in the good air of Mar del Plata, which means "the Silver Sea." I now live in a palace, which they tell me, has not yet been described for you.

To me then falls the lot of giving the most pleasant news; to me who have resolved to chase away all sadness and be the most joyful note in the community.

Our palace is called a "ranchito" here, but we have baptized it the "Stable of Bethlehem" where the rain does not come in unless it is raining. The apartment next to the kitchen serves as refectory, workroom, community room, laundry, etc. and, at certain hours, for school.

I'll tell you a good one about it.

The Director, Father Costamagna (you should hear him talk of Mornese now that he is far away from it! All saints, all holy at Mornese!) when he comes to teach us Spanish—you know that we haven't time for this—he sets about the lesson while we carry on with the work, whatever it may be. If he finds us at the washingtub, he takes a chair, turns his back slightly to us and without a smile runs through verbs and words in Spanish and corrects mistakes in our questions and answers, while we, bent over the washtub or on our knees on a bench which serves as a stone, continue to dip into the water, to beat, wring and rewring linen and rags. What patience in our professor! And how dull our brains! Of course, Italian would be easier for us than Spanish, as would the fresh stream of Mornese be better than the anything but limpid water of the washtub!

Oh, let us not speak of water! Even the drinking water [p. 33] we use comes up to us from a well so muddy and full of creatures, lively and not so lively, that we are in doubt as to whether we should use it nor not; but when we have nothing better . . .

Sometimes at the washtub we feel a great zeal for souls; then: "Come here, you enormous sheet; heavy and worn as you are, by submitting to a thorough washing, you can make us a gift of a first-class sinner." "Come you, innumerable stockings, you tattered shirts and jackets, you colorless handkerchiefs, come, let yourselves be put to good use, for this evening you will be our purchase price for many souls!" What a beautiful trade is ours! So beautiful, that it drives away all loneliness.

When the weather is good, we go out of doors for recreation in the little playground near our House, but when the sun is scorching we seek the little shade close to the wall, where the space is so restricted that we have to stand in single file, one beside the other, facing front or back as we find suits us and in this way we speak, laugh and put on an entertainment to a tune we all know: "Here we come to learn a trade—What trade?—Any trade! Set to work and do it."

All this on weekdays! On Sundays we have about twenty little girls with whom we exercise our speech, our hearing and our Salesian mission. The Fathers here understand those moments of missionary illness. . . called melancholy (?! ...) and by way of consolation they repeat to us what our good Father Don Bosco said at Mornese, that before long we shall have so many girls we will not know where to put them.

But the best news is yet to come; I've kept the best wine for the last: The Archbishop, Monsignor Aneyros, came to see us, and was so pleased that he kept on repeating: "Don Bosco really made me a big gift by sending me the Sisters. Our Lady wanted to complete the Salesian work, which is truly hers. I bless you, my Daughters, with both hands; I am so happy to see you and to hear that some young girls come on Sunday to pass the time with you, that from now on I too will sing: *Sancta Dei Genitrix, Sancta Virgo Virginum*, in Latin, as you do!"

Later it was explained to us why Monsignor, the Arch. bishop, said this: he had never accepted the Italian pronun- [p. 34] ciation of Latin and held tenaciously to the Spanish pronunciation.

[Greetings and expressions of affections follow.]

March 9, 1879

Mother writes to the Sisters of the new House in Las Piedras

News from America led Mother to profit from the quiet of her native hills to write to the Sisters in the new House, which she thought had already been opened in Uruguay.

Viva Gesù, Maria e San Giuseppe!

My very dear Sisters,

You are "alone" at Las Piedras, I understand. How are you? Are you cheerful? Really cheerful? Do you have many girls? Do you love the Lord? With all your heart? Are you working for Him alone? I trust you will all answer: "Yes!" Well then, continue to be cheerful always, and to love the Lord. Trample on self-love; make it sizzle. And practice humility and patience. Be charitable and love one another.

Have deep confidence in Our Lady. She will help you in everything. Be observant of the holy Rule, even of the little points, as they are the means of going to heaven. Cultivate as much as you possibly can the spirit of union with God; remain always in His presence. Since you are the Vicar, Sister Joan, you must be careful to give good example, and to do everything with much prudence, with the sole aim of pleasing God. Thus we will be happy some day.

And Sister Philomena, are you as happy as you were here? Do you love the Lord very much? Do you get annoyed with the fire does not light? Be patient and try to enkindle within your heart the fire of divine love; be cheerful and pray for me.

Sister Victoria, have you grasped Spanish yet? Are you still worried at not being able to learn it? Courage! Little by little you will succeed. Strive to learn to love and please [p. 35] the Lord, and to overcome yourself; then you will easily learn other things. Always be humble, cheerful and pray much for me.

Take heart, my good Sisters, be cheerful, become holy and rich in merit quickly because death comes like a thief. In a very short time he has claimed four Sisters, Sisters Lucretia, Maria Gariglio, Maria Cappelletti and Margaret Ricci. They are already in heaven I hope, but let us pray just in case they may not be there yet.

Remember me and your Sisters always, especially those who will be clothed on the feast of Mary Help of Christians. They will be ten or twelve. I never forget you. Be good! Sister Joan, your sister is well and sends her regards; pray for her. Greetings from all, especially from

Mornese, April 30, 1879

Your affectionate,
Mother Mazzarello¹⁹

The first month of Mary at Nizza

The illness of the Director, Father Chicco, cast a shadow on the early days of the month of Our Lady at Nizza: because of it, he was restricted to two sermons per week. Greatly had all desired to celebrate Mary's month from April 23 to May 24 according to the directive given in the *Salesian Bulletin*. Patience! Father Cagliero might come!

The Sisters recalled wistfully the month of Our Lady as celebrated in Mornese, with the daily talks by Father Lemoyne. But nothing could be done about the present situation, so they used every other means to grow in love of the Madonna.

Mother Enrichetta had seen, from the day she arrived at Nizza, that the picture of Mary Help of Christians proposed for the middle of the main altar in the big chapel of the ancient monastery, would have given a sense of remoteness to those good girls who vied with one another in Mornese for the privilege of adorning the little altar of the Madonna and of keeping the lamp alight on the days [p. 36] dedicated to her.

Therefore, on an understanding with Mother and with the help of the girls, she set about collecting sufficient money to buy a statue of Our Lady Immaculate, while in the church a little altar was being prepared to receive it and give it a place of honor.

The little sum grew daily but when the Director General, who had offered to buy the statue in France, went there at the end of January, it had not yet reached the required hundred lire!

"Don't worry, Sisters; do what you can, and if there is something missing, Father Cagliero will say to Our Lady: 'Now, it's up to you!'" So said the good Director.

The Madonna did not fail to do her part: she sent him twelve lire and twenty centimes. Thus the little statue came to Nizza and was hidden away until a propitious moment for its solemn reception should come.

When Mary's month began, the statue was surrounded by lights, flowers, and loving hearts; the great fervor of Mornese, which some feared had been left behind in those dear hills, seemed to have come to life again.

Thus devotion to Mary revived among the Sisters and girls; and hopes were entertained for the conversion of a young Hebrew girl of the town.

Mother returns to Mornese The Cardinal Protector for the Salesian Congregation

With the Sisters, postulants and girls who left Mornese two and three at a time, Mother also returned on May 6. Her heart ached at having to leave behind her beloved sick Sisters, a little group of postulants, and the few Sisters needed to look after the sick and the House.

The affection with which she was welcomed at Nizza lessened in some measure the sorrow of the detachment, and the news (which the *Salesian Bulletin* carried), that the Sisters were included in the privilege of having a Cardinal [p. 37] Protector, was of great consolation to the whole community.

"Let us read again, Sisters, let us read again this great and beautiful news," Mother said. So in refectory the Sister read the article in a loud voice: "The Cardinal Protector of the Salesian Congregation."²⁰

Other news followed, which day by day increased their fervor and zeal. If the pages of the *Salesian Bulletin* were read only a little at a time, it was through a sense of mortification even in the enjoyment of spiritual things, and to prolong these delightful topics: "Another attempt to enter the Patagonian Pampas" and "Don Bosco, the object of princely honors in the city of Lucca."²¹

Novena to Mary Help of Christians Annette Bedarida

The feast of Mary Help of Christians was fixed for June 1, coinciding with Pentecost and the feast of Our Lady of Graces. The novena in preparation marked a growth in fervor in the hearts of all.

On the 21st, Miss Annette Bedarida, a friend of the Terzano and Ravazza families, came to see Mother.

She belonged to one of the best-known Jewish families of the town, a family conspicuous for its business acumen, but also for its intolerance towards the Catholic religion. It was only natural, therefore, that the girl's leanings towards Catholicism, and her frequent visits to the convent should be frowned upon. This time she was determined not to go home, because she wanted to become a Christian and her family had refused to give her permission.

"This will stir up a hornet's nest," Mother told her. To avoid the worst and to favor the young lady's idea, she and another Sister accompanied her to Turin, where she could more freely follow her intent.

Next day the girl's brother and cousin came to the convent. They wanted Annette at any cost: they turned [p. 38] the parlor upside down; they shouted; they threatened.

The next morning the police came to carry out a house search, persuaded that the girl was hidden in some secret corner. They did not prod her, of course, but succeeded only in frightening the Sisters, who were fearful for Mother. Having entrusted the brave girl to the Sisters in Turin she returned to Nizza immediately to restore calm in the community.

What were they afraid of? The girl was twenty-two years old, and was free to do as she thought best; good people were obliged to help her.

But the town was divided on the issue. Everybody talked about the Sisters: some for, some against, but more against, because of the old habit of attributing to religious the most ignoble deeds.

The first day of the novena, May 23, found all united a supplicatory prayer. On the 24th, Mother Enrichetta Sorbone and the postulant, Felicina Ravazza, were summoned by the magistrate of the town to report on Miss Bedarida; the former, because, as teacher in the workroom, she had had occasion to approach the fugitive; the latter because of a letter in which she had given her the "bad" advice of opening her eyes and heart to the true law of the Messiah.

When it became known that the girl was in Turin, her father went there to tempt her, but the Director General reported that she had not yielded.

What a beginning for the novena at Nizza! But the storm only served as a further incentive to prayer, and every fear was overcome through hymns of confidence in the great Mother of God and of the Institute.

Mother comforts Sister Pacotto

In the anguish of the moment, Sister Pacotto, who was still at Momese suffering for many reasons, was not forgotten. [p. 39] The good Superior tried to bring her relief by writing to her.

Viva Gesù, Maria e San Giuseppe!

My beloved Sister Josephine,

First of all I must tell you that I have your little letters; pardon my long delay in writing these few lines. I really haven't a minute. I have so much to do; do be patient now with this short note. Next time I will write a longer letter.

Tell me, are the postulants good? Do they have a great desire to become holy and to give their life entirely to Jesus? Tell them to think often of the end for which they were created, rather, why they came into religion. Tell them not to think merely of dressing in a black habit, but of wearing the habit of those virtues necessary for a religious who wishes to call herself the spouse of Jesus. Let them strive for a spirit of obedience, humility and detachment from all that is not God. Enough! Encourage them all on my behalf, and tell them to pray for me and for everybody.

And for yourself, Sister Josephine, you are lucky that I am far away. Were I near you I would pull your ears! Don't you know that depression is the cause of many evils?

To be cheerful we must go forward with simplicity, not seeking satisfaction either in creatures or the things of this world. Think of doing your duty well for love of Jesus only and nothing else. If you are humble and have confidence

in Him, He will do the rest. Therefore, don't tell me again that your tears splashed on the stove. Remember you are no longer a child, you should have common sense and give good example. With regard to Mother Vicar, be assured she understands you; have confidence and tell her everything, and if at times it seems she does not believe you, that does not matter. Take the humiliation in good part, it will benefit your soul. Be cheerful, therefore, help Mother Vicar, and between you, help the postulants by cultivating a good spirit among them and making them holy. Greet all the Sisters, postulants and girls for me, and be cheerful. Viva Gesù to all, and from Him thousands of blessings! Believe me always,

(May) 1879

Your affectionate,
*Mother Mazzarello*²².

[p. 40] The Belbo overflows

While all the newspapers blazoned the kidnaping of Miss Bedarida for religious motives by the Sisters of Don Bosco, while threats of setting fire to the convent were shouted in every wind that blew, unless the fugitive returned to her family and abandoned the idea of becoming a Christian, the River Belbo, swollen by recent rains, overflowed its narrow bed and submerged the nearby streets to a height of two meters. The people had to evacuate their houses, and many families—men, women, little children, girls and boys—knocked at the doors of the school, pleading for help. Mother Mazzarello immediately directed that they be received with the greatest charity. She anxiously saw that supper was prepared for all, with the little food available. Soup was not enough; she brought polenta and even those pieces of bread, which through mortification, had been left in the bread-basket by the Sisters.

She was especially concerned that the women and children should have some dry garments, and some kind of bed for the night. Fortunately the mildness of the weather permitted the men to sleep in the corridors wrapped in some light covering on a layer of straw. But the women and children were accommodated in the parlor where Mother went in person to welcome and console, and where she sent the Sisters to insure that nobody was cold, or suffered from fear, although that was only natural.

The first to be helped were probably those women who, some nights before, had screamed in fury under the windows: "Poor girls, what brought you to this place to die? Go home to your parents. . .Death to the Sisters!"

But no matter! Rather, didn't their need offer an opportunity for the exercise of real Christian charity, by alleviating their suffering and helping them accept the trial as heaven-sent?

When, after two days, the 26 and 27, the waters subsided, the many men who had been welcomed and helped, **[p. 41]** and the more than forty women who had spent the night at the convent withdrew, they knew Mother and the Sisters better and sang their praises loudly. Mother, on her part, gratefully repeated: "Truly all things turn to good for those who love God."

Another storm cloud

Early in the morning of May 31, Father Cagliero arrived at Nizza. Our Lady had providentially brought him to ward off another crisis.

It was known in the town that the clothing of Felicina Ravazza, Maria Terzano and others was soon to take place. The word went round that especially the first mentioned was a victim of suggestion on the part of the Sisters. That sufficed to rekindle sectarian fire.

The subprefect of Acqui, the King's prosecutor, and two members of the municipal authority felt it their duty to intervene personally and presented themselves at the convent for a fully warranted interrogation of the candidates for clothing. Before interrogating Maria Terzano, they questioned her father minutely. He did not hesitate in declaring that their mode of procedure was absurd, in so far as he had failed to dissuade his daughter from her resolve of becoming a Sister, and a Sister of Don Bosco, because she wanted that at any cost.

When brought before this formidable group of men she was not afraid in the least. She had already told Mother: "Don't worry about me, I am not afraid of telling the truth."

She did just that in a few words, with a tone that did not admit rejoinder. The other five girls were interviewed also, and one after the other expressed their views in precise terms with like frankness and freedom.

There followed a search of the whole House. Father Cagliero led the way but could not refrain from saying in his inimitable way:

[p. 42] "As you see there are no dungeons or traps here, so you can depart with your minds more at ease than when you came. "

"Yes, yes! But tomorrow the ceremony will take place behind closed doors; and to avoid any nuisance to the Sisters, a civic guard will be sent for the necessary supervision. "

"As you wish. Remember however, that everyone may do what he likes in his own house!"

The deputation withdrew, less boldly than it had come, its members better disposed towards the Institute, and pleased to be invited to the function next day.

First clothing at Nizza

When the visitors were gone the Director General suggested that invitations be sent to the families of the candidates, benefactors of the House, and noteworthy people of the town.

Thus the first month of Mary Help of Christians celebrated by her Daughters in the Church of Our Lady of Graces came to a close; it was also the first clothing celebrated there. Among those vested were two vocations from Nizza, for whom Don Bosco had assented to the request of Father Bisio and Mr. Terzano, to have the function there rather than at Mornese.

It was a ceremony expressive of the complete liberty of the children of God, even if the attack was intended to frighten the weakminded. Therefore. . . closed doors for those who did not want to come or who came with the evil intent of disturbing, but open doors to all the well-intentioned. Then look upon all with respect, sound criterion and politeness at every instance; and confidence in Our Lady!

June 2—feast of Pentecost—well ahead of the scheduled time, the church was full of people. The choir of Sisters and boarders sang the mass beautifully and the general devotion [p. 43] was palpable.

Immediately afterwards, the postulants proceeded to the altar: Anna Brunetti, Ernesta Farina, Maria Stardero, Matilda Villata, and the "notorious" Felicina Ravazza and Maria Terzano. The questions that precede the giving of the habit were addressed to them by Father Cagliero, who presided at the function as Don Bosco's delegate. He preached the sermon for the occasion and referring openly to the happenings of the very recent past, took the opportunity of explaining the aims of the Institute, the moral and civil value of religious life, the freedom that each one is entitled to in his own House. At the end, he stated and answered a question: "What are the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians doing in this house? They do what they like; they make maneuvers!"²³

Such a novel type of sermon was welcomed by all, and aroused new fervor so that the attendance at sung Vespers in the evening was greater than that of the morning, and restricted space was the problem.

The days that followed brought the calm that follows the storm and in quiet serenity the Sisters enjoyed together the news which came from America through the Director General, and the affectionate letter of Sister Virginia Magone in answer to one written by Mother Mazzarello.²⁴

A second letter from Sister Magone

Giving a sample of her knowledge of Spanish, Sister Virginia began thus:

Viva Jesus y Maria!

Mi muy querida Madre Superiora,

I received your dear letter. Oh, how delighted I was when Sister Superior said to me: "Dear Mother Superior has written to you." I jumped for joy and then tears of consolation came to my eyes! How good of you, Mother! You do not forget your Daughters, even the worst of them! Yes, it consoles me very much that, besides my mother [p. 44] in heaven, I have a mother on earth who thinks of me, prays for me, and puts herself out to write to me and tell me so many lovely things, so many things worth remembering.

I feel I must thank her for all the good she has done for me, by taking me while still a child and teaching me so many useful things. Were it not for her great goodness, who know where I would be, perhaps lost for all eternity. Instead, her great charity withdrew me from dangers and taught me the way to heaven.

It is now up to me to pursue it. Alas, I must admit that up to this point, I have made little progress. However, I haven't lost heart. The Lord is very good, and I hope He will make me good too, because I greatly long for that. Is that not true, Mother? I now resolve to strive, and with God's help, I hope to do a little good to young girls

In the meantime, dear Reverend Mother, I beg you to forgive me all the displeasures I have caused you, which are many and great. I know them now, when I can no longer make up for them. I hope that your great kindness has already spread a veil over all, and that you will not remember them anymore. Would you believe, Mother, that I still remember the first displeasure I caused you when we were still in the parish of Mornese? And then all the others that I gave you after that come before me from time to time. Forgive me, that I too may forget and be at peace!

My dear Mother, shall I have the good fortune of seeing you again? One night I dreamed you came to America. Imagine my delight! I was so happy I could not find words to express the joy of my poor heart. But at the loveliest part of the dream the bell rang. I woke and felt as mortified as a beaten dog!

Please do not conclude from all this that I am not happy in America; quite the contrary. Indeed I am very happy, and wish you, Mother Superior and all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians could share my good fortune. This I wish especially for the next group destined to join us.

Oh, Mother Assistant, take courage and accompany Mother Superior out here. Don't be afraid of the journey. True, you may feel badly at times during it, but once you are better you feel great. It is a sheer delight to see mountains of water fall on one side and mount up on the other. It is a real recreation, and at the same time shows the greatness [p. 45] of God. One sees but sky and water, and it seems at every moment that the ship must break asunder, and we get lost in the waves. But God is Lord of the sea, and makes it bring us safely to port. That was our experience and will certainly be yours if you come!

How are you, Mother Bursar? Oh, if you were to come to America you would have no difficulty buying meat. Here there is plenty of it, and so cheap they even give it to the dogs. Dear Mother Bursar, please remember in your fervent prayers one who caused you so much trouble.

And all the Sisters who know me—do you still remember Sister Virginia? Yes, dear Sisters, remember me in your prayers, and I will remember you before the Lord. Pray to Jesus that He may give me the necessary virtue to draw souls to Him, and I will ask Him to give you all the grace of coming to America. Are you pleased? Yes, it is a wonderful grace for me and would be for you too. God could not give a greater grace to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Now dear Mother, I came back to you. Please pardon me the liberty I took of addressing the Sisters without your permission. This certainly isn't bypassing you, which I could never do. Allow me now to tell you about some of the wonders of America. In the first place I will tell you of the wind that blows here, which is so strong at times that our house sways from one side to the other like the ship at sea. It seems sometimes that it is about to cave in, but so far a hand has sustained it miraculously.

Were it not that we have the Blessed Sacrament in the House one wonders what might happen. The thought that, should the house fall we shall be buried under it with Jesus, consoles us. With Jesus all will be well with us, and we shall go to heaven. A few days ago we went out to the country for a walk. We saw many houses made of mud, which they call "ranchos" here, and in them were lots of people, who unfortunately, live like animals. I could tell you more, but it is too disgusting, and I will just add that we felt great pity for them. We three Sisters from Mornese, with Sister Superior's permission, sent a collective letter to our good parish priest, telling him about the journey, and how we are faring in America. Sister De Negri and Sister Teresa also wrote to their families. I too wrote once to my mother but got no reply.

[p. 46] I will finish now, dear Mother Superior, but I renew my deep gratitude for all you have done for me, and for your letter. With God's help I will do my best to practice your counsels. Please remember me in your fervent prayers and recommend me to those of Mother Assistant, Mother Enrichetta and all the Sisters. Accept the greetings of all these Sisters, who entrust me with their many messages to you. Want of time and paper prevent my doing so. When opportunity offers of writing to Borgo San Martino, will you kindly enclose this letter in yours for your sister, Mother Felicina. In the adorable Heart of Jesus, I am,
May, 1879

Your humble and grateful Daughter,
Sister Virginia Magone

Mother's comment

Mother's brief comment underlines the Sister's sincere affection.

Have you heard, my dear Sisters? What humility! What displeasures do you think that good Sister caused me? Trivial things, repented of immediately and repaired in tears and sincere promises.

But the more one advances in virtue, the more the soul is enlightened and the more light we have the more we see the hidden faults and imperfections of our poor nature. This is why the saints considered themselves the greatest sinners. For goodness sake, Sisters, let us be careful of little defects; they will be a cause of great anguish to us when we see them in God's light at the point of death. And let us also be careful about the little virtues; they will quickly make us holy. really holy.

Mother at Mornese and Turin

At Mornese the month of Mary finished on June 5. The Director General, Mother and Sister Roncallo went [p. 47] there and brought a ray of sunshine to every heart.

Father Cagliari soon found it necessary to leave, because immediate arrangements had to be made in Turin about Miss Bedarida, who was still a cause of concern. The young lady resisted firmly the conflict waged against her by her people. She continued to ask for Baptism, in face of her family's intransigence, yet somehow the time was not ripe to grant her wish.

As soon as he got back to Turin Father Cagliari sent word to Mother that she should come there also. Her Sisters desired it greatly. Besides, representatives of the public security had renewed their attacks on the future neophyte, and relatives, including her father, were again visiting her.

At first Annette had been clear, precise and strong in defending her position. Later she dissolved in tears of self-pity, which gave less assurance. Perhaps... a heart-to-heart talk with Mother, whom she loved and in whom she had great confidence, would be a help to all ...

Therefore, Mother returned to Nizza with some postulants on the 18th and set out for Turin with a prayer in her heart and on her lips.

She listened, reanimated the girl but before advising her to take a definite step, thought it better to await the father's consent. He was the best disposed towards the situation. Father Cagliari too thought it necessary to prolong the period of waiting and the religious instruction of the catechumen.

Having arranged for the approaching retreats, and obtained from Don Bosco other desirable information about the foundation of Cascinetto, Mother returned to Nizza, serene in spite of increased problems, work, and expenses. Her trust was in Providence and she found support in the spirit of sacrifice of the Sisters.

She encouraged teachers and pupils to prepare for the coming examinations, while she traveled back and forth from Nizza to Mornese, each time taking someone from the beloved House, while preparations for the definitive break were going ahead.

[p. 48] All this movement of persons and things, so keenly felt, gave promise of development and life for the young Congregation, and corresponded entirely to the amazing ideals of the Founder.

Teachers at Genoa

New legislation for the schools required elementary teachers to take an examination qualifying them to teach gym in the public and private schools of the kingdom. This required a new mobilization of Sisters. Through the paternal goodness of its Director, Father Paul Albera, the House of Sampierdarena came to the rescue. Suitable accommodation was provided for the Sisters taking the test, with the women who looked after the linen of the Salesians. Therefore, in the last days of June they left for Genoa: Sisters Madelene Morano, Adele David, Rose Daghero and Caroline Sorbone.

Fresh missionary enthusiasm

Days of relative calm at Nizza offered the possibility of considering in depth the words spoken by the apostolic missionary, Monsignor Anthony Belasio, in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, and reported as follows in the *Salesian Bulletin*.²⁵

In the Church of Mary Help of Christians, full to capacity, taking as starting point the divine invitation: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature . . ." he treated of the apostolic work accomplished by the Church throughout the centuries. Having dwelt on the work of the Salesians and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for hundreds of thousands of boys and girls, he concluded: "Salesians, gaze at the vast field that opens up before you; the harvest is ready, the ripe, heavy ears bend to the ground. Come, spread out over the world and [p. 49] reap! Even though you are the last to arrive, your harvest will nonetheless be abundant; through you the Church will be enriched with new conquests and heaven will celebrate new feasts! Go, and preach the gospel to every creature!"

Such words are capable of enkindling new fires in souls eager to embrace the whole world and reach the maximum of apostolic potential.

All Nizza was aglow with a flame of zeal and generosity.

Mother's feast - Varied tributes

This was the atmosphere in which Mother's feast was celebrated on July 16. It was a spontaneous manifestation of filial affection on the part of all the Sisters, who sincerely loved their Superior and Mother. This was reflected in the various tributes paid to her.

Carmelinda Dianda, a postulant who had been but one month at Mornese, relates:

I heard Mother spoken of by two ladies of Lucca, who knew Don Bosco well. He had told them that the Superior of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was a saint. I came to Nizza with this conviction, which still has not changed. On the contrary!

During my first week at Nizza, while I was still sad after leaving home, when Mother met me she would say: "Be at peace. Think that you are the first postulant from Tuscany. You will, therefore, be the grain of mustard seed that will open the way for many others. Many Houses will be opened in your province, and among the Sisters who go there, you too will be sent. . . "

When I got my first letter from home I began to cry. Mother looked at me seriously, and said a few energetic words. . . then...she was gone! But later she called me, and humbly and affectionately asked my pardon for treating me in that way. She consoled me so much that not only did I forget the reproof but felt grateful to have such a holy Mother, because I think such things are a proof of sanctity.

[p. 50] After the discourse of Monsignor Belasio had been read and commented on in community, a longing to go on the missions filled the ardent soul of vivacious Sister Maria Terzano. But wouldn't her hasty character and that overly-talkative bent of hers be obstacles to this objective? Taking her courage in both hands she made her application to Mother, who said: "Very well, I'll send you to America if you are capable of controlling your tongue for a month!" All her good will, however, didn't suffice to make the grade, and she was suffering physically from the effort. Mother, therefore, approached her and said: "That is enough for the present. If the need arises, I will send you to America just the same." How could one not esteem a Superior like that?

Sister Felicina Ravazza, one of those recently clothed, had her own contribution.

Mother understood that it cost me a lot to keep still and silent. One of those days, hearing me talk in time of silence, she said: "Well then, since you are such a chatterbox, you will do penance by taking a run around the vineyard every morning for eight days."

I understood immediately that it was not a punishment but consideration for me, and I loved her all the more. So also when she called me to do some little service for her, she asked me: "Felicina, are you happy to have come here to us?" Then she went on in a gentle tone: "You see how happy one is in God's House? Be wise and give no ear to the devil whenever he tries to tell you his stories!" One day Mother had paid us a visit in the workroom. Giving a passing glance to the work in hand, she went out. A few minutes later she called me, and with maternal goodness

said to me:

"Felicina, you don't seem well. Are you ill?"

"No, Mother!"

"Then are you hungry?! Wait for me here!"

She went away, returning after some minutes. She drew me aside, took from her wide sleeve a large piece of bread and a slice of cheese, and said: "Take it, little one, [tugnaca],²⁶ eat it, and be cheerful." Then for several successive days she sent me for an afternoon snack. I can't think where [p. 51] one could find a more saintly Mother than ours! I do not say this because of her goodness to me—no, no! I know well she is equally good to all, especially the new postulants, to whom she sends the best part of the dinner, the freshest bread, and plenty of it when possible, with all the delicacy and solicitude of a true mother.

Interesting news

The *Salesian Bulletin* of July brought news of the fury of the Protestants against the work of Sisters and Salesians in Bordighera-Vallecrosia; of the Sisters' participation in the feastday of their Founder and Father; and the activity of Father Costamagna and his missionary companions in Patagonia. For Mother and her Sisters all this was a motive for grateful humility towards God, Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, and for ever greater zeal in the interest of souls.

Mother writes to Sister Vallese about the House in Las Piedras

News came also from Uruguay: the Superior, Sister Angela, while telling of the opening of the new House on April 13, showed herself apprehensive for the work there, because in her view, the personnel was not equal to the requirement. Although Sister Vallese wrote this, the reports from other sources were satisfactory, and Mother replied:

Viva Gesù, Maria e S.Giuseppe!

My beloved Sister Angelina,

Do not be afraid your letters annoy me; far from it. I am very pleased when you give me news of all that concerns you and the Sisters. Write to me often, and at length ... your letters always give me pleasure.

I am sorry the new House at Las Piedras is not going so [p. 52] well. Sister Joan is too young and not sufficiently mature to take the place of the Superior. You must not panic, however; be convinced that there will always be defects. We must correct and remedy all we can, but calmly, and leave the rest in the hands of the Lord. And then we must not take too much notice of trifles. Often we so exaggerate little things that we overlook what is important. By saying this I do not mean you to take no account of -small defects. I don't mean this at all. Correct, point out always, but sympathize in your heart and be kind to all.

It is necessary, you know, to study the individual character and know how to take each one so as to succeed well and inspire confidence.

You must be patient with Sister Victoria, and little by little imbue her with the spirit of the Congregation. She can not yet have it, because she was at Mornese only a little while. I think that if she imbibes it she will do well. And so for the others—they each have their defects. You must correct them with kindness but not expect them to be without any faults, or expect that they can overcome them all at once—this is impossible. But with prayer, patience, vigilance and perseverance all can be attained little by little. Have confidence in Jesus; put all your troubles in His Heart and let Him act. He will arrange everything.

Always be cheerful, always optimistic. When you don't know what to do, consult Sister Madelene [Martini], do as she suggests and be at ease. Then too you have a good Director, so you really should have no worries. Be careful to obey him, Sister Angelina.

You tell me you have to work hard, and I am really happy about that, because work is the father of virtue. Work leaves no time for whims and one is always cheerful. While I recommend work, I also recommend you to take care of health, and also to have no other ambition in work than that of pleasing Jesus alone. I would like you to instill in the hearts of all those dear Sisters a love of sacrifice, contempt of self and absolute detachment from self-will. We have become Sisters to win heaven, but that cannot be done without sacrifice. Let us carry the cross bravely and one day we will be happy.

I would like to write a word to each Sister, but I really [p. 53] haven't time; I will write later. You should see the house! It is all topsy turvy. We are preparing for the retreat which will begin on August 6. Soon after there will be the retreat for ladies. Then there is the transfer of all at Mornese here to Nizza... so you can imagine the work to be done!

Be patient therefore, for the present. I shall write a longer letter after the retreat.

Say a word on my behalf to each of those dear Sisters of mine; encourage them all and tell them to love one another like good Sisters, to have great charity and remind them of heaven, where we shall all be reunited one day.

Give my regards to the good Father Director, and to the Director of Las Piedras; I think he is Father Beauvoir. Greet the Sisters one by one for me, especially the latest arrivals.

To yourself I again recommend cheerfulness. This is my message also for Sisters Joan, Victoria, the little rogue, Philomena, Teresina, Onorina, Cassulo, etc. . .

Always have a place in your prayers for your Sisters in Italy and in France. None of us forget you, be sure of that. From first to last they send you millions of greetings.

Your parents and relatives are all well, as we are also with the exception of Sister Mary Mazzarello, who is very ill. God bless you all, along with Nizza, July 22, 1879

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*²⁷

Sister Mary Mazzarello dies in Turin

On August 4 Sister Mary Mazzarello—also a native of Mornese—made her final vows in preparation for heaven in Turin. She had offered her life to God at the age of eighteen, and from then on had spread around her examples of the most refined humility and obedience.

She had improved somewhat after a serious crisis, and hopes of her recovery were entertained; but when Mother arrived, after purposely anticipating her visit to Turin with Sister Elisa Roncallo, she was already dead.

[p. 54] She had died on the 6th, feast of the Transfiguration, without pain or lamentation, her head resting gently on the arms of the Superior, Sister Catherine Daghero.

"I am going to heaven!" she had said a few minutes before—"and I will pray for you!"

Mother cried: her namesake, her fellow country woman, her pupil from childhood had been very dear to her for many reasons.

Retreat at Turin

On the morning of the 8th some other Sisters left Nizza to join those taking the examination at Genoa. That same evening the retreat began at Turin. It was conducted by the Director General and Monsignor Belasio. Nizza did not have sufficient accommodations because of the school, while in Turin the indispensable could be borrowed from the nearby Oratory, where paternal and fraternal charity met the needs.

Mother spoke to all the Sisters, but behaved in an unusual way towards Sister Mary Succetti, who had been in Alassio. There, she had had difficulty with her Superior, who though pious and good, was exacting and somewhat brusque in her manner, due perhaps to her timidity.

Sometimes Sister Mary had allowed words of discontent to escape her. Mother knew this and had warned her during her visit to that House. She was not to let it happen again; she was to think of her approaching final vows and make efforts to do better, so as to merit this grace.

Sister Succetti made several attempts on her arrival at Turin for the retreat to approach Mother, who always put her off with: "Yes, yes, I will call you later. Yes, I already know what you want to say to me!"

When the evening of the vigil arrived, and poor Sister Mary had heard nothing she spoke to the Superior of the House, Sister Catherine Daghero. She was inconsolable at the thought that the Superiors were displeased with her. Then she heard her name being called among those admitted to final vows. Every cloud disappeared, and Sister Mary was the happiest creature on earth.

The retreat finished on August 15, feast of the Assumption, with thirteen first professions, two renewals and nine Sisters making final vows. Don Bosco received the vows and gave the "Souvenir." The good Father was always pleased to give joy to his Daughters.

"A life of prayer, work, humility, retirement and sacrifice only for God and for souls in imitation

of their heavenly Mother on earth so as to share more fully in her glory in heaven." These were the finely chiseled words of the venerable Father, which left in all a keen desire for perfection and apostolate.

Sisters and Superiors returned immediately to their Houses. After consoling and comforting Annette Bedarida, who for some time had enjoyed some respite from the importunities of her relatives, Mother returned to Nizza, where the retreat for ladies began on the 18th.

Advertisement in the "Salesian Bulletin"

The August issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* announced this retreat with the following advertisement:

To meet the desire of many single women, teachers and pious ladies of spending some days in quiet retreat to attend to the interests of their souls, spiritual exercises will take place in the Convent of Our Lady of Graces, Nizza Monferrato, organized by our Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The retreat begins on the evening of August 18, and finishes on the morning of the 27th. The fee is 20 lire (reduced to L15 for teachers.)

The healthy country air and the pleasant, isolated setting will prove a delightful change for the tired spirit in need of rest.

Therefore any of our Cooperators wishing to take part are invited to apply, not later than August 14, to the Superior [p. 56] of the Institute at Nizza Monferrato, or to Don Bosco, Cottolengo Street 32 – Turin.

N.B. Nizza Monferrato is a station on the railway line between Alessandria and Cavalmaggiore.

Feast of Leo XIII

On her return to Nizza Mother brought the echo of Don Bosco's words, and spoke of his love for the Pope, telling the Sisters that in Turin, for the feast of Saint Joachim—August 16—all were asked to pray for the Holy Father's intentions, to obtain the graces he had most at heart. "This evening," Mother said, "we shall read at table what this month's *Salesian Bulletin* says, and everything we do tomorrow, including the preparation for the ladies' retreat, will be offered for the Pope Leo XIII. Does not Don Bosco say in his *Bulletin* that we must prepare to celebrate this feast in our Houses like affectionate children?"

The ladies' retreat

The ladies came in large numbers: about ninety of them. Among them were some teachers. The desire to progress in virtue was evident in all, but there was also the desire of knowing the spirit that animated the Sisters. They listened avidly to the words of Father John Cagliero and Monsignor Belasio.

To accommodate so many people while the boarders were still in the House called for sacrifice on the part of the community.

Following Mother's example, each had given up the best she had. Some slept on sacks of straw in the attic; some sought a corner of the House where nobody passed after all had retired. Plates, glasses, cutlery... all was put into service for the ladies.

To Father Cagliero, who remarked that the house was [p. 57] not yet ready to accommodate so many, Don Bosco replied reassuringly: "Don't worry, you will see how Mother copes with the situation. She is Mazzarello: and has not only the means (*mezzi*) but also the (*mezzarelli*) "little means" in such circumstances. "28

Mother had simply said to the Sisters:

"Nobody will die as a result of this. The lack of what is necessary makes us industrious. In the meantime just imagine how the retreatants will benefit... and the vocations that will result from it!"

She knew she could speak like this. When there were not sufficient beds in Mornese for all, had

they not taken turns in sleeping in the hayshed, using a sack as sleeping bag? And had she not been among the first of those generous volunteers? Now a marvelous harvest was being reaped from the sacrifices offered in that first field of labor.

The foundation of Cascinette

As August 20 was fixed for the opening of the House of Cascinette, near Ivrea,²⁹ Mother, though entirely at the disposal of the ladies, was at the same time dedicated for those Sisters about to depart.

She was generous with counsel and loving solicitude for the Superior, Sister Anna Oberti, and for the two Sisters who were to form the little community.

Don Bosco at Nizza

The 21st was a red letter day for Nizza. Don Bosco arrived, eagerly awaited by the ladies who besieged him continuously, without his showing the least sign of annoyance.

He received in private interview first the retreatants, then the Superiors, the Sisters and some boarders.

Among the latter was twelve-year-old Teresa Pentore [p. 58] who, convinced that she was in the presence of a saint, spoke to him of her religious vocation. He looked at her with a smile, asked her age and said: "You are still too young. When the time comes Father Cagliero will tell you."

Don Bosco also found time to visit some benefactors in Nizza. After the night prayers in common, he would address from the balcony words of encouragement and exhortation to all. It was only a matter of two minutes, but what a treasure of love of God and of souls it contained!

Exhortation of a saint and Father

In one of these sermonettes he said: "Some rich people, piously and generously leave part of their property by will to works of charity. A good thing in itself! However, the gospel does not say: "At the point of death leave the superfluous to the poor," but "Give the superfluous to the poor." As you see, there is a big difference. . ."

His paternal preoccupation about the poor health of the Sisters was among other things communicated to the Superiors when he said: "You have plenty of land. Here you need not be embarrassed by what neighbors might think. Let the young Sisters in need of movement dig and look after the vineyard and the garden. This exercise is beneficial to health."

Speaking apart to the Sisters, he had further paternal recommendations to give: "Write to your parents, do not leave them anxious through your prolonged silence. That does harm to you and them and may prove an obstacle to many vocations. If they hear from you often they will be happy to have given you to the Lord; your words will help them, they will read those letters to friends and acquaintances and they in turn will more easily permit their daughters to become Sisters."

[p. 59] Mother's display of affection

On one of these days Mother Mazzarello was seated in front of Don Bosco, when, with childlike simplicity, she took hold of his hand, pressed it affectionately to her heart and said: "Father, we love you very much!"

Don Bosco, surprised by this unusual act on Mother's part, looked into her eyes with such paternal kindness as to reveal the meeting of two holy saints.

Sister Josephine Quarello, who came in just then, said to Mother later: "What did you do, Mother?" as if to say: "Weren't you rather bold?" And Mother in her simplicity and goodness replied: "Did I do wrong?"

While Don Bosco was at Nizza Monsignor Sciandra also arrived there. He administered confirmation in Saint John's parish church; then, accompanied by the clergy, of the city he came to the convent to meet Don Bosco, and see the newly-restored church.

Welcomed joyfully by the Sisters, he went to the church and was deeply moved as he addressed to all, retreatants and community, words of complacency and pastoral exhortation, and words of congratulation to Don Bosco.

The ladies' retreat continued. They had all spoken to Don Bosco, had confessed repeatedly, and had enjoyed the presence of Mother Mazzarello who, with Mother Enrichetta and Mother Emilia, was among them all the time.

On the 26th they participated devoutly in the solemn mass and general Communion which brought the retreat to a close. The helpful words of Monsignor Belasio and Father Cagliero set a seal on those happy days.

That afternoon the boarders' entertainment and reception of awards took place. The ladies were present, and as at Mornese they promised to send pupils, and to return next year in greater number.

[p. 60] Departures and arrivals

Don Bosco left with Monsignor Belasio, and the ladies and boarders departed in little groups in the course of the evening of August 27. The Sisters' retreat would begin next day, and once more sleeping quarters were re-arranged.

Father Lemoyne came from Mornese to direct the new retreat, instead of Father Bonetti, who was detained in Turin by business of great importance.³⁰ For the few left behind at Mornese Father Joseph Campi was appointed in temporary capacity; Our Lady would look after the rest.

Family news

About a hundred Sisters assembled at Nizza for the retreat, and the joy of reunion with Mother, Father CagHero, and the kindly Director, Father Lemoyne, knew no bounds. They also had recent news from Father Costamagna. To be at Nizza and share the life of Turin, of Mornese, of America: Could a greater joy be imagined?

Among those present was someone from Bordighera, who was questioned about the reasons for the Protestant reaction as inferred from the article in the *Salesian Bulletin*.³¹ What were the Salesians and Sisters doing? School, catechism, social work in a big way, without counting fatigue or sacrifice.

Besides, as soon as weather permitted, the Sisters with the help of the girls had begun to collect construction material for several hours on Sundays, on the site destined for the new church. The Protestants ironically and contemptuously said: "Yes, throw yourselves into it! What an elegant church will rise out of all your work and perspiration!" But the Sisters continued in silence, and behind them men moved in with carts laden with all sorts of material, so that now all was ready for the erection of the church.

What do they do? They work all day and well into the night with very little of everything except appetite. We will [p. 61] add: and "fervor." And with Mary on their lips and Jesus in their hearts they become instruments for good among the girls, and through them for right-minded parents.

What are the Salesians doing? They haven't time to see or to know. They see and know only that their sphere of activity is expanding continually, which at least proves they are not asleep.

At recreation attention was focused on the late arrivals who had passed the examination at Genoa.

Oh, thank God and Our Lady! [exclaimed Sister Caroline Sorbone], I was so thrilled to know I passed that on my way home after hearing the news I wrote in great big letters on a package I had in my hand: "Thanks, my Jesus!" In the train a man in front of me, looking at my parcel, began to read aloud: "Thanks, my Jesus!"

You can imagine the general amusement: but I continued to sing in my heart: Yes, thank you, my Jesus! I won't be exiled to Mornese. You must know that our dear Mother when sending us for this examination bade good-bye to us

saying: "Those who don't pass, will go into exile in Mornese instead of coming back here!"

The others took it as a joke; but not I. It never left my mind and heart. But now, thanks to Jesus and Mary, my poor empty head got through as well as the others!

The beautiful statuette of the Immaculate Lady of Lourdes, on the little altar to the left as one entered the church, was another subject of animated conversation among the Sisters.

"When did it come?"

"Oh, what an arrival!...The whole place was in a state of confusion owing to the Bedarida affair. All we could do was done. But in a word, the little white Lady is here, and boarders and Sisters go to pray before her with absolute confidence, because especially in this jubilee year of the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, she will be disposed to grant exceptional favors. Besides, the Immaculate was the first devotion of Don Bosco, just as it was of the first [p. 62] Sisters of Mornese, of practically all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, who in childhood were enfolded in her white mantle and become young again in the memory of their early piety."

After many months of hard work in the various Houses, these hours of sisterly union were a welcome rest. Ever dear was any news of intimate family interest. Mother Mazzarello delighted and participated in it as an outstanding means of cultivating the family spirit and of tasting the charm of Salesian religious life.

The retreat begins

On August 28, at the appointed time the Sisters assembled for the opening words of the week's retreat.

"Good Father Cagliari will give the instructions," Mother said. "He will hear confessions, see privately those who wish to speak to him, and will take all our interests to heart, passing on to us his apostolic Salesian dynamism. The Director, Father Lemoyne, will give us the meditations, so that we will seem to be in Mornese again. Mornese, of course, is here now, and we must be holier and more fervent here than at Mornese because we are a year older and have many more graces to account for. Let us really make good use of the new insights these precious and much longed for days will bring us. "

During the retreat Mother didn't spare herself: she received the Sisters, prepared those who had to make triennial or perpetual vows, and still went to the workroom, the laundry, and kitchen to help out. If she saw some of the more "educated" Sisters come in she jokingly said: "Yes, yes, come along! With all your learning you don't know how to clean cabbage or peel potatoes as quickly as I, who always did it at home."

The theme of the retreat was the rapport of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians with God, with the Blessed Virgin, with the Superiors, with their neighbors, and even [p. 63] with those far away.

And to some who hesitated to aim at the heights, Father Cagliari exclaimed: "Up, up! Not so many pauses and sighs! There is no time to lose; there is so much to be done for us and for others. Don Bosco wants us to be active, alert, not half dead! Do you love Our Lady, Sister? Do you love Jesus? Courage, and ever forward! Heaven is there, there for those who trade the talents received, as reason, religion and love of God require. Forward! Ever forward!"

More news about Miss Bedarida

The latest news about Miss Bedarida was not good. Knowing of the absence of Father Cagliari, her brother thought she was fighting the battle single handed, and went to see her on the 25th. He spent a long time with her, weeping and entreating. In a moment of weakness, Anna gave in and let herself go to the point of writing, at his dictation, a few lines requesting that she be taken away from the house in which she was.

The consequences are easily imagined... but becoming conscious of her mistake in time, she begged for help to remedy the situation.

At the suggestion of Don Bosco the Countess Corsi took her to her home, ready to be a mother to her and save her.

What would be the outcome?

Father Cagliero presents the first printed Rule

At the end of the instruction of Wednesday the 3rd, the day before the retreat closed, Father Cagliero gave great importance to an act which would take place the next day for the first time in the Institute: the distribution of the Rules or Constitutions from the altar to the professed Sisters. He introduced his subject with an historical outline: the primitive Rule given by Don Bosco to the first Sisters; [p. 64] the Rule which had successive touches made by Don Bosco at the suggestion of the first Sisters and Superior, based on their experience and on circumstances; the Rule approved by the Bishops of the various dioceses where the Institute had opened Houses, especially after Don Bosco had worked on them at Ovada in August, 1875. Until then, the Rule had been in manuscript form, with but a single copy for each House. Then the preacher came to the express desire of the Sisters to each have a copy for her personal use for her greater spiritual advantage.

Finally he exclaimed:

Here then is the beautiful, printed copy of your Constitutions! Do you know what reflection, preoccupation, prayers and sighs it cost Don Bosco? Only in heaven will you know it, Sisters; only in heaven! [And with increased apostolic enthusiasm he continued:] What is this book, Sisters? It is the gospel for religious; your gospel, on which you will be judged at the hour of death, and at the final judgment before all the world!

What are the Rules, the Constitutions of an Institute—of your Institute, Sisters? They are the expression of the will of God! The observance of the Constitutions is the fulfillment of the will of God! To do God's will is to live in communion with Him. If it is true that religious life should be a continual communion, it should also be a life in keeping with the will of God. As God is in the tabernacle where the Sacred Species are kept, so also is He in the Constitutions. If a copy of the Constitutions were kept in the tabernacle, you would better understand how Jesus lives in the Constitutions as in a consecrated Host. The book of the Constitutions should be kissed as one would kiss a Sacred Particle. And when the Constitutions are neglected, an act of reparation should be made, as a priest repairs when by accident he lets fall a fragment of consecrated Host. A religious should never be without her Rule, as a religious House should do everything possible never to be without the Blessed Sacrament.

Happy that religious who lives by her Rule as she lives by Holy Communion!

[p. 65] Therefore, every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians and of our common Father, Don Bosco, should act in such a way that every night, kissing her copy of the Rule, she may repeat: "My soul, praise the Lord until I die!" You will find these words in the preface of your Golden Book. They contain the wish of our venerated Father, Don Bosco, for his good Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.³²

Towards evening great preparations began for the clothing and profession on the following day. Mother found time to assemble the candidates for a short conference in which she recommended them to reflect well on the step they were about to take; to thank the Lord for the religious habit they were about to receive, and concluded: "In tomorrow's Communion ask for:

- 1 - The gift of health to enable you to work much and do good to youth;
- 2 - The grace of remorse for even the smallest imperfection;
- 3 - The grace to be sincere in confession and to receive it well, always."

The retreatants in recreation

When Mother was missing from recreation (it wasn't always possible for her to be free) the Sisters' conversation turned to what had been done and what might still be done for their personal sanctification and the good of souls. These themes arose from the exhortations they have heard individually or collectively, from the desire to treasure what Don Bosco or Mother had suggested. Then too, of course, much of it was called forth from the joy of being reunited and reliving the

happy days of Mornese. They reveal many gems of virtue and of holy rivalry .

At Nizza as at Mornese the best exemplar of a humble and mortified spirit was always Mother Mazzarello.

[p. 66]Have you noticed? Her room is the last of the small apartments on the first floor. She would not dream of granting herself the privilege of sleeping alone and to avoid comment, has chosen a simple, uncouth Sister to share the room with her, saying that she will change companion often. She never allows anyone to render her services, and she succeeded in doing without a mattress, having given it to her roommate. She still spends the day in the common workroom, knitting stockings and listening to Sisters, novices and postulants who wish to speak to her.

Mother was only expressing a personal experience when she said that if we work with simplicity and a spirit of abandonment to Divine Providence, the Lord will even work miracles to save us from the painful consequences of our mistakes. She told me, in fact, about a kind of imprudence she had been guilty of in Mornese in '76, which could

have given rise to trouble, if Providence had not intervened to remedy it. When postulants,³³ my two sisters developed an infectious skin disease and were to be sent home, as in fact they were, without further ado.

When they got as far as Gavi at 6:00 p.m. on a November evening, the stationmaster wouldn't let them proceed, saying that arriving at Milan at midnight they would not know where to go.

At this point a good old man came up to them-"really like Saint Joseph,"-my sisters said later-and advised them to go on: "Go, go on," he said. "Providence will take care of you. "

Two policemen came into the compartment two stations later, and not only were they safe company for the remainder of the journey, but at Milan they got lodging for them with a good family and came next morning to accompany them to the station and put them on the train for their destination.

My father wanted to complain to Mother about not being informed of the journey, but on hearing how the two girls had been protected, he finished by thanking God and so confirming last evening's recommendation: when one works with simplicity and confidence in Divine Providence, all goes well.

"But I'm sure Mother did not fail to recommend them to their Guardian Angel and Saint Joseph. She never does any-

[p. 67] thing without their help." How true! With them, it seems she is working miracles even with that grumbling niece of hers. She seems completely changed. It must be that the air of Nizza is good for soul and body. What shoulder shrugging, and answering back at Mornese, even to Mother herself, when she wanted to send her home on an errand: "Why me? I'm not the only one in the world! Send the others, can't you? I am tired!"

"Did she dare answer Mother like that?"

Sure, and Mother said: "Go like a good girl, it will win you merit; otherwise you are disobedient, you know?" And her ladyship with an insolent air answered: "Who is putting me in the occasion of disobeying? Don't send me out any more and you will see that I too can be good."

"If she had answered me like that . . ."

Instead Mother was always kind and patient: "Look, if you go I'll give you a nice present and you will merit heaven." Little by little the young one calmed down and after awhile she went on the errand.

"But Mother doesn't always treat her niece with that indulgence. Sometimes she speaks very strongly to her and punishes her too. . ."

Naturally! She is Superior and teacher as well as mother, and is very firm when necessary, especially in the case of her niece, who is more in need of formation than others. Besides, good example for the other girls demands it. They would soon imitate her caprice and insolence, if being Mother's niece meant that she was always treated to sugar and honey!

"There is no fear of that for sure! Mother is the last in the world to favor partiality, especially to a niece! As you know, she has regard for all the girls, whether boarders or day pupils. She closes an eye to certain defects peculiar to certain age groups. She is indulgent, unless there is question of subterfuge or lies, so you can rest assured that the only privilege her niece enjoys is Mother's desire to bring her up properly. We all know what happened when, as a child, she strutted among her companions dressed in her best frock, saying she was the Superior's niece!"

Oh, we remember! When Mother got to know it she took her to the kitchen, blackened her face with soot from [p. 68] a pot, and taking her back to her companions said in a serious mocking tone: "Now look at the beauty!"

"And when she put that big bonnet on her head and turned her dress inside out? That too, of course, was to help her overcome ambition and vanity!"

That is all right; but what if her niece doesn't love her as a result . . .

"No, no; she loves her just the same. She understands it is being done for her good. But she has a difficult character, poor child!"

But she has improved; and Mother must be very pleased, for she has suffered quite a bit on her account.³⁴

"That which costs most is most valuable, they say, so. . . Do the girls of Nizza love Mother as much as those of Mornese?"

Oh, do they love her! They always want her to come to recreation with them, and are overjoyed if they even meet her in the corridors.

"Mother is just as she always was. She accepts them gratis if they cannot pay fees or expenses, as at Mornese; she takes an interest in each one, and recommends that all be well treated, without partiality of any kind. She is careful

that they be instructed and educated according to their condition so that they may be good Christians and be in a position to earn their living honestly. With regard to the Sisters she appoints to assist them, she wants at all costs that they act like Guardian Angels. The girls are thoughtless, it is true, but they soon know who loves them, more or less, and always know how to respond with sincere, cordial affection."

Somebody wanted to know if on Thursday all the Sisters went into the workroom to attend to their linen.

Of course, Mother is good but firm. When she has given a direction for the order or good spirit in the House, she does not compromise. Mother Assistant wanted to make some exception for those who needed time for study; Mother wouldn't hear of it! No, no, every Sister must learn to do a bit of everything, and realize she didn't come into the Congregation to be served. She often repeats to the Sisters [p. 69] of the workroom: "See to it that all the Sisters without exception learn to darn, mend and sew, because that is necessary. "

It would seem that one of her recent good nights made a great impression.

A postulant, engaged in the weaving section, feeling scrupulous about keeping a ball of cotton or remnant of cloth, woven to order, accused herself when she went for her interview. Mother praised her; but without preamble she said to the Sisters: "Such things are contrary to honesty, and justice. They are not permissible, not even under the pretext of poverty. And what about example? This perhaps applies only to one or two but I say it to all, so that even through ignorance, it may never happen in any of our Houses."

She had nipped the practice in the bud, because those who saw nothing wrong with it and had committed the fault, could only conclude: "Mother really trains us on right lines. May she be blessed for such strong words!"

It would seem that some other incisive words were very keenly felt by some.

Yes, of course, it is correct to ask God to let us feel the prick of conscience about little faults. However, Mother's motive was: "So that it may never happen that we use Holy Communion as a cloak for hidden vice!"

Those present answered in chorus: "She is right! Without the delicacy of conscience on which Mother insists, it is very easy to go off the straight path even while we go to daily Communion."³⁵

End of the retreat

Early on the morning of September 4 a state of excitement prevailed in the House. From the railway station, along the avenue which leads from the town to the convent, in the court yards, people swarmed to be present at a beautiful and touching ceremony: the religious clothing of fifteen postulants; fourteen novices making profession; one [p. 70] Sister renewing her vows; and four making final profession. A copy of the Rule was given to each professed Sister.

Father Cagliero presided and gave the "souvenir." The approaching feasts of Our Lady's birthday and patronage were his introduction to a favorite theme of his: the love of Our Lady.

Sisters! Have no fear! If the name of Mary puts all the devils to flight in the twinkling of an eye, confidence in her patronage is a tower of strength against all the wiles of the infernal enemy. Is Mary not the tower of David? And David was a warrior, a conquering king.

If then you, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, are so many soldiers fighting for Christ and for souls, and take refuge in the unshakable, invincible tower of your Mother, calling "Mary!" the holy Virgin will bring you instant victory. And that your strength may not fail, be constant and vigilant in wearing the armor of prayer and fortify yourselves daily with the Eucharistic Bread.

The singing of the *Te Deum* and solemn benediction brought to a close those hours of deep joy and left the hearts of all full of admiration for God's gift to the families of the chosen ones.

On coming out of church some of the more thoughtful among the Sisters discussed among themselves how their Rules had cost Don Bosco so many prayers and sighs, as the Director General had indicated in the conference of the previous evening.

"Isn't Don Bosco always guided by the Madonna," they asked. "And if so. . . why should she make Don Bosco think and rethink, write and rewrite?"

"Contradictions are the order of the day in the lives of the saints, and Don Bosco is a great saint!"

"Yes, Don Bosco is going through a period a great trial; a time of trial for himself as head and

Founder of two religious families. Then too he is suffering for his beloved Father Bonetti, who is at the heart of a matter brought to the highest tribunal of Rome,³⁶ and for the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, whose dependence on him, its Founder, is not being readily recognized."³⁷

Perhaps Mother knew something about this, but she was silent. Don Bosco continued to trust in his powerful Helper.

Dinner had a festive air; it was a happy family gathering where verses were acclaimed and good humor seasoned the meal. In the afternoon Mother invited all the Sisters—community and retreatants – to the vineyard to taste the first rich fruits of the vines. She personally distributed the little buns for the afternoon snack, accompanying them with a maternal word and seeing to it that each one sampled the grapes. Afternoon snack was, at this time, reserved to those delicate in health; to extend it occasionally as a recreation or reward, as in this case, was exceptional.

A memorable Good Night

The hour in the vineyard passed quickly and by evening, silence and recollection reigned supreme. A familiar, formative dialogue developed at the "Good Night."

"Well Sisters, did you enjoy yourselves today?"

"Oh, yes, Mother; very much. Thank you!"

"However, I hope each of you remembered to make some mortification, as a little offering to present to Jesus in tomorrow's Communion. A good religious would not go empty handed to Communion."

A general silence! Then one stood up and humbly accused herself: "Then Mother, I can't go to Communion tomorrow, since I did not make any mortification?"

"I didn't mean that. Go to Communion in peace. I just say we should thank Him, and make Him a return with some small act of self-denial. If we forget it then we should put more effort into the work we have in hand. We often say we have a lot of work to do. However, our dear Father, Don Bosco says that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians should not be worthless Sisters—that is, like people [p. 72] paid by the hour, who work because they have to—but really active Sisters. Spiritual activity means correcting one's defects, sanctifying one's work through purity of intention. Material activity means not wasting a minute to earn one's living, and teaching the girls to do likewise, in imitation of Don Bosco who, for love of God and of souls, never rests. It is a good method to fix a special task for each one of those who go to the workroom.

"I have just seen the last page of this month's *Bulletin*,"³⁸ Mother continued, "and I was struck by the title: *The Daily Life of the Pope*. Read it. You will see how the Pope has no rest. If he works unceasingly, why should we do less? Therefore in the absence of other mortifications, our daily work well done can be a preparation for the next day's Communion."

Father Lemoyne remains at Nizza

The Sisters returned to their Houses on September 5 and 6 for the Sunday Oratory.

Mother Petronilla and Sister Pacotto, now appointed Mistress of Novices, stayed behind. Father Lemoyne also remained definitively at Nizza, for Father Chicco, who had gone to Lanzo for the retreat, was transferred to Cremona.

Miss Bedarida publishes her story

On September 7, *Unità Cattolica* published a letter by Annette Bedarida, which later appeared also in the *Salesian Bulletin*.³⁹ It went as follows:

Dear Editor,

I hear that reporters for the press have information regarding me. I am anxious to prevent false or inexact news being spread about me, and I ask you to kindly find place in your [p. 73] esteemed paper for the following:

I am a Jewess of Nizza Monferrato. In May I abandoned my home to become a Christian. I had entertained this Idea for about three years, but found no means of carrying it into effect. I feared to tell my parents, knowing it would be useless and imprudent; I didn't dare run away from home as I didn't know where to go. At this point Don Bosco's Sisters of Mary Help of Christians came to live In my native town, and after thinking and rethinking the whole situation, I decided to be guided by them.

With a view to being free to prepare worthily for Baptism, I went to Turin where these same Sisters gave me free hospitality. My relatives, on hearing of my disappearance, and thinking it due to violence, reported the matter to the police. Therefore, a representative of the public security came to Interrogate me within a few days. I told him that I had freely and spontaneously sought refuge with the Sisters of Don Bosco and that I wanted to stay there to become a Christian. For the next three months or so I was left In relative peace. Some of my relations came to see me, especially my good father, with whom I remained on the most affectionate terms.

After some time of instruction, I considered myself ready for Baptism, and asked to be received into the Church first on June 24, then on August 15. However, Father Cagliero, the theologian who so kindly instructed me, advised me to wait so as to better prepare for such a great act.

In the meantime, (August 25) my brother came to see me, and the Superiors of the House, who never restricted me in any way, allowed me to remain alone with him for several hours. That was the moment of weakness for me. I was moved to see my brother weep and hear him implore me to return home. My courage failed, and my heart betrayed me. My brother, taking advantage of the situation, took my hand and made me write some lines, which he dictated, to be given to the public authorities, asking them to get me out of that house as if I were detained there by force. I told him that he made me do what was not right, yet I allowed him to take those lines, which I had written in a trembling hand, without giving real thought to the consequences. Furthermore, to please him I promised to go with [p. 74] him. Such was my agitation and confusion that I scarcely knew what I was doing. But the God of my Fathers helped me.

It took but a few minutes for me, when left on my own, to come to my senses. I realized I had done wrong, and in the presence of my brother and two witnesses, whom Father Bonetti had purposely invited, I retracted what I had done, stating that I wanted more time to think things out. Then my brother went away disgusted, and took my paper to the police, requesting them to oblige me to leave my place of refuge. I anticipated the move, and to spare the good Sisters further disturbance and trouble, I left their House next morning and went to live with a kind lady who treated me like a daughter.

On that same day, my brother, a cousin, a companion of theirs and the chief constable went to the Sisters' House, and not finding me there withdrew, but not without causing serious disturbance and annoyance to my hosts. On the following day (27th) the Public Prosecutor went to the Oratory of Saint Francis de Sales. When I was brought before him I stated that it was my resolute will to remain where I was, and I recommended myself to his guardianship. My interview was recorded and I signed it. This done, the prosecutor departed, convinced that I would not be subjected to further molestation.

I too thought all was over, but I was mistaken. On September 3, from early morning policemen-some in uniform, some in disguise-surrounded my asylum, and at one point the door was pounded as if it were being forced. It was not opened, but I leave to the imagination the effect of all this on me. Suffice it to say that I was terrified. Convulsions shook me all over, and only with difficulty did I calm myself. In the meantime the surrounding of the house, the gossip of the neighbors, well or ill Informed, attracted hundreds of people, and it seemed as if they wanted to take the house by storm. Certainly I never would believe that to become a Catholic I would have to witness such things, and feel such heartache. But I repeat, God helped me and gave me courage.

But all is not yet told. At about 9:00 a.m. two gentlemen unexpectedly came to my apartments. One introduced himself as the Prefect of Turin, the other as the Prosecutor General. They explained the purpose of their visit, after declaring that they had to see me alone. I took my courage in my hands, and invoking help from heaven, I told these representatives of the law that I had already been interrogated twice for the same reason, just a few days previously, and that I could not understand why it was necessary to subject me to a third interrogation.

The two gentlemen, having heard that my will was fixed; that I had been and still was perfectly free; that the writing had been extorted from me by my brother, without my foreseeing the consequences, brought in my family-that is my father, brother and sister.

It would take too long to tell all that was said on either side. What astonished me was to hear from the lips of the Prefect of Turin the wish that I returned to my family to relieve its sorrow. It came to my mind then that he must be a Jew. I must, however, say that these two gentlemen treated me politely, especially the General Prosecutor, who with wise and sober reasoning pointed out to my relatives that I was no longer a minor, and that the law ensured me the right of freedom in the choice of my religion.

Nevertheless, it seemed they were sorry, especially the prefect, not to be able to take me from this house. In spite of my protestations that I had not suffered violence of any kind, he still tried to persuade me to leave and get lodging in some other Institute.

"I don't know any other Institute," I told him, "except that of Don Bosco."

"I will make it my business to find you one to your liking, for example that of the *Figlie dei Militari*," he answered.

"But why change abode? Here I am no longer with the nuns, and there is no reason to fear that I want to become a Christian on their account."

"But here you are still close to people connected with Don Bosco's Institute; besides the life you lead here is not in keeping with your condition. I will find a place for you where you will have every comfort. Your relatives approve of this. Is that not so?" he asked, turning to them.

"Yes," my father replied. "I am prepared to pay the fee."

[p. 75] Eventually it was decided that the Prefect would look for a suitable place, and would inform me. Now I await what will happen in this regard.

But, before concluding my story I want to ask: Under our government has a girl who has come of age and who wishes to change her religion; who has declared several times in the presence of the public authorities that she is under no compulsion whatever; and who has deliberately chosen to live with a free citizen for the purpose of being instructed; I ask, has this girl or has she not, the right to be left free and in peace? If she has, why have I, for some days, been subjected to a kind of torture by people who come, one after the other, to question me as if they wish to catch me in my words. Why should they insist that I change house, as if I were not free where I now live, when I have repeatedly told them I am absolutely free? Why do the police surround the house as if to lay siege to it? Some tell me it is to guard my liberty; while others say that in the event of my going out I will be abducted, so that I no longer dare to go for a walk as I used to do. They want to make people believe that I am a victim of priests and nuns. Yet under the cloak of liberty I am the victim of another type of person! But what does it matter? It will be a good preparation for my Baptism.

Asking pardon for the possible importunity of my request, which I trust will meet with your kind consideration. I remain,

Turin, September 4, 1879

Yours faithfully,
Annette Bedarida

It is known from reliable sources that under the spacious pretext of not causing trouble to Don Bosco's Institutions, Miss Bedarida was denied the right of choosing her lodging. She was accompanied to the house of Mrs. Ferraria, a Jewess, and president of a teacher training school. The net had been cleverly cast and the little fish was caught. Would she succeed in escaping?

[p. 77]

Another vineyard party Mother and the missionaries

Every time that missionary news was read in the refectory either from the *Salesian Bulletin*, from letters received from the Sisters across the ocean, or from Father Costamagna, Mother wrote to her faraway Daughters.

One day on entering the workroom she said: "Put away the work for awhile, go to Cinina (the Bursar), get a bun from her and then.. . off you go to find the bunch of grapes you like best, and enjoy the treat!"

No sooner said than done. But Mother and Sister Rosalia Pestarino, her secretary, were nowhere to be seen!

The Sisters, wandering about between the vines, were reminding one another to resist the temptation of the moment, recalling the lesson about offering an act of mortification as preparation for Holy Communion. Now Mother had said: "Find the bunch of grapes you like best.. ." Then it was one bunch only. . . and was permission required if you wished to take another? Of course Mother had not forbidden them to take all they wanted. But there was method in Mother's direction: either one denied her appetite or mortified her self-love.

On that same day, September 11, she wrote to Sister Angela Vallese and the missionaries of Uruguay:

Viva Gesù!

My dearest Sisters,

I would like very much to write to you individually, to console and encourage each one of you, but you will forgive me if this time I really cannot do so. Therefore you will be satisfied with a few heartfelt words addressed to all.

The retreat left us all with a firm will to become saints, thank God. But how often our thoughts and prayers turned to you, that you too might have the same determination. I am confident that you have, and so one day we will be

reunited in heaven. Courage, therefore, dear Sisters! Every day we draw nearer to eternity. Everything passes, doesn't it? . . . But our merit will be ours eternally.

[p. 78] My good Sisters, love one another. Oh! How consoled I am when I get letters from the Houses and know that charity reigns in them; that the Sisters obey willingly, and are observant of the holy Rule. . . . Then my heart is full of consolation, and I continually ask blessings for you all, that you may be clothed with the spirit of our dear Jesus, and so do much good to yourselves and to your dear neighbor, so much in need of help. Yes, but what was Jesus' spirit? (I repeat to you what Father Cagliero told us many times): His spirit was humble, patient, full of charity-but that charity peculiar to Jesus, which never tired of suffering for us, and wished to suffer until the end. Courage, therefore; let us imitate our dear Jesus in everything, but especially in humility and charity. . . . but in reality. . . . pray for me, that I too may do this. . . . Be cheerful. . . . always cheerful, never take offense. Rather when you feel that someone needs to be comforted, console her and help one another reciprocally.

Sister Philomena, be cheerful! You and Sister De Negri are now awaiting an answer to the letters you wrote me, aren't you? I will write later on. Try in the meantime to be good, to give good example, and the day will come when you will be not only happy but richly rewarded for the little things done and suffered for our dear Jesus. Let us then set our hearts on becoming saints, let us pray for one another that we may all persevere in the service of our Spouse Jesus and of our dear Mother Mary.

Give the good Father Director our greetings and recommend me to his prayers. The Sisters all send their good wishes and are looking forward to meeting and embracing you up there in that beautiful heaven which awaits us. Courage then, my dear Sisters in Jesus; let us remember that everything passes. Therefore let nothing disturb us, because everything serves to acquire true happiness. Be assured that we never, never forget you, and that I am always,
Nizza, September 11, 1879

Your affectionate Mother,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

[p. 79] N.B. Send the enclosed letter to the Sisters of Las Piedras. Pray for poor Sister Rosalla.⁴⁰ Would you like to hear more consoling news? Guess how many were at the ladies' retreat? . . . More than ninety. It was a great uplift! At the Sisters' retreat also the number was greater than usual, and we frequently went in spirit to visit you, so you see you are not forgotten; quite the contrary! Therefore I again tell you to be always cheerful, but always-eh!

Take heart, Sister Virginia. . . . Become a saint, but a really humble saint, cheerful with everybody and full of charity for yourself and your neighbor. Will you pray for me always? We now have a beautiful statue of Our Lady Immaculate, and I often go to her feet to ask graces for all of you, especially for those who pray for me.

Always be cheerful, therefore! Evviva Maria!

The Director, Father Lemoyne, who at the moment is here at Nizza, greets you cordially and asks a prayer. He doesn't forget you in his fervent prayers, be sure, and neither do we.⁴¹

Mother Mazzarello assists her dying father

On the 22nd Mother left hastily for Mornese, where her father was seriously ill. The news was a great blow to her, but in her heart was resignation: "Lord, may Your holy will be done now and always."

Beside his bed she was a real daughter, and a true religious. She prepared him to receive the Last Sacraments, and disposed him to meet the Lord, reading the prayers for the dying. When she saw that he had breathed his last, she said: "Let us kneel and pray: he is now being judged."

Then she laid out the remains of her beloved father, reminding those present of how he had worked for the good of all.

She restrained her tears, but her prayers were tears of supplication for the soul that had departed from this exile, and for her dear ones whose sobbing called for comfort and support.

[p. 80] She entrusted his soul to the Sisters and girls of the school, to her former companions of the Immaculate, to all the people of Mornese who surrounded her with affectionate attention and sympathy, that through their prayers and suffrages, they might obtain his speedy admission into heaven.

She asked the same charity of all at Nizza when she returned there on the 26th. She recalled the possibility of gaining a plenary indulgence daily by the recitation of the rosary in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and other precious indulgences listed in the *Salesian Bulletin* every month. For example, the ejaculation: "Blessed be the holy and Immaculate Conception, etc," had been enriched with new indulgences that very month.

Sorrow turned to spiritual account

Mother's keenly felt sorrow did not make her morose or sad, or prevent her from helping those around her to see the bright side of things. She drew comfort, relief and courage from contemplating the crucifix and the wounds of Jesus, which was a favorite devotion of hers, and from the sorrows of the Blessed Virgin. Always first to enter church, and last to leave it, she drew the community to the Father's House, to find there, in communion of spirit, a family joy which infinitely surpassed what they had renounced to follow their religious vocation.

She was ever in God's presence, not only during the time of meditation and prayer, but during her various occupations, which she accomplished with a serenity and diligence that moved everyone to imitation.

Her ardent faith in approaching the sacraments unconsciously communicated her hunger and thirst for Jesus and His grace to the girls.

Even non-Christians and the baptized who were not particularly committed to Christian living found her heart rich in charity for them.

[p. 81] Death of Monsignor Galletti

On October 5, feast of the Rosary, the great soul of Monsignor Eugene Galletti, Bishop of Alba, returned to God. When Don Bosco had been seriously ill at Varazze in 1871, he was among the first to offer his life as a victim for him. The victim seems to have been acceptable, since Don Bosco immediately began to recover while Monsignor Galletti developed an incurable illness.

Mother, who never lost an opportunity of inculcating gratitude in the Sisters, said with evident emotion: "How sad our Father Don Bosco must be, and how much we Daughters of Mary Help of Christians owe to this good Bishop! Let us pray, let us pray, Sisters, for his soul! Let us pray also that Don Bosco may have many friends and protectors like him for his work; this is a duty of gratitude and justice."

Let us not waste time: let us become saints

On his part Don Bosco gave Mother frequent paternal proofs of his concern. When good news of the Sisters came from the missions, he never failed to send it to Nizza on the first occasion. A letter from Father Costamagna, dated August 19, and forwarded to her, says among other things:

I would never have dreamed that our Sisters could be of such help to us in our mission. So much could never be done for women and girls were it not for them. Besides the children, a large number of women come to their catechism lessons and hang on their words, as if they were preachers. While we priests were in the confessional the four Sisters gave instruction a little distance away, and sent us the penitents so well prepared, that tears flowed abundantly!

The Sisters prepared our meals, also. I write all this to repeat the antiphon: "Send us, send us, Send us what? Money? No! Because Don Bosco is poor, and we are not spendthrifts. But do send us priests, catechists and Sisters!"⁴²

[p. 82] "Oh, dear Sisters, how wonderful!" Mother commented. "We, who are so insignificant! Enough! Let us not waste time; let us become saints quickly and courageously as Don Bosco would have us be, so as to be ready for the work Providence is preparing for us at home and on the missions!"

Mother writes to her Daughters in Uruguay

News had also arrived from Villa Colon and Las Piedras. Mother wrote back to Sister Vallese and Sister Joan Borgna. She did not forget to tell them of her father's death, but through mortification, no doubt, left that to the end.

Viva Gesù, Maria e S. Giuseppe

My dear Sister Angelina and everyone,

Your letters of September brought me much consolation. Above all I'm pleased you have made the retreat, but remember it is not sufficient to make a retreat. We must practice with courage and perseverance the good resolutions the Lord inspired us to make at that time. I am happy too that Father Costamagna, our good Director of times past, comes to see you occasionally. Poor Sisters, I'm sure seeing him reminds you of Mornese, doesn't it?

My good Sister Angelina, keep up your spirit, be cheerful and keep all those dear Sisters of mine cheerful. The Lord loves you very much; it is up to you to love Him in return, don't you think so?

Now I will tell you our news. We are all well, thank God, except for our poor Sisters Justine and Albina, who are, I might say, in agony. Sister Albina is here at Nizza, and Sister Justine (Calcagno) is at Mornese. The others are all happy. eager to do good and envious of your good fortune. We have thirty-two postulants, fifty Sisters and thirty board. ers. Mornese has really been transported to Nizza. There are only five Sisters there now with Father Joseph, but we hope to have them all with us very soon, because the House is being sold. We are so happy about this transfer from Mornese to Nizza. Therefore, my dear Sisters, when you come to [\[p. 83\]](#) see me, don't go to Mornese but come here to Nizza. Dear Daughters, we are too far away for this! It is better that we meet in the Heart of Jesus, where we can tell each other everything.

I assure you that every morning I speak to you in this adorable Heart at Holy Communion, and say many things for each one of you. Are you pleased that I visit you this way? But you must meet me there! I am consoled by the good will of each of you; try to increase it ever more. I recommend to all great confidence in the confessor and Superior. All will go well if this confidence exists.

We are approaching the feast of Our Lady Immaculate, which our holy Rule would have us celebrate with great solemnity. But apart from that it should be one of the most beautiful feasts for us who are Daughters of Mary.

We must plant some lovely flowers in our hearts and so have a beautiful bouquet to present to our heavenly Mother, Mary most holy. In these days which still remain to us, we must exercise ourselves in all the virtues, especially in obedience and mortification. Let us not let occasions of mortifying ourselves in something slip by; above all let us mortify our will, observe our Rules and make a fervent Communion each morning.

During the retreat we kindled a fire in our hearts, but if we do not shake up the ashes from time to time and put on wood, it will go out. Now is really the time to stir up the fire. We must rouse up our fervor in preparing for the feast of the Immaculate, and then for Christmas, so that we may remain fervent to the end. Let us all, therefore, set to work with courage and good will. For some among us this may be the last time we keep this feast.

But time is passing for all of us, and at the point of death

we will be very happy to have celebrated it fervently. Then we shall remember all the little mortifications we have practiced and oh! what consolation will be ours! For our heart to be at peace in that hour we must combat and crush self-love.

Do you all want to set out on this crusade with earnestness and real good will? Do I hear you all answer: "Yes!"? Sister Virginia, Sister Angela Cassulo, Sister Gedda, Sister De Negri, Sister Teresina Mazzarello, and our novice, Sister [\[p. 84\]](#) Laura! Is Sister Victoria, who never writes to me, ready? And Sister Philomena, the little rogue who will always be cheerful? And Sister Joan, can you answer for everyone at Las Piedras? Attention, then! What I recommend most of all is that you be exact in the observance of the holy Rule. As you already know, this suffices to make saints of us. Jesus does not ask any more than this. If it is true that we love Him, let us give Him this pleasure, and so we will give joy to His Heart which loves us so much.

Tell me, do you love one another? Do you treat one another kindly? I hope so, but in these things there is always room for improvement. Therefore to give pleasure to our Mother, Mary Most Holy, be outgoing in charity to one another. Help one another in work, advise one another gently, and take corrections well, no matter by whom they may be given. Courage, dear Daughters, this life passes quickly, and at the point of death nothing will remain with us except our works. The important thing is that they be well done. At the moment of death caprice, pride, vanity in wanting to know everything, and in not submitting one. self to one who isn't clever will be a source of great dismay.

Poor Sisters!!! I'm sure I have tried your patience to the utmost. But there is still one thing more. I again recommend great confidence with the Superior and good example among yourselves, and with the girls, great patience and unlimited kindness. Then I again repeat: always be cheerful. Sadness is the mother of tepidity.

Lastly I ask you in your charity, to pray for the soul of my dear father who passed away on September 23 at 7:30 a.m. I had the good fortune, almost by miracle, of being there to assist him. I hope he is already in heaven; however, pray for him, please.

Sister Angelina, Sister Teresina and Sister Cassulo, I have news of your relatives, who are all well. So are those of Sister Virginia and Sister Philomena.

Now Angelina my dear, I can only tell you to have courage. Your heart must not be so small, but big and generous and not so fearful. Have you understood? Greet all those dear Sisters for me, and let all be cheerful. Regards to Father Director, and a request for his prayers. I leave you in the company of Jesus and Mary. I am

[\[p. 85\]](#) Nizza, October 20, 1879

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,

Sister Mary Mazzarello

P.S. You wish me to come to see you, but if the Superiors do not send me, I cannot come: it is up to you to get them to obey you.⁴³

V.G.M.G.

My dear Sister Joan,

I was pleased to get your letter and happy about the news it contained. I heard that you made your retreat, and praise God for giving you this big grace. It brought me much consolation that so many girls went to confession and Communion. That is very good! But you must not be discouraged when you hear that the world speaks ill of you, of our teachers, schools, nuns, priests, for whatever. If the world speaks ill of us that is a sign that we are on God's side, that the devil is angry with us, and that in itself should be an encouragement for us.

I will not give you news of this House. Sister Angelina, to whom I have written a long letter, will give it to you. In fact, tell her to let you read the letter. I forgot to recommend one thing to her. Tell her to take great care of everybody's health. If this is missing we cannot do any good for ourselves or others.

Tell me, Sister Joan, my dear, are you always cheerful? Are you humble? And the Sisters-how do you treat them? With kindness and charity?

My dear, I recommend to you always to give good example to your Sisters. You must be their model in every virtue, especially in the observance of the holy Rule, if you wish things to go well, and if you wish them to have respect and confidence in you.

I do not say this by way of reproof. Rather I know you do all you can to make things go well, but I say it because I have it very much at heart. Courage, Sister Joan, my dear Daughter, let us do a little good while we have time. This life passes quickly, and at the moment of death we shall be glad of the mortification, conflicts and strife waged [p. 86] against our self-love and ourselves. I recommend you never to be discouraged. If you become conscious of many defects, face them with good will, real good will, true and resolute, and Jesus will do the rest. If we try with good will to overcome them, our defects help us advance in perfection, as long as we have true humility. Have you many pupils? Remember to give them good example in gentleness and refinement. Tell them "Viva Gesù" from me and ask them to say a Hail Mary for me. I remember them at Holy Communion every morning.

Tell the Sisters also to pray hard for me, for our Congregation and for the Superiors who work so tirelessly for us.

Your sister is well and happy and wants to be good. She sends you her greetings, and asks your prayers. Be assured that I am looking after her.

Be cheerful, encourage all the others, take care of your health and be humble. Give my regards to Father Director. Recommend me to his prayers and write when you get an opportunity. May God bless you and make you all His. In His Sacred Heart, believe me

Nizza, October 20, 1879

Affectionately,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁴⁴

Shopping trip to Asti

Sister Albina Frascarolo seemed to be on the road to recovery. Mother took advantage of this to take Sister Felicina Ravazza with her to Asti to buy some silk for a work in hand, and to uplift her after the suffering she had undergone in the ordeal of her friend, Annette Bedarida.

Sister Felicina relates:

My presence in Alessandria was useless, and Mother, seeing me still preoccupied, said, "Come, we will go to Asti together." During the journey we prayed, and when she saw a church in the distance she said: "With the eye of the Spirit let us try to see the tabernacle, and greet Jesus, who is a Prisoner there for love of us."

[p. 87] She sighed frequently and it seemed as if she would willingly take flight. Before getting off the train she gave me her watch:

"Take it, Felicina, you can use it better than I."

"Oh, Mother, what do you mean?" I answered in confusion.

"Keep quiet: you are really not a bit simple! If you were simple you would have obeyed without a word. Don Bosco says that simple religious are pleasing to the Lord and to Mary Help of Christians, but you are not simple yet."

We searched Asti up and down for three hours without finding what we wanted, and from time to time Mother said to me: "We can't do anything. Patience! Let us offer our disappointment to the Lord, and so it will profit us for heaven. Every step and every word an act of the love of God with the intention of saving a soul."

With a shock we realized that the train would leave within minutes and we were a long way from the station. We hastened to make it, but in spite of our good will, the train had gone.

Mother wasn't even upset. After a moment's silence she said: "The Lord foresaw and knew all this; He knows how sorry I am not to get home this evening. Patience! Since He has permitted it, He will remedy it. Let us go: let us go in the company of Mary and Saint Joseph when they sought a lodging. In God's name, let us go."

When we passed a bakery, Mother bought some bread; a little further on, some apples. I watched her, amazed to see her so calm, when night was drawing on, and we had no idea where to spend it. Having walked aimlessly for some time, Mother said to me: "Here in Asti there are three girls who, for health reasons, could not continue with us. Let's go see them. They must be working with a Mr. Cerrato who wishes to begin a work of charity for the homeless poor—a kind of hospital."

Inquiries here and there resulted in our being accompanied to Mr. Cerrato by an elderly lady.

I cannot describe the joy of those three girls on seeing Mother! They were speechless, and just looked at her delightedly as if afraid she would disappear! When the excitement had subsided Mother said with a smile: "Could [p. 88] you give us a night's lodging? Call Mr. Cerrato for me, and ask his permission." Permission?! Mr. Cerrato thanked her for honoring his little house with her presence. He wanted to show us around immediately, so that Mother might say a word to the patients, give a conference to the six postulants, advise him and encourage the three girls to persevere.

What a hovel! The inmates numbered eight: two incurable old men, two children, two middle-aged women in advanced stages of tuberculosis, and one whose face was eaten away with a cancer that emitted an unbearable stench. Mother sat beside this sufferer and spoke to her for a long time of the sufferings of Jesus on the cross, purgatory and eternal reward. Tears of resignation and joy were the response. In her emotion she raised her hands to heaven and praised God aloud for sending her so much comfort. Before leaving her Mother drew near and said: "When you get to heaven pray for me." Tell the Lord to save my soul and recommend to Him those dear to my heart."

We went downstairs in silence; they brought us hot soup. But who had a will to eat after what we had seen and the services that had to be given to those poor invalids? And the soup! It was one thick mass of over-boiled spaghetti. What repugnance I felt! Yet Mother swallowed it: I had to imitate her! But in a moment that we were alone, Mother, quick as lightning, emptied my dish into hers, and gave me some of the bread she had bought: "Look, it's exactly like what is on the table; they won't notice. Come, quick! Eat it and keep quiet." Stunned by her quick action, and her understanding without my saying a word, I must have looked like a little goose. . . Having come to my senses I tried to do what she had done and exchange my bread for hers, but in vain!

When we had finished Mr. Cerrato came back again. Then the three girls, one by one, kept her for quite awhile. The last, Jacinta, was overjoyed when Mother told her she could return to Nizza to try her vocation a second time. The happiest of all was Mother in being able to relieve souls in need with the abundance of her charity.

At 11:00 p.m. we were eventually left alone to take some rest. I was preparing to spend the night on a chair as there was but one bed, and I hoped Mother would use it. [p. 89] But she arranged the sheets to make the poor bed seem two, and showed me where I was to go. I had to overcome my embarrassment and obey.

Mother did not remove her habit, and prayed in an under tone all night. I was awake but kept my eyes tightly shut. Every now and then she covered me (the nights had begun to get cold) and completely forgetful of self she repeated very softly the *Agimus*. "Yes, Lord thanks!"

Next morning after Communion we said good-bye to the girls and left. In the train she continued to pray, but from the few words she said I gathered that she was pleased. "We lost the train, and failed to get what we were looking for, but the Lord provided for us. *Deo gratias!*" She had really accomplished a mission.

Sister Albina Frascarolo dies

Sister Albina Frascarolo left this earth for heaven, which had been the one object of her desires, on the morning of October 28.

As the last moment drew near, she fixed her eyes on a certain place and in inconsolable tones exclaimed: "Jesus, that cross is for me, for me who have sinned; not for You, who are innocent!"

She reached out towards that point as if to take up the cross, and resumed her calm only when they placed the crucifix from the wall in her hands. Then placing it on her right shoulder, as if the cross she so desired had been given to her, she said: "That is better, Jesus," and died.

Poor Miss Bedarida!

November brought great sorrow.

Annette Bedarida, pressured by her new adviser, yielded and returned to her delighted relatives,

who took her for a long trip to distract her and make up for the anguish she had suffered.

[p. 90] Mother Mazzarello felt it keenly, attributing to herself the blame for this surrender. Yet, what more could she have done? And what more could the Salesians have done? Father Bonetti had risked every danger. Father Cagliero was ready to be imprisoned. Father John Francesia relates:

We were at Lanzo for the retreat; Don Bosco was with us. When he heard how things were going he said to Father Cagliero:

"Did you hear what's happening in Turin?"

"Yes, dear Don Bosco!"

"Would you be prepared to go to the Oratory and baptize Miss Bedarida tonight in the Church of Mary Help of Christians, with the prescribed rite and in the presence of witnesses?"

"If you think it's all right, I'll go at once. But come to visit me in prison tomorrow!"

So saying, the future apostle of Patagonia stood up to carry out Don Bosco's suggestion.

I was present to hear the order and witness the obedience and was dismayed at the possibility of serious consequences.

(... The bitterness shown by the Jews of Bologna towards the Pope for having received young Edgar Mortara, baptized by his servant when he was in danger of death, was not yet forgotten.

While Father Cagliero went away with Don Bosco's blessing, I went to my little cell, where, I am not ashamed to say, I prayed the Lord to prevent what I feared would become a great scourge.

Then Father Cagliero, who at forty years was nimble and quick footed, was off at full speed, on the street, over the Gesso Bridge, up to the gates of the station, saw the steam of the engine, and ... heard the whistle. . . the train was gone without him, and he had to return home! I again breathed freely. But perhaps he never in all his life regretted being late for anything as he did that evening.

On arriving at Lanzo he went to report to Don Bosco, and heard him say: "With men like you many battles are won!"

All the Lord wanted of us today was our good Will."⁴⁵

[p. 91] Mother prayed, suffered and had Superiors and Sisters offer sacrifices and mortifications but the Jews did not desist in their project.

Sister Adelaide Carena goes to heaven, too

In the meantime, Sister Adelaide Carena, who had been the picture of health, grew daily weaker, smitten by a serious illness. She was a soul of good humor which continued to characterize her in spite of ill health. This good Sister offered all her sufferings for Mother's intentions, with whose solicitude and that of the confessor she overcame the terrible crisis of fear in the face in God's justice.

The grace of final profession, granted her on the 16th of the month, restored her calm and serenity.

On the 19th, with the sweet name of the Help of Christians on her lips, Sister Carena went to join the Sisters who had preceded her to eternity.

Mother's recommendations

Mother took her cue from the apprehensions that had assailed and tormented Sister Adelaide at the point of death for recommendations on poverty: "Let us do all we can to economize. We are poor. We have taken a vow of poverty. Let us not waste anything. If you see on the floor a thread that can still be used, a button, a needle, a pin-pick it up. When coming downstairs lift the skirt of your habit slightly to prevent its fraying. Even crumbs of bread-let us not allow them to be wasted. Bread is a gift from God and must not be wasted, if we want Divine Providence to come to our aid. Train the girls in this also. "

In her refinement, Mother Assistant had taught the girls to use bread to clean the blade of the knife, then leave it on the plate, and also not to drink [p. 92] all their well-diluted wine. Mother told her quite simply: "Oh no, no, this is not for our girls! We are not dealing with aristocrats. Yes, it is good they know such things for special occasions in their lives. But in practice now... Our girls must be trained to simplicity of life; polite by all means, but without losing sight of

economy."

Again, she ardently spoke of obedience: "Please, let us take care to obey in a spirit of faith; let us put so much faith in our obedience as to find ourselves almost in the impossibility of thinking differently from our Superiors."

During one of her last conferences, as was her custom, she questioned some of the Sisters to hear from them what they thought of the affairs of the House. One of them cleverly excused herself from answering and Mother observed:

Oh you are not interested in the general good? That is a bad thing for a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians! Our good Father Don Bosco often says: "At the end of life we reap the fruit of our good works." We see this proven in our dear Sisters who so often leave us for eternity. Well then, let us reflect on our part, if we live a life of satisfactions or mortifications; and let us answer ourselves!

Mortification and poverty for herself and her Daughters

Mother, of all people, would examine herself on mortification! Mother Petronilla assures us that from adolescence Mary was wont to say: "Only through mortification can chastity be preserved." Therefore she gave nothing superfluous to her body; in fact she would have done acts of penance if they had been permitted!

This same principle she inculcated in her Daughters, as Sister Clara Preda testified: "She sent two Sisters suffering from inflammation to take some fresh milk. To prevent this from harming their spirit of mortification, she advised them to add a little vinegar. They did so with utmost fidelity, as I, who served them, can attest."

Yet her maternal attention was no less than before on this account. She was especially solicitous for the younger Sisters, whom she forbade to cut down on the already frugal diet. "Have you any self-love?" she said to them. "Mortify it by asking for what you need."

Sister Virginia Magone's last letter

A letter sent by Sister Virginia to Mother seems to indicate that others had been written before, to Turin. This letter was written in autumn yet there is reference to Christmas in it, and-alas-in America too the specter of ill health was beginning to show itself!

V.G. Bambino!

Very Reverend Mother Superior,

All the Sisters of Italy and France⁴⁶ had the good fortune of seeing you once or twice this year. Is this not true? And the poor Sisters in America were forgotten! How can you refrain from paying us a visit? Have compassion, yes compassion, on your Daughters so far away; leave the ninety-nine sheep and come in search of those who so long ago left the beloved fold. . . I am sure, my Reverend Mother, that if you could see how our hearts rejoice when we speak of you and think of you...you would certainly not fail to increase this consolation by visiting us. I can almost hear you say: "I would willingly come, but how can I leave so many for so few?" Reverend Mother, I am not asking you to come and stay here always, no; that would be impossible; but to pay us a visit would be so easy and reasonable. What? Do you not wish to see us sometimes, to see where we are, the place, the House and many other things? Come, then, come to console your Daughters in America.

Last year you gave me candy, telling me to keep them until you came here. I have kept them until now, but if you don't come soon they will go bad. Besides, shall I tell you something? I have a presentiment that I shall die soon, for I [p. 94] have a very persistent cough that I can't get rid of. Therefore, if you don't come soon I fear I will not see you anymore. If I go to heaven before you come to see me in America, I will stop at Nizza to see you! How about that? However, it isn't time for me to die yet. . . I have committed so many sins and must first do penance for them.

My Reverend Mother, please pray for my conversion. I came to America to save my own soul and others and then I do no good. The other Sisters are humble, obedient, full of charity, and kindness, and I am the exact opposite. Ah, you should see Sister T.M.,⁴⁷ she is so observant of the holy Rule. It's a joy to see her, but she makes me envious! The others too are all very good. I am the only black sheep, so ungrateful to the Lord for His gifts to me. Ah, Mother,

please ask Jesus to change my heart. Christmas is drawing near so I'm asking you as a favor to kiss the Infant Jesus for me, and at the same time, whisper a little word to Him for me. I leave you to think about what to say!

Pardon me, Mother, for sending you such a badly written page. What can I do? Today I have a temperature and as I cannot get up it's a case of not writing at all or of writing, as I am doing, in bed. I am sorry that I cannot say all I would like to, but no matter! What I cannot say now, I will write on another occasion, if God so wills.

Should I not be able to write again, I now wish Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you and all the Mothers, to all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, especially those who desire to come to America. To the Mornese group I send special wishes, beginning with Mother Superior, Mother Vicar, Mother Economer, Mother Felicina of Borgo San Martino, Mother Rosalia, Sister Rosina in Biella, Sister Carlotta Pestarino, Sister Bodrato, Sister Teresina Mazzarello, Sister Arecco and all those I do not now remember. Although Mother Assistant is not from Momese I remember her very well, as well as the bargain we made on the eve of St. Peter's feast. I wonder if she remembers it? She will have the goodness to say a word to Jesus for this poor creature.

My Reverend Mother Superior, I beg you to recommend me to the fervent prayers of all the Sisters, especially M.E.

⁴⁸ Now, I really must finish because Sister Superior wishes to [p. 95] write on the other side. Therefore, Mother, forgive me and in your goodness bless me,

Your poor child,
Sister Virginia

Mother's trip to Turin

On Saturday the 23rd, Mother Enrichetta accompanied Mother to Turin. They returned next day. Something new? Nobody said anything, but some conjectured.

It was significant in itself that Mother should spend a 24th. . . a Sunday, in Turin when the school year and the Oratory were in full swing. It meant being near Mary Help of Christians in her Church, assisting at the functions so magnificently celebrated by hundreds of Don Bosco's boys. It meant having more time and leisure to speak to the Sisters than on weekdays. It meant seeing for herself the attendance of the girls in the playground, catechism classes, and in chapel. In a word it meant to know and be better known in the various pastoral activities of the Lord's Day. In fact, Mother and Mother Enrichetta returned to Nizza with much good and edifying news.

Interesting and inspiring news

The Sisters relate that again this year Don Bosco followed his custom of sending them a pretty basket containing the first bunches of grapes he had collected himself, from the vine which cUm bed beside the window of his room. The grapes were reserved exclusively for benefactors of the Oratory.

They told how the schools were well frequented, some on a fee basis, some *gratis*. Those responsible were the Superior, with Sister Maritano and Sister Brusasco. They all learned whatever they had to teach day by day from Father Bonetti, who very kindly put himself at their disposal. In [p. 96] the evening they held home economics classes. The Superior, Sister Catherine, told how the scholastic inspector had come to see the work, accompanied by Father Durando, Salesian Scholastic Counselor. She was speechless with embarrassment, but nevertheless Father Durando made things show up beautifully. How fortunate to have such good Fathers and Brothers so near!

Mother Enrichetta made use of the opportunity to get from Sister Catherine all the didactic norms and hints in matters of education she had received from the Salesian Superiors: curriculum and timetable for the evening classes; formative and inspirational excerpts from authors, for dictation and memory work for the more advanced pupils; fundamental maxims of Christian assistance and formation in keeping with the mind of Don Bosco.

Mother Assistant knew how to avail of all this for the initiation of her young teachers and assistants.⁴⁹

The Sacred Heart Association gives good account of itself

The Mothers also brought word of the doings of the Sacred Heart Association in the Oratory of Turin.

Besides the rules of the Association, a booklet dealing with the "nine offices" and the "Little crown of the Sacred Heart" had been introduced and was treasured by all the members.

The number *nine* of the "offices" was given new significance: a new style of apostolate was built around it. Every member not only helped with assistance in the Oratory, in church and on the playground, but took care of nine girls of her own age group, to help them in every way.

The members held a conference once a fortnight. The Director, Father Cagliero, Father Bonetti and the Superior took this in turn. The other priests assigned to work with the Oratorians, Fathers Leveratto and Marchisio as well as the above-mentioned, were available for confession up to [p. 97] 10:00 p.m. The members of the group participated with great fervor in the principal feasts of the year. Daily mass and Communion were a feature of the preparatory novenas. There was general Communion for all Oratorians on the solemn liturgical feasts.

These occasions were marked by a breakfast of bread and ham, sometimes with a follow-up of sweets, given to all without exception, through the generosity of benefactresses and benefactors, known and unknown.

Father Cagliero did not receive the girls for private interviews, but if they thronged around him in the playground, he was happy to entertain them with stories of Don Bosco, Our Lady or other interesting subjects. Don Bosco also passed by occasionally to see this youthful gathering, and his few words were always cherished as a precious spiritual gift. In the same way they crowded around Mother, on Sunday, when she appeared among them, to greet, encourage and exhort them to do good.

Two letters from America

Don Bosco had received two letters from Sister Vallese and Sister Joan Borgna, and willingly gave them to Mother, that she might read them to the community, with a view to animating all for the works of the Institute. We give the texts:

Very Reverend and beloved Father, Don Bosco,

Pardon me for disturbing you with this letter. It is so long since I saw you that I feel drawn by an invisible hand to take the pen and give you some news of our House in Villa Colon.

In the first place, we are all well. We are happy and cheerful, but perhaps our desire to see our good, Reverend Father in this foreign land is too great. True, we do not deserve such a favor, but we hope that your kind heart will no longer resist the entreaties of your Sons and Daughters in America.

[p. 98] We are well looked after spiritually; we have mass every morning in our chapel, we can go to confession every week and receive Holy Communion daily. God grant we may become less unworthy of so many graces!

For the monthly retreat day prescribed by the Rule, we join with the three Sisters of Las Piedras. Our Director, Father Lasagna, kindly gives us a conference, animates and encourages us.

Our chapel is crowded on Sundays and feast-days, for there are no churches in the locality. All admire our beautiful picture of Mary Help of Christians and sing the praises of our dear Mother.

Our schools do not yet have the numbers attending those of Las Piedras, but we hope they will in the course of time. Besides the instruction of the girls, we attend to various other works, and have charge of the linen in Villa Colon School, which is always full of young boys.

Vocations to the religious life are very rare in these parts. Notwithstanding, we have a novice and a postulant. The latter is already more than twenty-five years old, the age limit fixed by the Manual. Consequently we should not have accepted her, but we thought it advisable to make an exception, considering her virtue and the scarcity of applications. We have well grounded hopes that she will one day become a true Daughter of Mary Help of Christians.

As for myself, good Father, I am a very muddled person. Just imagine: I have charge of two Houses, that of Villa Colon and that of Las Piedras, and I am not capable of directing one. I ask you, therefore, to pray much for me. I also ask you to send us some healthy, holy Sisters, among them one who will take my cross so that instead of commanding I shall have only to obey. It seems easier to get to heaven by way of obedience than by that of commanding. But may God's will and that of my Superiors be done in all things.

In the meantime, good Father, please accept everyone's greetings and good wishes for a happy Christmas and a successful ending of the old year and beginning of the new. Pray that the Infant Jesus may be born in our hearts and bring to us the fire of His divine love, to bum up everything in them which may cause Him displeasure. We pray and will [p. 99] pray much, very much for you.

Within the Sacred Heart of Jesus, I am happy to be, revered and illustrious Father,

Villa Colon, October 20, 1879

Your humble Daughter,
*Sister Angela Vallese*⁵⁰

Very Reverend Father in Jesus Christ,

Pardon my tardiness in giving you, beloved Father, some news of our House of Las Piedras. That is due partly to my negligence and partly to the amount of work we have on hand. Even now I shall write in installments and more by night than by day.

I begin by telling you they made me Vicar of this House, not because of any merit of mine, but that I may exercise the patience of the two good Sisters who live with me! Our good Superior, Sister Angela Vallese, is also Superior of the House of Villa Colon, and remains there most of the time. She pays us a visit once a week, and stays as long as possible, giving us suggestions and advice. If we put them into practice, all would be well but I am still Sister Joan . . . May God pardon me, and not permit me to let Him down!

When Right Reverend Monsignor Jacinto Vera, Bishop of Montevideo, came with Father Costamagna to give the mission in this parish, we too made our retreat, but not with the same tranquillity we enjoyed at Mornese. We had to go everyday to the parish church to teach catechism to the girls; at other times we had to prepare the older girls for confession and Communion. Let us hope the Lord accepted these hours of charitable service, and that He was pleased with our retreat.

Father Costamagna, who preached in the parish and gave suitable conferences to us, gave many good thoughts to the girls of our school, and taught them several beautiful hymns he had composed during his long journeys in Patagonia. His stay with us was a big uplift. We really have a great desire now to become saints, but we know it is not enough to begin: we must persevere. We have great confidence in the [p. 100] protection of Mary Help of Christians, our tender Mother, and in the prayers of our good Father Don Bosco.

The Lord is blessing our poor efforts ever more, and sends us many pupils. This is one of the greatest consolations the Sisters and I enjoy. I assure you the children are our delight even though some among them make us experience quite a bit of disappointment.

On the whole, however, they love us, and when school or work is over, instead of going home they prefer to stay with us. Sometimes I even fear I fail in obedience by not sending them away punctually at the appointed time. But what can I do? They ask to stay on. I haven't the heart to refuse them, and so the hours pass!

You will surely want to know how these girls, who don't want to go home, employ their time. I will tell you. Even though the girls here in America do not like work, ours are all busily engaged. Some sew, some knit, some spin, others weave and so forth. While they work they recite the rosary, which is led in turn by the senior girls. Then they sing the hymns we have taught them in Spanish, and also in Italian, like:

*Sei pura, sei pia
sei bella o Maria,
ogni alma lo sa
che Madre più dolce
il mondo non ha!*

Now that Our Lady's month is approaching (in America it is celebrated in November since it is spring then) we are teaching them to sing the Litany, the *Ave Maris Stella* and so forth. At other times we tell them stories. Or we exhort them to be good and obey their elders; to flee from bad companions, and not to give ear to the wicked or godless; in a word we tell them all the good things we know. They are extremely sensitive and warm hearted and are often moved to tears of joy by our simple stories.

They approach the sacraments every month. The Director, Father Lasagna, comes from the school at Villa Colon to hear confessions and gives them a talk suited to their age. The girls from the public school overcome great difficulties to participate in this function with our pupils. Poor things! There are [p. 101] some among them who find it too hard, and only once in awhile they manage to come. May the Lord bless them, and make them all His own.

We are in a very good country but in spite of that trials are not wanting. One of these came from the Departmental Inspector of Schools, who, contrary to the laws of the Republic, wanted to meddle with our private schools and exercise authority there as in the public schools. When the Director heard of it he went in person to the President of the Republic, who having heard the case, asked him:

"Whose is the house where the school is conducted?"

"It belongs to me, Mr. President."

"Well then, be at peace; nobody has the right to intrude."

Thus the Inspector had to drop his pretensions. As our one aim is to do good to young people, we trust that God will take up our defense, and are at peace!

Every Sunday we go to the parish church to teach catechism to the girls and it gives us joy to be able to tell you that we see ourselves surrounded also by a big number of women who listen eagerly.

Besides these occupations we also cook for the Salesians engaged in parish work, and we wash and iron the church linen.

For all this work we are just three Sisters, and I assure you that in spite of great good will we sometimes cannot attend to all. We have already asked for an extra Sister, but the Superiors are unable to release one, because personnel is at a minimum in Villa Colon. They are opening a new House at Buenos Aires in that very extensive parish known as La Boca. Reverend Father, will you send us some Sisters from Turin or from Nizza? We shall be deeply grateful. If only the good girls in the world could see all the good they could do in these countries for so many poor children, I am sure they would do everything to consecrate themselves to the Lord and fly to our help. May God inspire them and give them this vocation.

In the meantime and in the uncertainty of being able to write to you again before Christmas I take the opportunity of wishing you a happy feast and a successful New Year in the name of my good Sisters-Sister Victoria Cantu, and Sister Rodriguez, our first American.

[p. 102] May God grant you many, many years of life and happiness in the midst of your Sons, and may He also grant us the grace of seeing you in these countries. We expect you next year (1880) along with Mother General, as you promised to the Sisters who came to join us recently. Will you kindly convey our greetings to our beloved Sisters in Turin; tell them we pray for them, and ask them to pray for us in return.

I shall finish now as not to abuse your paternal goodness. All three of us ask you to obtain for us the grace to become saints. Excuse the bad writing and believe me, in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

Las Piedras, October 15, 1879

Your humble Daughter,
*Sister Joan Borgna*⁵¹

A Mother's thoughts for those far away

We have only two letters written by Mother to the Sisters in America at this time. Though they are not dated, internal evidence shows they belong to this period. One was addressed to Buenos Aires where, as already stated by Father Costamagna, preparations were being made for La Boca; the other was addressed to Uruguay.

Unfortunately we have only the end of the first letter.

To the Sisters in America

Courage, my dear Sisters, this life passes quickly and at the moment of death we shall be glad of the mortifications we have made. Never yield to discouragement when you find you have defects; on our part let us have good will, but sincere good will, and Jesus will do the rest. Let all have great confidence in your Superior and in your confessor.

Give good example to the postulants and pupils God sends you. Work for God alone if you wish to succeed and gain merit. Are you all united still? When you separate, be careful to remain united in spirit, and be always one in heart.

Let what is done in one House be done in another if you wish to always keep the spirit of the Congregation. Above all I [p. 103] recommend you to pray, pray hard, and with all your heart; pray for me, for your Superiors and all your Sisters. I often ask the Sisters to offer Holy Communion for you, and the Sisters do so very willingly, and with great love. Do you pray for us? Oh, how much more I would wish to say to you but I have no paper. Go to the Heart of Jesus, and you will feel all I would like to say to you.

You want my photograph, it seems. I would willingly send it but it has not been taken. Ferrero said he never took any, that no Superior had given him the order. If he takes it I will send it by the first group of Sisters that goes to join you.

May God bless you all, my dear Daughters, and make saints of you as I greatly desire. Pray for me.

Viva Gesù, Maria!

To my dear Sister Victoria (Cantu), shall I not say any thing? Oh, yes! I want to recommend that you be cheerful, obedient, that you work without fear and have great confidence with your Superior and confessor. Never be sad; sadness is the mother of tepidity. Keep up your courage, and help all those dear, very dear Sisters, to be cheerful. Be careful of your health and work always to please Jesus. With this thought in mind all will be light and easily done. Is that not so, my good Sister Victoria? I recommend myself very much to your prayers, and pray for everybody.

May Jesus make you entirely His, along with your,
Nizza, [November-December] 1879

Affectionate Mother in Jesus,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

An outing to the "Madonnina"

The last warm days of the so-called "St. Martin's summer" offered an opportunity for an outing that was both recreational and useful. Money and supplies were at a low ebb. Wishing to save the Sisters from the pain this realization would cause and make the penury of the moment less felt, Mother consulted a few Sisters confidentially and they [p. 104] came up with a solution. They were to take a handful of chestnut, sufficient to dissimulate the painful situation, and the Sisters and girls were to go a little sanctuary close by – probably the “Madonnina della Neve”- on a sheltered, sunny slope between vineyards and woodland.

Then they got there, Mother sent them all gathering sticks, under the pretext that the change of atmosphere called for a fire. It was colder and something sharper down in that area. She had recourse to the farmers round about and then sat the fire to boil chestnuts.

In the course she distributed them personally, inviting all to drink from the limpid, gurgling stream close by. After a few fervent Hail Mary's at the little sanctuary and a hymn to Our Lady, all returned home tired but happy and more disposed to go to bed than to supper. I was exactly what was needed.

Dear Sisters, pray for Providence

However, wishing to increase the number of those who knew how to meet trials with faith, before retiring Mother assembled the community and said :”Dear Sisters, pray to Providence to come to our aid, because I don't know where tomorrow's meals will come from.”

All began to console her, saying that they would not suffer for having to fast for one day, that they were ready to do a little penance.

The next day in the refectory they found only a little soup and Mother said: "Today, dear Sisters, we must be content to feel that we are really poor and we will not let it appear that we have had occasion to mortify ourselves."

Poor dear Mother, hers was no easy task to lead an ever growing family under such circumstances, yet all her great heart went into finding ways and means of lightening sufferings, especially of those less accustomed to a life of sacrifice, Franciscan in its poverty, Salesian in its joy. [p. 105]

“And then you say you wish to go to mAmerica”

The novice, sister Ernesta Farina, accidentally broke the best lamp in the House. She began to cry, fearing a severe rebuke. Instead she heard from Mother: “Oh! What courage! Weeping for such a trifle? An then you say you want to go to America? Come on, now! The tears ceased to flow.

Jubileo Novena

The novena in preparation for the feast of the Immaculate Conception began on the 29th. This year the silver jubilee of the definition of the Dogma was celebrated, and it was the first time that the community of Nizza assembled for the novena, around the statue of Our Lady of Lourdes. For the first time also the best among the senior girls prepared to become Children of Mary. It was the first time Father Lemoyne celebrated the Marian solemnity in the new Mother House, in the church of the one-time monastery, "Madonna delle Grazie."

Everything helped to intensify the fervor of the Sisters and boarders.

In his introductory sermon the Director flashed back to the solemn ceremony celebrated in St.

Peter's, Rome, on December 8, 1854, for the proclamation of the new Marian dogma. ⁵³

He then traced, in broad outline, the cult of Mary Immaculate, especially within those twenty-five years, at Lourdes and throughout the entire Catholic world. He commented briefly on the *Tota Pulchra* and suggested practicing most intense fervent love for the Immaculate, Mother of God and of men.

Thus the Director effected a twofold objective: he disposed the community to celebrate a festive jubilee and enkindled new fervor in the girls destined to be the first "Children of Mary Immaculate" in Nizza.

Mother's letter to the Sisters of Borgo San Martino [p. 106]

On the first day of December Mother wrote to the Sisters of Borgo San Martino.

Viva Maria Immacolata!

The beautiful feast of our Mother, Mary Immaculate, is approaching. I know you are waiting for a letter from me, and I am only too happy to fulfill your desire and encourage you to make the novena with all possible fervor by the observance of the holy Rule.

Therefore we must all put our best effort during these lovely days into the practice of true humility, crush our self-love at any cost, and bear with one another's defects with great charity. We should strive to perform our practices of piety, especially Holy Communion, with great fervor and desire. Let us strive to be exact in the practice of our Rule by being exact regarding the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. If we do this Our Lady will be pleased with us, and will obtain for us all the graces we need to become saints.

In these days also let us remember to renew the good resolutions taken during the retreat. Let us pray much for our dear Superiors, for the needs of our Congregation, and let us not forget our dear departed Sisters.

Courage, therefore; work willingly for Jesus, and rest assured that all you do and suffer will be well repaid in heaven. Be always joyful in the Lord. I am

Your affectionate Mother,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁵⁴

Intense cold; outbreak of smallpox

Sister Elisa Roncallo, writing to her mother during these days, said: "Here at Nizza the cold is intense. There is an epidemic of smallpox, and we have all been vaccinated. If the cold had healing power, then I should be as healthy as a fish! "

[p. 107]Cold and this specter of smallpox! What would Mother say to Our Lady? What would she do to sustain the courage of the Sisters?...Everybody knows! She continued to be, perhaps with a greater frequency than ever, where the work was heavy and tiring. She was at the washtub under the open sky in freezing weather. She sought to cover-in bed and out of it-those whose clothes were threadbare. And she was ever ready to repeat in a tone of loving encouragement: "Forward, Sisters; the good God will beautify your souls, and reward your every sacrifice..."

To all the rest, preparations for the next clothing and profession were added. Mother Economer took charge; Mother Mazzarello worked, prayed and smiled.

Father Cagliari arrives

The Director General arrived on December 5, to carry out the functions on the feast of Our Lady Immaculate. He spent the intervening days hearing confessions and cheering up Sisters and girls. Mother was very pleased. Her face was suffused with new joy. She must have thought back on the graces of that blessed day when she too received the medal of Mary Immaculate, then the habit of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians crowned with religious profession. She must have asked the same heavenly graces for her girls and her Daughters.

Jubilee feast of Mary Immaculate

On the 8th, the choir sang beautifully the so-called "Mass of Saint Aloysius." Vespers and the *Te Deum* were also sung. The first enrollment in the Marian Association came to twenty-two; there were fifteen novices; eight made first profession and four were perpetually professed.

Among the newly professed was Emma Ferrero, now [p. 108] completely transformed.

Countess Amalia di Meana, who edified everyone with acts of humility during her postulancy, was among those who received the habit. Though a native of Turin, she belonged by choice to Nizza, as her holiday villa was within half an hour's walk from the convent. Combined with a private education she brought with her a fresh simplicity and physical strength drawn from the agricultural environment and open country where she had spent most of her youth.

She and Mother understood one another perfectly: both were strong souls, sister spirits in the desire to go straight to God. Mother did not spare her either private observations or corrections in public, even on such matters as domestic disorder, which in her was understandable. The young girl, accustomed to excel and command, did not draw back from the test, but entrusted herself still more decisively to the one who molded her according to the designs of God.

The "souvenir" of the feast was given by the Director General. The evening entertainment was a worthy conclusion to the feast of the Immaculate, the fervor of which continued into the next days, thanks to the presence and words of Father Cagliero.

Miss Bedarida comes to weep over her misfortune

Soon after the feast of Mary Immaculate poor Annette Bedarida, just returned from her pleasure trip, came to confess her weakness and lament her misfortune. How entangled the web surrounding her had now become! And how Mother suffered in consequence!

[p. 109] News and practices for Christmas

For the approaching Christmas novena, Don Bosco sent to Nizza, through Father Cagliero, a copy of the practices he had dictated for the priests and pupils of his Houses. The good Director General added in his name an extract from the last letter of Father Costamagna to Don Bosco:

The other day our Sisters went enthusiastically to the new House at La Boca. So far they have not encountered any opposition, because the four or five masonic societies there are quarreling with one another. Since "every kingdom divided in itself will come to ruin," they are like lions without claws, and for the moment have not the strength to attack us! *Deo gratias.*⁵⁵

"*Deo gratias*, indeed!" Mother said, in a transport of joy, as she kissed those letters from saintly and apostolic men. Then she read slowly:

Novena In preparation for Christmas
for the religious and pupils of Salesian Houses
dictated by Don Bosco: Dec. 13, 1879

The Christmas solemnity should arouse in us the following desires and resolutions:

- 1 - Love of the Divine Child through the observance of His law.
- 2 - Bear with the defects of others for love of the Infant Jesus.
- 3 - Hope in the Infinite mercy of God and a firm resolve to avoid sin.
- 4 - Expiate scandal with good example in homage to the Infant Jesus.
- 5 - For love of the Infant Jesus, flee immodesty even in the smallest things.
- 6 - In homage to the Infant Jesus, to see if in our past confessions there was true contrition with its necessary qualities. [p. 110]
- 7 - If we have kept the resolutions made in past confessions.
- 8 - Review of our past confessions as Jesus Christ will review them at His divine tribunal.
- 9 - Resolve to love Jesus and Mary until death.
- 10 - Feast of Christmas. Communion and frequency in receiving it for the future.

With a wish for heavenly blessings for all on the part of your friend,

Filial wishes

In preparation for the Christmas feast, the community at Nizza sent wishes to Don Bosco:

Viva Gesù Bambino!

Very Reverend and dear Father,

We have nothing more at heart than to express the veneration and love we have for you, nor could we have a more propitious occasion on which to do so than the approaching feast.

Very Reverend and good Father, please allow us, your humble Daughters, to convey to you out of the fullness of our hearts, our wishes for your happiness. We would like to show how deeply felt these wishes are with deeds rather than words, but we must confess that we are incapable.

The thought which consoles us, however, is that you, our good Father, know our good intention and will understand.

The wishes for every success which we offer you, very Reverend Father, are intended to be a sign of our gratitude.

Our uppermost desire is to console your paternal heart, in recompense for the anxieties and afflictions you have to bear from a wicked world, especially this year. Therefore, good Father, we shall strive with our conduct to become, with God's help, all that you wish us to be. We desire, that is, to become saints, and so be the delight of the Heart of Jesus, as well as a consolation to you who wear yourself [p. 111] out for our good. True, our efforts count for nothing but the Divine Infant will help us. Our prayers for you then will be most fervent, that you may see your every charitable and holy undertaking crowned with success and that you may spread the perfume of Christ everywhere.

We hope the Baby Jesus will hear our prayers, in spite of our demerits.

Please accept, very Reverend Father, these poor but sincere wishes, while we ask your kind indulgence, and prostrate in spirit at your feet, reverently kiss your paternal hand, which we ask you to raise in benediction over us, who esteem ourselves fortunate to call ourselves

Nizza, December 22, 1879

Your humble Daughters in J.C.,
*The Professed Sisters*⁵⁷

Father Lemoyne wrote a post script:

Very dear Father,

A thousand thanks for the kind remembrance which Don Bosco always has for us; we kept the practices you sent us that we might celebrate the Christmas novena in a holy way. I also read in public the circular for prayers to be offered to the Lord for a good beginning for the mission in Patagonia. Be assured that the cloud of incense that will rise to heaven from Nizza Monferrato will be acceptable to heaven's Queen.

The Sodality of Mary Immaculate has been solemnly instituted among the boarders; that too will be a source of fervor and prayer.

I take the occasion of sending you my wishes, which I draw from a heart that, I trust, is not last in its love for Don Bosco. With God's help, I hope not to cause you any displeasure, but to adorn, as far as my strength permits, the days of a most beloved and most loving of Fathers.

Believe me in J.C.,

Your affectionate Son,
Father John Baptist Lemoyne

[p.112] To Mrs. Pastore

The kind Mrs. Pastore, always gracious and generous, was not forgotten. Mother wrote to her:

Viva Gesù Bambino!

Dear Mrs. Pastore,

How beautiful these days are! They fill our poor hearts with great joy, because Baby Jesus comes to us with His hands overflowing with graces. He is all love and goodness to inspire us to draw near to Him.

How many favors I will ask of Him for you, my dear lady, who are always working for the good of our poor Congregation! I will pray and have others pray that Jesus, who promised to reward even a glass of water given for His love, may give you, even in this life, a hundredfold return for your charity. May He bless you in all your works. May He keep you far from every evil, and preserve you in good health for many years to come.

Please pray for my soul; let us pray for one another at the feet of Jesus, that He may keep us ever united in His Heart here on earth, and reunite us in heaven for all eternity.

All the Sisters, especially those you know, send you their affectionate wishes. Please extend them to all the good ladies who made the retreat last summer.

I wish you the choicest blessings, and in the Heart of Jesus, I always will be

Your affectionate Sister,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁵⁸

Delicacy of a mother's heart

A beautiful basket of fruit arrived from Liguria for the postulant Louise Desirello. "It is Baby Jesus who has sent it to us," Mother exclaimed, "He knows well how things are going here. Come, come, Louise, see how sweetly this basket smells! Open it, take freely what you want. Take plenty of sweets and fruit for yourself and your com- [p. 113] panions! Yes, have a big feast in honor of Baby Jesus and be cheerful!"

The postulant was moved and ran to her companions to tell them of the impression, still vivid, of the day she entered at Nizza, when Mother went personally to meet her in the parlor, and continued to look after her with many attentions. She recalled Mother's solicitude in giving her a shawl to shelter her from the cold, never so intense in Liguria; how she insisted on her going into the kitchen to take something hot before retiring, so as to be able to sleep at night, and not suffer health wise.

This was the story of just one in the group, but all those who listened could say as much.

The birth of Jesus, delight of all hearts

The Christmas midnight mass was sung. Four resident students made their First Communion and the entire community participated in the eucharistic banquet.

The Director celebrated two other masses on the morning of December 25.

A program, in keeping with the day, filled the afternoon and was attended by some of the prominent people of the town as well as the nearby relatives of some Sisters and pupils.

The Divine Child made His birthday memorable in still another way. The joyful news came that on the 15th, sooner than originally planned, eight missionaries and four Sisters had left their houses in Uruguay and Argentina for Patagonia. The exclamations of joy and enthusiasm can better be imagined than described.⁵⁹

[p. 114] To the Sisters of Bordighera

On the feast of Saint John the Evangelist, Mother's thoughts went to her Sisters in Bordighera to whom she wrote:

My dear, good Sisters: Sisters Adele David, Maria Casulo, Carlotta Negri (Professed Sisters) and Josephine Armelonghi (novice),

I received your letter. I thank you for the wishes and prayers offered for me, which I very much appreciated. May Jesus reward you with as many wounds of love. In return I prayed to the Baby Jesus for you. Are you pleased? I mentioned you one by one saying: Sister David, Sister Carlotta, Sister Josephine and Sister Marietta. I asked Him to give you His sanctity, humility, detachment from self, love of suffering, and that prompt, blind obedience which He had to His eternal Father, to Saint Joseph, to Mary, and which He practiced until His death on the cross. I asked Him to give you charity and a total detachment from all that is not God, along with patience and perfect resignation to God's will.

Oh, my dear Sisters, how many virtues we can learn from the presence of Jesus in the crib! Meditate on Him, and you will see the fruit which you will draw from it. It will be great Indeed if you meditate with humility.

I wish you a year rich in graces and blessings from heaven.

My dear Sisters, begin the year well. Think that for some of us it may be the last we will begin, and who knows if we will reach the end of it? We must always be ready, keeping our accounts in order. Thus death will have no fears for us.

Be brave in combatting self love; let us overcome this ugly enemy, which makes us lose all the fruit of our good works.

Look after yourselves; always be cheerful, healthy in soul and body. Pray for me also please, and for your Sisters. Don't forget those who died, and those in America.

Thank you for your note, Sister Carlotta. I am so pleased that you are contented and cheerful. May God bless you, and [p. 115] help you to always be of good example to your Sisters.

Your sister is well and cheerful and sends you greetings. Pray for her and for me. Courage, I will soon pay you a visit. And you, Sister Josephine, are you still up to mlschler? I am happy, you know, that you are always cheerful. Continue to be obedient and humble if you wish to make your profession soon. I give you the charge of keeping Sister Marietta always cheerful. Pray for me and for all.

Sister Marietta, you are annoyed with me for having left you last, aren't you? But be cheerful. I love you, and never forget you. Do you pray for me? Do you obey your Superior? I hope so. Your sister Angelina is well.

Sister Madelene Martini has written that she is being sent to Patagonia; pray for her and for all. May God make you entirely His.

Therefore, let all take courage, especially you, Sister Adele; take care of your health. Give my regards to Father Director, and recommend me to his prayers. Say many lovely things to the girls, and tell Madame Letitia to cheer up, that I pray and have others pray for her.

Here we are all well except Sister Angelina Delodi and Sister Maria Stardero, who have smallpox. Pray for them, and for me, who need prayer so much.

I renew my thanks and at the feet of the Infant Jesus I am,

Nizza, December 27, 1879

Your affectionate Mother,
Poor Sister Mary Mazzarello60

Last day of the year

The liturgy of December 31 brought to a close a year rich in work, anxieties, sacrifices, graces and consolations, most of which were known to God alone. The solemn *Te Deum*, which followed the rousing words of the Director, prepared all to receive the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, as promise of a new year to be spent for God and souls.

After supper the community assembled to present New Year wishes to the Director and Mother. Sisters and girls alternated in reading compositions and poems suited to the occasion. All felt they were in Our Lady's House, anticipating the joys of heaven. And all blessed Don Bosco who in his greatness of heart had accepted them to be part of his family, and share his program: "*Da mihi animas, coetera*

1880

The New Year was full of promise. The number of postulants, forty-three, all imbued with good will, augured well for the future.

God's blessing was invoked on its first morning by a sung mass. In the afternoon the Director gave an inspiring talk, followed by the renewal of the baptismal promises and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Sister Ferrettino goes to Biella

On January 3-first Saturday of the year-Sister Ferrettino, the economer, and some other Sisters went to Biella to substitute Sisters who were working there with a praiseworthy spirit of sacrifice, with their thoughts and affections always turned towards the dear community of Nizza

Monferrato.

Mother makes Don Bosco's recommendations her own

In the meantime Don Bosco prepared to go to France. Through the kindness of the Directors, his desires and needs were known to Mother. She took them to heart and warmly recommended them to the prayers of her Daughters.

Our good Father wishes that the *Catholic Readings* be read in every Christian family. Let us take on this apostolate, according to the occasions the Lord gives us.

Don Bosco tells his Cooperators that he needs coadjutor Brothers, for many apostolic works unsuitable for priests.

Let us pray, and if we can get them for him, let us not spare ourselves.

Don Bosco suggests that his benefactors join the prayers offered in his Houses to obtain many graces and the help of Providence. To this end, he recommends the recitation of an *Our Father*, *Hail Mary* and *Glory Be*, with the ejaculation: Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us; Mary Help of Christians, pray for us. Then go to Communion and perform some work of charity.

Let us not lag behind, let us not do less than seculars for our good Father. Let each one find ways and means of carrying out this desire of Don Bosco, which for us is a desire of God and of Our Lady.

The Sisters did not make her repeat. And as their gratitude and veneration for Don Bosco increased, their own fervor in piety and generosity in sacrifice grew apace.

New preoccupations

The Sisters did not know it, but Mother was informed of some serious problems with which Don Bosco had to contend at this point. Among these were the inquiries from Rome about the relations between the two Salesian families. The situation was still difficult; divine intervention alone could overcome every obstacle. ¹

Don Bosco goes to Liguria and Nizza-mare

Between the 12th and 14th of the month Don Bosco left Turin for Liguria. He stayed for a few hours at Alassio, then proceeded to Nizza-mare.

There his visit was so short that the Sisters had scarcely time to see him. However, just knowing he was there repaid them for many sacrifices.

[p. 123] Mother at Quargnento

About that same time Mother went to Quargnento, where she spent two days apparently oblivious of the cold, which had caused Sister Elisa Roncallo to write: "Dear Mama, the cold is terrible here this year. It's a good thing we have heaters which give some warmth to the rooms where we work and teach!"

Mother looks after a postulant with smallpox

Mother returned to Nizza, just in time, one might say, to prevent death from claiming a postulant, Teresa Facelli. A few days previously this young girl had been maternally advised to postpone her plan of returning home after less than two weeks in Nizza.

She caught smallpox, and was quickly reduced to the state where the Last Sacraments were considered advisable. On Mother's arrival the infirmarian who attended the girl sad with a heavy sigh: "Ah, Mother, I was here alone this morning when she was about to go!" Mother replied with conviction: "But, no! This girl will not die; be at peace!" Then she attended her as she alone knew how. She wrote to Don Bosco for a special blessing; the postulant improved, and was soon out of

danger. Mother's faith in Don Bosco and in Mary Help of Christians had won.

And the school of Our Lady of Grace had denied smallpox its victim, who would perhaps have been the first of many . . .

But..Lady Death, defeated on one front, took revenge on another, cutting off the young life of Sister Agustina Calcagno, one of those ill at Mornese. Her death was as serene as the four years of her religious life. She died on Wednesday, January 28. Her mortification, obedience, poverty and fortitude during those last months were the precious heritage she left to her Sisters, who wept for her and confidently prayed for her.

[p. 124] Mother had known this Sister from childhood, had followed her through her innocent adolescence, welcomed her as a Sister at the age of twenty, and already she was gone! How keenly she felt it!

Yet, she again succeeded in encouraging the others, and though her own health, always precarious, suffered a setback, she did not seem to notice. She was always the first in prayer, at work and recreation.

Mother at the washtub

At Nizza the laundry was done in the house, but there was no room set apart for it. In fact there were not even open air facilities. The Brothers had not needed them, and the House was not yet in a position to meet expenses of this magnitude, so the present arrangement was large buckets set in the playground near the pump. There the washing was done. Mother was always first on the scene. She washed more than the others, even when the intense cold froze the water on her hands. And when at breakfast time the Sisters invited her to go into the house under one pretext or another, she answered wittily: "Wait until they prepare the breakfast I have earned, then I will go!" She took her bowl like all the others, received her share of boiled chestnuts and ate them standing there, seeing to it that the youngest and more robust had sufficient bread, and that those who were a bit delicate went to the refectory for something more suitable to their condition.

Silence was observed during this fatiguing work, and the ejaculations which interrupted it at intervals were said more with the heart than the lips. Here, as in the workroom, the silence was observed except for one half hour after 10:00 a.m. If during this break the rhythm of the washing slowed down, Mother intervened with: "Let us speak with our mouth, Sisters, not with our hands. This half-hour is intended to relieve the spirit rather than the body! Today is a harvest day for us! Heaven is beautiful! Shall we see [p. 125] who can gain most merit?"

Some went to wash only for an hour or two, as other duties called them. If Mother was present she noted the first stroke of the clock or bell: "Go, go!" she said, "I am here to do your share." Naturally, with such example before them the Sisters found any kind of work in her company desirable and meritorious.²

Beautiful happenings at Lu

The good Sisters of Lu made her heart sing with the news that on February 2, feast of Mary's Purification and the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, their little chapel was blessed. It was consecrated to the Holy Family, and the first mass was celebrated in honor of Saint Francis de Sales. The annual conference of Salesian Cooperators had been held in their House, with a huge concourse of priests and people from the country round about.³ There was general Communion, sung Vespers, benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, and much praise of Don Bosco, his work and the Sisters, who were overjoyed with the day. They simply had to share their happiness with the Sisters of Nizza. At Nizza everybody rejoiced with them in fraternal communion, and deeply felt gratitude to Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco.

Solemn erection of the Stations of the Cross

February 17 was memorable at Nizza for another event. Notwithstanding their unanimous devotion to the passion of Our Lord, they had had to be resigned to foregoing the pious practice of the Stations of the Cross, with the inevitable nostalgia for unforgettable Mornese. But the Director, Father Lemoyne, could not adapt to this kind of poverty, and sought the help of the members of the Catholic committee in town to cover the necessary expenses. And behold: [p. 126] the beautiful devotional pictures were here!

The Bishop of the Diocese, Monsignor Sciandra, granted the necessary faculties for their canonical erection. The apostolic missionary was delegated to perform the rite, and many people from town participated. How many memories were awakened, linking the function with the past history of this ex-monastery of the "Madonna delle Grazie!"⁴

The function took place at 2:30 p.m. Almost all the priests of the town, headed by the Vicar, Father Bisio, were present. There was also Monsignor Verri, Vicar of Incisa; the Salesians, Father Sala and Father Belmonte (Director of Borgo San Martino); and so many people that the church was thronged.

The delegate, Father Ricci, gave a short talk, explaining the origin of the *Via Crucis*, and the indulgences attached to this pious exercise. Then the procession began. One resident student carried the cross. Others had lamps and candles. The Sisters followed carrying the pictures of the Stations. Behind them came the ten priests, the canopy under which the relic of the true cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ was carried by the missionary.

A verse of the *Stabat Mater* sung at each station and a solemn *Te Deum* composed by Father Cagliero and sung by Sisters and boarders, gave added solemnity to the occasion, which came to a close with the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and veneration of the relic of the true cross.

Protection of Saint Joseph

This beautiful service marked the opening of the month of Saint Joseph, who was already invoked as the Bursar of the Institute. This year, he was also doctor and infirmarian, because the smallpox epidemic was still spreading in Nizza as well as in all Piedmont.

There were already more than three hundred dead in the city. In the convent there were just a few cases among [p. 127] the Sisters and boarders, so light in form as to be taken for chicken pox. The townspeople could not understand how the convent had remained immune, and some even thought that pupils had died of the epidemic in the House and been buried secretly!

They had not experienced the power of Saint Joseph to whom the matter had been confided.

Sicily on the map

The following morning, February 18, marked the departure for the first foundation in Sicily. Those destined for the new venture were: Sister Orsola Camisassa, Superior, Sister Rita Cevennini and Sister Virginia Piccono.

The Duchess of Carcaci was entrusting to them the direction of the girls' orphanage, which she had directed for some time. ⁵

Sicily is part of Italy, but that narrow strait of water which separates it from the mainland made it seem like the end of the earth, so that those who were leaving and those who remained behind had the impression of going to America!

Mother was most kind to them. She had called them from the Houses where they were working to have them near her in Nizza for a few days. In special meetings and private talks, she had predisposed them for the mission of being mothers and sisters to the orphans, and of being humbly submissive to the Duchess in all that was not contrary to the spirit of the Institute. She surrounded them with attentions, recommending them to take care of their health, and to love and sustain one another like Sisters. She personally saw to it that their poor trousseau contained all

they needed. She even gave them material for the first needlework classes and other things. Finally, she encouraged them to be generous in their detachment from people and places for the love of God, who would reward them with growth in virtue in this life and with [p. 128] heaven in the next. As she said goodbye, Mother wept with them and like them. The entire community followed them in spirit, accompanying them with religious affection and fervent prayer. At the station they were met by Father Sala, who accompanied them as far as Rome. At Rome the Procurator General of the Salesians, Father Dalmazzo, took charge of seeing them to their destination.

As Don Bosco's Sisters, they also enjoyed reduced fares for the train and for the boat from Naples to Messina. Our Lady surely went before them to prepare the soil, and the souls that were to be the field and fruit of their mission.⁶

Second anniversary of Leo XIII

On the evening of February 19, Father Lemoyne prepared the community for the celebration of the second anniversary of the election of Leo XIII to the papal throne. He commented on Don Bosco's invitation to all his children as reported in the *Salesian Bulletin*.⁷

The day was offered entirely for the intentions of the Pope: Communion and a suitable prayer for the Holy Father in the morning; the singing of the *Te Deum* and solemn benediction in the evening. Such expressions of love and devotion to the "sweet Christ on earth" are always beautiful and advantageous to the spirit.

Don Bosco in France

We know little of Don Bosco's visit to France, but that little is very consoling. On February 6 he was at St. Cyr, where he must have found extreme poverty, judging from the few words written by the Sisters. "The visit of Don Bosco and Father Cagliari was very helpful to us, not only spiritually but also materially.

We were all moved. Before leaving he said some affectionate words of encouragement, telling us to persevere [p. 129] fervently in our vocation. "

All France spoke of him; he went about "doing good." On the 24th he arrived at Nizza-mare where the Sisters hoped to meet him, even for just a few minutes.

First news from Patagonia

While Sister Ferretino went to Mornese to transport more items from that blessed but now abandoned cradle, news came from America to cheer hearts and rekindle missionary ardor: the Salesians and Sisters had arrived in Patagonia on January 20. Sisters Angela Vallese, Joan Borgna, Angela Cassulo, Catherine Fino were the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (and indeed the first Sisters) to set foot in that land of "mysterious dreams" among the Indians and the tribes to be won over to the kingdom of God.⁸

"Yes, we rejoice in their triumph," Mother said, "but do we think also of the sacrifices they made to arrive that far? We are all eager to follow them, but in the meantime what shall we do to help and sustain them among the many dangers that most certainly surround them? Souls are not saved by swords and enthusiasm only, but by mortification, self-denial and solid virtue, my dears. Who wants to enter the competition? Who wants to prepare herself for the missions by using the means which the Lord gives her here at home?"

To those who answered: "I do, I do!" Mother replied: "Then put yourself to the test! ("Bricchett a la pröva!"⁹).

Let us begin by making self-love keep Lent well, and give a sound trashing to those defects which are most in evidence and most contrary to the duty of good example. I will help you; you

will help me. Are you all ready?"

"All of us are, all of us are, Mother dear!"

[p. 130] Practical exercise of humility

Here we come then to the practice! As all knew, besides succeeding well in everything, Sister Louise Arecco sang marvelously. One day she was being congratulated for having saved from embarrassment another Sister who would have made a mess of the accompaniment to a *Tantum Ergo* in chapel. Mother feared for her humility, and in the presence of the Community said to her: "Who do you think you are? If we had studied as much as you, we would, perhaps, sing and play better than you!" The young Sister blushed, but thanked her with a smile, and never said a word, either then or later.

Sister Marietta Rossi, an expert in embroidery, showed herself somewhat reluctant to wash the plates and shine the saucepans. So Mother told her: "Ah, yes! To succeed better in the embroidery of your perfection, you will go to the scullery every day for a fortnight." This same Sister did not hide a certain complacency in her fine embroidery. And Mother: "It is better you go to the common workroom to patch the rags of the House." She left her there for quite some time, until the Sister repented and went to promise that she would rectify her intentions and seek only to please God in everything. She was then sent back to her embroidery.

If someone showed that she did not particularly like the company of a Sister who was a little unattractive or sickly, Mother would say, "Very well, for two weeks you will be her companion for the housework and at recreation. I will follow you, if only with a glance, to help you to victory." .

A Sister who took pains to appear well-dressed did not escape Mothers' vigilance. She called her: "Tell me, do you like your habit?"

"Yes, very much."

"Then we shall do like this: exchange it for this," and she presented her with another habit really well worn. The Sister was distressed.

[p. 131] "What?" Mother continued, "Don't you think Jesus put on worse than this habit?"

While full of kindness and sympathy towards anyone who accused herself with a desire to improve, or with humility, Mother could not bear the subterfuges of self-love, or the tendency to throw unpleasant consequence on others. In such cases she assumed a tone of severity: "These are like the Scribes and Pharisees! They should either change or realize they are out of place in the House of the Lord, and take another road if necessary. "

In community these incisive phrases of Mother were well known, and each one tried not to merit one of them, even in private. ¹⁰

If someone arrived late in chapel after prayers had already begun, without having to be told, she knelt in the middle aisle until the prayer was over, because Mother never tired of repeating that the postulants and novices must learn from the Sisters to consider punctuality a religious obligation. The reproof did not hold if everyone understood that the exception was due to duty or lack of health.

A novice going into chapel for evening prayers thought she saw something black on the floor, she shouted aloud: "Alas! the devil!" thus causing laughter and some confusion among her companions. Breaking rigorous silence? Mother wouldn't have it! With a gesture of the hand and a significant glance, she invited her to kiss the floor, as she had already intimated to two novices a few evenings previously, when they exchanged some words as the community was entering the chapel to give the last greeting of the day to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

The week before two novices had not kept silence after the bell had rung for the visit to the Blessed Sacrament. It was not the first time that the two little friends had been warned for the same fault. Mother quietly stopped them and had them kneel right in the middle of the corridor and kiss the floor just as the community was passing. They filed into chapel without paying any

attention to the novices. ¹¹

This kissing of the ground and kneeling as an expression [p. 132] of humble penitence was used in Mornese, under the direction of the young Director Father Costamagna, who wished to form the community to the highest degree of perfection. And so even Mother sometimes used it for formative ends—though she was more moderate in its application.

One might think that such a method of correction and of practicing self-denial would not be acceptable to all, that it might perhaps cause some hearts to close up, or tempt them to withdraw from her. Instead, all were persuaded that she sought only their good. No one went to bed with sad impressions, as she always found an occasion to banish every gloom. Besides, everyone saw with their own eyes that the Superior General first imposed on herself what she proposed to her Daughters.

One evening Mother had addressed some rather hasty words to a Sister just when she was about to ring the bell for the great silence. When all were in bed, she went on tiptoe to the Sister's bed, and on hearing her sob quietly under the sheets, she whispered in her ear: "Cheer up, you know I love you, and said it for your good!" The Sister's serenity returned and Mother disappeared, perhaps to thank Jesus, who had suggested to her to put charity before silence.¹²

Another day it came spontaneously to her to give a "first rate" correction in the presence of a novice. A little later, she met that novice and said, "Did I do wrong in saying what I said, and as I said it? Do you think I may go to Holy Communion in the morning? You see, I love that person very much. She can become a great saint. What I said to her in your presence, I said through a sense of duty, and to help her attain a greater good. Pray for me."¹³

During the week Mother had gone into the kitchen while the polenta was being cooked. She tasted it by taking a little from the stick used to stir it. She felt remorse immediately and prepared to make up for it. She waited until the community was assembled in the refectory, and before beginning grace, showed the stirring stick, saying: "Would you like to know how mortified I am?! I couldn't wait for this moment, and already in the kitchen I helped [p. 133]

myself to polenta, taking some off of this! Please, pray for me, dear Sisters!"¹⁴

On another occasion, she had a severe toothache. "Oh!" she said, "Why go to a dentist?"

Taking the pincers, she tried to extract the tooth herself, saying: "All is little, all is nothing for the Lord!"

When she didn't succeed, she called one of the more courageous Sisters, and asked her as a favor to be her dentist. The Sister excused herself, reasoning with her as a daughter would with a mother, but in vain! "All is little, all is nothing for the Lord, my dear!"

The second attempt having failed she tried a third. She tied a string around the aching tooth, attached the end of it to a chair, made the Sister sit on it while she gave a violent pull, and succeeded! What matter that blood flowed freely? "It would be a beautiful thing to shed all her blood for God."¹⁵

One day Sister Felicina Ravazza tried to take the broom from her, to prevent her from sweeping. "No, let me do it; be good! Poor ignoramus that I am, this is all I can do! The teachers and the students instead, have far more important things to do."¹⁶

The sewers had to be cleaned. Among the group in charge of the operation, Mother was first, working from nightfall until the early hours of the morning. "The smallpox," she said "was much more severe on the young than on the old." She considered herself now so hardened¹⁷ that no germs could attack her.

These are deeds that arouse the esteem and imitation of simple and upright souls. To them can be added that exquisite goodness of heart so characteristic of Mother towards all her children, be they postulants, novices or Sisters, or even girls of the boarding school, Oratory or workroom. Her words and acts of kindness won over the least tractable temperaments, and gave her free entrance into the hearts and wills of the most resistant.

[p. 134] To those who accused themselves of yielding to the temptation of taking a bun to ease

hunger she would say: "Cheer up! You did nothing wrong in that," and she continued, drying their tears of confusion and shame, if necessary. "I will tell Mother Economer to put a little more at table." She almost always finished with: "When you are hungry, come to me; we will find something!"¹⁸

What if someone accused herself of mischief?

"Now don't think of it anymore: I will take the blame; and that is enough!"¹⁹

She noticed when anyone was wet and shivery after a day's washing in the open. She was in no better condition herself, but while she would not dream of taking exceptions, she would send her Sisters to bed with a hot drink.²⁰

If she saw someone crying over a fault she had not committed intentionally or did not dare tell: "Look, don't be discouraged. I am like that too. I fail in this and that, but with a bit of courage and the grace of God, let's go ahead, and we shall arrive at the goal and become saints, you will see."²¹

When someone fell into the defect of exaggerated timidity, Mother some months previously would have said: "Come on you're really a goose!" Then she realized this expression pained a few and she stopped using it. In general it was noted that she was careful to refrain from any quips that were not always acceptable.²²

It often happened that at Nizza too the complaint of an unsatisfied appetite occurred with a certain frequency. A Sister (of beautiful character) came one day to Mother:

"I'm starved! I can't go on-I'm too hungry!"

"Start singing and I'll sing too!"

But Mother made a little trip, ransacked and rummaged here and there and came back with something to satisfy the Sister who in vain had tried to make the song of the spirit sustain her poor weakened body.²³

[p. 135] A visit from Father Cagliero

Lent passed in this exercise of the spirit. Towards the end of the month, the Director General, Father Cagliero, came to Nizza where, as usual, he was welcomed enthusiastically.

He brought news from France. He told of the prospective opening of the House of St. Cyr, and brought the general directory (*elenco*) of the Institute for the current year, given to him by the Sisters of Sampierdarena. For the first time, a short biography of the Sisters who had died during the preceding year appeared in it: five professed members and two novices. These latter had died at home but were Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in desire.

First biographical sketches of deceased Sisters

These biographical sketches were eagerly awaited ever since Don Bosco had mentioned them, saying that they would be helpful, and in a sense dutiful. If he did not send the Sisters the form used to compile the life of their dear departed, as he had done for the Salesians,²⁴ that implied that Fathers Cagliero and Lemoyne would take care of doing so.

They had, in fact, done so. While at Nizza Father Cagliero did not miss the opportunity of commenting on Don Bosco's idea. All, professed, novices, and postulants knew then that an account of the deceased religious was not something new introduced by the Salesians, but the established custom of practically all religious orders. The memory of the departed is an eloquent lesson on how one must live in order to die well; how one must use the ordinary means to acquire personal holiness; and how profuse God is with His grace with him who uses his talents at the right time. They also tell us how easy is the passage from earth to heaven for those who live according to the duties of their state; how at death everything of a transitory nature has no **[p. 136]** meaning; and how all imperfections are different when seen in the light of God's sanctity.

From the example of the dead we get new light on the characteristics of true sanctity, the observance of the Rule, and the necessity of keeping oneself in readiness for the great call. It is necessary, however, to read the biographical sketches attentively so as to draw profit from them. Those who come after us will say: "As they did, so can we, and if they, why not we?"

Last Eucharistic outpourings of Sister Emma Ferrero

On March 1 the remains of dear Sister Emma Ferrero were taken away from Nizza. Her illness was not long, yet she suffered much. There were hours of delirium, during which what had always occupied her thoughts came to the surface. "Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine Sacrament," she repeated continually. No matter what was said to her, a deep inclination of the head, or the unconscious repetition of that ejaculation was her only response.

On one of those last days, when asked during a moment of complete lucidity, if she preferred to live or die, she had answered: "It is all the same: if I live, I live for Jesus; if I die, I die for Him." That morning she received Viaticum. She had been almost unconscious up to then, but when Jesus touched her tongue, she came to herself and made a fervent thanksgiving.

Towards evening she was disturbed by the recollection of her youthful escapades, and temptation had induced her to regret having made the heroic act of charity in favor of the souls in purgatory.

²⁵ But at the word of Father Cagliero, who suggested to her to abandon all to the divine mercy alone, she renewed the heroic act generously. She suffered greatly. Father Cagliero asked her if she wished to go to heaven to be united with Jesus for ever. The answer was a ready "Yes, Father!" She looked steadily at the crucifix he showed her, bowed her head and died.

[p. 137] She would now receive the reward of the example she had given the community from the time of her conversion, and above all for the great love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament which she had fostered in her soul.

Mother's great charity

After all the fatigue of the more-than-maternal assistance she had given Sister Emma for several days, and notwithstanding the great sorrow that filled her heart, Mother spent that entire night sitting on a chair. In the evening it had occurred to her that Sister Pauline Orlandi, who was ill in the infirmary, might be afraid to remain in the same room where Sister Emma had expired. So, Mother had transferred Sister Pauline to her own room and put her into her own bed. Mother sat close by to keep her company.

Don Bosco at Bordighera for the laying of the cornerstone of the church

From Bordighera came the welcome news that on March 7 the cornerstone of the Church of Mary Help of Christians had been laid in the presence of Monsignor Philip Allegra, Bishop of Albenga and Monsignor Baragini, Bishop of Ventimiglia. Don Bosco addressed warm words of gratitude to all, and did not disdain to stand at the door at the end of the ceremony, sack in hand, to receive alms. The offerings, big and small, poured in, in response to the courteous words with which the good Father thanked them and invoked heavenly blessings even for a single penny.

[p. 138] Mother at Turin, Chieri, Cascinette and Biella

Mother knew that Father Rua, who had just returned from Sampierdarena, wanted to meet her in Turin for some necessary arrangements. She went by train, and after a brief visit to Valdocco went to Chieri, and from there to Cascinette where difficulties were not wanting. She also stopped at Biella, thus killing several birds with one stone.

Feeling very weak on the journey she approached a street vendor to buy a bit of bread and fruit.

Sister Pacotto, who accompanied her, objected: "Perhaps... as Sisters..." Mother replied: "So what! Only evil is out of place." She made her little purchase, then ate what she had provided, after giving the best part to her companion.

Sister Pacotto gives us further details.

When Mother arrived at the House at Cascinette the Sisters were out for a walk, and she went on to the rectory to pay her respects to the director.

As soon as the director's sister saw Mother, she hastened in search of the Sisters, and on her first glimpse of Sister Cordara began to shout aloud: "Rose, Rose, Mother is here!"

Sister Rose, who had charge of "external" affairs, wore secular dress and was regarded by the people more or less as the servant of the community. Very few gave her the beautiful title of Sister, which was a source of suffering for her.

Even on this occasion she was hurt by being called in this way, but the joyful, unexpected news made her forget everything else, and within minutes she was in the director's house at Mother's feet, kissing her hand.

Mother, who decidedly would have preferred a more controlled entrance and form of greeting, looked at her affectionately and said: "Oh, Sister Rose! Oh my Daughter, how tired you look!"

The director looked on in astonishment, and later told the Sisters that it seemed impossible to him that Mother, [p. 139] so austere, could at the same time be so amiable, so tender. He added: "Your Mother is a Saint Teresa, a real Saint Teresa!"

The director thought Mother was austere! Yes, because he wanted the Sisters to go, on all big occasions, to his house to prepare the festal dinners and dine there, and so forth. But Mother would not yield. She had already answered that it was not convenient, because the Sisters were not there for that. The director's renewed insistence had been in vain.

Mother spoke of him to the Sisters and others. He was a person worthy of high esteem, a model priest in piety, fervor and deportment. Therefore, Sister Pacotto asked her: "If you esteem him so highly, why do you not grant anything he asks?" The reply: "Because his requests might give rise to abuses; and abuses are not easily corrected. Be very careful never to allow an abuse, even one, to enter through your fault."

On his part, after this last meeting with Mother, the director used the title "Sister," for Sister Rose, which pleased her immensely.

"You are always the first to be remembered in my prayers, Sister Rose," Mother told her one day, "because I know you are in more danger than the others. Every evening I say to myself: "I wonder how my dear Sister Rose spent the day?"

What more could she have done to make them bless such a visit?

Mother does not permit exceptions

For the feasts of Saint Joseph and Our Lady of Sorrows which followed in quick succession, Mother was at Nizza.

There they noticed that she had deteriorated in health. They served her a slightly better fare, half a glass of undiluted wine, as in similar circumstances she had ordered should be given to others. But she would not accept it; rather she returned it untouched, with strong words: "A nice thing indeed, if we Superiors give such example, and during Holy Week! I don't need it, thanks!"

Mother's letter to Sister Piccono

On Wednesday of Holy Week, Mother wrote to Sister Virginia Piccono:

V.G. Maria, S.G!

My good Sister Virginia,

Are you well? and cheerful? Poor thing, you suffered a lot on the journey, but I trust you are better by now.

Be brave and cheerful, and keep Mother²⁶ and Sister Rita cheerful too.

What are you doing? Are you teaching manual work or just lessons?

Anyway, no matter what your work, I will never be mistaken in telling you to be humble, patient, charitable, obedient and exact in the observance of our holy Rule.

I was at Ivrea, and visited your good teacher,²⁷ that is Mother Vicar, who was asking for you. She gave me many messages for you, and showed me where you taught in the workroom. There were some of your friends there also. All were asking for you and wished to be remembered in your prayers.

You told me you saw many lovely things in Rome. My good Sister Virginia, in heaven we shall see even more beautiful things, won't we? Courage, this life is short, and in this short time let us strive to acquire treasures for heaven. Never be discouraged by any trouble you meet. Always confide in Jesus, your dear Spouse, and in Mary, our dearest Mother, and let us fear nothing. Say many things to the girls on my behalf, and have them say some prayers for my intention.

The Sisters of Chieri greet you. We have sent Sister Rose Daghero there. Remember always to pray for your Sisters and especially for me. I never forget you in my poor prayers.

[p. 141] Nizza, March 24, 1880

Affectionate Mother in Jesus,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

Write to me soon.

Sister Catherine Daghero Superior at St. Cyr

Sister Catherine Daghero knew about her new destination since Mother's last visit to Turin, and mindful of the order given her, prepared in silence to depart for France in the near future.

She knew a little about St. Cyr. She was to be in charge of a work which for some time had been carried on in misery and disorder. It had been offered to Don Bosco by the same priest, James Vincent, who was responsible for the La Navarre foundation. She knew that she would have to contend with "tertiaries," who up to this had an internal administrative system of a type to daunt the most courageous. Nor did the Director General hide from her certain painful situations of the La Navarre colony. But all this did not worry her as much as having to speak French.

For some months she and other members of the community had begun to scan the pages of an elementary grammar. But it is one thing to understand a few phrases, quite another to hold a conversation. Therefore now and then she took a little time to study and to put her wardrobe together. Fortunately the Lord alone counted the tears she then shed!

Notwithstanding her silence on the matter the secret soon leaked out, and the Sisters....To lose their Superior, who loved them and followed them like a sister and mother! Their agitation also upset some ladies, who were influential with the Salesian Fathers, and even with Don Bosco himself, to whom they wrote: "If money is needed to prevent Sister Catherine being moved from here we are ready! "

[p. 142] Don Bosco's answer was always the same: "We certainly need money, as we haven't a penny, but at the moment there is no one else who knows a bit of French, and can fill the assignment as she can. She will not be long in France and will be back again with us!"

Sister Daghero goes to Nizza

Towards the end of the month Sister Catherine Daghero escaped the affectionate attentions of Sisters and Oratorians and went to Nizza for the last arrangements with Mother Mazzarello.

On seeing her, to cover up the emotion caused by the prospect of her imminent departure, Mother said:

"Oh, you're here?"

"Yes, Mother! Father Cagliero sent me in Don Bosco's name!"

"Very well! For the moment, go to the wardrobe attendant who will give you some little

work to do for your self. If you don't find her immediately, do some housework; then we shall see. "

Sister Catherine obeyed to the letter. For two or three days nothing happened, and no one called her, leaving her time to think about what lay ahead and about God's will.

Mother's letter to Sister Marassi

In the meantime Mother wrote to Sister Pierina Marassi, who had taken over in place of Sister Daghero.

V. Gesù!

My dearest Sister Pierina and Sisters all,

Are you cheerful? I know the departure of your Superior has left you sad, but cheer up, my dears. You well know that life was not made to be together forever; that is reserved for heaven.

[p. 143]Now Sister Pierina, it is up to you to give good example. See that the Sisters observe the Rule, that they love one another, that particular friendships do not enter in, for they separate us very much from the love of God and the religious spirit. You must give good example to all so that no one can say: She loves her more than the rest of us. She speaks more frequently to her, she sympathizes more with her. . . etc. Speak to all, love all. Give your confidence as much as possible, but be careful always that your heart is attached to no one but the Lord. Ask advice often from the good Fathers. Never neglect to do good through human respect, always point out the defects of your Sisters, even while you sympathize with them, and do freely all that charity requires.

I recommend one thing further: you should never take amiss that the Superiors need one Sister rather than another, as for example Sister Maritano or Sister Laurantoni . . . You should never judge their orders, saying you are the Superior and that they should depend from you! The Superiors are always Superiors, and what they do is always well done. Therefore, should you find yourself in one of these situations, let things be and remember heaven is not won by satisfactions or preferences, but by virtue and suffering.

My good Sister Pierina, it really wasn't necessary for me to say this to you. I know that you are aware of these things, but I just wanted to give you some advice.

Take heart, therefore; let me hear from you soon with the news of the House. Be cheerful and keep the Sisters happy for me.

And you, Sister Teresa, are you cheerful? I'd like to think so! . . . Moreover, you should, with your example, keep all the others happy. Courage, and like a good Sister, help them work for the Lord. Encourage one another to do good, spiritually and temporally. Pray much for me, please! I never forget anyone of you, be sure.

I would like to say a word to each of you individually. But be patient with me, I really cannot do so now; another time, and if not I shall come to see you soon.

Let all be cheerful, including Sister Adelaide. Be good! Compete with one another in the race for sanctity especially by the practice of humility and charity. When I come you [p. 144] will tell me who won! Sister Pierina, send the trousseau of the new postulant who is coming with Sister Catherine.

Good-bye, then dear Sisters; let us pray for and love one another in the Lord, and believe me,

Nizza, March 31, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in the Lord,
*Poor Sister Mary Mazzarello*²⁹

Sister Catherine Daghero goes to St. Cyr

On April 1 –"Fool's Day"– Mother Mazzarello said to Sister Catherine:

"Are you still here?"

"Mother, I'm waiting for your orders."

"Ah!...then get ready to go to France. Father Cagliari told you everything, I'm sure. At Alassio, you will be met at the station; then the Director of Alassio will give you the Sisters for the new House. I really would not know whom to send. When Sister Sampietro gets well she will go, but at the moment she has a bad cold."

And Sister Catherine left for France alone, on April 2. The novice Sister Alexandrina Hugues, who knew she was to accompany her to France, met her at the station. Sister Telesio was also there. She expected to see Sister Sampietro, and asked why she hadn't come. "She has a cold,"

Sister Catherine answered, "Mother told me that a Sister from Alassio will substitute for her." Jokingly she continued: "Who knows but she may be among those who came to meet me!"

The Director of Alassio, moved by the necessity and by Sister Catherine's tears, gave her Sister Enrichetta Telesio (who would have to learn French). Sister Alexandrina already spoke French. He had already been chosen Provincial of Liguria and France, so he left with them. In their simplicity they invited [p. 145] him to sit in the carriage destined for "ladies only."

The conductor pointed out that the priest could not stay in the carriage reserved for ladies. They would have to give up either his company or the carriage. Naturally the Sisters chose to renounce the latter, and all traveled together.

Father Cerruti did not remain at St. Cyr, where they arrived on April 4. He would spend some time there on his way back.

Well supplied trunks

After Sister Catherine had left, a trunk well packed with church linen and vestments arrived at Nizza.

As the extreme poverty Sister Catherine would face at St. Cyr was well known in Turin, one of the Sisters who loved her very much, went to the Bursar of the Oratory and asked him to provide something for the church at St. Cyr. She was disappointed on hearing the confrere's reply: "I can't do that without the Superior's knowing about it." "But you can go and get his permission," she suggested.

Father Rua was in charge during Don Bosco's absence. He listened paternally, then spreading out his hands, exclaimed: "Oh, dear Son, in this case Don Bosco would say to you that between us and the Sisters there is as yet no division. What is ours is theirs, what is theirs is ours. Put into a trunk whatever you can find that might be useful to those poor Sisters, and do so freely."

So the trunk was filled, but the address was not clear and the goods arrived at Nizza Monferrato. Mother Mazzarello, who could not have wished for more, used it delightedly, thinking it to be a gift from heaven.

[p. 146] A prophesy?

After emptying the trunk the mistake was discovered. Someone stated that in consequence Sister Catherine would face extreme poverty. Mother replied: "Don't worry. Sister Catherine will not finish the year in that House! "

Did she wish these words to be a consolation for herself and the Sisters of Turin?

From Turin news had come, news that had certainly not come from the lips of Sister Catherine.

The Sisters were inconsolable, so much so that before Sister Catherine's departure Father Cagliero came to give a conference *sui generis* to ease the situation. He began:

I have come in Don Bosco's name to tell you his in reply to my intercession on your behalf. "I too am as sorry as they; were there someone else to meet our need, I would willingly change this decision. However, give them a conference, and repeat that Sister Catherine will not be in France for long."

Therefore, you and I are here to do the will of Don Bosco, which is God's will; let us then stop the lamentations!

The Oratory girls did the rounds of the House even at night, to be there to see her off. And what an uproar at the station! Luckily Father Cagliero was there to cut short the farewell scenes, and to stop them from preventing her passage.

Mother goes to close the House of Mornese

Mother's heart had to undergo another sorrow. She went to Mornese in person, to close that House which was dear to her above all, and which she would have wished to keep open at any

cost. But. . . "That is what Don Bosco wishes, and so be it!" she repeated to herself and the Sisters.

[p. 147] She went on this occasion because poor Sister Ortensia Negrini, who had been confined to bed for four years, had to be brought to Nizza in a carriage.

Before leaving Mornese, Mother went to see the two Areccos. One, like a lost soul, dragged herself about in the dirty room; the other did a bit of work but remorse gnawed at her heart, without giving her the grace to come to her senses. Were it not for the kind help of the parish priest and of Miss Maccagno, they would die of hunger.

Mother came out of that house with tears in her eyes as she said: "What a wonderful thing a vocation is! What an account to render to God!"

She returned to Nizza on the 12th, and was utterly exhausted when she got there, for she had insisted on keeping Sister Ortensia either in her arms or reclining on her knees the whole way. Instead the patient, whom they feared would not withstand the journey, seemed better as a result. The pathos of the moment induced Sister Emilia Mosca, who observed and interpreted all, to leave us this page of heartache.

When the Mother House was changed to Nizza a few sick Sisters remained at Mornese. Among them was Sister Ortensia Negrini, who had been confined to bed for four years, unable to make the least movement, due to an extremely serious form of asthma.

It was very inconvenient and costly to provide these dear Sisters with all they needed. Furthermore, the dire need of money for the repairs of Nizza Monferrato was becoming ever more pressing. Consequently the proposal to sell the College to the municipality, for some purpose beneficial to the place, or to private entities, was reluctantly accepted. The community made a novena to Mary Help of Christians to obtain the grace of being able to transport the invalids. Then Mother General went in person to bring those who remained to their new home. With infinite care Sister Negrina was lifted into a carriage, and after a full day's journey arrived at Nizza without having suffered in the [p. 148] least. Mother exhorted the community that evening to thank Mary Help of Christians who had so wonderfully accompanied the sick.

The Sisters who came told how the abandonment of the College had made a deep impression on the people of Mornese. The municipality had as yet made no move in the matter. Those who were embittered were silent or made absurd statements. Others merely shook their heads and said: "We shall see what will become of it!"

Mother Emilia continues:

It was a great sorrow for us Sisters to see that House pass into other hands. It was the cradle of the Institute, where the first years had been passed in simplicity, charity and fervor of spirit worthy of the ancient anchorites. How many dear, sweet memories were left there! But God had so disposed. The sacrifice was consummated. Mornese was abandoned!

Sister Rosalia Pestarino, native of Mornese, and among the first Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, did not refrain from putting her thoughts on paper:

April 12, 1880! A day of sad memories, for on it was closed—perhaps forever—our dear House of Mornese. That House will remain ever engraved on our souls as the birthplace of the Institute, and the first in fervor and religious virtue. How many miracles of Divine Providence we saw there in the spiritual and material orders! In that lovely chapel, how many graces, how many memories! The clothing of the first Sisters, the professions, final vows, . . . resolutions... sacred promises!

And now it is deserted, that House which had been the dwelling place of more than two hundred spouses of Jesus! . . . deserted as the chapel in which the praises of God resounded so wonderfully!

All abandoned... squalid misery has taken over! Poor Mornese! Poor suffering hearts, leaving a place so dear, so suitable in its solitude for pondering holy thoughts, despising the things of this world and aspiring towards perfection!

But on this day Saint Joseph, to whom we had recommended the matter, gave us new proof of his powerful intercession with God. He obtained for us the outstanding and, humanly speaking, impossible grace of being able to transport from Mornese to Nizza a dear Sister, invalid for several years.

Yesterday, due to her extreme weakness the doctor and parish priest had absolutely refused permission to move her from her bed. Our poor Mother Superior was in a state prayer and confidence in God!) Sister Ortensia was so

improved that without further hesitation she was placed in the carriage for the home journey.

The asthma, which tended to suffocate her in every least movement, was better today, and on seeing her enter the House of Our Lady at Nizza we could say: A grace! a singular favor!

May our dear Saint Joseph be ever praised, loved and thanked, and after Jesus and Mary may he be our support in life and in death!

Confidence in Saint Joseph Extension of the school at Nizza

In Nizza, Saint Joseph had been appointed "Bursar" of the House. To him was also entrusted the health of the Sisters and boarders, and the task of getting rid of sin and unsuitable persons, if ever there were such. He had charges of solving external problems harmful to the community and was to care for doubtful or vacillating vocations.

At Nizza, as at Mornese, secret letters of Sisters and others found their way to the little altar of this great Saint to ask his help and to assure him that he was loved.

And the Saint showed his appreciation by granting favors beyond all expectation, and the increase in fervor, regularity and holy joy in the community was attributed to him.

This year, with a new wing being added to the school, it was only natural that confidence to the saint of Divine [p. 150] Providence should increase. With the increase in the mouths to be fed, the anxiety of the Superiors grew accordingly, and so the invitation was continuous: "Let us pray to Saint Joseph! Let us give it to Saint Joseph!" Therefore the filial recourse to the head of the Holy Family was general among the Sisters, especially in preparation for the approaching feast of his patronage.

First news from St. Cyr

The first impressions and news of St. Cyr arrived.

The Sisters had been met at the station by two of Father Vincent's tertiaries, with a carriage. They had traveled for about an hour on a very lonely road as night fell.

After being joyfully welcomed by the Salesian Director Father Ghivarello, Father Vincent, the three orphans and those attached to the agricultural school they were introduced to the poor but clean chapel. There followed a guided tour of the playground, the Superior's combination room and office, and a tiny parlor which also served as dining room for the two priests. Eventually in the community refectory they were served some broth, olives, bread and little else. Lastly they were taken to the dormitory, from which there was a view of the sea.

Their poor trunks had already been deposited with the Superior, who also acted as linen keeper.

Community life was well ordered, beginning from the rising signal. The meditation was read by the Director, who then went to the altar to celebrate mass. The prayers were said in French (oh, what French!). The cook, a tertiary Sister Josephine, exercised them in mortification, seasoning everything *alla francese* as she said.

On consulting the Director as to what should be done the answer generally was: "Whatever you wish: as you think best!" It seemed that he did not want to interfere without first knowing how the Daughters of Mary Help [p. 151] of Christians did things.

Eventually Father Cerruti arrived. He had words of advice and encouragement for the Sisters and told Father Ghivarello to stop saying: "Whatever you wish!" He was to direct the Sisters like a father and brother, and make their difficult position less painful.

The hardest sacrifice the Superior had to face was to go begging, a custom introduced for the needs of the orphanage, which was extremely poor. It had already happened that at 11:00 a.m. they had nothing to serve for dinner, not even vegetables. They bought bread once a week, and the neighbors were asked to lend some if the supply ran out before the week was up.

One day, by God's grace, a kindly lady gave them a beautiful basket of fresh beans. They allowed themselves a good salad, which gave them even more appetite! In spite of all, joy abounded, and it was pleasant to meet in the evening to exchange the thoughts and adventures of the day.

Mother goes to Turin: good news

In Turin Sister Massolo was at death's door, and had expressed a wish to see Mother. She went for a short visit, which gave her an opportunity to restore serenity there.

From Turin she brought news to Nizza of the beloved Father, Don Bosco, who had been received in private audience by the Holy Father on April 5. He had received a blessing for his Sons and Daughters, which greatly comforted him after the fire and theft in the room where he was staying at Tor de' Specchi Street, Naples on March 31.

Mother also brought news in brief of our missionaries' entrance into Patagonia on the Rio Negro. The information had come from Father Fagnano (head of the expedition) to Father Bodrato, as long ago as January. It gave reason to thank God for the divine protection of the missionaries, who were the admiration of all for their piety,

[p.152] courage, and zeal. They had landed on the afternoon of January 20, were already in their own House, which of course had yet to be put in order, and had already begun to catechize children, adolescents and adults.

Sister Massola dies

On April 21 the pure, simple, soul of Sister Maria Massolo went to God. She had been one of the strongest of her clothing group in Mornese and had edified all by her recollection. It was said of her that her health suffered from her excessive fear of offending God. Mother could not help drawing from it a subject of instruction for the community, and while she exhorted all to confidence in divine goodness she added: "Let us be simple in everything. Look, I'm going to say this to you because she told me to. Sister Massola could not die in peace until she had accused herself of having coughed a few times to get my sympathy. Simplicity, Sisters, simplicity in everything and always!"

Mother in Liguria

At Alassio, they were still waiting for a Sister to take the place of Sister Enrichetta Telesio. It was decided that Sister Sampietro would go there, thus beginning to make the break with Nizza and Mother, and then go on to St. Cyr, which had originally been her destination.

Mother accompanied her there on the 22nd.

At Cantalupo, while they waited for the train connection, Mother took advantage of a quiet moment to console Sister Sampietro, who was desolate at leaving Nizza. She gave her some practical advice, exhorted her to fortitude of spirit, and gave her a picture taken from her own prayer book, on which she wrote this motherly reminder: "If you are faithful to Jesus, you will be happy in life and in death."

[p. 153] The secret of Sister Elisa Roncallo

Sister Elisa Roncallo sent a letter to her mother by Mother Mazzarello. She also wrote a little note containing a secret she wished to keep from the Superior General until later on:

My dear Mama,

Mother Superior will give you a letter of mine on her way back from Alassio when she passes through Sampierdarena. We would like to erect an altar to Saint Joseph; if you can collect. . . and if you possibly can . . . send me the collection before Mother passes through Sampierdarena . . .

I need some paper; see if . . .

Nizza, April 22, 1880

It was a matter, therefore, of a pleasant surprise, and Sister Elisa was ever ready to ask her "Mama" for this and that.

Return to Nizza Letter to Sister Sampietro

From Alassio, where she spent a few days, Mother went to see the Sisters of Bordighera. They were still full of the feast and the graces of March 7, and entertained her with a full account of it. She returned through Alassio where she left Sister Sampietro, then went back to Nizza. At the end of the month she wrote to the Daughter she had left in tears:

V. Gesù e Maria!

My little rogue, Sister Sampietro,

Are you cheerful? Are you still crying? No, rather I am happy and have great good will to become a saint. That is very good: continue, and be very humble.

Soon we shall have the retreat and you will see everybody again. Be cheerful, and take heart. Pray for me and for [p. 154] Mother Economer; we are really afraid that the Lord will take her from us. How sorry I would be! Patience!! I stop here for want of time. Have courage and pray with all your heart. May Jesus bless you, and make you all His own, along with

Nizza, April 30, 1880

Your affectionate Mother³⁰

Month of Our Lady Letter to the Sisters of Patagonia

May, as everyone knows, is Mary's month, and, therefore, a "time for new fervor in Sisters and boarders, who were still numerous and good.

On the 4th, Mother wrote to the Sisters of Carmen de Patagones:

V. Gesù, Maria e S. Giuseppe!

My ever dear Sisters Angelina, Cassulo, Joan, Catherine,

Oh, how far away you are from me, poor Sisters! But courage! We are very close in affection.

Yes! I assure you that I keep you ever present in my heart; in fact, I assure you that you are always the first in my prayers. I hear that you are very happy to be there, that you already have a resident student and twelve girls coming to you, and that on Sundays you are up to your ears trying to cope with all the girls who come for catechism. I am really happy that you have so much work to do for God's glory and for the good of souls. Correspond with the great graces the Lord has given you. Try with your example and work to draw many little souls to God.

My ever dear Daughters, I recommend you to love one another and to be charitable with one another, sympathize with one another's defects, correct one another but always with charity and kindness. Be careful of your health also. Remember that our life is no longer ours, because we have given it to the community; therefore let us treasure it and use it for the glory of God.

You, Sister Angela Cassulo, are you cheerful? Your [p. 155] sister is well and sends you her greetings. She is very good. Pray for her and for me. Courage!

And you, Sister Joan,³¹ are you a saint yet? Did you work some miracles already? Do you pray for me? Be cheerful! Your sister has begun to be good and is well. Have courage, and be always humble; have confidence with your Superior, and help her in everything.

Sister Catherine,³² are you cheerful? Humble? Obedient? Have confidence in your Superior always, and be always cheerful. No whims, Sister Catherine!

You, Sister Angelina V.,³³ keep the grapes for me, for I will soon come to eat them . . . Are you preparing only grapes for me?.. Prepare some peaches as well. Your sister, Sister Louise, will soon come to America. She will leave on the next expedition.

You also wish to hear the general news of our Congregation, don't you? Well, I'll willingly outline It for you.

The House at Mornese is closed. Father Joseph alone remains there now to see if it can be sold. Dear Mornese, we cannot think of it without feeling a heartache! We are now all here at Nizza Monferrato. We are a good number: One hundred and fifty, counting boarders, postulants and Sisters. I won't attempt to describe the House, because It could take too long. We have a lovely chapel, spacious, devout and well furnished. A new wing being built for the boarders will soon be ready.

The number of Houses here in Europe is ever on the increase. A few months ago three Sisters went to Sicily; another four went to open a House in France, and one at Ivrea. These last three are to have schools and kindergartens. All go

willingly to work for God's glory and for the good of souls.

Let us really thank the Lord, who has given us so many graces, and who makes use of us poor creatures to do a bit of good.

Courage then, dear Sisters, let us do good while there is still time! Never grow discouraged over any difficulty you may encounter. Say always: "Jesus must be all our strength," and with Jesus burdens become light, fatigue easy, even thorns become sweet. But be careful to overcome yourselves; if you do not, all will become heavy, and unbearable and [p. 156] wickedness will grow like festering sores in our hearts.

Tell me do you pray for me and for your Sisters? Here we never forget you; do likewise for us.

Health wise, thank God, we are all well.

Say many things for me to those little girls and tell them to be good.

All the Sisters, postulants and boarders wish me to send you lots of messages; Father Director also greets you. Be cheerful, pray for me and write soon.

May God bless you and make you entirely His, along with

Nizza, May 4, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,
Sister Mary Mazzarello Viva Gesù e M.³⁴

Vocations flourish in Nizza

In this letter we have really met Mother Mazzarello. Like a mother who is interested in all her daughters, especially those farthest away, she gives the detailed family news. Truly the interests of her heart are the rapid development of the Institute, the expansion of its works, the consoling number of vocations, the consolidation of its religious spirit. Therefore she willingly speaks of these things to people imbued with the same ideals and moved by the same inspirations.

Fifteen postulants had entered since January of that year, all rich in good will and offering great hopes for the future. The last to arrive³⁵ kept on repeating: "Oh, what a good, kind Mother we have here!"

This girl's parents had accompanied her, but on taking leave of her the mother had been so overcome by emotion that Mother Mazzarello considered it her duty to say to the girl: "In conscience, I cannot keep you here for the present: I fear that your mother may really become ill. Return home with her just for a fortnight. Then you can come back!" And so it was decided. As it was lunch-time [p. 157] they went into a hotel near the station to have a meal. Mother and daughter cried uninterruptedly; the father looked on sadly, so that the hotel proprietor asked what misfortune had befallen them. When he heard the reason the good man was surprised, because he said he too had a niece at the convent. . . who was very happy to be with Don Bosco's Sisters, and was forever singing their praises. And this-one may say-was the general opinion in the city.

These words increased the mother's regret at having given in to her weakness and not having left her daughter, and she began again to weep aloud. Then the father decided to go back to the convent and ask if mother and daughter could stay for the night.

"Not for one night only, but for a week if you want it that way!" was Mother's cordial answer. All three returned, weeping; the mother, however, was completely changed. She no longer thought of taking Maria back home, having seen that she would have another Mother. And the daughter wanted nothing more in this world, now that her father had declared he was very content with everything and everybody, especially with Mother!

Don Bosco meets Mother in Turin

The House of Valdocco was in jubilation on May 7 to welcome back Don Bosco, who happy but very tired, returned a little after 12 o'clock.

This time his absence had been longer than usual but with good and consoling fruits.

Accompanied by Sister Olympia Martini, Mother Mazzarello set out for Turin on the 10th to see Don Bosco again.

She felt she needed to see him, especially to hear what he thought of the Sisters he had seen in

France and Liguria. Besides. . . his holy words. . . were they not light, warmth and comfort for her?

Don Bosco received her in his usual fatherly manner. He had little news of the Sisters, because he thought Father [p. 158]Cagliero had already given much, if not all of it. However, he said the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians worked hard, gave satisfaction and were becoming saints. It was evident that Our Lady was looking after them, because in her generosity Madame Jacques of Marseilles had given a big offering for them. That was a great relief to them both because the poor Sisters of La Navarre and St. Cyr were in Mother's thoughts day and night.

Don Bosco had news from America, but as it would all be published in the *Salesian Bulletin* he limited his comments here to saying that in the Argentinian press our missionary Sisters, who had gone to Carmen de Patagones, were described as "the glory of their sex and of religion." Already they had opened a school for Indian girls. Their big problem: they were tormented by mosquitoes, day and night.

Among other beautiful things Father Lasagna had written about Sister Virginia Magone in a consoling way... This Sister was seriously ill, but her lot was enviable.

News of Sister Magone and the Houses of Uruguay

Mother came out of Don Bosco's office greatly consoled, and happy that through the kind offices of Father Cagliero she might read to the community those extracts from letters which concerned them more closely. All that inspires must be used.

It was Father Lasagna who wrote: . . .

Before all else, to satisfy the paternal tenderness with which you love us, I will tell you that all the beloved Sons and good Daughters whom you have sent to the distant shores of Uruguay to extend the kingdom of Jesus Christ, enjoy good health, with the exception of Sister Virginia Magone, who for the past five months is being slowly consumed. The end of her labors is approaching with giant strides.

[p. 159] I have never in my life seen a soul look death in the face with such serenity and joy. I have seen with my own eyes, that it is no exaggeration to say she is a Daughter of religious enthusiasm, of whom the prophet spoke when he exclaimed: "I rejoiced when I heard them say to me: Let us go to God's House!"

This beautiful soul is always cheerful, always serene. With a smile, she speaks to all of her imminent death. She asks for and takes on herself to deliver messages to Saint Joseph, Mary Help of Christians and Jesus Christ. Every time I go into that room I come away amazed. One day I saw her with her emaciated hands making snow white lilies. "What are you doing, Sister?" I asked her, "Oh," she replied. "I see that the end is drawing very near, and I'm hastening to make a few flowers that you will be so kind as to put on my coffin, when they take me to the cemetery." I had to turn away to hide my tears and not to scandalize that lovely soul, who had said those words in the joyful manner of a spouse preparing the nuptial wreath with her own hands. I linger on these circumstance because I think that hearing them will do good to the irresolute, as they have done to me . . . (.)

Who would not envy the lot of Sister Virginia? I envy her and hope for a death like hers. I too am a Son of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco, and when my last hour comes, I too have a right to hope for a peaceful death in the arms of Jesus and Mary . . . (.)

The girl's school of Las Piedras, conducted by our Sisters, is developing and flourishing. An internal chapel has been erected, where Jesus is adored, and it has already become necessary to build, to cope with the increasing number of pupils.

Beside the parish church there is an old chapel which belonged to a physicist. I succeeded in getting it from the government, to adapt it for a parochial school, demanded by many families, and admittedly a crying need.

Due to restricted space, the Sisters of Villa Colon were unable to remain in the first house we rented. They moved a little while ago to a nice little house in the midst of a vast stretch of land bought for them. But here again schools [p. 160]and a chapel must be built to receive pupils and do good, and so it means more buildings and further expenses! . . .

Your affectionate Son,
*Father Louis Lasagna*³⁶

Mother's return to Nizza Death of Sister Negrini

It would have been a great joy for Mother to spend Our Lady's feast in Turin, but since Sister

Negrini could wait no longer to go to heaven, her Superior had to be content with participating in some ceremonies at the Basilica during Pentecost, and the first days of the novena, then return to Nizza. These preparations were in progress for religious clothing and for the feast of Our Lady Help of Christians on May 31. Her presence was necessary to finalize arrangements.

Therefore Mother was again on the train on the 20th, bringing a welcome surprise this time: she had with her ten thousand lire, the dowry of Sister Olympia, which would serve marvellously to meet the considerable and urgent expenses of the building of Nizza.

Mother went straight to Sister Negrini's bedside. She found her very low, yet her face was lit up by a sweet smile. Mother sat beside her, dried her last tears of gratitude and love, and with her fervent prayers accompanied her to the end.

It was May 21, first day of the novena to Mary Help of Christians in the House of Nizza.

Sister Ortensia had suffered so much already that one could not wish her life prolonged, yet her passing away was keenly felt by all. On being asked in her last moments if she preferred to go to heaven or remain still on earth, she had answered: "If it is to suffer, yes, I would wish to live; but as the Lord wills!" Her heroic patience had been a continuous prayer, and the Institute could glory in such a member, precious in God's sight.

[p. 161] Novena to Mary Help of Christians

Father Cagliero had promised Mother to spend the whole novena in preparation for the feast of Mary Help of Christians at Nizza. However, he did not arrive in time for the opening ceremony, and the Director, Father Lemoyne, who was officiating, read to the Sisters and boarders what was published in the current issue of the *Salesian Bulletin*³⁷

in preparation for the feast. His words, spoken from the altar before the benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, accentuated these two points:

- 1- We need Mary Help of Christians to spread her mantle over us and our families, to protect us in soul and body. Let our attitude towards her be confident, affectionate, devout;
- 2- All created things vie with one another in honoring our Blessed Lady in this her month. Let us too prepare mystic garlands of prayer and good works to place as a crown on the head of the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God and our Mother also. Our loving prayers, placed at the feet of the august Queen, will be transformed into a shower of graces and blessings for us.

Father Cagliero reports to Nizza. Don Dosco's conference on the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Marian enthusiasm had reached such a pitch that Father Cagliero's first greeting when he arrived on May 23 was one of delight at finding himself in the midst of such fervor.

His presence in the House together with the music, singing, recitations, and candidates preparing for religious clothing, all combined to give promise of an exceptional feast.

In one of his talks to the whole community, he expressed his desire to have the gift of Don Bosco's efficacy of speech-to report what the good Father had said the day before to three hundred

Salesian Cooperators of Turin **[p. 162]** about the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.³⁸

His aim was twofold: to increase the fervor of the community, and to awaken awareness of the gift of a Salesian religious vocation in the boarders who might have received such a grace.

After the conference his confessional was besieged by Sisters wanting to know if they were on the path of perfection, and by girls wanting to know if one day they could be Sisters.

The African girl

In the meantime, Mary Help of Christians made a present of a young African girl, one of those whom the missionary Bishop, Monsignor Daniel Comboni had rescued from the Negro slave

trade to regenerate in Christ. From time to time he brought a little group of these to Europe, to entrust them to Catholic families and religious institutes, that they might be charitably provided for, and be able to reflect on their future, temporal and eternal.

The young girl entrusted to Mother Mazzarello was about twenty years old. She was a fine strong girl with pleasant features, but on her cheeks were five scars, marks of ownership of the various "masters" to whom she had been successively sold. She had probably already been in another Institute where she had learned the first rudiments of the Italian language, which she understood a little and spoke a little-in her own way, with all the verbs in the infinitive.

Before coming to Nizza she had spent some time in Turin, where the Oratorians readily welcomed her. Sometimes, to humor her, they gave her cigarettes, which she smoked with relish.

Mother presented the girl to the community saying: "Monsignor Comboni entrusts her to us that we may help her to become good."

Then after the girl-who soon became known as "the [p. 163] Negro"-withdrew, Mother recommended that she not be asked importunate questions, but be treated with politeness and charity, and asked all to pray that the Lord might grant her the grace of becoming a Christian.

The feast of Mary Help of Christians at Nizza

Who does not go in spirit to Turin on May 24 to share the family glories at the feet of our sweet Mother and Queen in Valdocco?

When the 30th dawned-a Sunday-all Nizza was jubilant!

"To the convent!" the people said to one another, and the convent was all decorated for the solemnity: church, playgrounds, porticoes, corridors. In the morning masses accompanied by the singing of motets and general Communion succeeded one another and at 9:00 a.m. the "Mass of Mary Help of Christians" was sung for the first time. There followed the ceremony of religious clothing for sixteen novices in the presence of nine priests.

In the afternoon solemn Vespers were sung, and towards evening, there was an entertainment with a stage performance of hymns, poetry and prose. All was greatly appreciated and praise was directed to the Help of Christians, who dominated the whole scene from a little altar expressly erected for the occasion.

Father Cagliari's enthusiasm about Nizza

The Director General was very impressed by the whole thing, and repeated that he had never been present at a feast so devout, so fervent and yet so simple!

With the Superiors he was even more explicit. Such a day of general happiness among parents and invited guests brought into relief the spirit of the Institute and of its individual members, winning the goodwill and support of [p. 164] all, as well as vocations for the work of Our Lady and Don Bosco. He remarked that assistance, as Don Bosco wished it, had never been missing, and that in the various groups the spreading of God's good seed had been evident. "Be cheerful then," he concluded, "Our Lady is with us!"

How the novices spoke of it

The comments which might be heard here and there in the House next day proved him right. Significant parts of conversations with parents and friends were being repeated.

But then, are you really happy here? Don't you want to run home? They say you have scarcely enough to eat! That you are hungry. . . and how can you be so happy? Do they ever treat you harshly, just to try you? Do they humiliate you in public? Is it true you have a Superior who seems very severe, but is really so good? . . .

You see, Mama, when I first came here, I did feel a kind of loneliness, and I remained apart, feeling sorry for myself. But when Mother passed, with one of those glances that went right to the depths of my soul, leaving there a smile of the Lord, believe me, all my sadness disappeared!

A few days ago I broke a bowl, and went to tell Mother Economer, while Mother was standing by. She addressed me in such a simple, motherly way that I was almost glad about my mishap!

Another day Mother had put up on the door of our little chapel the "practice" for the day, and during recreation asked some of us about it. It so happened that no one could give an answer, and Mother suffered on account of the little importance which, according to her, we attached to small things. She did not reprove anyone, but on the following day she gave us this practice: Let us examine ourselves to see if ours is a life of mortification or of satisfaction.³⁹

As there was talk of the clothing, I went to Mother to ask if I could hope to be admitted and she replied: "The question of your being sent home has arisen, because you [p. 165] are hoarse, and give the impression that you could soon be afflicted with Sister Negrini's illness. But I made inquiries of your teacher and your curate, both of whom assured me that your parents are healthy, and that you also are, although your looks belie it. Get ready, therefore, for the clothing, and soon after you will profess." Therefore, I owe my happiness to Mother, who has been extremely good to me.⁴⁰

Naturally before talking of the clothing the Superiors made us understand the importance of the step. And in such cases Mother Mazzarello also plays her part. In one of her talks she said to us very seriously: "I recommend you to be very careful not to build up in religion your own little world; strive instead to acquire the religious spirit which forms saints, and if you do not feel you can practice virtue according to the spirit of the Institute, do not even think of putting on the religious habit."

I was already fighting within myself whether I should stay or go home, so I used this excuse to decide: "Home-I'm going. . . and soon, even if I have to walk it!" I spoke to Mother about it. She listened patiently, then said with a smile: "Listen, it's too late to go now, I wouldn't even have a companion to give you. Wait a few days, then not only will I allow you to go, but I will accompany you myself; are you pleased?"

Fortunately I waited, otherwise I would not be among the happy novices today. Who knows how sorry I would be!⁴¹

Fraternal confidence

To these impressions of a general character, details of frank fraternal encounters may be added.

As the date fixed for the clothing approached, fears I had already experienced returned to worry me. I went to Mother and said: "I am not educated enough to become a novice. I really know nothing."

"Look," she answered me, "that does not matter. I too do not know how to write-Mother Emilia writes my letters for [p. 166] me. We don't all have to become teachers. We also need cooks and laundresses, people to sweep and sew. The important thing is to do all for Jesus."

Her reply set my mind at ease, and I became a novice.

I had come nearly to the end of my postulancy without having written a word home, and the good Mother said to me:

"You never write to your dear ones? Have you already given them the good news?"

"Oh, Mother, I don't know how to put anything on paper!"

"Never mind! Sit there and write what you can."

I did really write as well as I knew, and you at home must have understood, as you are here! But be sure to thank Mother, who can work miracles with an ignoramus like me...

This morning they sent me to the garden to water the cabbages. Mother passed by, and seeing me with yesterday's new habit on, she smiled and asked me:

"Have you anything more suitable to wear for this work?"

"No, Mother!"

"Very well, go to the dormitory, and the first old habit you see, take it and put it on."

I did so, and am wearing it now. It has given occasion for laughter all round. But, anyway! It was Mother who got it for me and I can work freely in it without the worry of ruining it and so I am at ease.⁴²

I have been in Nizza for only two months, but I could not count the number of times I have experienced Mother's goodness. She evidently knows when I would like a roll, because if she sees me a bit pale, she asks me: "Are you hungry? Wait, I'll go and fetch you some bread!" She comes back, gives it to me and says: "Go to the cellar and eat it in peace, without anyone seeing you."

But she also knows when I have not been very attentive at meditation. If I do not answer her questions quickly, she changes the subject and asks me what time it is so she can hear me repeat: "It is time to love God!"

Then she adds: "Let us love Him with all our hearts."

Mother's goodness is past description: she dries all tears!

More than once, seeing me a bit sad, she asked me: "What are you thinking about? Whom are you thinking about? Have [p. 167] you some worries?" Sometimes I've had to answer: "Mother I've not been kind to a certain companion." She immediately encouraged me to make an act of humility, adding: "Thus you will be happier and can go peacefully to Holy Communion."⁴³

The other day I went to get my new shoes to wear for my clothing, but couldn't find them. Almost in tears I went to tell Mother, who said: "Go to the room where I sleep. There you will find a pair of shoes that are still good I think

they will fit you." I went and found a pair of slippers. I felt like laughing but realizing they belonged to Mother, I took them. They suited me very well, more my heart than my feet, of course.⁴⁴

Mother played a big one on me! When telling me I was accepted for the clothing, she went on her knees before me! When I think of it even now, I am filled with confusion and cannot describe what happens within me.⁴⁵

The boarders' testimony

A further addition to this anthology, gleaned from the postulants and novices, is the contribution of the boarders culled from conversations between themselves or with their relatives on the "big" day.

- What keeps us so happy here, we couldn't really say, but the fact is that after God and Our Lady, Mother Superior is the center of the House. She makes the sun shine even on rainy days, so much does she love us, and show her love for us in many ways.

- I think Mother sees within us, because what she says usually comes true. We ask her: "Who among us will become Sisters?" Without thinking much about it, she gives answers which... Who doesn't remember Angelina Piani, who wearing a chic little hat, came to say she wanted to be a Sister? Mother quickly answered her: "No, no, you will not be a Sister! . . . that little hat!" . . . Angelina did succeed in entering but then she had to go home to look after her mother who was ill; we have yet to see her back!⁴⁶

[p. 168] - I don't know how Mother can seem so severe, yet be so kindly. Seeing her you soon think she must be very observant and mortified, yet you never approach her without being consoled by her look, her smile and her words. With us girls, she is a real Mother.⁴⁷

It impresses me very much to see Mother with such a poor, yet well kept habit! It seems she always has before her eyes the image of the true spouse of Jesus, and that her one desire is to reproduce it.⁴⁸

- Our teachers and assistants are indeed specially chosen, because Mother gives us Sisters who treat us kindly, instruct us for life, and assist us in a sisterly way every hour of the day and night. But she doesn't permit coaxing and caresses, nor that we get our own way in every thing because she says we have to grow up with a strong heart, and learn to deny ourselves in some way everyday so as to be people who do honor to the Christian character, whether we form a family or "fall into the net of Jesus" and become Sisters.

- Without wanting to, I overheard her say to a Sister one day: "I repeat: the poorest children, including those of the Oratory, the boarders who are accepted at a reduced fee or *gratis*, especially if they are orphans, must be treated with even greater charity than the others. That doesn't mean caressing them. The others usually have relatives that surround them with care and affection while those who are poor, or who have lost their parents do not hear any words other than those echoed by their own sadness and humiliation. Don Bosco wants us first and foremost for poor girls."

I enjoyed so much hearing her speak like that, that I could have hugged her!⁴⁹

With such simple, spontaneous, clear-cut eulogies the Institute could not fail to gain in esteem and appreciation. Certainly, the parents, relatives and acquaintances who were present at the feast effectively made the propaganda of a newspaper for the boarding school, the Sisters and the work of Don Bosco.

[p. 169] Father Cagliero also could go back to Turin fully satisfied and gladden the heart of Don Bosco with an account of the beautiful impressions he had received at Nizza among Our Lady's Daughters.

A program for the month of June

The Director, Father Lemoyne reminded the community:

Tomorrow, the month of June opens with the feast of Our Lady of Grace.⁵⁰ Let us who live in the House of Our Lady of Grace keep the feast in the little chapel of our hearts, even if we do not have an external celebration.

Which of us could not say with Saint Alphonsus Liguori: "I am a grace of Mary?" The month of June is also a beautiful month of heavenly graces. Friday: universal feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus; Sunday the 6th is the anniversary of the miracle of the Blessed Sacrament; the 20th is the feast of Our Lady of Consolations-all very solemn feasts for Turin. And we are linked with Turin, because our Father, Don Bosco is there, together with our sweet Mother Mary

Help of Christians.

The 21st is the feast of Saint Aloysius, protector of our boys. On the 24th we have the feast of John the Baptist, Patron of Turin, the feast-day of our Father, Don Bosco. It is also my feast, isn't it? The 29th brings the feast of Peter and Paul-feast of the Holy Father, therefore, and of those who love him. Who among us would not live this month with good will, and so merit singular favors? Courage, then! Let us go forward with fervor and joy, beginning at once the triduum in preparation for the feast of the Sacred Heart.

The Director's words did not fall on unprepared soil. In her Good Night Mother brought it down to concrete everyday life: "During this month let us say very frequently: *Viva Gesù!* But let us not say it just for the sake of saying it. Let us say it from our hearts, because we are and wish to be [p. 170]loving spouses of Jesus!"⁵¹

Having observed the feast of the Sacred Heart with great fervor, on the 4th Mother proposed a very suitable practice.

"The Heart of Jesus beats in great harmony with humble souls. Who among us would not wish to be counted among them? Therefore, are we all agreed? This will be a month of acts of humility, far more outstanding than usual." Some came to the surface and were recorded on paper.

Competition in humility

Mother made a round of the dormitory to insure that order, something she had very much at heart, was being kept. Finding something of which she did not approve, she made it the subject of an instruction. She held in her hand a list with names and notes; Sisters, novices and postulants were assembled. She said she had no intention of giving a conference, but just wished to say that the order of a religious House mirrors the spirit that reigns there. Having found things here and there to be remedied, she believed she should read the names of those that... The first was a novice of noble lineage, one of the most highly esteemed by the community. The novice stood up and Mother said:

"Your mattress is ripped. Are you not capable of giving it a few stitches?"

"You are right, Mother," the novice answered humbly.

I shall do it as soon as possible. Thank you."

Some others followed. Inspired by this example, they all showed such filial respect in receiving the admonition as to arouse the admiration of the community.

But when the reading in the refectory was in progress the moment came for Mother to play her part. She rose, took the book, and read in her slow, hesitant way, that all might know the level of education which she had reached.

Another day she had written a letter to some note worthy person, and called Mother Assistant to read it.

"Mother, this consonant should be doubled!"

[p. 171] "It's all the same: by not doubling it, I can be quicker, and save time, paper and ink.

"However, Mother. . . it changes the meaning!"

"Oh, look, it's all one to me; and the person who will read it is intelligent, will understand just the same what I wish to say, and will all the more readily understand that I am ignorant!"⁵²

Mother comments on the reading of the "Salesian Bulletin"

The reading of the June issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* in the refectory at Nizza aroused in all the desire to participate in the feast of Our Lady in Turin the following year, as the Sisters and girls of Chieri had done this year.

It was obvious that if Don Bosco was so favored by Providence, it was because he sought God's glory only in the salvation of souls. Mother stressed that if Don Bosco recommended sanctity and the salvation of souls to the Salesian Cooperators, all the more would he recommend these to his Daughters, first among the Salesian Cooperators. If Don Bosco in his conferences made the

Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and their work known, it was because he regarded them as part of the family.

Therefore, what the *Salesian Bulletin* says and asks in Don Bosco's name should be regarded by every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians as directed to herself, and each one should be recognizable, more by deeds than by words, as a true Salesian Sister. If then as Sisters they haven't money to give Don Bosco, they must give prayers, virtue and sacrifices, as Don Bosco teaches those Cooperators who, though poor, are rich in good will. Such are, in truth, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Only in this way can they claim to be daughters of such a father!⁵³

[p. 172] First news of the civil war in Buenos Aires

Already at the beginning of the month, the Director, Father Lemoyne had asked Mother to have prayers offered according to the special intentions of Don Bosco, because the papers said that Buenos Aires was going through a critical moment of political revolts, which naturally entailed anxieties for the missionaries.

Mother felt this worry keenly, and as Don Bosco's feast-day drew near, she suggested to Father Lemoyne: "Go to Turin yourself. Take our modest gift, our wishes and prayers to our Father. Spend the feast with your confreres. Who knows, maybe when you come back you may have some news of our poor missionary Sisters!"

Father Lemoyne did not need a second invitation!

Mother writes to the Sisters of Catania

In the meantime, Mother, though in Turin in spirit, wrote to Sister Orsola Camisassa.

Viva Gesù e Maria!

My good Sister Orsola and Sisters,

I received your letters and sincerely thank you for your wishes. Still more do I thank you for the prayers you offered for me. With all my heart I wish that the Lord may reward you and fill your souls with His choicest blessings.

Oh, yes, my good and dear Sisters, if you only knew how much I think of you. A minute scarcely passes that my mind does not travel to you, and often my heart aches at not being able to see you near me!! But, patience! A day will come when we shall always be united in spirit and body. For the present let us be content to be united in spirit, and let us always converse in the Heart of Jesus. Say many lovely things for me when you are united in this adorable Heart, especially when you go to receive Him in Holy Communion.

[p. 173] I assure you that I pray always for you, but most of all in those precious moments when I receive Him into my Heart. I ask Him to give you those so necessary virtues: humility, charity and patience. . . Yes, my dear, dear Sisters, take courage! Jesus loves you. It is true that you have many worries and trouble at times; but the Lord wishes us to have something to suffer in this life. He has given us example in suffering; let us then follow Him by suffering with resignation. Be sure that those to whom Jesus gives most suffering are the nearest to Him. But we must do every thing with purity of intention to please Him only, if we wish to have the reward.

I am really sorry that your health is not so good. Look after yourselves and provide what is necessary. I hear that it is very hot there. Take measures to protect yourselves from the sun as much as you can. I was very sorry that the Duchess was annoyed with you, poor Sisters, but that doesn't matter. Roses will bloom again! As you know, thorns appear before roses, and so it has happened to you, is that not so? Oh, be cheerful, because the things of this world all pass away.

I forgot to thank you for the hundred lire you sent me. It was very welcome. I need it for all the expense of the builders. Thank you, thank you!

Now for news of us. Thank God, we are all well, with the exception of poor Mother Economer. For some twenty days she has been very ill, and the doctor says hers is not an illness that is easily cured! Poor Mother Economer! Say a special prayer for her; how sorry I would be if the Lord were to take her, but patience!

Sister Orsola, write to me a little more often.

I greet you all, recommending you to be cheerful and have courage. Say many things for me to those good girls; have them say a Hail Mary for my intentions.

All the Sisters, postulants, and boarders greet you and send you a *Viva Gesù*; answer them!

I could go on and on writing, but I've come to the end of the paper, so for this time I will conclude. I don't know if

you will understand this letter. I didn't rewrite it, but you know I cannot write. You will have to study it a little [p. 174] to understand it. God bless you and console you; believe me always to be

Nizza, June 24, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,
*Poor Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁵⁴

My regards to the Duchess.

Father Lemoyne brings news from Valdocco

On his return from Valdocco Father Lemoyne brought all the news. He described the festivities of the feast-day and told how Don Bosco had addressed words of life to all present, to be lived eternally. They would undoubtedly be reported in the *Salesian Bulletin*, and could then be handed on as a sacred heritage of the beloved Father.

In the meantime, [continued the Director,] we must share what we receive with our nearest neighbors in Don Bosco's Houses. While others go to the American missions in search of souls to save, we must be the light and salt of God in our own country, where the enemies of good are also at work. That is what Don Bosco wants from us. He has no other desire than to fill heaven with saints and turn hell into a desert.

All Don Bosco's Sons and Daughters must help him in the regeneration of youth; all must cooperate to Christianize families and society. All must prove themselves products of the school of Saint Francis de Sales through the practice of sweetness and gentleness. And each must sow good seed in his own field, that flowers and fruits of sanctity may grow there.⁵⁵

In an undertone the Director told Mother that Our Lady had saved Don Bosco from a would-be assassin, who had again attempted to kill him. Unfortunately, it was a past-pupil of the Oratory, exploited by Free Masons, but so affectionate to Don Bosco that he had not the courage to carry out his commission. Filled with remorse, he had thrown himself in the River Po, but was rescued. Now Don [p. 175] Bosco was taking prudent and opportune steps to secure his safety by sending him out of Italy. Once again Don Bosco's greatness of heart was manifest, as well as Our Lady's protection of him.

"With regard to the revolution in Buenos Aires," Father Lemoyne went on quietly, "let us continue to pray. Disorders and dangers abound, but Our Lady is there: let us trust her."

Sister Madelene Martini's letter to Don Bosco

Father Lemoyne also brought Sister Martini's letter to Don Bosco, lent to him on condition that it be speedily returned for publication in the *Salesian Bulletin*.⁵⁶ It was a letter of greetings with various news items. Mother had a copy made to be read to the Sisters, and to be used as the subject of exhortations.

Very Reverend and beloved Father in Jesus Christ,

This is 1880. We, young poor Daughters in America, had hoped to have the pleasure of celebrating your feast-day in your presence here this year. But it was a vain hope, so we must sacrifice it and be patient! That notwithstanding, we cannot refrain from wishing you a thousand spiritual and temporal felicitations, and many years of life for the good of our souls and of many others. We offer you these cordial wishes on behalf of thousands of American girls who attend our schools and frequent our Houses. They also love you as their Father, and regret they do not know you except by reputation.

We wish to renew the expression of our gratitude to you for having sent us here. How much good we could do if only we were capable! How many poor children to be saved! How many lovely gems to decorate our crowns!

Pray, good Father, that we may correspond to the graces we have received, and that we may never lose heart.

Were it not presumptuous on our part, we would beg of you, since you cannot come to visit us, to be so kind as to send us, in writing, some words of yours capable of infusing [p. 176] courage and the desire for virtue into us. We know that you are overwhelmed with work; nevertheless we cannot hide this desire of ours from you. We hope that in your paternal goodness you will fulfill it.

We feel that some news from here will be very acceptable to you.

We have good news from Patagonia. Our Sisters there tell us they are very happy with their situation, and are delighted they already have classes to instruct a good number of poor girls and prepare them to receive the sacraments.

The Sisters at La Boca already have hundreds of children in their school, and their progress in virtue makes us think the work is blessed by the Lord. Quite a number of them, already mature, were admitted to First Communion. What sweet consolations for us and for them! They are joys the world cannot give, and which we ourselves cannot express, but so great that they abundantly compensate us for the sacrifices made for the love of God and the good of souls. Let others keep and enjoy their worldly pleasures. We would never exchange the least of ours for theirs.

At Las Piedras we also teach, but the number of girls is not yet as great as we would wish, even though it has increased since last year. At Villa Colon, we do what we can, as the number of Sisters is small.

At San Carlos too the personnel is inadequate, and we are unable to cope with all the work. Within the last month two postulants have entered. They are very promising, but quite insufficient for our present needs. Vocations are very scarce in these parts, and therefore, we beseech you, Father, to send the next expedition of Sisters so they may help us. What a wonderful gift it would be if you were to send our dear Mother General to accompany them!

I have come to the end of the page and must finish. I recommend my relatives to your prayers. I ask for myself and all the Sisters in America your paternal blessing, and with deep respect I remain, Very Reverend Father,

Almagro, May 5, 1880

Your deeply indebted Daughter in J.C.

Sister Mary Madelene Martini

[p. 177] Sister Elisa Roncallo goes to Alassio for treatment

As early as Pentecost Sister Elisa Roncallo had written to her mother saying that she had gland trouble, and was perhaps in need of sea air. On the 18th she wrote again: "Many thanks for the card you sent me; perhaps in a few days or before the end of the month, I shall go to Alassio, for my gland which is not getting better. Among other things, could you pay the journey for me? Going to Alassio is a big sacrifice for me!"

Now at the end of June, when school work was at its height, she had to leave Nizza for Liguria. The delicate Sister Teresina Mazzarello and a boarder accompanied her.

From Alassio Sister Elisa again wrote to her mother: "I am here at Alassio! This year Mother Superior's feast will not be celebrated at Nizza on the 6th as formerly, but on the 15th. How sorry I am to miss it! Will you send her a basket of plums on that day?"

It is obvious that the divine lesson: "Give and it will be given to you," was well understood by Sister Elisa. Truly her opportune and frequent acts of humility provided her with as many means of charity, which was the only thing she aimed at, following the example of Don Bosco.

In her humble, secret way, she knew how to find Cooperators to lessen the material anxieties of her Superiors, increase the number of girls helped in our Houses, to attract poor vocations and more especially perhaps, to attract Oratorians to the catechism lessons and dry the tears of every class of people whom she approached to lead to God!

This mode of acting was part of Don Bosco's program, which he had expressed in a conference given at San Beigno, the previous June 4.⁵⁷

During the absence of Sister Elisa Roncallo the boarders of Nizza were more directly under the guidance of Mother Emilia Mosca, helped in matters of general discipline and in the workroom by Mother Enrichetta, and in the school section by Sister Madelene Morano.

[p. 178] Borgo San Martino celebrates the third centenary of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga's First Communion

The girls were diligent, studied seriously, gave consoling proofs of solid piety, and it would seem that God's eyes rested on not a few of them, choosing them to follow the Queen of Virgins. The various references made by Salesian Fathers and Sisters to the life of Saint Aloysius, proposed on this third centenary of his First Communion as a model for the youth of the Catholic world, contributed in no small measure to this.

Borgo San Martino had celebrated the event solemnly on July 1, with an extraordinary concourse

of Cooperators of both sexes from Monferrato. Monsignor Ferré, Bishop of the Diocese, was present as well as Don Bosco. The Sisters wrote just a few lines but they expressed all the solemnity of the occasion, as well as their own joy of spirit in having been able to see Don Bosco even for a few minutes. One could read between the lines the amount of work it entailed. Dear Sisters! They were truly admirable in their generosity and sacrifice, in tiring hidden work, especially in these circumstances. It was a fact which did not escape Don Bosco, because he never left without a good word and one of his masses in their little chapel.

Maternal understanding

Sister Pacotto felt the extreme summer heat of those days more than others; in her case it brought about physical prostration. Even though she had a special diet at meal time and was allowed the afternoon snack she was overcome by exhaustion to the extent that on waking up at 11 :00 or 12 o'clock at night she remained awake until morning.

Telling Mother of her painful condition, she asked: "Might it not be a temptation of the devil?" Mother looked kindly at her: "It doesn't matter," she said. "When you wake up tonight, go to the kitchen. You will find what [p. 179] will help you prepared there. Take it freely."

"But Holy Communion?"

"Leave that to me!"

At 11 :00 p.m., with a light knock on the dormitory door, the novice Sister Lucy Garino, assistant infirmarian, entered carrying a little lamp, a cup of milk and a slice of bread. "Mother Superior wishes you to take it all," she said to Sister Pacotta.

This maternal charity continued until the wearisome prostrations ceased.

For others, who at 10:00 a.m. especially on vigils or fast days, asked to leave the workroom to get some fresh air, Mother had another method: "Poor thing, you need food, not fresh air! Go into the kitchen and ask them to give you something; then by all means go for a little walk if you still feel the need!"

To the Sisters in Uruguay

Mother's goodness of heart also appears in the following letters written to the Sisters in Uruguay.
58

Viva Maria, Gesù e S.G!

My good and beloved Daughters in Jesus, of Villa Colon and Las Piedras,

It always gives me pleasure to get letters from the Sisters of the various Houses, but those I receive from America make me feel an indescribable something which I cannot explain. It seems as if time and distance, instead of diminishing, have rather increased the holy and real affection which I have for each one of you.

Imagine then how welcome your affectionate wishes are! Yes, I hope the Lord will hear your prayers and grant me all those virtues, which I need to fulfill my duty. You tell me that henceforth you do not merely wish to be Sisters in name only, but in fact. Good! That is really fine! Continue to go forward like that always; remember that time passes in America just as it does in Italy, and soon we shall find ourselves [p. 180] at the hour which will decide our fate. We shall indeed be happy if we have been true Sisters. Jesus will receive us as a spouse receives his bride. But to be true religious we must be humble in all our ways, not only in words but also in deeds. We must be exact in the observance of our holy Rule. We must love all our Sisters with true charity and respect the Superior God gives us, whoever she may be...

But what am I doing? Without noticing it, I am giving you a sermon instead of thanking you for your lovely wishes. By way of thanks I've asked all the community to offer Holy Communion for you. Are you pleased?

You wish to know when I am coming to see you. I would like to go at once, but I cannot go until I am sent. Don Bosco and Father Cagliero have promised to let me go, but I don't know when . . . it is up to you to write to the Superiors: to Father Cagliero and Don Bosco. Then be sure that if it is the will of God, I will certainly go. But if the Lord does not permit that we meet again in this life, we shall see one another in heaven, won't we? When you receive this letter we may perhaps be beginning the retreat. Pray that we may make it well. If you wish to come, we shall go to Genoa to meet you. Pray also for a good number of postulants who will then be clothed, and for Mother Economer, who is ill, as you know. Up until now, she has not improved in the least. Only Our Lady can cure her;

pray therefore with all your heart. For the rest, thank God, we are all well. In the other Houses, and in general, all enjoy good health.

I will not try to describe the lovely feast we had for Mary Help of Christians; I will just say we celebrated it with all solemnity. There were sixteen clothings, and mass and Vespers sung. It was just like those feasts we had when we were all at Mornese; some of you will still remember. I shall conclude as I want to write to the Sisters who wrote individually to me. Courage, my dearly loved Sisters. I recommend you to love one another, to have confidence in your Superiors or in those who take their place; and remember to do all your actions with the sole aim of pleasing God.

Give my regards to your good Reverend Director, and [p. 181] recommend me to his fervent prayers. All the Sisters send you a million greetings and ask your prayers; they pray for all of you. I wish you every heavenly blessing, and am,

Nizza, July 9, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in J.

Poor Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù, Maria e S.G.

My dear Sister Teresina (Mazzarello),

Are you cheerful? Are you still happy to have gone to America? Are you well? Do you still have high temperature? Get rid of it, for you can't afford to be ill. You have a lot of work to do, don't you? Have you made your retreat? Then you must be full of fervor, an example of obedience, of charity, of precision in everything.

Be very careful not to allow the fire, which the Lord in those days kindled in your heart, to be extinguished. Remember it is not sufficient to make good resolutions; we must practice them if we wish the Lord to prepare for us a beautiful crown in heaven. Courage, then, my dear Sister Teresina. Strive to be always humble and sincere. Pray much, and with all your heart. Be respectful to your Superiors and to all. Perform all your actions as if they were to be the last of your life and thus you will always be happy.

Your parents are well, they send you greetings and ask you to pray much for them, so also your Sister Rosina who is still at Biella. Pray much also for me, who never forget you. Felicina, I mean the Superior of Borgo San Martino, sends many greetings. Be cheerful and help to keep all the other Sisters cheerful, especially the new novice.

I leave you in the Heart of Jesus. May He bless you and

Nizza, July 9, 1880

Your affectionate Mother,
Poor Sister Mary Mazzarello

[p. 182]

Viva Gesù, Maria e S.G!

My ever dear Sister Victoria (Cantù),

You have written to me twice, so I must really answer you. Don't think I have forgotten you. No, you are ever present in my heart, and I love you, as when you were in Mornese with me. How willingly I would go to see you! Although we are far apart we can be very near one another each day in the Heart of Jesus, and pray for one another there, can't we, Sister Victoria?

You tell me you are happy, and I am glad of that. You are in a place where you can gain many merits if you are first in the observance of the holy Rule, if you have great charity towards your Sisters, and if you are very humble. Have courage! It is true that we are not capable of anything, but with humility and prayer we shall keep the Lord near to us, and when He is with us all goes well. Never grow tired of practicing virtue; in a little while we shall be in heaven together. Oh, what a great feast we shall then have. Courage, therefore; be cheerful and keep all the Sisters and girls cheerful.

Are you all well in health? Take care of yourselves.

And is Sister Gedda cheerful? Tell her that I shall send a note to her the next time I write. In the meantime, let her keep her chin up, obey, pray for me and write to me sometimes.

Sister Victoria, remember to have prayers offered often for our deceased Sisters, and don't forget the needs of the Congregation.

Greetings from all, especially from Mother Vicar and Mother Assistant. Pray for me, who in the heart of Jesus profess to be,

Nizza, July 9, 1880

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù!

My good Sister Laura Rodriguez,

Thanks for the little note you sent me. I do not know you personally and perhaps in this miserable vale of tears, we shall not have the consolation of knowing one another, but I have a firm hope that we shall know one another in heaven. Oh, yes, up there we shall really celebrate a lovely feast the first time we see one another.

You are now professed; at least I hope so! I rejoice with you about the wonderful grace you have received from God. My good Sister Laura, be courageous in corresponding to so big a favor. Strive to be always faithful to the good resolutions you made on the blessed day of your profession. I recommend you to be always humble, to have great confidence in your Superiors, never to lose that cheerfulness which the Lord wants, and try in everything to make yourself pleasing to Jesus. Pray for me who love you much, even though I do not know you. I send you a picture; keep it in memory of me. Courage, then, be cheerful, and become a saint quickly.

May God bless you and make you all His own. Believe me always,

Nizza, July 9, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in the Lord,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù e Maria!

My dear, good girls [of Las Piedras],

Oh! how pleased I was to receive your dear and beautiful letter! How good you are to think of me and send me wishes! Even though I do not know you, I love you, and pray the Lord to give you all the graces and blessings you wished me. Pray for me always. I also pray always for you, asking God to help you grow up good, pious, and obedient.

Go willingly to the Sisters; tell them to teach you how to love the Lord and to know well your duties as good [p. 184] Christians. Avoid bad companions and always seek the company of those who are good.

Be very devoted to the Virgin Mary, our most tender Mother. Imitate her virtues, especially humility, purity and reserve. If you do this you will be happy in life and in death. I greatly desire to come and see you. Pray, and if it be God's will I shall go. Otherwise we shall see one another in heaven and that will be even better. Be good therefore, so that you may all go to heaven. Write to me sometime; your little letters give me such pleasure! Love your teachers, your assistants, but above all love Jesus and Mary.

In gratitude for your lovely wishes, I would like to send each one of you a nice picture, but how can I? You are so many and the letter would be overweight. For this time I shall send it to the one who wrote the letter. When I come to pay you that visit I shall bring one for each of you. In the meantime be good and pray for me. I greet you all, and in the Heart of Jesus believe me, your

Nizza, July 9, 1880

Affectionate,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

News from Argentina

From Buenos Aires came the news that precisely on the feast of Mary Help of Christians noteworthy events had taken place: the first American novice, Sister Laura Rodriguez, professed. Two cousins, Sisters Emilia Mathis and Mercedes Stabler, the first Argentinian vocations, received the religious habit. Finally, printed copies of the Rules, which the recently arrived missionary confreres had brought, were distributed for the first time.

The joy experienced on that day in kissing the dear little book, the new determination to aim at perfect observance—all this came through the letters.

There was no mention of the civil war, for the letters were written before that dismal day in June.

[p. 185] Now there was news of peace.

Mother wanted to celebrate a feast for she knew well how her Daughters had been caught between two fires; but. . . it was "better not to rejoice about it yet, so as not to run the risk of

rejoicing too soon. Let us still pray that it not go ill either with those who are alive or who were killed during the riot."

And the community really prayed.

Gratitude Day

July 15 was Gratitude Day: Mother's feast-day. Her name day was July 6, but the feast was postponed for scholastic reasons, and also to celebrate together Mother Enrichetta's feast (July 15) and Mother Emilia's whose name day fell in August, when the boarders would be at home.

Mother Mazzarello was very happy with the arrangements and said: "It is much better that way! Much better! I am not the only one who works with these young girls, and it is right that every Sister and Superior see her sacrifices recognized. Besides, that trains the girls to gratitude."

Mother's letter to the novice, Sister Octavia Bussolino

Sister Octavia Bussolino, a novice in Turin, had for some time been preparing with great fervor to be a missionary. Because of her exceptional piety, her zeal, and deeply rooted virtue, hope was given her that besides going to the missions, she would be admitted to perpetual profession without a further period of trial. Now as the big day drew near she wrote to Mother of the apprehensions raised by her humility. Mother replied without delay.

[\[p. 186\]](#)

Viva Gesù!

My good Sister Octavia,

Your little letter gave me much pleasure: I am glad you are well, that you work and study, but I would wish that you were always cheerful too. You must not think of the future. Now think only of perfecting yourself in virtue, work and study-then when the time comes to make the sacrifices, be certain the Lord will give you the strength necessary to do His holy will. Although you are in Turin, I never forget you, and always pray for you. So then, be at ease. For my part I shall be happy to see you make your vows, and I think the others are of the same mind. Prepare then to make them well, and become a true spouse of Jesus crucified. Have courage. Be always cheerful and pray much for Mother Economer. Greet the Sisters and your Superior for me, and offer a Communion for

Nizza, July, 1880

Yours affectionately in Jesus,

Mother

Many greetings from all the Sisters but especially from Mother Mistress and Mother Assistant.⁵⁹

End of school year

On the 29th, when final examination worries were over, the solemn Awards Day was held. Father Cagliero presided and gave the opening speech. Father Celestine Durando was also present, and both were very satisfied with the progress and diligence of the pupils. The principal authorities of the town, ecclesiastical and civil, relatives and acquaintances who had come for the occasion all returned home praising the school, where the Sisters were so well prepared and so dedicated to the real moral and cultural advancement of their girls.

By the 30th practically all the students had left Nizza, since accommodation must now be available for the lady [\[p. 187\]](#) retreatants, whom the *Salesian Bulletin* had already invited.⁶⁰

The retreatants arrive at Turin

If Nizza was a House of bustle and excitement in preparation for the ladies' retreat, the House in Turin was no less so, for the Sisters' retreat was to be held there.

Mother set out for Turin, while Sister Zoe Bianchi and Sister Angelina Sorbone left for Alassio, the better to prepare for the coming Teachers' College Examinations, held in September and October.

Mother was not really in the best health, and could not give herself as before to the Sister retreatants assembled at Valdocco, but her Daughters at Nizza thought it would be less fatiguing for her there. "At least she will not do all the heavy work there," they said; "Don Bosco will oblige her to have some extra rest." For the past month in fact she had not been at all well, yet would not allow herself any exception, holding to her principle: As long as we can, let us keep to the common life.

The last day of July—a Saturday—was fixed for the arrival of the Sister retreatants. The next day, Sunday, was a suitable day to spend in prayer before Mary Help of Christians, and to begin the visits for the *Portiuncola* Indulgence, while the festive greetings of the arrivals were exchanged with Mother and the Sisters of the House.

According to Don Bosco's way, Mother gave permission to the Sisters to exchange experiences and news, as long as this was done in a well subdued tone so as not to disturb those praying in the chapel, and on condition that care be taken not to fail in charity, but to make it an occasion of mutual edification.

The novice, Sister Rose Cordara, the vivacious Sister Rose, was in a state of indescribable joy on seeing "her" Mother again!

She had something to tell her that must be said immedi- [p. 188] ately. For her there was but a step from the main door to Mother's room, and in she went without considering time or convenience.

On coming out in the playground later she openly declared:

I really expected a good scolding... instead . . . How good Mother is! You see, the Bishop came to the parish and the Director's sister wanted us to stay to clean the church and help with the housework. This is not part of our duties. We might well have offered to do some little thing, but we didn't think of it! Well, the lady reproved our Superior about it. She was very mortified and suffered so much on account of it that she felt sick, and sent me to the Director next morning to ask his pardon. He, all goodness, said: .

"Oh, how is Sister Superior?" "She is ill," I dryly replied, "because of the reproof she got yesterday! You know, I'm sure, that your sister took her to task because we did not come to help her yesterday!"

The Director felt it very much and I was sorry for having spoken.

When I got home I naturally told everything to the Superior, who was thoroughly displeased, and then I too felt I had been imprudent and felt a heartache, a real pain in my heart! Enough! I just longed for Turin and Mother, and when I saw her I embraced her, weeping, and told her the whole story from start to finish. Do you know what she said to me in her admirable calm, after hearing it all? "My child, you had the Rule in mind; you really did nothing wrong! You could have been more prudent, yes! But oh, the Rule, the holy Rule, above all!"

Recreation with Mother

After dinner, recreation took on the character of familiar accounts of the continuous progress of the Oratories of Chieri and Turin, and of their Associations: the "Little Garden of Mary" in the former, and the "Daughters of the Sacred Heart" in the latter. This conversation rose naturally from the functions in chapel that morning. What fervor!

[p. 189] How many Communion for the Exercise for a Happy Death, and for the acquisition of the *Portiuncola* Indulgence! That proved the zeal which animated the Sisters in the Oratory under the guidance of the Superiors. Mother even asked questions in public so that all might be aware of the family news and learn from one another how to sanctify themselves and do good to souls.

By this means the bonds of fraternal charity were drawn ever -closer during the retreat and esteem for the Superiors increased.

"This morning it cheered my heart to see such a great crowd of young girls in the chapel!"

"Oh, yes! indeed, Did it not take you to Chieri in spirit? Who read in the June and especially the July *Bulletins* about the Chieri Oratory?"

"Yes, yes! We remember! But Mother, why did that

account finish by speaking of war?"⁶¹

Those who knew anything pretended not to understand. Mother was quick to come in with: "And where isn't there war? Who doesn't have it at home?"⁶²

The "Little Garden of Mary" at Chieri

"Is the *Little Garden of Mary* still flourishing at Chieri?"

"We still have the *Little Garden of Mary* introduced by Sister Rosalia Pestarino and directed by Father Bonetti. Each group of twelve has its own 'Queen.' They exchange practices once a month, and for our poor children it is wonderful! Perhaps other associations would not give such good results. "⁶³

[p. 190] The Daughters of the Sacred Heart at Turin

"Here in Turin instead," another chimed in "the Association of the Sacred Heart is in full sail."

"We saw it this morning; but tell the Sisters how you run it."

"Well, this year, due to the numbers, we have made two subdivisions: aspirants, those under 15 with the green ribbon; and "daughters" properly speaking with the red ribbon. All are provided with the regulations of the Association which contain a section on down-to-earth practices of piety, and the principal norms to carry out a zealous apostolate and do good not only in the Oratory, but also in families and within the sphere of their acquaintances.

Admission to the Association is almost as solemn as our profession: the singing of the *Veni Creator*; the question and answer formula; the giving of the ribbon; presentation of the regulations; the sermon for the occasion; benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. It concludes with a hymn.

After Vespers on Sunday, almost all the "Daughters" spontaneously remain in chapel to recite together their act of consecration before the statue of the Sacred Heart, all lit up by candles, bought with their own spontaneously given little savings.

This year Father Cagliero introduced a beautiful innovation; he chose twelve from among the most exemplary Associates and gave them the title "Apostles" so they may do among the girls what the Company of Mary Immaculate, of which Dominic Savio was the first president, does among the boys, especially here in the Oratory of Valdocco. The Apostles are known to one another, but must not be known as such by their other companions. For this reason their special conferences have neither a fixed day, place or hour.

They say that through this means wonderful vocations will come to light.

[p. 191] The Children of Mary at Bordighera and Nizza

"Mother, what is done at Bordighera and Nizza for the Children of Mary?"

"At Bordighera, Sister Adele David tries to conduct the Children of Mary Sodality with a rule she drew up and which the Directors there and at Turin said to try *ad experimentum*. "⁶⁴

At Nizza they already have the Pious Union of the Children of Mary like that of Rome. In the meantime we try both. The Superiors said that, in due course, we shall try to have the same association for all. "

"In the meantime, my dear Sisters," Mother concluded, "let us treasure everything. I don't know if those who come after us will have all the help we now enjoy. After the visit, those who wish may go for an hour or two to see what is being done with these girls."

The retreat Mother's exhortations

The hour for the opening of the retreat-the evening of August 2-struck. The preachers were Father Cagliero and the Salesian Father Ascanio Savio, who certainly gave their best to their good, simple, attentive audience. In the confessionals too they were always available to the retreatants. Father Cagliero was delegated by Don Bosco to receive privately those who wished to speak to him.

There were seven first professions, one renewal of vows, and twenty-one final professions at the end of the retreat.

Many of this group of retreatants put their thoughts in writing:

Our dear Mother, though by no means well, was not absent from a single recreation. In her short "Good Nights" she gave us practical and sincere recommendations.

She asked us, for example, to hold chastity in high esteem [p. 192] for love of Our Lady of the Snow, on whose feast our Institute as born. Great reserve, therefore, in our looks, in dressing and undressing, and in our words, which should resemble those of the angels. In bed our posture and attire should be that in which we would wish to be found at the moment of death. We should be attentive to such things, especially when ill. We should refrain from overindulgence at table if we wish to keep the passions in check. We shouldn't let the children be overly free with us. We should avoid kissing, embracing, holding hands, or going arm in arm. In a word we should reflect Mary's image as Don Bosco would have us do.

As she spoke more than one among us said softly: "She is painting her own picture."

Father Cagliero said the human heart always seeks to surmount every law, to accept no bridle. In her Good Night Mother wished to emphasize this thought: "When the heart finds true charity in the House between Sisters and Superiors it does not ask for more; but if this charity is missing, it acts like a wild horse. Charity, therefore, charity! Let it be the flower we present to Jesus in every Communion, and the grace we ask of Him every time we pay Him a visit.

Some of you are sad because you do not feel affective fervor. This cannot be experienced if the spirit of mortification and sacrifice is lacking. In tomorrow's Communion let us ask Jesus why our hearts are so cold in prayer; let us listen well and respond to what He tells us."

"Mother," it was said, "laid bare her secret of always being fervent!"

"Mother must be like a child with Superiors and confessor, because she is always recommending sincerity in confession and confidence with Superiors."

Life at St. Cyr

It had been suggested to the Sisters of Turin to refrain from asking questions about the House of St. Cyr until the end of the retreat. Now Mother asked the novice, Sister Alexandrina Hugues, to tell the Sisters something about life [p. 193] there, to animate all to the spirit of poverty and sacrifice. In a mixture of French and Italian, Sister Hugues said:

When we got to St. Cyr there were three little orphans and five tertiary Sisters, including one who acted as Superior, and who even now looks after Father Vincent, the founder of the orphanage. We were graciously received, especially by...Lady Poverty! When it was time for a meal we had to go and look for it; not buying it, of course, but by begging.

This was what the other Sisters had done and we had to follow suit. The poor Superior wasn't yet able to speak French, and I understood only a little. So, for the first week, she was accompanied to the city by one of the tertiary Sisters, already known to all, and very kind to us. To go by train money was necessary, and we hadn't any. So we sold some vegetables to the neighbors, and with the proceeds they went to the city. They climbed many stairs but had received very little by noon, barely enough to bring them home.

When giving them alms a lady said she hoped they would enjoy a good lunch; but where, with what? The poor Superior's heart was full and she must have looked ill for the lady asked her: "Do you feel sick?" "No," her companion replied, "but we haven't had breakfast, and we do not know what to do."

The lady then gave them something more. They continued their begging until evening. By then they had enough to buy bread for the week, some other very necessary items, and the price of their train tickets.

At St. Cyr meat is a luxury reserved for Sunday, when rabbit is served. We went to the butcher's once on the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Our fare consists of some beans, potatoes, and codfish. If an egg is served to Superior when she is more tired than usual she passes it to the others. She never complains of our poverty and is always the first at work. To have a little income she took upon herself to acquire and look after some silkworms. According to the season, sweet violets and evergreens that grow in abundance on the hills are gathered, also olives and almonds, all of which are sold to obtain the necessities of life.

When chestnut time comes round, one of the tertiaries [p. 194] goes about with her donkey and little cart to ask a contribution from all the neighbors. These are the main provisions for winter. The corn is also gathered and a little

wheat, as also some fruit when in season.

Sister Enrichetta Telesio is in charge of the kitchen. I think she suffers most of all, when she has no food to cook. One day she was ill, and the Superior went to substitute for her. The poor creature must have been badly stuck, judging by the number of times she had to go upstairs to consult Sister Enrichetta, but eventually she produced a good soup.

The prefect of the Salesian House of La Navarre came to see us once: I can't describe what we went through, thinking he would stay for dinner, nor our joy on seeing him depart! There was absolutely nothing in the House!

The Superior is not well really. She suffers from the dampness and her arms ache dreadfully after a morning's washing. Her teeth ache from time to time too, and she is subject to headaches. Still, the heaviest, most tiring chores, such as scrubbing floors, are hers by choice.

She is greatly loved by the orphans, whose number has now increased, and she has even won over the tertiaries, who seem now to want to be Sisters like us. The Director humiliates her often, even in our presence, and for very trivial things, but when she is not present he says to us; "Look after her well, because she is a holy soul! I try her like that because I think God is preparing her for great things. You should imitate her all you can, and console her with your obedience." We are very happy with her and would do anything to please her.

Tears fell silently from some of the Turin Sisters as Sister Alexandrina spoke. Mother rejoiced to hear her Daughter praised and before the recreation ended said:

I wanted you to hear these things to make you realize that virtue does not consist in being good when all is going well with us, but above all when things are missing or when what we plan goes wrong. Also, affection towards Superiors is not shown in words but in deeds, as Sister Catherine shows when she suffers and prays, suffers and keeps silent, suffers and smiles."

[p. 195] Sister Rose Ferrari could now entertain us for hours, if I asked her to tell you about La Navarre, but we have had enough for today. Let us all prepare to suffer much for Jesus Christ, because suffering proves love, and those who love become saints.⁶⁵

Don Bosco sends another vocation

One day a girl, Ursulina Rinaldi, was presented to Mother. Don Bosco had sent her. Mother repeated for the Sisters what the girl had told her. She couldn't quite decide to ask to become a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians though she was convinced that the Lord was calling her. Seeing the Sisters take part in the games and recreations of the Oratorians, she doubted she would measure up to our way of life, because of the pain and swelling of her right foot, which troubled her after a walk or work that entailed standing for any length of time. And to cure it she needed a day in bed. She was advised by the Superior, Sister Pierina Marassi, to speak to Don Bosco. She presented herself in the sacristy while he was hearing the confessions of the boys and told him her problem. Don Bosco looked intently at her and then told her that her will should be more energetic; that her illness was a mere nothing; and that he needed good Sisters to send far, far away. He then had her kneel and recite the *Hail Mary* with him. He blessed her saying: "Go see Mother Mazzarello, who is in Turin these days. Tell her Don Bosco sends you to become a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. "

"Don Bosco," Mother continued, "had already told me about her, so I accepted her for the coming autumn. Do you see how Don Bosco sends us new little Sisters and obliges Our Lady to give special graces to them?"

"Now," she added, "let us see if those who received a visit from Don Bosco can remember our Father's words."

[p. 196] At Alassio, Mother, he told us to become real saints through the practice of the Constitutions, and especially through the spirit of piety. We asked him to bless a Sister who was in bed, because we were not able to cope with her work. He blessed her and she got up immediately. When leaving us he blessed the entire community and left us this thought: "Courage, my Daughters; in heaven we shall have rest, but now we must work and work much."

Don Bosco came frequently to Nizza-mare, but none of us was able to approach and talk to him. All the Superiors said to us: "He is very busy!" I had a great desire to meet him; I had seen him just once at a distance, and I asked the Director of the House to bring him to see us. He promised, but the following day he came to tell us: "I carried out your commission, and with a sigh Don Bosco answered me: Tell the Sisters that we are not made to see one another, to speak to one another in this world, but to be always together up there in heaven. "

Everybody smiled, including Mother, who concluded, "Poor Don Bosco! He too does all he can!"

Death of Father Bodrato

Mother must have wept, as her eyes were very red when she told us that Father Bodrato, Provincial in America, had died. The news had come by telegram. She added: "My heart told me we shouldn't rejoice too much when we heard that the civil war in Buenos Aires was over. Our poor dear Sisters, Father Costamagna and the others: who knows what they suffered during those days, and what is still in store for them! Let us pray, yes, let us pray for the living and the dead!" Father Bodrato was also from Mornese, and in a way was the Don Bosco of Buenos Aires! The details of this unexpected death were not yet available. Father Costamagna would no doubt send detailed information later.⁶⁶

[p. 197] Father Cagliero's "souvenirs"

The souvenirs of the retreat, given by Father Cagliero on the morning of the 10th, sent the retreatants back to their Houses and work with hearts overflowing with holy resolutions. "As Esther saved her people by her prayer to King Assureus, so every Daughter of Mary Help of Christians should save many sinners, and bring many souls to heaven by her prayers, love of Jesus, and sacrifices."

The first sacrifice all were called to make was to leave Turin without having seen Don Bosco for even one minute. At that time he was overburdened with work, preoccupations and sufferings. In the inner circle of the senior members it was said that new accusations were being made against him to the supreme ecclesiastical authority,⁶⁷ and that the attack on religious communities in France would not leave the Salesians unharmed.⁶⁸

The novice Sister Anna Mora dies

The Sisters left Turin on the 10th and 11th of August. Mother returned to Nizza, just in time to receive the vows of the novice, Sister Anna Mora, already at death's door. The Sister's life had been one of long sorrow, except for the three years she had spent at Nizza. She was a poor orphan but so greatly had she insisted on becoming a postulant, that she was finally admitted. Then, by sheer willpower she managed to stay on her feet, despite poor health. Her activity and observance were most edifying, and now with a sweet smile her gentle soul took flight from its earthly exile.

[p. 198] Preparations for the ladies' retreat

Having assisted the dying novice, Mother went to put the finishing touches to the preparations for accommodations and hospitality to be provided for fifty lady retreatants.

The Sisters had arranged things very well. Having to give up every bed and every room, they took straw to the attic as a mattress. Some among the elderly Sisters even had sleeping bags with holes in the sides for their arms, and all prepared to sleep on the floor of the attic which was fresh and clean. Those for whom there was no room went to the so-called "Bruna," a villa on the nearby hill, property of the novice Sister Maria Terzano.

The good fortune of going to either place was denied Mother. Therefore, that she might also contribute her sacrifice, she gave orders that Mother Emilia and Sister Sampietro, due to leave for France in the near future, be accommodated in her room. Embarrassed, Sister Sampietro remonstrated, but Mother reproached her gently and she yielded.

"Something very beautiful"

Sister Maria must not have slept very much during the first night, finding herself between two Superiors, and next morning she told her companions:

Last night Mother talked a lot and towards morning began to shout for joy. Then she asked Mother Assistant: "Did I disturb you a lot? I had such a beautiful dream! I saw Saint Agnes with a troupe *of* virgins, who followed her singing!"

[Sister Sampietro continued,] I said to myself: "Dear Mother! You are our Saint Agnes and we are your troupe *of* virgins."

[p. 199] News from Quargnento

Quargnento had its hour of glory: Don Bosco and Father Cagliero visited it between the end of July and the first Sunday of August. The archpriest and mayor gave them a great welcome. They were first conducted to the rectory and were then followed by a big crowd to the kindergarten, all decorated for the children's display. Besides the members of the cathedral chapter and the municipality, a major general of the army, seven Sisters of Charity and a vast crowd of men and women were present.

All went wonderfully well for the glory of God. To Him the Sisters offered the applause, acclamation and interminable congratulations: to Him, all the gratification and praise of the audience.

After the display Don Bosco addressed all present. with such words on devotion to Our Lady that no one could forget.

Many wished to have their names inscribed as members of the Devotees of Mary Help of Christians. The principal families, the authorities and the Marchioness Cuttica di Cassine were enrolled as Salesian Cooperators.

The latter invited Don Bosco to honor her family with a short visit, and he accepted. While he was pleasantly entertaining his illustrious hosts he heard the new bells of the parish church chime in festal tones: he listened, and said: "What a harmonious sound these bells have! Father Cagliero, find out where they were acquired; I should like to have similar ones for our church of Saint John the Evangelist!"

The Marchioness said in surprise:

"But Don Bosco, you say you have no money, and you are now undertaking other expenses? How can you do it?"

"Eh! Lady Marchioness," Don Bosco replied, "don't you know yet that Don Bosco always goes forward with *puf, puf, puf!*?"⁶⁹

The joy which Don Bosco's visit left in Quargnento was beyond description. And who can tell the more inti- [p. 200] mate joy it left in the hearts of his Daughters? Saints alone can do such good, even if only in passing.

A group of retreatants

Early on August 13, the remains of Sister Mora were laid to rest. In the afternoon the House was already full of retreatants who had accepted the invitation of the *Salesian Bulletin* of July. There were ninety in all.

Preaching the retreat was the indefatigable Father Cagliero and Monsignor Belasio, both of whom were ardent apostles of virginity, deeply versed in spirituality.

"Jesus, open my ears"

The retreatants wanted to meet Mother at any cost, but for some weeks now, besides the ever-present headaches, she was suffering from acute deafness. A ware that this impediment would not be easily solved, she unthinkingly let slip: "Jesus, just now when I should receive these ladies! I don't understand what they are saying to me!? If You want to please them, open my ears!"

Immediately the trouble disappeared, and she delightedly put herself at the disposal of those who wanted her. Yet she felt remorse as if for having been lacking in resignation, or perhaps self-esteem, as if she believed herself necessary to the extent of obliging the Lord to adapt Himself to her little virtue. She thought back on it all, perplexed. Father Lemoyne chanced to be passing by, and in the presence of the other Sisters Mother accused herself. He listened kindly, and at his word Mother's perfect calm returned. That was Mother: submissive as a child to the voice of those who directed her in the name of God, yet with a conscience as delicate as those of the greatest saints who sought the highest perfection in all they did. Hence her frequent question: "Is this a sin? An imperfection?" and her oft-[p. 201] repeated expression: "I have a great fear of purgatory, because it will keep me away from heaven and from God."

Nizza celebrates Don Bosco's arrival

The feast of Our Lady's Assumption was characterized by exultation and love rather than the rigor of retreat silence, because it was the feast of *Our Lady of Grace* celebrated in the former monastery. The next day was gladdened by the arrival of Don Bosco. While desirous of gratifying the retreatants who wished to approach him, he also hoped to remain for the election of the Superior General and her Council.

He arrived at noon and was immediately conducted to an improvised hall where, in the presence of the ladies, who were scarcely able to contain themselves in semi-recollection, he was welcomed by the community with music, poetry and prose dictated by filial, devoted hearts. Mother had arranged things thus as the vital part of the retreat was to begin that afternoon, and she was anxious that the ladies see how the Sisters received their Father. Besides, she thought it wiser to be on the safe side, for Don Bosco often had to change his itinerary to adapt to compelling and unforeseen circumstances.

Father among his Daughters

Don Bosco enjoyed the entertainment and at the end said: "Your singing transported my thoughts to America, where precisely with song many souls are being saved." Then turning to the retreatants he said: "Let us get into the habit of making the preventive examination, so that the unforeseen won't lead us astray. ..

"I wonder why this thought now?" some asked themselves. Mother Mazzarello fixed her gaze on the greenish cape that covered the already bent shoulders of the revered [p. 202] Founder. As if he felt that glance, and almost as though to withdraw from it and answer the uppermost thought in the minds of many present, he leaned slightly towards Mother and said kindly: "If I could have a little polenta, I would be very happy; I had a cup of coffee at 4 o'clock this morning and I feel the fast!"

And Mother Mazzarello: "Oh, how stupid of us not to realize that you would need your dinner more than any entertainment! "

Those who overheard now understood: "If Don Bosco had not made the preventive examination himself, he surely would have dismissed us and our entertainment!"

Four of you in heaven!

In the meantime the Sisters forming the choir had come down from the stage to kiss Father's hand. He smiled, glancing around at the little group with one of those special looks of his: "Prepare to sing better in heaven," he said "Four of you will go there within a year!" As they kissed his hand his eye rested significantly on this and that Sister.⁷⁰

His words impressed them and gave food for thought...

For the ladies also he had a warning of the same nature given at the Good Night: "Four of you too," he said from the altar rail, "four of you will soon have to present yourselves before God's

tribunal!"

Some were so upset that on coming out of church they did not feel like going to bed. Mother Mazzarello and the other Superiors had a job on their hands to assure them that Our Lady would not permit any misfortune in her House, until they were all in God's grace. The next morning Mother Emilia took courage and went in to Don Bosco:

"For heaven's sake, Father, don't say such things any more because we cannot calm some very impressionable people! "

[p. 203] And Don Bosco said simply:

"I must do God's will! If God sends me this inspiration, I must speak!"⁷¹

The retreat took its normal course, but the door of Don Bosco's room was always crowded, because all wanted to get a word from the "Saint" and tell him of some heartache. Every evening he stood at the altar rail after night prayers for a few short words that went straight to the heart, and called forth resolutions for eternal salvation. The desire to hear him was great and his words were received with increased veneration each evening.

For the Holy Father's feast

The retreat closed on August 22, coinciding with the Holy Father's feast, and the occasion was used to renew in those good ladies their devotion to the Roman Pontiff. The *Salesian Bulletin* had already prepared the Salesian family for the event, and Don Bosco knew how to instill even more this devotion which he had so much at heart. The time and place were propitious: Our Lady's House, where days of special grace and fervent resolutions for Christian life were taken.

Father Rua also at Nizza

All expected Don Bosco to preside at the closing service with the *Te Deum* and give the "Souvenir." It was not to be.

Some said that he had very important letters to attend to, and that, perhaps, Father Rua would come from Turin. Was something big in the air?

Father Rua's arrival at Nizza that same day confirmed Mother's fears. As soon as the ladies were gone she told her vicar, Mother Petronilla, to invite Don Bosco to recreation with the Sisters. He accepted!

[p. 204] A recreation with Don Bosco

The good Father was soon surrounded by his Daughters. In the front line was a Sister who was notoriously mediocre in observance.

"Oh. . . how are you?" asked Don Bosco.

"Health wise, fairly well; spiritually, not even I know."

"Eh, look here. Bodily health does not generally depend on us, but on God. Health of soul, instead, depends only on our will, as God is always disposed to give it to us in generous measure, if we want it".⁷²

In the meantime Mother adroitly directed the group to the new wing, so Don Bosco might see and bless it.

He looked at it with great satisfaction and exclaimed: "Behold the miracles of Divine Providence and of Christian charity."

He then addressed some other words to Mother, who had not grasped the tenor of the conversation and with great content in her voice said to Don Bosco:

"You see, Father, besides all the other reasons I have already given you to be taken from this office of Superior General, I have the added novel one of having become almost deaf! "

"Really?!" Father answered. "Better still-you won't hear useless words!"

This time Mother understood and never again touched on this subject with Don Bosco. As he

withdrew from the group of Sisters, he said cleverly to them: "See that by your obedience your Mother may feel less the weight of her authority." ⁷³

Don Bosco's blessing for Sister Laureri

A novice, Sister Jacinta Laureri, could be thankful for having approached Don Bosco during these days! For some weeks her eyes had been so sore that it seemed religious profession was not for her. Furthermore after her return [p. 205] home, total blindness would be almost certain. Her companions advised her: "Stay in the dark-go to the darkest corner of the cellar; at least the light won't increase your suffering." And Mother Mazzarello: "Pray to Our Lady with all your heart to cure you, and then do not worry; you will make your profession." But her prayers seemed to have the contrary effect, and she felt this immensely.

Greatly discouraged, she followed the suggestion to make a novena to Pius IX, then one to the souls in purgatory to obtain at least the grace of resignation at having to return home almost or completely blind. During the second novena, begun on the feast of Our Lady of the Angels, Mother called her: "Listen, Jacinta, I have been thinking of sending you to Don Bosco for his blessing!"

The novice went to him. He asked her: "What do you want?"

Sister Jacinta told her sad story and Don Bosco, with the air of one who has not followed, asked another question:

"When Our Lady wants you in heaven, won't you be willing to go?"

"Oh, Father, I surely would want to go to heaven! But at the moment my sorrow is to have to leave here, to return to the world blind and miserable for all my life!"

"No, no don't worry! Our Lady has called you here, and wants you to do much good here. Are you professed or still a novice?"

"A novice, Father."

"Well, go straight to Mother and ask to be allowed to make your profession. Ask, ask, ask always! Now take this little medal of Our Lady and pray. In the meantime I will give you the blessing of

Mary Help of Christians and tomorrow morning I shall remember you at holy mass. ⁷⁴

Sister Jacinta went off full of faith. In fact, she gradually recovered her sight.

[p. 206] Sister Bonora is next for heaven

The announcement of the death of Sister Bonora came to Nizza. She had died at home. As a great favor she had been admitted to profession on August 15, and her good parish priest, who assisted her like a father, now sent to Nizza the details of her last days on earth. He expressed great admiration for her virtue, and concluded his letter with the thought which this young Sister had left for Don Bosco, her Superiors and all the Sisters.

"This will console Don Bosco in his sorrows," Mother said, and when she went to say good morning, she gave him the letter about that happy death. Then she was informed that he could no longer stay with them, not even to open the Sister's retreat.

Would he return for the election of the Superiors? Most unlikely if one judged by confidential allusions made by Father Rua to the unexpected searches being carried out in the Salesian Oratory of Valdocco during those days, as painful as they were unjustifiable. ⁷⁵

Don Bosco's self-control and charity

August 25, last day of Don Bosco's stay at Nizza, was memorable for another happening. The interested party, a postulant called Jacinta Morzoni, tells the story:

I had been told that one of my companions would have to return home for health reasons, and we were frequently reminded that to be clothed and professed, health was vitally important. A great fear came on me. If I fell ill, I would

surely have to go away from Nizza, where I was so happy. This fear brought to life a great desire to speak to Don Bosco. But when and how, since the line of those who wished to speak to him was growing ever longer outside his door?

While I was deciding to overcome my timidity at any cost, the assistant, Sister Josephine Pacotto, came to tell [p. 207] me to go with my companions to the "Bruna" to tidy the place, as some visitors were expected. What a disappointment! But I would go, be quick, and return soon. Without giving a thought to permissions, I came back to stand near Don Bosco's door, which was still surrounded by Sisters: "Oh, dear postulant," one of them said to me, "You can go away, you know! The train Don Bosco has to take has already whistled its arrival at the station. He can't receive even us, who have been waiting so long!"

I neither answered nor moved; and behold, out came to. He was ready to go.

All crowded around him to show how much they regretted his having to leave, and I, the last of the line stood on my tiptoe and said aloud: "Father, I have a little thing I want to tell you!" In his goodness and condescension he made a sign to make way for me. I introduced myself; he kindly lifted me up-I had knelt-had me sit down, and listened to me as if he was in no hurry to leave. To my last question, he replied: "Yes! The Lord will give you health and holiness!" It was all I wanted! I kissed his hand and came out happily, under the eyes of all the Sisters, who envied my good fortune!

Great was the disappointment of the retreatants who found him gone on their arrival. They had hoped to have him with them for those days.

As she descended from the Biella train, Sister Agnes Ricci saw him about to depart for Turin. She did not hesitate to tell him of her great disappointment at not being able to speak to him. Don Bosco, with an "Excuse me" to the priests and gentlemen who surrounded him, stepped aside to speak to her. The whistle blew; Don Bosco remained unperturbed. Only when the priests called out: "Don Bosco, you will miss the train!" did he say good-bye. Raising his hand in benediction, he left her serene and completely satisfied.

[p. 208] Mother goes to Lu with four boarders

When Don Bosco had gone, Mother decided to go to Lu Monferrato. She would thus escape the remonstrances of the Sisters, who absolutely did not want her to tire herself with retreat preparations. She would accompany four boarders, the Tavella and Grici sisters, for a short holiday in the house of the Rota family, where these girls would be treated as their own children. It would also give her a chance to pay a visit to the House there, which she had not seen that year, before as she said-her term of office expired. Within twenty-four hours she would be back to receive the retreatants.

She set out with the four girls, who were delighted with their good fortune.

When the majority of the retreatants arrived next day, she was already there to welcome them, ready to answer their filial and joyful greetings.

Sisters' retreat

At 6:00 p.m. on August 25, Father Francis Dalmazzo, Salesian procurator to the Holy See, arrived at Nizza to preach the meditations of the retreat. Monsignor Belasio had already gone back to Turin, and Father Cagliero had remained to give the instructions. Thus began the retreat which would close with the elections of the Superior Council.

"Do as I tell you"

Mother Mazzarello spoke to the assembled Sisters, and with tears in her eyes recommended them to pray...pray because, as she had said over and over again, she no longer felt she could carry on as Superior General. The reasons were manifold: before all else she found her [p. 209] self unable to keep the fervor of the religious spirit in the bloom of the early years. Besides, many Sisters were better educated, more virtuous, more capable than she of governing the Institute. Lastly, her health no longer permitted her to work as much as was necessary to govern the Congregation.

To Sister Josephine Pacotto she had already said in private: "You Sisters are thinking of

reelecting me as Superior General, but believe me, that is useless. Next year you will have to elect another. In fact, I offered myself as a victim for Annette Bedarida because, as you know already, it was my fault that she was never baptized. I offered myself for her and for something else!"

The young lady, in fact, wanted to be baptized publicly and with all pomp and ceremony. In view of the circumstances, Mother thought it would be more prudent to have her baptized privately in the chapel of Valdocco, Turin. Miss Bedarida would not accept this and remained without Baptism.

Sister Josephine had taken advantage of Don Bosco's presence at Nizza to tell him this secret, adding: "Could the victim be changed? Instead of Mother, I would offer myself." Don Bosco replied: "It is too late: the victim has already been accepted!"

Now Mother turned to Sister Pacotto: "Listen: you could vote for Sister Madelene Martini to become Superior, although I fear Father Cagliero would object as she is in America, and she too has poor health. Or you could vote for Sister Catherine Daghero. Both Sisters have great charity, a most necessary virtue for a Superior. Besides, the Congregation now needs educated Superiors because the young people who enter are educated and therefore are more difficult to judge where virtue is concerned. Country girls soon reveal themselves for what they are. To direct the more educated, a virtue enlightened by instruction is necessary, and the two Sisters I have named have both.

To prevent inconvenience during the coming year, wouldn't it be better to do things well now?"

[p. 210] Sister Pacotto insisted with one reason after another and Mother answered: "Do as I say; give the vote to Sister Catherine Daghero, and when I die you will have no confusion! "

Mother was actually wasting away visibly, and-most unusual-she left the Sister retreatants during recreation with Mother Emilia, Mother Enrichetta and Mother Catherine Daghero, who had come back from St. Cyr. The unifying center was thus never missing and perhaps Mother thought in this way to make the other Superiors better known and appreciated by the Sisters.

Borgo San Martino in focus

It was on one of these occasions that Sister Josephine Bolzoni, a very candid novice, gave the ingenious account of her stay at Borgo San Martino:

I had been but a few days at Borgo when I was told that Mother had come for a short while only. I ran to her in tears to ask her to take me back to Nizza, because Borgo seemed like a hotel. She allowed me to give free vent to my pent-up feelings, then said: "Do you know what the Lord wants from you? That you work much, thinking of Our Lady, who worked willingly in the apostolic college at the very type of work in which you are engaged. Be cheerful, humble, obedient, and prepare well; then when you go to Nizza for the retreat you will make your profession. But don't delude yourself with the thought of remaining in the Mother House. You will just pass through unless, of course, you become ill in body and soul!"

At that time there were seven or eight of us novices at Borgo. Mother spoke to each one individually, recommending us to be exact in the observance of the holy Rule, especially on those points which help to prepare for the vows. "You must practice them before you take them." She also told us to be open with our Superiors and confessor, to be sincere, and not to hide anything. Then she went away almost immediately with Mother Enrichetta.

[p. 211] Anyone who hasn't been at Borgo San Martino cannot imagine the work there. This winter, we were often in the scullery until midnight. The scullery is a good distance from the House and isolated from it. There we washed interminable piles of plates. During this work we often had to throw boiling water on our sabots so we would not freeze fast to the floor.

One extremely cold evening I was going to bed, unusually troubled by the belief that I hadn't earned the bread I ate, and had thus betrayed the community (and I tell you it had been a day full of sacrifices!). The Superior, Mother Felicina, called me and asked me as a favor to go and fill the tank with water. This meant I would have to pump until 11:00 p.m. I immediately said to myself: "Here is an obedience which will make up for the emptiness of today." And I was pleased to have the opportunity.

In this I was not doing anything outstandingly virtuous; all the Borgo community, when bedtime comes, believe they have not deserved a night's sleep. They consider it laziness and lack of virtue to feel tired. No wonder, with a Superior like ours! Father Cagliero already said of her: "She has so much to suffer in body and soul that when she dies we will be able to call her 'Saint Felicina, virgin and martyr!' She really is a heroic person! . . . a true sister of Mother Mazzarello. And as the older Sisters of the House say, "Watch her when Mother comes to visit! See how she

goes around helping everywhere, leaving the community free to gather around Mother for awhile."

Last winter and spring poor Mother Felicina suffered a lot and it made us sad to see it. Father Belmonte, the Director, must have felt it too, because he came one day with a little bottle of Lourdes water telling us to try curing Sister Superior with it, and to make the month of Our Lady Help of Christians with great fervor, promising to sing a mass and make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Crea in thanksgiving if she got better.

The illness from which she had suffered for ten years, did, in fact, get better, and we kept our promise. Then, beside ourselves with joy, we wrote to Mother. I know her answer by heart, such was the impression it made on me: "Do not rejoice too much! You should know that Our Lady [p. 212]

does not give us graces for our own gratification. Be grateful to her, but prepare also to receive whatever the Lord sends. Do not get proud in the thought that your prayers have obtained the grace you desired; we are poor children, good for nothing. Our Lady is the real Superior, the true Superior of the Congregation. She knows what we need. We only have to be docile instruments in her hands."

Sister Catherine Daghero could have added her adventures in France but she only smiled and was silent.

Election of the Superior General and her Council

The Superiors' terms of office had expired and provisions had been made for the fast approaching admissions to clothing, profession, renewal of the vows and final vows. Unfortunately no hope was now entertained of Don Bosco's presence for the elections. On the other hand the departure of the two preachers could not be delayed beyond the end of the retreat. On an understanding with Don Bosco, August 29, dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, was fixed for the elections of the new Council.

The evening before, Mother came out of the refectory, looked at a group of Sisters and said to one of the Superiors who stood near her: "I must take advantage of the little time left to me, to give a last advice to someone; tomorrow when I am not in office I will no longer have the right to interfere in these matters." And with determination she went to fulfill this duty.

On the 29th, before the afternoon instruction, the Superiors-eighteen in all-assembled in chapel. Delegated by Don Bosco, the Director General presided, assisted by Father Dalmazzo and the local Director, Father Lemoyne. Some other members of the community were also present, but sat apart from those who were to vote. Some boarders who had not yet gone on holidays, or had already returned, were peeping curiously through the windows in the cupola and the little door of the choir. Silence was [p. 213] absolute, as no one wished to be sent away for disturbing.

The Director General's discourse followed the singing of the *Veni Creator* and the special prayers for the occasion. Next two scrutineers were chosen. Then, in perfect silence, and with some hesitation, they proceeded to the election of the Superior General. Mother Mazzarello was unanimously elected, to the great jubilation of all, herself excepted. She seemed sad in her pious resignation to God's will.

The other elections followed, making Sister Catherine Daghero as Vicar; Sister Joan Ferrettino, Economer; Sister Emilia Mosca, First Assistant; Sister Enrichetta Sorbone, Second Assistant.

The place did not permit an explosion of joy, and the Director General, having congratulated all, read the relative statement to be forwarded to Don Bosco for the required approval. ⁷⁶

While the candles were lit and the joyous music of the harmonium harmonized with the singing in the hearts of the Sisters, the smoke of the ballot sheets ascended from the little brazier at the side of the sacristy. When the *Te Deum* was intoned before the Blessed Sacrament exposed, there arose heavenward a devout prayer of thanksgiving and enthusiasm. At the end of the function, when the Sisters filed out into the corridor and playground nearby, the congratulations to the reelected "made the walls ring!" In the midst of all Mother Petronilla looked the personification of joy for Mother's reelection, and for the conviction that Mother Catherine Daghero could be of greater help to all and for all. For herself, the most humble place in God's House sufficed.

The girls made a circle round her and the Sisters addressed her with expressions of affectionate sympathy, and appreciation of her serene humility.

[p. 214] Favorite theme of Father Cagliero

After free expression had been given to the common joy, the retreat was resumed in perfect silence and holy concentration of spirit.

In the course of the instructions, the Director General developed one of his favorite themes: the need for custody of the heart.

Be vigilant of the heart, Sisters, because it is blind and deceives not only the young but also the old. In a convent a Sister of more than sixty years said to me, "Father, I do not know how to overcome my affection for a girl! Please pray for me..."

Be careful, Sisters, that the world not enter the House by means of the news from outside. Be vigilant about curiosity to know worldly affairs; that causes the loss of religious spirit. With seculars and also with priests, I do not tell you to be impolite. No! But be brief; prolonged conversations diminish fervor of spirit, just as an oven cools if the door is left open. Do not be overly confident because of your own age or that of others, but pray and be vigilant, because the heart is quick to escape from home and fly onto the roof top.⁷⁷

Mother stresses the same thought

In her Good Night Mother returned to this subject and added details. Her thought was more or less like this:

Let us be careful, Sisters about the danger of name days and feast-days. With the excuse of the gift to present, or the work to carry out, we can run into difficulties. To arrange things and please people the chattering is prolonged, little subterfuges in the matter of poverty follow, some stay up at night beyond the prescribed time, visits are made and visitors are received. Perhaps it may be the parish priest or another priest-giving occasion to words that offend charity, to little jealousies, to lack of trust. All this creates bad feeling, cold- [p. 215] ness and anxiety of conscience, and kills peace and joy in community and in souls.

Also certain words and expressions used by seculars . . . "I kiss you, embrace you, press you to my heart." Let us not use them, not even when we write to our relatives. The good religious will always find other ways of expressing her affection. In a word, let us avoid anything in our external conduct that is more becoming to a secular than to a person consecrated to God. All this in order to keep the mastery of our heart more easily, be true Daughters of Our Lady and belong entirely to Jesus alone."

Clothings and professions

On September 2 the retreat came to an end. The previous evening the names of those admitted to the clothing, first profession, renewal of vows, and final profession were read out. There was great rejoicing and handclapping. Mother too was pleased, but tempered the enthusiasm of the moment with a maternal reminder: "Very good indeed! However, everyone who has been accepted should think well. Unless she is determined to observe the Rule, there is still time to turn back.

It is far better to be a good secular than a religious who is not exemplary."

On the following morning, fourteen clothings, twenty-two first professions, one renewal, and twenty-seven perpetual professions crowned the feast of the retreat closure.

Father Cagliero, who presided over the entire function, gave the "Souvenir." He again touched a favorite theme in his masterly way: "You are consecrated to God and Our Lady. Your relatives and acquaintances know that when you entered religion, you would no longer belong to them or to the world. Therefore, live your commitment. If you do not, neither your conscience, nor your family, and least of all the world will approve of you.

When God called you to His service He asked for your [p. 216] heart. You gave it to Him, and everyday you again offer that gift through Our Lady's hands, repeating: I give my heart to you, Mother of Jesus, Mother of Love! *Remember this well, and keep your heart pure, you who are called angels of the earth.*"

Paternal approval

Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament accompanied by beautiful canticles followed. Then a joyful interval in the open air was ended by the tinkle of a bell calling the community to hear some important news.

The priests came too and in joyful tones Father Cagliero read Don Bosco's approval of the election to the Superior Council.

I have seen the statement submitted by you on the election to the Superior Council, and I herewith confirm the election of the Superior General and the members of the Superior Council of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. I ask God to infuse into all the spirit of charity and fervor, so that this humble Congregation of ours may increase in numbers. May it spread to many, many other remote countries of the world, where the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will save themselves by winning many souls for God. Then one day, in company with the souls they have saved, may they be united in the kingdom of heaven, to praise and bless God for all eternity .

Turin, September 1, 1880

Signed: *Father John Bosco*, Director

The acclamations were joyful and prolonged: "Viva Don Bosco! Viva Mary Help of Christians! Viva our Mother! Long live our Superiors!" And some echoed: "Long live the voters! "

[p. 217] Transfer and new foundations

The changes of personnel now claimed attention: Sister Catherine Daghero had to be substituted at St. Cyr and four new foundations had to be planned: Borgomasino for September 4, Melazzo d'Acqui, Penango, Este, and Bronte in Sicily for mid-October.

Mother did all in her power to sweeten the hours of detachment for Superiors and Sisters.

She spoke such nobly tender words with such exquisite kindness to her childhood friend, Mother Petronilla, that she did not feel in the least her change of office and diminution of authority. Mother presented a temporary stay at Alassio so attractively that Mother Petronilla offered spontaneously to go there right away. As Mother had suggested, this would make it easier for Sister Catherine to take over her new assignment as Vicar.

The novice, Rosina Bertone, who had been sent to Borgo San Martino almost immediately after her clothing, had been there only a few months.

"Listen," Mother said to her, "is it true you were not well at Borgo?"

"Yes, Mother!"

"Then you won't go there any more. I will send you as cook to Alassio."

"But Mother, I left all my things there, except what I'm wearing."

"That doesn't matter! They will give you all you need at Alassio. You are going to another House you can call your own. What better could you ask?"

Some days previously Sister Petronilla Brusasco had noticed with admiration that Mother Assistant's habit was so badly worn that darning had to be done almost every twenty-four hours. She went to Mother and asked permission to exchange her beautiful new habit for it. Mother was touched by this sisterly act of detachment and went to the workroom to see that Mother Emilia's needs be provided as soon as possible.

[p. 218] Sister Petronilla wept for consolation and Mother asked her:

"Sister Petronilla, if I asked you to stay at Nizza, would your answer be yes or no?"

"Oh, Mother, how could I say no to you after your condescension these days?"

Mother Felicina Mazzarello, Mother's sister, was due in Sicily for the opening of the House and school of Bronte. The Sisters of Borgo begged that she be allowed to go back to them even temporarily, as her departure for the island was not immediate. Understandably, Mother Felicina was of the same mind. Mother thought about it, took counsel, prayed, and though her heart was suspended on the balance between prudence and charity she eventually yielded, remembering the beautiful Piedmontese proverb: "One pleasure is worth more than a hundred displeasures."

September 4-first Saturday of the month- was chosen for the opening of Borgomasino. A kindergarten, primary school and festive Oratory were the works envisaged.⁷⁸ The personnel consisted of Sister Anna Oberti, substituted at Cascinette by Sister Philippina Canale, Sister Ursula Macocco and a new novice, Sister Franchina Moffa.

Father Cagliero accompanied them, and did not fail to tell them that Don Bosco had already blessed the new house. Like a good father Don Bosco had visited it, even before it had been assigned to the Sisters. He had advised that the rickety old staircase, leading from the playground to the dormitory, be changed lest his Daughters break their necks ascending or descending it!

Sisters Gusmaroli and Cagliero to heaven

While at Nizza there were departures and arrivals, from Turin there were two departures with heaven as their destination: Sister Rose Gusmaroli died on September 6, vigil of the Patronage of the Blessed Virgin, and Sister Maria Cagli- [p. 219] ero followed her on the 8th, the birthday of her who is called "Gate of Heaven. "

Sister Gusmaroli, a young Sister of rare virtue, had aimed above all at self denial. In those last days, she had often asked Jesus to increase her sufferings that she might resemble Him more. She had a vivid presentiment of her last hour, and fixing her gaze on something heavenly, with a smile bade adieu to this world.

Sister Maria Cagliero, only twenty-one years old, was so naturally timid that she had to do violence to herself to give lessons to the little children in Turin and Nizza. They were very happy with her and regarded her as a sister and friend. Such was her love of retirement that she often cried when she had to go for a walk. During the last days of her slow and painful illness she was asked if she suffered a lot. "Oh, not at all!" she replied, "I'm quite all right!"

Sister Elisa Roncallo ever industrious

Sister Elisa Roncallo had returned from Liguria to Nizza on April 1 and entertained the Sisters with stories and news of her "little mother," who was really a mother to all the Sisters. These were moments of relaxation and happy, outdoor recreations, when Superiors and Sisters, free from the cares of boarding school, were more open to practical lessons in Salesian apostolate which Sister Elisa was ever ready to impart.

I wrote to mama saying I was better. Of course I added that our dear Mother could be better, so that my dear mama will pray that our beloved Mother Superior recovers her former energy. I sent her a good number of tickets for the lottery, so she can dispose of them or send them back to me if she does not sell them. But that will never happen, because I know mama wants to cooperate in every way to sustain the works of Don Bosco and Mary Help of Christians. Also you, Sisters, get your relatives and friends to help a bit to promote our works!

[p. 220] I also told mama we would like to buy a monstrance for the church but that we have no funds. My mama has no money but she has a tongue and a heart, and she knows how to get it from her friends. I would have liked to send her the *Salesian Bulletin* but it had already been lent to someone else. So I promised to send it later, and sent her the pictures she had asked for-those of Our Lady Help of Christians, whom she loves and honors and has introduced to many.

The more I went on, the more I saw that while I was having treatment for my glands, I could do at least something for those I met and to whom I wrote. That I learned from Don Bosco in Turin and am happy to say these things to you, that you may also use them.

Of course I told mama about the unanimous elections of our Mother Superior. She was thrilled, as were also the Sisters of Alassio and Sampierdarena. Nobody had had the least doubt about the outcome; still, all rejoiced with me! If we tell our sorrows, even at times when they would be better left untold, why not tell our joys, since it is good that others should thank God with us? I find in this communication of good and beautiful things a special aspect of the family spirit.

Bravado of Maria the Negro

When things had returned to normal at Nizza, Mother again made herself available to the community.

First to claim her attention was Maria the Negro, the young African girl who had been in the House for some months. She had told her sad story to the boarders, who sometimes treated her with a sense of curiosity mixed with fear. She told how she had been stolen from her beautiful home at the age of four, and sold successively to various "owners." They had slashed her cheek as a sign of possession, and made it scar by rubbing in salt and vinegar.

The continuous movement in the House during recent weeks and the extra work demanding attention enabled her to elude assistance, and soon her conduct gave cause for alarm.

[p. 221] Lacking in self-control and guided by instinct, she was a menace when corrected or when her jealousy had been aroused. Then she would even brandish kitchen knives, and it was no easy matter to bring her to reason, nor was it possible to prevent her getting drunk, if she succeeded in going to the cellar . . .

In those moments when she absolutely lost control which were far from rare—all Mother's goodness and patience were called into play to calm her.⁷⁹

Daily life with the postulants

The postulants had priority in Mother's thoughts. She sent Lucy Vescovi home for a break during the grape season, that she might improve in health, assuring her that she could return for her clothing at the end of the year.

To relieve her remorse, another who was among the most promising, accused herself to Mother of having eased her hunger with a bunch of grapes plucked from the vine without permission: "No, child, you did not steal; what is mine is yours! But to insure you have the merit of obedience I permit you to eat not only grapes, but the other fruit of the vineyard, the never you feel hungry or have a good appetite."

No need to say that the postulant was grateful and the permission thus given was not abused.⁸⁰

Enrichetta Gamba saw her companions go to Mother one after another to chat with her. She was extremely timid, and although she went, words would not come. Eventually she managed to get out some self-accusations, and Mother: "I do it too; you know, I am just like you!"

Encouraged by this the postulant continued the accusations, thinking perhaps, she had to make a kind of confession; and Mother: "Miseries, my child, that both you and I have!" Enrichetta came out convinced that Mother was a saint.

[p. 222] Another day Mother asked the same postulant: "Why do you not go to read in the refectory?"

"Because during the reading those sitting near me at table eat my roll of bread. "

"Oh, poor thing! Go just the same and pass by my place as you come back, and I will keep your roll for you."

It was a question of Mother giving her own, of course.⁸¹

"You suffer from being so long in the workroom, don't you?" Mother asked the lively little postulant Vincenza Bessone.

"Well, yes, Mother!"

"Go for a run in the vineyard. Then go to the garden.

Ask them to let you water the lettuce, then come back and continue your work!"

That postulant later recalled an instance of Mother's wise pedagogy:

One morning Mother came to the workroom and said to us: "Dear postulants, I came to say good morning because at 11 a.m. I leave for Turin. If you have any messages I will take them for you."

And all: "Greet Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco, Father Cagliero, and the Sisters for us!" I was from Turin, and hadn't yet grown used to Nizza. I suffered very much; I ran down the stairs behind her.

"Mother," I said crying, "take me with you to Turin." "But why, Vincenza?" she asked.

"Because I want to join another Congregation."

"Ah yes? Well then, go and pack," Mother said without another word.

I ran to the wardrobe attendant while a great battle raged in my heart. Was it my Guardian Angel that kept suggesting to me: No sooner will you be in Turin than you will be sorry? If the Lord brought you here, you should stay here. Yet another voice made me reply: "I can't; I don't feel I can; I don't like it . . . I'm going!"

In the meantime I changed, prepared my suitcase, and returned to the workroom, expecting them to call me when it was time to go.

[p. 223] At 11:00 a.m. the Novice Mistress came to take me to lunch with Mother.

Through sheer embarrassment I wasn't able to taste even a spoonful of soup. Not one of the Superiors who were present with Mother encouraged me to eat, perhaps having been so directed by Mother-and I could do nothing but cry because of the interior conflict.

When Mother had finished she got up and with a maternal caress said to me: "My dear Vincenzina, I am very sorry, but you have not eaten anything and I can't take you to Turin. Be good, and you will see . . ."

At this point I cried aloud. Then Sister Pacotto, who had been present at the whole scene, took me by the hand and led me into chapel. We prayed together for a while before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians. Then with a few words, peace was restored to my soul, and the temptation to leave was gone forever.

Without Mother's firmness and charity I would not have persevered in my vocation.

Formative counsels of Mother

To Sister Pacotto, who had charge of the postulants, Mother gave many norms and directives to help her in the knowledge and religious formation of her subjects.

Remember that dispensation from silence between 10:00 and 10:30 a.m. is a point of Rule and must be respected like any other. Besides. . . in that half hour you will often get to know a postulant far better than at other times, because during it there is a sense of freedom from the vigilance of the assistant, and we must know how to profit by it. If someone is silent or moody, ask her what her parish church is like, who is its patron saint, if processions are held, and what feasts are solemnized. You will see that serenity will return and at the same time you will find out if they frequented the church and the sacraments. It's not a bad thing that they speak about home if there is among them someone who knows how to use it to advantage.

Don't be overconfident about those who are always [p. 224] inclined to hang around you. They are often weak in control of their affections, and other things besides. Be careful of the curious, the vain, the ambitious. These are feminine weaknesses, and are often cause of real disasters in community. Let the postulants understand well that the sweets of religious are ejaculations.⁸²

A postulant had charge of tidying the room of the Superiors. Mother, who greatly feared the effects of bad example, took care to anticipate it: "You see, this Mother always has a woolen mattress because she is not well, but ours is exactly the same as yours. (For the community a sack of corn leaves was used.)⁸³

Sister Felicina Ravazza approached Mother wishing to speak to her. "Let us sit here," Mother said, pointing to the steps that led to the workroom. "This way, while we talk about our affairs, we do not withdraw from the community. If we wish God to be always with us, let us never separate ourselves unnecessarily from the community. A religious who loves community life has a good spirit. It is good that the postulants understand this and see it in practice. "

After dinner one day Mother was passing through the refectory, where she saw little pieces of bread: "You see, Sister Pacotto, we must have a lot of discretion! Whoever is in charge must try to eat even when she does not feel like it, because there are some who are ashamed to take a little more according to their need when they see the Superior doing otherwise."

Lesson in simplicity

The community was invited to go to the vineyard one morning for breakfast, eating the good grapes that hung in rich clusters from the branches. Mother went also and in their happy company recalled a story about Sister Emma Ferrero. She had been among the most mortified. Mother knew it, and kept an eye on her. Passing between the rows [p. 225] like the others, in a very unobtrusive way she had managed to avoid tasting a single grape. Mother, not wishing to give her cause for a possible act of self-complacency, said nothing just then, but waited until the reading

in the refectory at dinner was over to ask:

"Did you all eat some of the good grapes this morning?"

"Just imagine, Mother! Who do you think would not avail of the opportunity?"

"Yet I know that someone did not!"

A general silence! Then Mother stood up and said in a rather severe tone:

"Let us see if she is obedient! Let the one who did not take any, raise her hand! "

Oh, that upraised hand, that crimson face of the confused Sister Emma! Then Mother softened, and her real self came to the fore: "Come here," she said, "take this fine bunch. They are good-better than you or me. I chose them among thousands, so eat them and they will do you good.

Next time take what Providence sends your way and don't be different. "84

Death of Sister Allara

Sister Angela Allara died at home in Tonco on October 7. All the treatment given her in Turin and Nizza proved useless. In vain also was her obedience to her parents who thought her native air would effect a cure, and wanted her at home.

Mother Mazzarello suffered intensely at the thought of all these young Sisters who were called away just when they were formed to the Salesian spirit and were enthusiastically disposed to do great things for God. It certainly gave food for thought! Was it privations? Admittedly these existed. But how much more privation was self-imposed by these good Sisters in their fervor and desire for suffering!

Poor Mother laid the blame at her own door, while the real cause was their thirst for sanctity.

[p. 226] The great fervor which reigned in the communities urged them forward. The lives of saints and the tortures of martyrs, read in public or in private, made their life seem too comfortable. They longed for the martyrdom of love, if not of blood. From this flowed their continuous holy rivalry on all occasions of sacrifice and privations, and their constant resolve to follow, at any cost, in the footsteps of this or that saint. The life of the spirit was so intense that the body could not withstand it.

Clothings and new foundations

But the fruits of the sacrifice were evident. For every Sister who died, two or three came to swell the ranks, and the works multiplied: a sign of God's complacency.

Two novices, Sisters Battestina Camera and Jacinta Morzoni, received the religious habit on the morning of October 15. In the afternoon departures took place for three new foundations at Melazzo, Penango, Bronte.

Father Cagliari gave energetic and encouraging answers to those Superiors who fearfully asked him: "Must I really leave Nizza? How will I ever take on the responsibility of a new House?"

Because of his apostolic enthusiasm and Mother's magnanimous fortitude, each group set out, confident in its mission.

Sister Josephine Torta, who was appointed Superior, Sisters Felicita Bezzato, Matilde Villate and a postulant were accompanied by Sister Ferrettino to Melazzo, where they opened a kindergarten and began a festive Oratory. The relative contracts were based on those of Cascinette.

With Sister Margaret Rasino as Superior, Sisters Colomba Cei, Maria Fiorito and Anna Torresan went to Penango to take charge of the kitchen and linen of the Salesian House and to open an Oratory.

The following were destined for Bronte: Mother Felicina Mazzarello, Sisters Angelina Buzzetti, Zoe Bianchi, [p. 227] Caroline Sorbone, and the two novices, Sisters Battestina Camera and Jacinta Morzoni.⁸⁵

It was unfortunate that the two novices had to go so far away, but they were entrusted to a Superior of sound judgment and kind heart, and were accompanied to their destination by the Director General. They were to open a boarding school for young girls, with elementary and

vocational schools and-of course-the festive Oratory, besides caring for a small hospital. On October 19 those chosen for the new House of Este left Nizza: Sisters Teresa Guglielminotti, Maria Dell'Acqua, Margaret Rognantino, Teresa Veglia, Maria Cassulo and the novice, Sister Angela Fantoni. They were to take over the kitchen and linen in the "Manfredini" School conducted by the Salesians.

Mother Catherine goes again to St. Cyr

The change of Superior was so keenly felt at St. Cyr by Sisters and orphans alike that the latter found it very hard to adapt to the new regime. Letters followed one another to Nizza in quick succession. Mother Mazzarello decided to send her Vicar back there for a few days, for it seemed to her that she, better than anyone else, could touch hearts and incline wills to accept the circumstances of the moment. Besides, there was a question of starting off the new year according to the program recently established by the orphanage.⁸⁶

Mother's letter to Don Bosco

At the end of the month Mother wrote about these recent happenings to Don Bosco.

[p. 228]

Eviva G. M. G.!

Reverend Rector Major,

I write these lines to bring you up to date on our affairs and to ask your advice about Sister Maritano.

As you know, this good Sister was for a long time tormented by scruples. After Father Cerruti blessed her, she said she was at peace. Instead of that, a physical ailment now seems to have taken over, which has kept her in bed with a temperature, a burning thirst, sore throat, upset of organic functions, etc.

But more than that, she sleeps all the time, is practically deaf, and seems in a stupor. At times she seems to be a bit crazy. The doctor comes everyday, prescribes something for her, but seeing that her condition is unchanged after twenty days treatment, he no longer knows what to think of it. She is physically ill, of that I am convinced, but I fear this may also be a consequence of some moral evil in the past or another form of her former illness.

Prudence would suggest, and many have intimated to me, that I call in a specialist and hear his opinion. But what if it is not a real physical illness, and they ordered a remedy that might ruin her health? All these things cannot be spoken about. Therefore I turn to you, who know what has happened up to now, to ask if I should or should not consult another doctor. This would set my mind at ease.

I ask you to be so kind as to send her a special blessing in which I have the greatest confidence. We also have fears about Sister Tersilla, but I trust Our Lady will cure her for me.

The others are well, happy and full of good will. The novices and postulants are many but all very much in need of instruction and assistance. A number of them have brought a variety of little passions from the world. If not corrected, these hinder perfection and spread to others.

Sister Catherine, the Vicar, has gone to pay a visit to St. Cyr, where it would seem there were some little "things to be arranged-insignificant things, you know. I would like

them to allow her to come back soon because I need her help with the girls and the schools.

I had good news from the other Houses. Two new kindergartens have been opened these days: Melazzo and Borgomas- [p. 229] sino, and on Tuesday the Sisters left for Este.

There are sixty boarders. If they continue to increase I will have to send the Sisters away to other Houses to make room for them, as the new wing has not yet fully dried. But what can I do? They still need formation in the spirit and works. Therefore we must be patient.

We had a visit from Countess Corsi, who brought me five hundred lire and told me she would do more for your Reverence there. I encouraged her to help you, thinking she would indeed do more for you.

I will conclude with my respects and those of the community, recommending myself and the Sisters to your fervent prayers. Your reply will be a great charity for me. If I do not hear from you I take it I should not consult another doctor in Sister Maritano's case.

Bless me, Father in J.C., and believe me with great esteem,

Nizza, October 30, 1880

Your humble Daughter,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁸⁷

Mother's letter to the Sisters in Patagonia

Mother wrote personally this time to the Sisters in Patagonia, happy to be with them even in spirit, to share in their merits, and to urge them to ever greater perfection.

My dear Sister Angelina Vallese) and Sisters,

I assure you that your dear letter brought me much consolation. May God be thanked for keeping you in good health and with good will to go ever forward in the way of perfection. My good Sisters, how is it that you have received only one letter from me, when I have written you another two? I am very sorry for this, dear Sisters, because I would like you to be really convinced that no day passes without my remembering all of you in prayer before Jesus.

I am very pleased that you have a Director who is concerned about your spiritual life. For this too, I thank the Lord. It is a great grace for us.

[p. 230] Now I must give you some news. Mother Economer is still sickly; however, she gets up and does what she can in her office. The others are all well, only that from time to time the Lord takes someone to heaven. In these last months, for example, in the House of Turin, Sisters Cagliari, Anna Mora and Gusmaroli left us. They all died a happy death, and I trust we already have them as protectors in heaven. Nevertheless I recommend them to your prayers.

Our dear Congregation is going well, through God's grace. We have many postulants and many requests to open Houses, schools and kindergartens, but we are short of formed personnel and there is not sufficient time for training in the various types of work. This year we opened four Houses: two in Sicily and two in Piedmont (kindergartens and schools) and two communities went to work in Don Bosco's schools. On the feast of Saint Teresa, my sister went to Sicily with Sisters Buzzetti, Carolina Sorbone and two others whom you do not know. Please thank Jesus for the help He gives me and beg Him to assist us with His holy grace.

And you, my dear Sister Angelina, take courage and pray much. Through prayer you will receive the help you need to fulfill your duties well. Always give good example to your Sisters by the observance of our holy Rule. Be always cheerful! Your joy should always be superior to your afflictions.

And you, my good Sister Joan: are you cheerful? Are you humble and observant of the holy Rule? If you wish to become a saint make haste, there's no time to lose. Try to win many souls for Jesus, with your work, toil and vigilance, but most of all by your good example. Instill a real devotion to Our Lady in the hearts of the girls. Always be cheerful and when annoyances come, put them all into the Heart of Jesus.

Sister Angela Cassulo, are you good? Do you love Jesus very much? See to it that you become holy very soon and wage war against self-love and self-will. Be cheerful. Your sister is here with me; she is well and sends you her wishes. Sister Catherine, are you cheerful? I hope so! How sad if we were to allow ourselves be overcome by melancholy. It is a pest which wreaks havoc in religious souls, because it is the daughter of self-love and leads to tepidity in God's [p. 231] service. Therefore, be cheerful always! If we fail sometimes, let us humble ourselves before God and our Superiors, and then let us go forward with a great and generous heart.

I recommend confidence with your Superior and confessor as a great means to holiness. Your sister hasn't written to me so I cannot tell you anything about her, not knowing where she is. Pray hard for me, be always cheerful and courageous! Therefore, my good Sisters, take heart; pray much for me and for all, and become saints. Greet the girls for me, and give a "Viva Gesù" to all.

Mother Mistress, Mother Assistant, Mother Economer, Sister Elisa, Sister Enrichetta and all the others commission me to say many things to you; they greet you, as also does the Director.

May God bless you and all your girls; pray always for the one who signs herself

Nizza, October 21, 1880

Affectionately in the Lord,

Sister Mary Mazzarello,

the Mother who loves you so much.

P.S. I gave your letter to good Mother Vicar who is in Alassio at the moment because Sister Catherine Daghero was elected to her office. Pray for her also; write to her, and write soon to me.⁸⁸

Conference on purity of intention

Sunday, October 24 united the feast of the Archangel Raphael with the commemoration of Mary Help of Christians and was the occasion of a conference by Mother to the entire community.

My Sisters, at this moment we are all here assembled in the same workroom, we wear the same habit and the same linen, we call one another Sister and in reality we seem like Sisters. Yet in heaven one will be high up, and another in the corner beside the door, and maybe even outside the door. Why? Because what makes us different up there will [p. 232] be the spirit of faith we have down here.

Yes, it is the spirit of faith which makes us more or less great in the eyes of God. Here we live in community. Therefore, the same kind of cups in the refectory; the same practices of piety to strengthen our souls; the same hours for sleep and recreation in common to renew our strength. But will we be equal in heaven? Not at all! And this is because we don't work with the same earnestness for our own perfection, and not all attach the same importance to working for God alone for the good of souls, and to becoming really holy.

Let us pay attention to what we do and how we do it, and let us often ask ourselves for whom we are doing it.

We must not compare ourselves to others, asking ourselves if they work more or less than we do, if the work they do is more or less beautiful than ours. Each one has her talent or talents and must render an account of those gifts she has received, not of those she doesn't have. One may be able to give ten points while another gives but five, and still another only one. That doesn't matter! But if she who could give ten gives only nine, yes, my dears, she will have to render an account of the one she didn't give through negligence. If she who can give only one weeps within herself because others give more, she will have to give an account of her sadness, which comes from self-love alone!

She who is engaged in fine work must not consider herself better than those who do the heavy, toilsome, rough jobs. Perhaps these have more merit, because in them there is less danger of self-love entering, and purity of intention is easier.

When they praise us because we have worked much or done something well, we must say to ourselves: Ah! My dear! It will take a little more to get us through God's tribunal and into heaven. Let us be careful of the intention with which we perform our duties; this is necessary as Christians and religious. God sees beyond what is evident to the human eye. He sees our thoughts, counts our words, examines our works and in His infinite holiness He will demand a strict account of all.

I recommend, therefore, that each one put herself in God's presence, live in God's presence, do all only to fulfill God's will and give Him pleasure.⁸⁹

[p. 233] Mother Vicar recalled from St. Cyr

All at St. Cyr were delighted that Sister Catherine was on the General Council, but at the very idea of seeing her go away again the floodgates opened!

On her part, Sister Catherine felt the detachment from this House where it had cost her to adapt to French cookery, poverty and all-round insufficiency. More than anything else had been the humiliation of begging the means with which to sustain the orphanage and community, which she felt ever more keenly. Furthermore, she had met a Director who, wishing to make a saintly Superior of her, reproved her continually, even in the presence of Sisters, girls and workmen. Although she was humble enough to receive all in silence in the persuasion of having deserved it, she was not, of course, insensitive to the point of not feeling it!

With all this in mind, she disposed herself to do the will of God when and how He asked, and disposed the Sisters, the tertiaries and pupils to do likewise.

In the meantime Mother felt she needed her Vicar near her. Besides the progressive deterioration of her health, other worries had arisen. From Borgo San Martino came a rumor that things were not going too happily. Mother wanted to go there and nip the trouble in the bud by simply saying to all: "Sisters! you are in an uproar because you have forgotten that Our Lady is the real Superior and not poor Sister Felicina who has left you!"

Letter to St. Cyr

Viva Gesù, Maria e S.G!

Dearest Sister and girls,

I need a favor from you; please let my Vicar, Sister Catherine, come back.

By now I hope you are all acquainted with Sister Santina and have confidence in her. She is so good-why would you [p. 234] not have confidence in her?

You see, our imagination sometimes makes us see things black while in reality they are white. This makes us feel a coldness towards our Superiors and little by little the confidence we should have in them is lost.

Then what happens? We are unhappy ourselves and make things hard for our Superior. With a little humility, all can be set right. Give me this consolation, my dear Daughters. Love one another with true charity. Love your Superior, consider her to be Our Lady's representative and treat her with great respect.

I know she loves you in the Lord. Tell her all you would tell me if I were there. This is the greatest joy you can give me. My good Sisters, remember that where charity is, there is heaven.

Jesus finds great pleasure in remaining in the midst of His children if they are humble, obedient and charitable. Therefore, love in such a way that Jesus may stay willingly with you.

Then Sister Sampietro, Sister Alexandrina (Hugues), Sister Catherine (Pestarino), Sister Lorenzale, you should all help one another by your good example. Correct one another kindly should there be any falling-off in these duties. Not only should you have confidence in your Superior, but you should so act that the girls have it also, remembering your obligation of giving good example. Be exact in the observance of the holy Rule, and study well what it requires of you. Be careful, my dears, to be prompt in obedience, detached from yourselves, your satisfactions, everything. Remember the three vows you made with such fervor and reflect often how you observe them.

Time passes quickly, and if we do not wish to find our selves empty-handed at the point of death, we must lay a foundation of deep solid virtue. Words won't take us to heaven; deeds are required.

Set to work, therefore, with courage. Let us practice virtue for Jesus and for no other motives which, when all is said and done, are but the workings of our imagination. A Sister who really loves Jesus, gets on well with everybody.

It is understood, isn't it, that if you give me this consolation, I shall come to see you soon, and stay a long time [p. 235] with you? Are you pleased?

Send me good news soon. Remember, I want you to be cheerful. Woe to you if you are always brooding.

My good wishes to those who are already postulants and to the girls whom I dearly love. I want them to be good and cheerful, jumping, laughing, singing etc. Then when I come to visit you I shall bring something nice to each one.

May Jesus bless you all and make you holy. Pray for me and be assured of my prayers in return.

Believe me,

Nizza, October, 1880

Your affectionate Mother,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁹⁰

Sister Lorenzale, the last to join the St. Cyr community, received a letter for herself.

Viva Gesù!

My good Sister Marianne Lorenzale,

Have you laid out the garden well by now? Does it give you hopes of a good crop? You must compare your heart with the garden. If you cultivate it well, it will yield good fruit, but if you are not vigilant and careful to do a little bit every day, it will soon be full of weeds. Is this not so? Courage then. Everyday we should look to see if there is something, some thought for example, which prevents growth. If we find there is, let us root it out.

Sister Marianne, you understand what I mean. I am writing, but I have so much to do that I do not know what I am writing. Pray for me, be cheerful, and help the others to be cheerful also. I greet you and leave you in the Heart of Jesus.

Are you happy that I leave you in that beautiful place? Write to me if you are not. God bless you along with your

Affectionate Mother in the Lord,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁹¹

[p. 236] Mother advises the community

In the absence of Sister Catherine, Mother personally gave the community certain recommendations which, according to Don Bosco, should be given by the Vicar. However, the advice lost nothing by the substitution!

The postulants received the recommendations with great reverence. Some novices were so impressed by them that they made them their program for life. Not a few Sisters made a point of repeating them for the benefit of those absent, especially when it was a question of Good Nights.

A postulant, Lucy Vascovi, warmly and vivaciously passed on the message: "You should have heard how Mother Superior spoke to us last evening!"

Let us be careful not to waste time! That which we can do in half an hour, for heaven's sake let us not waste an hour on it. Let us work as much as possible, if we want God's blessing on the House!

Let us look after our linen, the garments we use. If something needs a stitch today let us not wait until tomorrow, so that the hole or the tear may not get so big as to oblige us to give ten stitches instead of one. What is neglected is destroyed. And religious poverty?!

Let us also take care of our health, as far as that depends on us. Eating too quickly harms the stomach and teeth and then we must buy medicine. Excess in eating injures body and soul. Do not break a whole bun for the sake of one mouthful, leaving it partly eaten. One bite less in a case like this won't injure health!

Sister Louise Boccolatte, who was a novice at the time, was deeply impressed by what was said:

Sister Jacinta Morzoni says that Mother's sister, Sister Felicina, told them that she (Mother) never rose from table, without feeling hungry still. From girlhood she remained for months without tasting milk, which she liked very much. She never tasted fruit when in season—for example, grapes during the vintage time! A sister told me: "Mother was [p. 237] coughing and I suggested she take a candy. Do you know what she answered? The sweets of a good religious are ejaculations and acts of love of God.

And the things she is recommending to us these days?

My dear Sisters, novices and postulants, let us ask every morning at Holy Communion for the grace of health and perseverance in our vocation. Do not be surprised if anyone falls into some fault, even unfortunately a sin, because if God did not keep His hand on our heads we would do even worse.

If, passing along the corridors or stairs, you see someone carrying a burden, offer to help her immediately. She should accept the help as Jesus yielded His cross to Simon of Cyrene. Don't ever be among those who think only of self, and let others make out for themselves!

Mother's conference on poverty

Sister Petronilla Brusasco, who had spent some time in Nizza after the retreat, took notes on a conference given by Mother to the Sisters only during the autumn.

Our good Mother Superior [the notes say] showed herself more tender and affectionate than ever, when she came to give this conference to the Sisters. One read in her eyes the anxiety of a mother, who loves and fears. She began by saying that a sad thought had kept her agitated and wakeful all night; and that she felt compelled to tell the Sisters about it, for their good.

"Up to the present we have been poor," she said, "and we often suffer the consequences of poverty; even bread is scarce sometimes but we are not less prompt in work because of it. Rather, with even greater ardor, each one fulfills the task entrusted to her. The spirit of our revered Father, Don Bosco, is ours too, and in all of us the spirit of the poverty of Jesus is still alive and generously active. But now our work is extending. Indeed it will assume greater proportions, and much will be done for young girls.

Little by little all that will bring great changes in the life [p. 238] of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. I won't be there to see it but you will see improvements being gradually introduced. You will wear less threadbare, less darned habits. Your food will be more abundant and less poor. You will have meat everyday, you will have all the bread you wish, wine, coffee, and milk in the afternoon, and coffee after dinner when needed. The schools, workrooms and apartments will be better, and you will have better equipment to help you carry on your apostolate with the girls. You will have not only what is necessary but also what is merely useful.

"But, my dear Daughters, for your own sake," and here her sad expression returned, "God forbid that all this should lead to the loss of our good spirit, the spirit of Don Bosco, the spirit of our Jesus. For heaven's sake, my Sisters, even in the midst of the comforts the Congregation will offer you, be poor, be poor in spirit, using what is given you and allowed for your use, without attachment to the things themselves. Use them but always be ready to leave them when obedience requires. Use them with your spirit disposed to accept the consequences of not having them, or of their insufficiency. For heaven's sake, Sisters, in the midst of greater comforts, continue to love, really and practically, the poverty which our Redeemer taught us, the spirit of which is well demonstrated by our good Father, Don Bosco.

I am speaking to all, but especially to those who will later go far away and to those in the various Houses here in Italy. There might well be no one to call you to order, and thus unconsciously you could soon find yourselves well off the track."

Reading of the "Salesian Bulletin"

Mother made wide use of the *Salesian Bulletin* to nourish in the community the true apostolic spirit of Don Bosco.

The issue of November contained the norms on catechisms promulgated by Pope Leo XIII. It also had very interesting articles on Salesian missionary work in Patagonia, as well as the history of that country.

[p. 239] We can say that every Sister in the community drew inspiration from it for her work among the girls, as well as new methods of exercising her zeal according to the desires of the Pope and of Don Bosco, both at home and in the Patagonian missions where the heart often went as to its desired goal.

Sister Virginia Magone: first to die in America

The holy death of Sister Virginia Magone, communicated from Turin to Nizza, turned thoughts anew in that direction.

No news of the dear Sister had arrived since May. It was known that she was very slowly weaving her eternal crown, so the question: "Is she still alive?" was frequently and spontaneously raised. Letters from her Director, Father Louis Lasagna and from Sister Madelene Martini were read at a conference, supplying the awaited answer to the community.

Very Reverend Father,

I write these few lines in great haste from Las Piedras, where I have come to visit the parish and to console the poor Sisters, who are very sad after the loss of their dear Sister Virginia Magone, who died a holy death on Saturday, the 25th of this month at 4:00 p.m., fortified with all the rites of the Church. If her whole life was edifying, her last illness, and above all, her death was for us a source of great edification.

When I left her Friday evening, I almost assured her that the next day, consecrated to Our Blessed Lady, would at last see her ardent desire of going home to God fulfilled.

"Do you really mean it?" she asked, her face aglow!

"My heart tells me so," I replied, "because to die on a Saturday is a privilege which the Blessed Virgin gives to those devoted to her, so that she may free them speedily from purgatory. It seems to me, therefore, that Our Lady Help of Christians will give you this grace."

At these words, which seemed sealed by certainty, the [p. 240] good Sister could not contain her joy, and turning to the Sisters surrounding her: "Did you hear? Did you hear?" she repeated with an air and tone I could never describe "Did you hear? Tomorrow I shall be with Jesus and Mary!" Then she burst into tears of joy!

Midnight came; Saturday dawned, and instead of getting worse Sister Virginia seemed to be much better, so that she gently complained to the Sisters that I had deceived her.

In the afternoon I went to see her. I found her tired, but (I would have said) still far from the end. But I had scarcely left the room when she sent for me. I went in and saw that life was ebbing fast. Without agony or convulsions of any kind, while we recited the prayers for the dying, between sobs Sister Virginia breathed forth her soul into the Heart of Jesus.

A more peaceful death I have never seen. To merit such a death, a hundred years of the most excruciating pain would be as nothing. And this enviable death, Mary obtained for one of her Daughters who had just completed her twenty-second year, rewarding her thus for the sacrifice she made in leaving her native land to come and make Jesus known and loved in these far away countries. I too am Mary's son, and when my time comes I too have a right to hope for a similar death. Oh, yes! May I die the death of the just and may my end be like theirs!

Villa Colon, September 27, 1880

Your affectionate Son,
Father Louis Lasagna

V.G.

Our very reverend and beloved Father in J.C.

The day at last arrived which our good Sister Virginia Magone had so long and eagerly awaited, admitting her to the joys she had yearned for. Hers was a precious life, and her death was its crowning glory. Sister Virginia really consumed herself for God, as the wick of the lamp burns and consumes itself before the Blessed Sacrament.

Her life and death give us hope that her soul flew directly to God and that she already enjoys the fruit of her long and [p. 241] patient suffering. But in spite of all this we are very sad, because she has left us.

We here confess our weakness. Although the loss was not unexpected, still, it was the first time a Sister had died in this far away land. We were overcome by grief and shed floods of tears.

I humbly recommend this dear departed Sister to your prayers, and likewise all of us who are in so much need of help that we may walk faithfully in the path of religious perfection.

Thanks to God, we are all well in health, and hope to become saints, if you, our good Father, will kindly pray for us.

Will you please convey this sad news to our Reverend Mother General? Bless all these, your poor Daughters in the Lord, while with deep respect I am, dear Reverend Father,

Villa Colon, September 27, 1880

Your most humble and respectful Daughter,
Sister Mary Madelene

Mother felt this news more than anyone else. She had watched this dear Sister grow up in the workroom at Mornese, like a budding flower. At sixteen she had heard her pronounce her religious vows; she had known the simplicity and fervor of her love for Our Lady and the Blessed Sacrament; she had seen her depart-less than two years ago-one might say among the first group of missionaries, and first among them she had won the palm at the age of twenty-two, singing for joy. A truly enviable destiny!

The Vicar returns from St. Cyr Mother again on her travels

Just after the feast of Saint Charles, the Director's nameday, Sister Catherine again left St. Cyr. Having made a short visit of farewell to some benefactors at Toulon, she proceeded to Nizza Monferrato.⁹²

[p. 242] Mother was just waiting for her return before setting out on her visitations. Then, heedless of the cold which had set in, she went to the House where she felt her presence was most needed.

She arrived unexpectedly at Borgo San Martino. She presented Sister Catherine Ricca to the first Sisters she met, or sent for, as head of the community until her return. She would be back a week, "if you are good," she said. Even as word of her arrival brought them running to greet her, she had already left on her way to Quargnento to see the two novices, Sisters Maggiorina Poggi, and Teresa Vallino, who were greatly impressed by her spirit of sacrifice and mortification.

"She consoled me so much" the first said, "and encouraged me to practice obedience to the Rule and humility if I wanted to become a saint."

And Sister Teresa said:

Our Superior needed a decent cape. As soon as Mother came to know it, she took off the one she was wearing, and gave it to her. Confused and embarrassed, she tried to refuse it saying: "Mother you will have to travel; you cannot do without it." But our dear Mother, covering herself with the shawl, said jokingly: "Who will notice that I don't have one?"⁹³

From Quargnento she went to Biella. Here she feared that too much comfort would weaken the Sisters' spirit. She had also occasion to speak with Monsignor Lato, who already knew about the happenings at Borgo.

Mother's prudence and goodness

About the middle of the month Mother returned to Borgo San Martino. The Sisters there really had taken things into their own hands!

When the participants of the last retreat heard that their Superior, Sister Felicina, was transferred to Sicily, although [p. 243] her departure was not imminent, they had insisently besought Mother to let her come back until she left. Mother thought it wise to please them, hoping that this condescension would help them accept the sacrifice better.

Instead, the day Mother Felicina definitively left the House of Borgo, and Sister Margaret Rasino took over, they wandered about absent-mindedly from room to room as if they no longer felt any sense of responsibility. No one went to the kitchen, and at dinner time the fire was not even lit. The whole school was waiting for dinner!

Good but timid, the new Superior sought every means of persuasion, but in vain. Seeing that all her efforts met with more tears, she too began to cry, decided to leave them to their own devices, and left for Nizza.

The Director, Father Belmonte, grasped the situation and tried to better it. Things went so far that he asked Monsignor Leto, who was passing through to say a few words to the poor Sisters, now left without a guide. Monsignor Leto, who thought very highly of the Institute, consoled and exhorted them to conform to God's will by accepting in good part the new Superior. It was useless! Souls were dejected, and reason had given way to sentiment.

Thinking perhaps to hum or them with a joke the Director said one day in his witty way: "But you can't go like that. Do you want to elect a Superior yourselves?"

His joke was taken seriously. They met, lit two candles in front of a crucifix, and by secret ballot elected a Superior!

In the meantime, not one word came from Nizza in response to the lamentations of those who had given signs of such little understanding of religious obedience. Mother obviously intended her silence to help them reflect, hoping that in consequence the malaise of head and heart would be cured.

It was thus interpreted by the more prudent, but all suffered.

At a propitious moment, therefore, Mother brought the new, regulary nominated Superior and left her "on [p. 244] approval" as one might say.

On her return she would ascertain the results.

She never mentioned the affair in community, nor showed displeasure or hurt. On officially presenting the Superior, Sister Catherine Ricca, she simply told them she was chosen by God. Then she continued her visit with her habitual kindness, listening to each of the Sisters.

To the Sister who had taken on the fictitious authority for a month or so, and who in her simplicity told of the nonsense that went on during the "election," she said frankly: "Childishness! Childishness! You won't do it again, forget it! What is past is past. "

The gentle Sister Josephine Bolzoni, professed but a few months, showed she knew yet didn't know, because she didn't have time to get mixed up in the mess. Mother did not enter into discussion with her. "You did well not to involve yourself," she said. "Be careful though not to think ill of anyone; these things happen without reflection."

In her conference to the community, she touched no sore points, but having noticed that some Sisters still wore the cotton habit in the kitchen or at household chores, she reminded them that

Don Bosco wished the habit to be the same for all and made of black gabardine.⁹⁴

Back in Nizza

Mother rejoiced on returning to Nizza to find the community already enthusiastic about the Vicar, who without being officious, followed everybody and everything. She taught the postulants, novices and professed with particular interest, never uttered a single word about France, which she had just left, and sustained those weak in virtue with a goodness and patience superior to her twenty-four years.

The pupils especially noticed this. During her religion class they listened breathlessly to her words on the goodness, greatness and love of God. It was the same with her comment on literary works, as for example, the poems [p. 245] quoted in *Galantuomo*.⁹⁵

Mother devoted her time to the boarders, who sought every occasion to approach her for a word. Just when she was about to put herself at the disposal of the postulants and novices on the morning of November 20, a telegram came from Chieri: "Sister Innocenza dying!"

Mother goes to Chieri to assist Sister Gamba in her last moments

There was no time to be lost if she was to catch the train. She informed her Vicar, borrowed a

black apron better than her own from the portress to save time, and was gone.⁹⁶

She arrived just in time to see Sister Innocenza Gamba, who had already received the last Sacraments. That very morning she had laughed and joked with her Superior, when she brought in her breakfast. Now, stricken with lung congestion, she was about to die.

She recognized Mother, thanked her for having come, for having accepted her into the Institute, and told her: "I knew I would die soon. Three times, Mother, I heard a voice say: 'Innocenza, give yourself completely to God, for your life will be very short.' How happy I am to die a religious! " Although it was the dead of night two Salesians Fathers Notario and Brando, who also had come from Turin in response to a telegram from the Superior-were present with the Sisters of the House.

Sister Innocenza whispered: "Let us sing a hymn to Mary Help of Christians!" She expired with that hymn on her lips, and a light in her eyes.

Some days earlier she had reached her twentieth birth day. Her vocation had been the reward of ardent piety.

Of a happy, affectionate, ingenuous disposition, she had sowed the good seed as she passed through life, and now she had gone to her Father's House on the day when the [p. 246] Church commemorated the Presentation of Mary in the Temple of Jerusalem.⁹⁷

Despite her fatigue, the impressions of the day, and the sorrow of the community, Mother spent the remainder of the night as best she could in the room in which it was said that Don Bosco had suffered the horrible attacks of Satan.

Sister Angela Sorbone had accompanied her from Turin. They took turns to occupy the one bed, so as not to disturb the distressed community, but the hours were long. The rising signal, "Let us bless the Lord," was very welcome!

Mother's letter to Sister Josephine Torta

After the usual practices of piety, while the Sisters were busy with the funeral arrangements, Mother wrote to Sister Josephine Torta from Chieri.

V.G.M.G!

My good Sister Josephine,

I am writing from Chieri where I came to find poor Sister Innocenza dying. However, she recognized me! I arrived here on Saturday at 1:00 p.m. and Sister Innocenza left us at 1:45 a.m. Her death was enviable. Do not fail to pray for her soul, lest she be detained in heaven's antichamber.

My good Sisters, are you all cheerful, all four of you? Are you keeping well? Is the number of girls increasing? Are they good? Greet them all and tell them beautiful things on my behalf. Sister Villata, are you really cheerful? Do you pray for me? Take heart and keep your Superior, Sister Felicina Bezzato and good Sister Rosina happy.

My good Sister Josephine, is it true your mother came to see you? All here say she did, but you did not write to me about it. Write to me soon, and tell me all about your mother and your classes.

I shall be back in Nizza by Thursday; you can send your letter there. I shall be pleased to get it. Sister Rosalia, I greet [p. 247] you on behalf of your dear sisters who recommended themselves to your prayers. They were very well when I left Nizza.

They wrote from Bronte to say that the journey was excellent, but poor things, we should pray very much for them. They are so far away. We should feel compassion for them.

I write so hurriedly that you probably won't understand, but have patience, I have very little time now but will write to you again before the feast of the Immaculate.

In the meantime take courage, and don't be too upset if some sacrifice comes your way, or better if you have to put yourselves out somewhat to receive people who come to visit the House. I recommend you to be humble, full of charity and patience. See that you observe the Rule well and that the others observe it. Pray much and earnestly: remember that prayer is the key that opens heaven's treasures.

Courage then in fighting self-love. Let us kill this malignant beast. Renew often your three vows and the resolutions made during the retreat. Be cheerful, my very dear and beloved Daughters In Jesus. This life is very short, and is quickly gone. Is that not true? Will you come to Nizza to spend this Christmas with us? We shall see. God bless you along with,

Chieri, November 21, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in the Lord,

Sister Mary Mazzarello

Regards to the Rev. Archpriest, the Marquis and the Curate. V.G. in the name of all the Sisters.⁹⁸

Fears and consolations

While passing through Turin, Mother received from Don Bosco Sister Vallese's letter with the latest news from Patagonia. But at the request to send Sisters to help she thought with apprehension: "Provided that they won't go to heaven soon down there also because of overwork and sacrifice. "

Truly her Sisters up until now had died such holy deaths [p. 248]

as to prove their sanctity, and this was a great consolation, so that while in her goodness of heart she could not conceal her sorrow for so many bereavements, neither could she be silent about her conviction that she already had a beautiful crown of little saints in heaven.

Don Bosco too must have felt it. After the news of the death at Chieri he spoke of Sister Virginia Magone. As she was the first Daughter of Mary Help of Christians to die in the missions, and had given such edification in her life and death, it would seem opportune to make her known by means of the *Salesian Bulletin*. All memories of her and any of her writings, would do much good when published and would inspire generous vocations to enter the Institute.

Mother returned to Nizza in time to give feastday wishes to her Vicar, bringing Sister Vallese's letter to read in community as she had already done in Turin.

We give it in its entirety as a family record.

Very Reverend Father in Jesus Christ,

I avail of this opportunity to send you these few lines. The news which I can give from here is very good, thank God, and I hope it will continue so.

We are preparing little dresses and so forth for our poor Indians, and it seems that the Lord is preparing plenty of work for us. We greatly desire it, so that we may save many souls who lie in the darkness of ignorance. Oh! Reverend Father, if you saw how many Indians there are, and how miserable in body and soul! They really arouse our compassion and we are so sorry that we cannot help them all, because we are so few and so poor.

We have thirty girls in this school of Carmen, two boarders and one Negress who helps us with the housework. If we had the money to support others we could receive and instruct and save many of them.

Every Sunday we teach catechism to the Christian children, who unfortunately are very ignorant in this country. They have confession once a month, after which a good number go to Holy Communion very devoutly.

This arrangement does much good not only to the young [p. 249] girls but also to the adults, and helps to awaken faith in the Indians, making them reflect on and love our holy religion.

Before concluding I would like to ask your Reverence for a favor, or rather, for two. Please recommend us in a special way to our sweet Mother Mary Help of Christians, so that having come to these far distant lands to make known the name of Jesus, our heavenly Spouse, we may remain faithful to Him until death. All four of us wish to become saints, and we hope to succeed with the help of your prayers.

The other favor is that you send other Sisters to help us, so that we may save a greater number of poor Indians. We had hoped that some would come soon. Oh! How long that day is in coming!

Allow me to add one more thing. When sending help to us do not forget our Salesian confreres. You should see all they have to do and how they work! Reverend Father Fagnano, above all, is a martyr of fatigue, and we fear he will succumb to it.

May God preserve your Reverence for many years. Please accept our respectful homage, and believe me in the Sacred Heart of Jesus,

Carmen de Patagones, October 6, 1880

Your devoted Daughter,

Sister Angela Vallese

We might add at this point that the Director of the Patagonian mission-Father Joseph Fagnano-had written on September 5 to Don Bosco: "The Sisters will write to you themselves. I must say

that they work with manly courage. and are much loved by the people."

Mother consoles the Sisters by resting

Obliged by the Sisters to cut down her household tasks, Mother availed of the much-needed rest to write to Sister Josephine Torta, who had promptly sent news of her House, as requested.

[p. 250]

Viva Gesù and Maria Immaculate,

My dear Sisters Josephine and M. and E. and R.,⁹⁹

Thanks for the news you sent me. You wish me to pay you a visit; I would willingly go immediately but at the moment it is completely out of the question. You will all come here at Christmas and bring a chicken, won't you? However, if a free day comes my way I will forestall you. With regard to Rose's clothing, we shall see what can be done.

Now that the feast of Mary Immaculate is approaching I thought it better to send these few words to invite you to make the novena well, with all possible fervor as our holy Rule exhorts us.

Let us therefore put great effort into the exercise of true humility and charity, bearing with one another's defects, putting more of ourselves into our practices of piety, and all possible fervor into our Communion and prayers, really living our vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Believe me, dear Sisters, this is what will give joy to Our Lady, and will obtain for us from Jesus all these graces which are so necessary if we are to become saints. During these days let us renew our retreat resolutions. Finally, let us pray for the Superiors and the Institute, our deceased Sisters and all our Sisters at home and abroad.

This is what I wanted to say to you, dear Sisters. Take courage, look after your health, become saints and help the girls become saints also. Give them my greetings. Get them to pray for me sometimes. Tell Sister Felicina to be very good, and if she does not make her profession now, she will do so with the next group; in the meantime tell her to be cheerful.

The Sisters send you all sorts of good wishes, as does the Director, and from me, who keep you in my heart and am ready to do anything for your good, a million greetings! May Jesus bless you, and give you His choicest graces, along with your

Nizza, November 30, 1880

Affectionate Mother in the Lord,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*¹⁰⁰

[p. 251] Preparation for the feast of Mary Immaculate and Christmas

Mother was already on fire with the desire for a fervent novena and feast of Our Lady Immaculate, and was deeply attentive when the December issue of the *Bulletin* was read in refectory. In it Sister Angela Vallese's letter to Don Bosco was published, relating the holy death of Sister Magone, with reflections and suggestions for an increase in Marian fervor. Most beautiful was the end of the article on the first pages:

Reign over us, O Mary, with your Son! Let us promise her that, if necessary, we will consecrate to her service not only our thoughts and affections, not only our speech and actions (...) but our blood, our very life, exclaiming: "We die for Mary Our Queen!"

After the feast of the Immaculate Christmas. Let us then avail of this beautiful occasion to show how ardent is our affection for Mother and Son. And when we have Jesus in our hearts, received as if from Mary's hands, let us pledge Him our fidelity in the words of a great saint: "Neither hunger, thirst, poverty, riches, persecution, troubles or anxiety nor the sword; neither height nor depth, nor life nor death nor any creature will be able. to separate me from your love, o my most loving Jesus."¹⁰¹

Mother's ardor came to light even more in her comments on Sister Vallese's letter: "Dear Sisters, let us strive for the spirit of sacrifice and holiness. There is so much good to be done! Happy those who can do it, and are chosen to sacrifice themselves still more to win souls for the Lord! At Mornese we stole the sacrifices from one another. Let us continue to do so more and

more!"¹⁰²

Another Sister for heaven

The Sisters of Lu were preparing a big feast for the Immaculate,¹⁰³ and Mother readied the hearts of the Sis- [p. 252] ters for the great solemnity at Nizza on the 12th. But the sorrow of another bereavement was again knocking at the door: Sister Carmela Arata, a member of the Turin community. She had been teaching in the vocational school at Chieri, but had been sent to Turin because of her health. In Chieri she was remembered by Sisters and girls, not only for her precision and patience in teaching, but for her union with God. On the feast of Our Lady of Loretta-December 10-heaven opened its doors to her after five years of religious profession.

Personal interviews with Mother

This latest sorrow did not prevent Mother from carrying out the plan she had in mind on her return from Turin: to speak in private to each individual postulant so as to insure the choice for the next clothing.

Vincenza Bessone was the smallest of the group. Don Bosco, touching her head lightly one day in Turin, had said to her: "Golden hair, golden heart! Here is a little missionary: Let us give her a good blessing!" She was the first to come to Mother: she wanted once again to express her thanks for having been admitted to the clothing. "She knew how to enter my soul and tell me my defects with the sincerity of a mother, and animated me to correct them and to practice virtue! She is really a saint, as I knew from the first time that I met her!"

Maria Viotti added: "The older Sisters had always told us that Mother was a saint; I believed it, but in speaking to her personally this time, I felt something far above the ordinary! What charity! What zeal in forming us to the spirit of the Congregation and in wanting us to be in every way as Don Bosco would have us!"

Enrichetta Gambe did not fail to express in public her genuine astonishment: "When I told her my weaknesses, she declared she too was guilty of them, to encourage me to speak, I am sure. Just imagine if I can believe that she, as [p. 253] holy as she is, has the same defects I do!"

Caroline Curino came out jumping for joy, because she had heard the final "yes" for her clothing. She told her companions:

You must know that if Mother hadn't provided in time, I should have gone home. . . out of hunger!

I had been a postulant for three months when she questioned me one day:

"How are you?"

"I'm well, Mother."

"Are you happy?"

"Yes, Mother."

"I'm afraid you are suffering. You are used to country air. You need a snack in the afternoon-go take it and keep well."

For fear of being sent home, and not to hurt her by mentioning the need I felt of eating more, I quickly replied:

"I don't need it, Mother!"

Then she encouraged me and said: "Go on, be good, take courage: your clothing won't be long delayed!" And now look, I am to get the habit with the others! Oh, what joy! May the Lord bless her!

"Real visions are for the humble only"

Almost all the postulants had something to say in praise of their beloved Superior; but if there was general rejoicing, there were also some tearful exceptions.

Sister Josephie Paccoto relates:

A young lady had come from Rome to become a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians. After three days of caprice and abstinence, she gave signs during mass of having special communication with Jesus, (she had not been to Communion). On coming out of church she said she had had a vision. Mother corrected her, and she took offense,

going from one Sister to another saying: "You can see Mother Superior is not educated. From the way she spoke to me it's easily seen she does not know the meaning of the words she uses! "

[p. 254] That was related to Mother, who smilingly exclaimed: "It is true, very true!" But Sister Madelene Morano did not let the affair die there. On her first meeting with the exceptional postulant, she said to her without preamble:

"You know, we appreciate Mother very much. She is entirely to our liking! If she does not suit you, Miss, perhaps you had better go! If you wish I will accompany you to the station and even pay your journey."

"Indeed," answered the other with irony in her tone, "Indeed, am I not a teacher here?"

And Sister Morano replied:

"If you haven't the money. . . we will pay half your fare; the government will pay the other half!"

The matter seemed closed. Instead it was not. That evening Sister Morano herself, on an understanding with the other Superiors, accompanied her ladyship to the station, bought her a first-class ticket that she might travel with propriety to Rome, and wished her a happy, one-way trip.

Mother did not praise Sister Morano for her prompt and business like action; neither did she reprove her. But she made it understood that to rid the community of visionaries is a charity to the Institute and a minor evil for the poor deluded ones, carried away by self complacency and pride.

Already at Mornese, Mother had shown that the less attention paid to certain people the better. I remember that as Christmas drew near a certain person came to me saying, "Baby Jesus wishes me to explain the Our Father!" Mother did not prevent my going with her at recreation, probably to see how things would go. But then she forbade me to touch on the subject, and since my friend was not disposed to correct herself, she sent her straight home. To me she repeated more than once: "Be on guard against those who in speech and actions seek to attract attention! They are not animated by the right intention, and always finish by being burdens for themselves and others, if not worse."

Another-still at Mornese-began to say she had seen Father Pestarino in glory, and that the Lord had chosen her for the missions in America. Mother suggested to me: "She says she is a bit deaf. Try to ascertain if she really is. At ten o'clock tomorrow morning, I shall go to the workroom; you tell me in an undertone something not entirely to her liking, and we shall see what happens."

[p. 255] What a scene! She became so upset that dear Mother had to say to her: "Ah, for such a trivial thing, you take it so badly? Perhaps your character is not suited to community life. It is better you fix a day to leave it!" The poor thing would have thrown herself in the well! Mother, in her goodness, came to calm her down, but soon sent her home, saying to me: "You see how visionaries end? Real visions are for the humble only. They are not for certain poor things who. . . enough!"

Mother looks for "good material"

Sister Pacotto affirms:

Among the postulants admitted to the clothing there was one about whom I did not entertain the least doubt. But Mother told me: "Don't believe that those who talk a lot about themselves are open (in reality they say nothing)and still more if they talk about others! You will find in. stead, some who really say very little, but that little includes everything. We can count much more on these, because usually there is good material there!"

Two or three were disappointed when, because of ill health, they were not admitted to this clothing. The older Sisters of the House understood this from experience and encouraged them saying: "If Mother told you to wait for another occasion, don't worry even if you have to go home. Sooner or later you will become good Daughters of Mary Help of Christians!"

Thus their sorrow was eased, and hope caused blue skies to return to young souls and to the community.

Twenty-two for clothing, Baptism of Maria the Negro

The arrival of Father Cagliero at Nizza brought the sunshine of new joy. Not only were twenty-two postulants to be admitted to the novitiate, but Maria the Negro was to be baptized. The young African had been so patiently and [p. 256] charitably helped and cared for, that at this point she was considered ready for the life giving sacrament.

Both functions were carried out by Father Cagliero assisted by the Director of the House, Father Lemoyne. He gave the religious habit to twenty-two novices and the stole of original innocence to the Negro, who received the beautiful name of Mary, in spite of her impetuous temperament.

Spiritual souvenir and Good Nights

In his souvenir for the day, the Director spoke of the "great gift of grace and faith," uniquely

excellent gift in Our Blessed Lady, the fundamental gift from which every virtue grows for eternal reward in God's glory. Hence the necessity of preserving and increasing it by frequenting the sacraments, and by having great confidence in one's confessor and the Superiors of the Institute.¹⁰⁴

At the Good Night Mother spoke just one sentence: "Let us keep today's fervor; let us be good; let us become saints."¹⁰⁵

A further word on the choice of missionaries

Before leaving, Father Cagliero gave some hints about the choice of personnel for the next missionary expedition. Some names were left pending, but before the end of the year the final decision would be made. In the meantime, preparations would arouse new enthusiasm in those who were to cross the ocean.

The novices and Mother

After Father Cagliero had gone Mother devoted her time and attention to the novices, to whom for a few months [p. 257] she had not been able to speak. She also interviewed some boarders, especially those who had the seed of a vocation, and she directed the professed members on the road to sanctity.

The novice Sister Maria Genta, simple as crystal water, told her companions that she had always been happy to speak to Mother, but the problem of not knowing what to say was always there. This time she had told her about it, and Mother said: "Do not worry. I know you, and my wish for you is that you may always have the problem of not having problems."

Sister Delphina Guido, another novice, equally simple, confided: "Mother told me that if I am faithful I will know more and more everyday the happiness of being called to be a religious. She told me to thank God often for so great a benefit, because not even in heaven will we ever thank Him sufficiently for this favor. Mother spoke with such fervor! Oh, such fervor!"

There were two other novices who, as postulants, had been on the point of abandoning their vocation for reasons of health.

To them Mother had said: "Do not fear! Let us make a novena to Mary Help of Christians and you will get better."

They were really cured and now were happy to tell how they had gone with light hearts to Mother, who said to them: "Before your clothing you promised me that you would really become saints if Our Lady took away your illness. Where are your miracles? Come on; let us see them, because promises must be kept!"

They said that through the strength and sweetness of her words they felt body and soul reinvigorated.¹⁰⁶

Mother writes about Sister Magone

During the Christmas novena Mother was in very poor health, and was consequently obliged to discontinue for a while the rather tiring work of private interviews. This [p. 258] gave her some time to dictate and write those letters which needed to be written.

On December 17, she responded to a request of Father Bonetti, editor of the *Salesian Bulletin*, by putting on paper a few thoughts about Sister Magone.

Very Reverend Father,

I received your letter with great pleasure, and I answer immediately.

You will find enclosed a number of little letters from our Sister Virginia. I am sorry that I have misplaced the last one which was written from her bed of sickness, in which she told me that she was preparing the lilies for her last

appearance on the catafalque.

I think you can say without fear of exaggeration that Sister Virginia was always good, obedient, respectful and pious. She entered our House at Mornese in 1871, with the intention of withdrawing from the world.

Although in a letter she refers to a displeasure she caused me, you can take it for a mere nothing: a lie she told me, and which when found out, served to correct her of this weakness forever.

She received the religious habit in 1873. On June 14, 1874, she made her triennial vows and on August 28 of the following year she made her final profession.

I will not write of her virtue, because Your Reverence knew that firsthand in the House of Borgo San Martino. I can assure you that she was always very zealous for the good of the children.

She showed a special aptitude for teaching catechism and instructing poor girls, who loved her tenderly as a sister, when they got to know her. She was also very delicate in conscience, and was absolutely sincere and open with her Superiors.

She made her application for the mission while at Borgo San Martino and was accepted after some time, when she no longer expected to be called. When the time of departure came, she suffered immensely on taking leave of her dear ones, but she made the sacrifice generously for love of Jesus. What she did in America and what her sentiments were while there, Your Reverence can gather from her letters.

[p. 259] I conclude by wishing you every blessing during the coming Christmas holidays and at the end and beginning of the year. May the Divine Infant console and protect you; this is the desire and wish of your poor and humble servant,

December 17, 1880

*Sister Mary Mazzarello*¹⁰⁷

Letter to Madam Viarengo

On December 19 she turned her thoughts to Madam Emilia Viarengo of Agliano d' Asti, who felt called to the Institute.

Viva Gesù!

Very esteemed Madam,

I am very sorry that you did not come to take part in our feast, but I would also have regretted it very much if you had come expecting to find Don Bosco. It was Father Cagliero who gave the habit to the new Sisters. Don Bosco does not come except during retreat. If you need his advice, you could write to him at Turin.

I thank the Lord that you continue to cherish the desire of consecrating yourself completely to Him; be faithful to Him; pray and trust.

If the Lord is calling you among the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, do not worry. He will lead you there, provided you correspond to His grace.

You, of course, must do your part and overcome fear by doing violence to yourself.

Courage, my dear sister. Commend yourself to the Infant of Bethlehem. I too will pray for you. Abandon yourself entirely to Him, and be sure He will do what is best for your soul. With all my heart I wish you a happy Christmas, and a year full of blessings from the Lord.

Pray for me who am, in the sacramental Heart of Jesus,

Nizza, December 19, 1880

Your affectionate Sister,
*The Superior*¹⁰⁸

[p. 260] Mother to her Daughters in Patagonia and Las Piedras

Another letter written on the 20th was addressed to a group of her Daughters in America:

VivaGesù Bambino!

My dearest Sisters Angelina, Joan, A. Cassulo and C. [Catherine Fino,]

I received your dear letters and hasten to answer you, my dear, faraway Daughters, whom I greatly desire to see. I feel we shall have to sacrifice together this satisfaction, because I believe I will never get that permission. But, take

courage. Although we will not see one another corporally, we are, I feel, united in spirit. I can assure you, a day does not pass that I do not think of you all, my good Daughters!

I am very sorry to hear that Sisters Joan and Catherine are not well. Poor things! Cheer them up for me. Tell Sister Catherine to get well because health is one means of doing more for souls, and tell Sister Joan to be cheerful. There is no time to be ill. You see that we have plenty of work, so encourage them.

In general at home we are well except Sisters Louise Arecco and Tersilla. It seems as if death is drawing near to embrace them, but poor things, they don't want to hear of it yet. Yet it is better they be resigned, especially Sister Louise, whose days are numbered. Pray hard for these two Sisters, who need it.

Pray also for the souls of Sister Carmela and Sister Innocenza Gamba, who have already been called to the Lord. Sister Innocenza died in November in the Sisters' House at Chieri, while Sister Carmela [Arata] died on the 10th of this month at the Sisters' House in Turin.

My dear Daughters, you see that now and then Lady Death comes to greet us! Let us pray! Let us pray and be ready. On the feast of Our Lady Immaculate-that is the following Sunday-Father Cagliero came and gave the habit to twenty Sisters and two Coadjutors. You will say they are clothing so many Sisters and never send us any! Yes, this time we will really send you some. They will leave on the [p. 261] 22nd or 26th of January, if no further changes are made, but I think this time they will really go. Pray they have a safe journey.

I thank you with all my heart for your kind Christmas wishes, and I pray to Baby Jesus to reciprocate them for me with His choicest blessings. May He give you true humility, charity, obedience and love for Him. I have asked Him and will always ask Him to give you the spirit of mortification, of sacrifice of your self-will, keeping you fervent and zealous, and giving good health to each one of you. Would you be pleased if Jesus gave you all these? I wish them to you most cordially, and I will pray to Him for you as long as I live, with the help of His grace. And you, my beloved Daughters, do likewise for me, who am the neediest of all. Courage, always be cheerful. Love one another, sympathize with one another. Let us console our dear Jesus, and perform all our actions so that He may say: My Daughters, I am pleased with your work!

What a joy to hear these words from Jesus!

You, my good Sister Angelina, do not worry; I read your personal report. Think that your defects are the weeds of your garden. It is necessary to humble yourself and fight them. We are miserable and cannot be perfect; therefore, humility, confidence, and cheerfulness.

Pray much for me, and give my regards to your Reverend Director and thank him on my behalf for the good he does to you all. Thousands of greetings from all the Sisters and especially from me, who love you in the Lord, and would do anything for your good,

Believe me in the Heart of Jesus,

Nizza, December 20, 1880

Your affectionate Mother,

Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù on behalf of Mother Mistress.

My good Sister Angelina Cassulo, your sister is well. She is in the House at Este. She is happy there cooking for the Salesians.

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[p. 262] On December 21 Mother wrote to the Sisters of Las Piedras.

Viva Gesù Bambino!

My dearest Sister Victoria [Cantu] and Sisters all,

I received your very dear letters. I rejoice in the first place to hear that you are all enjoying good health, and thank God for that. I hear too that you have plenty of work with so many girls and this also gives me pleasure. Look after and help them, first by your good example and then by your words.

I regret that you have problems because you are so few to cope with the work. But take heart, we are sending you some help. On January 22nd or 26th the Sisters destined for there will be set out. And you, prepare to keep them cheerful. Thank you so much for the lovely wishes you sent me, and still more for the prayers you promised to say. Please continue to pray for me.

I pray to Baby Jesus for you and will continue that He may reciprocate your wishes with the choicest blessings; first of all spiritual health, then health of body. May He give you true humility, great charity, obedience, patience, tolerance with yourselves in the first place. Yes, may Jesus give you also a true spirit of poverty, of mortification of your own will, and keep you always zealous and fervent in the service of the Lord. Yes! My beloved Sisters, I wish you these lovely virtues with all my heart. Oh, may Jesus really fill and console you with all these things. On your part, thank Him and correspond.

My dearest Sisters, let us do a little good while we have the time and occasion to do it. You see, my dears, the Lord called many Sisters to Himself this year: Sister Carmela [Arata] died on the 10th of this month at Turin, and Sister

Innocenza died at Chieri on November 21. Do you see how death comes so often to pay us a visit? Sooner or later it will come to us, and we will be happy if we have a good trousseau of virtues!

Courage then, love one another, sympathize with one another, correct one another, but always with charity. What about that, my good Sister Victoria? Be cheerful and read what I have written to you here to the Sisters.

[p. 263] Always encourage them. Do all you can to win the confidence of all. When you have it, you can more easily admonish them.

Be cheerful and pray hard for me; I assure you that I never forget you in my poor prayers.

Accept many, many greetings from all the Sisters who love you so much, envy your good fortune and recommend themselves to your prayers.

Regards to your Reverend Father Director, and recommend me to his fervent prayers. God bless you and all your Sisters. In the Heart of the Infant Jesus, believe me

Nizza, December 21, 1880

Your affectionate Mother in the Lord, ¹¹⁰

Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù, dearest Sister Victoria. Two years ago we were at Mornese for the feast of Mary Immaculate. I thought of you on December 8 and remembered your clothing, and then the last good-bye on the ship. When shall we meet again? In heaven! Courage, some more little sacrifices, more work to be done, and then we shall all be united in heaven! In the meantime let us live united in the Heart of Jesus; let us work and pray.

In your Communions remember me sometimes as I never forget you. Greetings to all the Sisters. I shall write to them when the Sisters leave. Greet Jesus on behalf of your Sister Emilia. Sister Morano sends her best wishes.

Christmas and First Communion of the neophyte Maria

Besides the usual joys of innocence and acts of generous love for the Child Jesus, Christmas this year brought the First Communion of Marla, the African neophyte. Among the little boarders, she sparkled with a joy she never knew or dreamed of before.

Sister Torta and the Sisters of Melazzo were also present at the beautiful service. How could they turn down the invitation given them by Mother in her letter of November 30?

[p. 264] After the joy of this unhoped-for meeting they returned with solicitude to their little field of action where they had means of exercising the recommendations given them by Mother in a practical way: "Keep up the harmony among yourselves. Do all the good you can to the children and to your eighty workroom girls. Pray well and be careful to work only for God. "

"Until we meet in Turin!"

Father Cagliero too left Nizza with a paternal: "Until we meet in Turin!" to Mother and the future missionaries, who were already preparing to go. In the meantime they were praying for the gift of "fortitude without regrets" as the Director had suggested to them; of "infused knowledge" and of the "quick command of the Castilian language"-heavenly gifts, suitable gifts, necessary gifts for those who go to distant foreign lands for the conquest of souls.

Miracles of obedience

"Yes, yes, sanctity, health and knowledge in between, dear Sisters!" someone said aloud, quoting an excerpt from a letter of the joyous Sister Josephine Vergnaud. Writing to Mother she had said,

Without the least preparation we opened the school at La Boca! Every night we studied what we had to teach next day. That is where the advice of our good Director, Father Lemoyne, came in handy: "Do whatever you are told," he said. "Even if they send you to teach Greek, do it; God will help you!"

And indeed, God has helped us! The mistakes we make when speaking or writing are good-humoredly corrected by our pupils and little by little, by ourselves. And so we go ahead full sail!

[p. 265] How effective similar examples of obedience can be in moments such as these!

Mother "rests."

In compliance with medical advice, and even more because her weakened condition imposed it, Mother resigned herself to a modified work schedule during the second half of the month. She simply had to slow down. She went about the House like "the visible presence of God and the tangible hand of Our Lady." Both boarders and Sisters spoke softly and loudly:

Some rest! First we see her in the garden or up by the vineyard, hanging the wash, hoing around, picking vegetables. next we find her at the washboard, soaping and scrubbing. Now she sweeps the house and the courtyard and tidies the worst places; shortly after, she hides In a corner of the kitchen to peel potatoes and clean vegetables, chestnuts, or fruit.

Here she chops with the ax and uses the saw to prepare the split wood; there she scours the kitchenware and the pots. In the workroom she sews and mends for Don Bosco's artisans and her Sisters. Sometimes sits among the postulants and gives them advice in an undertone while speeding ahead with her needle, or rekindles their fervor with frequent prayers to Jesus and Mary.

Of course Mother Assistant does her duty trying to keep Mother from all this work, but she is most elusive: she appears here, there and everywhere, cheering and uplifting all she contacts by her presence and her good word. ¹¹¹

But this was not all of Mother's rest. Her frequent visits to the chapel told everyone where she obtained oil to keep her lamp burning so brightly. Well could Sister Vergnaud have asked:

Is Mother as holy as ever? Who knows? Yet, I am quite certain she grows more holy everyday.

[p. 266] I can still picture her at prayer and meditation! Oh, how well our Mother prayed!

I remember one day at recreation, we were gathered around her, speaking of the poverty in our unforgettable House of Mornese, when a Sister took the liberty of asking her:

"Mother, what do you do in church with the thought of the House, and the needs and problems which seem ever on the increase?"

"What do I do?" she answered with all simplicity. "By the grace of God those thoughts don't bother me in church!"

Dear Mother, if only we could imitate her!

Mother among the boarders

Perhaps more than anyone else the boarders enjoyed this enforced rest of Mother's. Owing to the cold they could not play outdoors, and therefore they could invite her: "Mother, come with us!"

They were delighted when she came. Their games became more animated, as if to show their gymnastic ability. They made a circle round her with a lively song, or they simple formed a group to listen to her words, the missionary news or her witty remarks. With heartfelt goodness, she gave herself to them, happy to be able to satisfy her little rogues. She prevented the pushing forward of those who always sought the limelight, and occasionally taught the art of little mortifications in preparation for Holy Communion, offering little sacrifices for the salvation of souls.

¹¹²

Mother's conference at the end of the year

In preparation for the last day of the year Mother gave a conference to all the professed Sisters of Nizza. The main theme was the spirit of poverty and mortification, though she referred in general to various other points.

[p. 267] The proverb says: "New life with the New Year" but it shouldn't be a dead letter for us. You see, my dear Sisters, how often death comes to visit us; it could come for me, for anyone of you. Let us therefore take things seriously.

For heaven's sake let us not be good-for-nothing Sisters, as Don Bosco says, but let us behave always as good religious. Let us not seek satisfactions. We have left the world. Therefore we should not be worldly but committed to God. Let us not live in religion as if it were part of the world we have abandoned. Let us be careful not to bring the world into religion with our words and lack of mortification. Let worldlings enjoy life! It will be only for a short time. Let us pity them. Our enjoyment should be suffering and self-sacrifice for the love of God.

Let us be careful about little things, little defects, and never make peace with them. Remember we shall have to

account to God for everything, good and bad. Let us ask God for the grace of feeling keen remorse for our fallings. Thus we shall confess them with greater sorrow and do our penance in this world.

Let us keep ourselves always humble before God and men. Let us not be among those who think that they alone are capable of doing anything.

Let us pray and act in everything as if Our Lady were present. Her presence is a fact even though we do not perceive it.

Let us put our all into recreation. This is the time one can judge if she has prayed well in the morning and made her practices of piety well.

And now I will let you in on my great fear. You see, my dear Sisters, that we now live like ladies in comparison with our mode of life at the beginning of the Congregation. A good number of postulants are entering, some with a little dowry. We have a big number of boarders, almost all of whom pay something. For many of you, who in the past have known hunger, this is a period of well-being. In fact we have now, besides bread and soup, a good portion and fruit also. We have a beautiful House and a lovely chapel. We are opening several Houses, without anxiety about the necessities of life in most cases. But what benefit would all this be to us, if as a result we were to lose our good spirit or grow cold in [p. 268] fervor? I fear that a comfortable life weakens fervor and the desire for an ever more comfortable life may enter the House of Nizza, and that each may form a world within her heart more dangerous than that she has left. Sisters, for charity's sake! For charity's sake!

At this point, with tear-filled eyes, joined hands and an attitude of one who prays, supplicates and wishes to make the greatest possible impression on those who listen, Mother continued:

With real love, let us love and practice religious poverty, so dearly loved and certainly practiced by our Jesus, by our Mother Mary and by our ecomer and special protector, Saint Joseph. Let us not be overcome by the danger of comfort and wealth. Let us continue to live united in charity with the fervor and spirit of poverty that formed the most beautiful glory of the first years of Mornese and the speediest means of attaining that sanctity acquired by so many Sisters who have already preceded us into eternal glory, as their enviable deaths would lead us to believe.

This is already a big House, yet it will be extended on all sides (Don Bosco says so and he is a saint. Who doubts it?) We are already a big number but many, many postulants will come, including rich young ladies. The Houses will multiply beyond all expectation. But if we want the Lord to continue to bless us and our Institute, we must observe poverty, increase our fervor, and have no fear of mortification, even that we voluntarily embrace. Let us remember we have a vow of poverty, that we must consider ourselves poor, and each must advance in the spirit of poverty if she wishes to become a saint. If she does not want it, then all the worse for herself-and what a disaster for the entire Congregation!

Religious life is, in itself, a life of sacrifice, renunciation and privation. Community life and work often offer the opportunity for these. . . does that suffice? No, no! A good Sister is not content with what opportunity brings her, but finds the means of doing more for the love of God, of souls and her own soul. There is mortification of the head, the [p. 269] will, the heart, the senses. There is obedience and humility which can ask much of us, even if no human eye sees or human ear hears. My Sisters and Daughters: poverty and mortification, obedience and humility, observance of the Constitutions and chastity are the virtues so united among themselves as to be but one. *As long as we are poor in spirit, and do not seek to gratify ourselves in food and other things, we shall have many other virtues, and then the Congregation will continue to expand and progress in beauty and strength. If we are holy Sisters, Providence will not fail us, but will become more and more abundant, so that we can do more and more good.*

If we wish to become saints (Who does not wish it? Let anyone who does not, stand up!) we must practice all these virtues. We vowed it at the altar and our guardian angels have written it in letters of gold to remind us of it often and to put it before us at the hour of death.

Let us be real Sisters, and let the New Year be for all a new life! ¹¹³

No one of those present could express the effect of such a conference. But each felt that Mother spoke like one inspired, like a saint, and many wept from emotion.

Mother's confidences

Sister Josephine Pacotto followed Mother after the conference and as always, managed to find the opportune moment to make her say something more. Mother replied to her questions with all simplicity:

Oh, yes! I always have before me the thought of having to give an account to God for everything. That is what makes me ask God for the grace of keen remorse for my failures, so that I may fear and avoid them.

You say you see me pray fervently. But I must say that I never feel joy in prayer, and therefore I do not know what [p. 270] my fervor can be.

All I can say is that when I feel something is missing in the House or when I have a greater sorrow than usual, I feel more drawn to prayer and detached from earth. Then I like to be in chapel alone. I seem to be nearer to Jesus, and more completely His. I tell Him, "Now Jesus, I am here all alone with You, show Yourself to me only for a brief moment, that I may contemplate Your adorable face." Wouldn't it be nice to see Jesus?! How beautiful He must be! I wonder what we shall feel when we see Him!

And Sister Pacotto, in her frank simplicity asked:

"Mother, didn't you ever see Jesus?"

"Ah, no! I never really saw Him! Who am I that Jesus should show Himself to me? No, no! I have not the virtue to merit such a grace!"

The last Good Night of 1880

A little letter received from Sister Agnes Ricci prompted a fervent act of gratitude to God at the end of the year.

Called by Mother to transfer from Biella to Este, this Sister spent Christmas in Turin, where on Saint Stephen's day she went to ask a blessing from Don Bosco.

She had laid bare to him her inmost soul, with the exception of a point she didn't know how to explain. But Don Bosco, reading into her heart, expressed for her what she had not manifested, and added: "Despise these things; tell your Sisters to despise them too!"

Therefore, Mother I am writing you to say that the things to be despised are all the whims of vanity which, according to Don Bosco, are tiresome flies and insects, which are not to be taken notice of, but sent away as quickly as they come. Don Bosco told me to tell this to my Sisters! But how can I do so here at Este? Mother, will you please say it! Don Bosco told me that he learns geography without [p. 271] studying it; I didn't understand this very much, and don't understand it yet. But then in a prophetic tone and with a changed appearance, he finished by saying: "The Lord gives you many graces; be careful to correspond to them!" When he said those last words "Be careful to correspond to them," I felt myself grow cold, such was the force of his expression! Mother, tell this also to the Sisters, that they may pray for me. In turn I will pray for them, because they also have received much from the Lord, and are obliged, as I am, to correspond to heaven's favors.

This was the subject of the last Good Night of 1880, when the Director's talk, followed by the solemn *Te Deum* and benediction, had turned all hearts to the dominant note of loving gratitude and every soul felt disposed to renewed efforts in the struggle for sanctity.

1881

"Do much good and do it soon"

The January issue of the *Salesian Bulletin* enkindled a new fire of fervor in the Nizza community.

Did you hear, Sisters, what the Holy Father said to the Salesian Cooperators? "Do much good, and to do it soon, for the need is great." Those words are for us also you know. Therefore courage, and forward!

Mother wasn't lacking in courage, and all recognized it as an inspiring force!

In spite of the intense cold and the discomforts of declining health, she still refused to use a mattress at night, and laid her aching head on a little block of wood, putting aside the pillow which her Daughters had offered her hundreds of times. ¹

She was still the first to clear away the snow where the Sisters would pass when going to the laundry, to break the ice in the water tank to wash the linen. She was almost always the last to retire, having seen that all was in order, even what was not really within her sphere.

To give the impression of warmth in the workroom a little heater was used, sometimes lit, sometimes not. Mother would not use it. She was already accustomed to everything, she said.

Instead those who were frail, and not yet accustomed to such cold. . . let them at least see a little fire and it will cheer them up.

[p. 280]The agricultural school of St. Cyr

Among the works listed by the *Salesian Bulletin* for the previous year was the girls' agricultural school of St. Cyr, where it was stated the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians trained orphans in "the elementary sciences, housekeeping, cultivation of garden and fields in the measure which the age and strength" of their young pupils permitted.²

"Do you see how necessary it is to know a little of everything?" Mother commented. "Come Sisters, let us learn to put our hand to any kind of work, so that when God calls us to work among the little ones, especially the poor and most needy, we shall be in a position to teach them indoor and outdoor work as well as virtue. Thus we shall ensure for them an honest livelihood, contentment, and heaven at the end. "

Mother again visits Lu

Hearing of the splendor with which Our Lady's feast was celebrated at Lu Monferrato, Mother said: "We will go and see if the description is exaggerated!"

Some tried to dissuade her from this intent: it is too cold, the snow is heavy; your earaches will be worse than ever. . . Postpone the visit until later!

No, no! If I don't go now, I won't have time to go later!"

On meeting the novice, Sister Voccalatte, she asked her: "Have you any messages for your part of the country?"

No one could detain her; and between the 5th and 6th of January, accompanied by Sister Elisa Roncallo, she left for Alessandria-Quargnento. From there she went to Lu,³

to see the community and solve some problems. She took occasion to give each one a program for her apostolate and religious life, pardoning personal failings and congratulating them for all the good already done in the countryside.

[p. 281] Mother's revelations

Back in Nizza she was obliged to spend a day or two in bed and availed of it to speak more intimately with the affectionate Sister Josephine Pacotto.

She sent for her and introduced her subject without preamble.

"Listen, would you like to do me a favor?"

"Yes, Mother, two if you wish, even three!"

"Well, look: Mother Enrichetta has offered to go to America, with the intention of making the sacrifice of detachment from my poor person, but she won't go for the present. . . it will be later, if ever, and she will do much good there. In the meantime she will have to leave me just the same."

"What do you mean, Mother!?"

"I mean... that if you went instead of her... you would do me a great favor. You would accompany your novices. . . I know well the sacrifice I am asking. But even if you were to remain here, you would have to leave me just the same. because... I will be gone before the year is out, you know? . . Shall I tell you something, not so much to console you, as to tell you the whole truth? . . .

Not many days ago I was called to the parlor to meet a certain Father Superior, a complete stranger to me. He looked at me steadily and then asked me: "Are you the Superior General?" I answered, "Yes." He went on, "I too am a Superior General. But be it known to you that this is the year in which many Generals have gone or will go to the other world; among them the two of us. You know Mother Irene, the Superior General of the Sisters of Saint Joseph

in Turin? She died a short while ago.⁴ Let us get ready then! "

He got up, gave me his blessing and went away.

Now don't you think that I have reason to say to you that even in Italy you would have to leave me?

Sister Pacotto did not tell how she felt at this disclosure but we can easily gauge her generous acceptance of Mother's [p.282]proposal from her promptness in getting ready to go to America.

All for her Daughters

As soon as she was up and about again, Mother gave herself entirely to the missionaries and the novices. She was interested in everything they did and used her own system: "What time is it? Could you tell me a point of the meditation, the reading, the sermon? Are you cheerful?" If the response came quickly, and was what she wanted, her word of encouragement was heartfelt. If instead, confusion or lack of memory caused the interrogated to be tongued-tied, she sent her to reread the meditation, repeating frequently one of her favorite thoughts: "As the sun lights up the world, so does the word of God enlighten the mind, inspire the heart with good sentiments and yield an abundant harvest of good works for heaven."

If she noticed that someone's face was clouded she would quickly put her finger on the discordant note and tune it to the harmony of serenity and joy of spirit. In the evening she received those who wished to speak confidentially with her. She wrote to her Sisters far away or wrote some souvenir thoughts for those who earnestly asked for them before leaving for the missions. Some of these have been preserved and we include them for our common edification.

V. Gesù, Maria e S.G!

My good Sister Sampietro,

Are you content and cheerful? I don't want you to think anymore that you have displeased me. I am not in the least displeased with you! Therefore, don't think of it anymore. Think only of becoming holy by giving good example to all your Sisters and girls, and by confidence in your Superiors.

Never look at the defects of others, but at your own. What about that, Sister Sampietro? Never, never be dis- [p. 283] couraged, but with humility turn to Jesus. He will help you by giving you the grace and strength to keep up the struggle, and He will console you. Be cheerful, then, and pray for me; I never forget you in my prayers. In the month of March, if God gives me life, I shall come to see you. Are you pleased? Yes, Mother! but that is too far away!

This is true, my dear Sister Sampietro; but do as I tell you, and the time will seem short. Set to work earnestly to acquire many beautiful virtues, and to become holy in a short time, and time will then seem short to you. Come, come, pray, pray for me, be cheerful, really cheerful. May God bless you, along with

Nizza, January, 1881

Your affectionate Mother,
Sister *Mary Mazzarello*

Viva Gesù, Maria!

My good Sister Lorenzale,

I received your letter and gather from it that you keep cheerful. This consoles me. There's no need to weep because you have a strong heart. The Lord does not count tears, but the sacrifices we generously make for Him. Be cheerful therefore, and if you cannot cry when you have some trouble, all the better!

I hear that your garden and fields need lots of things, which at the moment are out of the question, but be assured that little by little everything will be provided. In the meantime do all you can, and you will find that all goes well. What is of greater importance is that you be careful to keep the garden of your heart in good shape. Every now and then, you should give a glance to see if some weed is suffocating the good plants; you understand. . .

I hope that you will gradually learn to understand French, as also the confessor. Most important of all is that you always have good will, fervor, humility and charity. You will see that if these virtues are not missing you will know how to do and understand everything. Courage, my dear Sister Marianne; pray for me, be always cheerful, and keep the Sisters and girls cheerful also. To the latter say many things [p. 284]on my behalf. Tell Sister Pestarino, Sister Sampietro and Sister Alexandrina that I do not forget any of you in my prayers. Let all be cheerful. Send us good news; obey your Superior. God bless you, along with

Nizza, January, 1881

Your affectionate Mother in the Lord,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù, Maria e S. Giuseppe,

My good Sister Jacinta [Olivieri] ,

Are you dead or alive? You never write me a line! All the others let me know that they still remember my poor, miserable person either by writing themselves, or through others; but nothing from you.

I really hoped to pay you a visit. Instead I have to be satisfied with sending a piece of paper; patience! God's will be done! We shall surely see one another in heaven. In the meantime let us prepare ourselves a beautiful place up there by the practice of all the virtues required by our holy Rule; let us be exact in its observance. Let us know how to courageously break the horns of self-love, remembering that every blow we strike adds a flower to our crown.

You are very fortunate, for you can do so much good, and win so many souls for Jesus. Work, work untiringly in the field God has given you; never grow weary; work with the intention of doing all for the Lord and be sure you will have a rich treasure of merit for heaven. Courage, my good Sister Jacinta. Pray for me and for our dear Congregation.

I will not delay further to write many things because I know that the Sisters who go there will give you all the news. I send you this picture, and want you to keep it. I leave you in the heart of Jesus and Mary. Greeting you, I am

Your affectionate Mother,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

[p. 285]

Viva Gesù e Maria!

My good Sister Rita [Barilatti],

I would willingly satisfy you with even a short visit but we must resign ourselves to God's will, because it is really He who wishes it so. . . All the better, isn't it? How many things my poor heart would say to you, my dear, good Rita. We do not know one another except in the Heart of Jesus where we meet in the spirit.

Take courage, and persevere in your vocation. Know how to correspond to the happy lot of having been chosen by the Lord to be among His special Daughters. I think I hear you say: "Oh Mother! I want to, but what must I do?"

Listen, the safest way is to be truly observant and obedient to our Superiors or rather to the holy Rule, and to practice true humility and great charity. If we do this we shall soon become saints.

We have come into religion for this. Therefore courage; courage and always be cheerful. . . this is the sign of a heart that loves the Lord very much. Pray much for me. I never forget you in my prayers. I'm sending you this picture; keep it in memory of me. May Jesus bless you! Believe me,

Nizza, January, 1881

Yours affectionately in the Lord,
Sister Mary Mazzarello
your Mother

Viva Gesù e Maria!

My very dear Sister Mercedes [Stabler],

Just a few lines for you also. I too would like to know you, but what can we do about it? The Lord wishes us to know one another in spirit only. Therefore, let us be resigned to that. The day will come when we shall really know one another.

In the meantime, let us strive to observe the holy Rule well, and to exercise ourselves in the practice of true humility and great charity towards all. Have confidence in your Superior and confessor. Respect everyone and always take [p. 286] the last place. If you do this with sincerity and not merely in words, you will soon be a saint. Courage, my good Sister Mercedes, and pray for me; I assure you that though I do not know you personally, I have you very close to my heart, and no day passes without my enclosing you in the Sacred Heart of Jesus and Mary. Will you also pray for me?

Love the Lord very much; this is the desire entertained for you by
Nizza, January, 1881

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus
Sister Mary Mazzarello

Viva Gesù!

My dear Sister Teresina Mazzarello,

Here are the good Sisters to help you. Are you pleased? Keep them happy for me by telling them many lovely things! Now that you have a Superior, you won't have so many worries, will you? I recommend you to have confidence in her and to instill this confidence towards the new Superior in the other Sisters.

I will not stay here to tell you much about our Houses because the Sisters will tell you everything. I only tell you to be always humble and charitable with all. Keep yourself cheerful and content with everything as the Lord wishes.

Never forget to pray for me, who love you so much in the Lord. May God bless you and make you a saint quickly. In the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, believe me

[Nizza, January 17, 1881]

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,
Sister Mary Mazzarello

[p. 287]

Viva Gesù e Maria!

My dearly loved Sister Victoria [Cantu],

At last help has come! Will the worries diminish? No, my good Sister Victoria; as long as we are in this miserable vale of tears, there will always be something. We are fortunate as long as God gives us something to suffer for His love.

I recommend the "new Americans" to your care, poor things! They will be lonely when they find themselves in such strange (*forest*⁵) surroundings; but you and the other good Sisters will keep them happy, won't you?

I don't know if Mother Mistress, that is Sister Josephine Pacotto, has been appointed Superior of the House of Montevideo or Las Piedras; whichever it may be, she will be able to cope with it.

The important thing now is that you agree with one another, whether in one House or another; help one another as true Sisters.

Keep in touch with the other Superiors by letter. By so doing things will go well. Try always to progress in good example, by living detached from self, by not seeking preference or praise, rather despising such nonsense. We should be the first to show that our heart is made to love God alone, and not direct that love to ourselves. Courage, my dear Sister Victoria; never forget to pray for me and for all our deceased Sisters.

I will not prolong this letter with news because I am certain the Sisters who arrive will tell you everything. I only wish to recommend charity, patience and union among yourselves. I also ask you to write and give me good news. May Jesus keep you In His holy grace and make you a saint quickly. Pray for me, who love you very much in the Lord,

[Nizza, January, 1881]

Your affectionate Mother
Sister Mary Mazzarello
[p. 288]

Viva Gesù, Maria e S.G!

My ever beloved Sister Josephine [Pacotto],

Listen to the souvenir I give you: You must never be despondent or discouraged about your defects. Great humility, great confidence in Jesus and Mary, and always be convinced that without Him you are capable of doing nothing

good.

Second: Always work in the presence of Jesus and Mary, by being ever united in will with your Superiors. Keep this thought ever present in your work: If my Superiors were present, would I act or speak in this manner?

See to it that your will is always free from self-interest in what you seek. Be careful to observe the Rule well, and vigilant in seeing that others observe it exactly. Never allow the least abuse or slackening in this matter for any reason whatever.

Have great charity towards all without exception, never partiality. Be vigilant here if there are some who might manifest affection for you, protest their love for you, (in reality it is mere nonsense) and would always want to be near you with their compliments. For goodness sake, despise this rubbish, overcome human respect. Do your duty and correct them. If you keep these things in mind you will be pleasing to the Lord, and He will bless you, enlighten you ever more, and help you to know His will. Courage, courage; let us become saints and pray always for one another. Let us never forget our one aim, which is to become holy and perfect for love of Jesus.

My last advice to you is this: when the cross seems heavy, look at the crucifix we carry about our necks and say: "Oh, Jesus, You are all my strength. With You, burdens become light, toil easy, thorns are changed into sweetness."

But, my dear, you must overcome yourself, or else all will become heavy and unbearable.

This, dear Sister Josephine, is all I can give you as a souvenir. Pray always for

Nizza, January 17, 1881

Your affectionate Mother in Jesus,

Sister Mary Mazzarello

[p. 289]

Viva Gesù!

My good and dear Sister Octavia (Bussolino),

The souvenir is this: Observe the holy Rule with exactness. Secondly, never get discouraged when things go wrong; take all from the hands of Jesus. Place all your confidence in Him, and hope for everything from Him.

I recommend purity of intention and humility of heart in all your actions. Let your humility be free from the contamination of self-interest. Act in such a way that Jesus may say to you: "My Daughter you are dear to me. I am pleased with your work."

Courage: when tired or afflicted, go place your troubles in the Heart of Jesus; there you will find relief and comfort. Love all your Sisters. Love them in the Lord, but never divide your heart with anyone. Let it belong entirely to Jesus! Pray for me always, for my intentions. God bless you along with

Nizza, January 18, 1881

Your affectionate Mother in the Lord,

*Sister Mary Mazzarello*⁶

"I would like to go to America with you"

In spite of all her good will, Sister Josephine Pacotto was unable to hide the deep sorrow she felt in detaching herself from her dearly loved Mother, who often repeated to her: "Listen, Sister Josephine, make the sacrifice willingly. In due time you will have a great reward. Shall I tell you something nice? I will accompany you to Turin and Genoa, and if God permits it even to Marseilles. From there I shall go to St. Cyr. I would like to accompany you to America, but am resigned to the will of God. As I already told you, this year is really my last, I feel it! The good

Lord has deigned to hear my supplication, accepting me for the good of all."⁷

[p. 290]

Mother speaks

The words Mother addressed to the community at the Good Night, were always deep and

practical but during these days they had power to move hearts not easily moved, in a way never experienced before. In her desire to send out missionaries immunized against every possible, unforeseen situation capable of weakening the religious spirit, she seemed sometimes to repeat herself to impress her warnings. But in reality there was always something new and better each time.

I do not know, [she said,] if in America you will find the abundance you have had in this House. But as I always recommend, especially to the other Houses, I repeat here: Be mortified. Jesus, the Son of God, when hungry, ate some ears of corn as He went through the fields with His disciples, as it He would say to us by His example, what in fact, Don Bosco has recommended to us: Let us be satisfied with whatever the community provides. God blesses the food of the community. Let us take nothing outside of mealtime. Don Bosco said it clearly to us: It in certain cases you have over and above and there are no poor or sick people to whom you can give it, it is better to let it go bad-fruit, sweets and the like-rather than eat it outside of mealtime.

Let us therefore be careful, Sisters. Let us not cause displeasure to Jesus by not being mortified as we should be. Every morning we can offer Him some lovely flower of interior or exterior mortification. He will give us souls and special graces in exchange.⁸

As we go about the House, it is easy to find a kitten, a puppy, a little bird with which to amuse ourselves for a few minutes, during recreation and also apart from the recreation time. I have told you, and will never tire of telling you, not to lose yourselves in this kind of childishness. It is not worthy of a spouse of Jesus and a virgin who is actually consecrated to Our Lady. We must show our tenderness, but not to a dog, a cat, or a bird. . . It makes one ashamed even to mention it, never mind doing it. What would our good Father Don Bosco think of us where he to find us thus employed?

[p. 291] And you who are going away from here, be very careful not to allow yourselves this type of nonsense, and not to permit others to indulge in it, because it cannot please Jesus and Mary.

Therefore, let us all repeat, thinking well of what we say: "I give my heart to thee, Mother of Jesus, Mother of love." I am sure that many of you have heard since childhood that exterior order is a reflection of the interior. Here in this House I don't know many times it has been repeated. Yet, my dear Sisters, not all strive at all times to be orderly during work and then leave to things in order. Let us do as the good Sisters of Saint Anne taught us from the beginning. Every time we must inconvenience ourselves to put a chair or bench in place, pick up a bit of paper or a straw from our pallet, let us say an ejaculation, let us make an act of love of God, recite a *requiem* for the poor souls in purgatory or ask a soul from the Lord. Consider what merit for heaven, and how much good for ourselves and others! There's no need really to go to the missions to be missionaries. And you missionaries, unless you keep continually in mind the thought of winning souls and gaining merit, of using every means of being entirely for God and souls, what kind of missionaries will you be? Therefore let us promise to use even these little things to become ever more truly Daughters of Our Lady and of our good Father, Don Bosco. Are you all agreed, my dear Sisters?

Good! Poor, yes! But always tidy, like Don Bosco.⁹

The Good Night of the 19th and the good morning of the 20th were dedicated to farewells, reciprocal promises of prayers and fraternal remembrance, because the new missionaries had to be present at the evening service in the Basilica of Our Lady Help of Christians in Turin. Mother had already said she would go, accompanied by Mother Emilia Mosca and Sister Elisa Roncallo. She would go on with them to Marseille, if Don Bosco allowed, for a last *Viva Gesù* to the dear missionary Sisters.

[p. 292] To Turin with the missionaries

God alone knows what the departure cost Mother! Sister Louise Arecco was coming very near the end, even though not confined to bed. The doctor had already said she should be watched, because she could go at any minute. This had so impressed the Superiors that before Sister Louise retired for the night Mother Petronilla went to the Director to say: "We really do not want her to die without the Sacraments, but neither do we want to frighten the poor creature by telling her outright of her danger. "

"Bring her to the chapel to me," Father Lemoyne said immediately, "I will give her Holy Communion."

"But she has just had supper! ":

"That doesn't matter. If the doctor's verdict is what you say, she can receive Communion as Viaticum."

Mother Petronilla, surprised but obedient, accompanied Sister Louise behind the altar, where the Director was already waiting to say a few words as he so well could. Sister Arecco, who wanted to make some preparation, heard him repeat: "A lovely act of charity! A lovely act of charity. . . Jesus asks no more of you at this moment."

Thus she received the Lord as Viaticum and went peacefully to bed.

Mother had to leave Sister Louise in this state, while she herself felt very shaken in health and

knew that her own last hour was not far distant.¹⁰ Besides she was apprehensive about the departure of one of the missionaries who had wheedled this permission from Father Cagliero, in opposition to her expressed opinion.¹¹

Sister Pacotto felt leaving Nizza more than anyone else. She was leaving her novices and dear postulants, who were bound to her in a particular way by bonds of gratitude and affection. She managed to leave the House without being seen.

When Mother met her she said in a tone of gentle reproof: "That was not right, you know! We mortify ourselves always: others, never!"

[p. 293] During the journey it was Mother who cheered them all. Sister Elisa Marocchino told of the reception given them by the Sisters and girls of Valdocco:

I had been but a short time in the Turin House, where I was waiting to go to Nizza as a postulant, when I heard that Mother Superior was expected. The Sisters were so happy that it seemed like the vigil of a great feast. Then I too began to feel I wanted to meet her of whom they all spoke so affectionately: I couldn't imagine what she was like.

When she arrived there was joyful, prolonged ringing of bells. All the Sisters ran to the door shouting: "Viva la Madre!" Just by seeing her surrounded by such confidence and spontaneity on the part of her Sisters, I understood that she must really be a true mother, and I, too, although some, what timidly, approached her. I felt I was in the presence of a saint and wanted to cry. And she: "Ah, you are the postulant from. . . Courage! Courage! we shall soon see one another well!" I kissed her hand and was so happy!

The farewell in the Sanctuary of Mary Help of Christians

The solemn ceremony of farewell for the missionaries took place in the Church of Our Lady Help of Christians on January 20, first day of the novena to Saint Francis de Sales.

The Salesian Cooperators were there in great numbers, together with people of every age and condition.

Don Bosco gave the address, announcing the special blessing of the Holy Father for all those who cooperated with the Salesian work and for the missionaries assembled there. Then he developed his theme, speaking of the good already done and of the work envisaged for the Pampas in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, all of which had been entrusted to his Sons and Daughters, through the generosity of their benefactors.

He referred to the sacrifices of the missionaries; of the duty of helping them for the redemption of souls; of the eternal reward of those who left all for Jesus Christ, and [p. 294] those who gave part of their wealth for the spreading of His Kingdom on earth.

For about half an hour he spoke with the efficacy, simplicity, and warmth peculiar to him. After giving benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, he brought the ceremony to a close by paternally embracing his departing Sons. The entire congregation was deeply moved.

The Sisters also received marks of esteem and affection and requests for prayer from the ladies of Turin assembled there, as they passed from the church to the square outside.¹²

Some kind families had provided carriages, which gave the impression that the missionaries were going to the station to take the train for Genoa then and there. But in reality the departure was delayed for some days.

That too was according to Mother's desire and she did not fail to put every spare moment to good use.

Don Bosco addresses those departing

In the first place she obtained an audience with Don Bosco for her departing Sisters, that they might have a word from him and his special blessing.

Here is the summary of his words kept by one of those who were leaving:

Having encouraged us to undertake the long journey, our good Father, concluded. "As the Apostles called themselves unprofitable servants after they had accomplished great things for God's glory, so after all the work that God is pleased to effect by means of us, we must confess to be but humble servants of the Lord, holding for certain that all that we do is His work. And you, Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, called by God to the missions, should arm yourselves with strength and virtue so your work may have the desired effect. To this end it is necessary to treasure the principles and wise instructions received in the Mother House. Therefore, you should be like soldiers, who even in the barracks do nothing but train in military exercises, [p. 295] drilling now as if coming to the aid of a besieged city, now to disperse a troop of bandits and so on. You must now practice the virtues you have been taught in the Mother House, and strong in soul, overcome the difficulties inseparable from the great work of saving souls. And what is the means by which the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians can be sure their life conforms to the spirit drawn from the Mother House and according to the desire of their Mother General? The easiest and most secure means is to hold fast to your holy Rule in everything. Imitate the Jews in this: They carried two bands on which the Law was written, one on the forehead, the other on the heart, so they would never forget their obligation of faithfully observing the Commandments of God. So you should carry the holy Rule in your minds and hearts and never depart even in the least thing from ail it demands."

Our holy Father concluded his words by giving us each a rosary, with a crucifix where one ordinarily sees a medal. He said this was "so we might remember that the cross must be our inseparable companion wherever we go."

He again wished us a safe journey; assured us of the protection of heaven; and finally, gave us his paternal blessings
13

Mother at Chieri

On that same day, January 21, Mother accompanied Sister Frances Roggero to Chieri. This Sister could not resign herself to the idea of being so far away from Mother and wept nonstop. "But cheer up!" Mother concluded after she had put before her the most consoling thoughts faith could suggest. "The Lord is also in the House you will soon call your own. Go to visit Him frequently and He will console you."

At Chieri she received the Sisters, gave some wise and timely advice, and before leaving gave a conference on the spirit of faith, prayer, and union with God; on silence and recollection as means of acquiring and preserving it; on how to treat the pupils; and on the duty of speaking well of all.
14

[p. 296] Back in Turin

On the 24th Mother was back in Turin where she found time and means to satisfy the new missionaries, Sister Ernesta Farina and Sister Lorenzina Natale, by writing some souvenir thoughts for them, as she had already done for the others.

Viva Gesù, Maria e S.G.!

My dearest Sister Farina,

Before all else I recommend you to observe the holy Rule exactly, and as far as it depends on you, get the others to observe it.

2nd. Think that you are capable of doing nothing, and whatever you think you can do, remember it is God's hand that works through you. Without it we are not able to do anything good.

3rd. Take humility as your friend and learn from her. Never give ear to Mistress pride, the great enemy of humility.

4th. Never be despondent when you find yourself full of defects, but have recourse to Jesus and Mary with confidence. Humble yourself without discouragement, and then go ahead without fear.

5th. Pray always. Let prayer be the weapon you ever have at hand. It will defend you against all your enemies and help you in all your needs.

Always be cheerful, and never forget the one who loves you in the Lord. I assure you that I will always accompany you with my poor, weak prayers. May God bless you and make you all His own. Your

Turin, January 24, 1881

Affectionate Mother in J.C.,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*¹⁵

[p. 297]

V.G.M.G!

My ever dear Sister Lorenzina,

- (1) Strive always to become humble, humble.
- (2) Let humility be the virtue most dear to you. May piety and modesty also be with you. Yes, you must make it shine out for everybody to see.
- (3) Obedience, too, should be your friend. Never abandon it to go your own sweet way.
- (4) Be a lover of sacrifice and mortification of self-will.
- (5) Don't include self-love among your friends, but study every means of killing it.
- (6) Remember that our holy Rule is our sure guide to heaven: therefore, observe all of it faithfully.
- (7) Be full of charity towards all, but especially towards your Sisters.
- (8) Never neglect prayer. In it you will always find great consolation and comfort.

Turin, January 24, 1881

Your affectionate Mother who loves you in the Lord,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*¹⁶

"Sister Arecco is dead"

During the night Mother woke suddenly with a sense of anguish and called Sister Pacotto, who slept next to her:

"Sister Louise Arecco is dead! We have seen and understood one another! What an impression! Oh, what an impression ! "

Then recovering her self-control...perfect silence!

At 9:00 a.m. next morning the announcement of the serene death of Sister Arecco arrived. The news was not unexpected, yet how deeply felt!

Father Cagliero, following the impulse of his heart, and no doubt with Don Bosco's approval, arranged to leave Sister Roncallo at Turin to attend to the missionaries and returned to Nizza with Mother, Mother Emilia Mosca and [p. 298] four young girls: Maria Brigatti, Alfonsa Cavalli, Brigida Prandi and Elisa Marocchina, all of whom were waiting to begin their postulancy at Nizza.

Their arrival was like a ray of sunshine on a dark day.¹⁷

The following morning, overcome by an unusual weariness, Mother asked permission of Mother Assistant to get up a little later. But between sleep and wakefulness, while the community was at meditation, she heard such a sad moaning that she immediately moved aside the curtain of her bed to see if Mother Assistant too had slept in, perhaps because she was ill.

Mother Assistant was not there. Then she thought at once of Sister Arecco, in need of suffrages, and saw her in front of her, not in the flesh-Mother said-but it was she, really Sister Arecco! She said aloud:

"Tell me what you want, Sister Louise, but don't frighten me!

This dialogue followed:

"Are you saved?"

"Yes, by the grace of God!"

"Will you be long in purgatory?"

"Through the suffrages of the community and the purity of intention with which I worked, I shall remain until Easter only."

"Now you can tell me freely: what is there in me that hinders the glory of God?"

(She told her)

"Is there anything in the community that is not as it should be?"

"Look, Mother. . . (She showed her the Sisters in the playground) these groups in the playground are never a good thing! At the moment it's not very significant, but. . .",¹⁸

Under the vivid impression experienced, Mother rose and went to chapel to offer all her practices of piety in suffrage for the deceased Sister. Then she began to beg, so to speak, for Holy Communion, ways of the cross, and rosaries for that dear Daughter of hers, telling quite [p. 299] simply what had happened.

Sister Louise Boccolatte adds: "How many prayers were offered by the community for Sister Arecco!"

In spite of the severe cold, Mother went into chapel, and when she felt she was alone she knelt on the freezing floor in ardent supplication.

This extraordinary combination of circumstances and the deep sorrow of the community was not surprising, when one recalls the brief life story of this Sister, so suddenly brought to a close.

Her mother had died when she was but a child. More or less abandoned to her own devices Louise spent most of her time in the open country, singing more often than working, and her songs were anything but sacred! The passers by stopped to listen and said she had a heavenly voice!

Mother Mazzarello pitied her, and fearing that some good-for-nothing might exploit her, won her affection so that Louise stayed at Mornese and asked to receive the habit, which was granted her before she was sixteen.

How well Mother helped her cultivate humility, the spirit of sacrifice and apostolic ardor!

When Sister Louise sang, her voice raised the thoughts of her audience to God and the Holy Virgin. It was vibrant with feeling and expression. For this reason, Mother wished to keep her humble, lest she become proud and thus lose the precious fruit of such a rare gift!

The Sisters told how she had longed for Mother to be there before she died to receive her last breath; then in an attitude of one who speaks and listens, she used expressions as if she were really conversing with Mother. Finally they invited her to sing Cagliero's *Recordare Jesu pie*. She intoned it with her dying breath. . . and expired shortly after with a beautiful smile on her face.

She was the first of the four on whom Don Bosco's glance had significantly rested the previous August at Nizza, saying: "Get ready to sing better in heaven." Sister Louise was not yet twenty-two years old.

[p. 300]The memory of Sister Arecco

The thought of Sister Arecco suffering in purgatory never left Mother during those days.

At table they tried to serve her something more suitable to her state of health, because she was now suffering from a heavy cold, but she countered: "Ah, yes! Now you say: 'Mother, take this and that!' But then no one will do my purgatory for me!"

They also tried to warm her bed, but when she discovered it she aired it again, saying: "Today I suffered nothing for the Lord; let me at least offer Him my acceptance of the cold which is a gift from heaven!" And although shivering all over, she went into chapel to recite night prayers with the community.¹⁹

The doctor had suggested that she use a specially prepared flannel to counteract rheumatism which was causing her considerable pain. Father Cagliero had given her permission but. . . "If I, the Superior, use it. . . " objected Mother, "However, if a Sister needed it, I would be the first to order it for her. For the moment it is better not to use it myself; I have many debts in the Lord's book."²⁰

In her short but earnest Good Nights, she insisted on detachment from the world and its vanities; on purity of conscience, which she represented as care for interior order, out of respect for the Lord whom we receive daily in Holy Communion; and finally on war against little

dissimulations, deceits, compliments, which aim at wheedling Superiors to obtain what is desired. The mention of those things caused some to lower their eyes. Some exchanged significant glances. They seemed to want to say: "Poor Mother! and she must watch that one go all the same." alluding to one among the new missionaries of whom they, too, knew some unpleasant particulars. But she had played her cards so well at Turin as to be reckoned worthy of belonging to the chosen group. Mother's vote was unfavorable, but this time the balance had weighed on the Sister's side. Those who knew [p. 301] all the circumstances suffered, also because they knew Mother's feelings on the matter. They suffered, prayed, kept silent and hoped... perhaps for some last minute change of plans.

Under suspicion

In these days also reports had it that some lighthanded person was appropriating objects not her own: suspicion seemed to fall on the recently arrived postulants. Mother could not and would not overlook a defect of this kind, and therefore before leaving Nizza she spoke to the postulants in no uncertain terms: "My dear postulants, there must be among you one who, not sure of persevering, is keeping her own little trousseau untouched, while she is making free use of that which does not belong to her. All that you have brought must be given up to the wardrobe attendant so that she may provide for the needs of all with justice and charity. The weather is cold, but I add: she who has warm things should wear them, and she who hasn't any but won't ask can let her teeth chatter!"

Those who knew the style and heart behind those words knew what she meant, and smiled. But one among the new postulants showed her consternation. Mother noticed it and as she went into chapel for night prayers, she guessed the thoughts behind the furrowed brow and asked her:

"What do you want to tell me?"

"Mother, I brought the money instead of the trousseau and . . . I will have my teeth chattering, because I have no warm things to wear."

"Very well, don't cry anymore. Before you go to bed you will get what you need tonight and tomorrow you will be ready for any kind of weather!" In fact, when the postulant went to the dormitory she found more than she needed on her bed!²¹

[p. 302] Last conference of January

In her conference for the last Sunday in January addressed to the whole community, Mother made some major points:

Getting up these cold mornings certainly costs. When the bell rings, imagine that the bed is on fire. If it were, you would soon rise to avoid being burned. Remember that these moments of laziness have to be atoned for in the fire of purgatory .

Never go to bed without having apologized to anyone you have offended in any way during the day. Thus you will be more at peace going to Communion and Jesus will be more pleased with you.

Charity, Sisters; above all charity, always and with every one.

I can't say when I shall return from France, but if you live in the presence of God and Don Bosco, you will be happy and make me happy on my return.

Let us pray to Jesus to give us docility, submission, and good will to accomplish readily and cheerfully all His orders and desires, and to know how to interpret them well.

Let us never forget to distinguish Our Lady's feasts and every Saturday by some act of piety and mortification in honor of her who is our dear and true Mother. Let us teach this to the girls also.

Allow me to repeat for the hundredth time: After God and Our Lady Help of Christians we are indebted to Don Bosco for every benefit of our vocation, and every possibility of doing great good in the world. We must feel the duty of gratitude and cooperate with all Don Bosco's works and those of his Sons, with all our strength, because they are the works of a saint. They are the works of God, Our Lady and of our dear Institute.

This time, also, Mother joined her hands when she mentioned Don Bosco's name and her

expression of deep affection was noted by all. ²²

[p. 303] First thought always for others

Having been informed of the day and hour for the departures of the new missionaries from Turin to Genoa, Mother made plans to continue the train trip with them from Alessandria to Sampierdarena.

In the meantime she went about the House with a hot brick at her side where the rheumatic pain was most severe. By this time it had reached the stage of preventing free breathing and her acute suffering could no longer be hidden. It was useless to ask her to have some regard for her state of health if she planned to visit the Houses in France. The only concession she made was to give that providential brick, which from time to time was reheated at the kitchen fire, to anyone she met or saw suffering from cold, or from a temperature that obliged her to be more or less an invalid.

I had to remain in the dormitory, [narrated the novice, Sister Enrichetta Gamba], because I had a temperature, and Mother came to see me:

"Do you need anything?"

"I am very cold," I answered, and she replied: "Here take this brick quickly. It brings me relief and will do likewise for you!"

But that was not all! Learning that I also had a sore throat, she went hastily and came back with an orange: "Come, it's the only one in the House, but it's yours. Take it with faith and it will surely cure you!" Oh, what a Mother, what a Mother! Where can another like her be found?

Mother meets the new missionaries

February I found Mother Mazzarello and Mother Emilia Mosca at the station in Alessandria waiting for the arrival of the train bringing the Sisters from Turin to Genoa. The joy of meeting them made her forget, for a while at least, the sad impression she had on seeing the Sisters of Nizza weep at her departure in such poor health. Her [p. 304]pain did not, however, escape the vigilant eye of Sister Pacotto, who soon sat beside her to make her talk and to tempt her in a certain sense.

"Mother, couldn't you have met us at Sampierdarena?"

"Yes! You speak through affection, but I want to accompany you as far as I can."

"And do you really have to go to St. Cyr?"

"Sister Sampietro is there. She wants very much to see and speak to me again; and if I don't go now, who knows if she will see me again?"

"But Mother, you are suffering so much, anyone can see it . . ."

"Yes, but not like the souls in purgatory."

"What do you feel in those ears that make you start so often as if in pain?"

"I feel as if a knife were going round and round, cutting me right in the ear drum."

"But wherever did you get that dreadful illness?"

"I believe I got it when I was a girl. I often got up too early by mistake and had to wait at the door of the church so as not to wake up Father Pestarino and the parish priest. Sometimes I was drenched right through. Other times the snow was deep. I think I'm feeling the effects of it all now!"

The Sisters' fears for Mother

At Sampierderana the stage was set for the reception of Don Bosco and the missionaries. Despite her desire to be present at the entertainment for the occasion, Mother had to retire because she was running a high temperature, with other complications of a serious character.

When Don Bosco was told, he sent her his special blessing, suggested that the three novices

about to depart make their vows and arranged to receive them himself in the private chapel of the hospice in the presence of all the missionaries.

This moral consolation combined with his paternal [p. 305] blessing gave hopes for an improvement in Mother's condition, but here was really no perceptible change. With her usual strength of soul, Mother Emilia suggested: "Put the thought of going to Marseilles out of your mind, Mother. Come back to Turin with me; everyone will be happy with that arrangement, and I won't have to travel alone!"

Next day the doctor gave hopes that the resumption of the journey and a sojourn, in a milder climate, however short, would benefit rather than harm the patient; therefore no one thought to oppose it.

Intimate function presided by Don Bosco

In the meantime Don Bosco assembled the missionaries, Salesians and Sisters, near the altar of the semi-public church. The function was private and most intimate in character. The three novices-Sisters Lorenzina Natale, Juliana Prevosto and Teresa Rinaldi-were admitted to first Profession and Sister Angela Gualfredo made her final vows. Then Don Bosco addressed the assembly With an augury of the success of their apostolate in the new spiritual field of action that awaited them across the sea.

Once again Our Lady has gathered us here on one of her feasts, to renew our consecration and profession. The feast of the Purification of Mary Most Holy and Presentation of Jesus in the Temple is, we all know, the feast of humility and generosity. We will try to apply its fruits to ourselves in the following points.

Respect and honor Superiors. Do all you can to be their joy and consolation. Obey promptly and willingly. If they have defects, cover them with the mantle of the most delicate reverence and charity. Imitate not the bad example of Cham, but Noe's two good sons. They covered their father, when he was overtaken by sleep as the effect of inexperience, and hence, entirely involuntarily. We all have defects. Why marvel then to find that Superiors have them? Kindness of heart and reverence of spirit will make you use every possible remedy.

[p. 306] Help and love your equals. This I warmly recommend. Let each one do his own duty, so it won't happen that one has to do the work of three. Let there be no drones around. Love one another as real brothers and Sisters, as each loves himself or herself. Let your affection be cordial and expansive-not such, however, as would degenerate into particular friendships, which serve for nothing except to destroy the spirit of piety and fraternity. Correct one another with goodness and simplicity. Act so that your true religious, Salesian union may be known to all.

Sustain and comfort your inferiors. Be particularly kind to anyone who is defective and has greater need of encouragement and spiritual formation. You may have to work in an arid field, especially at first. You will have to deal with unstable, undisciplined, rebellious characters... even perhaps with those of evil life. It is particularly in this case that you should practice charity and repeat to yourselves: Charity! charity! charity!

Finally, wherever you may go, remember that you all have the same Rule to observe, a soul to save, and the same Lord to serve. From Him you will receive the great reward prepared for you in heaven. Think too that our holy Rule, having been approved by the Church, is infallible. It is a sign of eternal salvation for us if we faithfully observe it. Therefore, before leaving this chapel let each one promise Jesus and Mary to practice humility and generosity in the way indicated, as comprised in the exact observance of our holy Rule."

"Like Don Bosco, I will be always with you!"

Even as she took all the precautions of an invalid, Mother did not cease to devote herself to her Daughters, now speaking to this Sister or that, now addressing them as a group.

Asked if they might entertain the hope of seeing her one day in America, she replied:

I will say to you what Don Bosco said to Father Cagliero on the departure of the first Salesians: "Of course you will [p. 307] see me in America; I am coming with you, and will remain with you!"

Then producing the little booklet of the Rule, he added: "When you feel the desire of seeing and hearing Don Bosco, take this book... read it... and you will see and hear Don Bosco!"

I say the same to you, [Mother went on]. You have heard me speak often of that which our Rule contains. Recall what I said to you; practice it and you will have me with you-and I will really be with you in thought, affection, and prayer.²³

From Don Bosco's words to the group, Mother took her cue to insist on mutual forbearance and

helpfulness, on sacrificing oneself for souls, and of self-sanctification through the observance of the holy Rule. When they besought her to restrain herself, she accepted momentarily, only to begin a little later to give advice and recommendations: "Yes, it is true, I feel I have no energy, but I have so much to say to you, that you may keep the spirit of Don Bosco and the Institute... away down there... so far away, my poor Sisters!"

That night her temperature soared and it seemed also that she was slightly delirious for awhile, because she continued to repeat: "Poor Sisters! Only four, only four," referring, no doubt to the four Sisters, who from the time of embarkation would be separated from the other six. This too was an unforeseen sacrifice, but Don Bosco had already said that he would see to it that they would not be alone and that one of his missionary priests would accompany them.

Don Bosco precedes and Mother follows

On the evening of February 2, having once again imparted his blessing and given his photograph to each of the missionaries, Don Bosco took the train for Nizza-mare, intending to continue later to Marseilles, where he would again meet them.

[p. 308] On the following morning Mother was no better. In fact the Sisters continued to protest: "Listen to us, Mother; don't try to go! You don't want to disappoint the Sisters of St. Cyr? We will write and tell them you could not possibly make it! "

To this she answered: "They will think it is just an excuse! Let me go see them, poor Sisters! I will be more at ease and they will be satisfied!"

At the appointed time the group set out for the port. Father Cagliero, like a kind father, followed Mother Mazzarello and Mother Emilia onto the *Bud America* to see the first four into their berths, recommending them again to the paymaster of the steamer as well as to Father De Valle and the cleric Pestraino, both Salesians. Fearful but serene, Sister Octavia Bussolino, head of the group, went aboard with Sisters Anna Brunetti, Louise Vallese and Ernesta Farina. The last mentioned spoke with charming pride: "We are travelling first class and our fare was paid by an Argentinian benefactress! Don Bosco dried my tears by telling me to go willingly to America, not to fear the ocean, because even were the fish to swallow me, I would be in heaven all the sooner. And Mother actually gave me her watch! "

When the *Bud America* set sail, the seventeen Salesians and Sisters, accompanied by Mother Mazzarello and Sister Elisa Roncallo, hastened to their places on the *Umberto I*. Above the long piercing sound of the ship's siren a voice announced: "Passengers aboard immediately!"

Father Cagliero would accompany them as far as Gibraltar, infusing spirit and courage. Then, with a group of seven destined to open the new foundation in Utrera (Spain), he would disembark and then... then ... Good-bye! More pain and more merit!

Mother Emilia, with some Salesian benefactresses on the wharf of Sampierdarena, waved to the travelers: Sisters Josephine Pacotto, Angela Gualfredo, Catherine Lucca, Lorenzina Natale, Juliana Prevosto, Teresa Rinaldi. She then returned to recommend Mother to those staying [p. 309] behind, and with a sad and prayerful heart, set out for Nizza.

Less than two hours had passed between the two separations.

Mother Emilia returns to Nizza

When Mother Emilia returned to Nizza the Sisters crowded around her: "How is Mother? . . . and Don Bosco and Father Cagliero? And the poor things we may never see again?! " During recreation in the playground, she often heard: "Patagonia or death!" and this was not only from Sisters but from pupils as well.

In the school she was surprised to hear the poem which the *Salesian Bulletin* had published to commemorate the occasion recited enthusiastically.²⁴

This was only the echo of the reading in the refectory, workroom, and recreations, which had aroused new enthusiasm in all the pupils of the school.

Mother Emilia enjoyed it. In her educative work, she was adept in discovering the first germs of religious and missionary vocations among the girls who; in and out of school, hung on her words. They in turn were happy to allow that intelligent gaze to scrutinize their thoughts, and let that strong hand guide them.

First news from Marseilles

News came from Marseilles: all had written something and the various bits and pieces fit together to give a reasonably full picture which satisfied the community.

The sea was calm; no one suffered except Mother who had been very ill! If only she had lain on the deckchair for awhile it would have helped. However, the fear of giving bad example would not allow her even this, until Father Cagliero said to her in a loud voice: "But the deckchairs are [p. 310] there precisely for cases like this!"

Contrary to all expectations they had to remain anchored in port for a day or two, so that repairs could be carried out on the steamer. The Sisters were delighted: they would have Mother that much longer. Slightly improved, she was always at their disposal, listening to them, talking to them, preparing them for many things-"even future events"-Sister Pacotto added. They hoped to see Don Bosco soon. They asked for prayers, promising theirs in return, and sent greetings by the thousand!

These details, read and discussed, left hearts in relative calm; relative only, because Mother Emilia could not banish the thought that Mother was seriously ill, and that she might have to remain in bed. . . so far away. . . in those blessed and impoverished Houses of France!

A presentiment confirmed

The painful presentiment was confirmed a few days later in a letter from Sister Elisa Roncallo. She told how she had accompanied Mother to St. Cyr immediately after the *Urn berto I* had sailed, comforted by the blessing of Don Bosco who remained at Marseilles. She described the filial welcome given by Sisters and orphans. She told how she had immediately called a doctor for Mother, who was again assailed by high temperature and perhaps, pleurisy. The doctor attended her with solicitous care, as he found her seriously ill. Prayer, much prayer was needed to make her better. Sister Elisa concluded with affectionate greetings from Mother, who was so strong, serene and calm. . .and with her thoughts turned to Nizza.

[p. 311] Prayers and tears everywhere

The news caused general consternation, and prayers in common and in private were offered unceasingly. Hope centered on Don Bosco. To console his Daughters, would he do less for them than he was so prodigiously doing for strangers who needed comfort or health? Nor were there wanting some who offered their lives so Mother's health might be restored. But the news never improved.

The request for prayers was sent to all the Houses in Italy, and everywhere there were tears and alternate fears and hopes. Even the deceased Sisters were brought onto the scene: "Dear Sister Virginia, you are already on the pages of the *Salesian Bulletin* as a saint. Go to Mary Help of Christians and ask her to leave us our Mother!"

"Oh, Sisters! As you are in heaven, in a position to pray for us, have compassion on our sorrow, and obtain for us the cure of our dear Mother."

Third anniversary of the Pope's election

Father Lemoyne was always the first to propose to the community everything possible to carry out the directions of Don Bosco. But now he was so deeply participating in the general grief, that his reference to the Pope's feastday was very limited.

In fact this third anniversary of Leo XIII's election, which fell on Sunday, February 20, was not distinguished in any way from an ordinary Sunday, except by the singing of a hymn suitable to the occasion during mass, a homily, general Communion, and frequent visits with the double intention of obtaining grace for the Holy Father and Mother's cure. There was no entertainment, no rejoicing of any kind, so that the long-planned program was completely abandoned.

But the date still left its mark. A simple suggestion from the Director sufficed to make many take pen and paper [p. 312] and record the expressions used by the *Salesian Bulletin* in listing the Holy Father's attributes:

The Pope is the great Priest, the high Pontiff, the Prince of Bishops, the successor of Peter. On earth he possesses the principality of Abel, the dominion of Noah, the dignity of Aaron, the authority of Moses, the jurisdiction of Samuel, the unction of Christ. To him were given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. No one else opens or closes it. He is shepherd of the entire flock. He is teacher of teachers. To him alone belongs the privilege of infallibility, when he speaks to the world in God's name...

Leo XIII is the living rule of justice, the mirror of holiness, model of piety, custodian of truth, defender of faith, doctor of the nations...²⁵

A stormy voyage

From the missionaries, who should now be near their destination, only a few words came through: heartsore and seasick! Naturally they were sad at heart when they recalled the condition of health in which they had left Mother. Besides, wind and wave threatened to submerge the ship. But-as they wrote-they had Don Bosco's word to assure and calm them.

A ray of comfort

The 22nd of the month brought hopeful news of Mother's condition to Nizza. "Alleluia!" resounded in every heart. The sun shone again, because the tone of the letters from St. Cyr and the more detailed news made them feel improvement was not merely a momentary thing, since the doctor considered it portentous and the Sisters there were so relieved.

Had not Don Bosco said: "Now that the Sisters have left, go and get really well with the good Sisters of St. [p. 313]Cyr. We shall meet there." And Don Bosco-they thought-will see her soon and give her one of those blessings that bring people from death to life. Our Mother will sing victory, and we will join in.

These were hearts' desire, reaching out in joyful hope.

An even more reassuring letter came on March 1.

Don Bosco was already on his way to St. Cyr. Everybody was talking of the miracles which his blessings effected wherever he passed or stayed, and Mother would try to get up to receive him.

The three days at Marseilles

Meanwhile, excusing herself for the delay, Sister Elisa Roncallo wrote describing the three days at Marseilles in her own poetic way. The joy of communicating to her Sisters the news they had been waiting for came through in her letter.

Guided by Father Cagliero, the missionaries of the *Umberto I* had gone to the Oratory of Saint Leo, while the necessary repairs were being carried out in the steamer. They did not forget the Sisters who, when they disembarked, were directed to a little house belonging to very kind people beside Saint Joseph's parish church. Even there they found Saint Joseph on their path!

They were given a fairly big room void of necessities, but capable of containing eight sacks of straw-which Mother, who was feverish, had prepared little by little and lined up side by side, on the damp dark floor. And lo! the community was organized!

Next morning when Mother tried to get up with the others she could not. She had to resign

herself to remaining in bed. Father Cagliero came later to see the Sisters and above all to see how Mother was. He found her happy to feel the pricking of the straw as Jesus did in the cave of Bethlehem, but she was prostrate with a slightly diminished temperature. She told him that her greatest sorrow was to [\[p. 314\]](#) see that particular Sister, who would soon cause trouble, go so far away.

Father Cagliero's words only served to double her anxiety, for she judged by them how successful the poor thing had been in deceiving the Superiors. However she finished with an act of abandonment: "Mary Help of Christians, remember that she is your Daughter more than mine!"

On leaving the missionaries Father Cagliero said in an undertone to a few of them: "You have much to learn from your Mother-her spirit of fortitude, of sacrifice and of zeal for souls. Learn and imitate."

On the last day they again met Don Bosco, from whom they also had much to learn. What paternal goodness in accompanying his Sons aboard the steamer, in the face of the storm that had arisen, and how affectionate his farewell! To prevent tears from flowing again it was better to forget that scene!

Mother too had played her part in that sad hour: "Do not fear the dangers of the journeys, my Sisters. The blessing of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco accompanies you. Go in God's name, determined to wage unceasing war on self-love and pride. Cultivate humility and piety. Hold fast to the spirit and affection of our beloved Founder Don Bosco, and you will do much good."

After the ship sailed they had gone to St. Cyr where they experienced what is meant by a struggle between life and death. The remainder of the news would follow after Don Bosco's visit, which was now imminent.

The "Sister of silence"

She who was acknowledged by all to be the great lover of silence-Sister Catherine Nasi died in Turin on March 3. She had passed her six years of profession in almost unbroken union with God, radiating the peace and joy of the saints. When she died between twenty-eight and twenty-[\[p. 315\]](#) nine years, she left us her moral portrait in her last words: "Keep your hearts detached from everything which does not lead to God. You will be content in life and find death sweet. "

Foundation at San Isidro in the Argentine

News of the foundation in San Isidro distracted them in some small way from the thought of the latest family bereavement. While hearts were still centered on St. Cyr, and fervent prayers and hopes were turned in that direction, love for vocations and participation in the joy and glory of the missionary Sisters also found a place.

Letters had come stating that the Provincial, Mother Madelene Martini, accompanied by Sisters Emilia Borgna, Maria Magdalene and Natividad Rodriguez entered that lovely land-only an hour's distance from Buenos Aires on January 6, first Wednesday of the month. Bells had pealed out a joyful welcome. They were accompanied by a select group of ladies and gentlemen, future patronesses and patrons of their work. They were honored by the presence of the Archbishop, Monsignor Aneyros, followed by priests and high-ranking officials and acclaimed by a vast jubilant crowd.

They first visited the church, where the Archbishop cordially welcomed them and joyfully introduced them to all the people as "the poor Sisters of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco." Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament followed.

At midday the entire group-including the Sisters naturally-was hosted by the Belanstegui brothers, worthy founders of the work. By 3:00 p.m. they were conducted to their House, which was soon sanctified by the blessing and liturgical prayers of Monsignor Aneyros.

Jesus took over in the House on the following day. The ever zealous Provincial, Father Costamagna, spoke warmly of this privilege.

[p. 316] Then to work: free classes; visits of charity to the homes; distribution of food and clothing to the poor of the locality and of the country. All were happy, and would be even happier if the Sisters coming would swell their numbers in that vast field of apostolate.

In a postscript, Vespignani bemoaned the fact that they (Salesians) were absent from that entrance! "The Provincial, who was away, had forgotten to give directions on the matter, and I felt it was not my place to move. However our very good Monsignor Aneyros soon made us feel it. When I offered my apology, he made me promise not to fail like that again when it was a question of our Sisters!"

The missionary spirit revives

As usual, this news communicated to all the Sisters was received with loud applause and handclapping, because all felt that in spite of distance the spirit of the Founder lived and triumphed in that family unity, which is the prerogative of the Salesian work.

The *Salesian Bulletin* contributed to this. In it the life of Sister Virginia Magone was given in brief. She had braved the long voyage to America, inviting Superiors and Sisters to go to sow and reap good grain there for God, and while she joked about her illness, she reawakened love for the already large family of Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco.

Don Bosco at St. Cyr

The first letters from St. Cyr after Don Bosco's visit arrived. What shall we say about them? They compensated for the silence of the missionaries who, perhaps, were only now arriving at journey's end.

St. Cyr was jubilant with filial devotion and gratitude towards Don Bosco, but we have to choose from among [p. 317] the various thoughts of the Sisters.

The day and date of Don Bosco's arrival was not given—probably the evening of February 28 would be the best guess. He wanted to see Mother immediately. He spent a long time with her and returned the following morning and afternoon. Although Mother was gradually improving, progress was slow, and she was not yet allowed up. While she was very happy to speak to Don Bosco, she seemed somewhat preoccupied.

Sister Roncallo had dared to ask Don Bosco about the probability of her complete recovery, receiving an evasive reply. Regarding her return to Nizza, his answer was an immediate affirmative.

Every Sister in the House spoke with Don Bosco, al. though he was sought after by interns and externs, and in all hearts the great happiness at being Daughters of such a saint reigned.

Don Bosco at La Navarre

From St. Cyr he went to La Navarre.

That community, too, had its thrilling experience to communicate to Nizza: Don Bosco's visit had transported them to heaven. He had told them that Mother would soon be among them, and had left some providential assistance.

All that did not overjoy the Sisters of Nizza, who felt the Sisters did not know the whole reality of Mother's condition. Indeed the uppermost feeling was: "as long as Mother doesn't have a relapse in that blessed place which is misery at its worst!" But then faith in Don Bosco's words took the upper hand, and they went about with a measure of serenity.

[p. 318] Definite improvement

March 19 confirmed their hopes: "Mother is really better," the letter said. On the 17th she went as far as "La Madrague" and in the wood nearby enjoyed the little feast which the Sisters and girls had prepared for her. She thanked them all for having looked after her so well, and remembering

the words of Don Bosco about the future of that House,²⁶ 26 exhorted the girls to listen to the voice of the Lord, and if called, to follow Him faithfully and courageously in the religious life. Encouraged by the fact that the walk had not tired her, she thought of going to La Navarre, but the Sisters would not allow her without the doctor's permission.

Confidential letters from St. Cyr

A few days later Mother Daghero at Nizza received many confidential letters from the Sisters of St. Cyr. Sister Hugues wrote:

Our dear Mother left us all sad on Saint Joseph's feast to go to La Navarre. The doctor does not think she is really better. He says that short of a miracle, she can have a relapse of her illness and in a matter of two months be called to her eternal reward. You can imagine how we felt!

But how much good has resulted from Mother's illness! In the first place Mother and Sister Elisa have understood the difficulties of our life here. The Superior is really very good, but so spiritual that often our misery cannot reach her. . .between that and the want of bare necessities, our limited virtue makes us feel that life is very hard. . .

But let us go to the second point. It is not the case of filing a copybook with the acts of virtue of which we were both the objects and the witnesses during the past forty days, which I do not know whether to call sad or fortunate. But some of them I must write.

We had longed for Mother's visit and prepared a little feast, but when she arrived, she was so tired and sick that [p. 319] she asked to be left in quiet for awhile. We did so: but what a "quiet!" After a few minutes, she came around where there was work to be done, and in her own nice way began to visit this and that Sister to tell her what she had most at heart. Then, thinking it the best thing, we chose the first free quarter hour to have the orphans greet her and recite for her a few things they knew. She accepted but almost immediately said: "I don't feel I can stay up any longer. Allow me to lie down awhile." Then her illness and our anxiety began!

In our poverty we gave her the best we could provide and assisted her all the time. The senior girls took turns with us Sisters, to be in attendance day and night. She had a kind word for all so that they vied with one another to have a glance, a smile from her, each feeling the happiness a good daughter would feel in nursing a tender mother.

When Mother noticed that one of the Sisters suffered because she was not allowed to take her turn as night nurse, she asked her why. On hearing that this satisfaction was denied her because she was considered inexperienced as a nurse, she said to her: "Oh, very well! Go and say I will teach you little by little. Are you pleased?" The Sister was delighted, and received permission to stay up that night. Such was Mother's goodness that she didn't even notice her clumsiness. Rather, she heard Mother repeat: "Now do you see how well you can do it? This broth you prepared for me is the best I ever tasted."

Sister Roncallo slept in the room next to Mother's and we frequently went to her, especially when we felt the strained circumstances of the House to which our Superior would have added still more rigor. And to think that we would have wished to be in a royal place where we could get everything needed for our dear patient. An example? . . .

There was no cover for the saucepan in which the broth was made. A plate was used instead, so that Mother's drink might not taste of smoke. But a plate used thus ran the risk of being broken. And then: "We are violating religious poverty! The spirit of poverty is not understood!" . . .

Shall I give another instance now that I'm at it?

I had kept some little bits of linen which Mother had used. When my Superior came to know of it, she began to tell me my heart was too attached to these little things, that [p. 320] the Lord was not pleased with that. To please Jesus we had to be detached from everything. This went on to such a degree that when Mother left, she had them brought to her to be burned. What happened? Along with the scraps of linen which I was keeping as a relic, she also burned another envelope similar to that which contained "my treasure," in which were two hundred lire which the Director, Father Cerruti, had given me as an offering when he came here to accompany Don Bosco to Alassio.

Who can describe her sorrow? In her great humility she called me and told me what had happened. Instead of consoling her I said: "There you are! Our Mother is a saint and God wasn't pleased that you should burn everything in that way! "

However, I soon felt remorse, and said: "Really your intention was good, and Jesus wanted to give us a lesson! I wonder if we told the Director..."

The Superior wrote to him that same day, and today the two hundred lire arrived to cheer up our poor House of St. Cyr, and to show us that the Lord does not measure us according to our weakness, but rather rewards us for our humility. How true it is that we can learn from everything and everybody, but dear Mother Catherine, excuse me if in my boldness I add that this excess defeats Its purpose in the matter of sanctity.

The Vicar General smiled at these spontaneous conclusions which, though not in keeping with consummate perfection, gave her subject matter for a moral lesson for all.

Sister Sampietro added her postscript to Sister Hugues' letter:

Even in her illness, Mother did not cease to animate us to fervor, love of God and of our heavenly Mother, Mary Help of Christians; to the observance of our Rule and love for our Institute, which she said was really Inspired by Our Lady for the needs of the time. A day did not pass but she exhorted us to acquire the "spirit of Don Bosco, to exercise ourselves in humility, in sacrifice, without attaching too much importance to the little miseries of every minute, and [p. 321] to increase our confidence more and more in Divine Providence.

How much she suffered during all this time through the application of the blistering ointment to her poor back, and through the excessive perspiration that was its consequence! It kept her, as it were, in a continuous bath now hot, now cold. Yet she was always patient and uncomplaining. Her one desire was to return to Nizza to die among the Sisters there.

While she was at her worst, I too fell ill. She was less concerned about herself than about me. She told me: "Look after yourself, Sister Maria. Obey the doctor and take what he prescribes. Don't get into your head that you will die because-I'm telling you-you will live to be old."²⁷ he spoke to the Superior to make me take all possible precautions. Now she has left us. But we still feel her and think about her lovingly, and wish to console her by practicing her maternal recommendations.

A picture of La Navarre

News came from La Navarre practically at the same time:

Mother's arrival at Saint Joseph's school was characterized by an act of humility: "I am sorry to come today. Sunday is not really the best day for traveling, but I couldn't do otherwise. Forgive me, as I hope the Lord does."

She did not remain here long, but while keeping to her rest schedule, found time to be at the disposal of her Daughters, deputing Sister Elisa to visit every part of the humble House, to inquire about Don Bosco's visit the previous year, and in a word, to look into all the minor details, which often are more revealing than things considered of greater moment.

A newly professed Sister was so shy that she didn't even raise her eyes to look at Mother. On meeting her the latter asked: "If I needed an act of charity from you, would you do it? . . . Listen, come to comb my hair, and you will do me a great service!" All confused she followed her, and did [p. 322] that personal service as well as she knew how. Meanwhile Mother gave her the opportunity to speak and laugh, and won her confidence and love before the operation was finished.

Despite the solicitude of her Daughters, Mother saw and experienced the straitened circumstances of the House. She addressed her conclusive words of exhortation to them, reminding them of the holy house of Nazareth and the poverty that reigned there. She encouraged them to take Jesus, Mary and Joseph as their models so as to esteem and love that state of misery, which was their daily martyrdom. If accepted and not destroyed by self-love and vanity, it would consume them entirely for God and souls.

Her eyes were veiled in tears, because in her mind's eye she saw among the assembled Sisters here dear Sister Maria Gariglio, first victim of this agricultural school. She had been a jewel of humility and charity, and from her lips, right up to her dying moment, no word of complaint had escaped, only: "Oh, La Navarre! La Navarre!"

One can only imagine what La Navarre was like then, for the Salesians as well as the Sisters. Records of Don Bosco's and Father Cagliero's visit there in February of the preceeding year ran as follows:

Our good Father, who is always happy to know that poverty reigns in his Houses, was moved by our misery and left a sum of money to the Director to relieve the most pressing needs.

Plaster continues to fall from the roof: wind and rain enter freely through the chinks in the walls. The floors are covered—one knows not with what. By day insects remain hidden in the crevices of the partitions and take over completely by night.

The boys are so ragged that they arouse compassion. They change several times a week, even daily sometimes. The result only increases the number of rags that we wash again and again, until they can be used for nothing else except to stuff the pallets in place of corn leaves, which are too expensive to buy.

The baker has refused to supply bread any longer, and [p. 323] when we do get it, it is never enough. We go without to give it to the Superiors.

There are oxen and cows in number, about twenty sheep, six goats, and two mules for ploughing. We could have milk in plenty, but it is not the custom here to milk cows; we do not know why. Nor do we dare milk them, so that

the milk goes to water the fields, while we have the sorrow of seeing it wasted, the sacrifice of going to buy it elsewhere, where we can. Weakness from work and hunger comes over us and makes us cry when we do not want to. The Director, Father Perrot, is a saint. But the only comfort he can give us is: "Prayer and sacrifice! God sees and knows all! Let us go on. Those who come after us will reap the harvest."

One day we asked him if, precisely for those coming after us, we should not write some record of what we were going through. With a little shrug of the shoulders he answered: "But this is the history of every charitable foundation! Besides it is already written in the heart of God. Isn't that enough?!"

With such an example before our eyes, what can we do? Keep quiet and go on as long as we can and God wishes.

The page was too eloquent to be accepted in silence by the Nizza community, for whom it was summarized. "Who knows how our dear Mother must have suffered on hearing all this?" they said. "And yet, how pleased she must have been at the thought of having Daughters so generous and heroic! It is useless: without a spirit of sacrifice we cannot become what we should, if we are to do good to youth and become saints. Courage therefore and more courage!"

Mother at Nizza-marre

From La Navarre Mother went to Nizza-mare for a short visit. Here she again met Don Bosco, as she had wished.

She gave him an account of these last days, her impressions and fears. With simplicity she also spoke of her state of [p. 324]health, and finished by asking him: "Father, will I get better? "

He changed the topic for a minute, then in a very kindly tone began:

One day Death went to a convent, and asked the portress to follow him.

"I can't," she answered, "there is no one to substitute me in my job."

Death then strode freely through the convent, inviting all he met to follow him: teachers, students, even the cook. But everyone had the same reply:

"We still have many things to do."

"Fine!" Death said to himself, "I will go to the Superior!"

From her too he heard a long string of good reasons for postponement. But Death held fast!

"The Superior must precede all in good example," he said, "even on the journey to eternity. Let us go then!"

And the Superior bowed her head and followed him.

The fable could not have been clearer to Mother's quick intuition. With a significant intelligent smile, she knelt for his blessing, thanked for what he had done for herself and for the Institute and once again locked away in her heart the thorn that had first pierced it at the prediction of the unknown Superior General, who had come to visit her.²⁸

She still smiled as she went about among the Sisters, and from time to time was seen to grasp the crucifix around her neck in a gesture of strong and tender love. She privately interviewed each Sister" and in her short talk to the little community before saying good-bye, she told them of the apparition of Sister Louise Arecco. She had done so in the other Houses of France, to obtain suffrages for her. Then again expressing regret on having to travel on a Sunday she concluded: "Let us not be surprised at anything or any person, even when we have to witness serious offense of God. Rather, let us pray and be vigilant ourselves because if God did not keep His hand on our heads, doubtless we would fall even lower than those we condemn. Let us never [p. 325] forget, this dear Sisters; charity and humility always spread a large mantle over the miseries of others.

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Last stop-Alassio

From Nizza-mare Mother went by train to Alassio where she was to spend the feast of the Annunciation. To the Sisters' joyful reception she replied with a smile that said, "I am very tired."

"Mother, rest here a few days with us!" the Sisters suggested and she:

"Yes, I will stay here awhile, although they keep writing to me from Nizza to come home!"

The feast of the Annunciation, holy day of obligation, fell on a Friday. Abstinence was not

dispensed. Mother would not dream of having meat served her in the presence of a young aspirant, who was sitting at the same table. Then the Sisters said in chorus: "The law of abstinence does not bind for convalescents like you, Mother! The girl already knows; she is mature and won't be scandalized!"

Yet, Mother would not give in until she was told that the Salesian Director had given orders. Then she immediately complied, saying aloud: "This too is obedience. The precepts of the Church must be always respected, but if he who speaks to us in the Church's name and for good reasons tells us to do differently, we must obey him. All this results in equal if not greater merit."³⁰

On Saturday and Sunday she received all the Sisters privately and finished her visit with a few words to the community as a whole: "Having seen the Sisters' fare at La Navarre, I cannot help thinking that you are like queens here, by comparison. For heaven's sake, do not abuse this abundance. Be careful to avoid gluttony and practice mortification! Be careful to keep external order, and more still, order of the soul. Jesus should always be pleased to come into your hearts, and those who meet you or see you working should be able to say: One feels they live in the presence of God.

[p. 326] Let us not forget Sister Louise Arecco; let us send her to heaven as soon as possible."

It was touching to hear her speak. Her voice was very weak, but her words were accepted as precious pearls. And when she left for Nizza the eyes of Mother and her Daughters were tear-filled. Will we ever see each other again?

The majority of the Sisters saw her off at the railway station on Monday. They could not help noticing that holding the crucifix in her hands had become habitual, and their eyes commented: "How poor Mother must be suffering! She is happy to return to Nizza yet her eyes are veiled in tears!"³¹

Besides Sister Elisa, another Sister traveled with Mother. At the stations they passed en route this Sister invariably went to the window to look out. Mother ignored this for a few times, then without saying a word, with great simplicity she smilingly pulled the window curtain. "I won't readily forget that lesson," the Sister said.

The longed-for return

The Sisters' longing for Mother's return would be hard to describe. Two letters had arrived from Sister Elisa on the 19th and 25th saying she was on the way. And the two feasts of Saint Joseph and the Annunciation increased their fervor and heightened their expectation. We can, therefore, more easily imagine than describe the welcome being prepared.

The memory of that March 28 was indelibly written on the memories of all at Nizza. The avenue from the convent to the town was lined by her two hundred Daughters. Sisters and girls formed a guard of honor, and waited expectantly with eager hearts and open arms, hands ready to clap at the first glimpse of that beloved Mother. "Evviva! Evviva la Madre!" They shouted as they joyfully thronged around her, and accompanied her to the main door. There they broke ranks to file into chapel for the singing of the Church's [p. 327] great prayer of thanksgiving: the *Te Deum*.

Yes: Mother was home, but how changed! How thoroughly fatigued! Mother, for whom they had prayed and wept so much, was back. But how worn, how thin she was!

They hoped to see her again after the singing of the *Te Deum* and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, to tell her of their joy in music and song. Bells pealed joyfully through the House. But Mother could not stand up any more and asked to retire.

"Of course, poor Mother! Let her rest. We will make up for it another day. In the meantime, she is with us. May the Lord be praised for that!"

Thus each one reasoned, and the word went from corridor to corridor like a wave of intermingled sadness and hope, while night drew on in silence. The peace it brought invited all to an hour's quiet study or work; then a quick supper, a shortened recreation, fervent night prayers and sleep—more or less!

Next day Mother did not get up. This time she readily accepted the general consensus. On Wednesday instead she was again in chapel and at every community exercise, participating in the great feast held as an expression of gratitude on behalf of all to Our Lady Help of Christians and Saint Joseph, for her recovery. Of course it also expressed filial homage to her, whose return had brought back joy to everyone in the House.

Among the postulants who had entered in her absence was a certain Antoinette Baratti, who having dried her tears, gave her impressions of these days:

Everybody in the House was in festive mood, talking about Mother and busily preparing an outstanding welcome! I couldn't understand all this enthusiasm. My heart was cold and indifferent. I thought of my mother from whom I had run away to become a Sister. I thought of the difficulties to be overcome. I was waiting only for the chance to go home and was not pleased that the goodness of the Vicar, Mother Catherine Daghero, had detained me to wait for Mother Mazzarello's return. I can not explain what I felt when [p. 328] the mistress of postulants, Mother Petronilla, introduced me to Mother on the avenue the day of her arrival, saying simply: "Mother, this postulant wants to go home." Oh, that glance of Mother's! And her words: "Take courage, I will see you later!"

Then I regretted that my desire to stay came back.

Mother had said she would see the postulants individually. What if she really advised me to stay! ..ah, poor Antoinette!

Mother let it be understood that she would take the prescribed rest, but would have some time each day to see the newly arrived postulants. However, family business, with its relative anxieties³² interfered with her plans, so the interviews with the postulants were postponed.

From the Sisters overseas

The Sisters who had sailed on the *Bud America* landed at Buenos Aires on the afternoon of February 27. Those on board the *Umberto I* destined for Montevideo arrived there on March 1, while the others continued the journey to Argentina on the following day.

Both parties had had a very rough crossing. In fact there were days when the violence of the wind and the confusion of the Atlantic made them sure the ship would sink. Yet they were able to assist at mass and receive Holy Communion everyday, as if heaven wished to show its protection.

They had hoped to study Spanish a little and follow a community timetable. However, of the first four, Sister Octavia Bussolino was the only one who could teach, having had a few lessons from Father Cagliero in Turin. But then with so much seasickness. . . Books, copies and practicing the new language went with the wind. Among the Sisters on the *Umberto I* there wasn't even one who knew Spanish, or indeed had any desire left to learn it, so tossed about were they by the waves and a feeling of [p. 329] dismay against which "Mary Help of Christians, pray for us," was their only weapon!

As for practices of piety and silence, they did their best, but for meals and rest they had to be guided by the circumstances of the moment.³³

The foreseen cross takes shape

The only really sad news came in Sister Pacotto's letter. It concerned the dear Sister about whom Mother had expressed reservations and apprehensions.

Her superficiality had been a cause of great anxiety during the journey. At St. Vincent's Island she was already surrounded by persons who were not well-intentioned, and the admonitions and precautions of her Sisters were absolutely ignored.

It was truly painful to see her after all her promises to be the consolation of Don Bosco and Mother-to be true to Jesus and Our Blessed Lady-now on the verge of compromising the honor of the Congregation with her attitudes and superficiality. Despite the warm reception given them by the Sisters of Uruguay, Sister Pacotto, who was responsible for her five companions, could not hide her tears. She wrote begging for prayers that nothing worse might happen. She asked pardon for the sad communication and promised to be very observant of the holy Rule, so as to make up

for the poor, dear Sister, who in the meantime had proceeded to Buenos Aires.

Now Sister Pacotto understood Mother's words aboard the *Umberto I*: "Courage, Sister Josephine; a time will come when the cross becomes heavy, very heavy. That is when you must accept it wholeheartedly and promise fidelity to the good God!" That time came all too soon. Recalling the episode, Sister Josephine did not forget those words of maternal exhortation: "Remember that thorns suffered for the love of God will change into roses! Tell everything to Our Lady, joys and sorrows, and you will find a Mother [p. 330] infinitely more dear than the one you are leaving in Italy!"

The letter from Buenos Aires, with its brief account of the voyage and the joy of meeting the Sisters in the Argentinian capital, also brought the thanks of the Provincial for the reinforcement sent to the mission. It also contained a reference to "the cross" which was looming on the horizon, sad and distressing.

It was to be expected. Mother again and again laid the blame at her own door for this and any other scandal that could arise. If only she had been more resolute in opposing that Sister's departure. Or better, had she been more specific in speaking to Don Bosco... perhaps the consequences could have been avoided. Even more clearly convinced was she now that the Congregation should be put into more capable hands than hers, as she had said so often.

Mother prepares herself and others

It was not the first time Mother expressed such sentiments. In her humility and simplicity she had told others besides Sister Pacotto that because of her "ignorance" she could not carry on. She had willingly offered her life for the Congregation and for some Sisters who were not walking the way of the Lord. The Salesian Superiors encouraged her affectionately, but she held fast to what her foresight presented; not sad, but strong and sure.

The first evening she could give the Good Night after her return from France, she responded to all expressions of joy by simply telling the community the fable Don Bosco had told her at Nizza-mare. In conclusion she said, "We must never be overjoyed or despondent about anything that happens in this life."

[p. 331] Dedicated even in declining health

Mother's days of convalescence might be thus described: She attended mass and all the practices of piety with the community. She was as punctual as a novice in refectory and went to recreation whenever they allowed her. In fact she took part in evening recreation, where she was the central figure, surrounded by Sisters and postulants, interesting herself in everything and everybody. She kept everybody happy, trying out their voices and encouraging the non-singers to join with the choir in a soft, subdued tone.³⁴

During the day she went about wherever there were Sisters working. She was at the disposal of anyone who wished to speak to her. When she could avoid the loving vigilance of Mother Emilia, she would undertake work for which she was no longer able.

The novice, Sister Louise Bardina, remembered how one morning of the previous December, when snow lay heavy on the ground, Mother came to help her do the washing, and exclaimed: "Oh, if only I could do it all and spare you such cold!" She continued: "Mother came again today to the washtub, but Mother Emilia came to say that someone wanted her in the parlor. Quickly replying, "You go instead of me!" Mother went off in another direction, and fortunate indeed were any who found her!"

Antoinette Baratti, already mentioned, was among the first called by Mother. When the joyful impressions of the "Welcome home" were gone, discouragement again took over, so she packed her little bundle and prepared to slip away. Mother surprised her in the act. The postulants all gathered round her and there in their midst, with her bundle on her shoulders she had to kneel and recite the *Hail Mary* three times.

The private interview which she dreaded, naturally followed.

"The Lord called you here," Mother said to her seriously, "and here you must stay. You will have to suffer and do penance, but you will save your soul, whereas if you return [p. 332] home you will be lost! Now do as you wish!"

And Sister Antoinette remained with us, because she could never forget Mother's strong words. Hers was a soul of deep prayer.

The Sisters had already told me about Mother's goodness, [the postulant Caroline Masoero said to her companions,] but it was entirely understated! It seemed, to me that I was the only one she had to think of in all the House. And I'm sure others felt as I did, because to please her they would have thrown themselves in the fire.

Of course! I still see her with her arms blistered from those sticky plasters (*mosche di Milano*),³⁵ barely able to stand, going so frequently to do her share of the washing! I was delighted to see them use every means to take her away from the heavy work. I should and would have done the same myself, only I did not dare.

Seated on a bench in the workroom to be more approachable, Mother began talking to the timid yet frank novice, Sister Louise Bardina. She had in her hands a bodice for one of the little orphans, and while she stitched she asked some questions so as to get to know this seventeen-year-old a little better. At a certain point she said to her: "I'm sewing the last button, but I do not feel I can do it anymore. What would you advise?"

The girl replied: "Oh, Mother, go into the garden for a little fresh air!" Mother did exactly that. She went into the garden and brought joy to the Sisters working there.

"I tell you again"

At the Good Night she repeated: "You don't mind my telling you something again? Do not trust those who are all about you, showing love by compliments and stories. They are never those who attend to their duty. They are usually the most egoistic and insincere, because they seek nothing but sensible affection, especially from Superiors, with their own interests as ulterior motive. Do you know [p. 333] who love most and best? The most docile, the most obedient, those who are most observant of our holy Rule."

To the Sisters of Patagonia

She was rarely seen now at the little table that served her as a writing desk, and still more rarely with a pen in hand. She told the Sisters in Patagonia why.

Viva Gesù!

My dearest Sisters of Patagonia,

I received your letter with great pleasure, and delayed writing in the hope of recovering from my illness, so I could write to you personally as you desire. But seeing that I shall be weak for a long time I have others write for me, and you will be content won't you?

Sister Catherine is ill? Poor thing! Encourage her on my behalf. Tell her to be resigned to the will of God, and to suffer with patience and resignation. How much merit she will acquire! I believe she will get better soon; you are too few to let one go to heaven. Besides she hasn't yet done enough work. Therefore, she must get well, become a great saint, and win many souls for the Lord. I need not recommend you to look after her well, because I know you are already doing so.

I would like to say a word to each Sister individually. But since I haven't enough space I will say to all that I remember you, and pray for you to Jesus in a special way everyday. I greatly recommend humility and charity. If you practice these virtues, the Lord will bless you and your work so that you can do much good.

All your Sisters in Europe greet you most cordially, and remember you always; pray for them all especially for those who are ill, among whom are the reverend Economer, Sister Catherine and Sister Tersilla.

The Sisters of Buenos Aires must have given you all the news, so I shall bring this to a close, recommending myself to [p. 334] your prayers. I leave you in the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus in whom I shall always be,

Nizza, April 10, 1881

Your affectionate Mother,
*Sister Mary Mazzarello*³⁶

Always all for others

On her rounds of the Houses during the so-called "spring cleaning" Mother did not neglect the dormitories, where some one might be sick. In fact she found Sister Rose Bertone there whom she questioned:

"Did they serve you?"

"No, Mother," she answered, somewhat confusedly, "Since I had my medicine at breakfast time, I've seen no one!"

"Oh, poor thing! and it is nearly evening!" Mother exclaimed, "I'll go and have a little soup prepared for you. "

Soon after the soup arrived, steaming hot!

A Sister who had to change House pointed out that her shirt was threadbare. Mother, immediately said:

"Give her the one you recently bought for me."

"But Mother, we bought it for you because you need it! "

"Very well! But now the pressing need is that of the Sister who must go."

In the same circumstances another came to say she had no good shoes.

"Take mine. They are almost new, and I think they will fit you. For me at the moment, sabots are better! "³⁷

However, ordinarily Mother preferred to provide for the Sisters through others, so that all thanks would go directly to God.

[p. 335] Father Costamagna gives the theme for the last conference

A letter from Father Costamagna brought the latest news from America. So that all might enjoy and profit by it, Mother read it to the community. When the last sentence was read-"Mother, I ask your pardon if at Mornese I caused you displeasure"-the Sisters said: "What humility! And what esteem for our dear saintly Mother. "³⁸

At the usual weekly conference to the community, Mother took her cue from Father Costamagna's letter to renew her appeal to practice those virtues which had become natural to her.

Sisters, who gave us a Father Costamagna, a Father Cagliero, a Father Rua, and the other holy priests, each one more zealous than the other, for our spiritual help, guidance, encouragement in the way of perfection? Don Bosco: our good Father, Don Bosco! And who gave us Don Bosco as our Father? Our Lord and Our Blessed Lady, who through Don Bosco tell us what They want from us.

But what They want from us is written in the Rule Don Bosco has given us, after much thought and prayer. Do you believe all this? If we believe it our conscience must tell us that we do what Don Bosco and Our Lady want from us whenever we observe our holy Rules.

Don Bosco knows what Our Lady wants from us, her Daughters. Not content with having given us the holy Rule, from time to time he tells us how to act under certain circumstances. If we believe this, we must also believe that out of obedience and gratitude, we must not present difficulties and delays in carrying out what has been ordained. The simplicity Don Bosco asks of us is really the simplicity of faith-but the faith of a child, not of one who wants to be her own guide. You see, an innocent child believes at once what his father says, and if he is well disposed and loves his father, does not wait to be told to do this or that, but does at once as his parent desires.

That is how Don Bosco would have us. That is how Our Lady would have us, to please the Lord.

It may be that someone, through experience, or the [p. 336] difficulties which daily life presents, or for any other reason, feels she must discuss some order or advice given by Don Bosco or those who represent him. I think instead

that such a desire to contest an order should be banished as a real temptation against faith. The only thing to say is: "If that is what Don Bosco wants, that is what we do!"

Have we not seen up to this that everything goes well when we do as Don Bosco suggests? And that when we do not contest what we are told to do, obedience is easier and leaves peace and joy in our hearts?

The conclusion follows: Let us be simple also in our obedience. This way we will show ourselves grateful, and will never regret having said or done whatever Don Bosco, our dear Father, wished.³⁹

Mother Mazzarello as the girls remembered her

As has already been said the pupils always wanted Mother with them, but realizing that she needed rest, they were anxious to contribute to her speedy recovery by foregoing the joy of her presence. Yet their memories and impressions of her were very vivid.

Angelica Sorbone, who might be styled the most faithful "Mornesian reporter," starts off:

At the age of seven, more or less, Mother wanted me to be as sensible as a girl of fifteen. Meeting me one day after confession she asked me: "What penance did the confessor give you?" I was about to answer, when placing a finger on her lips, she said: "Silence, Angelichina! What regards confession is kept secret; remember that!"

Another day I learned this lesson:

"What did you have for dinner today?"

"Fried potatoes, Mother!"

"You greedy child! We shouldn't talk about what we eat, just as we do not think in advance of what will be served at the next meal."

Once I was holding the skein of stocking wool which Mother was winding; I moved my arms here and there, [p. 337] impatient to finish. Mother said to me: "You are already seven years old and still so thoughtless?"

Annunziata Vespignani came forward to speak:

Do you remember the Thursday that Mother came with us to recreation? We were practicing our French as we do every Thursday. We greeted her in French. She smiled a lovely smile and then, what a beautiful act of humility! I can almost hear her say: "I came because you wanted a good word from me. However, I know less than you, because I never went to school; and you want me to say something all the same? Very well then: My dear girls, remember that without a lot of instruction we can love God very much. He does not ask for instruction. He is satisfied with our heart and our good will, and with many visits to Him in the Blessed Sacrament, telling Him we love Him and want to love Him more and more, with both heart and will. Will you do that? Good, my little daughters!"

We could never adequately tell of Mother's goodness to our relatives! Let me tell this story which dates back to Mornese days:

My father had come to see us one winter day. It was snowing heavily and he was drenched. When Mother saw him, she had a fire lit immediately so he could dry himself. She invited him to change his stockings and shoes after having borrowed the change, from the Salesians, I think. She herself washed his stockings and had them dried very well. She treated him with such kindness and attention that she could not possibly have done more were she his most affectionate daughter or sister. My father was surprised and deeply touched and never stopped repeating: "Sisters and girls have a saint for a Superior!"

I am not the only one who says so: Mother considers the parents and relatives of the Sisters and the girls as part of the family.

Sophia Cairo exclaimed:

Yes! indeed that is very true! Mother's acts of charity can never be forgotten. It was 'awards day.' I had taken [p. 338] part in the song of welcome but was not among the prize winners. So amid general applause almost all my companions went to receive their prizes, while I stayed apart in a little corner swallowing all my humiliation. Suddenly I heard my name called softly, and there was Mother, with a beautiful gilt-edged book for me. Then tears of emotion poured down as I kissed her hand and blessed her kind, maternal heart!

She had done the same last year with two orphans.⁴⁰ They had arrived towards the end of the scholastic year and therefore, received no award. She called them and gave them each a beautiful book, with one of those words of hers which are like candy: they seem hard but they are very sweet.

Another girl added:

Oh! we can really talk about Mother's predilection for us girls! You need only look into her face when she can come to tell us we may go for a walk, or a snack because we have been good. When she returns from a journey, never once does she forget to bring us a picture or some candy, to encourage us to do ever better, and to tell us that she wants us to be good so that Our Lady may be really happy to have us in her House.

Rosina Gilardi recalled Mother's outstanding humility:

She consulted us, the pupils, with a simplicity, spontaneity and naturalness that impressed us all. I saw her call a girl, ask her how to do a certain task, and then express her deep gratitude. I wish I could practice humility the way she does.

Frances Gamba too intervened:

I don't know how anyone could say that Mother has a rough exterior. But I do know that when my sister, Sister Innocenza died, Mother hastened through the November weather to reach at Chieri in time to console her in her agony. I feel like crying even now when I think of it. On her return, with a delicacy that was full of affection, she prepared me to receive the news of her death, which was very painful for me. Mingling her tears with mine, she said: [p. 339] "Before going to heaven Sister Innocenza entrusted you to me. From now on I will be your sister. Do you accept?" Hers were not mere words. Since that day deeds have borne them out. I couldn't even count the number of times she has interested herself personally in my health, my studies, my conduct, just like a mother. Therefore I think: Let her exterior be what it may, she has a most tender heart. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, yes, that is so! That's true!" the group chorused. Then the loud voice of Angelina Cairo took over:

Perhaps she is a bit serious with the Sisters, because she wants them to live up to her standard of perfection. But when did she ever reprove us in a harsh tone, or make us feel that she was commanding us? She came to distribute little prizes when we deserved them. She gave us news that made us feel part of the family. She increased our hatred for sin and our love for virtue, never for anything else. You have seen her come into the workroom, the study, the recreation; you know how she has been an angel of peace everywhere.

Approval was general. The assistants were pleased that the girls had all these impressions chiseled in their hearts.

The spirit is still strong

Mother wanted to keep her prayer vigil with Our Lady of Sorrows on the Friday of Passion week and at the altar of Repose on Holy Thursday-April 14-despite the remonstrances of the Sisters. She also insisted on doing her share of the big "Easter laundry." On Good Friday she joined in their sacrifice of recreation, and allowed the visit to the Blessed Sacrament to be delayed awhile. However, feeling her strength fail, she was eventually obliged to give in and retire.

As she passed by the refectory she heard the voices of two novices who were cleaning there. Not having heard the bell for the visit, they were still deep in conversation. "Eh! [p. 340] little Sisters, are you still here? I'm coming from the laundry where I thought I would give a hand, but do you think they would allow me? Not at all! And so I just had to accept the job of stoker and keep the fire going under the boiler. Now I am a bit tired; and it's better I be sensible and go to lie down a while. "

She went, and stayed in bed for a few days. Then she tried to get up for the practices of piety in common, almost always carrying her heated brick, which she pressed close to where the first renewed attacks of pleurisy were most acute.

Looking at that dear Mother of ours, [the novice, Sister Louise Bardina said], we knew she was still suffering atrociously from those plasters. Yet she would kneel straight through mass, without even touching the bench with her

joined hands, as though in perfect health. I cannot do that even though I am young and strong.

The doctor had ordered her to eat meat, [the postulant, Elisa Marocchion, related, with her eyes open wide as she recalled Mother's virtues], but to prevent our being scandalized, she hastened to tell us: "I am obliged by obedience to eat meat, even though it is a day of abstinence. Don't be scandalized, dear postulants!"

[The same postulant continues:] Do you know where they found Mother after searching the whole place for her? In the infirmary! Already in bed, and smiling as if to say: "I put one over on you this time!"

The infirmarian could not refrain from showing her displeasure, but she answered: "Indeed! Why all the repugnance to coming in here, and even dying here if God so wills? Who am I to act differently from the others? I must give good example and that's enough!"

Fortunately an order came from an authoritative source and she resigned herself to return to her little room.

You might say that Mother had a presentiment that she would have to yield entirely to the illness which tormented her. She called the boarder, Angelina Cairo, to talk about her religious vocation in a fervent tone that deeply impressed the girl. Angelina left her with tears in her eyes and a lump in her throat. Mother left us all the same way the other day [p. 341] when she concluded: "Some of you are thinking of returning home; but remember what I'm

telling you, my dear postulants. Now poor Old Nick⁴¹ is jealous of you, because you have given him a kick. You must not forget, however, that he knows your weak points, and if you do not wage ruthless war on him he will play ugly tricks on you. Be on your guard, therefore. Forewarned is forearmed!"

Without a miracle there is no hope

The presentiment to which the postulant Elisa Marocchino refers, really existed. It grew stronger daily with Mother's increasing pains, difficulty in breathing and fever which never abated. It became evident that pleurisy had returned in full force. She was obliged to remain in bed.

The doctor in attendance and the Superiors of the House decided to call in a specialist, Professor Grillo of Acqui, who confirmed the verdict: "Nothing but a miracle can save her now!"

Prayers and sacrifices were offered without number to obtain that miracle. Though resigned and self-possessed, Mother said: "Don Bosco in Rome, Father Rua in Spain. I can no longer speak to either about certain fears that assail me and certain thoughts that come to me for the good of individual. Sisters and of the Institute. May God's will be done! "

As every human hope was lost, and the disease advanced with insidious and alarming strides, she herself asked for the Last Sacraments, which were administered together with the papal blessing.

The complete serenity of her spirit was evident to all in her calm, confident attitude: "Now that all my papers are signed," she said, "I can go at any moment, can't I?"

To those who still hoped for an improvement, if not a full recovery, she answered decisively: "Oh, you don't know anything! Have I not already told you that if I do not die, certain things will never be remedied? Don't delude yourselves, poor Sisters! I shall have to suffer much, and I desire [p. 342] that. God alone knows how long it will be, but I shall not get better. No!"

Moments of perplexity came to replace momentarily her habitual confidence in God: "I'm afraid of losing heart!"

"You have no need to fear," they told her. "Trust in the Lord, dear Mother!"

"It is easy for you to say that, but that blessed self-love, where does it not enter in? Yet, of course, my trust is in God and Our Lady. However, don't ever leave me alone. My imagination frightens me, whereas when someone is near I am more calm."

With religious affection she would stretch out her emaciated hands, and clasp the hand of the particular Daughter who was devoting so much care and touching tenderness to her.

From time to time she attempted to sing a hymn, inviting the bystanders to help her.

A critical night

The evening of Wednesday, April 27, gave forebodings of a night of suffering. Her pulse was racing madly; her features and glance gave signs of approaching agony: breathlessness and the death rattle. Surrounded by the Superiors, assisted by the Director, Father Lemoyne, the invalid

awaited her last moment. With unbelievable will power she began to sing: *I want to love Mary, to give her my heart, to die of love-For you my Mother! He who loves Mary will be happy.* Then with visible joy she said: "So great is the good that awaits me, that every pain is delightful to me!"

When advised to keep still and rest, she obeyed. Then, taking hold of the priest's stole, she said: "If at the very end I can no longer talk, and I touch the stole as I do now, Father Director, give me the last blessing. If I can no longer move and just look at you, you will understand what I want to say: a blessing, please!"

He reassured her, and she relapsed into silence for a few [p. 343] minutes. Then: "Where is Father Director? When I get to heaven he will know that I am there!"

Until midnight and after, it was a continuous "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus! Most Holy Name, You are enough for me; You are the source of every comfort and consolation. Oh, dear Jesus I am Yours, and I wish to be Yours eternally in life and in death. Mary, I am your Daughter."

At 2:00 a.m., Thursday, she again received Viaticum and continued to converse silently with God, but soon after she returned to her loving colloquy in an audible voice: "Oh, Lord, let me do my purgatory here...allow me to suffer much here, but I do not wish to go into that prison. However, may Your holy will be done...I willingly submit to Your justice, but if I have to go to purgatory, let my present sufferings be in suffrage for the dear Sisters who have preceded me into eternity..."

The crucifix was presented to her and with ardor and childlike simplicity she said: "Ah, dear Jesus, in the world it seemed I did not love You, because then I was such a thoughtless little imp.
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Even now I am still an imp, but I love You very, very much, my Jesus! Ah! Had I been on the way to Calvary, I would not have allowed You to carry that cross or wear those thorns. I would not have been among those who beat You and derided You. I would have taken on myself all Your sufferings, and embraced You with love! Ah, if only I could! But now that I can imitate You even in a little way, send me much suffering, with the grace and strength to bear them. Ah, my Jesus; my Jesus; why do I not know how to love You?"

She stopped, exhausted. That precious time of calm and silence was respected by all present.

Precious memories

Days and nights succeeded one another in this atmosphere of prayer and trepidation, while the Sisters kept [p. 344]solicitous vigil at her bedside.

During one moment when she seemed more at ease, Mother Emilia approached and asked her:

"Mother, have you some special advice to give us?"

"My dear Daughters, see to it that you always love one another. Do not rejoice too much or be too downcast, no matter what may happen to you. A month ago you rejoiced too much on my return from France. Now do you see how all your festivities end? Rejoice in the Lord always and let us attach ourselves to Him alone."

After a short silence, during which she seemed to be slightly delirious, the Director tried to distract her: "Mother, if you have some other advice for your Daughters, they are here to listen to you."

She looked around: "Only the Superiors?.. and not the senior Sisters of the House?"

"Yes, Mother, we are also here," the latter answered.

"Then I recommend to you in the first place the Sisters of the other Houses, especially the farthest away.those of America and Sicily. Tell them farewell for me when I am no more, and assure them that I will always pray for them. I also recommend to your care my little niece; see that she never has to leave this House. And for you...I have three counsels and I beg you to remember them.

First: I fear that when I am gone, petty jealousies, envy, sadness and misery may arise among you through motives of superiority, seeing a younger member in charge, or some such cause. As a

result the spirit of charity and holy union may diminish in the House.

While this poor rag was here there was no fear of that, but now it could enter in. I know that the Congregation belongs to Our Lady, who will always help you, but you do your part. Obey willingly whomever the Superiors will appoint. Restrain your own will to command.

Second: Help one another to practice virtue, but leave spiritual direction to those appointed. Not so many individual conferences, therefore!

Conferences, conferences: Let them be given by those [p. 345] whose duty it is.

And let catechism be catechism!

Get all possible instruction in this. However, leave each one free to do her part; otherwise divisions will arise in the spirit, to the detriment of all.

I would still have a third point, but I have no more energy...I do not know how to explain myself. If only I could say what I feel within me! If I could express a thought that is so clear in my mind!.. but I am too tired. I cannot explain myself any more..."

"Rest awhile, Mother; leave the remainder until later," Father Lemoyne suggested.

"I want to say... I want to say. . . but I'm ignorant. . . I cannot!"

She rested for awhile as if drowsy. When she aroused herself the Director said:

"You still have the third counsel to express. Just say what it is about; I will understand, and explain' to the community. "

"Ah, yes...I want to say...if I can... Let the Sisters remember that having abandoned the world to come here, they should not build another world like the one they have left. It is not the big things that hinder perfection, but certain little jealousies, envy, and acts of disobedience; certain little acts of pride and attachment... They do not remember why they came into the Congregation... and thus...."

Turning to the crucifix she added: "Oh, my dear heave only Spouse... and they say that they want only You!...Ah, if only they knew You as I know You now!"

Having rested awhile, she took up again the thread of her thought: "You who have to train postulants and boarders, never tire of recommending sincerity and openness, especially in confession. Then they will be at peace at the point of death!"

[p. 346] The invalid's wishes

One morning at daybreak, she asked the Sister assisting her: "What day is today?"

"Thursday, Mother."

"I die willingly, but if the Lord left me in this world until Monday, I would be pleased. . . On Monday I will be forty-four years old; besides I have still much to suffer before I die. But... then; shall I really never see Father Cagliero again?"

Telegrams had already been sent to Father Cagliero in Spain in the hope of hastening his return, but he was busy with the new foundation at Utrera, and with visitations to the other Houses in Spain and Portugal. It was very difficult, if not impossible, for him to return to Nizza. Therefore, they told Mother that he was expected back any day, to which she replied: "That is good."

But Mother had also another desire-to die on a Saturday. Would the Lord grant it to her?

In the meantime, Father Cerruti came from Turin, where he had been during these first days of May, with the intention of helping Father Lemoyne in the round-the-clock assistance he had proposed to give Mother.

Individual exhortations

To Sister Meana who drew near her bed Mother said affectionately:

"Is that you, Sister Amalia? Don't entertain any longer those doubts about your vocation. The Lord wants you here, really here and not elsewhere."

"And what do you have to say to me, Mother?" asked Mother Enrichetta Sorbone who was standing by. Her look and voice revealed what she was suffering.

"Courage, Richetta, soon you will be with me in paradise!" and looking at her tenderly she

repeated: "Soon, you know?!"

[p. 347] Sister Philomena Bologna, a good Sister, but in constant conflict with herself about going home to improve her health, timidly advanced from the doorway, and Mother said: "It is really you I wanted, Sister Philomena: make this month of Our Lady well because you won't make another!"

One after another they passed before her in a touching good-bye procession. Mother spoke: "Oh, if only I could see all my dear Sisters! Send a telegram to the Superiors of Turin and Chieri to come quickly. Can I not say a word to the novices, Sisters Victoria, Enrichetta, and Teresa? But one at a time."⁴³

They were sent for immediately, and as each one came in, she received a few words just for herself.

"Then Sister Victoria, you wish to go the whole way? You must change your heart. Remember, you haven't become a religious to attach yourself to creatures! Now you promise, but poor little thing, will you be faithful to your promise? Leave the company of those you like and attach yourself to the best among your companions. Keep your heart open to your Superiors and be sincere in confession. "

"And you Sister Enrichetta, do you really want to become good and earnest? I forgive you, yes, but remember words are not enough; deeds are necessary! Be brave, and keep to what your Superiors tell you."

"Sister Teresina, you see where I am? This moment will come for you also! Pardon, pardon, is a very beautiful word, but you need to speak more with your Superiors, especially with the confessor so that you may be happy at the hour of death!"

Mother Economer had left her own sick bed when they told her Mother was so seriously ill. Mother Mazzarello looked at her with dying eyes, and tried to express all her affection: "Oh, how poor we are in health, but I shall be the first to go. Let us pardon one another the little quarrels of Mornese. You must prepare for death, forgetting material things and leaving the main thought of them to others. By this I do not mean that you should [p. 348]do nothing, but that you think a little more of your soul in peace and tranquillity."

For Sister Pampuro, who knelt at the foot of the bed, she had a confidential word of personal interest. "I won't forget you in heaven; but you, without having so much to say to the cooks, ask for what you need. And if you need to admonish them, do so, but always with great charity!"

She broke down and cried when her childhood friend and faithful companion of the early days, Mother Petronilla Mazzarello, now Mistress of Novices, came for a last word, and to ask her pardon for any displeasure she had caused her. It was but momentary however; with her usual moral strength she regained perfect self-control and turning to the other Sisters who knelt in tears around her: "Don't cry like that, my dear Sisters. Be careful not to fall any more into caprices and lightmindedness. In heaven, where by God's mercy I hope to go, I will pray for you!"

Her little niece was brought in: "Will you pray for your aunt?" she said to her. "Be good and obedient; and then they will keep you always in this House. You will never leave here. Will you promise me you will stay here always and willingly? Yes? Good! Then go, poor little one!"

At this point all were invited to leave the room to let her rest and breathe more freely for a little while. However the postulants were not resigned at being refused admission. They filed past in silence and almost without stopping, while Mother still found the strength and breath to say to them: "Frankness and sincerity with all, especially with the confessor. "

"I am cured!"

On Friday morning, as the bells were ringing for prayers, there were no Sisters in the room except the one attending the patient. Mother seemed overcome by drowsiness.

Father Lemoyne was wondering if he should recite the *Proficiscere*, for it seemed to him that Mother's face showed [p. 349] returning signs of imminent agony.

But all of a sudden she roused herself, stretched out her hands to the picture of Our Lady and

exclaimed: "But no, but no, my Mother! Get better? No! Now I am ready. All my papers are in order. I don't want to turn back. No."

"Mother," the confessor suggested, "God's will also in this! "

"Yes, yes! but I'm sorry not to die now! I have no longer any worry-I'm perfectly at peace."

"And if God wanted you to work still for His glory, is He not the Master who has a right to ask it?"

The dying Mother roused herself with surprising strength; a complete change from the immobility of the recent days! She sat up in bed, moved her arms, fixed her pillows and coverlets and repeated:

"I am cured, Father Director, Sisters, I'm cured! I have no longer any pain. . . Go, all of you; leave me. Get me my clothes: I want to go to chapel to see our little Madonna!

"No, no, Mother! What are you doing?" those present chorused.

"I am cured, really cured! Weak, yes, very weak, but cured....without pain of any kind. Give me something that will help me regain strength!"

A little while before, she could not hold the crucifix. Now she put it to her lips with a firm hand, and like a healthy person held the glass they gave her and spoke with a strong, sure voice.

A real cure?

Who can describe the joy that prevailed when the news of Mother's recovery spread through the House?

The Sisters and girls had just come out of church, but they returned immediately to sing the *Te Deum* spontaneously and fervently. When they came out again some cried, some laughed, some clapped their hands with enthusiastic *Evvivas*, and there was a general movement in the [p. 350] direction of Mother's room to find out if she was really cured.

When the doctor came, he agreed that the fact could be regarded as a special grace from heaven, and though he did not vouch much for the recovery as definite, he gave hope of a possible improvement in general health.

News spread from Nizza to Turin, and in all hearts joyful hopes came to life again.

But Mother thought differently. After the first days of tangible and visible improvement she continually said: "Yes, I may have a while to suffer here perhaps, which I desire, but you will see that all is finished for me."

Precious days

Mother Emilia had taken it on herself to see that the doctor's prescriptions were carried out, and to limit the visits to Mother's room. However, when she had to be absent for scholastic reasons, Mother sent for this or that Sister, choosing those who were most humble, had the heaviest work or were suffering from poor health.

She had already spoken with the two Superiors of Turin and Chieri, whom she had expressly invited, recommending them to have special care for the Oratory, renewing her exhortations in prudence, charity towards the Sisters, filial and devoted submission to Don Bosco and his representatives in any way.

Mother had regained the humorous, witty way of dealing with things that had characterized her when well.

The young professed, Sister Felicina Ravazza, let her voice resound in the sickroom with the greeting "Viva Gesù, Mother!" The Sister said, "Mother begged me to bring her a bread roll. In it, I was to hide a key which the cook had distractedly left behind her, and for which she would surely be searching. Then thinking of Sister's anxiety in the event of needing the key, she told me where to leave it, so as to continue the joke without loss of time or patience for anyone."

[p. 351] The postulant, Elisa Marocchino, saw the door slightly ajar and made a beeline for it, hoping to get a glimpse of Mother. To her surprise she heard: "Ah, is that you, Elisa? Pray for me and I will pray for you that you may soon be clothed." At this she took heart and went into the

room.

And Mother: "Come, let us sing this song: A happy thought tells me that I too will rejoice. . ."

Other postulants, too, whether invited or not, had the good fortune of seeing Mother during this last week. To one she gave the assurance of persevering and of going soon to the novitiate. To another instead she said: "Look, it is better you go home. Better now than later; Jesus is calling you to another way of life."

In the presence of the Director, Father Lemoyne, and a Superior of the House she had the novice, Sister Rosina Rota, come into the room to say to her: "I recommend you to Father Director here. But if you want to persevere in your religious vocation you must overcome the inclination you have to love creatures through sympathy, and keep your heart open to your Superiors and the confessor."

When left alone for a brief while she softly spoke or sang her love to Jesus and Mary and told them of her desire to suffer.

The first wish is granted

May 9 dawned. It was her birthday! Mother received the homage of the boarders, when two of their members presented flowers and wishes. In the meantime the Sisters assembled in the garden at a point from which not only her room, but her bed could be seen. With one voice they cried out: "Viva! Viva! Viva!" Mother answered with a gesture of her emaciated hands, as if to let them know that her heart heard them and saw them more clearly than the pupils of her eyes ever could. But then, is Mother getting better or not? The answer was uncertain. Her condition might be described as un- [p. 352]changing. This perplexed many. Prayers were again multiplied, and the desire for Father Cagliero's return became more ardent, as if his presence would reawaken their hope for a complete recovery.

Presentiment or prophecy?

Perhaps the fulfillment of Mother's first desire-to see her forty-fourth birthday-may have given slight hope that the second and third would also be granted. The fact is that she, so adept at counting, had fixed day and date in a way that seemed prophetic.

Sister Marietta Rossi was suffering so much from the effects of a stroke that she was obliged to undergo an operation. Mother sent word for her to get up and come to see her. After making her describe all her pains minutely, Mother raised her eyes to heaven and said: "May God's will be done! You will go to Turin. Let them do all that has to be done; you will get better and you will do much work yet for the Lord."

After a brief pause she added: "You will go to Turin on the 17th with Father Cagliero."

The second wish too is satisfied

On May 10, without any notification, the playground and corridors of Nizza resounded to the dear name: "Father Cagliero! Father Cagliero! Father Cagliero is here!"

Great was the joy of the Sisters, boarders, Superiors, Father Lemoyne and Mother.

But those nearest to her who knew her desires, could not hide a new sense of fear. If this second desire is fulfilled, are we not at the vigil of the third?

Sister Catherine, the Vicar, though relieved after the anxieties of the previous days, was the first to rejoice and to suffer at this providential arrival, preparing herself and [p. 353] others to accept whatever God disposed.

Father Cagliero was already in the House! His great heart took him at once to the invalid's room, who said her *Deo Gratias* with tearfilled eyes and joined hands.

The visit was short, but brought much consolation and the promise of other visits, if necessary. Before Father Cagliero withdrew Mother Petronilla asked him quietly:

"Will Don Bosco come?"

"But Sister, Sister! You already have Don Bosco here!" as if to say: "Am I not enough for you? Am I not for you another Don Bosco? Am I not here to represent him?"

In case he would not be able to return to Nizza for the feast of Mary Help of Christians, he fixed May 12 for the reception of the new Children of Mary. He recommended that the House Council meet for the admission of postulants to the clothing and arranged to leave for Turin by the early train on Saturday.

Mother receives the new Children of Mary

The reception of the Children of Mary took place at the appointed time, with a devotion and fervor that was more of heaven than of this world. Four of their number came to tell Mother their joy and heard from her words that were a life program.

Mother was reclining rather than sitting up in bed. In her eyes there shone a light of happy memories-or was it a foretaste of things to come? Perhaps she saw the innumerable ranks of young girls who would follow in the footsteps of that first group to consecrate themselves to Our Lady. Yes, the line would stretch out on both sides of the ocean, in all the Houses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Had not Don Bosco said that the Institute would spread far and wide?

Rosina Gilardi, one of the four, left Mother's room and manifested her impressions: "She did not give me the impression of a convalescent who might have a relapse, but [p. 354] of a soul very dear to God, to whom the happy hour of her entrance into glory has already been revealed."

In spite of all her efforts to hide the fact, it was clearer by the hour that Mother was sinking rapidly. To the girls, overcome by a sense of devoted affection, she could but say: "Stay as good as you are now; be sincere in confession. I am sorry I cannot say anymore, but if you do that, it will suffice. Pray for me. "

Father Cagliari, however, did not believe her end was near. She was too alert in following the news from America, which he had communicated briefly to the Superiors.

The last days

However Mother Daghero, the Vicar, felt that the loss was imminent, and while she said nothing, her eyes reflected in tense anguish.

"Sister Catherine," Mother said to her on Friday morning, "do you wish to speak again about some business of ours? Such and such a Superior must be changed because she does not treat everyone with charity. This other...can continue, but look well into things in that House and make some change of personnel. "

She learned that in the other communities the Sisters were well and happy: "Let us thank the Lord," she exclaimed, "and beg Him to continue to help us!"

"And do you not think of us, Mother?" the Vicar added. "Do you not mind at all having to leave us?"

"I don't think of anything now, other than getting ready for eternity, and presenting myself to the Lord."

"So, for me you have no special advice?"

"Yes, I tell you to take courage. In heaven I will pray for you, that you may always be cheerful."

Then Mother thought for awhile, and for her own consolation and that of the Vicar, recalled: "What a good Father we have in Don Bosco! He is everything for the Institute, I am nothing! His work is God's and Our Lady's, [p. 355] and in his virtue and advice the Institute will always have support, as Father Cagliari has assured me."⁴⁴

In the afternoon the Director General came back. He spent about three-quarters of an hour with Mother, speaking about the affairs of her soul, and about certain defects which seemed to be making headway in some of her Daughters. He promised to take care of this as soon as possible, so that with the passage of time they would not compromise the good spirit of the Institute. She

finished with an act of profound gratitude: "Oh, what a grace the Lord has given me to be and to die a spouse of Jesus, a Daughter of Mary and of Don Bosco! Oh, may He give this grace also to all my Sisters, whom I have dearly loved and hope to love eternally in heaven!"

When Father Cagliero gave her his blessing in Don Bosco's name, her face lit up and she exclaimed: "This benediction of our dear Father, after that of God, is the greatest comfort for me."

On coming out of the room, Father Cagliero hit his palms together and uttered through clenched teeth: "Yes, yes, yes...if only I had always listened to her!"

Mother Petronilla, who followed him like a little lamb, took courage to ask him again: "Will Don Bosco come to see our Mother?" And Father Cagliero replied in a tone between annoyance and good humor: "But good Sister, have I not already told you that Don Bosco cannot move from where he is now...and that when there is one Superior in a House, you do not ask for another? Am I or am I not for you Don Bosco's representative?"

A silence followed in which Father Cagliero realized how deeply those words of his had hurt, and in his goodness of heart he tried to make up with the assurance: "Oh, but she will still hold out. . . and so Don Bosco will have time...her mind is so lucid."

That same evening, in Mother's room and in the presence of Father Cagliero, the Superiors met to decide on the admission of the twelve candidates for the clothing. Mother seemed to be dozing, but whenever a date, name of locality [p. 356] or some important particular, or some mistake that might lead to a change of decision, escaped the memory of the Counselors, she roused herself. She suggested, corrected and showed she was actively present at that important and decisive meeting.

When it was over Father Cagliero renewed his paternal blessing and fare-well greeting. She seemed to be falling off into a sound sleep. But at this point she opened her eyes and said in a convinced tone: "Father Cagliero will not leave until I am gone!"

The last night

The first hours of that night passed slowly. The assistants changed silently but no one could sleep. A sad presentiment hung over the whole place. Sister Ravazza was among the night nurses:

"Felicina," Mother called in a barely audible voice, "come here. Why are you crying? Pray rather that I may save my soul. When I am dead, pray to the Lord to free my soul from purgatory, if I have to go there. I will pray for you. Become holy; work much. Be always united to your Superiors and the elder and holier Sisters. Love the Congregation. You will do much good."

The Sister broke down and wept aloud. Mother took her hand, and held it affectionately as she said: "Come, come,...do not cry like that; and may Our Lady bless you. "

About 9:30 p.m. Sister Maria Besucco came on tiptoe to give Mother Emilia the medicine prescribed for the patient.

"Oh, Sister Maria, how are you?" Mother asked her, as the good, simple Sister was about to go away at Mother Emilia's nod of dismissal.

"Come here, Sister Maria, come!" Mother continued. "It's two days since I saw you! Are you well?"

"Oh, as for me. Mother thank you! But it is you who are so ill," she answered with a sob.

"Don't cry, Sister Maria! I am as the Lord wills, and [p. 357] I'm getting ready for heaven, but you must take care of yourself... Remember that!"

"That's enough, Mother; otherwise you will exhaust yourself," Mother Emilia interrupted, again making a sign to the Sister to withdraw.

"No, no! Stay a little while," Mother insisted. "I would like to know what will be of help to your heal...You see, Mother Emilia, you Sisters who are always around me cannot understand what good a word from the Superior can do to these poor Sisters who, one might say, just see her when she passes by. Come closer, Sister Maria!"

After suggesting a remedy for the Sister's illness, Mother added: "Would you like now to sing a hymn with me?" And in a clear voice she began *Lodate Maria* and sang the first verse.

Those who slept in the next room heard her repeat from time to time in a clear voice: "To suffer, yes, Lord, as much as You wish; but when I breathe my last, grant me to come and be united with You in heaven. However, Your will be done!"

She dozed for awhile, then returned to her hymns which rose from her heart through her slightly opened lips, a sweet, quivering sound that filled the silence of the House with an air of the supernatural.

She grew calm as midnight drew near. At the change of assistants, Sister Morano and Sister Meana entered. Mother Emilia and her companion went to get a little rest. The Superiors could be at peace with Sister Morano and Sister Meana near Mother, since they were the two best suited to this delicate charge. No one had hand, eye, perception and strength like them to respond immediately and skillfully to any need that might arise.

Mother seemed to be enjoying a peaceful slumber. But shortly after, she fixed her gaze on the Sister beside her, opening and closing her eyelids in a very strange way. Was it the return of her crisis of two weeks before? Her pulse did not seem to indicate it, and the nurses were vigilant but not alarmed.

[p. 358] About 2:00 a.m., Mother raised her head quickly, energetically supported herself on the pillows and began to move about, looking around her as if to see who was present.

"Oh, Sister Morano, is that you?" And she took a strong grip on her hands. "Shall we sing? Come, let us sing," she said joyfully in a strong, clear voice. "*Maria, che dolce nome tu sei per chi t'intendes. . .*" she went right to end of the verse with such a resonant tone that she awakened some who slept on the other floors.

"Don't tire yourself, Mother, don't tire yourself like that!" Sister Morano suggested lovingly with the authority of a head-nurse, but the fervent rendering of *Lodate Maria! O Gesù d'amore acceso! Chi ama Maria contenta sarà!* continued sweet, clear and harmonious.

And how many other aspirations of love rose from her pious soul, overflowing with tenderness for her divine Spouse and her heavenly Mother...

One after another the Superiors came in, alarmed, but the color of face and the pulse did not seem to warrant any alarm.

It must be the repetition of the crisis which she has already come through. She seems to be recovering rapidly, so why disturb Father Cagliero and Father Lemoyne?

In fact a good quarter of an hour's silence followed; then...she again raised herself on the pillows, calling out with authority in look, gesture and voice: "Get out of here! Shame on you!"

"To whom are you speaking, Mother?" Sister Morano asked gently.

"Ah, I know to whom I am speaking!" and turning her eyes to the foot of the bed, she looked fixedly at Mary's image.

"And why fear?" she added after a pause, to exclaim again in a very loud voice:

"Courage...come on, courage!"

"Don't shout like that, Mother," she was told. "You know well the doctor does not wish you to tire yourself [p. 359] like that!"

"The doctor... the doctor...I must think of myself, and that's enough! But why such fears? Whatever is this? Who ever confided in Mary and was forsaken? Shame! Shame! Come, come, Mary! Courage! Tomorrow the novena to Mary Help of Christians begins... sing the praises of your Mother in the passion of the Lord." With a supreme effort of the will she intoned the hymn *Chiamando Maria* with special stress on the words: *Chi ama Maria, contenta sarà!*

Tears of love glistened like pearls in her eyes; she drew a long breath, smiled and lay back quietly on the pillows, as if tasting the triumphs of battle in calm, peaceful rest. But now, her pulse registered one hundred and forty beats a minute.

The end

It was almost 3:30 a.m.; while the hope that this was but a passing crisis was dimly entertained, the desire of obtaining the comfort of a priest's presence for the revered invalid prevailed. Holy Communion, the desire, strength and delight of her life, especially in these last days, should not

be denied her. Therefore the Director and Father Cagliero were called.

They were already in the sacristy preparing for mass, but Father Cagliero took off the sacred vestments and in a flash was beside the patient. She received him with a lively gesture by way of greeting and said very clearly; "Ah, Father, I am not sorry to die; indeed I die willingly. My only sorrow is to think of the suffering my death will cause Father Director when I am gone!"

Dear Mother! In her goodness of heart and ready intuition she had quickly understood the delicate sensitivity of Father Lemoyne. On his part, he had soon recognized in her that strength and gentleness of soul, that generosity and prudence, which assured him of the consoling spiritual [p. 360] correspondence of the House, and stimulated him personally to fervor and zeal. Now at the close of her life Mother understood the sorrow of her spiritual Father, and expressed it with her natural simplicity.

Father Cagliero, like the Superiors and Sisters who were present made their own the sensitivity of Mother and thought it providential that Father Lemoyne was not present. Father Cagliero characteristically expressed his grasp of the situation, saying: "Go tell him not to come. For the moment I am enough!" Raising his hand he gave her a last absolution. There was no time to lose. In fact her color changed, the light went out of her eyes, her emaciated features grew sharper. And Father Cagliero: "At this moment, Mother, Don Bosco is surely praying for you; and I bless you in his name."

On hearing that dear name and receiving that blessing, Mother smiled faintly, then made a sign to have her pillows fixed, lay gently back on them, made a movement of her hand in farewell and steadily fixed her gaze on the crucifix. It was now the moment for the *Proficiscere*, and the agonizing Mother pronounced slowly a weak "Jesus, Mary, Joseph, I recommend my soul to you!" The names "Jesus! Mary!" were pronounced three times, with a little pause between. Then she closed her eyes to this vale of tears, to open them in her heavenly home!

Her heart had ceased to beat, but the smile of the just was on her face and on her half-open lips.

45

It was just 3:45 a.m.; the dawn of Saturday, May 14, vigil of both the novena to Mary Help of Christians and the anniversary of Father Pestarino's sudden death.

Bereft of their Mother, the Sisters reflected on these coincidences and drew from them hope of heavenly comfort.

But...Don Bosco? Don Bosco in Rome or Florence, did he not sense the deep bereavement of his Daughters? Could his fatherly heart not feel it?

[p. 361] A community in mourning

Though wishing to show himself strong, Father Cagliero could not hide the blow this death was to him. With his disconsolate Sisters he recited the first *De Profundis* for the departed soul, then reassured them: "I shall stay here as long as I am needed and will say the community mass." Having spoken to Father Lemoyne he went down to chapel into the confessional and stayed there until mass began. He knew well that the early risers among Sisters and novices would need and avail of his presence and apostolic charity for counsel and guidance.

In the meantime there was a constant movement in the corridor that led to Mother's room.

The Vicar and Mother Petronilla did not put in an appearance. Mother Emilia continued her vigil near the door. Sisters Morano and Meana did not come out, and all that could be heard from behind that closed door was their faint whispering.

Mother Enrichetta instead ran upstairs, allowing no one to deter her until she arrived at Sister Teresa Pampuro's room, now used as an infirmary.

"We no longer have a Mother," she said in a hoarse voice. And Sister Pampuro, through her sobs: "God gave her to us; God has taken her from us. May His holy will be done! "

Sister Marietta Rossi, who slept beside her, asked in anguish: "And now? Will we all be sent home?"

Mother Enrichetta continued her rounds with all solicitude, wherever her heart led her and

without breaking the great silence, until she had insured the suffrages of practically all her Sisters for the soul of that incomparable Mother within a quarter of an hour of her demise.

She did the same with the boarders once the rising bell was rung.

Among the older and more sensible girls there were some who expected the news from the time they saw their assistant leave the dormitory hurriedly, in answer to an [p. 362] urgent summons. And between one prayer and another the conviction took shape: Mother Superior must feel worse after all that singing. And all the movement in the corridor, and that whispering. . . maybe she is dead already?

At the first sound of the bell, Mother Enrichetta clapped her hands for attention: "Girls, our Mother is dead! Let us pray and offer Holy Communion for her." Then she could say no more. Her long restrained tears choked her voice.

Despite all Mother Enrichetta's solicitude, there were still some whom the sad news had not reached, and who did not in the least expect it—those who worked in the kitchen, the garden, the laundry and who faithfully attended the first mass, or those who in the early hours had gone to secure a place in Father Cagliero's confessional line. Among these was the novice, Sister Louise Bocolatte.

She had followed every hymn sung by the revered patient from her own bed, concluding in her own mind: "As soon as the church is open, I will go down to confession and Communion. Then I will go up the stairs leading from the choir to the corridor near Mother's room, and see for myself how she is. After all that singing she must have fallen asleep."

She did so. Surprisingly, the coast was clear and she found...her dear Mother, all alone, beautifully composed in her habit on the bed. She thought she was asleep!

She had never seen a corpse, and had not the least idea that she was in the presence of one, but she thought was alone with her dear Mother who was preparing for a fervent Communion. She seemed almost to smile at her, as she bent to kiss that hand which was neither cold nor rigid, and gave her Mother a gentle, filial embrace.

Affectionate words arose to her lips; but alas! She was surprised at that moment by Mother Emilia, who sent her away without further ado.

"Why? Why? What have I done wrong?" she said to herself, as she swallowed her humiliation. The answer came from the Sisters who had come from chapel and gone [p. 363] straight to Mother's room. Almost incredulously, they kept saying to one another: "She is dead! Our Mother is dead! Dead! "

"Ah, now I understand!" the poor novice exclaimed, "Father Cagliero said to me this very morning: 'But of course Sister, of course! If the Lord inspires you to do something more for the souls in purgatory, make the heroic act in this morning's Communion!' I made it as he had taught me, and I did it for my dear and holy Mother!"

"Be strong in your sorrow"

Father Cagliero celebrated the community mass. He was visibly moved to find himself surrounded by so many Sisters who wept while they prayed, and whose eyes were tear-filled and swollen as they received Holy Communion.

When mass was over there were the usual moments of silence. Then Father Cagliero came to the altar rail to address the community and boarders as one family. He stood there in silence for a moment, then:

You weep! Weep, then, weep! You have reason to weep! You have lost a wise, loving, exemplary Mother. But be comforted; she is already in heaven praying for you. From there she will continue to help you, and to love you even more than she did here below.

She died when we least expected, but she too was a saint, and went to God as the saints do.

Now be brave in your sorrow and imitate your Mother's fortitude, so that she may be pleased with it before God.

Later on you will be told what the arrangements for today and tomorrow will be. In the meantime, be strong; place your trust in God and in your Mother, Mary Help of Christians, and in our dear Father, Don Bosco.

He was overcome by emotion and withdrew to share his sorrow with his confrere, and to arrange with the Superiors how the sad news should be communicated and to whom [p. 364] telegrams should be sent.

When the bell rang for breakfast the Sisters filed into the refectory with lowered eyes and in perfect silence, but tears flowed freely, and few felt like taking anything. The postulants, including the newly arrived, and those who had not yet decided to stay, looked around at those sad faces and concluded that this was no ordinary person whose death caused such sincere sorrow, such deeply-felt grief. The general anguish they now witnessed convinced them that this was a Mother, a much loved and very holy Superior.

Maria the Negro shared in the common sorrow. She was found in a corner, weeping her heart out and crying: "Mother dead! Mother dead!"

When the Sisters left the refectory they met Father Cagliero, who said to them in his fatherly way: "Sisters, are you already about to go to your daily work?! But today-as I have told the good Superior who accompanied me here today we have to adapt to the requirements of our sad circumstances! Yes, yes: it seems like a discord, yet this is a moment which calls for strong love. Your Mother has set you an example. Therefore, while those who do not sing can go to their tasks, the others will come with me to practice the requiem mass. Tomorrow is Sunday, and there will be a big attendance of Nizza people at the funeral. Therefore, whether working or singing we can all equally make suffrage for your Mother's soul should she be in need. Obedience is the greatest offering we can make to God for our dear departed.

Come, come, courage, Sisters!

Silent and with bent heads, the Sisters nodded assent. It was understood there would be no classes that day, and those who wished-boarders excepted-could visit the remains. In that little room, witness of so much virtue, they could hear again the words that came from a heart that loved God alone, and each and every one of her Daughters in God.

Among the Sisters in the choir was Sister Louise Boccolatte, who vividly recalled those moments:

[p. 365] Good Father Cagliero had no easy job: our voices would not come out as he wanted. When we sang the *Requiem* especially there was a kind of sob, and then tears flowed! He would say: "Come, Sisters, Come! You had better take a little drop of wine to calm your nerves. Come, come, try again!"

We encouraged one another, but when the *Requiem* came along again there was another tearful interruption! "But really, will you stop it, yes or no?" Poor Father, he was moved himself while trying to be gruff! "If you don't stop it, I'll throw my biretta at you!" But the biretta lay on the harmonium while Father Cagliero's hands and feet were not still one minute, so difficult did he find it to resist his own onslaughts of natural emotion.

He sent us away saying: "There, there! Let us hope that it will go better tomorrow morning, and that your Mother will give you a little of her courage. Pray to her, pray to her and you will see she will give you the grace."

In Mother's memory

Recreation time might have been called "Reminiscences and prayers." Those who were free from household tasks walked around the playground in little groups, while in subdued tones the mouth spoke of the heart's abundance, and steps led invariably to the chapel where the majority of Sisters had gone to speak to Jesus or Our Lady of Sorrows, or to make the way of the cross.

Mother Enrichetta gathered the boarders around her and told them about their good, wise, prudent, heroic, saintly Mother. "Can't we see her anymore? A Sister told us she looks like a saint dressed in her religious habit, a lily and the book of the holy Rules between her joined hands. Let us see her, Mother Enrichetta, let us see her!"

It was not considered advisable to grant them this favor, and the good assistant replied: "Now here's a beautiful flower we can offer in suffrage for our dear Mother's soul. Let us go then and place it on Our Lady's altar asking her to offer it to Jesus, as proof of our love and gratitude [p. 366] for her who did so much good for us."

Father Cagliero spent most of the afternoon with the Superiors. He first approached Mother Petronilla, whose grief was too deep for tears.

Then he spoke to each of the others, first in private, then all together when he commented on some confidences recently received by letter from Sister Josephine Pacotto.

Prophetic confidences of Mother

Together with news of the voyage, as already noted, Sister Josephine told how Mother had prepared her for future happenings. Later, as also mentioned, she reported Mother's warm exhortation to confidence in Our Lady. But she kept nothing back from Father Cagliero, feeling in her heart that Mother must have spoken prophetically to him also, knowing her end was drawing near.

She began, therefore, by asking pardon for the liberty she took in writing certain things to which he could attach the importance he thought fit. She went on:

Our dear Mother said repeatedly she would pray for me in this world and in the next. She told me, "Yes, I promise you this: after death I will come to visit you, and then I will be able to help you more than I can now." She said with great affection: "Remember that Sister Catherine will always be a Mother to you as I was, and will always be ready to help you. Promise me you will always write everything to her. It doesn't matter if you write badly, the Superiors understand just the same."

Then in another tone of voice she told me to tell Sister Madelene Martini that she had received her letters and not to worry; to take heart, and go ahead without fear because the Superiors and Sisters were pleased with her.

When she said this, it entered my mind that perhaps Sister Martini might give in to some act of pride. Mother read my thought and said: "Never fear. Sister Madelene is humble, and this will just serve as a stimulus to her to correct those defects of which she is conscious. Sister Madelene is [p. 367] more than ready to crush her self-love and moderate her overly serious nature, to win the confidence of the Sisters as the Superiors desire, and to give greater glory to God.

In the meantime, however, do not forget to tell Father Costamagna that I am sending him Sister Octavia Bussolino a novice of only a few months-so that he may prepare her to be a Superior. Not soon, of course, but for when the Lord will call Sister Madelene Martini, the present Provincial, to Himself."

To these communications Father Cagliero's comment came spontaneously:

Your Mother Mazzarello had a clear, long-sighted vision. What Sister Pacotto has written reminds us of Mother's last exhortation: "Be united in mind and heart with her who at this moment must bear the weight of government of the Congregation." That means Mother Vicar, Sister Catherine Daghero, until the next Chapter in which it will be seen on whom that cross will fall.

The Vicar should not fear all her responsibility. Don Bosco and his Sons will always help her. You who are her helpers and Counselors will do your best to lessen the weight of her cross, and Our Lady Help of Christians will surely do the rest.

The big tears that flowed slowly from the swollen eyes of the humble, timid Mother Catherine Daghero, touched the heart of the Director General and he characteristically relieved the situation with: "Yes, you really are a group of *masna* (children) but precisely because of this, the help of heaven-and of earth-will not fail you."

The remains in church

The meeting concluded with detailed arrangements for the transfer of the remains to the church, and the order to be followed at the funeral.

About half an hour before supper all the community, boarders included, lined up beside the stairs leading from [p. 368] the ground floor corridor to the playground, awaiting the arrival of Father Cagliero.

When he came he repeated his consoling words: "Your Mother was a saint. Now in heaven she is praying for you, that you may continue to be her true Daughters, imitating her virtues. Notwithstanding this persuasion which you and I share, we must offer prayers in suffrage for her soul because we never know... before God's infinite holiness ..."

He then referred to the funeral next morning, expressing the hope that the whole of Nizza would

see how religious could sanctify sorrow. He left one of the Superiors with the task of announcing the arrangements for the requiem mass and funeral cortege.

All felt that Don Bosco was present with them in the person of Father Cagliero, and even the most doubtful banished the fear that the death of the first Superior General meant the death of the Institute.

The holy Rule established that in a house where a Sister was called to eternity, mass and the Office of the Dead be offered on the day of burial, and the entire rosary recited.

Therefore, the remains were brought into the chapel late that evening and placed on a humble catafalque.

Some among the older and more courageous Sisters suggested taking turns in keeping vigil beside the remains, but the Superiors did not consider it opportune, and religious obedience prevailed.

The solemn funeral

On Sunday morning, before the first mass, the catafalque was adorned with white flowers, perfumed and wet with dew, collected at dawn on the nearby hills, property of the Counts of Meana. Ah, precious sight! Under the flickering reflection of the candles in the morning light that streamed from the high windows every blossom on that garland assumed the appearance of a crystal pearl on the [p. 369] veil covering the coffin. "They are our tears!" the Sisters said.

After the community mass and general Communion, preparations began for the funeral, which was fixed for 9:00 a.m. The people of Nizza came in goodly numbers, so that the church was soon crowded. There were no members of the Mazzarello family present, as the telegraphic service was nonexistent, and the mail was very slow. Mother's two brothers, Nicholas and Joseph, had come on foot from Mornese to see their sister after her April crisis. She had advised them to go home quickly and console her mother with the good news of her improvement.

The Sisters took their places in the choir. Father Cagliero already sat at the harmonium, surrounded by novices and postulants, who sustained the singing.

The high mass was celebrated by Father Bisio, Rural Vicar of the nearby parish of Saint John's, assisted by the Director, Father Lemoyne, and the ever faithful Father Joseph Campi.

The Salesian Brother, Michael Vigna, served at the altar.

After the celebration the *Recordar Jesu Pie*, set to music by Father Cagliero, was rendered in a masterly way. The sweet voice of Sister Teresa Baioni made one think of faith, raising to God a cry of hope and charity in the name of that elect soul whom all present loved and venerated as a saint.

When the obsequies were over, the funeral cortege set out towards the cemetery.

The remains, carried on a bier by postulants and novices in turn, was preceded by the cross, a line of oratorians, boarders in uniform, and the community. They alternated with the clergy in hymns and prayers, in a continuous round of *De Profundis*, *Miserere*, rosary and Requiems.

Six senior boarders bearing lighted candles flanked the remains.

The Superiors followed, while a large number of ladies who esteemed and loved Mother and the Institute brought up the rear with prayer and suffrage.

[p. 370] Those who did not take part formed a silent guard of honor along the route. The sun was somewhat veiled. The air was full of the perfume of mid-May. And the Lord's day lent a somehow festive tone to the funeral which was entirely new to Nizza. Everyone remembered the kind charity of the deceased towards the flood victims when the Belbo had last overflowed.

At the cemetery the remains were lowered into the grave. The last absolution, the last *De Profundis* and the last Amen were the farewell of hearts which, on leaving the place, repeated: "Yes, you have gone back to God, Mother; pray for us who will never forget you!"

Their return to the convent was quicker, following shortcuts through the fields. The noon *Angelus* found all gathered together at the feet of Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. From the beloved image of Mary Help of Christians came the gentle words of divine comfort: "Behold

your Mother!"

Father Cagliero did not let the remainder of the day pass without seeing the Superiors and Sisters again. He explained to all the value of the 'Heroic act' in favor of the souls in purgatory, if anyone among them wished to make it, with the necessary permission, in suffrage for the dear departed one. Animating all to ever greater confidence in Don Bosco, he kept repeating: "I, too, will always be your father!"

He gave proof of this then and there by interesting himself in them all, and in each one individually.

Don Bosco had not yet returned to Valdocco. Therefore Father Cagliero felt he could remain an extra day at Nizza, to bring further comfort to all.

He did not waste a minute on Monday. He heard confessions, listened patiently to those who wished to speak to him and assembled the community at spiritual reading for a special instruction and conference.

This meeting had the double aim of drawing the community closer to the heart of the Vicar, Mother Catherine Daghero, and convincing them that Mother Mazzarello and [p. 371] Don Bosco were with them to insure their holy perseverance, and in due course their admission to heaven along with the many souls saved by the work of their common Father and Founder, Don Bosco.

"Your Mother," he concluded, "is not dead; she has gone to heaven, all the better to help you here on earth. Her spirit lives among you more than before. You feel it, don't you? In the meantime from heaven she recommends that you now see in her Vicar the person who for the present must guide you and be a Superior and Mother to you. You must obey her, and show her your religious affection. In heaven she will speak to Our Lady of you; and prepare you a beautiful place for all eternity.

About our dear Father Don Bosco, what can I say more than I have already told you?

One day Don Bosco thought of booking a place in heaven for ten thousand souls, but Our Lady told him it was too few.

Imagine that there are mountains in heaven, each one taken over by a religious family: the Franciscans, the Carmelites, the Dominicans, the Jesuits, etc. In his humility Don Bosco chose a plain, and what happened? All the people of the world were gathered into that plain!

Now you too were in that plain. Each one of you must help Don Bosco and Our Lady Help of Christians to gain many souls...all those the Lord will send you: the souls of the whole world, the poorest, the most exposed to danger, the most in need of a good word, an act of charity, a prayer, a sacrifice.

Courage then; don't think of anything else but becoming holy, so that you may win many more souls to the kingdom of Jesus Christ. For this end Don Bosco has gathered you under his standard. For this alone, Mary Help of Christians entrusted you to Don Bosco.⁴⁶

The postulant, Antoinette Baratti, still undecided as to whether she should stay or go home, found that clothes and objects of devotion belonging to Mother were being divided among the Sisters and Superiors. Returning from the funeral the previous day she had seen her companions [p. 372] vie with one another in getting the leaves and little petals of the garland placed on the coffin.

"So many tears, such esteem for a dead Sister," she said to herself, "goes to show that she was no ordinary person. And here I am in conflict with myself about staying with such holy people?"

Taking her courage in both hands she went to speak to Father Cagliero and told him everything. He advised her to begin a novena to Mother Mazzarello. She did. She felt peace soon return to her soul, and from the serenity of her smile it was clear that her victory was sure.

Departure of Father Cagliero

On May 17-exactly as Mother had foretold-Father Cagliero set out for Turin, accompanying Sister Marietta Rossi for her medical appointment.

He went to Don Bosco, and naturally told him of the final swift developments leading to the great family bereavement, even before giving his beloved Father an account of his work in Spain.

Without Father Cagliero, Nizza now seemed a bereaved House indeed. Father Lemoyne was at the disposal of the Superiors in any way they wanted, as Father Cagliero had recommended. He repeatedly encouraged the community to be a powerful intercessor with God." I always considered her a holy soul," he said in a happy animated tone, "but now I can add that I have already had sure signs that she is in heaven. I had an understanding with her that as soon as she got there, she would obtain for me a favor I greatly desired. I received the favor; therefore..."⁴⁷

[p. 373] The first letters from the nearby Houses

In the meantime the nearby Houses responded to the sad news. The letters were full of filial mourning, consoling news, requests for more details of Mother's death, and sincere and religious promises.

From Chieri:

It was the Director who prepared us for the unexpected loss. What weeping! What weeping! We cried so much that he-Father Notario-did not want us to answer the door. He actually acted the porter for us and gave us a free day. Then he gathered the pupils; who didn't want to go home, to pray with us and console us.

But please, won't you tell us how it all went? We promise from now on to be more observant of our holy Rule, to console our Superiors and please our dear Mother in heaven!"⁴⁸

From Alassio:

The Director told us nothing until about 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Then he came into the workroom where, at his direction, we were all assembled. With great charity and prudence he gave us the sad news, which had come that morning. It was a moment of intense emotion. Even Father Cerutti went away drying his eyes.

When the Director had come from Nizza, he had told us he would put special intentions in all his practices of piety for Mother's recovery. When the first sad impression was passed he consoled us saying: "Your Mother was truly a saint, and from this moment I take her as my protectress. Do the same, and you will see that she helps you from heaven far more than she did on earth."

How dearly our holy Mother loved us, and how we, her Daughters, loved her! Now is the time to prove it by deeds, and by practicing her recommendations. This is what we want to do for the consolation of the Superiors whom the Lord has given and will give us!

Please send us some particulars of how she took flight to heaven. We long to hear it ..⁴⁹

[p. 374] From Turin:

After hearing the news from Father Cagliero, they wrote:

Father Bonetti came to give us the sad and unexpected news on receipt of the telegram Saturday morning. He didn't know how to begin, and we didn't know what his hesitation was all about. . . But then...oh, how many tears! They flowed freely, and he let us give vent to our grief, before attempting to console us.

By Sunday morning, many of our oratorians knew it already, and mass was offered for the repose of her soul. Many Holy Communion were offered for her. The older oratorians came to sympathize and console us, and the little ones asked: "What have they done to our dear Sisters to make them cry so much?"

Father Bonetti encouraged us all. In recommending us to pray for our Mother and very dear Superior, he added that we should pray to her, so that she will welcome us all to heaven.⁵⁰

While we were immersed in our grief the Oratory was already joyfully preparing for the return of Don Bosco. You can imagine, after four months of absence, how they wanted to welcome him with music, song and noise!

He arrived, however, when they least expected him, and all were in chapel for the novena of Mary Help of Christians.⁵¹ He went straight to the sacristy, just in time to put on surplice, stole and cope, for benediction.

They said that his unexpected appearance electrified all. Meantime we said to each other: Dear Father, perhaps he wanted to see Our Lady first, to tell her; "Now that you have taken away Mother Mazzarello, see about someone to replace her; console your Daughters!"

After all, to us it seemed unreal! Joy, hand clapping, bands, applause, acclamations; and we at home sad, silent and grief stricken, thinking: "In the midst of that noise and festivity it is impossible for Don Bosco not to think of his

Daughters who are mourning."

On reading these expressions the Vicar, Mother Daghero, affirmed: "You would have to know the kind heart [p. 375] of our good Father, to be able to write of him as they have written here. How often the poor Superiors have to play a double part, showing a smiling exterior, while the heart is crying!

In the meantime see how the good, kind Directors interest themselves in our affairs! Just like fathers and brothers. What a grace! What a grace! "⁵²

The first obituary notice

On May 21, the *Unità Cattolica* of Turin, (no.120), brought to the notice of the public the loss sustained by the second religious family of Don Bosco. He had had recourse to his friend and benefactor, Father James Margotti, editor of the paper, to print the news immediately.

The article, entitled "The Superior General of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians," ran as follows:

The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, founded by Don Bosco, has recently sustained a severe loss. On the 14th of this month, the cornerstone of the Institute-its first Superior General-Sister Mary Mazzarello, passed away, in the midst of her grieving Sisters, a victim of her ardent zeal. She was the able instrument whom Divine Providence put into Don Bosco's hands to guide the Congregation in its early stages.

Last winter she braved the inclement weather to visit her Houses in France, so as to maintain the religious spirit among her Sisters there, and to animate their desire for perfection. During this visit she contracted the fatal illness which slowly took her to her grave at the early age of forty-four.

She was a woman gifted with rare ability in the direction of souls, so that in a very short time she was able to give such development to the new Institute that the Founder himself marveled at it.

In the space of nine years, under her government, the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians reached two hundred, establishing foundations in Piedmont, Liguria, Venetian

Lombardy and France. In fact, emulating the zeal and [p. 376] enthusiasm of the Salesians, they also crossed the Atlantic, and began their work in America, penetrating even into uncivilized Patagonia to make their heavenly Spouse known and loved there.

Truly worthy Daughters of such a Mother. May she have peace in heaven, and an undying remembrance on earth.

Collection of filial memories

This first public tribute to the great virtues of her beloved Mother was a great consolation to Mother Daghero, because it reflected the mind and heart of Don Bosco and Father Cagliero. On the advice of Father Lemoyne and following her own fraternal sentiments, she decided to satisfy the reasonable desires of the Sisters in the various Houses by sending them the final important memories of their beloved Mother and Superior.

Therefore facts and previous sayings were solicitiously collected: memories were recorded, compared, coordinated, tested and finally edited. Some wrote all available data in copybooks to send them as quickly as possible to the waiting Sisters.

As the work proceeded the Sisters of Nizza felt comforted at the thought that they had paid a debt of filial gratitude to their Mother. The gentle Vicar approved of all with her "Well done!" and added her contribution by giving them all the information that continued to flow in after Mother's death became widely known.

General mourning

The Salesian Directors of Borgo San Martino, Lanzo, Bordighera, Penango and Este, who had been requested to transmit the sad news to the Sisters, could not have been more spontaneous and cordial in showing their sympathy, expressed by offering masses, Communions and rosaries in all their Houses.

[p. 377] No less sincere and generous was the offering of the parish priests of Lu Monferrato,

Cascinette, Borgomasino, Melazzo, Quargnento, in which places our Sisters conducted kindergartens and elementary schools. These invited the faithful to participate in the requiem celebrated in the parish church.

Also Bishop Leto, in charge of the seminary of Biella, could not possibly have done more to console "those dear little Sisters of Don Bosco."

Thus authoritative expressions of esteem and appreciation of the truly superior gifts of our dear departed Mother flowed in from all sides.

From Mornese

Heart-stirring accounts came from Mornese too.

The parish priest received the news from Nizza, with the request to transmit it to the Mazzarello family. Knowing that the funeral was already over, he decided to go slowly in giving the communication.

How would *Main's* (Mary's) good mother receive it? She had always reserved a special little corner of her heart for that daughter, about whom everybody spoke so well and who had not been seen since she left the Valponasca after her father's death...

After she had given vent to her sorrow, this dear mother did not delay the best of suffrages—a holy mass. Accompanied by relatives and acquaintances she had gone to the parish church which still held so many memories of her dear daughter.

There she found assembled many of Maria's pupils and companions, who repeated: "She does not need our suffrages! She was so good, so holy!" Though that consoled her somewhat, it did not take away the great sorrow she felt on not seeing her die in her arms, even though what the Superiors had written—that she had died singing her love for Jesus and Mary—gave her the assurance that Jesus and Mary had welcomed her with infinite love.

[p. 378] From Sicily

The Vicar's thoughts were turned to Mother Felicina, Mother's sister, who was in Bronte. If she had felt so intensely the last parting even when she entertained the hope of seeing her dearly beloved Piedmont again and of spending time with her beloved *Main*, how would she feel now? And not a word from there yet!

Eventually an answer came. On the evening of May 14 Father Joseph Prestianni, president of the administrative council of the House and confessor of the community, had received the telegram from Nizza announcing Mother's Mazzarello's death. How should he tell the Sisters, especially the good Superior?

He prayed and had prayers offered. Next morning he went to the Rosary Church to celebrate mass, with the intention of announcing the sad news after it was over.

After his thanksgiving he went to the school as was usual to say good morning to "his dear Sisters," as he affectionately called them—but this time he just couldn't make himself go in. As he stood at the door, perplexed, who should come out to relieve his embarrassment but Mother Felicina herself.

She approached him and said: "Father, last night I dreamed about my sister... What am I saying?—I didn't dream about her, I saw her. I was wide awake! How beautiful she looked—flooded in a light impossible to describe. She was radiant with joy. She smiled at me, and greeted me saying: 'Good-bye, Felicina, good-bye!'... Then she vanished... What can it mean?"

As if relieved of an enormous weight the good priest raised his eyes to heaven, thanking Mother Mazzarello for having so prodigiously helped him. Then turning to Mother Felicina, he said: "It is sure proof that your Sister has already gone to her reward, and she came to take leave of you." Saying this he gave her the telegram which he later read to the community, called together by the

Vicar, Sister Angelina Buzzetti ⁵³

[p. 379]Sister Caroline Sorbone added: "Our Superior did not shed a tear; in an attitude of

resignation she received the local priests, who came for three days of silent sympathy as is the local custom on occasions of deep sorrow.

Now we and the Sisters of Catania, who are asking us for detailed news, are awaiting all the details of Mother's passing. Please send them soon, because we feel at heart that they will bring us some consolation."

United in heart and soul

Usually family news of this kind was given at the "Good Night." If a stranger could see the faces and attitudes of the Sisters of Nizza at such moments he would unhesitatingly say: "Here is but one heart and one soul!"

So it really was. Almost all had grown up together, one might say. They knew one another intimately. Loving one another, the joys and sorrows of one were the joys and sorrows of all. Even though they were no longer gathered under the same roof they still loved one another. Any news of absent ones tightened that precious bond Don Bosco had given to be the special characteristic of his children: the family spirit.

The incomparable Mother who had left them had done everything possible to establish that same spirit among them. The Vicar now took up the practice, drawing encouragement from the Sisters, who surrounded her with edifying docility and Salesian confidence.

But, the Sisters in France: have they heard it yet? And those still farther away in America: how they will feel not having her support any more on this earth?

Waiting for word from Turin

The memories had been collected and in fact were almost ready for dispatch to the other Houses in Italy. Before [p. 380]circulating them with a letter of presentation, Mother Vicar awaited word from Turin, as her humility and filial dependence suggested.

But no word from Turin. After such a long absence Don Bosco must have had many urgent matters to attend to. Perhaps, too, he had to go very cautiously at this point, not to give rise to new suspicions about the now forgotten question of immediate dependence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians on the Superior General of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, to the detriment of lawful episcopal jurisdiction.⁵⁴

Without an explicit word from the Founder, not even Father Cagliero would give his own, especially since there was also a duty to inform the Sisters-simultaneously or not-of the next Chapter for the election of the Superior General. According to the Constitutions should not be delayed more than fifteen days.

The Founder's dispositions and the Vicar's communication

Don Bosco wanted all his Daughters, as well as those of Nizza to know, at least through his representative, Father Cagliero, how that he had participated in their sorrow and wished to preside personally at their Chapter.

He entrusted the communication to Father Cagliero, who signed it with the precious date of May 24-feast of Mary Help of Christians, then had it delivered at Nizza towards the end of the month. Thus Mother Vicar could send to the other Houses the following letter:

Viva il Cuore di Gesù!

Beloved Sisters in Jesus Christ,

With a sad heart, but in absolute conformity to the will of "God, I send you details of the last days of our beloved

Mother Superior. May God grant her eternal rest!

[p.382] They are memories of a holy soul replete with the spirit of God. Oh, yes, may her life, her example, her counsels be always present to us, and serve as our guide, especially at this time when our Congregation lacks its true rudder to guide, direct and govern it in the way of religious perfection, to which Jesus, our heavenly Spouse calls us.

At the same time, I communicate to you the dispositions of our Superiors, especially of our Reverend Founder and Father, Don Bosco, regarding the time of the election of the new Superior.

To Sister Catherine Daghero, Vicar. Reverend Sister and Daughter in Jesus Christ,

Reverend Don Bosco, our dear Father and Superior, deeply shares your sorrow on the keenly felt loss you sustained at the death of your Superior.

He recommends to God the beautiful soul of the deceased Mother, and at the same time, is mindful of her orphan Daughters.

He wishes you all to be resigned to the holy will of God, and begs you to be united in the sweet bond of charity, through the perfect observance of the holy Rule of your Institute. As it is impossible, given various circumstances, to keep to what article 3, No. IV of your Constitutions prescribes about the election of the Mother General, he postpones it until next August, on the occasion of the retreat.

He encourages you all to confide In Divine Providence and in the maternal protection of Mary Help of Christians, and wishes that every day in all the Houses of the Institute an *Our Father*, *Hail Mary* and *Glory Be* be recited to the Holy Spirit, that He may grant you a Mother like your first one, who will guide you to paradise.

Recommending myself to God in your fervent prayers, I am in Jesus Christ,

Turin, May 24, 1881

Your Director and Father,
Father John Cagliero

[p. 382] Here then, good Sisters, are the dispositions of our good Father in our regard. For me it remains but to ask you to pray for me and the Congregation.

Turin, June 4, 1881

Your affectionate Mother Vicar,
Sister Catherine Daghero

In a sense this was the Vicar's first official act of government. Following the exhortation of Don Bosco, confiding in Divine Providence and in the maternal protection of Mary Help of Christians, the Institute awaited the turning of another page of its history.

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NOTES

1881

1. Account of Sister Elisa Marocchiono.
2. *Salesian Bulletin*, January, 1881, Vol. V, No. 1, 1.
The program of the orphanage is kept in Gen. Arch. F.M.A.
3. Account of Sisters Maggiorina Poggi and Louise Boccolatte.
4. She died on November 25, 1880. Mother Mary Josephine (in the world, Benedicta) Rosello, Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy of Savona, died on December 7 of the same year and was canonized by Pius XII in 1949.
5. *Foresti*: expression in dialect which means: places extraneous to one's ordinary experience.
6. The original of all these letters are kept in Gen. Arch. F.M.A.
7. In the Italian Mother showed special deference when speaking to Sister Josephine and other Sisters invested with authority, using the "voi" form in writing. In conversation she reverted to the "tu" form which is more confidential and intimate.

8. Account of Sister Louise Boccolatte.
9. Account of Sisters Enrichetta Sorbone, Juliana Prevosto, and Lorenzina Natale.
10. Account of Sister Petronilla Mazzarello.
11. This is an evidently an allusion to Sister Catherine Lucca (cf. page 14).
12. The *Salesian Bulletin* of February, 1881, Vol. V, No. 2, 3-4 gives a full account.
13. The few pages which contained this account have no signature, but just the dates of the two meetings with Don Bosco: January 21 and February 2, 1881.
14. Account of Sister Frances Roggero.
15. Original autograph In Gen. Arch. F.M.A.

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16. Copy in Gen. Arch. F.M.A.
17. Account of Sister Elisa Marocchino.
18. Account of Sister Josephine Pacotto.
19. Account of Sister Josephine Bolzoni.
20. Account of Sister Josephine Pacotto.
21. Account of Sister Elisa Marocchino.
22. Account of Sister Louise Boccalatte, Sister Elisa Marocchino and others.
23. Account of Sister Lorenzina Natale, Sister Juliana Prevosto and others.
24. *Salesian Bulletin*, February, 1881, Vol. V, No. 2,4-5.
25. From the *Salesian Bulletin* of February 1881, Vol. V, No. 2, 1-2.
26. On January 26, 1879 when Don Bosco visited St. Cyr, he confirmed Mother's idea that only the feminine section of the orphan. age be located there. In the presence of the few residents and with a prophetic tone, he said: "Among them will be the first links of a beautiful chain of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Here we shall have a wonderful line of Sisters which will never fail and will always increase. And on these hills-oh, how many Sisters!"
27. Sister Sampietro died at the age of 70 years.
28. Cf. pp. 283-4.
29. Account of Sisters Carlotta Pestarino and Domenica Barbero.
30. Account of Sister Louise Desirello.
31. Account of Sister Domenica Barbero.
32. See Appendix No. 10.
33. *Salesian Bulletin*, May, 1881, Vol. V, No. 5,8-10.
34. Account of Sister Elisa Marocchino.
- 35.. *Mosche di Milano*: pharmaceutical preparations applied as a blistering plaster.
36. Copy in the General Archives F.M.A.
37. Account of Sister Elisa Marocchino.
38. Account of Sister Louise Boccalatte.

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39. Account of Sisters Elisa Roncallo, Louise Boccalatte and others.
40. Rosetta and Catherine Tavella, two sisters.

41. *Bargnif, ciapin*: Expressions of Piedmontese dialect used con temptuously to indicate the devil.
42. *Farfium* (from *farfui*): a word in Piedmontese dialect indicating vivacious temperament and mobility-In Italian the equivalent would be, more or less, *folletto* or imp, sprite.
43. Sisters Victoria Monti, Enrichetta Gamba, and Teresa Rigalzi.
44. Verbal deposition of Mother Daghero, written by Cardinal Cagliero, (May, 1918).
45. From the memoirs of Father Cagliero, of Superiors and Sisters who were present.
Cf. *Salesian Bulletin*, June, 1882, Vol. VI, No. 6, 106-107.
46. From the verbal accounts by Superiors of the General Council, especially Mother Daghero and Mother E. Sorbone. Also from later oral and written memoirs of Mother Teresa Pentore, and Sisters Caroline Rota, Frances Gamba, Clelia Armelonghi, the two Cairo sisters, Rosina Gilardi, Marietta Rossi, Louise Bocolatte, Amalia Meana and others.
47. From the accounts of Mother Enrichetta Sorbone, Sister Maria Pasquale and others.
48. Account of Sister Angelina Sorbone.
49. Account of Sisters Enrichetta Telesio and Louise Desirello.
50. Account of Sister Alexandrina Cane and ex-Oratorians of Turin; Sisters Margaret Garetto, Annette Rigazzi, and Marina Mesman.
51. Confirmed by *Salesian Bulletin*, July, 1881, Vol. VI, 2.
52. Memories expressed orally by Mother Daghero and Mother Enrichetta Sorbone.
53. From an account of Sister Catherine Prestianni (from Nunzio) who heard it from her father, the brother of Father Joseph.
54. Appendix No. 7a, b, (already quoted on page 122).

APPENDIX

APPENDIX No. 1

*Summary Report on the Chieri Controversy*¹ April, 1879 - May, 1881

a) The complaints lodged by Canon Oddenino against the functions in the girls' Oratory at Chieri were not solved by the explanatory letter written by Father Rua to the Archbishop of Turin on January 13, 1879. Rather, they were increased on account of the far from edifying rumors which circulated to the detriment of many souls.

In the meantime, Father Bonetti wrote to the curate of the Duomo, asking him to desist from so hostile a procedure. The Canon took offense at this, and sent the letter to the Archbishop, who waived the normal formalities of the case and on the pretext of lack of respect to Canon Oddenino, suspended Father Bonetti from the exercise of the faculties of confessor. (February 13, 1879).

From this point onwards the situation worsened to such a degree that Father Bonetti, in spite of all the measures he took to justify himself-some of which involved real acts of humility-was suspended absolutely and indefinitely from hearing confessions, not only in the city of Chieri, but throughout the archdiocese.

This disposition far surpassed the limits of justice, yet could not be disputed at that time. As a result, the Salesian Prefect of Valdocco, Father Leveratto, went to replace Father Bonetti at Chieri. Father Bonetti had to dissimulate the real reason for his absence from such a fruitful field of apostolate, saying he had to accompany Don Bosco to Rome for some business on behalf of the Chieri Oratory.

In the meantime-on February 16-five Canons of the Chieri chancery testified in writing to the merits of Father Bonetti, "the most suitable to instruct and correct the evil ways of so many ignorant girls of reproachable conduct." Much against his will, Don Bosco felt obliged to refer the matter briefly to the Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, stating that "the Director of the Festive Oratory at Chieri, who did much good. . . who preached in that city ... had had to abandon his confessional surrounded by a crowd of penitents, and withdraw from the diocese, to avoid giving [p. 390] rise to gossip." (Feb. 1879)

At the same time Canon Sona wrote from Chieri to Father Bonetti: "The Oratory of Chieri would be unjustly defamed and the honor of the Salesian Congregation would suffer if your Reverence were not vindicated in your good name and in the exercise of your sacred ministry." On March 2 Father Bonetti humbly submitted to the Holy Father his petition "to be freed from a punishment which made him seem guilty of some serious fault." (March 5).

This appeal, which gave rise to many questions and answers between Rome and Turin, disposed the Archbishop to restore confessional faculties to Father Bonetti. However, he stated: "Father Bonetti is a good priest, but he should not go to Chieri!" The situation was most painful; and there seemed no way out.

There followed a succession of more or less unpleasant situations which, however, left the way open to the hope that for Father Bonetti the trial was drawing to an end.²

b) On May 2 the document restoring confessional faculties to Father Bonetti still contained the clause that without special permission from the Archbishop he should not go to Chieri. Father Bonetti, who had been there two days already preaching for Our Lady's month, asked the Archbishop to allow him to continue so as not to arouse unjust suspicion again and to gather the fruits of his apostolate which were already maturing. His request was turned down. He then appealed to the Pope for the second time (May 4).

Further communication between Rome and Turin ensued, with glimmers of hope for Father Bonetti's being allowed to confess anywhere, but a verbal statement to that effect given on May 26, was omitted in writing on May 27, when it was stated that Father Bonetti might not exercise his priestly ministry at Chieri.

Only on May 29 did the Salesian Superiors, united in Chapter, come to know that for some two months an obscene, highly censurable book, *The Archbishop of Turin, Don Bosco and Father Oddenino or Comic, serious and sad facts narrated by a citizen of Chieri* was in circulation. In the most energetic terms the Superiors expressed their grief that ecclesiastic authority should be so disrespectfully demeaned before the public... as they foresaw the serious consequences.

Father Bonetti again took up the pen and wrote to the Pope. . .

[p. 391] For the third time he had recourse to His Holiness, respectfully but insistently begging him to use his supreme authority and free him from a situation that was most painful to the Salesian Congregation, as well as being most harmful to souls and obstructive to God's greater glory, since it was a cause of scandal and discontent among the people (last days of May-first days of June).

Rome awaited the statements and answers of the Archbishop-which were never forthcoming-before judging the question. Father Bonetti gave vent to his feelings to the Secretary of the Sacred Congregation of the Council, asking him to expedite a definitive decision in his case. (July 16).

Not getting a reply from this quarter either he consulted Attorney Leonori of the Vatican Congregations: "The state of punishment in which I find myself," he wrote, "has given rise to the grave suspicion that I am guilty of some infamous behavior, especially as it is a question of a female institution.

If I am considered guilty I should be accused. . . but if I am not guilty, why am I subject to a long and unjust punishment which is such a slur on my character and my Congregation, and a scandal to the faithful?" (July 27).

The good solicitor advised him and promised to defend his case, and on the strength of this Father Bonetti returned to the Secretary of the Congregation of the Council, Monsignor Verga: "The Archbishop neither answers nor withdraws my suspension. In the meantime what is the result? Before my confreres, the institute I govern, the city of Chieri, my native place, and all the Archdiocese of Turin, I am looked upon as a scandalous priest. Sinister voices become ever more daring since they know I have had recourse to Rome, and that after seven months there has been no reply to my appeals." (August 20).³

c) August, September and half of October passed without changing in any way the *status quo*. Being refused a much sought audience with the Archbishop, Father Bonetti prepared a fourth recourse to the Holy Father, hoping that he would repeal the case. He included with his petition the testimony of the five Canons already mentioned, as well as the following from Don Bosco: "John Bosco, priest, Superior of the Pious Salesian Society, testifies that Father John Bonetti, member of that Congregation, has always been of virtuous and exem- [p. 392] plary behavior as becomes a good religious. In fact in his published writings, his direction for twelve years of the minor seminary of Borgo San Martino-diocese of Casale-he was outstanding in his ability to educate young people. He successfully conducted retreats, missions, triduums, novenas and so forth.

In his office of Director of the Festive Oratory of Saint Teresa at Chieri, he worked with zeal and sacrifice to catechize, confess and instruct poor young girls, succeeding in influencing more than four hundred of them in the above named Oratory, with the help, assistance and material direction of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians. This statement has been made so that the aforesaid Father Bonetti may use it wherever it may serve him."

Turin, October 28, 1879

Father JOHN BOSCO

He sent this letter to Mr. Leonori, Attorney, asking him to transmit it to Cardinal Nina, who in turn would submit it to the Holy Father. He asked the lawyer to interest himself in it immediately so that the whole matter might be satisfactorily cleared up before the novena of Mary Immaculate-principal feast of Saint Teresa's Oratory (October 24).⁴

d) The year came to an end, bringing no ray of comfort to the distressed Father Bonetti. On January 2, 1880 he wrote to the attorney: "I suffer greatly. . . evil tongues are wagging, and some would incite me to bring the whole scandal into the open. But with God's help I will never do

that, even were I to die suspended from exercising my ministry as one unworthy of the priesthood. I will suffer all with resignation so as not to increase the suffering of the Holy Father and of my Superior, Don Bosco, and to pay for the declaration of my innocence on the day of Judgment. However, I cannot but desire to be released from this state of punishment, that I may be free to work in the Church at the good pleasure of my Superiors and for the honor of the Salesian Congregation to which I belong, and of my family, who are humiliated and degraded through my unjust suspension" (January 2, 1880).

Father Francis Dalmazzo, newly appointed Salesian Procurator with residence in Rome, went all out immediately in Father Bonetti's interests, but was advised to bide his time. Eventually he was in a position to write to Turin that the Congregation of the Council had dispatched its ultimatum to the Archbishop (March 23).

As a result of the "Bonetti question," Don Bosco was considered by the Cardinal Prefect of Bishops and Regulars in Rome and by some other prelates of the Roman Curia, as a person to be avoided so as not to compromise the rights of episcopal jurisdiction, or the laws of the Church. As such, he was an obstinate rebel against diocesan authority, who should not be admitted to audiences of duty and necessity, so entreatingly sought (last week of March and first days of April).

The Archbishop did not reply to Rome's ultimatum until three months later, and then in an unsatisfactory, evasive way (June 28).⁵

e) Summer merged into autumn. Worn out from bearing up against a slate of injustice and contradiction for twenty-two months, Father Bonetti submitted directly to the Pope the petition of October 24 and 28, 1879. It was not transmitted to his Holiness for reasons of prudence and remained in the hands of the Secretary of the Council.

Five days later Cardinal Caterini, Prefect of the Council, ordered Monsignor Verga to write to Father Bonetti that within a month his case would be dealt with in full *Eminentissimorum Patrum consensu*. He advised the attorney Leonori to communicate this officially to Don Bosco and the Archbishop of Turin (November 29).

On December 5 the Archbishop took the ball on the bounce, and gave his own explanation to the Cardinals of the Council, bringing to light a new accusation which occurred on the death at Chieri of a Daughter of Mary Help of Christians-Sister Innocenza Gamba on November 21.

It was a question-according to the submissions sent to the Curia-of serious violations of parochial rights and Canon Law by the administrations of the last rites by two Salesians, who used the sacred species from the internal chapel, and the holy oils from the Jesuit church; and furthermore by their having accompanied the funeral procession through the streets of the city to the cemetery.

This was completely false, as the Last Sacraments were given to the Sister by Canon Sona of Chieri, and the coffin was accompanied to the cemetery (*more pauperum*) by a crowd of young girls. (Declaration of Canon Sona, cf. M.B. XV, 720).

[p. 394] Some days later the enemies of Salesian work in Chieri added fuel to the fire by presenting other formal accusations to the Archbishop against Father Bonetti, attributing to him the authorship of the blameworthy libel contained in the trashy book *The Facts of Chieri* (December 8-13).

The Archbishop then prepared a prolific account and forwarded it to the Cardinal Prefect, His Eminence Caterini (December 29). On his part, Father Bonetti sent in his defense on January 8, 1881.

At this point Cardinal Nina to carry out the desire of the Archbishop expressed through his lawyer, Canon Colomiatti-proposed that the matter be decided *de bono et de aequo* (amicably and justly) between the parties (February 10, 1881).

This was what Don Bosco had desired all the time, without attaining it. But if good will seems to be prevailing now-he said-we will return to two alternatives. Either the culpability of Father Bonetti in the Chieri question is proved and he will be dismissed from the Congregation; or he is not guilty and the honor of which he was unjustly deprived will be restored and through him to

his Superiors leaving Father Bonetti perfectly free to exercise his ministry wherever he may be, and withdrawing every unjust complaint made against him to Rome. There followed verbal and written clarifications and agreements between Rome and Turin; but the question was never solved except in desire (May 27, 1881).⁶

APPENDIX No. 2

The Cardinal Protector of the Salesian Congregation

Last year our Holy Father Leo XIII deigned to become not only a Salesian Cooperator, but, as he put it, "the first Cooperator." On March 20 of this year while Don Bosco was at his feet in a special audience, he was benignly pleased to grant a special blessing to all the Salesians and their Cooperators, men and women.

But His Holiness would do more: Wishing to give the Salesian Congregation its own Cardinal Protector, on the 26th of that month [p. 395] he deigned to confer that office on Cardinal Lorenzo Nina, his Secretary of State, a personage of such high merit as to be known to all the world.

Before referring to the precious document which gave effect to this election, we think it necessary to give some introductory ideas about the origin of the various kinds of protectors.

The need for protectors has been felt by men of every time and place.

The weak have always sought the help of the strong; the poor have turned to the rich; the little to the great, and so forth. The institution of "protectors" as such, however, goes back to Roman times. Romulus, founder and first King of Rome, had divided the citizens into two orders, i.e., the patricians and the plebeians. Wishing these two classes to be united with reciprocal bonds he ordained that every plebeian should choose a patrician as his patron and protector, whose client he then became.

The obligation of the protector was to defend his client, look after his interests and do for him all that a father would for his son. The duties of the client and his descendants were to be respectful to the protector and help when the need arose. Thus it came to pass that between them and their families there were inviolable relations, which greatly contributed to the maintenance of peace and harmony in the city.

There was only one step from private to public protectors, who arrogated to themselves the advantages arising in the cities and in the foreign republics. The great preoccupation of every colony and confederate city was to have a patron or protector in Rome to promote its interests. Instances might be quoted: Marseilles had Pompey and Caesar as its patrons; Syracuse-Marcellus; Bologna-Antonius; Durazzo and Capua had Cicero; and so forth for other cities.

The Church too had created its protectors. In fact in the first centuries the Sovereign Pontiffs elected persons of merit to whom they gave the office and the title of Protectors or Defenders of the Church and of the faith. Pope Saint Caius, elected in 283, gave the office to Saint Sebastian, General of the First Cohort of Diocletian. This holy and courageous soldier faithfully promoted the interests of the Roman church and the Catholic faith, giving his life for both. When persecution ceased, the Roman Pontiffs chose as defenders and [p. 396] protectors of the Church and faith the Emperor or other sovereigns outstanding for their loyalty to the Apostolic See. Later protectors were appointed to individual churches, parishes, hospitals, confraternities, colleges, universities, academies and so forth.

The practice of assigning Cardinal Protectors to religious Orders and Congregations began in the 13th century. The first to enjoy the privilege were the Friars Minor of Saint Francis of Assisi. This saint had a vision: In a dream he saw a hen who strove in vain to shelter an innumerable clutch of chickens under her wings, to defend them from rapacious hawks, which were on the point of swooping down on them. Try as she would, she could not succeed in defending them all, and many were killed in consequence. Then it seemed to him that another big bird spread its wings to offer them refuge and safety. The saint awoke and asked the Lord what the dream meant. The Lord let him know that the hen represented Francis; the chickens were his religious,

and the large winged bird was a Cardinal whom he had to take as Protector of his Order.⁷

Bercastel relates in his *Church History* that Francis and his disciples had enemies who tormented and afflicted them in many ways. He went to Pope Innocent III, who received him with signs of great benevolence, which encouraged the "poverello" to say: "Holy Father, your goodness to me and my Brothers is a cause of confusion to me. But I would accuse myself of having taken from the Church these precious moments which we steal from its Head when so many serious problems await his consideration. Therefore, we ask you to give us a Cardinal with whom we can treat of our affairs under your authority."

The Pope graciously acceded to the request, and gave him as Protector Cardinal Ugolino Conti, his own nephew.

In imitation of the Franciscan Order, other Institutes and Congregations in the course of time had Cardinal Protectors appointed, in the manner which still prevails.

In 1694 in a Constitution beginning *Christi Fidelium*, Pope Innocent XII fixed norms for the authority of Protectors towards the protected.

According to Cardinal De Luca in his *Cardinal Pratico*, Chapter 15, their office consists in defending the prerogatives and privileges of the Order with the Pope, in the Sacred Congregations, and wherever [p. 397] the need arises, they are to forward its interests, prevent it being harassed or oppressed and such like.

This protectorate is conferred by the Pope through a notice from the Secretary of State. This is followed by an Apostolic Brief after the Cardinal has accepted the assignment. The Holy Father gives it to Cardinals at the request of the applicant order desirous of a Protector or by means of a *motu proprio*, that is, by his spontaneous will. This is exactly what Leo XIII did in assigning his Eminence Cardinal Nino to be Protector of the Salesian Congregation.

With these introductory notions, we now give the precious document referred to above:

From the Secretary of State

His Holiness, wishing that the Salesian Congregation, which is daily acquiring new claims to the special benevolence of the Holy See because of its works of charity and faith in various parts of the world, should have a special protector, has benignly deigned to confer this office on Cardinal Lorenzo Nino, his Secretary of State.

The Pontifical disposition is communicated to the Superior of said Congregation, Father John Bosco, for his information and guidance.

The Vice Substitute
of the Secretariate of State,
SERAFINO CRETONI⁸

APPENDIX No. 3

The image of the Holy Face at Lucca

On February 26 (1879) the Chapter of Lucca Cathedral wished to give a mark of esteem and veneration to Don Bosco who was passing through the city. They invited him to visit the Holy Face, and received him solemnly at the door of Saint Martin's Cathedral. Leading him to the beautiful little chapel which contains the venerated image, they exposed it for him and presented it to him to kiss, [p. 398] a privilege granted privately only very rarely, to persons such as princes and leading Church personalities.

The Holy Face is a sculpture of the Divine Savior on the cross. The figure is life size, clothed in a long tunic customarily worn in the Palestine of His time, all carved in wood. The head, a reproduction of one of the most ancient images, is free from the ordinary crown of thorns. Instead

it is crowned by a thick mass of hair, which according to the custom of the Nazarenes, hung untied over the shoulders and arms.

The most reliable traditions and innumerable documents worthy of belief state that this image originally belonged to Nicodemus who, together with Saint Joseph of Arimathea, had taken Jesus down from the cross. The rich disciple, through the love he bore Jesus Christ, was stripped of his princely dignity and expelled from the Sanhedrin, of which he was one of the principal members. He took refuge with his relative, Gamaliel, also a fervent Christian. The image of Jesus Christ crucified had always remained impressed on his mind and heart. And so, in his leisure hours, as a pleasant occupation, he had carved the figure with his own hands-or at least, he had designed and directed the work. He put into it a phial of the precious blood, a part of the crown of thorns, a nail, some hair and other precious relics tied with a strip of Our Lady's veil.

When Nicodemus was dying he entrusted this treasure to a certain Issachar, a God-fearing man and good Christian, who hid it in the most secret part of his house lest the Jews or Gentiles should come to know about it. But even in its hiding place it was surrounded with every possible reverence and homage. Thus it was venerated in Jerusalem by generations of Christians until the end of the V III century. Then in 782 A.D., in a marvelous way it came to be the property of the devout people of Lucca. (See *Cenni Storici* etc. compiled by Cavalier Louis Larini, archpriest of the Metropolitan. Lucca, tip. Landi, 1866)⁹

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APPENDIX No. 4

Rules and Constitutions for the Institute
of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians
aggregated to the Salesian Society

Laudait usque ad mortem anima mea Dominum:
My soul will praise the Lord until death.

(Eccl. 51 :8)

[Turin - Salesian Publishers and Press, 1878.]

To the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

Through the special favor of our heavenly Father. the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to which you have the happiness to belong, has for some time past been making great progress. In the course of a few years we have been able to open Houses in Piedmont, Liguria, France, and even distant America.

While the Institute was centered in the Mother House at Mornese, a few manuscript copies of the Rule were enough to enable every Sister to become acquainted with it; but now that Divine Providence has multiplied the Houses, and the number of Sisters has increased, these copies are not sufficient.

Wherefore, I have deemed it conducive to the greater glory of God and to the good of your souls to have the Rule printed, and now I present it to you. It has already been approved by many bishops who found it well suited to sanctify one who aspires to belong entirely to Jesus Christ, and at the same time devote her whole life to the service of her neighbor, especially in the education of poor children. Furthermore, the Institute itself was commended and approved by the Most Reverend Bishop of Acqui, in whose diocese the Institute had its origin in 1872, and where it still flourishes.

You should, therefore, hold in high esteem the Rules which govern the Institute, and should meditate upon them, but above all remember that it would avail nothing even to know them by

heart, if you do not [p. 400] practice them. Wherefore, each one must be deeply solicitous to observe them with exactitude. To this end both the vigilance and zeal of Superiors and the diligence and efforts of the Sisters should be directed. By this means you will find in your Congregation peace of heart, the path to heaven and thus become saints.

Meanwhile, I gladly avail of this opportunity to urge you to pray always for the repose of the soul of the Very Reverend Father Dominic Pestarino, the first Director of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, whom God made use of to lay the foundations of the Institute, and who, by his charity and zeal, has indeed merited our deepest gratitude.

Pray also for one another that God may keep you constant and faithful to your vocation, and make you worthy to accomplish much good for His greater glory. Pray especially for those Sisters who have already gone or will go to far distant lands in order to bear thither the name of Jesus Christ, and to make Him known and loved. Pray above all for the Holy Catholic Church, for its Visible Head on earth, for your Bishops and pastors. Pray also for the Salesian Society to which you are affiliated, and do not forget to pray for me, who have your happiness at heart.

May Our Lady Help of Christians protect us and be our defense in life and death. Through her powerful intercession may she obtain from her Divine Son the inestimable grace of being one day gathered together under her maternal mantle in eternal bliss.

Turin, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1878

Father JOHN BOSCO

*Rules or Constitutions of the Institute
of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*

*Chapter I
The Aim of the Institute*

1 - The aim of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is to strive after one's own perfection, and to cooperate [p. 401] in the salvation of others by giving a Christian education to the children of the poorer classes.

2 - The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians shall therefore strive above everything else to practice the Christian virtues. They shall then dedicate themselves to the benefit of their neighbor. It will be their special care to direct schools, boarding schools, kindergartens, festive oratories, and also to open work rooms for the poor girls of towns and villages. Where necessary they will also assist the sick poor, and do other similar works of charity.

3 - They may also open educational establishments for girls of middle class background, to whom, however, they will never teach those sciences and arts which are proper to the upper class families. It shall be their aim to train their girls in piety, make them good Christians and render them capable of earning an honest livelihood.

4 - The Institute is composed of unmarried women, who profess the common life by means of temporary vows taken for periods of three years. After one or two periods of three years the Major Superior, in agreement with his Council, may admit to perpetual vows, when this is considered advantageous to the religious or the Institute.

*Chapter II
General Organization of the Institute*

1 - The Institute is directly dependent on the Superior General of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales. To him they give the name Major Superior. In each House he may appoint as representative a priest with the title of Director of the Sisters. The Director General will be a member of the

Superior Chapter of the Salesian Congregation.

To the Director General the Major Superior will confide the vigilance and care of all that regards the material and spiritual wellbeing of the institute.

2 - In all that concerns the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of religion all the Houses will be subject to the jurisdiction- [p. 402] tion of the Ordinary. The Sisters will have as confessor the Director appointed by the Major Superior and approved as confessor in the Diocese.

3 - Ordinarily he will not interfere in the government and discipline of the House, except in matters in which the Major Superiors will have commissioned him.

4 - The Sisters and girls of the establishment will be subject to the jurisdiction of the parish priest in those matters which regard parochial rights.

5 - The Sisters who enter the Institute retain their civil rights even after having taken vows, but they may not administer their goods, except in the measure and manner fixed by the Major Superior.

6 - The usufruct of all property, movable and immovable, must be ceded to the same.

7 - The Institute provides for each Sister all that she may need in the way of food, clothing and all that may be necessary in time of health or of sickness.

8 - Should someone die without having made a will whoever has the right will succeed her according to civil law. .

9 - The vows are binding while one lives in the Congregation. Should someone, for reasonable motives or on the prudent judgment of the Superiors, leave the Institute, she can be dispensed from her vows by the Holy Father or the Major Superior. All should strive to persevere in their vocation until death, always remembering the grave words of our Divine Savior: "Whoever puts his hand to the plough and turns back is not fit for the kingdom of God."

10 - Should a Sister leave the Congregation, she cannot claim compensation of any kind for any office she may have held in the Congregation. She may, however, take those goods and movable objects she brought with her when entering, in the state in which they are, but she has no right to ask an account of the Superiors of the administration of same during the time she spent in religion.

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Chapter III *Internal Government of the Institute*

1 - The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians is governed and directed by a Superior Chapter, composed of the Superior General, Vicar, Economer and two Assistants, dependent on the Rector Major of the Salesian Congregation.

2 - The Superior Chapter will be presided over by the Major Superior or by the General Director or local Director, if delegated.

The Superior Chapter will be held when there is a question of opening a new House or establishment, or for any other business that concerns the general interests of the Institute.

3 - A House may not be opened nor the direction of any institute, kindergarten or the like be assumed until the Rector Major has discussed the matter with the bishop, or is in full agreement with him for that which pertains to ecclesiastic authority.

4 - The Superior General will have the direction of the whole Institute, and all that concerns the material and moral interests of the Houses of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will depend from her, always in submission of the Rector Major. She will assign offices to the Sisters, and transfer them from one House to another when the need arises. In the buying or selling of immovable property, in demolishing buildings or undertaking building constructions, she must first consult the Director General and have the consent of the Rector Major.

5 - The Vicar will replace the Superior General and will be, as it were, the center of the income

and output of the entire Congregation. She will have the care of bonds and donations given to the Houses, and will keep a register of the same. The administration of the movable and immovable goods of the Institute and their usufruct is also her charge and responsibility. She will, however, depend from the Superior General, to whom she will give an account of her management every three months.

6 - The Vicar is also entrusted with the secret admonition of the Superior General, but she will not advise her except on serious [p. 404] matters and after having prayed and sought light from God if the admonition she intends making is in order, and to find the manner, place and time when it could be most advantageous. The Superior herself will, ask her from time to time, if she has any observations to make, so as to facilitate for her this charitable service.

7 - The Economer will have charge of all that concerns the chases, sales; wills and the way to make the same; provision in bulk of clothes, food, furniture and all that concerns such management are in a particular way confided to the Economer, who will depend from the Superior.

8 - The first Assistant Will Keep up the correspondence of the Superior Chapter with all the Houses of the Institute, and also with externs at the direction of the Superior General. She will keep a record of the decrees, letters and all other documents which relate to ecclesiastical and civil authority.

9 - To the Second Assistant will be given charge of all that concerns schools and teaching in the various House, of the Institute.

Chapter IV

Election of the Superior General, Vicar, Economer and Assistants

1 - The Superior General and other members of the Chapter will remain in office for six years, and may be reelected.

2 - The elections can take place at any time at the direction of the Rector Major, but unless there is some obstacle in the way they will be held within the octave of Mary Help of Christians. Therefore, three months in advance the Superior will inform all the Houses that her term of office and that of the Chapter members is about to expire. At the same time the Rector Major will give directions as to the special prayers to be said to obtain light from heaven, and will remind all who have the right to participate in the coming election to give their vote to those whom they judge most suitable for the government of the Institute, and most fit to procure the glory of God and the good of souls.

[p. 405] 3 - The election of the Superior General should take place not more than fifteen days after her term of office has expired, during which time the Superior General will act as Vicar in all that pertains to the direction and administration of the Institute.

4 - The members of the Superior Council and the Superiors of all the Houses will take part in the election of the Superior General. Should it happen that someone cannot possibly be present to register her vote, the election will be valid notwithstanding.

5 - The election of the Superior General shall take place as follows: A crucifix and two lighted candles having been placed on a little altar or table, the Rector Major or his delegate will intone the *Veni Creator*, which will be followed by the *Oremus*. Then, after a short talk on the election, the voters will go up to put their ballot papers (folded) in the urn purposely prepared. In all the voting perfect secrecy will be maintained so that no Sister may know for whom another is voting either before or after the election. She who receives an absolute majority of votes will be elected Superior General. By an absolute majority is meant more than half the ballot papers placed in the urn.

6 - If no one is elected in the first scrutiny a second and third scrutiny may be made on the same or on successive days. Should no one be elected in the third scrutiny the Rector Major may

appoint the one who has a relative majority.

7 - Should it happen that two Sisters get an equal number of votes, the President will give his vote to her whom before God he considers best suited to the office. Apart from this circumstance the President will never vote.

8 - The Rector Major will confirm the election.

9 - The election of the Vicar, Economer and the two Assistants will follow the same procedure, but a relative majority is sufficient for the validity of the same, which means that the one who has obtained more votes than any other Sister will be elected.

10 - The scrutiny will be carried out by the President or by two Sisters elected by the Chapter of voters. The *Te Deum* will then be sung.

[p. 406] 11 - To be elected Superior General, Vicar, Economer or Assistant a Sister must: 1. Be thirty-five years of age and professed ten years, but in case of necessity the Rector Major may modify those conditions: 2. Be exemplary; 3. Be outstanding for prudence, charity and zeal for regular observance; 4. Be perpetually professed.

12 - Should it happen that a member of the General Chapter must leave office before the six years has expired, the Superior General, with the consent of the Rector Major, will elect as substitute the one she thinks best suited in the Lord, but that Sister will continue in office only to the end of the six year period begun by her predecessor.

13 - If during the six years the Superior General should die, or for reasonable motives renounce her office, a new Superior will be elected in the manner indicated above.

14 - In this case the Vicar will take on the government of the Institute; she will inform all the Houses and in agreement with the Superior Council and the Rector Major choose the opportune time for the election of the new Superior General.

15 - The Superior General will visit each House of the Institute at least once a year. Where distance or the number of Houses makes it impossible to do this in person, she will elect, with the consent of the General Chapter, some Superiors as Visitors to whom she will delegate her authority in those matters and affairs she thinks fit to entrust to them.

Chapter V

Election of the Superiors of Local Houses and their respective Councils - General Chapter

1 - In every House of the Institute a Superior will be appointed to receive the obedience of the Sisters. She will depend from the Superior General, who at present resides in Mornese, but who may dwell in any House of the Institute, as far as possible with her General Council.

[p. 407] 2 - The Superior of each House will be elected by the General Council and be given a special Council proportionate to the number of Sisters in her House. The first to be elected will be the Vicar and the Assistants according to the need. In the election of these the new Superior will also take part.

3 - The Superior of each House may administer the goods brought to the Congregation or donated to her House but always within the limits fixed by the Superior General. She may neither buy nor sell immovable goods nor construct new buildings, nor make changes of importance without the consent of the Superior General. In administration she is entirely responsible for the material, moral and scholastic welfare, if there are schools. In matters of importance she will consult her council and do nothing without its consent. Every year she will give an exact account of her administration to the Superior General.

4 - The Vicar will take the place of the Superior when she is absent and her duty will be to administer material things. Therefore she will keep a vigilant eye on all that regards domestic economy. She will see that nothing is missing, nothing is wasted, or damaged, and will make all necessary provisions for the House. The Vicar in turn must give an account of her administration to the Superior whenever she asks for it.

5 - The Assistants will take part in any deliberations of importance, and will help the Superior in scholastic, domestic or other matters confided to them.

6 - Every six years a General Chapter will be held in which the Rector Major, the General Chapter, and the Superiors of the Houses, if distance and circumstances permit, will take part. In it, all matters of general interest will be discussed, but always according to the spirit of the Institute.

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Chapter VI *The Mistress of Novices*

1 - The Mistress of Novices will be appointed by the General Council and the Superiors of the Houses in the manner indicated in Chapter IV, No. 9.

2 - The Mistress of Novices must be a Sister of proven virtue and prudence, have a deep and clear knowledge of the Rules; and be known for her spirit of piety, humility and patience. She must be at least thirty years of age and professed five years. She will remain in office for six years.

3 - The Mistress will be extremely careful to be affable, and full of goodness so that her spiritual Daughters may open their souls to all that will help them to grow in perfection. She will direct and instruct them in the observance of the Constitutions, especially in that which regards the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. She will be a model for them in everything so that all the prescriptions of the Rule may be fulfilled. She is recommended to imbue them with the spirit of mortification, but at the same time to use great discretion so as not to weaken their strength excessively and thus make them unsuitable for the works of the Institute.

Chapter VII *Conditions for Acceptance*

1 - Girls wishing to become members of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians will apply to the Superior General, who will, either personally or through her Vicar, examine the application, get all the necessary information regarding the circumstances, conduct, etc. of the applicants, and if the necessary qualities and conditions are fulfilled, will accept them as postulants.

2 - Personal conditions: legitimate birth, excellent character, good disposition, sincere inclination to the virtues proper to the Institute, reference of good conduct from parish priest and assurance [p. 409] by same of the honesty of the postulant's family; good health; a certificate of vaccination or of having overcome smallpox; age 15-25 years.

3 - The postulants will pay a monthly fee of 30 francs during their time of probation. They will also bring the prescribed trousseau. The dowry should not be less than a thousand lire. The Superior General with the consent of her Council may modify this article when it so redounds to the glory of God.

4 - Should a girl die or return home during her period of probation, her dowry and what remains of her trousseau will be given back to her family, but the expenses of room and board, illness, and funeral will be the obligation of the family.

5 - If a novice leaves or dies the trousseau will be given back in the state it is in on condition that 15 lire per month be subtracted from the dowry for the time she spent in the novitiate.

6 - The dowry and trousseau will be handed over in their entirety to the Institute if a Sister leaves or dies as a professed member.

7 - By means of a will, a Sister may dispose of anything she possess over and above the dowry and the trousseau.

Chapter VIII

Clothing and Profession

1 - The young girl accepted as postulant will be exercised for at least six months in the virtues proper to the Institute, learning its spirit and qualifying herself in all that may be useful to her in the various types of work, especially in teaching and catechism.

2 - When this time of probation is over the Superior General will apply to the Rector Major for the faculty of canonical examination of her vocation by the local Director. The Council of the House in which the postulant resides will then proceed to vote, and if she receives a majority of votes, an exact account will be sent to the General Council which will judge as to whether she is to be admitted [p. 410] to the clothing with the religious habit with the prescribed ceremonies. If she is not admitted, her relatives will be informed and she will be returned to them.

3 - The clothing will be followed by two year's novitiate. A month before this period ends the conduct and attitudes of the novice will be reexamined, and if, in the scrutiny held in her regard, she obtains a majority of votes, she will be admitted to holy profession with the prescribed formula.

In the event of her not being admitted she will return to her family, unless the Council considers it advisable to prolong the period of probation for six months, after which a final decision must be reached.

4 - The clothing will be preceded by a few days of retreat; the profession, by the regular spiritual exercises.

5 - In every House of the Institute a register will be kept of the age, nationality, name, surname, of the Sisters living there and of their parents. In another book will be registered the date of profession with the signature of the neo-professed and of two Sister witnesses.

6 - In the event of grave motives of morality and conduct a novice may be dismissed from the Institute by the Superior General, and a professed member by the Superior Chapter with the consent of the Rector Major, who by that act releases her from her vows.

Chapter IX

Principal Virtues Proposed for the Study of the Novices and for Practice by the Professed Sisters

1 - Patient and zealous charity not only with children but also with young girls.

2 - Simplicity and modesty; spirit of mortification, interior and exterior; rigorous observance of poverty.

3 - Obedience of will and judgment, and humility in accepting willingly and without observation the advice, correction and tasks entrusted to her.

[p. 411] 4 - A spirit of prayer in which the Sisters will eagerly attend to their practices of piety, keeping themselves in the presence of God, and abandoned to His Providence.

5 - These virtues must be well tested and firmly rooted in the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians because in them the active and contemplative life go apace in imitation of Martha and Magdalene.

Chapter X

Distribution of Time

1 - As the occupations of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians are many and varied, great care is required to fulfill them with exactness and order. To this end a well planned timetable will prove helpful.

2 - From April 1 to the end of August the Sisters will rise at 5 o'clock; from September 1 until the

end of March, at 5:30 a.m. There will be half an hour for dressing. At the sound of the bell the Sisters will go in chapel for the prayers in common, according to prescribed formula.

This will be followed by a half hour's meditation, to be read aloud in a clear voice. Holy mass will follow. From then until dinnertime, the Sisters will be occupied in the works imposed by obedience, except for a half hour for breakfast.

3 - A quarter of an hour before dinner they will go to church for the particular examination of conscience, which will last about ten minutes. They shall then go to the refectory in silence. During dinner, there shall be reading of some spiritual book, which will be instructive and uplifting.

4 - Grace before and after meals will be said. After dinner there will be about an hour's recreation. During this time the Sisters will recreate together with fraternal love, animating one another reciprocally in the divine service, and rejoicing in their privilege of being in God's House, away from the danger of offending Him. To relieve body and spirit simple games are allowed. No one should be absent from recreation without permission. At the end of recreation the [p. 412] Sisters will go to the chapel to make a short visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

5 - After this they will resume their occupations in silence. When need or duty requires-for instance to direct work, do shopping, deal with externs on matters for business-it is permitted to speak in an undertone during time of silence.

6 - At 4:00 p.m. there will be spiritual reading in common for a quarter of an hour; about half an hour before supper they will go to chapel to recite a third part of the rosary. If anyone cannot perform these practices with the community she will make them at another time.

7 - During the supper there will be reading as at dinner. After a half hour's recreation they will go in chapel; the prayers will be recited in common and having read a point of next morning's meditation, they will go to rest in strict silence.

8 - Apart from the recreation after dinner, breakfast and supper, silence will be observed as in No. 5. In the workrooms, however, the silence may be interrupted for half an hour after 10:00 a.m. and 4 p.m., but in moderate tone and with the singing of hymns.

Chapter XI

Particular Practices of Piety

1 - On Sundays and holydays of obligation the Sisters will recite the office of Our Blessed Lady, unless they take part in parish functions or assist at some confraternity meeting. The Office of Our Lady will be recited with the greatest devotion, slowly and in unison, and making the pauses at the asterisk.

2 - They will approach the tribunal of Penance regularly every eight days. In confessing their sins, they will omit useless circumstances, be brief and mention their faults with simplicity and humility as to Jesus Christ. They will have for their confessor that respect and confidence which is due to one appointed by God to be the father, [p. 413] master and guide of their souls. They will never speak among themselves of matters of confession, and still less about the confessor.

3 - Every six months they will have an extraordinary confessor appointed by the Rector Major, and approved as a confessor in the diocese. Should a Sister need another confessor apart from this time she will apply to the Superior.

4 - Holy Communion will ordinarily be received on Sundays and holydays of obligation, on Thursdays and Saturdays, and on the anniversaries of clothing and profession. But everyone may receive it daily with the permission of the confessor.

5 - The feasts of Saint Joseph, Saint Francis de Sales, Saint Teresa, Saint Angela Merici, who are the special patrons of the Institute, will be celebrated with particular devotion and solemnity.

6 - On Sundays and other feasts they will attend the sacred functions in their own church or in the parish.

7 - The principal feasts of the Institute and the solemnities of the Immaculate Conception and of Mary Help of Christians will be preceded by a novena. The Sisters will prepare themselves for these feasts with sentiments of deep piety, by approaching the sacraments and by thanking Our Lord and Our Blessed Lady for having given them the grace of a religious vocation.

8 - There is no rule prescribing special fast and abstinence for the Sisters; neither may each one follow her own will in the matter, but will obey the confessor and Superior. In like manner they may not give themselves to bodily penance without asking the necessary permission.

However, they will conform to the praiseworthy custom of fasting every Saturday in honor of Our Blessed Lady. If a fast day prescribed by the Church occurs during the week or Saturday falls on a feast day the fast is dispensed.

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Chapter XII

Enclosure

The Sisters of Mary Help of Christians cannot observe strict enclosure, given the works of charity they must perform for their neighbor. They will, however, observe the following rules:

1 - Externs will not be introduced except in that part of the House which is destined for the reception of seculars, or when necessity requires, in the rooms of the boarders. In those rooms occupied by the Sisters it will never be permitted to introduce other persons except those whom duty or need require there, or when some extraordinary event would warrant an exception according to the Superior's judgment.

The doctor, Director and near relatives of a sick Sister may visit her in the infirmary, but always accompanied by another Sister.

2 - No Sister may leave the House, go for a walk, visit or go out on business, without the permission of the Superior, who will always give her a Sister or girl as companion.

3 - Except on the occasion of a journey or for a work of charity, the Sisters will not be out of the House after sunset.

4 - They will not stop in the street to speak to anyone except for real necessity, which would justify them before others.

5 - They shall not lodge or take any food whatever with seculars except while traveling or in other cases of need.

6 - When traveling if they stop overnight in a place where there is another House of the Institute they will always get accommodation there, even if they happen to have relatives or acquaintances in the same place.

Their religious Sisters will always receive them with charity and kindness, without any recompense for the hospitality given.

7 - The Sisters will not frequent the houses of parish priests or other priests nor render services to them; nor will they stay to dinner or to recreative or devotional meetings.

[p. 415]

Chapter XIII

The Vow of Chastity

1 - The continuous exercise of charity to one's neighbor and fruitful apostolate with poor girls require an untiring study of all the virtues to an extraordinary degree. But the angelic virtue, the virtue above all others dear to the Son of God, the virtue of chastity must be practiced in an eminent degree by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. In the first place, because the duty they have of instructing and guiding their neighbor in the way of salvation is like that of the holy angels; it is therefore necessary that they live with a pure heart and in the angelic state, since

virgins are called "angels of the earth." Secondly, because their vocation, to be properly carried out, demands total detachment both internal and external from all that is not God.

2 - In order to observe this vow they must practice a most vigilant guard over the senses, which are, as it were, the doors through which the enemies of the soul enter. They shall no longer live and breathe but for their heavenly Spouse alone, with all purity and holiness of spirit, of words, of deportment and of deeds, bearing in mind the words of Our Lord who said: "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God."

3 - To preserve so great a treasure it will greatly help to recall the presence of God, turning to Him often with acts of lively faith, firm hope and ardent charity. They shall flee from idleness, and practice internal and external mortification, the former in an unlimited measure, the latter as obedience will permit.

4 - An efficacious means of perserving this beautiful virtue is the practice of devotion to Mary Immaculate, to the glorious Saint Joseph and to the Guardian Angel, as also the remembrance that the faithful spouses of Jesus Christ who live and die in the state of virginity will enjoy a particular glory in heaven and with Mary they will sing to the Divine Lamb a hymn not granted to the other blessed to sing.

[\[p. 416\]](#)

Chapter XIV *The Vow of Obedience*

1 - The life of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, being a continuous holocaust, would lose what is best in its sacrificial character if one's own will were to enter therein, because it is precisely the will which is offered to the divine Majesty through the vow of obedience. Besides this, we know that the divine Master protested that he had not come among us to do His own will, but that of His heavenly Father. It is to ensure that in every action they carry out the will of God that the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians make the vow of obedience.

2 - The vow obliges the Sisters not to occupy themselves except in those things that the Superior judges to be for the greater glory of God, and the advantage of souls, according to the Rules of the Institute.

3 - The Sisters will obey in a spirit of faith, seeing God in their Superiors, convinced that what is ordained by obedience will redound to their greater spiritual advantage.

4 - Let their obedience be willing and cheerful, that is without delay, sadness or dispute.

5 - Finally let it be prompt, without examining or criticizing the motives of the command.

6 - No Sister should be over anxious to ask for any particular thing or refuse it. Should she deem something to be either harmful or necessary she should mention the fact to her Superior, who will solicitously provide for her need.

7 - Let all have great confidence with the Superior and regard her as a loving Mother. They shall have recourse to her in their doubts, and tell her their troubles and difficulties.

[\[p. 417\]](#)

Chapter XV *The Vow of Poverty*

1 - The observance of the vow of poverty in the Institute of Mary Help of Christians consists essentially in detachment from earthly goods, which they will practice by the common life with regard to food and clothing, keeping nothing for personal use without the special permission of the Superior.

2 - It is part of this vow to keep the rooms in the greatest simplicity, striving to adorn the heart with virtue rather than the person or the walls of one's dwelling.

3 - No one may keep, in the Institute or outside it, money in property or deposited for any reason whatever, without the express permission of the Superior.

4 - Voluntary poverty makes us true followers of the Savior, who practiced it from His birth to His death to leave us a great example.

Chapter XVI *General Rules*

1 - Every day the Sisters will commemorate the seven sorrows of Our Blessed Lady at seven separate times. At the end of each they will recite a Hail Mary and the prayer which they will also repeat frequently during the day: "Eternal Father, we offer you. . . etc."

From Vespers of Holy Saturday until Low Sunday and during the octave of Our Lady's Assumption they will recite at these same hours the seven joys of Our Lady, one at a time.

2 - In the quarter hour reserved for spiritual reading they will use those books approved by the Superior. Those especially recommended are: *The Imitation of Christ*, *La Monaca Santa*, and the *Practice of the Love of Jesus Christ* by Saint Alphonsus; the *Philotea* of Saint Francis de Sales, adapted for young people, *Rodri- [p. 418] guez* and the lives of those saints who dedicated themselves to teaching children.

3 - All the Sisters of the various establishments will go once a year to the Mother House, or if the distance is great, to the House from which they depend, to make the retreat. If the work in which they are engaged does not permit them all to go at the same time, they shall make it in two or three turns, as the Superior determines.

4 - Letters addressed to the Sisters and those written by them will be opened and read by the Superior. She will then dispatch or retain them as she sees fit.

5 - Letters may be written without permission to the Sovereign Pontiff, the Rector Major and Superior General, and letters from these persons to the Sisters may not be opened.

6 - When parents or other persons visit her the Sister will go to the parlor accompanied by another Sister appointed by the Superior. In such indispensable visits the Sisters are recommended to observe great prudence and Christian modesty and the Superior shall take all the precautions necessary to prevent any inconvenience. As the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians have many duties to attend to, they should themselves ask their relative not to visit them more than once a month.

7 - The Sisters will love all in the Lord, but they will be careful not to build up special friendships among themselves or with any person whatever. These friendships withdraw the soul from the perfect love of God and finish by being the plague of the community.

8 - No one is allowed to give commissions to the pupils or their parents or to anyone else without previous permission of the Superior, to whom any message that might be given should be reported.

9 - Each one must consider herself the least of all; therefore no one will shirk humble occupations nor will she refuse to do the most abject work of the House in which the Superior will engage her according to her strength, which she will judge prudently in the Lord.

10 - The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians will always be cheerful, laughing and joking among themselves as would become the angels. In the presence of persons of the other sex they will preserve [p. 419] a serious and dignified behavior. Going through the streets they will walk with the greatest composure and modesty without gazing at any person or thing they may meet, acknowledging, whoever, by an inclination of the head, those who greet them and ecclesiastics whom they may meet.

11 - In the House and outside of it they shall always be humble in manner, not sustaining their own opinion, avoiding, above all, every harsh or bitter word, all reproach and all expressions of vanity about self or any good the Lord may deign to draw from their work, doing all their actions in private or in public solely to please God. They will never speak of birth, age or riches if they happen to have had any in the world. They will never raise their voice excessively no matter with whom they may be speaking, even at recreation time. When speaking to persons of the other sex their conversation will be serious, because if they are superior to them-for example, ecclesiastics, it is the respect due to their state, and if they are laymen, good manners and good example require it.

12 - They shall be intent to show themselves at all times such as they ought to be, namely imitators of Jesus Christ and servants of the poor. In church they shall maintain the greatest possible recollection; they shall kneel upright and genuflect to the ground when passing before the altar on which the Blessed Sacrament is reserved.

13 - They will go to the refectory to partake of the food served to all. They will never complain of the food or speak of it among themselves, but if they need something they should mention it confidentially to the Superior. No one should go into the kitchen without permission.

14 - If accommodation permits, each one will sleep in a separate room, but she may not lock it, nor may one enter the dormitory out of time without permission. They will not use a mattress except when ill or for some other need.

15 - They will keep beside the bed a holy water font, a crucifix with a wooden cross, a picture of Mary Help of Christians or the Immaculate Conception framed in black.

16 - The habit shall be uniform, modest and simple as becomes poor religious. It will be black in color with long sleeves reaching to [p. 420] the knuckles, 46 cms. wide. The cape shall reach to the waist. The shoes will be of black leather, like those worn by the poor. They will never wear gloves, and should their use be necessary, they will never be made of silk or of fine leather, or light in color. Around the neck the professed will wear the crucifix; the novices, the medal of Mary Help of Christians.

17 - The linen will also be the type worn by the poor, and stored in common after profession. Each Sister will keep her habit and all she uses perfectly clean; therefore she will carefully fold the veil, apron, habit, etc. every time she takes them off.

18 - The cutlery and china will, as far as possible, be of durable material but not extravagant.

19 - Every Saturday the Sister in charge of the linen, which will be kept in common, will put on each Sister's bed the necessary change, and the Sisters will bring to the place assigned the articles to be washed.

20 - Anything received as a gift by the Sisters will be handed over to the Superior, who may dispose of it as she thinks fit without having to give an account of the same. The Sisters will not give presents to externs or to one another without express permission, nor may they lend or change anything without the Superior's consent.

21 - Every Sister shall take care of her health. Therefore, should anyone feel unwell she should inform the Superior without exaggerating or hiding her complaint, so that she may provide what is necessary. In time of sickness she will obey the infirmarian and the doctor, so that they may give her the treatment that seems best to them before God. She will strive to be patient and resigned to God's will, bearing the privations inseparable from poverty and maintaining a calm tranquility of spirit in the hands of that Lord who is a loving Father, whether He gives us health or afflicts us with sickness and sorrow. To sustain the spirit of those confined to bed Holy Communion will be given at least once a week, wherever the type of illness and the place permit.

22 - The Sisters will strive to remain closely united by the sweet bond of charity, for it would be a deplorable thing if those who have engaged themselves to imitate Jesus Christ should neglect the ob- [p. 421] servance of the Commandment He most recommended, so much so that He called it His own Commandment.

Hence, besides mutual forbearance and impartial affection, it is prescribed that should any Sister

fail in charity towards another, she must apologize as soon as she has become sufficiently calm to realize her fault, or at least before retiring to rest.

23 - That charity may be more perfect let each one prefer the convenience of her Sisters to her own, and let all on every occasion help and encourage one another by acts of kindness and holy friendship, and let them never yield to any feeling of jealousy.

24 - Let them desire and seek to do all the good they possibly can for their neighbor always intending to help and serve Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of His poor, especially by assisting, serving and consoling their sick or afflicted Sisters in religion, and by promoting the spiritual good of the children of the countries in which they live.

25 - To advance in religious perfection it will be very helpful to them to keep their hearts open to their Superiors, as to those who, after the confessor, are destined by God to direct them along the path of virtue. Therefore, once a month, or oftener if necessary, they will speak with her about their exterior conduct, with all simplicity and frankness, and she will give them the advice necessary to succeed in the practice of mortification and in the observance of the Rules of the Institute. Matters relating to the interior life and exterior things which are the matter proper for confession are, however, excluded from these interviews, unless through a spirit of humility they wish to manifest such things so as to get advice and direction.

26 - All the Sisters will be present at the conference which the Superior gives once a week, to instruct them in their duties, and in the correction of those defects which might cause a relaxation of the fervor and observance of the community.

27 - Let all perform their practices of piety with the greatest care because they are the source of that interior fervor, which sweetly draws us to conformity with Jesus Christ, our divine model and the Spouse of faithful souls.

[p. 422] 28 - The charity which has united the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians during life should not cease at death. Therefore when any Sister is called to eternity, her death shall be announced to all the Houses so that Holy Communion may be offered in suffrage for her soul, and the rosary be said for her. In the House where the death takes place, holy mass will be offered in the presence of the remains. The Office of the Dead will be recited as well as the whole rosary.

29 - On the occasion of the death of the Rector Major or the Superior General, besides the above suffrages, a funeral mass will be celebrated in all the Houses.

30 - May the peace and mercy of God descend copiously on all who follow these Rules.

Formula
for the
CLOTHING OF THE DAUGHTERS
OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS

When all the Sisters of the House are assembled in church where the postulant lives, the Director or another priest appointed by him, vested in surplice and stole, will kneel on the lowest step of the altar. Then the intoning of:

Veni Creator Spiritus

The versicle and respective *Oremus* will follow.

After this, the recitation of the:

Litany of the Blessed Virgin

When it is finished:

V *Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.*
R *Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*

V *Maria Auxilium Christianorum.*
R *Ora pro nobis.*
[p. 423] V *Regina sine labe originale concepta.*
R *Ora pro nobis.*
V *Domine, exaudi orationem meam.*
R *Et clamor meus ad te veniat.*
V *Dominus vobiscum.*
R *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

Oremus

*Omnipotens et misericors Deus, qui ad defensionem populi Christiani, in beatissima Virgine Maria perpetuum auxilium mirabiliter constituisti, concede propitius, ut tali praesidio muniti certantes in vita, victoriam de hoste magligno consequi valeamus in morte.
Per Dominum nostrum etc.*

The Director then turns to the postulants, and interrogates them thus:
(If there is but one postulant the questions and answers are in the singular .)

Dir. My Daughters, what do you ask?

Post. We ask to be accepted among the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and to be clothed in the habit of the Congregation.

Dir. Do you know the Rules of this Congregation?

Post. We do know them, and with the help of God we hope to practice them.

Dir. Do you know what it means to be clothed in the habit of this Congregation?

Post. To be clothed in the habit of this Congregation means to renounce all the vanities and maxims of the world, to be clothed in a new habit, that is to practice retirement, mortification and especially chastity, obedience and poverty, to consecrate ourselves to Jesus, and to take as model Mary, His Immaculate Mother.

Dir. Do you think you will be able to practice these virtues?

Post. Of ourselves we know that we are not capable, but with the help of God and the protection of the Blessed Virgin, we [p.424] hope to practice these virtues, and to show by our deeds that we are worthy Daughters of Mary.

Dir. The Lord be with you; divine assistance will not fail you, and Mary will protect you. Therefore with resolute will, go and lay aside the habit of the world and be clothed in that of religion.

Blessing of the Religious Habit

V *Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Domini.*
R *Qui fecit coelum et terram.*
V *Dominus vobiscum.*
R *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

Oremus

Domine Deus, bonarum virtutum dator et omnium benedictionum largus infusor, Te obnixis precibus deprecamur, ut has vestes, quas famulae tua pro indicio cognoscendae religionis induisse volunt, benedicere, et santificare digneris, ut omnes cognoscant tua benedictione tibi esse dicatas. Per Christum Dominum nostrum. Amen.

The priest then sprinkles the habits with holy water.
Then follows the

Litany of the Saints

to the Agnus Dei inclusive.

While the Litany of the saints is being recited the postulants go to dress in the religious habit. When they come back they kneel in their former places until the Litany is finished, when the medals of Mary Help of Christians will be blessed as follows:

Blessing of the Medals
(the formula also serves for crucifixes)

[p. 425] V *Adiutorium nostrum in nomine Domini.*
R *Qui fecit coelum et terram.*
V *Dominus vobiscum.*
R *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

Oremus

Omnipotens, sempiterna Deus, qui Sanctorum tuorum effigies sculpi non reprobas, ut quoties illas oculis corporis intuemur, toties eorum actus et sanctitatem ad imitandum memoriae oculis meditemur: has, quaesumus, sculpturas in honorem et memoriam (if there are only crucifixes) Unigeniti Filii tui Domini nostri Jesu Christi, (if there are only medals) Virginis Mariae Matris Domini nostri Jesu Christi, adaptatas, benedicere, et santificare digneris: et praesta, ut quicumque coram illis (if crucifixes) Unigenitum Filium tuum, (or) Beatissimam Virginem suppliciter colere et honorare studuerit, illius meritis et obtentu a te gratiam in praesenti, et aeternam gloriam obtineat in futurum. Per Dominum nostrum etc. Amen.

When the medals are blessed the priest will give one to each postulant and then will say:

Sup. Behold, my Daughters, the image of her whom today you take as your Model. Holy Church proclaims this heavenly Mother to be the sure Help of Christians. Love her, imitate her, have recourse to her, for no one ever had recourse to her without being speedily heard.

The novices kiss the medal and then say all together:

Nov. Most Holy Virgin, dear Mother of my Jesus, powerful Help of Christians, comfort of my soul, in this moment I place myself in your holy hands. Protect me, defend me and help me to persevere in the divine service. Amen.

If the clothing is not followed by another function, the Superior or Director if he thinks fit, will at

this point give a short exhortation to the novices, after which he will intone the Psalm:

[p. 426] *Laudate Dominum, omnes gentes: laudate eum, omnes populi. Quoniam confirmata est super nos misericordia eius: et veritas Domini manet in aeternum.*

Gloria Patri, etc.

Formula for the Profession of the
Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

All as precedes clothings; then the Superior intones the hymn

Veni Creator Spiritus

V *Emitte Spiritum tuum et creabuntur.*

R *Et renovabis faciem terrae.*

Oremus

Deus, qui corda fidelium etc.

Then follows the

Litany of the Blessed Virgin

V *Ora pro nobis, sancta Dei Genitrix.*

R *Ut digni efficiamur promissionibus Christi.*

V *Maria Auxilium Christianorum.*

R *Ora pro nobis.*

V *Regina sine labe originali concepta.*

R *Ora pro nobis.*

V *Domine, exaudi orationem meam.*

R *Et clamor meus ad te veniat.*

V *Dominus vobiscum.*

R *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

Oremus

[p. 427]

Omnipotens et misericors Deus, qui ad defensionem populi Christiani, in Beatissima Virgine Maria perpetuum auxilium mirabiliter constituisti, concede propitius; ut tali praesidio muniti certantes in vita, victoriam de hoste maligno consequi valeamus in morte. Per Dominum nostrum etc.

The Director then turns to the novices and says:

Dir. My Daughters, what do you ask?

Nov. We ask to profess the Rules of the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Dir. Have you already practiced these Rules?

Nov. We have done all we could to practice them during the time of our novitiate, and

though our weakness is very great, with the help of God we hope to practice them in future, with greater zeal, greater edification of our Sisters, and the greater good of our own souls.

Dir. Have you considered what it means to profess the Rules of this Congregation? Now We think we have considered and understood it. Professing these Rules, we must promise especially to aspire to the sanctification of our souls by avoiding all deliberate sin, by living in perfect chastity, in humble obedience, in poverty of spirit, offering to God all our thoughts, words and actions. We know also that by professing these Constitutions we oblige ourselves to promote the spiritual and temporal good of our neighbor, especially of poor children, as far as our state and condition permit and according to the opportunities that God will give us.

Dir. For how long do you intend to take the holy vows? Although we have a firm will to pass all our life in this Congregation, in accordance with what is prescribed by the Rules we intend to bind ourselves for three years, full of confidence that after that we can make our vows in perpetuity.

(If final vows are being made):

Having a firm will to consecrate ourselves to God for ever in *[p. 428]* the Institute of Mary Help of Christians we intend to make perpetual vows.

Dir. May God bless this holy resolution, and help you to maintain it faithfully. Now place yourselves in the presence of God and pronounce the formula of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience according to the Rules of your Congregation.

One at a time they will go to kneel at a prepared place and in a clear, intelligible voice will pronounce the following

Formula of the Vows

Mindful of my weakness, and fearing the instability of my will, I place myself in Thy presence, Almighty and Eternal God, and imploring the light of the Holy Spirit, the assistance of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and of my Guardian Angel, I promise God, and you, my Very Reverend Father (if it is his delegate: you who represent my Superior). and I make the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, for three years. (If the vows are perpetual: for all my life.)

Thou, o merciful Jesus hast inspired me to make these vows; assist me with thy holy grace to observe them.

Immaculate Virgin, powerful Help of Christians, be my guide and defense in all the perils of life. Glorious Saint Joseph, my guardian angel, Saint Francis de Sales and all the saints of heaven, pray to God for me.

All answer - Amen.

When the vows have been made and all have returned to their places the priest will say:

Remember this solemn promise which you have just made to God, and may He with His holy grace help you to keep it until you present yourselves to receive the reward of your fidelity at the throne of Jesus, your heavenly Spouse and Savior.

Here will be sung:

Ecce Dominus vocat nos. Veni Sponsa Christi, accipe coronam, quam tibi Dominus praeparavit in aeternum.

[p. 429] When the singing is finished, if the crucifixes have not already been blessed the priest blesses and distributes them; then to the newly professed he will say:

Behold, my Daughters the sign of our redemption. Here you have the image of Jesus on the cross, which will remind you every day of your heavenly Spouse, whom at this moment you take as your model. True you will have to carry the cross with Him; but the thought of Saint Paul, the Apostle, will be of great consolation to you: he who suffers with Jesus Christ on earth, will be crowned with glory with Him in heaven.

The newly professed will kiss the crucifix and say:

Good Jesus, dear Savior of my soul, who hast died for me, I embrace Thy cross, and will keep it henceforth as my most precious ornament and comfort. Grant that through thy holy grace my resolutions may be constant and unchanging.

The priest will then say:

V *Kyrie, eleison.*
R *Christe, eleison.*
V *Kyrie, eleison.*

Pater noster.

V *Et ne nos inducas in tentationem.*
R *Sed fibera nos a malo.*
V *Salvas fac ancillas tuas, Domine.*
R *Deus meus, sperantes in te.*
V *Mitte eis, Domine, auxilium de sancto.*
R *Et de Sion tuere eas.*
V *Nihil proficiat inimicus in eis.*
R *Et filius iniquitatis non apponat nocere eis.*
V *Benedicamus Patrem et Filium cum Sancto Spiritu.*
R *Laudemus et superexaltemus eum in saecula.*
V *Domine, exaudi orationem meam.*
R *Et clamor meus ad te veniat.*
V **Dominus vobiscum.**
R *Et cum spiritu tuo.*

[p. 430]

Oremus

Deus, cuius misericordiae non est numerus, et bonitatis infinitus est thesaurus, piissimae maiestati tuae pro collatis donis gratias agimus, tuam semper clementiam exorantes, ut qui petentibus postulata concedas, eosdem non deserens ad praemia futura disponas. Per Dominum etc.
Amen.

V *Nos cum prole pia.*
R *Benedicat Virgo Maria.*
V *Divinum auxilium maneat semper nobiscum.*
R *Amen.*

If opportunity permits the Superior will address some words to the professed.
If the two ceremonies are combined the discourse will include the novices also.

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APPENDIX No. 5

Didactic Norms Recommendations to the Teachers

- 1 - Continuous vigilance.
- 2 - Treat the children as you would like to be treated.
- 3 - Correct them with the gentleness of Our Lady.
- 4 - Remember them when you pray.
- 5 - Love all without partiality.
- 6 - Be prepared to accept some lack of virtue, as long as they avoid sin.
- 7 - Do not expect the same progress from all.
- [p. 431] 8 - Impose few orders; it suffices to see they are observed promptly, without seeking an explanation.
- 9 - Age, ability and individual aptitude should be your norm in directing all.
- 10 - Know all they do or omit doing.
- 11 - Dissimulate many of their actions when with them.
- 12 - Reward and punish sparingly.
- 13 - Never abandon them to their caprice or despair of their improvement.
- 14 - Treat them always with charity, cheerfulness, and politeness.

Sister Josephine Rose of Lovere¹⁰

SCHOLASTIC TIMETABLE

for 2nd Class Juniors

	Explanation	Written Work	Lesson
Monday	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar
Tuesday	Nomenclature	Composition	Nomenclature
Wednesday	Church History	Dictation	Church History
Thursday		Composition	Doctrine
Friday	Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Arithmetic

for 1st Class Senior

	Explanation	Written Work	Lesson
Monday	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar
Tuesday	Nomenclature	Transcription	Nomenclature
Wednesday	Church History	Dictation	Church History
Thursday	Question & Answer		Doctrine
Friday	Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Arithmetic

[p. 432]

for 2nd Class Juniors

	Explanation	Written Work	Lesson
Monday	Grammar	Grammar	Grammar
Tuesday	Nomenclature	Reading	Nomenclature
Wednesday		Dictation & Reading	
Thursday	Church History	Composition	History & Doctrine
Friday	Arithmetic	Arithmetic	Arithmetic

APPENDIX No. 6

Pius IX and the Immaculate

Pius IX was at Imola in 1857, visiting a kindergarten which he himself had founded there and entrusted to the Good Shepherd Sisters of Angers. Asked by the good Sisters how he felt at the moment when he solemnly proclaimed Mary to be Immaculate, December 8, 1854, the Superior thought it would be opportune to put his words in writing and wrote them as the Pope spoke. Her account ran as follows:

The Cardinals and other Prelates were not present. Pius IX, continuing his visit to the school came to the second floor and when he came to a hall that was not yet allocated to any sector of the work he intimated that he wanted to speak to the Sisters a little more intimately. He spoke of the events which followed his departure from Imola for the Pontifical election; also of the great events which made his Pontificate so outstanding up to that day.

When he came to the definition of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, I took courage from his attitude and his smile, and I said: "Would it be audacious of me to ask you, Holy Father, what your intimate feelings were when you proclaimed Mary's conception without stain of original sin?"

The glance of Pius IX, always kind and penetrating, became even more benevolent... "You believe, my Daughters," he said, 'that the Pope was rapt in ecstasy, and that Our Lady [p. 433] appeared to him at that moment?" Therefore I said: "It would not be extraordinary, Holy Father, that Mary should have manifested herself to Your Holiness, in the moment when you glorified her in the most solemn way possible; that is when you ordered all peoples and all future generations to believe that Mary's purity never suffered a stain of any sort."

"Well," the Pope replied, "I had no ecstasy or vision of any sort, but what I felt when defining that dogma is something human language cannot possibly describe. When I began to proclaim the dogmatic Decree I felt my voice absolutely impotent to make itself heard by that immense multitude (50,000 persons) who thronged the Vatican Basilica; but when I came to the formula of definition God gave to the voice of his Vicar such strength and supernatural vigor, that it resounded throughout the Basilica. And I was so impressed by that divine help that I was constrained to suspend my words for an instant to give vent to my tears."

"Besides," continued the Pope, "while God proclaimed the Dogma through the mouth of His Vicar, He Himself gave to my spirit such a clear and wide vision of the incomparable purity of the Most Blessed Virgin, that engulfed in that knowledge which no tongue could describe, my soul was inundated with delights not of this world but of heaven.

No prosperity, no joy of this world would give even the least idea of these delights and I do not hesitate to state that the Vicar of Christ had need of a special grace, not to die of joy under the impression of that knowledge and feeling of the incomparable beauty of Mary Immaculate."

Finally, as if he wanted to descend to the level of our intelligence, [the Sister concludes-] Pius IX said: "You were happy, my Daughters, very happy on the day of your First Communion and still more so on that of your religious profession. I myself knew what it is to be happy on the day of my priestly ordination. Unite all this happiness together; add still others, multiply them beyond

measure so as to make of them a single thing and you will have some idea of what the Pope felt on December 8, 1854."

As the Pope spoke, his person seemed transfigured and [p. 434] we [-concluded the Sister-] amazed, overcome with emotion, felt our hearts overflowing with supernatural joy and said to one another like the Apostles at Tabor: "Oh! How good it is to be here!"¹¹

APPENDIX No. 7

Juridical Situation of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians

a) Observations of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars in the light of clarifications from Don Bosco (October 3, 1879)

b) Declaratory Response of Don Bosco (January 12, 1880).

a) In the clarifications which Your Excellency gives to Observation No. 3 you say as follows: In female institutions and in assuming the spiritual direction of them the norms of Chapter X of the Constitutions were followed. In this chapter in fact, there is no mention of the opening of houses for women, but for those of clerics and of boys to be educated by the Salesians. It cannot be said that the opening and direction of such Houses by the Salesians was contemplated by the Holy See when approving the Constitutions, because that is contrary to its maxims for well grounded reasons. The Salesians may exercise spiritual direction in religious Houses of women, when this is entrusted to them by their respective Ordinaries, and this spiritual direction must consist in the administration of the sacraments and in preaching the word of God if, and in the way the same will be granted them by the aforementioned Ordinaries. (. . .)

To Observation No. 5 your Reverence answers: When the Salesian Constitutions were approved the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was dealt with and decisions taken. The Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians depends from the Superior General of the Pious Salesian Society. On examination of the voluminous documentation of the Salesians and especially the part which regards the approval of the Constitutions it has been ascertained that [p. 435] whatever regards the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was not treated of, much less discussed. If that were true this Congregation would certainly have ordered the separation of the two Institutes. It has never been its custom to approve, especially in recent years, that women's institutes should depend on men's institutes: and if it has ever happened that a case of such dependence has arisen it has constantly ordered its immediate cessation. You wish to introduce a different idea, which this Congregation cannot do other than censure.¹²

b) Your Eminence,

I am very sorry that in spite of my goodwill I have not succeeded in giving the desired clarifications on the triennial exposition to the Holy See about our humble Congregation. So that this and other affairs can be cleared up in a way compatible with this Congregation and at the same time in a way required by the Sacred Canons, I send Father Francis Dalmazzo, our procurator, with the charge to put himself at the orders of your Eminence or to any other person you may indicate to him.

In the meantime I will here express my thoughts in respectful reply to the letter which Your Eminence deigned to send to me on October 3, 1879.

The above-mentioned Father Dalmazzo can give explanations if the need arises.

(..)

In matters relating to the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians, the Salesians have no other interference apart from the spiritual and that within the limits and in the manner that the Ordinaries of the Diocese in which the Houses are situated permit and prescribe.

(...)

In that which refers to the Institute of Mary Help of Christians, whether or not they were proposed for the approval of the Constitutions I can answer that in the printed Summary for the attention of the Sacred Congregation in the examination for the definitive approval of our Constitutions when naming the Houses at that time already open, on page 10 No. 16, the following is stated: "As an extension and dependent on the Salesian Congregation is the House of Mary Help of Christians, founded with the approval of the ecclesial author- [p. 436] ity in Mornese, Diocese of Acqui. The scope is to do for poor girls what the Salesians do for boys. The religious are already forty in number and they are looking after two hundred girls."

Their Eminences the Cardinals made some further inquiries about the nature and scope of the Institute, expressed satisfaction on my verbal declarations and concluded that the matter would be examined in greater detail, when their Constitutions would be presented for the approval of the Holy See.

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In the clarifications asked for on April 5, 1879 it was asked:

'If this Institute of the Sisters of Mary Help of Christians has a Superior General from whom the Sisters depend and if she is entirely independent, as she must be, from the Salesian Institute.' This was answered affirmatively, and its authorization in keeping with the Constitutions of those religious given. Now Your Eminence asks if the aforesaid religious have a Superior General and a General Chapter in keeping with Part III of their Constitutions,¹³

No further observations came from Rome after these clarifications on the matter. But as the question of Father Bonetti arising out of the Chieri Oratory dispute was still pending as well as the supposed lack of regard for parochial and archepiscopal rights connected with it, it is understandable that the immediate dependence of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians from the Superior of the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales was continually in danger of surfacing even when the thorny question of Father Bonetti seemed to be reaching a solution.

APPENDIX No. 8

Decree for the Erection of the Via Crucis in the Church of Nizza Monferrato

Josephus Maria Sciandra

Dei at apostolicae Sedis Gratia Episcopus Aquensis et Comes. etc.

Visis precibus sub die vigesima quinta januarii nuper evoluti, quibus adm. Rev.dus Dom.nus Sacerdos Lemoyne Superior localis [p. 437] Instituti Beatissimae Mariae Virginis Auxiliatricis consensum et licentiam nostram expostulavit pro erectione Stationum Viae Crucis in Ecclesia B. M. Virginis Gratiarum, quam Congregatio Salesiana suam habet in Civitate Niciae Montisferrati, nostrae dioecesis.

Viso consensu ad id scriptis dato die 24 januarii 1880 ab adm. Rev.do Dom.no Petro Bisio Vicario Parochiali S.ti Ioannis Laneri, intra cuius Paroeciae limites exstat praefata Ecclesia.

Nos consensum et licentiam nostram damus ut Stationes Viae Crucis erigi possint ac valeant in Ecclesia B. Virginis Mariae Gratiarum supradicta, deputantes adm. Rev.dum Dom.num Sacerdotem Eugenium Ricci-speciali facultate gaudentem-ad peragendam erectionem Stationum Viae Crucis: vetamus autem ne quovis tempore publicum Viae Crucis exercitium fiat quando Parochiales functiones locum habebunt.

Praesens decretum servetur in tabulario Congregationis Salesianae.

Datum Aquis die 3 february 1880

† JOSEPHUS MARIA Episcopus

P. PRATO Pro-Cancellarius

Transcribed from Vol. 18, 549 of Decrees.

Acqui, June 28, 1940

The Episcopal Chancellor
F. to: Father JOHN GALLIANO¹⁴

APPENDIX No. 9

Minutes of the Election of the Superior General and of the Superior Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians Nizza Monferrato, August 29, 1880

On August 29, 1880 A.D. feast of the Sacred Heart of Mary, the General Chapter of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians and the Superiors of the individual Houses of this Institute met in the Salesian church of Our Lady of Grace in Nizza Monferrato to pro- [p. 438] ceed to the election of the new General Council and Superior General whose six-year term of office, according to the Regulations, had expired. With the consent of the Rector Major Father John Bosco, Reverend Father Cagliari, Director of the Institute and Catechist of the Salesian Congregation, assisted by Father John Lemoyne, Local Director, having invoked the light of the Holy Spirit, declared the meeting open in the name of God, and at the direction of the Rector Major.

Nominated as scrutineers of the first ballot were Sister Rosalia Pestarino, Superior of the boarding school of Chieri, and Sister Catherine Daghero, Superior of the House of St. Cyr, near Toulon in France.

The Sisters present who had a right to vote were eighteen. As prescribed by the Rule there were two votings: the first to elect the Superior General the second to nominate the members of the Superior Chapter.

The results were as follows:

Sister Mary Mazzarello

had full votes and was therefore elected Superior General.

The following Sisters were elected on a majority of votes:

Vicar Sister	Catherine Daghero
Economer	Sister Joan Ferrettino
First Assistant	Sister Emilia Mosca
Second Assistant	Sister Enrichetta Sorbone

The elections having been announced in the presence of the entire community and the ballot papers burned, the *Te Deum* was intoned and the meeting adjourned.

In order that this election may take effect and the officials chosen may take up office, the Rector Major Father John Bosco is humbly requested to make such observations as he thinks opportune, and deign to add his signature to show his approval and confirmation of the elections.

I have seen, and approve of the content of these minutes, and confirm the election of the Mother

Superior and of the Sisters comprising the Superior Chapter of the Institute of Mary Help of Christians, and ask God to infuse into all the spirit of charity and of fervor so that this, our humble Congregation, may grow in number, may spread to other remote countries of the world, where the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, winning many souls to God, may save themselves and may one day, with the souls saved by them all go to heaven to praise and bless God for all eternity.

Turin, September " 1880
Rector¹⁵

Father JOHN BOSCO,

APPENDIX No. 10

Claim and declarations regarding the ex-novice Teresa Josephine Persoglio

From the District Court of Turin, a letter dated March 7, 1881, was sent to Don Bosco and Father Cagliero. It contained an unjustified claim made by the relatives of the ex-novice Teresa J. Persoglio, who having returned home for health motives, died there.

Communication of the claim

Royal District Court - Borgo Dora
TURIN

March 7, 1881

Reverend Don Bosco and Father Cagliero,

Charged by the Chairman of the Commission of Public Assistance, I must inform you that a certain Stephen Persoglio (son of Francis Anthony) tailor and porter, has presented a claim to the aforesaid Commission to be admitted to its free clientele so as to ask and obtain from your Reverence the sum of L.1010,15 for injuries sustained through the compulsory detainment of his daughter, Josephine Margaret in the monastery conducted by you.

Should you have some objections to lodge you can direct the same within four days either to the aforesaid Commission through the chancery of the Tribunal, or by letter to this office.

[p. 440] Should you think it better to express your objections to this demand verbally, you may present yourselves to the Commission during its meeting on the 16th of this month at 2:00 p.m. at the Palace of the Civil and Correctional Tribunal of this city, No. 13, St. Dominic Street.

Respectfully,
G. BORGOGNO Magistrate

In the absence of the above-mentioned and in his role as Prefect General of the Pious Salesian Society, Father Rua set in writing the relative declarations.

Declaratory Reply of Father Rua

1 - Miss Persoglio lived on St. Dominic Street, and had no need to pass by the Church of Mary Help of Christians which was far distant from her parish church.

2 - The missionaries or priests of Don Bosco would hardly allure and still less oblige any girl to enter the Company of Jesus, which is entirely composed of men. If, by that title, some other

Company is meant, let it be held that neither do they allure, still less oblige anyone to enter it. Those who seek advice or make application are answered according to the circumstances, in the light of what is most advantageous to the postulant, always however, observing the rules which prudence counsels and inculcating the dependence and the respect of the daughter to her parents, as is evident from the wording of the claim.

3 - If Miss Persoglia revealed the very unfavorable financial state of her parents, it becomes even more evident that whoever advised her to enter an Institute did so solely for her benefit. Besides there was no obligation for the young lady to confess to Father Cagliero or to manifest the financial situation of her family; if she did so, it was to satisfy a personal desire.

4 - From the wording of the claim it would seem that Father Cagliero, far from enticing and obliging Miss Persoglio to enter the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, actually op- [p. 441] posed her admission unless her parents gave their consent, so that if she was eventually accepted, it was with their consent.

With regard to this consent, it must be stated that the mother granted it on the first request of the daughter. In fact, on hearing that some of her companions had reported to the Sisters that her daughter worked in a tobacco factory, where all kinds of people are employed, and that she didn't seem suited to religious life, she was very angry with the person who had put such barriers in the way.

The father had opposed her entering at first, but then he gave in and granted his permission, without which she would not have been accepted in the Institute. This consent he renewed in the presence of many persons when he came to see his daughter before she left for Mornese where the House of formation is situated. Besides, if the father really did not wish to give her consent, it would have been easy to have her return home by merely giving her a command to this effect in the presence of the aforesaid Sisters.

I say this, not to mention the civil authorities who would certainly have supported him if he had made a simple request.

5 - Having given his consent, whatever the father might have said if he still spoke of the subject could be considered as a simple expression of the sorrow he felt over the absence of his daughter. Consequently, words were spoken to comfort him and confirm him in the consent which he had already given explicitly.

6 - The detainment must have been very pleasant, as the girl wished to remain there always. Even when ill at home her one fear was that due to her illness she would not be readmitted to the Institute; hence the repeated requests to this end made by her to the Sisters who came to visit her.

7 - The father never went to see his daughter. Had he done so, he would have been allowed to speak freely with her.

As for the letters, the procedure was that used in every Institute: letters being dispatched and those received pass through the Superiors hands. With regard to her illness: it was consumption, not however as prolonged as this disease normally is: the cough was evidenced in August; when it was seen to be persistent it was decided to send her for some weeks to Turin in the hopes that her native air might do her good. As it was not of a serious character in the beginning, the parents [p. 442] were not informed so as not to occasion them unnecessary anxiety. When the illness seemed to get worse and it was decided to send her to Turin, the parents were informed some days in advance, leaving them free to choose whether to take her home or leave her with the Sisters, where she would have all the necessary care from doctors, medicines and nurses.

The parents preferred to take her home, and did so on the day of her arrival.

8 - It is not surprising that not within months, but within a year and some months which she spent away from home, she fell ill, as so many diseases are common among young people of that age. She could develop the disease in the Institute as she could have done had she remained at home.

9 - As for the expenses of her illness, it should be noted that the parents freely chose to take her home. It would seem that their claim to have the expenses reimbursed is without justification. The father is a porter and tailor, and is in a position to provide for his daughter's needs. She had

not occasioned her parents any expense while away from home.

Finally it must be stated that the girl was not carried off by stealth but had withdrawn, spontaneously and with her parents' consent and had she lived she would never have asked for compensation for the days she had spent away from her family.

Finally it must also be considered that all the time she was ill at home her Sisters in religion and Father Cagliero visited her very frequently not only to console her but to bring her help in money and in kind, although they were in no way obliged to do so, except following the urgings of fraternal charity.¹⁶

[\[p. 443\]](#)