

# Cronistoria

CHRONICLES  
of the Institute of the Daughters of  
Mary Help of Christians

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



Preparation and foundation  
1828 – 1872



Don Bosco Publications  
New Rochelle, New York

**Chronistoria: Chronicles of the  
Institute of the Daughters of Mary  
Help of Christians, in 5 volumes.**

Translated from the original Italian

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Library of Congress Catalog Numbers 80-68484

ISBN 0-89944-043-6 five volume series

0-89944-044-4 volume 1

0-89944-045-2 volume 2

0-89944-046-0 volume 3

0-89944-047-9 volume 4

0-89944-048-7 volume 5

Published for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians  
by Don Bosco Publications, New Rochelle, NY 10802

Printed in U.S.A.

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## PRESENTATION

*I am happy to present in print the first volume of the Cronistoria of the Institute for which everyone has waited with eager expectation.*

*The introduction states how it was compiled, its criteria and its aims. It is intended to establish not only the history but also the spirit of the Institute. Therefore, I shall not use repetition to emphasize values, but limit myself to setting on record what follows.*

*Having read the typed copy of the first volume, on October 31, 1943, Father Eugenio CERIA wrote, "I have before me three volumes of the Cronistoria. I have read the first and have an eager desire to look at the other two. I do not know whether you intend having them printed but I feel this work constitutes a valuable asset for the future. Its content is sound and its spirit excellent."*

*These authoritative words of the renowned Salesian historian and author, usually so sober and measured in his judgments, are a great encouragement at this time, the eve of our General Chapter XVI. The "valuable asset" of the Cronistoria has now been taken from the shelf in order to produce fruit.*

*It is my wish, therefore, that attentive reading of these pages which breathe the freshness of the primitive spirit, will encourage that "return to the sources" looked for by Vatican II, and will ensure the continuity of vigorous life in the Institute.*

*This wish is based on the clear, concise words of Father Ricceri, the Reverend Rector Major, in Rome this past February during a course on Salesian spirituality, on the importance of remaining faithful to the sources. He did not*

*sitate to state: "A congregation which becomes detached from its past can have no future. It resembles a plant detached from its roots."*

*Our past relives in the Cronistoria which is meant to give ever-increasing knowledge and a stronger bond of love that we may stretch out into the future with fruitfulness.*

*Rome, August 15, 1974*

*Solemnity of the Assumption of Our Lady*

Sister ERSILIA CANTA

*Superior General*

## INTRODUCTION

The idea of publishing the *Cronistoria* of the Institute dates from 1884 when the first General Chapter was held.<sup>1</sup> In fact the minutes of the 12th session held on August 19, mention the desirability of collecting notes on the characteristic features of every House in order to include them in the *Cronistoria*. We read, "This task should be entrusted to some worthy Salesian author."

However it would seem that the undertaking of this task remained only a wish, and perhaps because of the pressure of work, no Salesian was found to take it on.

The so-called *First Chronicles of the Institute*, preserved in the Archives, were written by Sisters and bear no date.<sup>2</sup>

What is considered to be the oldest of the chronicles is the one bearing the title, *Chronicle of the New Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians — Mornese 1872*.<sup>3</sup> A note which follows indicates the supposed writer of the first part, presumably between the years 1885-1889, "taking material from old, well-worn exercise books as is stated." Unfortunately these books were not preserved.

There are two pages at the front of this Chronicle which must have been inserted later as is seen by the difference in paper used. These pages contain a beautiful summary of the beginnings of the Institute and bear this footnote: *This was written fifteen years after the foundation of the Institute by Sister Rosalia Pestarino, an eye-witness of these events.*<sup>4</sup>

The style of handwriting varies in the course of the text, which takes us up to 1900. Very little is written concerning the first years. Some of the expressions would seem to be Father Costamagna's, taken perhaps from some of his

notes. In the first part especially, the composition reveals a large number of inaccuracies and gaps, while later it takes on a more direct and continuous flow. Nevertheless it does not appear to have given satisfaction because across the first page, there is written in large letters and in different ink the single word, "Annulled."

The chronicle attributed to Mother Emilia Mosca continues until the end of 1900. The cover carries this note: *This chronicle follows the one written by Sister Rosalia.* It would, therefore, seem to derive from a preceding one or simply from Sister Rosalia's written memories no longer preserved. There is, however, nothing certain about this.

The chronicle must have been written during the last years of Mother Emilia Mosca's life, between 1895 and 1900. This is deduced from what is stated concerning the beginning of the House of Turin, 1876. Mention is made of the FMA, teacher, who was the sister of Father Sala, and he is spoken of as "Bursar General of the Salesians up to the time of his death." Father Sala died in May, 1895.

After attentive and minute study this chronicle would appear to be very inaccurate because it was compiled at a distance of time and possibly in haste. It contains quite a number of date errors, some misplacement of facts and a number of gaps.

The third chronicle, written later, covers the span of the first twenty-five years of the Institute and would seem, at least as regards the early years, to be drawn from the two preceding ones. It actually presents some identical passages contained in one or other of these.

Even the third chronicle is not devoid of error and lacks detail regarding the first years at Mornese.

And so to the year 1913.

Mother Clelia Genghini, who was elected Secretary General in September of this year, was very conscious of the duty of her office to provide a *Cronistoria* for the Institute, that would be as complete and accurate as possible. She held it essential that this *Cronistoria* should start, not

with the founding of the Institute in 1872 as the other chronicles had done, but should stretch back to include the long, gradual, remote and immediate preparation of the years preceding the foundation. Moreover, Mother Clelia wished to gather into one vast framework, those incidents from Don Bosco's own life which reveal the work of Divine Providence in preparing him to be the Founder of the Institute.)

She also gave much care to securing records of Mother Mazzarello right from her birth.)

(Thus Mother Clelia imposed on herself the laborious task of gathering together all the material needed and every possible record referring to Mother Mazzarello and Don Bosco, especially from those surviving Sisters of the early times in Mornese and Nizza.)

(Nothing was considered negligible. Even the smallest incidents, phrases, habits and details which would seem insignificant, but because they derived from the beginnings, could be valuable fragments in rebuilding the past and giving life to the spirit.)

The records collected had to be carefully evaluated in order to ascertain their historical accuracy. Many gave no exact dates or else were a combination of facts or events which actually occurred at different times.

The few chronicles of the Houses were short and often fragmentary, sometimes reporting noteworthy incidents without reference to the time or persons involved.

(Even the data on the Sisters recorded in the first registers of Mornese and Nizza were incomplete and inaccurate, and it required a great deal of long, hard work to inscribe in a new register the precise and complete details of all the past members of the Institute.)

It is, therefore, easy to understand how much time and diligence were required in the research and control of investigations. It actually took years to retrace a single missing date which was found after the patient following-up of one

slender thread of evidence discovered through attentive, loving study.

(During this same period the Diocesan Process for the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Mother Mazzarello was taking place in the Curia of the Archbishop of Acqui. This was opened on June 23, 1911 and closed on July 21, 1914. The vice-postulator of the Cause, Father Ferdinand Maccono, wrote and published the first edition of our Saint's biography during the year 1913.) Up until that time there were only the *Biographical Sketches* written by Father Lemoyne in 1881 and the small volume, *Suor Maria Mazzarello e i primi due lustri delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* written by Father Francesia in 1906.

With the intention of preparing a second and fuller edition of the biography of Mother Mazzarello and also in fulfillment of requirements of the Cause, Father Maccono, with his well-known determined and accurate manner of research, gathered together records of Mother Mazzarello and the first years of the Institute, making use in great part of what is mentioned above.

Sometimes witnesses of the same facts were not fully in agreement with those collected for work on the *Cronistoria*. It was, therefore, necessary to proceed with further research regarding these, as can be seen by the relevant correspondence between Father Maccono and Mother Clelia which is kept in the Archives.)

During that year also, (Father Lemoyne was making his own analogous research in preparation for his work on the *Memorie Biografiche di Don Bosco*. Material relating to 1862 onwards was being sifted for evidence concerning the relations between Don Bosco and Father Pestarino for Volume X, which includes the foundation of the Institute.) Proof is to be found in some of the documentation in the Archives regarding his correspondence with the "dear friends of Mornese" whom he knew in the period when he was director of that first House.

All this goes to show, together with the relative ex-

change of information, what assiduous dedication was put into verifying the sources for the history of the origin and early days of the Institute.

The greater part of the many records collected came from Mother Petronilla, Mother Mazzarello's faithful companion from the years of her girlhood. Without going into a list of names, mention must be made of Sister Rosalia Pestarino, the niece of Father Dominic, who was born in Mornese. She made use of her brother, Father Joseph, for records and research. Father Joseph Campi, a Salesian who spent most of his life in Mornese, provided information and records.

Then there is Sister Josephine Vigola who, still a novice, had gone to Mornese as a public school teacher. When in 1897 the Institute's much desired return to Mornese was effected, with her knowledge of the people and the places she made a valid contribution towards following up the lines of research.

(At that time Mother Clelia had a great deal of other work in hand connected with her office. She obtained help for the research and drawing up of the *Cronistoria* from Sister Madeline Moretti, a teacher of pedagogy at the training school in Nizza. This justifies the note added by Mother Clelia when passing the typed copies of the three volumes to the Salesian Archives in September, 1942. Wishing to remain the the background she had the following written. "Edited by Sister Madeline Moretti, revised and enlarged by the Secretariat of the Generalate on the basis of later documents provided in large part by the diligent research of the Reverend Angelo Amadei, or found in the *Memorie Biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, Nizza Monferrato, Turin, 1922-1942."

However it is only right to mention that Sister Moretti was in Nizza up until 1924. She was then transferred elsewhere and it is unlikely that she would still have been able to continue work on the *Cronistoria*. Hence it seems reason-

able to suppose that her collaboration was limited to Volume I. Apart from this, as the above note states, even Volume I was drawn up essentially by Mother Clelia who took it up again and rearranged it while contributing to the work of Father Amadei in compiling Chapter VI, *Forma la sua seconda Famiglia* of Volume X of the *Memorie Biografiche* left unfinished by Father Lemoyne.

The first three volumes of the *Cronistoria* conclude with the death of Mother Mazzarello in 1881. These will be followed by Volumes IV and V which continue the narrative up until March, 1888, a little after the death of Don Bosco.

The thought of the *Cronistoria* and eagerness to bring it to its prearranged conclusion was very much alive in the mind of Mother Clelia although many reasons and a succession of events forced her to interrupt the work over long periods, even for years.

When she died on January 31, 1956, she was working on it still, and had brought it up to August 24, 1884. It was then taken in hand and continued by the undersigned. Volume IV was completed and Volume V compiled according to the guidelines laid down, although not with the same amount of detail.

The *Cronistoria* is written in narrative style and with continuity. It contains the most faithful reconstruction of facts that is possible. Although not pretending to be a scientific, critical work by modern standards, it is nevertheless reliable and true. Proof of this is in the already recorded diligent research that preceded the work and the relative material collected and preserved in the archives.

The style used is that of the period. When sending it to print it was thought useful to leave it in the original form, except for a little light and indispensable touching up.

Marginal notes in the typed text have also been retained and in the printed copy are to be found incorporated in the narrative not as subtitles, but as simple reminders to

facilitate the research of individual points.

This present Volume I embraces the remote and proximate period of preparation up to the actual foundation of the Institute in August, 1872. It brings out the wonderful manner in which Divine Providence guided its gradual formation, and allows a luminous insight into the foreseeing and loving intervention of the Blessed Virgin, who chose from afar and cared for the foundation stone of that living monument of gratitude and love of which she herself was the heavenly inspiration.

Sister GISELDA CAPETTI

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## **HOW DIVINE PROVIDENCE PREPARED THE FOUNDER OF THE INSTITUTE (1828 – 1862)**

In order to preserve physical life, divine economy provides that a seed hidden in the soil shall flower, beautify the earth and enrich it with fruit. In the spiritual life, a slender, invisible thread is spun, which will come more or less slowly and obscurely with other threads. They are guided by the Same Hand to produce a magnificent tapestry. On this tapestry, embroidered in characters of gold, will be the name of the Providence that willed it, the traits of the heart of God who blessed it.

For the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, this golden thread was the priest Don Bosco. Among the many others who wrote of him, Father Lemoyne's work was one of historical truth and was written with the love of a son. We extract from his records of those particulars which, without his being aware of it at first, gradually led the man to God and to the fulfillment of his redemptive mission in society. They show the formation of the Founder and Father of a second religious family, which worked alongside the first and, under its vital influence, dedicated itself entirely to the salvation of young girls.

### **Young John Bosco and the little Moglia girl \***

1828: Thirteen-year-old John was now a boy on the Moglia farm and was already working to fulfill the mission

\* As has been stated in the Introduction this indication that those which follow are only simple reminders of the subject corresponds to the marginal notes in the original text of the *Crónica*, in order to facilitate research.

Our Lady had entrusted him of converting the boys of his own age group. The lady of the farmhouse wanted to give him the responsibility of looking after a five-year-old girl. Although this was not to his liking he could not refuse an order given by one who had every right to command.

This was the only time he appeared to shirk obedience, [writes his biographer, adding:] Nevertheless, his mistress sometimes placed her little girl on a hillock and went off, thus obliging him to look after her. But as soon as he thought he could not be seen he took himself some distance away. Soon, Dorothy would return and scold him saying, "You young scamp! Why don't you want to do this?" "I am not meant to do it," was John's calm reply.<sup>1</sup>

Was this a seed sown in the ground? A thread prepared for weaving?

John Bosco, the shepherd boy of Becchi, was only nine years old when he had his first "dream" in which a noble lady showed him a multitude of goats, dogs, cats and bears, telling him: "This is your field of labor. This is where you must work. Become humble, strong and robust and what you see happening at this moment to these animals, you must do for my sons."<sup>2</sup>

This must have been the reason why, when faced with a little girl, he said, "I am not meant for this." He saw only boys in his dream and had already wept over the difficulties of the undertaking. He had no wish to add to these.

But, attentive to divine inspirations as he always was, he must have understood that the voice of God was speaking through his employer. Therefore, if because of natural reserve cultivated by his mother's training, he kept away from the little girl, he never went far enough away from her to be out of sight when she was left alone. When any danger whatsoever threatened, John was quick to protect and defend her.

In the same way when organizing games and catechism lessons for the boys of the neighboring farms, according

to his biographer, "He did not want any girls." This was because he had often heard his mother recommend them to be reserved and to keep away from the boys. However, if he realized that they were in some need of protection and defence, or were in danger of offending God, would he not have helped them and spoken an appropriate word to them and on their behalf, following the example of Mama Margaret, who could do so even to the elderly?

If his precocious discretion made him cautious and vigilant, God, who measured the strength of that already adamant character, certainly did not hide from the fortunate young farm hand that young girls are as exposed as young boys to the enticements of evil. From that time he expanded his heart until at the right time it could open up paternally and give refuge to both. That he was unaware of this mattered little. The seed would lose nothing of its fertility.

1844-45: The seed lay hidden in the soil for many years while John, guided and directed by "dreams" which were repeated in order to point out God's plans for him ever more clearly, left the Moglia farm. He took up his Latin studies once more, entered the seminary at Chieri, was ordained priest and started his oratories for boys, the work in Turin that was typically his.

In 1844, after spending the autumn holiday in Castelnovo and preaching for the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary, Don Bosco returned to the residence of his fellow countryman, teacher and friend, Father Cafasso, who was also his spiritual director.

### **Don Bosco at the Rifugio**

After a few days, Father Cafasso took him aside and asked kindly, "Why do you not ask me where you are to go?"

"Because," replied Don Bosco, "I want to accept God's

will in your decision and am anxious not to put forward my own. Send me wherever you wish and I shall go at once.”

“Very well! Pack your bags and go to the *Rifugio*. There you will be the director of the small *St. Philomena's Hospital*. Also, together with the theologian Father Borel, you will work for the good of the young girls of Marchioness Barolo's Institute. While you are working at the *Rifugio*, God will not fail to let you know more clearly what you are to do for poor children.”<sup>3</sup>

St. Philomena's Hospital was a home for handicapped children; the Refuge, a group of institutes for girls, founded and maintained by the Marchioness Barolo. This group of institutes was, then, the field of labor assigned to Don Bosco by God's will manifested through Father Cafasso.

Don Bosco did not sidestep this work so diametrically opposed to his own ideals. Rather, he gave himself to it with more dedication, and better than was expected of him or required by his duties. He gave himself as father, brother and apostle.

“Throughout the week he helped Father Borel in directing the Sisters and the girl residents. He took singing lessons, formed a choir and gave regular lessons in arithmetic to those Sisters who were training to become teachers. He also heard confessions, preached and gave conferences on the monastic life and on perfection.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Don Bosco dreams he is working as a tailor**

While attending his first course of philosophy Don Bosco had had a dream. He himself narrated it later to Father Turchi and Father Dominic Ruffino: “I saw myself already a priest, dressed in surplice and stole. I was working in a tailor's shop still wearing these. However I was not making new things but patching well-worn clothing and putting together numerous pieces of material. I did not immediately understand what this signified. At the time I mentioned the matter to someone but did not speak about

it clearly until after I was ordained and then only to my advisor, Father Cafasso.”<sup>5</sup>

Did Don Bosco think of his dream while at the Refuge? Did he ask himself if the torn garments included those of the fallen girls, with whom he was occupied by order of Father Cafasso? These were poor children, born perhaps into sordid squalor and the slush of vice, and whom society was not able or did not wish to save. Ought he not also to help the Sisters to live serenely in the midst of so much material and moral misery and to bow down to the earth in order to teach others how to carry the cross with eyes fixed on heaven? Would he not have drawn the conclusion that even if his dreams seemed to speak only of boys, Divine Providence was placing him in contact with girls and women religious?

The seed was already opening in the soil and silently preparing to push up its first shoots which with divinely bestowed sap would produce luxuriant growth.

### **“Hinc inde gloria mea”**

1846: The shoot was to appear sooner than expected.

Don Bosco was in great distress, looking for a place where his boys could congregate. He had refused to give them up in order to concentrate on the work of the Marchioness Barolo so she was compelling him to leave the *Rifugio*.

Just about this time he had another dream.

It seemed to him that he was on Cottolengo Street. To his right was the Pinardi house surrounded by a vegetable garden and field. On his left was the Moretta house, almost facing the first, with adjoining courtyard and fields, which were later to be occupied by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Two columns towered at the gates of the future Oratory. These columns bore the repeated inscription, “*Hinc inde gloria mea*”—“From both sides my glory.”

This evidently was the first hint of a sister Congregation

to that of the Salesians. If he saw the latter on one side could he not have seen the Sisters on the other? However he said nothing at the time since he was very reserved in giving such explanations.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore he remained silent, knowing from experience that in His own good time, God would indicate the hour for the new work seen in the dream, and place in his path all the instruments needed for the undertaking. But Don Bosco must certainly have thought about it because, even if God only hinted at His will for a future still unknown, he would have to prepare himself to accept it at the appointed time, and comply with it to the best of his ability.

### **Don Bosco in the attics and in the wards of the "Cottolengo"**

We glimpse this remote preparation when, in 1841-42 Father Cafasso sent Don Bosco up into the attics of Turin. These "low, narrow, squalid and foul places with blackened walls, served as dormitory, kitchen and place of work for complete families. Here, father, mother, brothers and sisters lived and slept with every inconvenience imaginable."<sup>7</sup>

This preparation was continued in 1842 when Father Cottolengo took him round the wards and beds to make a study of the unfortunate people with material and moral miseries, who were cared for in the name of, and for the love of God, in the House of Divine Providence. Here, as in the attics, with the eyes and heart of a priest and apostle, Don Bosco came into close contact with the abjection and needs of the young.

His practical knowledge of the feminine soul came through contacting the families of his little "urchins" and telling the mothers about their children. His ministry also brought him in contact with rich and poor women, consoling both in their sorrows, and often giving alms from the rich to the poor.

He understood their weaknesses, aspirations and ener-

gies, since waiting for God's will did not mean for Don Bosco remaining inert and passive, but rather actively vigilant with alert mind and open heart.

### **Don Bosco's concern for the plight of young girls**

**1856:** As he waited he worked—and what energy he put into his work! In July, 1856, together with six thousand copies of *An Easy Way to Learn Sacred History* and three thousand copies of the *Life of St. Pancratius* in a second edition, he had four thousand copies of *Advice to Christian Girls* printed in Paravia.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious then that even at that time, when he had no more ties with the Institutes of the Marchioness Barolo and was totally committed to working for boys, Don Bosco was thinking of young girls and writing moral and religious norms based on the knowledge he had acquired to help in their formation. This proves that he no longer regarded this particular apostolate as outside the span of his work.

His curt reply to the housewife at the Moglia farm, "I am not destined for this," must have referred only to that period of time. Be that as it may, he was never heard to repeat it. Now, at this later stage he observed the plight of young girls with sorrow, and hastened to help with all the means at his disposal until such a time as Divine Providence should indicate the way to a wider and more decisive apostolate.

### **The death of Mama Margaret**

It seemed that Divine Providence wished to point out this way, not by giving him fresh means but rather by withdrawing a very valid help in the person of Mama Margaret, the light that had directed and guided him until then. In the year 1856 the Oratory was firmly established. It had begun to produce fruit and gave promise of an abundant

harvest. Numerous boys attended the Oratory and many were given shelter; schools were well established with many clerics and lay people, and all this was due in part to the providential help of Mama Margaret. In 1846 she had established herself in Turin with her son and had contributed to the exterior and moral order of the house by her wisdom, enlightened economy, indefatigable work and exemplary piety. Even if it had not been known it would soon have come to light that there was someone at the Oratory with the heart and hand of a mother, rich in uncommon spiritual and practical values.

But now those eyes, which had reflected her son's, both physically and in foreseeing, admonishing, suggesting and correcting in the implied language of the heart, were closed forever. Those hands, untiring in work and doing good and which had exalted through piety, the humble, lowly domestic chores and the never-ending stitching of the coarse clothing of the young urchins, were now still and rigid, resting and interlaced with the brown rosary which had been their support in numerous trials. The heart of the strong woman who had made her own the needs of all her son's boys and clerics was now stilled forever in the heart of God.

Beloved Mama Margaret passed away peacefully at 3:00 a.m. on the morning of November 25. She was mourned by Joseph and John, and everyone at the Oratory. All came sadly like veritable orphans to venerate her remains. Don Bosco was touched by their grief. He himself had wept and his heart was torn with anguish. Gathering everyone together in order to comfort them he said, "We have lost our mother, but I am sure she will help us from heaven. She was a saint!"<sup>9</sup>

If even in small families the loss of a mother is a misfortune, what must it have been at Valdocco? Who can describe the desolation and sense of loss experienced by those poor young people when they entered the House in expectant joy and no longer heard the greeting which gave

**them** the comfortable feeling of possessing a mother, a real **mother**? Who would prepare the church linen? Who would **provide** the poor but indispensable meals for Don Bosco and **his** sons? There would arise both economic and moral **needs**. It was imperative that something be arranged.

Father Rua narrates, "When his mother died Don Bosco foresaw the need of a congregation of religious who would **look** after the clothing and linen of his numerous family, **but** he waited for the certain manifestation of the will of Divine Providence, before taking his decision."

### **Don Bosco places before his young people the idea of calling in Sisters to look after the linen**

Father Rua continues:

However, as if to test the general opinion of the House, one evening after prayers he asked the boys this question, "Should we get some Sisters in the House to look after the washing and to make and mend the clothes, or pay a woman we do not know to come in daily to do this work?"

Thinking that the presence of Sisters would restrict their freedom the boys answered unanimously, "Bring in a woman from outside!"<sup>10</sup>

The boys were used to thinking of Sisters as solemn and completely dedicated to prayer, silence and iron discipline, **and** therefore incapable of adapting to their noise, love for **games** and singing. According to the boys' way of thinking the Oratory would become a sad, dull place, not much better than a prison and would also be unpleasant for Don Bosco, who loved their fun and encouraged it. Oh no, they did not want religious but a woman, a mother who would **listen** to them, help them and, yes, even correct them, but **with** a smile on her lips, someone who would share their life of poverty and work with them.

All these were good reasons for the poor boys and their Father understood and accepted them. But the conclusion

springing spontaneously to his mind must have been, "I need Sisters specially made for my youngsters."

While awaiting a clearer sign of the divine will concerning Sisters formed for this purpose, and not so much for the present battalion of boys as for the future army of boys and girls which he must have already had in mind, Don Bosco yielded to the wishes of his boys. His thoughts turned to Mrs. Joan Rua, the mother of Michael Rua, the cleric. This lady had for some time been generous in helping Mama Margaret. She was of the same mind and intention as Don Bosco's mother and had a firm will to carry on the traditions of the Oratory. Mama Margaret could not have wished for a more suitable person to succeed her.

### **Don Bosco and the detainees of St. Mary of the Angels**

1858: In February, 1858, Don Bosco made a journey to Rome where on March 15, complying with an order of Pius IX, he preached a spiritual retreat to the detainees in the prison of St. Mary of the Angels at the Baths of Diocletian.

Those unfortunate people were touched by his words and all went to confession with signs of sincere contrition. It was another occasion for Don Bosco to approach the souls of women, and another aspect of the training of his fatherly heart in the manner of strengthening woman-kind against the seductions of life.

How much reflection he must have made on the falls of those poor people who, for the most part, could have kept themselves pious and honest if only they had had a firm director full of goodness and faith.

This practical study was carried out by Don Bosco on the orders of the Vicar of Christ, that same Pontiff who later was to approve or rather, suggest that he provide for girls in the same way as for boys, almost dictating to him the norms for this undertaking.

## Formation of the Pious Salesian Society

**1859:** The shoot becomes a plant. On December 9, almost as if by way of a present from Mary Immaculate, Don Bosco held a special conference in his room to which he called "priests, clerics, and the lay people who cooperated with him in the fatiguing work of the Oratory. Called to a private and secret conference, they must have realized that important matters were to be discussed.

With visible emotion he announced that the time had come to give shape to the congregation he had for some time considered forming and which had been the object of all his care. He intended to name it or rather, keep for it the name of Saint Francis de Sales."<sup>11</sup>

On the 18th of the same month he held a conference for the first members of the Pious Society. The minutes of that meeting report a strict commitment by these same members to form themselves into a society or congregation with the object of reciprocal help in their personal sanctification and promoting the glory of God and the salvation of souls, especially those most in need of instruction and education. They asked Don Bosco, as initiator and promoter, to accept the position of Major Superior. They constituted a Council by secret ballot. This was later named the Superior Chapter.<sup>12</sup> The plant had thrust its roots deeper; it was secure.

**1862:** On May 14, 1862, the eve of the solemn novena of Mary Help of Christians, "the members of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales were called together by the Director and most of them ratified their membership in the nascent Society by making formal triennial vows."

Don Bonetti writes, "Twenty-two of us, not including Don Bosco who knelt among us close to a table on which rested a crucifix, made our vows according to the Regulations."<sup>13</sup>

The first religious family of the shepherd boy of Becchi was now an accomplished fact.

Scarcely a month later on June 14, two of the most faithful and affectionate sons of Don Bosco, Fathers John

Cagliero and John Baptist Francesia, were ordained **priests** by Monsignor Balma.

Thus, the Father had already two priest-collaborators among his Sons. One was to be the poet of the great **family** and the other an excellent musician who would take **Don Bosco's** name across the ocean to the Italian emigrants and new Indian converts to the great Christian civilization.

It would seem that the first presentation of a repeated dream should be ascribed to this time. Without stating the time, Father Francesia notes in his book on Mother Mazzarello that Don Bosco dreamed that he was in Piazza Vittorio in Turin, among a great number of noisy girls who were clamoring for his help. He made efforts to repulse them but a noble lady appeared on the scene. Her face was resplendent. She said, "Take care of them; they are my dear daughters."<sup>14</sup>

The dream was possibly ascribed to this period for two reasons.

First of all, the dreams regarding his first major work had come true for the most part and Don Bosco had not only boys, but also clerics and priest-helpers coming from his own Oratory boys. Was it not time for heaven to make its voice heard clearly and precisely, concerning the second work waiting in the heart of Don Bosco to be brought to life? He was waiting expectantly for an order from Divine Providence.

Also, by placing the dream here we find the key to another dream containing very precious details, which Don Bosco himself related to his Sons.

**In this dream Don Bosco tells the Marchioness Barolo that he must occupy himself with young girls**

Father John Bonetti and Cesare Chiala wrote down the following:

On July 6 Don Bosco told some of us about a dream he had had during the night of July 5-6. Francesia, Savio, Rua, Cerruti, Fusero, Bonetti, Cav. Oreglia, Anfossi, Durando, Provera and some others were present. Don Bosco told them, "I had a peculiar dream last night. I dreamed I was walking with the Marchioness Barolo in a small square which led on to a large plain. I could see the Oratory boys running, jumping and enjoying themselves thoroughly. I wanted to take the Marchioness there, but she said, 'No, stay where you are.'"

Then she began to discuss my boys, and told me, 'It is good that you work for boys, but leave me to work for the girls. Then our works will complement each other.'

I replied, 'Now tell me, didn't Our Lord Jesus Christ come into the world to redeem girls as well as boys?'

'I know,' she replied, 'that Our Lord redeemed everyone, both boys and girls.'

'Very well then, my duty is to see that His blood not be shed in vain regarding girls as well as boys.'"<sup>15</sup>

Leaving out that part of the narrative which does not apply and remembering the considerable value of dreams in Don Bosco's life, we ask ourselves, why it was that the Marchioness wanted Don Bosco to abstain from working for girls? Why, instead of replying that he would not directly occupy himself with them did he declare that he was under obligation to see that the blood of Jesus not be shed for them in vain? Had the unwilling boy of the Moglia days now lined up on the side of the girls? Was the zeal in his heart so great that it even invaded his sleep?

This seemingly peculiar change was soon clarified. In fact it became natural and logical in the "dream of the Marchioness." It is taken for granted that this was preceded by the other dream referred to before. In one, the order to interest himself in girls also came from the "noble lady," and he could not say no to her. In the other the Marchioness opposes what he knows he must do and the father of the little "urchins" resolutely gives the pious lady of Barolo, powerful, rich, but only a creature of this world, to understand that he did not intend to move one iota from his duty towards young girls.

Don Bosco's biographer says that those present while the dream was being narrated understood only later how it referred among other innovations, to his plan to found institutes for girls also.

### NOTES

1828 – 1862

1. *Memorie Biografiche di Don Giovanni Bosco*, I, 199.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
3. *M.B.*, II, 233.
4. *M.B.*, II, 234.
5. *M.B.*, I, 382.
6. *M.B.*, II, 407.
7. Lemoyne, G.B., *Vita del venerabile G.Bosco* (Turin, SEI, 1930) I, 234-35.
8. Cf. *M.B.*, V, 591.
9. *M.B.*, V, 565.
10. *M.B.*, V, 569.
11. *M.B.*, VI, 333-34.
12. Cf. *M.B.*, VI, 335-36.
13. *M.B.*, VII, 161-62.
14. Cf. Francesia, G.B., *Suor Maria Mazzarello e i Primi Due Lustri delle Figlie di Maria Ausiliatrice* (S.Benigno Canavese, Salesian Publishers, 1906) pp. 212-13.
15. *M.B.*, VII, 217-18.

## **HOW DIVINE PROVIDENCE PREPARED THE FIRST DAUGHTER OF MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS (1837 – 1857)**

**1837-1847:** Unknown to Don Bosco, the same Providence that entrusted him an enterprise destined to give glory to God, was preparing the necessary instrument in another sphere of activity. It concerned a work of preservation and education; the instrument was pure and docile, chosen and formed by God in the person of a humble girl from Mornese.

This was a small town situated on the hills of Monferrato in the Diocese of Acqui. Although only a short distance from the city it was too much out of the way to attract commerce and there was no railway system.

This might not suit our age of movement and trafficking but it went unnoticed by those down-to-earth people who loved their own land so tenderly, and who by their serene, hard work were unconsciously witnessing to the advantages of a simple, healthy life.

### **Mary Mazzarello**

This fortunate child was born on May 9, 1837. It was Tuesday, the day Don Bosco set aside in his Houses for honoring the Guardian Angels. It was as if Providence willed to emphasize her future mission.

She was baptized on the day of her birth and received the names of Mary Domenica after her maternal grandparents: Mary, the name of the Immaculate Virgin, and Dominic, which signifies belonging to God. The name was soon shortened to Mary which, besides being a family and Christian tradition was also an augury that became for her a symbol and a promise. The little girl soon made it clear

that she would bear the name honorably.

Mary's parents vied with each other in forming her not only to a Christian life, as they had been formed to live, but also to a holy life. It was their wish that God should bless in her all the other little ones they hoped to have around them.

She lived her early years at home with those she loved and who were entranced with her baby chatter, charming humor and cheerful vivacity. The child left the house only to go to her father in the fields or to church with her mother or cousin Domenica. This cousin became part of the family when she was left an orphan during the cholera outbreak of 1836. Later, when Mary's younger sister Felicina was able to trot along beside her, they went together.

### **The Help of Christians at Mornese**

On May 24, 1843, in the hamlet of the "Mazzarelli," the small church dedicated to Mary Help of Christians was blessed and opened to the public. It was scarcely a hundred yards from Mary's home and although only six years old, she could not have been absent from those festivities. It might also be presumed that right from the completion of the chapel the child must have absorbed some of the fervor that had spurred her fellow countrymen on to raise a devotional monument to the Blessed Virgin.

The isolated town of Mornese was not left unscathed by the cholera of 1836, and it even claimed victims from the Mazzarello family.

Amidst the trials of those sad days the good people continued to have recourse to the Mother of God, renewing the vow made by four or five soldiers of the district during the turbulent Napoleonic period 1812—1815, as remembered by someone still living today.

Why Mary should have been invoked under the beautiful title of Help of Christians is explained by the fact that in

those days, especially in the Genoese region, the historical imprisonment of Pius VII was connected with the subsequent institution of the annual commemorative feast on May 24. This feast was instituted by the Pontiff in fulfillment of a promise made to Our Lady of Mercy whose image he crowned in the spring of 1815. Hence it was not rare to find chapels and frescoes in towns bordering Liguria where, with more or less resemblance, Savona's wonder-working Our Lady of Mercy could be seen under the single title of Help of Christians or with some other patron saint.

However the little church at the "Mazzarelli" was not the only proof of special devotion to Mary Help of Christians.

Among the various sacred images painted by popular piety on the walls of houses in the so-called street of Valgelata in the town, there is one of the Blessed Virgin which resembles that of Savona, yet it bears the title, Help of Christians. Below, where figures of armed soldiers with helmets and lances were once depicted, the year 1814 is inscribed. This is the year of the institution of the feast of Mary Help of Christians, although the painting, as the rest of the inscription states, is dated no earlier than 1841.

These two details possibly point to a returning soldier from the Napoleonic Wars, fulfilling some promise to Our Lady in return for his safety.

When the chapel at the "Mazzarelli" was opened little Mary often attended the recitation of the rosary and litany as well as the votive masses. But still more often, perhaps even daily, she would stop to play in the little courtyard in front of the church with her friends. At times, perhaps, Mary would look up at the fresco of the Blessed Virgin on the façade and repeat the Hail Mary, adding an invocation to the Help of Christians. Occasionally she would sing one of the popular hymns her mother had taught her. So right from infancy there resounded in her ears the name of the Help of Christians whose first Daughter she was to become.

### From the "Mazzarelli" to the Valponasca

Towards the end of the year 1843 Mary's family left the house in the "Mazzarelli" and went to live in the so-called "Valponasca," property of the Marquis d'Oria, from whom they rented the vineyard and the attached farm.

The Valponasca was a forty-five-minute walk from the parish church. When the weather was good it was possible to ford the streams, but when the rain or snow made the short cuts impracticable the road was long and difficult. Nevertheless, when still very young Mary began to tread this path with her family for the first mass, early in the morning every Sunday. Later on she would go every day to attend the catechism classes which were held at 7 a.m. after mass.

As her mother intended, this gave her the habit of overcoming another of her great enemies, namely, sleep. In this, Madelene Calcagno resembled Mama Margaret Bosco, who wished to see her little John grow strong against the tempter who, if not repulsed immediately, would steal the best and most productive hours of his life.

Mary was scarcely eight years old when her parents were asked by cousins John Baptist and Catherine Bodrato to allow her to stay with them for a while. It was their secret hope that the parents would leave her with them as there were many other children and they had none. Mary's parents agreed but they recalled her after six or eight months to help her mother in looking after her little brothers. The cousins were most upset but Mary was very happy because Catherine Pestarino Bodrato, although motherly in her affection for the child, had not the discernment of her own mother. In order to make Mary pious she made her rise too early and kept her too long in church, reciting many prayers. Ostentatious piety was not at all in keeping with her nature. This she revealed later in the words, "I liked to be good but without staying all those long hours in church and without making so much show about it." This showed her precocious intelligence and reflection and was a manifestation of what could and did become a way of

life that never weakened: to love good and do it with all her strength, but to spurn the slightest sign of ostentation.

It was going to confession that cost the child most, not so much because her conscience accused her of faults she was ashamed to confess, but because of her natural reluctance to manifest herself. Perhaps the temptations of the enemy had a hand in this in order to exclude her very early from the surest path to spiritual heights. However, her mother, who went to confession before every church festival, found it natural to expect her daughter to do the same as soon as she reached the age of strong and resolute reason. Thus Mary was enabled to overcome this repugnance as well as others.

Sermons annoyed her to the extent that she deliberately forced herself not to listen and gave herself over to drowsiness. Perhaps this was because she understood very little, and found in them little food for her soul. At that time sermons were given in a stiff, formal style. Language was elevated and interspersed with Latin quotations and quotes from classical authors. Mary willingly listened to simple, quiet discourses, like those of her father which she understood and remembered very well.

She tells us herself that when the bells rang out long and loud on the vigil of a solemnity, she only momentarily enjoyed the festal music before becoming disturbed at the thought that great feasts brought with them confession and a sermon. This was still more painful since it meant not only listening to the sermon in church but, if she and her mother walked the long journey home alone, she would be questioned to see if she had understood what the priest had said. If she could not answer her mother would repeat the whole long sermon with suitable personal applications for her daughter. Thus utter weariness would destroy even the will to put these thoughts into practice.

If sermons and confession caused her annoyance and disgust it may have been because of the sacrifices they entailed, since catechism was Mary's joy. She received her

first lessons from the lips of her father when still too young to attend those at the parish church and as long as he was able to answer her demanding questions. For she was not content with a simple answer but wanted to probe each problem deeply. When she grew older she went to lessons given by the parish pastor and then to Father Pestarino. She would also study from a book of her own. Her companions all testified that she was very attentive during the lessons. Petronilla Mazzarello, the faithful friend who followed her all through life and finally outlived her, assures us, "Mary did not tire as easily as we did. She really enjoyed the lessons."

### **Father Dominic Pestarino**

**1847-1848:** Who was Father Pestarino? People in general spoke of him as "the priest." Those who were more intimate in their affection spoke of him as "il previn," (our own little priest), while in heaven he was probably known as the apostle of Mornese and so for once, the proverb, "No one is prophet in his own country" was proved false.

Born in Mornese in 1817, he began his studies in the seminary at Acqui and completed them in Genoa where he was ordained. He stayed on in charge of the children and accepted a rural chaplaincy in order to do some missionary work in the suburbs. But towards the end of the scholastic year 1846-47 he was forced to leave the chaplaincy and Genoa<sup>1</sup> after becoming suspect to the revolutionaries.

On returning to his family he exercised his zeal in his own town where he found a good deal of coldness in the practice of religion because of the upset and perversion of Jansenism. In a short time true devotion revived through his fervor, good example and generosity, especially towards the poor and the young, and no less through his discreet tact.

Bound by ties of friendship and apostolate to the most cultured and zealous among the Genoese clergy, Canon

Alimonda, Father Joseph Frassinetti—the prior of St. Sabina—Father Sturla, Father Montebruno and Canon Raymond Oliviere, he had quickly brought to perfection with them and for them, his natural capacity for understanding the human soul and winning it over. At Mornese then, without showing disapproval or seeming to make innovations, he began to say mass at the time best suited to the poor people, especially to the mothers, who easily responded to his sentiments and good example, although his heart wept at seeing God treated as though He were not a Father but a hard taskmaster. Through readings from the altar and exhortations in the confessional he managed to bring some of the women to Holy Communion even outside the Paschal season, and also a great number of girls to catechism classes.

✓ The ice was broken, and ironical astonishment soon gave place to admiration and admiration to esteem and affection. Men and boys began to flock to him, so much so that his confessional was soon in demand both day and night. He would rise at three in the morning if someone wished to make his devotions without being observed and would stay up very late at night for the sake of the men.

Father Pestarino was witty and good to all. He had a talent for teaching catechism and, since the parish pastor allowed him complete freedom, he set to work enthusiastically to organize different classes suited to men, women and children separately, without ever tiring or limiting his efforts to help them acquire and retain knowledge.

It goes without saying that Mary never tired of listening to his lessons. In fact she was as eager as if she were at a party.

It could often be seen by a movement of her body or a change of color that the child would like to ask for further explanation. But she refrained and kept silent. However, when questioned she was prompt and exact in her answers and always won the boys-versus-girls competition organized by Father Pestarino every Sunday.

He called this competition "point of honor," and the winner received a small prize. After one of these competitions Mary said to her friend Petronilla, "I will be second to none in catechism. I am not afraid even of the boys and am determined to beat them all." That day Petronilla had also received the "point of honor." When Father Pestarino handed Mary the book prize he indicated her friend and said, "You must share it with her."

Petronilla thought it a shame to divide the prize and good-natured as she was she surrendered her share saying, "It is a pity to split it in half. Let us read a little each."

But Mary, in her desire to be first in both the study and the practice of religion, kept the book for herself.

Could it be thought that she was perhaps arrogant and selfish? Not really. Like all the unspoilt people of the countryside she had a good share of rustic shyness. Nevertheless, even at that time she manifested a strong, open character which, when well directed, would render her capable of many victories. She wanted to win because her nature urged her to vanquish others and because she was determined to absorb the doctrine which was so satisfying to her spirit. She only kept the book in order to know God more easily and love Him in greater measure.

### **The young catechist**

It was wonderful to see with what disinterest and joy and how pleasantly, Mary repeated the lesson for the slower among her companions, and how, with catechism text in hand she applied the explanations she herself had heard, adapting them to her young audience. It is not known precisely when she learned, but it is certain that at this time Mary could already read a little. She had not attended school because in those days Mornese had no school at all for girls, not even for the elementary basics. Less well-to-do girls could not afford to go to the city schools or pay for private lessons and had to resign themselves to illiteracy.

### How she learned to read

Mary was among the fortunate exceptions. Since her parents would not allow her to go around with other girls, she found her pleasure in household tasks. Because of her above-average intelligence and activity she soon completed her work and was left with quite a lot of time on her hands. Hence the long winter evenings were well and pleasantly employed learning the rudiments of reading from her father. We have this information from Petronilla Mazzarello who was more fully aware than anyone else of Mary's habits right from adolescence.

She was unable even to write her own name at this time and she certainly had not the faintest idea of numbers, although able to make any elementary calculations quickly on her fingers.

Father Pestarino understood the child's ardent spirit as he saw her attentive and ready before him during his catechism lessons. She had as much determination to help others learn, as to learn herself.

### First Communion

**1848:** Therefore he began preparing her for First Communion although she had not yet reached the prescribed age of twelve years. The child's soul was so well prepared and she was so advanced in study that it was absolutely impossible to withhold this great gift from her.

After passing the whole of Lent in quiet, fervent recollection, the great day at last arrived. The night was passed dozing and waking and in so much joyful, prayerful longing and spiritual outbursts as to overflow to those who slept near her and envied her good fortune.

The celebration was timed for 8:00 a.m., but dawn had scarcely broken on this Wednesday of Holy Week (April 19, 1848),<sup>2</sup> when Mary was already up and about, tidying herself and putting on her beautiful new dress and, for the

first time, the white veil which meant so much to her.

Her father's last instructions on the divinity of the Eucharist and her mother's recommendations as to behavior and recollection must have sounded far more pleasant than usual in her ears. She did not speak but her eyes shone with the inward desire to do everything well in order to receive Jesus in a worthy manner. Along the path she went in the clear, chilly air which speeded her steps just as interior fervor gave wings to her soul! Mary's mother was unable to go with her because a new little one needed all her attention. But Mary was cheerful just the same as she tripped along between cousin Domenica and sister Felicina who looked up at her with admiration and held her tightly by the hand as if fearing she might take flight to heaven.

They were first at the church although they had come the longest distance. Mary knelt devoutly and paid attention to no one except Father Pestarino who was giving the last instructions. Once the parish priest had started mass her eyes did not leave the altar except to glance towards Father Pestarino who was reading aloud the preparatory prayers for the great event. Mary did not miss a word. Her face, which was more flushed than usual, showed that these sentiments had entered her heart and become her own, increasing her eager longing still more.

Finally, Father Pestarino began the *Confiteor* and all the young voices joined in this solemn confession of sin for which they had been prepared. Mary's clear, sure voice could also be heard and her step was firm as she went in pious recollection and radiant with joy and happiness to receive Jesus.

Mary was admirable in her recollection during the customary afternoon procession from the parish church to the chapel of Saint Sylvester, a matter of fifteen minutes' walk. The First Communicants were joined by the children still attending catechism classes. At the service of *Tenebrae* in the evening, when considering the sufferings of Jesus, Mary must have renewed her resolution never more to cause suffering to the Lord who had filled her soul with so much happiness.

We have no other memories of this solemn and precious day because of Mary's shyness in speaking to anyone about the gifts God had given her and what happened in her soul.

Nevertheless, all who saw her on that day, those who received the Bread of Angels with her for the first time and especially Petronilla, were edified by her extraordinary recollection and her radiant joy.

If her precocious discernment kept silence on what went on between her soul and God in those moments of heavenly bliss, her actions were eloquent enough. From that day forward no one observed her sleeping during the sermons. It was just the opposite. She listened willingly and paid great attention to the words of the preacher and then repeated the most difficult points of what she had heard to her sister, taking care that her little brothers practiced the advice given.

Neither was it necessary for her mother to urge her to go to confession. This did not mean that she liked going. Oh no! But having tasted the presence of the Immaculate Lamb she became aware of the need for keeping her soul spotless and pure, and found this impossible without frequent confession. What an amount of light had been shed on her at the first visit of Jesus! She began to understand that some of the mischievous pranks she had laughed over as if they were acts of high-spirited cleverness, were really faults displeasing to Jesus and therefore needed correction. Her prayers became calmer, more fervent and more regular. She herself made Felicina kneel at the bedside with her to say their morning and evening prayers and when they went into the town together Mary took her younger sister to church and made her repeat, word for word, fervent ejaculations she had composed herself.

Father Pestarino, a priest of the confessional and still more of the altar and the tabernacle could not but notice these fervent, spontaneous visits, and must have resolved to see that the seed of virtue planted by God in that young heart should thrust its roots deep in order to become a

vigorous plant. Therefore he began to cultivate it in a very purposeful manner.

### **Confirmation**

The Holy Spirit came directly to Father Pestarino's mind inspiring him to allow Mary to receive the Sacrament of Confirmation. He prepared her for it fervently and helped her to make a more detailed confession in order that she might derive the maximum benefit from it and correspond with all her strength to the grace of the sacrament. The event was accelerated and she was confirmed at Gavi on September 30, 1849.

It must have been after Confirmation that Father Pestarino allowed Mary to receive Holy Communion more frequently than was usual. This gave the people to understand that she was being formed to a more than ordinary level of virtue and confirmed the sentiments of her parents regarding the duty they had of protecting jealously the treasure in their possession.

Thus it was that the Holy Spirit cast not only a ray but a beam of light into that heart. This was a continuous process so that every Communion reinforced Mary's vigor to fight and win.

Together with light came love and courage.

The recognition of her failings no longer meant only vexation with herself and a resolution to be careful.

Mary was now aware that Jesus could not unite Himself willingly to an unmortified heart. Therefore at the cost of however many blushes and at the cost of taking self-love between her own two hands and crushing it as grain is crushed between millstones, she imposed on herself the absolute duty of self-accusation in confession of certain of her escapades, in order to obtain strength not to fall again. How many reforms she imposed on herself! Examining herself impartially Mary felt in all honesty, according to her heart and mind, that what everyone called a high-spirited

disposition, was on the way to becoming fiery; that the seriousness her father wished her to cultivate could become arrogance, making her overbearing with equals and disrespectful to her elders. She understood that by dint of hearing herself praised by friends and neighbors for her frankness and openness, she faced the danger of becoming petulant and independent. She saw in a new light, the snares of the devil regarding her virtue.

Drastic treatment was needed and she approached it with that mature judgment and energetic will which were hers, enlisting the help of her parents and in a special way seeking the advice of Father Pestarino.

### **Mary's judgment of her childhood failings**

The defects in which she once almost took pleasure seemed, at the dawn of spiritual awakening, to be poisonous weeds in her garden and, even piercing thorns. She regarded them as enemies, remembered them with sorrow and determined to fight them with a virile spirit that knew no respite.

The simple confidences made to Petronilla later shed light on this period of her life.

"I cannot now remember," said Petronilla, "whether we were walking together or working together, but I well remember that Mary told me:"

When I was a little girl I loved eggs. I would not dream of taking and eating them slyly, but neither would I ask for them. So one day I made a plan. I would take one or two at a time and hide them here and there behind the plants in our vineyard. When there were a good number I would collect them and present them to mother as if they were a surprise find. No sooner said than done.

"Look what I have found, Mamma. A lovely lot of eggs hidden under the plants!"

Mamma said,

"Just imagine! Those hens are getting into the habit of

laying their eggs all around the place!"

I said nothing for a few seconds, then,

"Mamma, I have brought you such a lot of nice eggs, may I not have some?"

Thus without telling lies I got what I wanted. I thought how clever I had been but it was really tricking my mother, poor woman, and an act of disrespect. It was only later that I realized this.

Then there was the incident of the little cheeses. My mother used to build them up into an orderly pile. How tempted I was to take some! But how could I do it without Mamma's noticing? One day the pile was larger than usual so without much consideration I knocked against the table and when the cheeses all scattered, I helped myself. When Mamma returned and saw what had happened she exclaimed,

"Just look, Mary . . . and to think I had arranged them so well!"

"Well Mamma, if you leave the door open the cat will certainly . . ."

On that occasion, too, I managed to get away with it.

I loved milk, too, and when I was alone and saw the lovely cream settling on the surface in the large containers, and it was almost "snack time" I would scoop it up freely and spread it on bread. When Mamma came in and noticed the disturbed cream, she called me,

"What happened, Mary?"

I ran at her call and pretending surprise said,

"How many times have I said it! If the door is left open the cat can do as it likes. We must take care to keep the door closed."

This artfulness cost the cat nothing but it meant a diminution of my simplicity and all because of my greediness! O what a shame!

Mary continued:

On one occasion I saw a mendicant friar coming toward the house and there was still much tidying up to be done. "Mamma, Mamma," I called. "There is a friar coming . . . quickly . . . give me a broom." Not getting the broom quickly enough I took a cloth and, regardless of my mother's protests, began to rub the floor hard. This was all because I

felt ashamed for us to be found untidy. By the time the friar arrived we could have eaten off the floor, it was so clean. I was happy at the moment but it was really only self-love.

Here is another incident.

One day I was working in the vineyard, tying up the vine branches quickly along a good stretch. But there seemed to be no end to these branches. At a certain point, in a fit of impatience, I took up the reaping hook and, instead of tying up the smaller branches, I cut them off. I was soon filled with remorse and the morning after had to go to confession. You should have heard Father Pestarino! What a scolding he gave me! I did not think it a very serious matter because there were so many branches. I was told, instead, that they were very valuable and could have produced I do not know how much. In short, bitterness always comes afterwards and that blessed confession . . . , and good Father Pestarino had hard work making me what he wanted me to be!

It is, therefore, obvious that Father Pestarino was not easily satisfied and treated that energetic nature with virile forcefulness, since the young girl still felt some of her old repugnance for confession. Nevertheless in the apparent harshness of the minister of God she saw the zeal of an apostle who wanted to crush whatever prevented her from becoming good and also, since she herself really wanted to be good, she was grateful even for the seemingly blunt manner of the father of her soul. Besides this, while reproving her and demanding mortification in everything, he permitted her to receive Holy Communion every Sunday. What more could the young girl wish for, now that God's love was a burning light in her heart?

### Forming a virile character

**1850:** This year marks very important changes in Mary's life.

Up until now her day had been divided between household chores and other womanly occupations. She was a very good worker and a great help to her mother who could confidently leave the house and go to work in the fields, certain that Mary would take her place at home and keep everyone happy.

In fact while Mary prepared dinner and put the house in order, she took an interest in her little brothers' games and showed great pleasure in playing with them. Her liveliness kept family life going. Later, according to need she would sit down to sew or prepare the vegetables while the little ones clustered at her feet. If they had been good or said their prayers as she wanted she would tell them a story. Mary was a good storyteller and she knew how to command! Perhaps as she gave her small orders she already had in mind what she confided years later to her friend in these words, "With a lot of words Mother obtained scarcely anything whereas Father spoke little, yet everyone ran to obey him." She too spoke little but in an effective, resolute manner.

### At work with father on the farm

Felicina was now growing up and able to help her mother. Mary preferred to work regularly with her father in the fields. The little anecdote related above gives us some inkling into this preference. Her physical strength and her character, together with the wish to be of more practical use, made her predominantly suited to more virile work.

Besides this, perhaps without even realizing it, her father himself was forming his daughter in this manner by calmly reducing her impetuous yet energetic nature to a grade of virtue capable of leading her to do more and better than

other girls of her age and condition. At the same time he was watchful lest anything untoward should dim the candor of that pure soul.

He began taking her to markets and fairs with him. The young country people hurried to these events as to a celebration. Why then should he deprive his daughter of them? If he deprived her she would be an exception and thus noticeable. This might be still more dangerous because conversations with her companions could make her long more than ever to go with them. Besides this, her precocious, questioning mind was already proving useful in the interests of the family. But what an amount of care the good man took to prevent anything which might harm her! He would keep up an interesting conversation when she seemed to be in danger of overhearing less correct words and he was able to suggest in a pleasant manner the right behavior in individual situations. So Mary came and went. She reflected, judged, laughed, and returned from those same places where others found temptation or a fall, more open, more self-confident, more circumspect and stronger.

Her father's reflections were morally clear-cut and sound in practical, everyday things, being founded on the firm religious basis that Father Pastarino was infusing ever deeper in her soul, thus placing it in a superior sphere of spirituality in which the peace and simplicity of the pure of heart could be tasted.

Therefore, if her father educated her spirit and her practical sense and she found nourishment in this exercise, it was only natural that she should prefer to work with him than be shut indoors. This was the special reason why, when with quickness and thoroughness she had completed her daily occupations in the house, she preferred to work in the fields. Her hand was as quick with the hoe as with the needle, and she acquired such a taste for using tools that she spent more and more of her time in the fields and finally requested to pass the whole day there like the men hired by her father. This she was allowed to do.

At first the laborers looked at her with an amused smile

thinking that she would not be able to keep it up for long. Slender and tidy as she was she would seem to belong more at home than in the fields. Then they began to look at her wonderingly. The joke was being prolonged and that young girl worked as hard as they did. Not wishing to be compared with or surpassed by that "slip of a girl" they had to work under pressure and some, unable to resist the fatigue, gave up and left. One of the friends of her childhood who became the esteemed mother of a family stated, "She worked like a man to help her father." And another good woman from Mornese confirms, "No girl in Mornese ever worked like Mary."

Mary's father tried to restrain his daughter's passion for work and the girl obediently tried to slow down. But what could she do if her hand betrayed her good intentions and forged ahead quickly and energetically in spite of fatigue and the heat of the sun? "If you continue in this fashion," her good father insisted, "I shall not be able to hire any laborers for our vineyard. They say, 'That girl has arms of iron and it takes an enormous effort to keep up with her.' Take things easier, Mary!" On another occasion he said, "If you don't slow down a bit more no one will want to come and work with us."

Nevertheless, he was happy to see her so serious, so happy in her work and so strong-minded! But that which was most beautiful in her was known to God alone. Her exterior virtue was admirable, but her interior struggles and victories made her Guardian Angel rejoice as he daily noted her gigantic strides along the path of righteousness.

It is not known whether or not Father Pestarino would rather have seen her more at home working at the household chores. It is true he could count on her virtue and also on the protection of her father who never left her alone and at the first equivocal or less serious word which might injure charity or virtue, rose hurriedly to interrupt brusquely and sometimes severely. Yet as a careful shepherd the good priest wanted to forestall any possible failing in his little sheep by giving her the "Bread of the Strong." This

kept Mary's thoughts always occupied either by the Jesus whom she had received that morning or with the Jesus she was to receive the following day. Her heart kept her continually on guard and she had no other interest but God and the desire to please Him more every day. So while the workers gathered to chat during the rest periods Mary, under the pretext of wanting to enjoy a little shade, retired behind some trees either to read some spiritual book provided by Father Pestarino or to pray and meditate. If her cousin Domenica or her sister Felicina were with her they would sing hymns together.

Does not this scene remind us, in its rustic simplicity portraying the hard-working life of a young girl scarcely more than a child, yet so pure in the sight of the God who dwelt in her heart, and the father who could read her thoughts in the limpid clarity of her eyes, of another pure and ardent childhood? That one, too, was passed working in the fields under the vigilant eyes of a mother and the blessing and protection of the Blessed Virgin, as Becchi became first a field of apostolate and then a sanctuary.

### **Cutting a fine figure**

One thing still worried Mary very much. It was the knowledge that she still possessed that innate pride which even as a child had made her sacrifice recreation and sleep without complaint in order to make sure she would not utter a single wrong word at the catechism lessons, and would be first in line for the "point of honor." This pride had in fact grown stronger as the years passed and manifested itself in an ardent desire to cut a fine figure, not so much for motives of vanity as to satisfy her instinctive urge to excel and surpass all others.

Mary had not the so-called beautiful face but her countenance was very pleasant to look at because of the intelligence which lit it up and the purity of soul which

shone in her eyes and graced her smile. She carried her slim, graceful figure with dignity and was well aware that a smart outfit would add to her attractiveness and charm, and give her an uncontested advantage over her companions. This was just what she wanted and oh how much she wanted it! She herself confessed later to Petronilla, "I knew it was wrong, but I was really very vain indeed. The new bodice had to be as I liked it because it was I who wanted to look stylish, not my mother."

Perceiving the danger, even if not serious, her holy director could not but have opposed this trait of wanting to be singled out all the time, lest it should overshadow her many beautiful gifts or spoil that generous heart and cast a shade on that spotless candor. Therefore he exhorted her to be clean and tidy but to dress simply and in keeping with her youth. Mary did not wish to displease God's representative so she tried hard to obey. But it proved a slow, costly, uphill task.

One day she went to a fair with her father and fell in love with a pair of fashionable, patent leather boots. She bought them to wear on Sundays and feast days.

However, as always happened after she had listened to the voice of nature rather than that of her Guardian Angel, the sight of the boots she was holding in her hand filled her with pain rather than pleasure. The day for her weekly confession came round and she accused herself of having once again given in to the evil of vanity. She said she was prepared to punish herself by giving up the use of the stylish boots and passing them on to her cousin Domenica or reselling them. "Since you have bought them you will wear them," was the answer. "But before you put them on you will grease them well in order to diminish the gloss."

It was not an easy task and required considerable self-control to reduce those eye-catching, once desired boots to a condition equal to or worse than her others. But the young girl was not in the habit of discussing orders received, so she obeyed and a great reward was hers. From that day

forward war was definitely declared on her ego which had always sought the limelight; it was waged without respite or turning back. This struggle was a prelude to triumph by means of little everyday victories.

Everyday victories? One could say every hour. Father Pestarino was always making new discoveries regarding this soul's capacity for effort. He had an intuitive understanding of the heights of perfection she could reach in her own sanctification and of what she could do in the salvation of countless other souls! Hence he became daily more demanding. He directed her steadily and prudently but kept her advancing at a good pace along the path to the "mountain of delight whence cometh joy."

### **The ABC of the spiritual life**

Father Pestarino began by instructing her to mortify her taste. This first step is a very difficult one for many children, especially country children who eat freely at any time and taste everything they like. Mary succeeded almost immediately in refraining from eating between meals and never helped herself to food at home without asking and obtaining permission. This was meant by Father Pestarino to be a sort of trial. Seeing that the diamond lent itself readily to purification and polishing, he set to work with an eagerness that found its reason and verification in Mary's own ardent spirit.

The fact that she was able to mortify her taste so decisively meant that she was without doubt capable of something more. Mary proved this. She sacrificed her sleep to the extent of limiting herself to just the number of hours she felt she could not do without and, rising before dawn she made her way to the parish church in order to hear mass and receive her Lord.

### Progress in mortification

This was possibly fairly pleasant in good weather. The long walk might be tiring but it was not harmful. However, during the winter when there was a great deal of snow or the rain caused flooding and it was dark, walking along even the best roads in Mornese was both difficult and dangerous.

Any other young girl would have thought herself bound to stay at home, dismayed by these major difficulties. But when did Mary ever allow herself to be held back by difficult circumstances? Her life seemed to echo the motto of the valiant Napoleon, whose name was at that time on everyone's lips, "If it is difficult we shall do it; if it is impossible we shall have a good try." So when the weather was passable Mary took her cousin Domenica or her sister Felicina with her, but when it was bad she pushed her legs into a kind of waterproof leggings called *caussotti*, in dialect, and made of thick straw held together by a knitted cover. Then away she would go in the company of her Guardian Angel. Jesus, who came into her generous heart every morning, filled it so completely that there was room for nothing else. What did cutting a fine figure matter to her now? What had once been an object of complacency was now the cause of humiliation and grief to her.

How often when walking through the streets of the town, especially on Sunday at the time of the high mass, eyes would be turned to the happy group formed by Mary, her sister Felicina and her cousin Domenica. They were dressed tastefully and in suitable colors. Then a voice would be raised, "The *bula* is passing. There goes the *bula*!" (*Bula* = a valuable person who is aware of it) At that time Mary enjoyed the eulogy because, without interfering with the sincerity upon which she set great store, it picked her out from the rank and file. Later, however, she ceased to find pleasure in it and no longer wished to attract any compliment since her manner of dressing, without being ugly or untidy had ceased to be eye-catching. Governed by her energetic will, her gait also became more unobtrusive.

Everything was geared to make her humble. The name *bula* would remain with her but its only use would be to remind her of an enemy to be fought continually so that she might become better than anyone else in opposing the same evil in the children one day to be gathered around her.

Protected by her father, her confessor, and certainly by grace, against the dangers besetting her age and condition, Mary did not seek or even desire to gather with other girls, even in their homes, to chat during the long winter evenings; besides, the isolation of the farmhouse and her father's discipline would not have permitted it.

She continued to stay in and help her mother or occupy herself with her brothers and sisters. She would relate to them what she had heard in church or read in spiritual books. Then she would build up their fervor by reciting the rosary with them. Sometimes when going to or coming from town Mary would meet some of her companions or some of the women. These would try to curry favor with her by predicting a rosy future or giving her all kinds of news. With self-possession and seriousness Mary would try to disentangle herself from these meetings before frivolous or flattering words could reach her ears.

In such a delicate matter as this Mary would not hesitate even to the point of austerity to obey her conscience and the voice of authority.

### **Mortification of the will**

With regard to authority, Mary felt and saw God both in her confessor and in her parents, but more especially in her confessor because of the sacred character of his mission. Therefore, if Father Pestarino wanted something, so did she. She would do nothing against obedience. Nothing without its seal!

Easily said but not so easily done! Now, step by step, Father Pestarino wanted Mary's docility towards himself

and her parents to be extended to her cousin, her sister, her brothers and her companions. It was a difficult task for a young girl so sure of herself and with such a quick intuitive sense, to be always ready to give in and, when appropriate, to accept the opinion of other people. Her father had trained her to a firmness of judgment which at times bordered on obstinacy, while her mother's confidence in consulting her like a sister produced an assuredness that could lead to clashes.

How often her cheeks would flush a brilliant red in the middle of a conversation and her lips would tremble. She would on other occasions, perhaps, cast a quick, serious glance at the person contradicting her and make as if to move away. Then she would slowly come to a halt and after a moment's silence gently take up the conversation again with a witty remark to the person who had upset her. When a companion, little attuned to these difficult moments, would remark, "How red you are!" the blushing would increase and the struggle become harder. "Oh how I wish they would not make such remarks," she lamented to Petronilla one day, "because not only do I blush but I burn." In the early days this often happened, but gradually the number of victories increased until Mary acquired such self-control that the reaction of her irascible temperament became scarcely noticeable.

Did Father Pestarino want her to keep her nature in check so that everyone might find it easy to get along with her? Was it his wish that under the guidance of Saint Francis de Sales she should dominate her high spirits and her impatience even when at work or alone? Mary, who now had an ally in her acquired repugnance for half measures and partial obedience, condemned all impatience with virility since the desire to please God had always been engraved on her heart. She did not think it too much to deny and overcome herself all the time in order to have some spiritual fruit to offer Jesus in exchange for the infinite gift she received in the Sacrament of Love.

### General confession

1852: What was to be the reward of such a victory or rather series of victories? God keeps His promise faithfully and He exchanges the wire link we place on the altar with a golden one, for His is the greatest and most valuable part in forging the chain that leads us to heaven.

What then was the prize? A fresh act of self-conquest in the field of piety.

Mary still approached confession with trepidation. She went regularly every week because of her desire for Holy Communion, but felt it to be a penance. True, it was a welcome penance because of the advantages it brought with it. However this did not make it less a penance.

Mary approached Jesus the physician with excessive fear. Would Jesus not heal her of this fear so painful to her and which in the hands of the enemy could become a weapon capable of clipping her wings and preventing freedom of flight? Yes, Jesus would cure her through the energy of Father Pestarino and the grace of the sacrament.

One day when returning from high mass Mary caught up with a group of her friends. Her cousin was speaking of the happiness which almost overpowered her. She gave as the reason that she had made a general confession and she seemed to be encouraging the others to do the same. Mary was dismayed and tried desperately to dissuade her companions from following such example, thinking to herself, "If they do it I shall have to as well." And there welled up within her in a still livelier desire of being second to none in good deeds requiring a strength of will resulting from the love of God. She was almost afraid that the others should be more fervent, humble, and simple than she in manifesting themselves completely to Father Pestarino. At home her cousin Domenica raised the subject again. Mary showed annoyance and her father, who probably read her mind, said, "General confession is necessary for some, of indifferent value for others, and positively dangerous for still others." A very good answer indeed, thought Mary. For

me it could be dangerous.

For a few days she battled with herself and when the usual day for confession came around she presented herself intending to put the idea forward with the words of her father in the hope that her mind would thus be put to rest. But after a moment of silence Father Pestarino answered,

“Yes it is dangerous for some, but for you it is necessary and you must do it.”

“When?”

“Now, at once.”

“But I am not prepared.”

“I will prepare you myself.”

“He questioned me and in a few minutes I made the general confession I had feared so much.” Mary related this later to her friend Petronilla.

The pious author of the *Progressive Use of Confession*, in treating of humility asks, “What does the omnipotent God need in order to make saints of us?” The answer is, “A great deal of humility on our part.” Therefore we can assume that the Holy Spirit of God suggested that Father Pestarino required a general confession as the necessary act of humility for Mary, before starting definitely to build the edifice of perfection God willed for her.

### **Vow of chastity**

Indeed from that moment Mary took flight to greater heights, fixing her gaze on heaven where all her love was to be found. There followed as a consequence the impulse of that fervent virgin soul to bind herself to God still closer, by a vow of perpetual chastity.

We do not know the precise time of this singular grace, neither do we know what prompted it. But is it necessary for God to have a special time in which to bestow particular graces on his elect souls?

Was it on any special occasion that the children, Agnes, Gertrude, Catherine of Siena, Margaret Alacoque, pro-

me it could be dangerous.

For a few days she battled with herself and when the usual day for confession came around she presented herself intending to put the idea forward with the words of her father in the hope that her mind would thus be put to rest. But after a moment of silence Father Pestarino answered,

“Yes it is dangerous for some, but for you it is necessary and you must do it.”

“When?”

“Now, at once.”

“But I am not prepared.”

“I will prepare you myself.”

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Was it on any special occasion that the children, Agnes, Gertrude, Catherine of Siena, Margaret Alacoque, pro-

nounced their vow of perpetual consecration to the Lamb who feeds among the lilies? It suffices that we have the reassuring words of Petronilla:

Father Pestarino wished the following feasts of the Blessed Virgin to be kept with solemnity in Mornese: the closing of the month of May, the Assumption, the Seven Sorrows and the Help of Christians. This last was really a great feast and was celebrated with great fervor by all the people. It must certainly have been a feast of Our Lady that suggested to Mary, who loved her so much, that she should imitate her with a vow of chastity. I came to know that she had made a vow of chastity in the following manner.

Although Father Pestarino was continually telling us not to talk among ourselves about matters of confession, from time to time someone would transgress. One day one or another of us began saying that she had asked to make a vow of chastity for a certain period of time and it appeared that Father Pestarino had said yes to some and no to others. Mary who was in the middle of the group came out with, "I don't know why you ask this and specify a certain time. I asked nothing of anyone but I made it forever immediately and I don't think I did wrong." Mary was then only fifteen years of age.

The date and particulars of her total consecration to God may be hidden under the veil of obscurity, but we are not ignorant of the secondary causes which Divine Providence used to prepare the soul of the young girl for the great offering brought about by the first ineffable touch of grace. We find these causes first of all in the energetic and insistent exhortations of Father Pestarino, as well as the devout reading he made publicly in church and spread among the more devout as he gradually received the appropriate pamphlets and leaflets from his friends in Genoa.

The most assiduous testify:

Our *previn* (little priest) never tired of recommending parents to preserve the innocence of the children they had

received from God. "Take them to church with you. Send them to catechism classes and the sacraments and be vigilant lest anyone should scandalize them!" He would say to the children repeatedly, "Innocence is the soul's most precious treasure. Preserve it at any cost and let no one rob you of it. Have a great hatred for sin, even voluntary venial sins, and have a great respect for your Guardian Angel. Recommend yourselves to Our Lady and ask her to keep you as pure as Saint Aloysius, Saint Agnes, Virgin and Martyr, and many other youthful saints who preserved their purity. They defended it with their blood and are now in heaven surrounded with immortal glory."

He then made everyone understand the need to strive in every way to avoid evil and do good and not to be less active in this than the devil, who makes use of everything to draw souls to perdition.

"But," he would conclude, "in order to help save others it is necessary to keep in God's grace and be pure, since only purity of soul can make one effective in the apostolate of good example, the Word, and prayer."

Thus it could never have crossed Mary's mind that she had done wrong in taking her vow. She knew how much peace it had brought to her soul and how she wished to be still more pure in order to become nearer to Jesus, less unworthy to honor the Blessed Virgin to whom she felt closer, and better prepared to do good to those about her.

### **Work — prayer**

1852-53: Mary was already climbing the high mountain of virtue. On her return from daily mass, when the others were still in bed she would prepare breakfast, tidy the house and then be away to her work in the fields before the quickest of the workmen could arrive. One of them said of her, "I always went to work very early, yet I found that sprite already in the vineyard. How often I surprised her saying the rosary with her sister Felicina."

Mary's hands worked rhythmically yet without agita-

tion. Under the strokes of the hoe the ground opened up to expose the fertile soil as if it were happy to be exposed to the sun through the efforts of that good young girl! From time to time the hoe ceased its motion for an instant and the men thought she was taking a respite. Her hands clasped, she glanced across the valley towards the church, while her lips formed a fervent ejaculation, an act of love, a plea for the agonizing, an invocation to the Queen of Sorrows or an offering of her work in union with the sufferings of Jesus and Mary for the conversion of sinners and peace in the Church. It took but a moment; nevertheless those who saw the new light on that happy countenance soon understood that it was like the refueling of the already well-filled lamp of the prudent virgin, and those who could hear the soft music of a hymn understood that spirit and hands were working together for the glory of God.

The workmen might laugh at her. They might, if they dared, even say cutting words to her, but the peace of the young girl was never disturbed. She had become so immersed in the divine and was so united to her God that everything else failed to touch her.

Towards evening a keen observer might notice a slight sense of urgency in her manner. Mary did not even wait for the other workers to leave but, if her father gave no order to the contrary, would quickly gather her tools, hoist them on her back as if they were trophies of victory and hurry home. Upon entering the house she would greet her mother, pass a witty remark to her little brothers and set to work in the kitchen. After supper she would hurry to the window where, looking towards the west she could see the distant parish church.

### Evening adoration

Father Pestarino had arranged that at a certain time a number of the townsfolk should gather in the church to recite the Little Crown of the Angels<sup>3</sup> and listen to spir-

itual reading from the book, *The Soul Devoted to the Eucharist* by the priest G.B. Pagani. Mary was aware of this gathering and would have liked to be there with the others in spite of the tiredness she felt after her hard day's work. But the parish church was too far away so she had to content herself with taking part from the window. The flame of her desire caused her even to imagine she saw the sacristan lighting the candles for the celebration, and could see the prayerful gathering, and perhaps even the brilliant glow of the tabernacle lamp so soon to be shining alone. Mary, herself resembling a small altar lamp, kept company with her Sacramental Lord from far away.

Quick as all good mothers are, Mary's mother noticed her daughter's flight and her subsequent recollection and understood the reason. Wishing to make the fulfillment of Mary's holy desire possible and to use it for the good of the family as well, she arranged, after consulting her husband, for them all to gather for prayer together in the evening.

Mary was very grateful for this and saw to it that everyone was ready at the appointed time. She took her place at the window in order to be as close to Jesus as possible. Behind her were her brothers, sisters and cousin all trying to emulate her fervor and give the correct responses to the prayers in honor of the angels and to the holy rosary. Mary added to this a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and then, as the others left, glanced tenderly towards Jesus once more, repeating one of her own special ejaculations in which she again declared herself to be entirely His forever. Then she begged His blessing through the night. Finally she closed the window and set to work at her mother's side, sewing, knitting or spinning while her lips moved in prayer and her heart kept close to Jesus.

If however, because of the lateness of the hour the others had gone to bed, Mary would remain a little longer in prayer and spiritual reading. Sometimes she became so absorbed in her devout practices that they became prolonged. Then her mother's gentle voice would rouse her

with, "Go to bed, it is late," or in a still more effective way, "Go to bed, you are using up all the oil in the lamp!"

### **At dawn with Jesus**

To walk from the Valponasca daily for years, in order to assist at mass and receive Holy Communion was no small undertaking for Mary, who was just starting out on the path of perfection. But it shows that she was already capable of living for Jesus alone, bound to Him by the tie of mystical nuptials.

It was no longer sufficient for her to arrive in Mornese just in time for mass. She must now emulate the angels who prostrate themselves before the altar the whole night through. Knowing that the church opened very early because Father Pestarino wished to give some diffident souls the opportunity of going to confession at an hour when no one would see them, she used this facility to prolong her prayer before the tabernacle. Her parents slept on and she rose very quietly in order not to disturb them, leaving the house very early. But what would happen if she should not wake or tiredness and her tender age got the better of her will? Mary knew well what means to use in order to prevent this happening!

Several times, according to her sister who slept in the same room, Mary would rise when her sister was sleeping soundly and attempt to sleep on a chair or stretch out on the floor so that an uncomfortable position would prevent her from sleeping soundly. On other occasions, maybe in winter when sleeping on the floor might bring about an attack of pneumonia, Mary would tie a piece of cord round her waist before going to bed. This would make breathing difficult and interfere with her sleep. Thus she would often wake up during the night and, not possessing a watch, would mistake the time. Thinking it nearly dawn she would rouse Domenica or Felicina, both of whom were as fervent as she was, and together they would hurry through the deserted streets.

### Spirit of a virgin apostle

It would sometimes happen that the church would be still closed when the girls arrived. They would then kneel in prayer on the step, waiting to enter the temple of the Lord. If any other young girl from the town arrived, rivaling Mary's fervor and wishing to keep her company, Mary would discourse on spiritual matters. In one of these short conversations, Mary raised her eyes to heaven and said, "Look how many shining stars there are in the sky. How beautiful they are! Yet one day they will all be beneath our feet because we shall be higher than they are." Such expressions came from a noble, sensitive mind, and what a wealth of living faith they reflected!

One of her friends also states that she once found Mary and Felicina asleep on the church steps near the door. They were huddled together like a pair of doves. Nature had forced its just demands on the spirit.

The faithful Petronilla relates:

When Mary spoke to me about her morning trips she said that once she was with Felicina and had reached the place where the bypath opens onto the road, when they saw a man approaching.

"Let us ask him the time," said Mary to her sister, "then we shall not give the impression that we are frightened."

The man replied and then asked a question.

"It is two o'clock. But where are you two going at this hour of the morning?"

"To mass."

"To mass at two in the morning?"

"We did not realize it was so early. However we shall have more time to pray."

They continued on their way followed no doubt by the admiration of the man, who most probably knew them.

Another time Mary was with her cousin and the night was very dark. As they drew near the cemetery, two large white forms came out from the shadows and advanced toward them across the square. The two girls fled, terrified. Soon Mary stopped, caught hold of her cousin's skirt and

said calmly, "Let us keep calm and walk on ahead without fear. They can do us no harm." The girls walked toward the church paying no attention to the two figures who, after making one or two more rounds and gesticulating from afar, finally disappeared.

Mary spoke about this imprudent apparition to someone able to stop it. It was the work of two practical jokers who wanted to frighten the devout early risers. But once their identity had been discovered, they did not repeat the incident.

Nothing could diminish Mary's fervor. When bad weather prevailed she wanted no one with her and braved the cold and the rain alone. She would even have braved guns had she met them on her way. Some days she reached the church so drenched with rain from head to foot and with her *caussotti* in such a state that she just had to think of herself chiefly out of respect for Jesus. She would then go into a small ground-floor room adjacent to the church. This belonged to a family that affectionately admired her and the other girls who followed her. She had been told where to find the key and had permission to use the place freely. She would remove her dripping *caussotti*, shake the snow or rain from her clothing and as soon as the church door opened would make her way in, to return later and collect the famous leggings which had dried out a little by that time.

When everything was frozen Mary foresaw suffering the cold too intensely. So she took a little bundle of sticks with her. At the hospitable little shelter she would light the sticks and warm herself in order not to be too numb to pray.

A friend of hers, four or five years older than she was, almost took offense when she saw doubt on the face of her questioner as she related this fact. She asserted most emphatically,

I can assure you that she always came and on entering the town she left her *caussotti* in a room collecting them on her

return. She would sometimes take them off outside the church and after shaking the snow off would go in and take her place. We invited her more than once to come to our house in order to warm and dry herself a little, but we rarely succeeded in getting her to accept the invitation. I remember that on one of these cold, wet mornings she wanted to go straight into the church for fear of missing mass. However, afraid that if Father Pestarino saw her in that state he would send her away she went to kneel a long way from his confessional. She knew well that although severe in word and manner, his tender heart was very solicitous for the physical health of his spiritual children. But either someone must have told him or else he recognized her cough for he ordered her to go home immediately.

Petronilla Mazzarello completes the story for us, "Yes," she said, "and when Mary tried to get up she had to make a strong effort because the water which had soaked through her skirt and shoes had frozen and she was stuck to the floor."

After speaking of her fervor, her sacrifices and her piety, another companion concluded, "One would have had to know Mary in order to comprehend how much courage and will power she had."

However all her precautions were not always sufficient to elude the vigilance of her mother who, without moving from her bed often heard the girls going out in the morning and then returning. She did not dare place obstacles in the way of Mary's piety and probably Father Pestarino had advised her not to interfere with the work of grace in her daughter's soul. Nevertheless when Mary returned home soaked to the skin and frozen with cold she warned her to be more careful. She brought forward who knows how many reasons in order to make her understand that she must take care of her health, that she was the eldest and all the hopes of the family rested in her. Then she would usually finish up with, "When you are ill how shall I be able to cure you?" After listening respectfully Mary would answer, "Do not be afraid, Mama. I shall not fall ill, you

will see.” Her mother would then smile and Mary would continue as before.

### **Piety not a burden on the family**

It happened sometimes that the function in church was longer than usual and consequently Mary arrived home rather late. These were very rare occasions since Father Pestarino was always the first in recommending women and girls not to make their piety a burden to the family and to abstain from anything which could cause friction at home. Perhaps it was because there were now five other little ones at home and some of them very small that Father Pestarino made such observations.

Whenever she happened to be late the good young girl, who wanted to obey and yet not give up the mass or cause displeasure, would deprive herself of the rest period customary for all. Then in the evening when the others had gone to bed she would remain behind, and if the season required it, would prepare the stakes and twigs for use in tying up the vine shoots the following day. Failing this she would do some other work.

Sometimes she foresaw she would be late returning from mass the following morning. Then, if the season was good for working the land and there was a bright moon shining, Mary would rise earlier than usual and, without rousing her sister would go into the vineyard and get ahead with the part of the work that was her responsibility. Or, since there was a shortage of water at the Valponasca, she would hoist the twenty-five-litre container on her shoulders and clamber down the steep path to the well, which can still be seen. Then carrying her heavy load, she would climb back up the path to the house. So, having provided for the needs of the family, she would set about rousing Felicina and off they would go, hurrying as if in answer to a call.

With all this flowering of robust piety one might be led

to think that the lively, natural precociousness of the fervent young girl was no more likely to rear its head. Actually, Mary was always quick to repulse it instantly and to exercise herself in humility and abnegation. However, from time to time and for nobler motives Mary became again the irresistible young girl who, without lying or harming anyone managed to gather eggs, knock over the cheeses, skim the cream off the milk and finally get her own way.

Here is an example.

On one occasion, even though she walked very carefully, Mary's father heard an unusual sound. So he got up and went downstairs to see what it could be. As soon as she heard his footsteps Mary ran quickly to the stable and loosened the cord on the cow. As her father appeared at the stable door she said, "Look, the animal has got loose, I will tie her up again!" Even if he did suspect the truth how could her father do anything else but smile and go back to bed while his daughter continued in a crescendo of fervor which could no longer be hidden.

It could be said that she relived the words of Peter, Chief of Apostles: "What I have, I give you." She seemed to say to her sister, her cousin and her friends, "Follow me and I will give you what I have: a great love for Jesus, an immense longing to mortify myself in order to please Him and a zeal which devours me."

It seemed at first that her cousin Domenica would surpass Mary in virtue and piety. Now the disciple had become the teacher.

### **Fruitful zeal**

We have already noted the effectiveness of the young apostle who was so able to inflame the heart of her cousin with love that she too wanted to rise from her bed early every morning in order to go to church. Mary used to exhort her to work with the intention of pleasing God alone

and to mortify herself regarding food and dress. She began to teach others all that she had acquired through struggling with herself, and because her words were supported by example she always obtained what her zeal had suggested.

With her sister Felicina the apostolate was easier and more profitable. Rarely had the hearts of two sisters been so closely united, so quick to understand each other as they were. Mary had taught Felicina her first prayers, given her a first taste of the sweetness brought by contact with God and by denying oneself for Him. The two sisters would seek one another out, when work had parted them for a few hours. They enjoyed working together when, from time to time, this was possible and they helped one another to keep up their fervor. Felicina wrote, "When our parents sent Mary to town on a message she would go into the church to visit the Blessed Sacrament and would also make an act of adoration for me. When I was sent she would remind me to visit Jesus and remember her also."

Mary was more than usually happy when the weather became warmer because it meant that she could take Felicina to morning mass with her. Felicina had made great progress under Mary's guidance. She prepared with great care for her First Holy Communion and asked her Guardian Angel to wake her early even if the weather were bad, so that she could go to mass with her sister. Although Mary rejoiced at this fervor she was also adamant and would not allow her sister to do anything that might harm her even if the same things came naturally to herself, even becoming a duty.

Besides this Mary had found another friend to enkindle with fervor. She was robust and able to go with her even during the winter months. Ten minutes farther on from the Valponasca there was another farmhouse where a certain Rosa Mazzarello, also known as Bertera, lived. She too burned with desire for frequent Communion but found it difficult to wake up early enough. So the young apostle used to go call her. She would wait for her and together they would go to receive Jesus, while Mary, making good

use of the lengthy journey, would stimulate the soul of her companion with fervor and help her climb the high peaks she had already ascended.

### **First signs of religious vocation**

God's pleasure in this pure, communicative fervor is proved by the fact that at this time Mary received the gift of God's privileged ones: the call to religious life.

Mary did not speak of this either at the time or afterwards. Had she been forbidden to do so by Father Pestarino in whom she must have confided, or was it from fear of being unable to follow such a high ideal for lack of the dowry, considered necessary at that time? Did she think it best to keep silence in order not to strengthen or even to crush the desire of the unattainable? It is certain that when she saw the friars who often came to the Valponasca to beg, she received them with respect and tried to obtain abundant alms for them. However at this time the sight of them coming would cast a shadow over her countenance but she would try to dissimulate her sadness. Once she said to her brothers, "Do you see how holy the friars are? You should become friars too and then you would find it easier to avoid hell and keep your souls safe." They looked at her in surprise and asked her,

"Then why don't you become a nun?"

"Because I cannot," she replied, "but if I were a man . . . !"

Her brothers looked at her in wonder and began to think as everyone in Mornese, especially the mothers, were thinking and saying, "Mary surpasses in virtue all the girls of her age and can be held up as an example to all the girls in the town." This was accepted without envy. One of them writes, "I remember that Mary Mazzarello always edified me especially because of her piety. Seeing her humble attitude at prayer and the fervor with which she approached the Eucharistic Banquet, one could not but regard her as

an elect soul seriously progressing towards perfection, in whom God dwelt with joy."

**1854-1857:** God had permitted Mary to hear his divine call yet allowed the doors of the cloister to remain closed against her in her conviction that she would never be able to become a religious. He wished, nevertheless, to give her an unexpected consolation and open to her a life in which her love and zeal would be able to expand and stabilize.

### **Angelina Maccagno**

From among the young girls who corresponded best to the conscientious work of Father Pestarino there emerges Angelina Maccagno who also belonged to Mornese. She was even more outstanding than Mary because, born in 1832, she was older in years, her family was in comfortable circumstances and, considering the town and the times, she was quite well educated. Angelina was good-hearted and practical. She could and wanted to give herself completely to apostolic work. Thus she became Father Pestarino's right hand in all that pertained to young girls. Father Pestarino recognized her fervor and capabilities and knew that she was free to do as she liked all day. He was also aware that her widowed mother was happy to help her in her works of zeal. So he told her, "From now on I shall work directly with the men and the boys, and outside church, you will work with the women and the girls."

One might think that Angelina Maccagno felt herself called to be a religious but could not follow the call, either because she had not courage to leave her mother alone (there was a son but no other daughter), or because she was not ready to detach herself from everything. Or perhaps she feared she would not have sufficient health, being very delicate. But it is a fact that one day, on an understanding with her cousin Maria Arecco, she spoke to

Father Pestarino about the glory which might be given to God and the Blessed Virgin and the advantage which would accrue to the town and the young people if an association with a special bond of piety could be formed for those young girls who did not want to, or could not become religious, yet not wishing to take any other state, wanted to become holy in the world.

In order to convince him she pointed out that it would be a very good thing in those dark times when so many sects were agitating and stirring up people against the Church and religion, if there were women prepared to make a counterattack by working quietly and without attracting attention to themselves in order to bring God back to home and state, promote love for the Church and the Pope, who was being so badly treated in those tragic years. She suggested that, while the Christian world was preparing with joy to accept the Dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the young girls of Mornese form an association bearing the name of Mary Immaculate.

Angelina Maccagno's fervor could not but find an echo in a heart so well disposed to agree with her. But when she suggested that Father Pestarino himself should draw up a set of rules the holy priest thought it better that she do it, saying that he would review it or have it reviewed. Angelina willingly obeyed and promptly made a draft copy which she handed over to Father Pestarino. He passed it for revision to Canon Joseph Frassinetti, the Prior of St. Sabina's in Genoa.

### **The first Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate**

The draft in question<sup>4</sup> suggested two aims: a particular one composed of five articles and a general one which comprised three.

*Particular aim* — the sanctification of the associates by means of the vow of chastity made under the guidance of the Director and at the most, year by year. Also the vow of obedience to the Director or to a companion of the Union,

designated by the members in order to acquire uniformity of spirit and action. In order to make this a success there should be one confessor for all.

*General aim* — to work together for the glory of God and religion by frequenting the holy sacraments, by loving Christ in His passion and by a special, tender devotion to our Mother, the Most Blessed Virgin Mary. According to the Rule, the plan and the aims of the Pious Union “are to inculcate and promote this devotion wherever it is possible, among girls and women and even boys and men, obviating however, direct relations with men of any age and reaching them through the women.”

Every Daughter of Mary had an absolute duty to be ready to sacrifice everything and to leave everything, rather than leave the Pious Union. She would help with her own money those among her companions who might become homeless or without means of subsistence. No one was allowed to live alone but must go where and with whom the Director should decide. Everyone was expected to do whatever she could to promote the Pious Union but without talking too much about it, in order to prevent indiscretions which might harm religion. All must be united in heart and soul and avoid exclusive friendships.

Canon Frassinetti was the most obvious choice to revise the Rules because he had followed with affection and advice, the whole movement of young people who flocked around his sister Paula, Foundress of the Sisters of Saint Dorothy. However, not evaluating the matter correctly, despite his willingness to please Father Pestarino to whom he was bound by longstanding ties of friendship, he lost Angela Maccagno's manuscript and for another year the Rule remained a pious desire.

In the meantime Angelina started gathering some young girls together and followed the norms she had drawn up. Seeing that the undertaking was not only practicable but also made a good impact she took courage and wrote to Canon Frassinetti again, sending a second draft of the Rule.

The Canon again put the matter to one side either

because of his own father's death which took place in February, 1853 or because of his parish work, but most probably because he put little faith in the success of the project.

Here we note what Petronilla Mazzarello narrated:

Frassinetti lost the second copy also. He told us so later in a conference. He was unable to trace it although he searched everywhere. However, on December 8, 1854, the first feast of the Immaculate Conception, when he was far from thinking about it, he found the manuscript on his desk as if it had just been put there at that very moment. Could it have been that Our Lady wanted to manifest her wish in this way?

Frassinetti must have thought so since he immediately consulted other priests who studied questions of spirit in depth and finally corrected the draft, rearranged it and completed it but, as he himself said, "in substance adding or subtracting nothing."<sup>5</sup>

The long-awaited document reached Mornese on November 21, 1855 and on the 27th of the same month Angela Maccagno thanked Canon Frassinetti in the following letter:

Very Reverend Canon D.G. Frassinetti,

On the beautiful day of our dear Mother Mary's Presentation in the Temple, our spiritual Director communicated to us the glad news that he had received the Rules for those country girls who wish to consecrate themselves to God. I am one of the most unworthy among them, but I wish with all my heart to make this consecration. In the name of all the others I take the liberty of writing these few lines in order to thank you for the care and trouble you have taken over us. God and Mary Most Holy will, I hope, reward you.

Our gratitude for this news is all the greater because of the wish we have cherished so long and because it comes as a beautiful gift from Our Lady on her feast day. The following day a spiritual friend and I offered Holy Communion in thanksgiving and we prayed for you in a special way because this is the only way we can thank you and we know it will please you most. I shall always remember my debt to you

in my poor prayers and Communions, never forgetting to pray for you. Also I shall recommend my companions, who are already increasing in numbers, to do the same. God is so good to me even though I serve Him with so many defects and so much tepidity. But I shall do so no longer, rather I shall strive to observe the prescribed Rules, both particular and general, in a fitting manner.

Be pleased to accept my greetings and those of my companions and, if you consider it advisable, extend them to the good young people there. We ask them to pray for us as we do for them. Thus we shall form a holy bond. Kissing the hand that has worked so hard for us, I am, Most Reverend Canon,

Your humble servant,

*Angela Maccagno*<sup>6</sup>

Mornese, November 27, 1855

### **The first Consecration of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate**

On December 9, 1855, the Sunday after the feast of the Immaculate Conception, the girls who had already been trying to practice the Rules drafted by Angela Maccagno for about three years, met secretly in the chapel of Father Pestarino's house, to initiate in a truly formal manner the Association of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. They were but five: Angela Maccagno, Mary Mazzarello, Maria Arecco, Rosina Mazzarello and Joan Ferrettino, chosen by their spiritual Director, Father Pestarino, from the increased numbers noted by Angela Maccagno in her letter to Frassinetti.

The choice was a hard one since the careful priest wished the handful decreed to nourish the others to be good wheat of the finest quality, taken from well-cultivated ground free from all weeds. The five fortunate ones were too humble to apply the words of Jesus to themselves, "Many are called but few are chosen," but good Father Pestarino must have applied them when he saw those

excellent young people before him. He knew their worth and could foresee what they would accomplish in holy emulation among themselves and in direct contact with the enkindling flame of Mary Mazzarello. Although she was the youngest of the five she was nonetheless able to direct the Daughters of Mary. Five are the petals of the wild rose that perfumes the Lady Altar in the village; five the letters forming the Virgin's name in Italian: Maria, the white rose of the Blessed Trinity.

No one has preserved for us any notes regarding the holy diligence with which Father Pestarino prepared the chosen ones to take this step, nor is there any memory left to us as to what the humble minister of God said to help them understand the value of the step they were taking. Neither do we know the words used by the happy young girls promising for the first time, in unison, to dedicate their lives to the Blessed Virgin, nor how they confided to one another their fervent transports of joy.

But certainly the offering of their consecration even if celebrated in an unadorned corner, could not have been less pleasing to the Immaculate Virgin than those solemn celebrations in her honor taking place on that same day in Rome and other great Christian centers.

There were no splendid lights at Mornese, no harmonious music and hymn singing, no prayerful crowds. The angels alone witnessed that ardent commitment to cultivate and radiate purity in the name of the Blessed Virgin.

*O Mary Immaculate, give virgins to the world. Grant that virgins on earth may be more numerous than the stars of heaven.*

This was the ideal expressed later in the first prayer of consecration which completed the Rules of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.<sup>7</sup>

### Canon Frassinetti takes action

It was only natural that Canon Frasinetti be informed of the simple but important celebration. He was thus able to follow up the work of the zealous Daughters of Mary either through news from Father Pestarino who often went to Genoa, or on his own visits to Mornese. Here he was recognized and loved as a friend of Father Pestarino and because he never refused to give a beautiful little sermon to the good people. He was also the extraordinary confessor of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

As was commonly said, Canon Frassinetti had a finger in every pie where associations for the girls and women of Genoa were concerned. Some of these were: the "Pious Works of Saint Dorothy," the "Holy Infancy," the "Pious union of souls wishing to become saints," the "Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus," etc. He was either the spiritual director, the initiator or the promoter as can be seen from the above-mentioned letter Angela Maccagno wrote to him, "if you consider it advisable, extend them (greetings) to the good young people there. We ask them to pray for us as we do for them. Thus we shall form a holy bond . . ."

Once Canon Frassinetti had established the value of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate he put aside all his previous doubts concerning the success of the undertaking and wished to present the city of his own apostolate with this Association, foreseeing a long, fruitful passage for it. Hence on August 16, when his parish was celebrating the feast of Mary's Assumption into heaven, following more or less the pattern of Mornese, he held a reception for the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. "At that time," as he himself wrote, "a limited number of copies of the Rules was printed, but kept secret to prevent the criticism and censure never absent from anything new, even if good and holy."<sup>8</sup>

So a friendly breeze had carried a good seed away from its native plot and a new plant took root in fresh and

fertile ground. It soon produced other plants, flowers and fruit to enhance the beauty of the Church.

### **Fruit of the Pious Union in Mornese**

Meanwhile in Mornese the zeal of the five Daughters began to take effect.

Many women now assisted at daily mass and many young girls became daily communicants. Church feasts were celebrated by a multitude of people amidst a wealth of light produced by candles offered for this purpose. All this gives us to understand how well the humble, active young apostles were working among the people.

Those five young people really exercised an extraordinary influence. Nothing had substantially changed in their conduct, but there was something about them that commanded respect. They came and went appearing to involve themselves in nothing, yet their names were on every one's lips because all had received words of advice, a favor or a kind word from them. Even Mary, at one time so shy, now approached one or another young person, questioned her, went to church with her, spoke to her of Our Lady, extracted a promise to go to confession before the feast day, that she would fix her dress more modestly, go to Holy Communion, not go to a certain place again, etc. What is most noteworthy about this is that she did not seek out the best, as she would once have done, but seemed to prefer the most wayward among them. And after a while even the wayward grew to like her and could not help imitating her.

### **The Company of Our Lady Immaculate at Valdocco**

Remarkable coincidence! While the Blessed Virgin was forming groups of innocent girls from the children of the people in Mornese and through Mornese in Genoa to point

out new ways of purity to the world, she was building up the same burning fervor for consecration in the Oratory at Turin.

For this wonderful work she chose Dominic Savio, the purest and one of the youngest of Don Bosco's sons, who was also the nearest to eternity. This young saint belonged to an association, established with the aim of securing many Communions everyday at the Oratory. With Don Bosco's advice he wanted to make it a lasting matter. Using his gentle, industrious charity he chose some of his most trusted companions, inviting them to form with him a *company* which he wished to name *the Immaculate Conception*.

Its aim was to secure the protection of the great Mother of God in life and especially at the hour of death. The young Savio proposed two means to obtain this end: to make use of and promote practices of piety in honor of Mary Immaculate, and frequent Communion. In agreement with his friends and effectively helped by Joseph Bongiovanni, he drew up a set of rules and, after much effort, on June 8, 1856, nine months before his death, he read the articles aloud with his friends before Our Lady's altar.

The Rule consisted of twenty-one articles all connected with the duties of pupils at the Oratory and inspired by an ardent desire to form in themselves and others a sense of duty and an open, solid Christian character. The last article sums up the spirit of the rest. It states, "The Society is under the protection of the Immaculate Conception whose title we bear and whose medal we carry with devotion. A sincere, filial, unlimited tenderness towards her and a constant devotion will render us superior to every obstacle, tenacious in our resolutions, severe towards ourselves, kind and gentle towards others and exact in everything."<sup>9</sup>

Don Bosco read the Rule and approved it, adding in his own handwriting, seven conditions to make its practice easier and to secure tranquillity of conscience. The good this association accomplished was equal to the love and purity of heart from which it sprang, the love and purity

of a Dominic Savio whose apostolic ardor encouraged and supported it from heaven.

Thus in two different places unknown to each other there ascended to the throne of Our Lady Immaculate from Turin and Mornese, the same tribute of love, the same fiery zeal, under the same title and having the same practical aims. The two most fervent devotees of the Immaculate Virgin were two young hearts which beat in unison with that of Don Bosco, the great Father whom Savio would soon have to leave and whom Mary Mazzarello did not yet know, although she was already his daughter in sentiments, aspirations and works.

### **Monsignor Contratto at Mornese**

1857: In the meantime Father Pestarino, who watched the small seed thrust its roots deeper and spread daily in the general good for the glory of God, could no longer contain his joy. Thus he opened up his heart to his Bishop, Monsignor Modesto Contratto. Father Ghio, the parish pastor of Mornese and cordial admirer of Father Pestarino, gave him free rein to exercise his zeal as he thought best. This year Father Pestarino saw the month of May fulfil all his desires. He went to Acqui to invite his beloved Bishop to make the celebrations of the closing of the month still more solemn and fruitful by his presence, his words and all the exterior magnificence preceding and accompanying the arrival of the venerated pastor.

In order to tempt the Bishop to come to Mornese Father Pestarino told him about the revival of fervor among the people and the almost daily Communions of the teenagers. He impressed on him the necessity of his coming to see for himself how the work of the secret association—the little nucleus of young girls united in Mary's name—was producing abundant, practical fruit. He was so insistent and eloquent that the heart of the good prelate was touched. He not only accepted the invitation to go to Mornese but,

enlightened from on high, wished to give the good priest an unmistakable proof of his pleasure by approving the Rule of the Association of the Daughters by a decree dated May 20, 1857.<sup>10</sup>

On Sunday, May 31 the church was packed with people who had come even from the distant farmsteads. Then the function held by Father Pestarino secretly eighteen months before was repeated. The six Daughters of Mary Immaculate knelt at the altar rail. There were six now because the five had been joined by a young, childless widow, full of zeal and good sense. A little nervous but very happy they repeated their consecration and received the medal of Mary Immaculate from the Bishop.

What in substance, was the formula for this reconsecration? The memory of Petronilla, what can be read in the regulations a little further on and what was already in practical use by the Daughters lead us to accept the following:

“I, . . . being resolved by God’s help to work for holiness by avoiding especially even the smallest deliberate sin and exercising charity to my neighbor, promise to observe the Rule of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.”<sup>11</sup>

The young associates no longer needed to hide their spiritual commitment because now, all knew the name of their Association. They were Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

## NOTES

1837 — 1857

1. Regarding the date of Father Pestarino's return to Mornese see the letter of Father Mario Carpaneto, Prefect of the Seminary of Genoa, to Mother Clelia Genghini on August 23, 1926 with the enclosures and the copy of a marriage certificate pertaining to a marriage celebrated by Father Pestarino at Mornese on June 30, 1847 (Gen. Arch. FMA).

2. From the depositions of Petronilla Mazzarello who made her First Communion at the same time, from the reports made by Father Joseph Campi and Sister Vigolo. (See report of March 25, 1921) and from Father Joseph Pestarino on November 4, 1921 (Gen. Arch. FMA).

3. *Rosary of the Angels in honor of Saint Michael the Archangel* with Decree of the relevant indulgences of 1851 (equal to that published in Turin by Giulio Speirani and Sons in 1887).

4. Appendix No. 1.

5. Preface of the *Rule of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate*, under the protection of Saint Ursula and Saint Angela Merici (Genoa, Tip. della gioventù, 1867) p. 7.

6. Original in Gen. Arch. FMA.

7. Cf. Frassinetti, Giuseppe, *Regola Pia Unione delle Figlie di S. Maria Immacolata* in the appendix of the book, *La Monaca in Casa*, (Genoa, 1st ed.) p. 219.

8. *Regola della Pia Unione delle Figlie di S. Maria Immacolata Sotto la Protezione di S.Orsola e di S.Angela Merici* (Genoa, Tip. Gioventu, 1867) p. 7.

9. *M.B.*, V, 482.

10. *Decree* — We are favorable to all that concerns the spiritual good of the souls entrusted to our care, the greater glory of God, and devotion to the Most Holy Virgin. Praising the pious desire of the daughters of Mornese to unite in a Pious Association under the title of Our Lady Immaculate, we grant them our full consent and approve the relative regulations presented to, and duly seen by us.

Acqui, May 20, 1857

Signed † Father MODESTO, Bishop.

11. Frassinetti, Giuseppe, *La Monaca in Casa* (Sampierdarena, Tip. Libr. di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli, 1880) p. 167.

## THE ZEALOUS DIRECTOR OF THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE AND THE TWO SINGLED OUT FROM AMONG THEM (1857 – 1862)

### **The meetings of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate**

Once the festivities were over the Daughters of Mary Immaculate almost disappeared again into the shadows because Father Pestarino insisted immediately that they should not discuss the Pious Union with outsiders, and Father Pestarino's word was law for them. They had to continue a work of perfection in their own lives which resembled the humble violet spreading its beneficial perfume unseen. They were to be noticed only by the plainness of their dress, the modesty of their behavior and their enlightened zeal in preventing evil and doing good. The young people did not require the recommendations to be repeated.

They gathered together before dawn every Sunday in the Maccagno house, in order to hold the prescribed meetings. Because Angela had drawn up the Rule, was a little better educated and older than the others, she naturally held a certain ascendancy over them. However she had no actual right to superiority since Father Pestarino intended them all to be equal among themselves.

The meetings were held in her house because, as has already been stated, she lived alone with her mother and could receive her companions at any time without disturbing anyone or asking permission of anyone. However, whenever there was an extraordinary meeting, when a new Daughter was to be received or a conference to be given by a priest such as Fathers Frassinetti, Sturla, Olivieri or Father Pestarino himself, the meeting took place in the latter's own little chapel.

Father Luigi Sturla, the missionary from Genoa and

Canon Olivieri of Acqui, were among the group of good priests who with Fathers Frassinetti and Pestarino were infusing the spirit of serious, solid piety throughout Liguria by means of sermons, confession and shining self-sacrificing example. Father Pestarino often invited them to Mornese to help renew the fervor of the people and to teach the Daughters of Mary Immaculate the means they themselves had found effective in the various ways of doing good.

Usually the meetings of the Daughters took the following procedure. They read a few pages of the *Monaca in Casa* (*The Nun in Her Own Home*) by Saint Alphonsus M. of Liguori, *Christian Perfection* by Rodriguez, or the *Life of Saint Teresa*. They then discussed what they had read in order to gain a better understanding and to apply it to the Pious Union. If there happened to be a novena in preparation for one of the major solemnities, they would encourage one another to make it well by performing some interior and exterior practices of mortification according to their fervor and confirmed, or rather established by Father Pestarino's advice. Then, in order to practice humility, a virtue their director wished to be cultivated most of all, they would accuse themselves to one another of the exterior faults committed during the week, acts of impatience, tepidity or omission regarding piety, lack of zeal, changing the established day for confession, neglect of personal duties as daughter, worker etc.

They would then point out to one another areas in which good could be done, such as girls to be watched over when in danger, sick persons to be assisted, mothers needing a discreet word of advice regarding their daughters, etc.

### **The Daughters of Mary Immaculate and the Christian mothers**

For some time Father Pestarino had been gathering fathers and mothers of families in separate groups for special conferences. He now contemplated handing the

mothers over to the zeal of the Daughters. He directed this not very easy mission, by choosing the women who were to take part in the meetings, stipulating which spiritual readings should be used and what suitable advice, private or otherwise, should be given according to the circumstances.

It was then established that each Daughter should have the care of five mothers. These would meet in the home of the individual Daughter in charge, or in some other house where there might be more freedom of action. In good weather the meetings might even take place outside under a tree. They began with an Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed recited together. This was followed by a short reading from a prescribed book with explanations if needed, and suitable applications. Then in a serious, but friendly conversation the best ways of watching over the early inclinations of children would be discussed, especially in regard to girls. Ways of directing them towards love of home and a secluded life would also be deliberated. This would be followed by a dialogue on how to persuade the girls in the light of faith, that dancing was dangerous for soul and body. The meeting concluded with the "*Out of the Depths*" for the souls in purgatory and the ejaculations "*Saint Teresa pray for us.—Praised be Jesus Christ; praised for evermore!*"

### **Mary Mazzarello's zeal as a Daughter of Mary Immaculate**

Mary was so punctual in arranging her meetings and so well able to direct the good mothers towards a serious attitude regarding their grave duties that she felt herself responsible for all their actions, their neglect or weaknesses, thus revealing her apostolic soul and her habitual union with God.

If the effectiveness of her zeal was so great with the Christian mothers, it was much more so when exercised

towards the young girls of Mornese.

Contemporary with Mary in those days was a young girl who, either through caprice or because of bad influence had firmly resolved never again to approach the confessional. All attempts to shake her resolution had failed. She herself tells the story: "As a young girl I made up my mind, because of a repugnance I felt, never again to go to the sacraments. Many people tried to move me from my foolish resolution but to no avail. Mary tried, and almost as if joking with me induced me to confess my sins to Father Pestarino much to the advantage of my soul." How did Mary manage to argue the case when faith and reason had both failed? She saw that she was dealing with caprice rather than an apparently logical motive, so she dealt with it by using a childish mode of persuasion: "If you go to confession I will give you a chicken, and if you are good we shall eat it together."

But why did she, who lived according to a far different standard and who, trained by Father Pestarino never to speak of food or to give her body more than was strictly necessary, have recourse to such an expedient? Mary tells us herself, "A soul is a soul, and each soul needs special handling. Therefore, how could I, a Daughter of Mary Immaculate, not use every possible means to set one soul once more on the right path?"

Hence, if once she was all zeal because of the fire burning within her, now that the interior flame was revitalized by force of rule, the inward ardor and the apostolate that followed led her securely towards perfection. It was but natural that the upright intention that made her an obedient, careful young girl even with regard to the smallest commitments, should be perfected under the new stimulus of vibrating piety and now make her into the most observant of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

### **The temporary absence of Angela Maccagno**

It was about this time that the town council of Mornese proposed opening a primary school for girls and wished to entrust it to one of the Daughters. Father Pestarino suggested that Angela Maccagno go to Genoa for a year and place herself under the direction of good professors, since she was able to spend what was necessary, in order to prepare for the Primary Teacher's qualifying examinations. Her cousin Maria Arecco, who had helped her to prepare the first draft of the Rules sent to Father Frassinetti, was to take her place while she was away. The Daughters rejoiced at the thought of the greater good one of their number would be able to accomplish in the future and Mary must have taken the ball on the bounce and made a last assault on her friend, Petronilla, in order to induce her to enroll in the Pious Union before Angela should leave.

The two approaching feasts of Our Lady, August 15 and September 8, lent themselves favorably to the enrollment.

### **Petronilla Mazzarello — Daughter of Mary Immaculate**

Petronilla gave in at last. It had been difficult to win her over, not so much because she did not love piety nor admire the good in her companions but rather because her phlegmatic temperament was slow to demonstrations of enthusiasm and she feared having to give up her habits and the prayers to which she had become attached, in order to follow those prescribed by the Rule.

Mary kept an eye on her and realized how much good she would be able to do. At one moment, she seemed to cast a golden thread around her friend and gradually drew it tighter and closer until she finally overcame Petronilla's diffidence. This is how it came about.

Petronilla went to mass early every morning and whenever she could she knelt close to Mary to enjoy some of

her fervor. One day they were outside the church together waiting for the door to be opened. Mary turned to her friend and said, "Do you mind my telling you something? We have met in church many times. We pray side by side. But you have never invited me to say a Hail Mary with you, although you know how powerful prayer in common is and that Our Lord Himself promised that where two persons were speaking of Him together, He would be there with them." From that moment they always prayed together.

After this Petronilla attended the bishop's celebration and rejoiced with Mary. She tried to find out what the Daughters did and who joined their ranks. In the meantime, Mary one day cheered her with a gentle word and, on another gave her an invitation. On still another she joked with her until at last she was able to see her friend wearing the medal of Mary Immaculate.

### **Mary Mazzarello**

#### **and her spirit of mortification and union with God**

Mary's fervor did not diminish when Angela Maccagno went away. She continued uninterruptedly the work of improving her natural inclinations and of acquiring habits of interior recollection in order to attain true union with God. She desired this union so much that, during one of the meetings, Mary felt it her duty to accuse herself with sorrow of having remained a quarter of an hour without thinking of God. To succeed in this undertaking of remaining united to God and dissimulating as much possible, she imposed such mortifications on herself regarding food as to limit the two principal meals to either soup and potatoes or maize meal (polenta) and bread, even when there was an abundance of grapes, milk and cheese in the house. She also cut down her already restricted hours of sleep either for prayer or to get ahead of her work and to be free to attend church celebrations.

One day, not realizing what a self-revelation she was

making she confided to Petronilla, "During Lent I satisfy my hunger only on Sundays." Her friend states that: "had Father Pestarino not restrained her but allowed her all the mortifications she wanted, she would have injured her health.

"Groups of us used to keep vigil with Our Lady of Sorrows during the night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday, so there were always some of us in church praying to Our Lady and meditating on the passion of Jesus. Mary was always the first in church and the last to leave and, if she thought she would not be noticed, would join other groups as well as her own."

### **Devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows**

Devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows was a legacy of Father Pestarino. When a young cleric he had bought a small picture of Our Lady of Sorrows from a second-hand dealer. It cost him two and a half lire, and he thought it to be only an ordinary lithograph. However it proved to be an oil painting of the school of Dolci. Perhaps even he did not realize the artistic value of the picture but the image of Our Lady pleased him and, happy with his acquisition, he took it back to the seminary. Then someone told him the real value of the picture and offered to buy it for ten thousand lire. However he would not part from it not even for a hundred thousand but spent five hundred on having the painting, darkened with age, cleaned and touched up.

Now that the Pestarino family was permitted a chapel in their home the altar was dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows and the beautiful picture was venerated by the youth of Mornese and witnessed the first consecration of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. It received the first devoted impulses of Mary Mazzarello, who consecrated the best moments of meditation and all of Holy Week to the thought of the sorrows of Jesus and Mary.

The Blessed Virgin rewarded the devotion so dear to her by increasing Mary's desire for Communion until it became a real thirst for Jesus.

### **Mary Mazzarello's delicate conscience**

One day Mary was seen running breathlessly through the maze of pathways over the Mornese hills urged on interiorly by the words of Jesus, "Blessed are the pure of heart."

What had happened? Something had disturbed her and without delay she hastened to the parish church in order to go to confession. Father Pestarino was not at home. Perhaps he was at Borgoalto where he owned some land and a rustic cottage. He often went there to cultivate the beautiful roses he used to adorn the altar and to take a little relaxation snaring birds. These he liked to capture alive. Mary hurried over to Borgoalto and there she met a certain Campi, the stammering caretaker of Father Pestarino's property. Aware of her urgency he wanted to know if there was someone ill, but with all his stuttering and effort it was some time before Mary understood that Father Pestarino was at Uccellaia, another of his properties. As the name suggests this was a place very suited to bird snaring, (uccello = bird).

This meant climbing up to the Valponasca because Uccellaia was close to a vineyard rented by Mary's father. So the devout young girl turned her steps in that direction.

However Father Pestarino was not there either. Mary sighed and looked further afield to Cadepiaggio, a small town about an hour and a half away. It was not the distance that was the burden, for her legs were ready to carry her to the ends of the earth if necessary, but it was nearing sunset, the time she dedicated to her little brothers in order to relieve her mother and enable her to cook the meal in peace.

Still she had to go on. She could not go to bed with such a weight on her soul and then miss her Communion

in the morning. "Guardian Angels," she murmured, "take my place with my mother and brothers." Then away she sped to Cadepiaggio.

Hurry as she might it was impossible to reach her destination before dusk, and then she found the priest at supper. The servant refused to call him but offered to take a message. "But it is a secret," said Mary. At last, staring disdainfully at the young girl she turned slowly and went to call her master. As soon as Mary saw the priest coming she greeted him and blurted out her trouble.

"But my dear child, it is nothing, you should have been at peace."

"Then I have not sinned and can receive Holy Communion?"

"Of course, because . . ."

But Mary interrupted with,

"Many thanks. Praised be Jesus Christ."

And while the priest was still reassuring her she hurried away as if on wings.

On arriving home, she said simply, "I am a bit late but it could not be helped," and no one questioned her. Her parents were at this time well aware of her zeal and since she faithfully carried out her share of the work and did it well she merited a little indulgence on the part of her family and had the right to use her free time as she pleased.

Who would have recognized in her the child who found confession so difficult, as she spoke out her fault to the priest even outside the confessional. Her self-control had reached the point where she could do anything. This was not an isolated case. As Petronilla says, "If she feared she had offended God she could not rest peacefully and when there was no risk of impropriety or compromising anyone and she could not go to church, she would stop the priest in the street, seeing him as the representative of God."

### **From the Valponasca to Mornese**

**1858:** Mary's family experienced a considerable setback during this year. One day Mrs. Mazzarello took the little ones to Mornese, while Mary was working in the vineyard with her father and her brother Dominic. While they were away some thieves broke into the house, ransacked it and made off with seven hundred lire, a fortune in those days.

Everyone was very upset, especially the parents, who saw in the audacity of the thieves the danger of repetition which could affect people as well as property. They trembled for the safety of their children. Finally they decided to leave the Valponasca which was too isolated and distant from the town. So they bought a house in The Vagelata Street, Mornese, from John Bodrato, who was known as Zanetto. This they did on March 16, 1858.

Mary was sorry to see her parents so upset, but would not allow any invectives to be used against the thieves. She would always say, "The unfortunate creatures are worse off than we are. Let us not speak evil of them but forgive them and ask God to have pity on them and pardon them."

In her heart she whispered, "Good comes out of evil and in the town we shall be nearer the church and be able to attend mass more often, make more visits and to go to benediction. May God be praised!"

### **Rosina Pedemonte**

Having completed her examinations, Angela Maccagno returned to Mornese in early August. She brought the twenty-year-old Rosina Pedemonte back with her. Angela had stayed in Rosina's house at Genoa during the scholastic year 1857-58 and now Rosina was to spend the three summer months in Mornese. She was an exemplary Daughter of Mary Immaculate from the Genoa foundation and had been under the spiritual direction of Canon Frassinetti.

It must have been on his advice that she accepted the invitation to seek a temporary respite in the healing climate of Mornese for her youthful physique was already worn down by an incurable illness.<sup>1</sup>

### **Mornese's first state-registered teacher**

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate welcomed the newly qualified teacher and her good friend, with great festivities. One might say that Angela was now crowned with a new halo which would increase her authority and place her in a position to be of greater use to all and especially to the souls of young girls.

On the 22nd of the same month the town council nominated her to be the teacher in the only girls' school with an annual salary of two hundred and fifty lire.

Mary Mazzarello rejoiced more than anyone else. Open minded and clear-headed as she was, she recognized Angela's culture and intelligence. Loving the Pious Union she saw in her the person who had brought her the happiness of belonging to Our Lady in a special way. Mary no longer suffered, rather she found pleasure in seeing the advancement of a person who knew God better and was better able to make Him known and loved by souls and better prepared to advance in Christian perfection.

### **Cordial dependence on Angela Maccagno**

If Mary was all respect and submission towards Angela Maccagno before, she now seemed unable to think except according to Angela's mind. She consulted her regarding whatever concerned her external behavior and faithfully followed her advice. She reached the point of not even wishing to buy a new dress or shawl without asking what material and color to choose, thus binding her own freedom of judgment and action, and adhering more to the spirit

than to the letter of the Rule she had embraced.

Her companions teased her and said she was exaggerating but she replied jokingly, "Eh, you still don't know what I need!" To her mother, who seemed in a certain manner pained by this subservience to Angela Maccagno, she said, "Don't worry about me, Mama," in such a way as if to emphasize that to a Daughter of Mary Immaculate as she was, there was no harm in yielding twice instead of once.

### **The first hours of class for the Daughters of Mary Immaculate**

Mornese had no school building and since there was a room suited to the purpose in the Maccagno house, the new school opened there.

It was wonderful on Sundays to see the good Daughters of Mary Immaculate holding their weekly meeting in that room. At some other time, others would be learning to read and others improving themselves with practice. It was natural for Mary to take her place among the others and, seeing that the textbook was a bible history, she applied herself with the zest of a soul solely and completely enamored of the things of God.

### **Springs of fresh fervor**

**1859-1860:** Italy was in the ferment of her second war of independence with Austria and Mornese was affected by alternating grief and joy according as the country suffering setbacks or victory. For Mary, the echo of so much grief and the news of so many victims were sufficient motives for a life of deeper recollection and increasing attention to the perfection of the everyday virtues which, although perhaps unnoticed, are precious in God's eyes.

Her piety received another stimulant during this year.

Another of Frassinetti's pamphlets was published in 1859 and Mary, who imbibed his works in their plain, simple style in order to improve her knowledge of the means of perfection and apostolate, received this latest pamphlet joyfully. It bore the title, *La Monaca in Casa* (*The Nun in Her Own Home*). She, who had received a secret call from God, rejoiced as she read that if God left her in the world He also willed that she should erect a little cell in her own home, in which she could make herself all His and emulate the virgins of the cloister.

The little book contained the Rule of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate in the appendix. The fact that Mary could now have a copy of this Rule for herself together with the certainty that being printed it would become better known, to the advantage of the young, made her heart glad and compensated, to some extent, for her many causes of sadness.

### **Typhoid fever comes to Mornese**

A painful trial was awaiting Mary. The scourge of war with all its hardships necessarily brings hunger and it always leaves a heritage of sickness, often on an epidemic scale. Mornese was attacked by typhoid fever which claimed several victims. All Mary's uncle's family was struck down by the illness and was forced to seek help from other people. Father Pestarino, the "father of the Mornesini," was asked to help. The family was a large one and the mother, who was gravely ill, wanted her niece, Mary. Father Pestarino was perplexed. Mary was now twenty-three years of age and the eldest of her family, which was also a large one. She was her father's right hand, as well as his own support because of her great zeal. She was his hope for the good work he still planned to do. Supposing some harm should come to her?

By their Rule the Daughters of Mary Immaculate were obliged to assist the sick of the town. But there was more

involved here than just caring for sick people. He wondered who could be sent into a house in which there were young men also. So he finally asked Mary's parents to allow their daughter to perform this work of charity. They refused. Mr. Mazzarello said he needed Mary himself for work in the fields and Mrs. Mazzarello needed her in the house. Then there was also the question of infection and the fear in her mother's heart was evident.

### **Mary the nurse**

Father Pestarino persevered. He was well able to get all those good people into the habit of dropping their personal interests in favor of the interest of God. Finally good Joseph Mazzarello said, "I will never send Mary into that house, but if she wants to go I shall not oppose her wishes." This was sufficient for the good priest and he immediately broached the subject with Mary who, although usually eager for obedience and self-renunciation, hesitated on this occasion. Oh why couldn't Father Pestarino send her to look after any other woman in the town instead of sending her to the Mazzarelli, to her young male cousins from whom she had always kept her distance? Why had she to go into a house where just because they were relatives there would be so much more freedom? Besides this, without knowing the reason, she felt certain she would succumb to the infection.

Diffidently but sincerely she replied, "If you wish me to go I will go, although I am certain I shall catch the infection."

The holy priest, admitting her reasoning and the powerful voice of nature, was on the point of letting his own heart take over. However, he felt that God was speaking in the request of Mary's aunt and He must be obeyed. Therefore he held firm and Mary went to nurse her relatives.

Joseph, her cousin wrote in 1913,

I was seventeen years of age when typhoid broke out in Mornese. The whole of my family was struck down and my mother's condition was very serious indeed. She was even anointed and remained in bed for a very long time. We needed a woman who would not only nurse us but would also take charge of the house. Father Pestarino sent us my cousin, Mary Mazzarello who was then twenty-two years old. At first it seemed an imprudence to have such a young person around, but I soon had to admit that Father Pestarino must have been inspired by God.

Mary was far from young in virtue. Everything she did was carried out with such seriousness and discretion, and in a manner so pleasantly simple, that our own morale was stimulated. She seemed like one of those Sisters of Charity who are dedicated to hospital work.

You should have heard her pious words when preparing us for confession, and how helpful she was in enabling us to suffer in resignation to God's will!

### **From nurse to patient**

Under her wise care and capable management the sick were soon out of danger and able to take up their normal life, but Mary's premonition now became a reality and the good young girl had to forego her nursing activities and become the patient.

It was August 15, the Solemnity of the Assumption, and she had hoped to devote the day to more prayer in union with the glories of her heavenly Mother as her uncle and aunt no longer needed her. But Mary herself was now tormented by a raging fever and the doctor diagnosed typhoid in a very serious form.

It is said that illness is the touchstone of virtue. Mary, pure gold without alloy, submitted to the crucible. As soon as she understood from the affliction of her parents and the words of the doctor that her condition was serious, she asked for her confessor and demonstrated so much repentance that it could not have been greater even if she were

about to leave this earth for eternity. She then expressed a desire to receive Holy Communion and joyfully heard Father Pestarino promise that Jesus would be brought to her early every morning. Before the surrounding hills became gilded by the light of dawn Father Pestarino went to the church and, accompanied privately by Mary's brothers and preceded by some of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, brought Jesus to the soul that even in the delirium of fever yearned for the Eucharistic union.

The angels could witness that, although agitated by fever and delirium the whole night through, a few moments before the expected Communion she appeared to revive in expectation of her Lord.

### **A school of virtue**

How fervent she was and how recollected in her thanksgiving! How peaceful she appeared in the certainty of an early departure for eternity! Hers was not resignation to the divine will but joy at having something to offer her God as a pledge of her fidelity. It was the yearning for heaven. One day Mary heard her parents lamenting as they wept, that they had allowed her to go and help her relations. They were accusing themselves of having placed her in danger. She interrupted promptly with, "Why do you think that my illness stems from that? Oh if it were true I should die a martyr to charity. But I am unworthy of this. A martyr! What a fortunate thing it would be for me. Don't cry. Let us accept everything as God's will. Wait and see how He will reward you!"

Fearing her parents might take the matter up with Father Pestarino she repeated often, "How good Father Pestarino has been to me! All Mornese has experienced his goodness and all of us should be very good to him; but I have more reason to be grateful than everyone else. May God preserve him for many years for the salvation of souls, and leave him here in Mornese!"

The weather was very hot, yet Mary supported all discomfort with patience and without permitting any lessening of her habitual reserve.

While in delirium one day, she would not allow her mother to remove some of the bedcovers during a bout of excessive perspiration.

In order to lighten Mrs. Mazzarello's burden, the Daughters of Mary Immaculate came to assist Mary during the day and stayed with her during the night. They came to understand more and more what a treasure of virtue lay hidden within her as they listened to her ardent ejaculations to God and the Blessed Virgin, and her joy at the thought of going to heaven, the advice she gave her brothers and sisters who from time to time wanted at all costs to see her. She recommended them to be good and obedient and to avoid sin, vanity and bad company.

One of her companions tells us, "She had always been zealous and we knew it, but listening to her during her illness was another matter! What advice she gave!" Another says:

Mary was an example of mortification and made even the doctor marvel. She asked for nothing and refused nothing, however bad it might be. One day she said with her natural energetic frankness: "Don't talk to me of medicine. I need nothing and my only wish is to go to heaven."

It was then that the doctor who had always taken such great care of her began to despair of being able to save her.

### **Close to death**

Weeks passed and instead of diminishing, the illness seemed to gain strength. Mary asked for the Last Sacraments to the consternation of everyone, and received them with her usual fervor, giving great edification to all.

God wanted to show His pleasure in her zeal and the generous offering of her young life. Seizing an opportune moment one of the neighbors suddenly appeared at the door. He was not a young man but his conduct left much

to be desired, and he had lapsed from the practice of his religion. He stood there, cap in hand, looking diffidently at the sick girl. Timidity was certainly an unusual quality for him. Mrs. Mazzarello noticed him and did not know what to think. She made a sign to her daughter who was recollected in silent prayer. Mary turned and saw the man. She looked at him fixedly as if lost in thought. Then she said, "You see, people have to die and often when they least expect it. Supposing this misfortune should happen to you?" Then lowering her voice as if telling a secret she pointed out to him the bad example he was giving to the young and the danger he was in, of dying an unhappy death with dreadful consequences. She impressed on him the need for repentance and serious reparation to man and God. The man listened, his uncovered head bent low with increasing emotion. Then two large tears rolled slowly down his bronzed cheeks. He acknowledged his fault and, thanking Mary, who had spoken words of truth to him, promised reparation, a promise he faithfully kept.

With her parents Mary was always in a festive mood. But one day her mother inadvertently gave her a double dose of medicine. The effect on her weak condition was to bring about severe agitation and she began to rave. She started giving recommendations, at first gently but soon with more and more heat, until she reached the point of threatening her parents with the divine vengeance if they were not careful in educating the little ones well, having them instructed, watching over them, correcting them, not permitting them to play in the streets, being vigilant regarding the friends they made and making sure they grew up pious, loving their Church and their duties! From the flushed face, the staring eyes, the unusual extravagance of her gestures and words it was evident that she was out of her mind with delirium, because Mary's words had always been just and true manifestations of a mind filled with nothing but a loving and merciful God.

Meanwhile the sickness progressed rapidly and Mary's companions in the Holy Childhood Association agreed that

her funeral should not find them unprepared. So they wrote to Genoa for a large wreath of white artificial flowers thinking that if Mary should die this would be a suitable token of their respect. If however God listened to their prayers and dried their tears, the wreath could be used for other funerals.

### **A slow return to life**

Heaven did not, however, open its gates for Mary, who had not yet finished her earthly mission and had to continue her hymn of glory to God on this earth. When all seemed at an end and, moment by moment she expected to take her flight to heaven, death drew back and a slow return to health took its place. However this health was weak and precarious and the doctor soon realized that the powerful strength he had admired in her two months previously had now completely gone.

### **Looking at the picture of Mary Help of Christians**

On October 7, after fifty-two days in bed Mary was at last able to sit with her family who looked on her as one risen from the dead. It was the feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary and as she could not as yet go to church as she so ardently desired, they took her to the window where she could see the little picture of Mary Help of Christians painted on a wall facing her house. It was a rough painting with a very incomplete inscription, "*Auxilium christianorum, con: 1844 fecet al meso di setembr alli 7 anno: 1841,*"<sup>2</sup> but she saw beyond appearances and truncated words.

Many a time during her illness Mary had found comfort in remembering that poor painting on the nearby wall. Who could have numbered the times she had repeated the complete offering of herself to the Holy Virgin and her wish to

go to heaven to see and love her perfectly! Perhaps she even asked Mary what heaven meant by allowing her to fall ill under the eyes of the Help of Christians, just as she had grown up from childhood close to the chapel erected in honor of the same Help of Christians.

The silences of a long convalescence were rich in deep, effective reflection!

### **Back to church once again**

At last Mary was again able to go to church where she surrendered herself completely to the outpouring of her inmost soul, renewing her holy promises which bound her to Jesus.

She stayed at the back [says Petronilla,] in the darkest corner she could find and said many things to Our Lord. Since she was resigned but not glad to take up life again, she said among other things, "Oh, God, if it has pleased you to add a few more years to my life, grant that I may be forgotten by everyone. I shall be happy if I am remembered by You alone."

The tornado had been terrible, but the flower bloomed again exuding a scent far more delicate than before.

### **During convalescence**

**1860-1861:** Convalescence took longer than expected and the approach of winter did not help. Mary found it very difficult to rise late in the morning and miss daily mass and often Holy Communion as well. These were her joy! Yet this was doctor's orders and Father Pestarino also wanted it, so she obeyed. She also found it difficult to accept the attentions her family and companions tried to give her when all she wanted was to be really forgotten by everyone.

She was not allowed to work because her strength

showed no sign of returning. Hence she gave herself to reading without fear of neglecting her duty.

In January 1860, Rosina Pedemonti who had come to Mornese in search of health, passed away. She died a true Daughter of Mary Immaculate and her director, Father Frassinetti, wrote a beautiful biography. He had already done this for Rosa Cordone who was also a Daughter of Mary Immaculate and had died the death of a saint.

These two books were Mary's ordinary reading during these days and were her companions, comfort and instructors. Both these girls were young as she was and more or less of the same condition. Yet they had reached such heights of virtue as to merit the spiritual direction of a cultured priest as busy as Father Frassinetti in life and be honored by writing their biographies when they died.

They became that good by observing the Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate conscientiously, [said Mary to herself]. They certainly went straight to heaven to see Our Lady. Had I died of this illness I wonder if I should have gone straight there? Oh, what a lot of purgatory I should have had to suffer! And yet, if they were able to become so good and do so much for others, especially young girls, in such a short span of life and in spite of their poor health and the sacrifices they had to make in order to earn their daily bread, why should I be left behind? Am I not also a Daughter of Mary? Have I not the same duties and help as they had? Rather I have more. Good Rosa Cordone was a servant, poor thing, and greatly desired to become a nun. Now she is in heaven. If I am left here I too want to become a saint even if only by being a nun in my own home. Oh no, I do not want to lag behind. But what a lot of good these two did for others!

Mary enjoyed reading about the spread of the Pious Union of Mary Immaculate. There were already foundations in Chiavari and Cremona. "What a wonderful number of souls are drawing closer to Our Lady! And to think that all this started in Mornese, a hidden, insignificant village. Mornese honors Mary Most Holy and Mary Most Holy

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helps us all.”

Since life meant nothing to her except insofar as she could give glory to God and spiritual help to her neighbor, she read Canon Frassinetti's pamphlet, *Industrie Spirituale* again and again until she knew it by heart, and became stimulated to resemble an industrious bee in doing good, as soon as her health allowed her to leave the house.

She was not permitted to work nor could she. But what could stop her ever-alert animation? To her it seemed that she had already conceded enough in agreeing not to work in the fields, to spend much of her time reading and to pray without heeding the passage of time. She did all she could to help her mother in sewing, keeping the house tidy and preparing the meals. Then when, tired and faint, she would have to give up and let others finish, she saw her mother's eyes full of fear and anguish rest upon her. Then she would come out with, “Oh well, let me act the lady for a while longer, but just you wait and see how strong I shall be once spring comes!” In this way she cheered everyone and perhaps even herself with hope for the morrow.

Meanwhile Mary followed her own system of mortification. In order to make her eat substantial food the doctor ordered meat broth everyday. She complied for a while, then thinking she had done enough consulted Father Pestarino in the hope that this lover of austerity would allow her to return to the family fare. To her dismay the good priest told her sharply to abide by the doctor's prescriptions. She bowed her head and obeyed but just the same she thought up a way of self-mortification. By purchasing bones with little meat on them and boiling them over and over again she could still have her meat broth tranquilly. In reality she was swallowing a watery substance of more use to the spirit than the body.

### The renunciation of work in the fields

Winter passed and spring appeared but the roses failed to return to Mary's cheeks and in spite of every effort her arms refused to wield the hoe or flex themselves for work in the fields. The laborers had nothing more to fear from her exertions. If the will was always ready, physical strength did not correspond and Mary had to give up working in the fields so dear to her. She did this without sadness or complaint. If God permitted this it was clear He required something else from her and she must make herself available with a good will. This was her effort day by day.

It was God who had placed in her heart the desire to work for young girls and this desire was now stronger and more insistent than before her illness. We have already seen that children were always her great attraction. When but a child herself, if she learned something new in her catechism lessons, she felt the urge to explain it to others so that they might learn it too. At home she would teach her little brothers and sisters all she knew and especially the things of God. As a Daughter of Mary Immaculate she felt Our Lady was asking her for the souls of girls and she never refused apostolic work. Now this voice was continuous and the urge became a need, an overpowering need. Mary wondered! How could she fulfill this need?

**"If only I could be a dressmaker!"**

"If only I were quicker with my needle and could work as a dressmaker, what a number of girls I could gather! I would teach the little ones to knit stockings, sew and mend, and make their own dresses. In the meantime they would be kept away from danger, flippant conversations and vanity. I would teach them to love God and Our Lady. I really must become proficient."

Something singular occurred about this time which

strengthened Mary's desire to work for young girls, although she did not speak about it until long after.

### A vision?

One day Mary was walking in the hills of Borgalto when she seemed to see a cluster of buildings before her which had the appearance of a girls' school. She stopped and stared in wonder saying to herself, "What am I looking at? There has never been a building like this here! What is happening?" Then she heard what resembled a voice which said to her, "*I entrust them to you.*"

Habitually self-controlled, Mary walked quickly away and tried to put the affair out of her mind. But those girls were always there calling her, especially when her steps led her again in the direction of that hill. Nothing but throwing herself into her work with increasing ardor could distract her from the matter.

In order to free herself from this persistent thought she tried talking to Father Pestarino after confession. But when she started describing the mansion the holy priest interrupted her abruptly. He reproved her for allowing herself to indulge in daydreaming and forbade her either to think or speak of the matter again.

We were together at the oven when Mary said, "As you know, I went to Father Pestarino for confession this morning. Afterwards I felt I ought to tell him about a certain matter concerning some girls, but he sent me away saying that I was a visionary." It was obvious that Mary was suffering and needed to talk to somebody with openness, but she would not disobey. I heard a full account of the affair later from Sister Laurentoni, who heard it directly from Mary herself. But to me, on that occasion she said with a sigh, "Oh well, I shall think no more about it."

Not think about it! Certainly not deliberately and much less did she attach any importance to it. She did not

even say a word to Angela Maccagno in whom she had respectful confidence. But in spite of herself, when she least expected it a little group of girls would appear before her mind's eye as if to say, "When are you going to teach us how to sew?"

The good work Angela was doing in the school contributed to this as well. Mary had great admiration for her and wished to imitate and follow her. "This school closes far too early," she said sorrowfully to herself, "because vanity and the passions come to life at the age of ten or twelve years when girls need greater care and assiduous supervision."

### **An invitation for Petronilla**

One morning Mary met Petronilla at the church exit and drew her towards a little-used path known as "the orchards." Standing under a large nut tree with her friend she said, "Listen Petronilla, I really believe that God wants the two of us to work for the girls of Mornese. Look, you are not strong, and since my illness I can no longer work in the fields. We both have an ardent desire to save our own souls by doing good for young girls."

"Do you not think that if we learned to sew we could accomplish this? I have decided to learn dressmaking. Come with me and we will go to Valentino Campi. He is a good tailor and an excellent Christian. He goes to the sacraments and has only one five-year-old son. We shall be quite safe under his roof."

Petronilla who related the incident said, "I looked at her in wonder. It was a lovely idea. But at this point I said:

"But why the tailor? Don't you want to learn how to make women's clothes?"

"Yes, but Campi also sells material, so we shall learn to make men's wear which is more difficult. Meanwhile not only shall we gain experience in cutting out, but also gain

knowledge of the cost of materials which will enable us to fix our prices. Quite a number of the more easily pleased women also take him their orders but he cannot always oblige them as he has too much to do. We shall ask him to give us the easier work and anything he would have to refuse. We can cut out and stitch them at home during our free time or in the evenings. Besides, the dressmaker has scarcely enough work for herself and would perhaps be afraid of our taking her trade away.

As soon as we have learned enough to manage on our own we can leave the tailor, rent a room of our own and take in a few girls who would like to learn sewing. Our aim would be to keep them from harm, make them good, and teach them especially to know and love God. We shall pool what we earn in order to support ourselves and not be a burden to our families. Besides this we shall be able to spend the whole of our lives for the good of souls. What do you think about it? You see we really need to do this but, pay attention! From this moment we must fix the intention that *every stitch may be an act of the love of God.*”

In saying these last words she seemed to be inspired.

For a moment I feared she was daydreaming, she spoke with such confidence, but then I realized that she was really inspired by heaven.

Therefore I answered that I was happy with her plan but felt my sisters-in-law would put a spoke in the wheel when they heard of it and insist that I was needed to help at home. At this Mary said forcefully, “The in-laws! Consult your father alone about the matter. He is the head of the household and his word is law. I know he will give his consent. Now let us go back to the church a moment and pray that Jesus and the Blessed Virgin may enlighten and support us.”

### Paternal consent

I was very happy with Mary's suggestion, so after supper that evening I talked it over with my father. I trembled a little for fear he would refuse, but he agreed immediately,

that I should go with Mary to learn sewing.

When my sisters-in-law heard about it they complained a little but my father brought the matter to a close in almost the same words as Mary, "As long as I live I alone will command in my own house. You may go!" I was delighted and hastened to tell Mary the good news. She went at once to consult Father Pestarino without whose permission we could do nothing. He approved our plan and so did Mary's parents. Soon we presented ourselves to Campi and asked him to let us work in his shop for a few months. That meant from Easter until Christmas in the year 1861. We were to work for him during the hours when the shop was open and for ourselves in our free time.

### At the tailor's

**1861-1862:** Just after Easter, on April 1 or 2, the people of Mornese were amused to see something new. Mary Mazzarello and Petronilla Mazzarello, two Daughters of Mary Immaculate, had started work in Campi's shop! What were they doing? Were they tired of being peasant girls? Did they want to take up needlework? The people stared at them with an air of incredulity and even scepticism. But the two girls took no notice and, bending over their work paid not the slightest attention to either the people or their chatter. The novelty soon wore off, the wonder ceased and, after a few more days the gossip died down. Some became quite used to seeing the two busy with their needle, always silent yet very courteous.

The women folk appeared quite happy with the situation and the mothers, who greatly appreciated Mary, turned to her for advice when making purchases. She was admired for her taste. They were very pleased when Campi himself asked them to give some of their work to her. The two girls arranged their program in this manner. At about eleven o'clock they conscientiously made their way to their own homes where they helped with some of the chores and then had dinner. They then met and returned to work

together, making a quick visit to the Blessed Sacrament on the way.

In the evening they again went to church for prayer in common and the readings of Father Pestarino. After this they went home for supper.

### **Evening work in the Maccagno house**

The two friends met again at the Maccagno house where they worked together on the items entrusted to them. Why was it that they did not work in their own homes? Because, inexperienced as they were, they needed to consult one another, to advise one another, and then to try and try again. This would not have been easy in Mary's home with numerous little brothers and sisters around. Neither would it have been possible at Petronilla's with the three sisters-in-law. They had explained their plan to Angela, who had encouraged them with sisterly affection and invited them to her house where she and her mother were finding the evenings very long. They would all use the same room and have only one light. Mary and Petronilla would do their sewing while Angela prepared for her little pupils. The invitation was gratefully accepted. At a prearranged time, not too late, the two friends would leave because Mary had to be careful of the night air.

### **Martha and Mary**

Both in the tailor's shop and in the Maccagno house we nearly always kept silence, [Petronilla relates,] consequently as we traversed the streets we talked about our own affairs and our difficulties. We spoke of the spiritual thoughts we had had and the ejaculations we had used as well as our hopes of being able to set up our own workroom. People who saw us so intent and enthusiastic in our conversation sometimes asked us, "Have you always such a lot to talk about even after being together all day?" We just laughed and walked on.

What had they to say to each other? Perhaps they had never before had so much to say as at that time. Did not every fresh unfolding of their task bring about new expressions of joy, and was not increased knowledge equivalent to having in hand a sure means of doing more good? This was Mary's preoccupation. It also filled the mind and heart of Petronilla who was open and ready for all the "seed-sowing" of her companion.

### **Becoming aware of the Ursulines**

There was something more. Father Pestarino had said something in a conference which filled the Daughters of Mary Immaculate with joy, especially our two friends.

He informed them that it had come to light that their Pious Union resembled another union of virgins founded by Saint Angela Merici in Brescia and approved by the Pope in 1544. This Union was under the protection of Saint Ursula. Angela Maccagno had know nothing of this when she proposed her Rule. Even when Father Frassinetti printed it he had no knowledge of the real, unique Institute of Saint Angela Merici, founded expressly for unmarried women living in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Now that the Pious Union had begun to spread, it became evident that at the distance of three centuries, it derived from the spirit of Saint Angela Merici. Father Pestarino had also told them that since the Pious Union of Mary Immaculate had brought back the memory of Saint Angela Merici and her Ursulines in many places, the Holy Father had issued a decree (July 11, 1861) by which the work of this saint should be revived throughout the Church. An institution of this type could not, after three centuries, remain exactly the same for it must adapt to the needs of the times. Thus it was clear that God willed the Pious Union of Mornese to amalgamate with that of the Ursulines.

How sure the good Daughters now felt of God's blessings of their Union! It was impossible for Mary to be silent

about this important event, for she loved the Union with filial affection. So the journey home always seemed short with so much to discuss and such pleasant happenings to talk about.

### The New Ursulines

Soon, after coming to an agreement with Father Pestarino, Father Frassinetti followed up the motion of Pope Pius IX and modified the primitive Rule of Mornese, combining it with that of Saint Angela but adapted to the times. A single Rule was drawn up and printed that same year under the title of, *Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate under the protection of Saint Ursula and Saint Angela Merici*.

Was this new little volume, already announced by Father Pestarino if not by Father Frassinetti, a gift for the feast of Mary Immaculate? Or a Christmas gift? Christmas happened to be the date prescribed by the Rule for the annual election of the Superior. Because the parish functions connected with these feasts would hardly have left Father Frassinetti free, it would perhaps be more accurate to cite the days nearest to these feasts. Be that as it may the Rule was eagerly awaited by the Daughters at Mornese.

In the meantime, not to cause a disturbance by more novelties and at the same time comply with the Rule which required a prioress, Angela Maccagno, who already held moral and natural ascendancy, was elected to the office by acclamation.

For a few years the title "New Ursulines" was more official than actual; more a matter of everyone's good will than a reality because, although the Daughters embraced the new Rule, they continued to call themselves Daughters of Mary Immaculate and only later, Ursulines.

It is easy to imagine the eagerness with which Mary studied the new Rule in order to find how it differed from

the old one, setting herself to observe it in an exemplary manner. It was wonderful to see her intent on discovering whether her desire for apostolate was compatible with her new duties. Imagine her expressions of joy with Petronilla. "Have you read it? Heaven will really bless our work, our commitment to work for neglected and orphan girls. The new Rule states it in black and white. As New Ursulines we can and must spend ourselves for youth. I think we can now be even more certain than before that Our Lady is pleased with what we want to do. Oh may the day come quickly!"

What did the two have to say to one another? The people of Mornese would never have guessed the topics of those conversations to which heaven seemed to respond: "So be it," with actual events.

### **Common life begins among the Daughters of Mary Immaculate**

On December 16 of that same year, 1861, Petronilla's father died. Angela was very kind to her, for she knew that Petronilla's father meant everything on earth to her. So she went to see her and tried first to comfort her brothers as best she knew how. Then she took Petronilla to stay with her for several days in order to remove her from the sad, oppressive environment brought on by the loss of the head of the family.

Father Pestarino realized that Petronilla's life would have extra thorns now, because her sisters-in-law expected her to work the land with them or care for her nieces and nephews at home. Therefore, he used the facts that:

- 1) no Daughter of Mary Immaculate should live alone;
- 2) thirty-year-old Teresa Pampuro, though fairly well-to-do, was alone and in poor health, as a pretext for suggesting that Petronilla move in with her. Petronilla obeyed. For awhile Mary and Petronilla did not go to Angela Maccagno's in the evenings.

1862: To make up for the days lost because of Petronilla's bereavement the two friends stayed with Campi the tailor until after Christmas.

Petronilla tells us,

We felt rather uncomfortable at the shop although the owner was kind and serious, and taught us willingly. A number of men were always coming and going and Mary often said to me, "Let us learn as quickly as we can so that we can leave here."

They did leave after the more urgent work of Christmas and the New Year had been completed and finally set up their own workroom in Teresa Pampuro's house. Their early experiences were not always happy ones.

Here is an incident which occurred during this period of initiation.

The good sister-in-law of the tailor from whom they had learned the trade brought them a length of black material with a small flowered design for a dress.

That very evening, [related Petronilla,] Mary got busy. She cut the dress out and tacked it together. Oh what an unpleasant surprise! Both sleeves had been cut out for the same arm! There was nothing for it but to hurry to the tailor for more material. But there was nothing like it left.

What should we do?

There was nothing we could do but send for the customer and explain. Instead of getting upset the good lady told us not to worry. So Mary said it might be possible to cut a sleeve from the front panel of the skirt and the sleeve pieces could be inserted as a lining to be kept covered by an apron. Her smile was humble and gentle.

"Well yes, do what you can. I will keep an apron on when I wear it."

So everything was settled and despite the inevitable errors of inexperience, the mothers who came to them were pleased. This was especially because their prices were reasonable, and they could mend and remodel used articles of clothing. Sometimes things which even needed washing

were sent, yet the Daughters accepted them no less willingly.

### **At the dressmaker's**

After about two months of this rather unsteady work, [relates Petronilla,] Father Pestarino stopped me after mass. He said,

“Do you know that Antonietta Barco will soon be leaving Mornese? Her husband has rented some land in another area, and so . . .”

“So all the work will be left to us?”

“Exactly! But first you had better go and work with her for awhile. You will thus get some practice in cutting out women's clothing and get to know her customers. This will be both to your advantage and theirs.”

### **Mary in charge of the first workroom**

The dressmaker departed early in May and the Daughters returned to take refuge with Teresa Pampuro. She welcomed them as usual, in fact more than usual, because they came with a group of children who wanted to be pupils. They would bring young life to that silent house and place the three companions in their true apostolic setting.

Petronilla and Mary went home to meals as usual and the latter also to sleep.

But the devil now began to raise the wind of controversy.

Petronilla's sisters-in-law were displeased that she brought nothing lucrative into the house, while Mary's family would have preferred her to try helping them on the land again. Mr. Mazzarello closed the matter once and for all by ordering them to leave his daughter free to do what she thought best in the Lord, and one of Petronilla's brothers committed himself secretly to giving his sister five lire a month so that she could hand it over in the presence of her

sisters-in-law as profit from her work.

Now at last they were dressmakers and hard at work. The good-hearted women of the place went willingly to them for their needs and even if they doubted the skill of the neo-dressmakers, there was, after all no one else to go to for the moment. It was true they were not yet very skilled but they had taste and aptitude. Their courageous apprenticeship was made pleasant by their humility, and Mary's serenity. She was able to draw useful lessons from everything without becoming the least bit upset. She had not only memorized Saint Teresa's beautiful maxims, "Let nothing disturb you, nothing fright you, everything passes," etc., but she remembered them during the day, putting them into practice when the need arose.

The two dressmakers had one rare gift in their profession because it was not very agreeable to young girls. They were not eager to make showy dresses; quite otherwise. Mary did not even want to adapt to the caprice of fashion. She did not want to encourage vanity in girls and it took Father Pestarino to intervene with, "Make the dresses as they are required to be so long as they are not immodest. If you two do not satisfy them, rather than dress in outmoded clothes these girls will go to dressmakers in other places. Matters will then be much worse."

The mothers were on his side and gave a thousand reasons as did the girls themselves. Caught between two fires the friends closed the matter making dresses which were pretty and yet modest and only a little out of fashion. This was quite a concession and brought Mary real consolation.

"I was young," relates one of the Mornese women, "and set great store on looking smart in the eyes of my friends. So I wanted to dress in the latest fashion. Mary, backed up by my mother, tried to reason with me. They gave so many excellent reasons that I was induced to give in and was happy to wear a very simple new dress. Mary obtained a change of mind for me as she did for so many girls and their mothers."

### The first rented room

Soon Mary's desire was fulfilled. Other mothers, happy with the progress and still more the virtue of the apprentice dressmakers asked that their own daughters be taught needlework. Naturally, these requests were very welcomed.

The pupils increased and Teresa Pampuro's room, poorly lit as it was, could no longer accommodate so many people. It was then that Angela Maccagno, good and generous as ever, offered a room, free of charge, on the ground floor of her house with an entrance at the back of the building. This meant that the occupiers could come and go without disturbing anyone or even being noticed by the owners. The two accepted the offer gratefully and used the room for about two months—that is, until Father Pestarino showed that he would rather they moved. In consultation with the priest it was suggested that they move to the floor of Petronilla's house which had been bequeathed to her by her father on his death for as long as she lived. However, enlightened from on high, the good director ordered them to look for separate premises and manage for themselves, free from interference even, and most of all, from relatives. Obediently they rented from Birago a poor hovel which only had the prerogative of being near the church. No sooner had they taken up residence than they realized it would be impossible to stay, so they started to look for a better place immediately. Angela Maccagno's brother had a house which he let out in apartments to young ladies from Genoa who came to pass the summer months in Mornese. He offered them a spacious, airy room in this house at five lire a month. Mary accepted the offer gratefully because, being quite near the church, it offered the facility for frequent visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and of starting the girls on the path of devotion to the Holy Eucharist.

Besides this the room was ideal for a workroom. It was reached by a flight of stairs and a short passage. The two large windows looked out onto a small courtyard

which nobody used. It gave them the complete freedom needed wherever there is a group of girls to educate.

### **The “school-family” and how it is lived**

Once the premises were made available the children increased still more. It was considered a real school of work, asking a fee of one lire a month either in money or in kind.

By “school-family” is understood a place where one goes without any shadow of hesitancy. For example, if a woman needed an article of clothing or some linen she would put the material into the hands of her daughter and say, “Go to Mary of Valponasca, she will teach you to make it.” At times there were garments to be turned. This meant a lot of work and very little profit. Still, Mary never refused. She looked to see what had to be done, then if it was personal linen she passed it to Petronilla who was more adept in this line. If it was an article of apparel she kept it for herself. Then, with infinite kindness she would help and teach the girls and give them the pleasure of taking home the completed work.

It goes without saying that this was all a means, used with discretion and true zeal to attain the end they had always kept in view. Mary wanted children in order to lead them to God, yet she did not tire them with prayers, recommendations and prohibitions. In a well-lighted part of the room she had placed a statuette of Mary Immaculate. As the first to enter the room, she would go without a word to where the statue stood, make the sign of the cross, and say a devout Hail Mary. This became almost automatically a part of the program. Every girl would enter and greet the teachers with a pleasant “Good morning.” Then she would move over to the little statue of Our Lady where she would say her own little prayer. Each would then take her place in front of Mary who, a lover of silence herself, would allow the girls to chatter as they did at home. Only when someone

spoke in an undertone which could not be heard would she say kindly, "Speak a little louder, let us all enjoy the lovely things you are saying." However, neither she nor Petronilla encouraged talking, and because of this there was often absolute silence in the room, broken only by the regular clicking of needles. Occasionally Mary would say an ejaculation aloud or perhaps read, or have read a page from the life of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga, Rosina Pedemonte, Rosa Cordone or another of Frassinetti's pamphlets. She might then teach a popular hymn. Thus the days flew by with work-filled hours, good thoughts gladly heard and, most of all, good example from the two humble, diligent teachers.

### **The Daughters become nurses**

Around this time something new happened again.

A lady fell ill and wished the Daughters to care for her. Father Pestarino questioned them and, finding them ready to obey his orders encouraged them to give the nursing a trial. They did try, but since they could not send their pupils home and Mary was not allowed to do without sleep, she became the day nurse while Petronilla took over the nights. She cut her sleep to a few hours in order not to be absent from the workroom. After the first trial case came others of poor, sick women living alone with no one to prepare them for their last hour or assist them in the long hours of their agony. Father Pestarino sent the Daughters and a small hospital was erected at his insistence. The Daughters took turns as the need arose, but the good director soon became aware that the sick and the workroom could not function together. A definite choice of one or the other must be made. He thought it over and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit gave the order that the two obedient Daughters should no longer go to the sick but should dedicate themselves solely and completely to the workroom. They could however, if they so wished, care for one certain person who was old,

poor and blind. They continued this work of charity aided by their widowed companion. She prepared the necessary food daily and gave it to the Daughters for the poor old lady. She did not forget them either, and carried out her opportune acts of kindness hoping they would not be noticed even by those who received her charity.

#### NOTES

1857 -- 1862

1. Frassinetti, Giuseppe, *Opere Ascetiche* (Rome. Poliglotta Vaticana A. 12) IV, 491.

2. The same fresco mentioned previously

3. Cf. *Regola della Pia Unione Figlie dell'Immacolata* (Genoa, Tip. della gioventú, ed. 1867) p. 10.

**FATHER PESTARINO, A SALESIAN  
FIRST CONTACT BETWEEN DON BOSCO  
AND THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE  
(1862 – 1864)**

**Father Pestarino meets Don Bosco for the first time**

Mary and Petronilla were establishing themselves in the new workroom. Forgetful of self they asked God for nothing more than needlework to enable them to work for the good of souls. In the wonderful simplicity of His economy God provided for them by preparing a meeting between Father Pestarino and Don Bosco.

Father Joseph Campi, whose testimony is usually well worth attention in view of his tenacious memory and the fact that he was, as a youth, very close to Father Pestarino, has repeatedly stated:

Father Pestarino came to know Don Bosco on a train trip from Acqui to Alessandria when there had been a festival or special reunion of priests in Acqui. During the journey they spoke about their work for the salvation of souls.

On hearing Father Pestarino's account of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, Don Bosco manifested his own idea of an institute of women according to the advice given him by a number of bishops and distinguished priests.

Then Father Pestarino, almost as if in jest, made the cordial offer of the devout, zealous Daughters of Mornese, "even if they are at times somewhat ignorant and unrefined . . ."

**The assembly: Acqui or Lerma?**

There is no surviving record or document from the Bishop of Acqui's Curia confirming that any festival or

special assemblies for priests were held in the city during 1862, and so this incident, true in itself in reference to the meeting between Don Bosco and Father Pestarino and the latter's proposal, is doubtful regarding circumstances and place.

This is not surprising. A boy, as Father Campi was then, would not have given such importance to these particulars as to warrant recording them. However the fact remains that there was actually a meeting between Father Pestarino and Don Bosco in 1862, probably between August and October of that year. In his single volume, *Ascetical Works: Biographical Memoirs of Father Louis Sturla*,<sup>1</sup> Father Joseph Frassinetti says, "I was a companion of Sturla when I went to establish it (The Pious Union of the Sons of Mary Immaculate) in August, 1862. Father Sturla was at Mornese in those days. He had gathered about twenty priests from the surrounding districts at the nearby Sanctuary of Rocchetta, close to Lerma, and was endeavoring to establish among them a Congregation of Rural Missionaries for the evangelization of those parts."

If then the feast or reunion was not in Acqui itself, there was a reunion of priests not very far away.

There must also have been another assembly of priests at Lerma on September 3 of that same year.

The Congregation of Rural Missionaries had been flourishing in Genoa even before 1849. Father Pestarino had belonged to it up to that time and Father Sturla, as we have seen, initiated it in the diocese of Acqui on August 26, 1862. Article 64 of the Rules prescribes: "The general meetings shall be held, one in spring on the Wednesday after Easter and the second, at the end of the summer on the Wednesday after the last Sunday in August."<sup>2</sup>

In this year the last Sunday of August was the 31st and consequently the following Wednesday was September 3. Now, if it is certain that Father Pestarino attended as a missionary and friend of Fathers Frassinetti, Sturla and the parish priest of Lerma, Canon Olivieri, the gathering we call the foundation meeting of August 26, where he was elected

to the office of Second Consultor,<sup>3</sup> presumably he was not absent from the first regular meeting on September 3. It is but natural to suppose that his obedient priest who was so open and filial towards the supreme authority in the diocese, should make his way to Acqui soon after August 26 or September 3, in order to give an account to the bishop either of the association for men founded in Mornese or of what had occurred at Lerma. He would then have returned to Mornese via Alessandria.

During this period Don Bosco was much involved with selling the last tickets for a lottery for the benefit of the youngsters he was sheltering in Valdocco. In all probability his travels took him as far as Nizza Monferrato and the surrounding districts where he knew a number of people, among them his great benefactress Countess Corsi. On the other hand he might have gone on to Acqui where he always found a welcome both from the bishop and the seminary.

On September 6 he had to be in Montemagna for a triduum of sermons in the form of a spiritual retreat to prepare for the foundation of the Confraternity of the Sacred Heart of Mary, due to take place on September 8.<sup>4</sup>

There is nothing easier or more logical to imagine than that on one of these journeys or at any station on the line Don Bosco and Father Pestarino might have met. Father Lemoyne bases his statement on the testimony of Father Joseph Campi, when he says "... about 1862, having gone to Acqui for a festival or conference for the clergy, which was presided over by the Bishop, Monsignor Contratto, Don Bosco met Father Pestarino and, when everything was over, they traveled together from Acqui to Alessandria . . .etc."<sup>5</sup>

Once more turning the leaves of Volume VII of the *Memorie Biografiche*, we find on pages 278 and 288 that, coming from Mirabello Monferrato, Don Bosco left the train at Alessandria. It was late in the evening of October 15, 1862 and he took lodgings in the diocesan seminary of the city with his boys who were on holiday. He spent the whole of the 16th and 17th exchanging visits with important

personages, both clerical and lay. The following morning he and his pupils went to the cathedral and paid a visit to the shrine of the Madonna della Salve. In the afternoon he and the boys with their musical instruments, accompanied by many priests, friends and cooperators went to the station and boarded the train for Turin.

Now, might not the feast or reunion for priests referred to by Father Campi and of which there is no record in Acqui, be the one held in Alessandria?

### **A chance but providential meeting**

Be that as it may, after dealing with reasons and documentation we may draw the conclusion that Divine Providence placed two souls in direct contact with each other by using mere chance. They were souls destined to be instruments in a supreme work. The one, Don Bosco, was to be the great originator of a sublime monument. The other was the simple instrument, but it was necessary for them to become acquainted for the fusion of strength.

Father Pestarino had already heard Don Bosco spoken of with admiration. The interrelationship between the apostle of Valdocco and the Genoese clergy, and Father Pestarino, and the latest journeys of Don Bosco to Genoa,<sup>6</sup> especially those which were in the interests of Father Francesco Montebruno, the worthy priest who wanted a union between his "little Artisans" and those of Don Bosco, would have given Father Pestarino ample opportunity to see and appreciate Don Bosco. Father John Cagliero affirms this, saying that they met in Genoa, in the house of the Prior of Saint Sabina (Father Joseph Frassinetti).<sup>7</sup>

Given his active fervor, Father Pestarino could not but have wanted to know the providential "Father of little urchins" better. Might not his decision to go to Lanzo Torinese in July, 1857 for the spiritual retreat directed by the theologian, Father Cafasso,<sup>8</sup> have been the outcome of this desire? Perhaps he thought he would be able to see

this extraordinary person. He clearly would have heard about him and his works of charity from one who knew him so well.

Father Pestarino's name also must not have been unknown to Don Bosco, either for the reasons mentioned above or because Mornese, which had become an exceptional town for the Christian piety brought about by Father Pestarino's work, was attracting the admiration of the whole diocese and the neighboring countryside.

Therefore when they did meet it was as if they were old friends. When telling Don Bosco about his work Father Pestarino must have made special mention of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate, which had been founded at Mornese a short time before. He would have spoken of all the good he expected from it not excluding the hope of cultivating some holy vocations. Finally he would have mentioned the success experienced in caring for the souls of the mothers through the work of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

What great attention Don Bosco must have paid to the account of the good priest as he told of the precious fruits these Daughters, almost religious in the world, were producing through their incipient workroom and oratory!

All this must surely have taken him back to the dream he had had two months previously during which he told the Marchioness Barolo that he wanted to work for girls also. He also had in mind the various inspirations of God in this regard, so that almost without realizing it the last uncertainty regarding this new apostolate began to disappear.

Thus this good Father and Father Pestarino must have pondered over together the need to care for young girls and Don Bosco told his friend of the repeated invitations he had received from worthy priests and from bishops. All this must have made him certain that at the right time he would be able to provide for the needs of girls and offer them many advantages.

It must have been at this point that Father Pestarino

offered his Daughters of Mornese, and added jokingly, almost as if fearful of having said too much, "... even if they are at times somewhat ignorant and unrefined ..."

In reply came a quick, expressive smile, as though the new offer were linked with something Don Bosco already had vaguely in mind. Don Bosco concluded with a spontaneous invitation, "Come and see me, Father Pestarino; come and see me at Valdocco."

Oh that smile! Perhaps it was precisely the ignorance of the Daughters that, while seemingly an impediment to Father Pestarino, actually strengthened in Don Bosco the conviction that God would fill that great void with an abundance of divine gifts. He would bring out of it such a harvest of humility as to attract divine wisdom upon them.

Our good Father understood how valuable a heart empty of self was to the work of the Lord.

### **Father Pestarino and his complete dedication to Don Bosco**

Father Pestarino returned to Mornese with a heart full of joy and determined to go to Turin as soon as possible. Don Bosco's words seemed to turn all his energies in one direction: the desire to place himself under obedience. Thus he would secure both greater perfection for himself, and the seal of the divine will upon his work for souls, manifested no longer by the ardor of his own zeal alone, but by a Rule and the guidance of a Superior who directly represented God. He would go to Valdocco for more than a mere visit to see the apostle in his field of labor, but to consolidate something practical in his own life. He would give himself as a son to his father, as a conscious instrument into the hands of the craftsman, who by using him for a great work would improve and perfect him.

"Before leaving for Turin he went to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of the Rocchetta with Father Raymond Olivieri

who suggested a pilgrimage to petition our heavenly Mother to show him her will. He felt inspired to dedicate his life and property, which was substantial, to Don Bosco.”

So, having left for Turin he arrived at the Oratory and, “falling in love with the spirit of the Pious Salesian Society wanted to become a member immediately and began to practice the Rule in an exemplary fashion. He promised Don Bosco unlimited obedience and was ready to stay at the Oratory there and then. But, in view of the great good Father Pestarino was doing in the world, the Servant of God wished him to stay in his own town. He also recognized how necessary it was not to deprive the Daughters of Mary Immaculate in Mornese and elsewhere, of such a pious and wise director.”<sup>9</sup> In fact the young girls in the adjoining districts where there was no special center also regarded him as their guide.

After accepting Father Pestarino among his Sons, Don Bosco did not keep him at his side in order not to deprive the Daughters of Mary Immaculate. This goes to show that the impression he had received of the Pious Union was not just a passing one. In Don Bosco’s private sanctuary, his poor room, they must have understood that the hour was approaching for God’s will to be accomplished regarding young girls since the instruments were already beginning to take shape in those persons.

### **Don Bosco’s first gift to Mary and Petronilla**

It is a fact that Don Bosco gave Father Pestarino a medal of Mary Most Holy<sup>10</sup> for each of the two “good Daughters,” recommending that they be kept carefully because “they would keep them free from harm and help them in all the vicissitudes of life.” At Father Pestarino’s humble request Don Bosco, who was always very obliging, picked up a piece of paper and, after raising his eyes to heaven, wrote slowly, *“Pray certainly, but do as much good as you can, especially to the young, and do all you can to*

*prevent sin."*

This time Father Pestarino returned to Mornese more light-hearted and joyful than if he had discovered a gold mine. He came back a Salesian, a Son of Don Bosco and with the assurance of soon seeing his beloved Superior in his native town in order to decide with him on a work of public advantage to the people of Mornese. He had a vague hope in the depths of his heart that, in Don Bosco's hands, those Daughters of Mary Immaculate would one day be able to perform miracles.

So he returned, bringing them a gift from the Father they did not as yet know, but when he explained the meaning of the recommendations and the written note, he spoke of Don Bosco with such warmth that they too felt that they loved him.

They were now in perfect peace under his protecting prayer, so much so that if before they thought but little about themselves and their future, now they forgot themselves altogether and thought of nothing else but the glory of God and the good of the young.

### **Two motherless children at Mary Mazzarello's school**

**1863:** Increased trust in Divine Providence, if one might say so, and complete calm of spirit gave the two Daughters and particularly Mary, a joyful serenity that was more communicative than before and even more tender.

The little pupils, happy in the affection shown them, were loud in their praise of the workroom. A merchant, who had been left a widower and had two little daughters of six and eight years of age respectively, begged the two friends to keep the children the whole day as he was frequently away from home. Their grandmother had agreed to send them their dinner and she would take them in the evening. Two motherless children! How welcome they were in spite of the consequent necessity of modifying the timetable!

### Variations in the timetable of the two friends

The good Mornese housewives no longer saw the two friends coming along the street with the children at about ten-thirty each day, on their way home for dinner. Neither did they see them tripping along together deep in conversation once the children had left them. This was because the two children of the merchant could not and must not be left alone. Petronilla now left first, had her dinner and returned to the workroom immediately where Mary was waiting. They would all say the *Angelus* together and then Mary would leave, surrounded by affectionate children. Mothers would flock to doors and windows to watch the touching sight. Petronilla was left to give the two motherless children their dinner and then amuse them. Between times she tidied the room and went ahead with a piece of work.

Mary returned about noon with her following of children who had awaited her in various alcoves along the street. For awhile the girls chattered among themselves in the courtyard while Mary watched them from the ground floor window. From there she could hear their conversation and join in their recreation, but she always had a piece of work in her hand. When the girls came in they set to work again with a will to the sound of innocent chatter, fervent ejaculations and sacred songs.

Before evening they were given a good thought and then left, the two motherless ones for their grandmother's and the rest for their own homes, while the two friends made their way to the church for the meditation read by Father Pestarino. This was followed by the Rosary of the Angels and community prayer.

Then each went to her own home for supper. After this Petronilla went to spend the night with Teresa Pampuro who lamented that her poor health impeded her from helping in such useful work. Mary did what she could to help at home. The two younger children were Assunta, to whom she taught sewing and three-year-old Nicola who

would sit on a stool at her feet. They both enjoyed **her** catechism instruction, the stories she told them and **the** jokes that made them laugh. They would tell her about the pranks they had played during the day, the scoldings their mother had given them and, with Mary's help **they** planned ways of being better the following day.

The older children also shared in those cheerful evenings but sometimes they could not meet the scrutinizing eyes of their sister who seemed to look right through them. When they had been naughty, without even using her voice her eyes appeared to say so much.

How could this sister of theirs know so much about them? It must be she who alerted their parents to their mischievous ways. They did not love her less for this but they did so wish that she were not so zealous in their regard.

### **A hospice? An incipient boarding school?**

The two motherless children were loud in praise for their teachers and the poor father, realizing that they had found the happiness so necessary for growing up good, asked the two Daughters of Mary Immaculate to let them also stay with them during the night. Their mission had begun to change its aspect. What would Father Pestarino have to say about it?

Father Pestarino allowed them to take the children as boarders. His great heart could never hamper God's work which was progressing so admirably. This would have been still more difficult for him at this moment just after his return from Turin where he had been to celebrate the feast of Saint Francis de Sales. His heart was still full of the accounts he had heard from thousands of voices all in agreement when speaking of the miracles of charity worked by Don Bosco in accepting every boy sent him by Divine Providence. On hearing his Daughters' request he must have thought, "Don Bosco sends no one away no matter what sacrifice is involved. If these two, without

realizing it, are digging the foundations of the same apostolate as best they can, who am I to place obstacles in the way of their doing good?" Thus the first two boarders were accepted.

### **Extra rooms in the Maccagno house and rooms in the Bodrato house**

The workroom was not large enough to include sleeping accommodations so another room was needed. One opening on to the same corridor was rented and two beds for the children were placed there. Petronilla brought her bed from Pampuro's and became house mother to the little ones. However she still went home to dinner and supper and served the children with the food sent in by their grandmother.

The two friends were now at the head of a household and directing a small orphanage.

But accommodation was still insufficient and, after much seeking and asking, two rooms were offered by Antonio Bodrato in the house facing Maccagno's. It was only a matter of crossing the road. These rooms were large and each could take five beds. It was decided to rent them and so the beds were transferred. Thus the workroom remained at Maccagno's while Bodrato's rooms became the dormitory.

### **Dining together to save time**

As there was now sufficient room a bed was also provided for Rosina Mazzarello, Petronilla's fourteen-year-old niece. She had lost her father and wanted to stay with her aunt. She was however unable to stay every night for fear of causing trouble among her relatives.

This increase in the family meant an increase in the assistance required and Mary\*herself felt that going back

and forth at dinner time was becoming more and more a burden. It was a waste of time and besides this, one person was no longer sufficient to do everything.

One day, having put everything in order and making sure that each one had her own work, Mary said to Petronilla, "Listen, things cannot go on like this. Go and ask Father Pestarino's permission for us to buy what is necessary to make ourselves some soup here. We shall then save time and you will not have to go out in the evening, and I . . . we shall see . . . That is enough for now. Let us begin by asking this permission and we will decide other cases as they arise."

Petronilla was a little hesitant because, although Father Pestarino followed them with care equal to the confidence they had in him, he was always very busy and wanted at all costs to avoid the slightest pretext for gossip. So he kept to the Rule of the Ursulines and did not allow them to approach him individually outside the confessional. In fact he continued to treat them strictly and abruptly. However Petronilla, docile and obedient as always replied, "If you send me I will go," and she went.

At first Father Pestarino listened to her with an air of displeasure. Then, after a pause he relaxed and answered kindly, "Do as you wish."

Hearing this answer Mary said, "He did not refuse and, coming from him, 'Do as you wish,' means we really can do as we choose. Therefore this very day we shall start having our dinner here. We shall buy a basket of spaghetti so that we need not go out every day to get it. That will be another gain."

Utensils were lacking so Petronilla went to Teresa Pampuro who gave her what was needed. Dinner was soon ready and never had the two Daughters sat down to a meal so cheerfully.

From that day Petronilla rarely went home to dinner although her brothers and relatives continually insisted that she should go home with Rosina, who tried every day to take her. Mary still went home for supper and to

sleep because Father Pestarino wanted her to take care of herself. From time to time she also went home to dinner because her mother still found it hard to give up the beloved daughter upon whom she had set so much store. But she usually stayed at the workroom.

### **Frugal table and contented spirit**

The food was absolutely spartan. It consisted of soup and a few cooked potatoes brought from home, or given by Teresa Pampuro or others, and a little fruit. Petronilla would often prepare some milk or an egg for Mary because she noticed that she was tired and frail. But then she had to do the same for herself if she did not want Mary to divide the egg in half and say, "I do not want special treatment."

It must be noted that at this time they were in want of nothing. Many of the women paid with vegetables, flour, chickens and eggs as was the custom in villages. Therefore they did not have to spare themselves regarding necessities, even if they wanted to give all the profit in money and goods to Father Pestarino, according to the spirit of their Rule. This suggested having a common purse or store available to every Daughter on the advice of the Superior or Director.

"But," says Petonilla, "Mary wanted to mortify herself and if it were possible she would have tried to live on air."

It is clear that they had some poultry from the following anecdote that Petronilla relates with obvious relish. It gives a picture of family life in those blessed days. Petronilla speaks:

The younger of the merchant's children was in charge of the hens. One day I asked her, "Listen, where are the two chicks? I have not seen them today."

After looking down the corridor she answered, "They are on the stairs laughing!"

Then we all began to laugh. We were laughing, but the young cockerels were trying to crow!

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Around 5:00 p.m. the girls took a snack and those who wished to, continued sewing. If work was not pressing Mary would go to the church for a short visit to Jesus and one or other of the girls followed her, until slowly a habit was formed and they all went, even without her. How could it have been otherwise when they heard her repeat so often, "How lovely it would be to stay close to Jesus always! If only it were possible to go to church to sew, staying at the back, just to keep Him company. Let us at least go to visit Him as often as we can!"

### **Working with hand and mind**

Following Don Bosco's advice, "Do good, much good," the Daughters took heart and as sure of God's will as they were of the children's affection they began to say the rosary during the afternoons while sewing continued. Before dusk Mary usually read a page of *Maxims for Eternity* by Saint Alphonsus Marie del' Liguori or *The Art of Becoming Saints* by Frassinetti, which had been printed in Genoa in 1861. Without any thought of giving a religious lesson, in reality she commented and explained the reading in such a light and easy manner that it could be easily understood by everyone. At the same time she used such powerful arguments and showed such liveliness of manner that the truths of faith became so firmly imprinted on the minds of the girls that time would never obliterate them.

### **A carnival that did not destroy peace of soul**

Mardi Gras days were at hand and with them came the danger that the edifice raised so jealously by the Daughters would be endangered by carnival balls. Mary thought it over and soon an idea began to mature.

"Don Bosco writes that we must do good to young people to the best of our ability and do all we can to pre-

vent sin, even venial sin. Father Pestarino says that it is better to take care of the girls' souls than to make the Way of the Cross or say the rosary. Well then . . ." Off she went to consult Father Pestarino who not only approved her plan but actually supported it by inviting a Daughter of Mary Immaculate who had a good little concertina at home, to learn how to play it and then take it to the workroom in order to give the girls a little music.

The friend, Catherine Mazzaello, proved willing. She was very fond of the two Daughters and would have joined them in the workroom had she not been committed to caring for her old, needy father. As she could not join them she helped them in a thousand ways even providing fresh bread and wine free, at least once a week. Besides she used to give her services whenever she could.

No sooner said than done. A good angel, commissioned by Mary, informed her in good time whenever there was a public or private dance in the town. She would then invite the girls and the musician to the workroom which would soon be filled with young people. Then whether they were able or not they danced or, to be more correct, jumped and hopped as much as they liked sure of not offending the good God. They did rather the opposite because, sooner or later, when legs began to tire, Mary would relate an amusing story with a moral or start a hymn for the girls to learn. After this they would do honor to the so-called *bugie* (a type of light doughnut) and between times Petronilla produced biscuits and sweetmeats she had prepared. All were as happy as the day is long. Finally, almost too tired to stand as they said their prayers, they listened to a good thought from Mary and finally made their way home, desiring nothing more than their beds and content in the knowledge that they had kept themselves pure in mind and heart. Thus on the morrow, those who had made their first Holy Communion would be able to receive Jesus and all could be tranquil as they sounded the depths of their consciences with Mary in a deep, scrutinizing examination which seemed made for the purpose.

She herself made this examination and wanted the **girls** to form the habit of making it and never going to **rest** without asking God's pardon for their own shortcomings.

Dances were repeated at the workroom every **Sunday** during the Mardi Gras period and if on the first occasion **the** men were surprised by the almost total absence of girls **at** the public dances and could not find a reason, their eyes were soon opened. The mothers who were tranquil and often during these days went to the Daughters were the ones to uncover the mystery of the sounds they had heard coming through the workroom windows and resounding through the nearby streets, to the annoyance of those setting up a public ball and those who wished to dance in the square.

The young men agreed among themselves as to their plan of action. They waited for the girls as they came out of the workroom and tried to make them promise, at first gently and then with threats, not to go to the dances of "Mary of Valponasca." The girls remained strong however and reported to Mary what had happened. She encouraged them and said they should not worry about the threats which would come to nothing, but take no notice and walk on as if they did not hear. As a reward for their resistance she promised them picnics. These were not idle words. Soon with the help of Father Pestarino, the parish pastor or the parents, the picnics began to take place either on the workroom premises or at the Valponasca where there was so much more freedom and more high spirits. The young men were furious and continued to threaten the girls, letting it be known that if it were not for Father Pestarino they would soon settle the matter of the feasts with the Daughters and especially with Mary.

### **Wise foresight of Mary Mazzarello**

Mary calmly recommended the girls never to be caught alone. She herself divided them into groups so those living

in the same street could keep together. Each group was led by an older and more sensible girl. Sometimes she would go part of the way herself and then return alone. But no one ever dared to speak to her.

The girls kept steady. One of the more fiery however, gave a sharp retort, in spite of Mary's advice not to speak at all, either kindly or with insults. She received a blow for her pains which shattered her comb. This served only to strengthen the others and it brought not only Father Pestarino but also the fathers and brothers of the girls into the fray. Naturally they took the part of the girls and so the public dances were definitively deserted.

Mary was very upset by the occurrence but, stronger and more determined than others she made the following resolution, "With God's help we shall do still better next year."

### **An unsuccessful wager**

On one of the last Sundays an episode took place which shows how the two friends were respected and how they had managed to inculcate respect into the girls. They were dancing to their hearts' content while the musician, seated on a desk to be better heard, played her best. Suddenly the door leading onto the corridor burst open and two youths danced into the room. The music stopped abruptly, the girls stood against the wall as still as statues and the Daughters looked serious but did not speak.

The two *heroes* gave a few hops then, confused and shamed by that too eloquent silence, backed out without a word.

They had wagered with others of their kind that they would go and dance at Mary's workroom and they did it. But it did not appear that the five lire they earned through their audacity tempted others to do the same, because no one else appeared and the carnival finished happily for soul and body.

### **Lenten catechesis in the workroom**

With Lent there came preparation for Easter and for First Communion for the younger children. “Mary did not actually teach catechism,” says Petronilla, “but without using the name it could be said that throughout Lent she thought of nothing else and scarcely allowed others to think of anything else either. She helped the children remember what the priest had said, she repeated it and reminded the more inattentive, and best of all she applied it to the needs of each one.” Mary knew the girls well and also their individual inclinations and weaknesses, and she tried to make them become serious, active and sincere.

### **Fundamentals of the educational method of Mary Mazzarello**

The fundamentals of Mary’s educative work were: “avoidance of vanity which impedes all good; sincerity at all costs because the devil is the father of lies; avoidance of idleness because idleness blights the soul.”

She neglected no one but as was only natural, her greatest care was for those whose family situation was doubtful or who had lost their mother. For these she gave herself no rest, and as if she had received a mandate from God to substitute the deceased, she prepared them for the sacraments and for life. She did not ask them to make many sacrifices, preferring to win them by affection, but when she did ask she expected to be obeyed.

One of her pupils relates:

I had lost my mother and enjoyed exquisite care from Mary. But one day I disobeyed her. There was a public ball taking place so, leaving my little sister alone in the house I went to see the dancing, just to see it. Mary heard of this. She called me and questioned me, but I was stubborn and would not admit that I had done wrong. So she said very seriously, “This means that you are not yet ready to make

your First Holy Communion and therefore you will not make it for Easter." I wept and promised but she knew I needed a lesson and kept firm saying, "You weep now but later on you will be content and thank me for causing your tears." The Easter feasts drew near and on the Wednesday of Holy Week all the others made their First Communion but I did not. Nevertheless after a few days she prepared me to receive Jesus and went to the altar with me treating me like a mother. It is a fact that I have to be very grateful to her, for the ball temptation either never troubled me again or I was strong enough to resist it. I am now old in years but I never again went to a dance.

### **The month of May in Mornese**

Easter had scarcely passed when the month of May arrived. By effort and patience Father Pestarino had succeeded in seeing that the month was celebrated with solemnity.

Father Joseph Campi relates:

By degrees Father Pestarino introduced the practice of celebrating the month of May with solemnity. Father Ghio, the parish pastor was against it from the start because the church was very poor and could not support the extra expense of a greater use of wax candles. Father Pestarino calmed him with the assurance that gifts would be forthcoming for whatever was needed. In fact one woman began by offering candles and many others followed her example. So much so that for the closing celebration the whole church was lit up, and afterwards there were enough candles left for the celebration of a year's masses.

In the early days the function was limited to a clear reading from Muzzarelli's book and the blessing with the "relic" of Our Lady.<sup>11</sup> Later, when he realized that everyone was attending Father Pestarino arranged for two functions. In the morning there was the reading and the blessing with the relic, and in the evening a reading, a blessing with the sacred Pyx and a hymn.

### The "Little Garden of Mary"

What wouldn't Mary do to enable her girls to honor the Blessed Virgin in the month dedicated to her! How fervently during the day did she speak to them of Mary Most Holy. How enthusiastic she was in animating them to offer their hearts to the Blessed Virgin, free from all sin and full of the desire to receive Jesus with love. She also introduced them to the practice of the "Little Garden of Mary." On a visit to Mornese Canon Frassinetti had taught and explained it to them so that they could start it with the girls. When Petronilla asked him, "And are we not allowed to practice it?" he answered jokingly. "Ah well, older plants produce tastier fruit!"

Therefore the Daughters shared in the "Little Garden of Mary" with the girls and Mary made good strategic use of it in training the souls of her girls, to religious fervor.<sup>12</sup>

This practice was not dropped at the end of May. It had proved excellent for keeping an alert vigilance over heart and inclinations and was, therefore, continued in use as a helpful method of renewal.

### The "Six Sundays of Saint Aloysius"

The month of May brought about another important event for Mary and Petronilla. It was an event that without their knowledge drew them much closer to Don Bosco because it brought about another point of resemblance between his work and theirs: the festive Oratory. It goes without saying that the name came much later when because of its regular functioning its identity became obvious. It was initiated at this point to fill a need brought about by the "Six Sundays of Saint Aloysius."

Some time previously Father Pestarino had inaugurated the practice of the *Six Sundays of Saint Aloysius*. Father Joseph Pestarino, nephew of Father Dominic, writes with reference to this, "The celebration of the feast of Saint

Aloysius was definitely meant for boys rather than girls. I am inclined to think that it was really instituted for boys only and that the young girls in holy envy of their male counterparts insisted on joining them. Therefore it is only natural that during the early years the Sundays of Saint Aloysius were practiced by boys alone. I was in the seminary at that time and so knew nothing, but Father Campi who was on the spot and had a very retentive memory would have remembered this event more and better than other people."

Father Joseph Campi says, "On the feast day Father Pestarino himself or a visiting priest invited by him, celebrated mass at the altar of Saint Aloysius, gave Holy Communion to the boys and then presided over the procession in honor of the saint. Sometimes he would go to say mass at a chapel in the country. The boys would receive Holy Communion and after mass eat a picnic breakfast in the open. However this was always strictly for boys only. The Six Sundays and the feast of Saint Aloysius were reserved for them."<sup>13</sup>

Hence women were excluded from the function. But since the church was public no one prevented them from taking part from the back benches or from offering the saint the homage of their piety. Petronilla says:

We ourselves began the Six Sundays of Saint Aloysius with the girls after we had read the *Life of Saint Aloysius* and learned that a plenary indulgence could be gained by performing this practice. We already practiced them as Daughters of Mary Immaculate, but at an early hour in the morning, before the people arrived in church. So much so that one of the Daughters, a certain Bodrato, whose family would have objected to her going out so early and who was unlikely to awake on her own, decided to tie a cord to her wrist and leave it dangling from the window. One of us, usually Mary, would pull it in time for her to get up and come to church.

It was only natural that such a practice should be introduced to the pupils of the workroom. This would not have entered their minds had they not already been in the habit of practicing it themselves.

In itself this was already a good thing but it became wonderful because of the circumstances which accompanied it. The question was, when could they go to church to fulfill the practice? Father Pestarino, now completely dedicated to Don Bosco, had brought from Turin the book of piety, *The Companion of Youth*, (*Il giovane provveduto*). This was printed in 1847 and contained beautiful considerations and appropriate prayers concerning this practice. Mary wanted to read it to the girls and was happy to carry out a suggestion written by Don Bosco himself. So the matter was decided.

After high mass which each girl attended with her mother, those living in the town went home for dinner. Those from the outlying farms who would not have been able to get back in time, brought a packed lunch and afternoon snack. After mass these, instead of going home with their parents, went with Mary and Petronilla to the workroom. Here, after eating their dinner they played in the little courtyard. Around 2:00 p.m. they all went to church together where they met the girls returning from home. After a fervent act of adoration and a spiritual Communion they knelt before the altar of Saint Aloysius, where either Mary or Petronilla read the prayers of the Six Sundays.

### **The trips to Saint Sylvester's**

Coming out of church they all made their way to the chapel of Saint Sylvester, a good fifteen minutes distance. They walked in groups but not too far apart. Catherine Mazzarello, who was well liked by the girls, often went with Mary and Petronilla.

Once arrived they would sit in the little square in front

of the chapel while Mary related a suitable anecdote which gave them food for thought as they relaxed. Then there were games such as "Hunt the thimble," chasing games and *botta*. When tired of playing they would sing hymns or perhaps learn a new one until the distant sound of the bell ringing for catechism warned it was time to return. How the time had flown! The Daughters always played with them and Mary usually had some new idea and was just as enthusiastic as she was over her work and her prayer.

What fun we had, [related Rosina Mazzarello,] and how cheerful we were! We went happily to church for catechism, Vespers and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. We were always under the vigilant eyes of the Daughters. During the winter we went to the workroom for awhile. Once we had been given the weekly practice we wended our way home. Mary walked part of the way with us and then went to her own home.

During the good season we would go back to Saint Sylvester's and continue our games. Before dusk we would be given the practice and then return because Mary wanted us all to be home before the Angelus bell sounded.

Those of us who lived in the town went with Mary and Petronilla. She went to her own home and Petronilla to supper with the boarders and then to bed.

Another pupil from the workroom states, "We thought of nothing else but Sunday, the whole week through and became better behaved and more pious. Mary knew so many beautiful things to tell us about!"

### What the stars said to Mary Mazzarello

Once, although it was not yet dark we could see two or three stars and we chattered as we watched them. Mary suddenly stopped talking and stretched out her hand. Her eyes were shining as she said, "Oh how beautiful they are! How high! But one day we shall be higher than they are and shining more brilliantly than they, around Our Lady!"

These are things we could never forget.

(*Carlotta Pestarino*).

### First consecration of the pupils to Our Lady

The month of May ended on Sunday with a general Communion. In the afternoon after the prayers of the Six Sundays, Mary and Petronilla gathered the girls round the altar of Our Lady and got everyone to make a simple consecration to the Blessed Virgin together, using the words, *I give my heart to you, Mother of Jesus, Mother of love*. There were also present several other Daughters of Mary Immaculate or New Ursulines, with their prioress, Angelina Maccagno.

June followed May without special celebrations except the daily readings from Frassinetti's, *For a Girl Who Wants to Belong All to Jesus*, (*Per una figlia che vuol essere tutta di Gesù*) and a noticeable increase of fervor as the feast of Saint Aloysius drew near.

This was a feast which if it could not command special splendor in church because it was reserved for boys, called for a great deal of interior preparation and brought much joy to that nascent oratory.

The Six Sundays had brought about its initiation and now when it was well established and had begun to bear fruit, would it have to die? Certainly not.

Mary continued treating the pupils so well that they did not want to stay away from her even for a single day. She had won their affection and had made even the most restive obedient.

Besides, in Mornese they spoke very much and very well about those festive recreations and even if the girls of the workroom could not number more than seven or eight because of the size of the room, on Sunday there were many more and they were everywhere, on the stairs, in the workroom itself and in the little courtyard.

Anyway, the house was for holiday makers who only came at harvest time when it was not necessary to stay inside. During the other months it was uninhabited so there was no one to complain of the noise.

During the recreations as in the workroom Mary had

complete control of herself. She supported all noise, all disturbance; she tolerated everything and was always extremely patient so long as the girls committed no sin and their behavior improved. Without knowing it she was putting into practice, the words of Don Bosco, "Make yourselves loved rather than feared." If it was necessary to give a correction however, she did not spare herself. If she discovered a bad fruit and could not cure it, she got rid of it before it infected others. She also succeeded because she kept on good terms with the families, seeking at the same time the good of the mothers.

### **Mary and the mothers of the pupils**

The mothers approached her willingly either to bring work or to talk about their children. Mary would say to those who were a little cold in matters of religion and to those with whom she had a certain amount of confidence, "I cannot afford time to talk to you straightaway. Would you like to pay a little visit to the Master? In five minutes I shall be at your service."

For the first time or so, faces would cloud over, astonished: "The master? . . . Oh of course, did you not know that we are working on our own property? . . ."

"And yet . . ." and she smiled kindly as she continued, "and yet in church there is your Master and mine, the Master of the house, the vineyard and eternity."

There would be a laugh all around, a visit to Jesus and a talk with Mary who, affably and humbly satisfied them while making them aware of the moral needs of their children. She would give praise where praise was due and speak of shortcomings with a charity that offended no one. She would suggest ways of correcting them, recommend that the children be sent to the sacraments, the Sunday recreations, and all this was done with such an air of kindness and disinterest that at certain moments even the mothers themselves would have stayed with her to learn how to become better.

### **The first thorns in the life of the apostolate**

The Daughters of Mary Immaculate were, however, far from happy. They complained not of the noise which did not reach them, but of the new type of apostolate carried on by the two Daughters. They were unable to say anything at first because both Mary and Petronilla were faithful to the conferences and the services and shared all that happened with Angela Maccagno. But when boarders arrived Father Pestarino said that they were not to be left for a moment. Then to add to this, the Sunday mission began to operate so he dispensed them from all direct dependence except on himself. The younger Daughters of Mary Immaculate looked with pleasure on the two friends and as we have seen, Catherine Mazzarello gave them every possible help. But the older members were not pleased. They regarded this new work as an abuse brought about by Mary's self-assertive spirit as a ruse to attract notice and to push herself forward. Not daring to approach her directly they waylaid the gentle Petronilla and reproved her for joining Mary since they both had a home and family. They said that such a thing was not included in the Rule and was not according to their first undertaking, and that Mary was on the wrong path, etc.

Petronilla reasoned as well as she could, endeavoring to place Mary in the best light. She mentioned that the Rule dispensed all ties when there were other duties to be carried out. But when she could say no more and saw that bad feeling was on the increase she opened her heart to Father Pestarino. He simply replied, "Take no notice. You are not breaking your Rule in any way. Therefore do as much good as you can and let them talk."

**The Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate  
finds hospitality in the "Catholic Readings"  
("Letture cattoliche")**

Father Pestarino was supported in this calm unconcern with gossip not only by the assurance of the good accomplished by the two Daughters which was obvious to all who did not close their eyes because they did not want to see, but also by receiving in those days the July issue of the *Catholic Readings* (*Letture cattoliche*), "*The Life and Institute of Saint Angela Merici*," ("*Vite ed Istituto di S. Angela Merici*") by J. Frassinetti, Prior of Saint Sabina's in Genoa. Besides giving him faith in the work of the two, with all the trouble in Mornese it reminded him of the great opposition Don Bosco always met on his path. All this made him say to Mary and Petronilla, "Good works must meet with opposition from the very people who should give support. God will provide."

It also gave him food for thought in that, if Don Bosco offered a place in his *Letture cattoliche* to the Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate it was a sign that he was really beginning to work for young girls as he had given Father Pestarino to understand he would.

**Don Bosco to Miss Provera**

How good Father Pestarino would have rejoiced had he known the answer Don Bosco had given at that very time to Miss Caroline Provera who wished to enter a religious congregation! "If you will wait a little longer Don Bosco will soon have Salesian Sisters just as he now has clerics and priests."<sup>14</sup>

### Moral authority of Mary Mazzarello

Father Pestarino had told the two good Daughters to "go ahead" and they went ahead like two sisters. Mary was always the moving spirit but she gave herself no superior airs. Although unaware of it she was the intelligence and the eyes while the other was the arm and the hand. This came about automatically as if by natural consequence, and everything proceeded harmoniously.

Mary told Petronilla all her plans and did not move an inch without her advice. Petronilla was rather slow in determination and in execution, but pious and upright. She found all she wished for in Mary regarding speed, energy and goodness. The girls made no difference between them when seeking help in their work.

However, [says Carlotta Pestarino,] for a permission we went to Mary. She did not hesitate but gave us a clear, convincing answer. We also went to her when we were disturbed in conscience or were in some danger. She seemed to be able to read our thoughts and had no need of many words. We knew that even if we went to Petronilla she would have said immediately, "Why don't you ask Mary?"

The words of Saint Paul were verified in her, "Those God has called He has also predestined" (Cf. Rom 8,29-30). Hence, called one day to be head of a great family, she was endowed with the gift of government, a wise government based on the happiness of others and forgetfulness of self. The motive and extent of every sacrifice was her own moral perfection and that of others.

Christmas arrived in the midst of all these novelties worthy of bearing the name "apostolic works" and, since Angela Maccagno's triennial period of office was drawing to an end new elections took place.

**Mary Mazzarello an unconscious rival  
of Angela Maccagno**

It could be foreseen that the elections would not run as smoothly this year as in former years. Angela Maccagno's name was no longer the only one proposed. Mary had given proof, not only of virtue and piety, but also of energy, delicate tact and formative action, and in a wide sphere of work carried out with happy results. The voting brought out a recognition of this which revealed that there was a division among the Daughters. One group wanted Angela and the other, Mary.

The older among them manifested displeasure and a hostile distaste in recognizing high authority in such a young person whose virtue and zeal exercised outside the usual range of customary habits, seemed in their eyes to be moved more by the desire to excel rather than a call from God. Then, was it not ingratitude to place oneself on a level with Angela who, without seeking notice was very good and had done so much even for Mary? Mary herself soon settled the question by showing herself displeased that her name had been suggested. All she wanted was to be left alone in her workroom. So Father Pestarino prudently and in the interests of peace arranged that the office of prioress should remain with Angela Maccagno.

This did not satisfy the younger members who saw their votes discredited by the decision and with the best intentions of assuring Mary of their affection and cooperation in her work, they vexed and wearied her. Their observations also grieved her, because they seemed to criticize what Father Pestarino had decreed. One day one of them asked her,

“What's your opinion of these elections?”

“I think they were right and sensible. They could not have given a better result.”

“But I and others wanted you to win.”

“You did not see clearly.”

“That is what you say.”

“But things had to be as they are and let us thank God and seek rather to correspond to His goodness.”

Thus the humble prudence of Mary managed to disarm spirits and silence dissensions. The year ended peacefully. A little cold perhaps, but it might have seemed the fore-runner of a clearer dawn.

### **A step closer to community life**

However, the year 1864 dawned overcast.

The two Daughters continued their needlework school which now included Louise Maccagno, daughter of their landlord and niece of the prioress of the New Ursulines.

Before the Mardi Gras days came along Mary made a courageous decision. She was now somewhat stronger physically and thought herself able to begin early morning rising again and she wanted to stay with the children and Petronilla at night. Her desire was to offer God the total sacrifice of her family to which she was very attached. She wished to live in the true poverty of those who depended on their work for a livelihood and dedicate herself entirely and forever to the good of young people. All else meant nothing to her for she felt urged still more powerfully to a complete dedication of herself for the kingdom of God in young souls and nothing appeared too difficult for the attainment of this end. But her father, usually so ready to back her enterprises, would not hear of it and, torn between the wish not to sadden him and her interior impulse, as a dutiful child, she gave in for the moment on the understanding that she could stay with her adopted family when there was a need, for example in carnival time.

In this way, without it being noticed she began to detach herself from her own family, and taking advantage of the permission granted she made good use of it. But how difficult this proved at times!

Having gone home on some message or other, [relates Petronilla,] and to let her people know she intended staying

with us for the night, she returned very late and upset. She told me, "I have been reasoning all this time with my father because he did not want to let me return. It hurts me to have to inflict suffering on that holy man but one cannot ignore God's voice. I do hope he will one day give me full permission." She sighed with grief but was not discouraged!

**Carnival at the workroom once again,  
a means of attraction towards goodness**

The girls began talking about the approaching period of carnival. They saw all the preparations that were being made in the town for both public and private balls and when the young men of the place met the two Daughters they stared at them questioningly as if to scrutinize their intentions. Mary realized that she must go back to the beginning and concede a good deal if she did not want to lose everything. This was all the more urgent since Father Pestarino was making great efforts to get the boys together. "I am not very happy about that concertina," she said to Petronilla one day, "I think that if we had a barrel organ we should be less rowdy and more orderly and it would be easier for us to do other things . . . because this dancing business must come to a halt!"

So they hired a barrel organ to the great delight of the girls and also to the satisfaction of Catherine Mazzarello who could be replaced in playing it by anyone, so she could help with the cooking or in maintaining order.

Catherine was beginning to show that she had the makings of an educator and while following Mary's footsteps she showed her adaptability in ways of doing good. So carnival gatherings began and they were no less cheerful than the year before nor, for that matter, less well attended. But they were certainly more orderly and much calmer. One day however, the girls, made bolder by the goodness of the two, and especially Mary, said, "Why do you not dance around a bit? It was understandable last year. Everything was so new and we did not dare to ask you but it

would be so nice if you danced with us. It would double our happiness!"

Should they give in? Father Pestarino must be consulted. First Petronilla asked him and was answered in the affirmative. The director, after reflecting a moment had said, "Yes, you may dance." Then overcoming her self-love and maybe to do more good, Mary took her courage in both hands and followed her friend. But without even a moment's reflection, Father Pestarino said to her, "No, you may not dance."

The barrel organ was a great success because its less powerful tone stimulated less exciting movements. The girls also made efforts to be more courteous to one another even at recreation because they saw Mary striving daily to bring this about. They heard her repeat often, "True devotion breeds good manners." All of them had grown very fond of her and listened to her willingly. She had scarcely to make a sign that she wanted to speak when they all stopped without complaint. It goes without saying that Mary made good use of these dispositions! She tried especially to draw to her those who were overly attached to dancing. She had a special word for them, a very special message. Then, if she liked making *bugie* best of all, how could they not prefer this too. Thus she easily interrupted a dance by going to the kitchen where there were plenty of hearty laughs, fortunate mistakes and tastings, both at the right and the wrong time. So the hours passed cheerfully and beautifully.

In short Mary became ever more successful in obtaining maximum cheerfulness with minimum dancing and what was still more valuable was that she was successful in bringing about the understanding that carnival can also be enjoyable without tiring oneself to excess by dancing, and that God approves of and blesses honest recreation during which His holy Name is repeated with love.

### **Bad feeling renewed**

But if the girls' Guardian Angels applauded their joyful sacrifices, there were those in the town who murmured against these gatherings which enticed people from amusements which provided gain. Petronilla relates:

"Some young ruffians, waited behind the cemetery for us one day and, hiding their faces tried to frighten us with threatening gestures. However we saw through their little game and turned off into another street." So ill humor, which seemed to have died down, began to rear its head again.

Quite a number of the New Ursulines upbraided the two companions. "See what gallantry you have performed? You have put the whole town against you. Just see how many people you have upset. It is all your fault, Mary. You who want to do so many things, what have you achieved? See what happens when you are not faithful to your undertakings and want to do everything yourself. Our Rule says we must not have noisy gatherings. Why will you not understand?"

Mary kept quiet and let them talk. She did nothing more than try to calm them with her great humility and her efforts to draw the souls of the girls ever closer to God.

### **Teresa Pampuro joins the two friends**

Teresa Pampuro was a soul without guile, a real co-operator who witnessed to their work and the abnegation of Mary. She not only kept herself aloof from the criticism and opposition of her companions but, although rather introvert by nature and loving a quiet life because of her delicate health, she felt the urge to give more and better help than before. So she began to spend the whole day at the workroom but went home at night because there were certain matters which she could not conclude immediately. In the meantime she looked after the little household

affairs. This left Mary and Petronilla more time for work.

Rosina Mazzarello also, who up to that time had been part boarder and part day pupil, now stayed permanently with the Daughters even for meals. She was determined to follow them in their work of apostolate and sacrifice.

### **Painful consequences**

Naturally this increase in the family only added fuel to the fire of dissension and Mary found it hard to convince her companions that the two of them did nothing without the advice of Father Pestarino. It was difficult to demonstrate her good intentions, her honesty and her trust in Angela Maccagno. She was hard put to it to defend Father Pestarino from the accusation of partiality while admitting that he took special interest in them because of their greater need, the ignorance and lack of experience, etc. But every drop of oil was lost in the ground without diminishing the creaking of the wheels.

In spite of the stance he had taken of ignoring gossip, Father Pestarino at this point thought it necessary to intervene. He saw that, even if these annoying murmurings were fortunately restricted to the New Ursulines and did not cast any discredit on piety, they caused hearts to be straitened, spirits embittered, and they prevented delight in the sweetness of divine and fraternal charity. Therefore the girls were told that Mary required a little rest, which was true, and Father Pestarino ordered her to the Valponasca, not to come to town except for mass and the festive gatherings with the girls. Petronilla and Teresa Pampuro would supply for her temporarily. It was a quiet period because Easter was over. There were no special feasts and consequently no increase in needlework at the workroom.

### Mary obediently returns to the Valponasca

Mary, in the habit of always obeying, was happy to have a painful sacrifice to offer the Lord. She well knew the real reason for the "country holiday" but did not utter a word. Taking as much work as she could she said to Petronilla, "Father Pestarino has ordered me to go to the Valponasca for awhile." So she went back to live where every corner of the house was familiar and every foot of earth reminded her of one of her childhood pranks. It was here that as a young girl she had first been attracted to the Lord and had poured out her heart to God in joyful serenity, and everything reminded her of her holy rivalry with Felicina and Domenica as to who would become more holy than the others.

At the Valponasca she found her two brothers, eighteen-year-old Dominic and fourteen-year-old Joseph, both engaged in work in the fields. Her father often stayed overnight. But during the day she was completely alone and doubtless she went with her sewing to the room she loved best with the window opening towards the church which was now so far away. The distance seemed to be doubled since she could now only go in the mornings, and the day was very long.

The mind and heart of Mary continually suffered a painful longing for the church and the workroom. She felt like an exile far from her native land. She would think to herself, "I wonder if the girls are behaving well? Did they pray well today? Will N . . . be in a good mood today? I wonder if Petronilla managed to finish that dress? It is now time for them to go home. I hope they do not loiter around."

It is true that Petronilla did not leave her without news. Every day on the pretext of collecting finished work and sending fresh work, or of clarifying one point or another, one or two of the best and most sensible girls would go to the Valponasca on errands and with greetings. It is also true that Petronilla, astute in her goodness and devotion to Mary, found a way of getting her to come to the workroom from time to time.

In order to stop all idle gossip, [related Petronilla,] Mary never came near me in church. For the whole of this period at the Valponsaca, she knelt in the back bench deeply recollected as if she knew no one there. From time to time when I had some difficulty or other I would send one of the most trustworthy girls to kneel beside her with instructions to ask her to call at the workroom for a moment as I really needed her. Mary came but was on tenderhooks for fear of being disobedient. I gave her an account of everything and told her about the instructions Father Pestarino gave me in those days. I showed her the cash I had received and asked what to do about it. Then giving an affectionate glance around she would hurry away. Never did any complaint pass her lips either at that time or afterwards, nor did she mention to me anything about the trial God had given her through Father Pestarino, although she knew that I was aware of the cause of all this suffering.

During that month the greatest reward for the girls was to send them to the Valponasaca and I believe that on Sundays even if they had been running a temperature and had to be carried speechless, they would not have stayed away from Saint Sylvester, where Mary was to be found good and cheerful as ever, making up for those days of separation with a good word.

### **The trial ends**

Father Pestarino could not ignore the daily visits to the Valponasaca, nor the happiness of the girls on seeing Mary every Sunday. Neither could he ignore the lamentations of the mothers over the grief of their children. Hence, when just over a month had gone by and all seemed to be quiet he told Mary she could return to the workroom and home to Mornese. The trial was ended and doubtless she who had been persecuted in her humility must have become still more dear to God, more resolved to leave nothing undone where the good of souls was concerned and wanting still more to abase herself and live, seen by God alone.

## NOTES

1862 — 1864

1. Written in the first months of 1866 and printed at Genoa in 1871, three months after Frassinetti's death. Single Vol., 450.
2. Frassinetti, Guiseppe, *Opere*, p. 299.
3. Frassinetti, Guiseppe, *Opere*, p. 294.
4. Cf. *M.B.*, VII, 246.
5. *M.B.*, IX, 615.
6. *M.B.*, V, 599 and Capecelatro, Alfonso, *Vita della Serva di Dio Paola Frassinetti, Fondatrice delle Suore di S. Dorotea* (Rome, Desclée, 1900) pp. 306-07.
7. Appendix No. 2.
8. Appendix No. 3.
9. *M.B.*, VII, 297.
10. In the *Memorie* Mother Petronilla says medals of *Mary Help of Christians*; but it has been verified that no such medals were struck before 1868.
11. In some of the regions of northern Italy it was customary to present for the veneration of the faithful the so-called "relic of Our Lady" or a case bearing the inscription, *vel B. Mariae Virginis*, in which there were preserved some pieces of material or something similar, and ancient marian images which were deemed miraculous.
12. Frassinetti, "Il Giardinetto di Maria" in *Opere Ascetiche*, IV, 143.
13. Statement of Father Joseph Campi on Father Dominic Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).
14. Appendix No. 4. *M.B.*, VII, 297.

## DON BOSCO AT MORNESE (1864 — 1867)

### **Joyful news welcomed in unity of hearts**

It is a firm law that the sun dispels the mist.

One day, possibly about September 19 or 20, Father Pestarino approached the three Daughters radiant with joy. He told them he had received a letter from Don Bosco saying, that he would be coming to Mornese at last, early in October and would stay until the feast of the Maternity of Our Lady. He was not coming alone but bringing about a hundred boys with him. Father Pestarino gave them the task of preparing all that was needed for the boys regarding food and sleep in his farmhouse at Borgoalto. He himself would inform the people and appeal to their generosity in lending utensils and mattresses and in donating food. Their work would be to organize everything and cook the meals, under the supervision of Francis Bodrato, the village school-master and secretary and trusted friend of Father Pestarino.

So Don Bosco was actually coming to Mornese and they were entrusted with the preparations! This was an assurance that they would see him at close quarters. What did all she had suffered matter to Mary now?

It could really be said that peace was restored in those days. The Ursulines all offered to work with the three Daughters and went to all the houses where they knew they would find Father Pestarino's best friends. They accepted the loan of mattresses, utensils and tablecloths, and gifts of chickens, butter, flour, cheese and salted fish, together with promises to provide bread and wine when needed.

Beds were not mentioned. The mattresses were just laid on the floor, some inside the farmhouse and some under the porticoes. The tables set up on trestles made a

good show in a large shed which had been emptied and cleaned for the purpose. What might be lacking in convenience was made up in festal abundance, and that should give great pleasure to Don Bosco's little waifs who were certainly not used to such prodigious largesse.

### **The anticipation and festive reception**

On Friday October 7, 1864 everything was ready by 11 o'clock in the hope that Don Bosco would arrive for dinner. But the group had traveled by train from Genoa to Serravalle Scrivia and then continued by the only transport available, their own two legs. If these were not very serviceable, any nag they could get would do. It was well into the night when the company arrived. Don Bosco was mounted on a lovely white horse belonging to Father Pestarino and some of the singers had the privilege of riding a donkey.

Don Bosco saw at once that the heart of his devoted son had already won over the people. "All the people went out to meet him preceded by Father Valle, the parish priest and Father Pestarino who had gone to Serravalle to meet him and then left him at Gavi where Canon Alimonda had arranged dinner. Father Pestarino had then preceded the group to Mornese so that he could go out with the band to meet it. Everyone knelt to receive Don Bosco's blessing as he passed. Then all went with him into the parish church for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament and evening prayers. This was followed by supper and then rest."<sup>1</sup>

### **Reciprocal first impressions**

"We got to know Don Bosco's heart straightway that very evening," said Petronilla, "because tired as he must have been, he wanted to see where the boys were to sleep. Fearing perhaps, that those sleeping under the porticoes might feel cold, he urged them to cover themselves well and even

to put their jackets on. Then they were to sleep soundly until the assistant roused them. We were enchanted."

The next day was Saturday the 8th. Don Bosco celebrated Mass as soon as the Angelus sounded. He then went into the confessional where boys and men kept him until ten. He would have remained longer had Father Pestarino not called him for a little breakfast. Meanwhile the Daughters of Mary Immaculate who had gathered for the work of those days, were presented to him and Father Pestarino asked him to bless them. Don Bosco did this willingly and, rejoicing in the report he had received from their Director, exhorted them to be constant in doing good and in seeing that good was done.

The young Father John Cagliero was present at this first meeting between the resolute Daughters and the apostle of youth. Don Bosco himself had called him saying affectionately, "You come too."

Don Bosco stayed with them for a few brief moments. His short talk, simple, benevolent and warm as was everything that came from his heart, was sufficient to inflame the Daughters with renewed fervor and infuse fresh joy into their souls. Mary was especially affected. Soon afterwards she confided to Petronilla that she had sensed something more extraordinary than she had ever known before. She could not explain herself, but her soul was filled with heavenly joy. It seemed to her that Don Bosco's words echoed a language she heard in her heart without being able to explain. They seemed to be a translation of her own sentiments, as if something long awaited had finally appeared. It lasted two minutes, contained nothing especially for her, nor would she ever have dared to think so. However, everything led to the supposition that Don Bosco would speak again in public and that in the environment and house of the boys she would catch again at close range a glimpse of his heaven-filled eyes and the brightness of his smile which made her think of Jesus among the crowds. This was sufficient for Mary to live happily in that new atmosphere of sanctity.

We had such a lot to 'do in those days, [states Petronilla] that we scarcely found time to sleep. Once we took the whole night to make *tagliatelli* (ribbon macaroni) for the boys' dinner. Mary also endured the fatigue of that time both day and night. Her only wish was that all should go well and that we should be able to go and listen when Don Bosco was speaking. It was wonderful to see her in the evening when at sunset Don Bosco gave his boys the good-night! She was always a quick worker but at that time she seemed to have wings and worked for three. Then tidying herself she would go and stand in that part of the courtyard where she would be better able to see and hear Don Bosco. She stood there with her soul in her eyes straining her ears not to miss a word.

All the Daughters of Mary Immaculate including Angela Maccagno came to hear him. He had made a very good impression on her as he had on us all. No one, however, was as happy as Mary. If anyone asked her in wonder, "Where do you find the boldness to intrude where there are so many men and boys?" she would answer, "*But Don Bosco is a saint! He is a saint and I feel it!*"

If Mary had been educated and able to express her sentiments fully, or had read the *Life of Saint Jane Frances di Chantal*, she might have made her own the saint's words regarding Saint Francis de Sales:

I admired all that he said and did and I regarded him as an angel. His appearance was so decorous and so holy that it affected me to the extent of my being unable to take my eyes from him. He spoke little but with a wisdom and gentleness able to satisfy all who heard him. I felt that there was no good fortune worthy to compare with remaining close to him and listening to the words issuing from his mouth. For this reason I would have deemed myself only too happy to be the least of his servants.<sup>2</sup>

If Mary had seen far ahead into the future how she would have delighted in the exquisite refinement of the Blessed Virgin's action in placing the Daughters' hearts in a first contact with that of the Father, on a Saturday which was also the vigil of the day dedicated to the cele-

bration of the feast of the divine Motherhood. It would seem as if this were her gift to them.

The day following was Sunday, October 9. Don Bosco celebrated Mass in the parish. There was a general Communion and he was astonished at the fervor of the people, but most of all at the zeal of Father Pestarino who went into the confessional the evening before and continued to hear confessions all though the night. He was still there at 9 o'clock.<sup>3</sup>

In the afternoon he was able to see for himself, at Vespers, the religious behavior of the girls surrounding Mary and Petronilla and to witness to the fact that Father Pestarino had not erred in his report on the workroom and on that nascent oratory for girls which was already producing fruit. The good Father was touched as he blessed little Mornese where young girls, all unawares, were sowing his own seed in handfuls and already harvesting full ears of corn.

### **Father Pestarino attains his aim**

During these days Father Pestarino did not leave Don Bosco's side. He wanted to enjoy the company of his beloved Father from whom he had been forced to separate herself for the good of souls. Besides this he had a subject very close to his heart that he wanted to discuss with him. There were two reasons for the insistence of his invitation. He wanted Don Bosco's opinion on a work of public advantage he had in mind to establish in Mornese and there was also the question of the Daughters which had been the chief reason for his being left in his native town. Now that Don Bosco had been able to verify personally the good that was being accomplished and, as Superior and Father could judge what he was doing for them, he wanted Don Bosco to give him norms for their better spiritual direction in order, perhaps, to render them more apt for the use he meant to make of them.

He had seen the Daughters and now must think of Mornese.

Don Bosco pondered over everything and agreed to Father Pestarino's plan for a boys' school and promised to come back to open it when it should be completed. This endeared him still more to those good people, who vied with one another in offering him their rustic gifts and receiving his blessing.

### **Don Bosco recruits a great and very dear son**

On the 10th the group with Don Bosco and Father Pestarino went as far as Lerma where they were awaited by Father Raymond Olivieri, who was then the parish pastor and a very dear friend of both. It was here that Don Bosco met Father John Battista Lemoyne.<sup>4</sup>

In the evening everyone returned to Mornese, including Father Lemoyne. During the whole of the journey of an hour and a half he was wrapped in intimate conversation with Don Bosco who received him immediately as a dear son. The following day was October 11 and after dinner the whole company left Mornese where Don Bosco had accepted ten boys as pupils in his schools of Turin and Lanzo.

### **Father Pestarino's idea becomes a reality**

Father Pestarino's dream was about to become true even if there were to be some modifications. He himself writes in the *Chronicle of the Building of the School of Mornese*, (*Cronaca della Fabbrica del Collegio de Mornese*)<sup>5</sup> that for many years he had been preoccupied with the thought that in the division of his patrimony, the Uccellaia of Borgoalto should remain to him. This was not as beautiful as the other country houses but more in keeping with his plan. He was hoping to arrange a house with a chapel and ten or

twelve rooms where he could receive a priest, a good youth or man of God wishing to dedicate himself to the good of the young, who would help him to bring about his project of gathering together the boys of the town especially on Sundays in order to amuse them, gather them in chapel, instruct them and animate them to virtue, love of God and respect and loving submission to parents and superiors.

This is just what happened as we see from the chronicle: "My brothers were happy with their possessions and I with Borgoalto and the other properties they had refused. In October this year, 1864, the reverend and celebrated Don Bosco of Turin came to Mornese and I manifested my desire to build in that place. He praised my plans and when I asked if the building could not be put to better service he said it could be used as a school and as a novitiate for his clerics."

Nothing could have given Father Pestarino a greater impetus in his effort to speed up the work. On October 16, he announced the great news in church and urged everyone to do his best to help in order to keep down expenses and speed up the building.

Since they could not neglect their personal commitments to work he exhorted them to transport stones from their properties on Sundays after the celebration, and leave them at the side of the road where they would be collected in carts and taken to the site.

The bishop would certainly have given permission for this charity while he, Father Pestarino, willingly undertook to provide drink for the volunteer helpers and hay for their animals.

On the 21st of that same October the builders began excavating, and on the following Sunday, the 24th—the 24th of a month of Mary—nobody ignored the call and all those good people were faithful as long as the need continued.<sup>6</sup>

### A significant coincidence

How touching is the harmony of Divine Providence!

During the same year in which Don Bosco in Turin was working indefatigably to erect a great church designed to be a monument of his special love and fervent devotion to Mary Help of Christians,<sup>7</sup> in Mornese excavations were starting for another edifice. A modest one, but in the divine plan destined to be the foundation of a living monument raised to Mary Help of Christians by the same apostle, “as a token of perennial gratitude for the many singular favors received from this good Mother.”

### Don Bosco for the Institutes in Turin and the salvation of young girls

Here, to assure ourselves once more that Don Bosco was preparing himself and gaining experience of whatever might be of service in his purpose of working for young girls when the time should be ripe, his biographer says, “Don Bosco arranged for one of his priests to celebrate mass every day at St. Peter’s Institute where young women coming out of prison were given shelter. He did the same for the Good Shepherd Sisters and on Sundays there were two masses. A confessor was provided for the many girls staying there or who were sent there for protection. He also sent clerics to serve at religious functions.”<sup>8</sup>

The following letters from two Sisters of the *Rifugio* give another proof of this. Sister Madaline Veronica writes:

I feel I should be lacking in my duty if I did not write a few lines to thank you for your goodness to me in receiving my religious profession. When giving me the holy veil you told me to carry it without stain before the tribunal of God. In your goodness help me to keep it unstained. For this purpose please be so good as to visit the small pine tree you have planted and examine it for fear wild shoots should begin to sprout preventing the tree from growing tall. I

shall try to lay out a garden around it perfumed by the sweet scent of roses and violet and I shall endeavor to imitate the sunflower.<sup>9</sup>

Doubtless the words used were those suggested by Don Bosco during the ceremony.

The second letter is as follows:

Very Reverend Father,

The singular goodness with which your Reverence favored me in accepting my aged father into your Oratory brought about his salvation. You did your best to put my brother on the path to heaven but he has not yet corresponded. Therefore I recommend him to your prayers. I am also grateful for the charity with which you taught me arithmetic. All these favors place me under the obligation of expressing all the gratitude of which I am capable for the rest of my life.

I am now in need of a twofold grace that is both spiritual and temporal. Therefore I beg you for one of your Hail Mary's. We are fortunate in having an excellent Mother Superior whom we love tenderly and for whom we desire all happiness. The 23rd of this month is her feastday. Would it be possible for Mother Emanuella to have the same good fortune as Mother Eulalia? Could your Reverence enhance the feast with a few words in common and then reserve a quarter of an hour for our good Mother who will have many things to say to you? Should you not find time on the 23rd be sure that you will still be in time if you give us a few minutes on Christmas Day.

I beg you to do your best. It is a matter of consoling a Community and liberating a superior from a capital vice (envy, but holy envy). I conclude by offering you my cordial greetings for the Christmas Feasts and a happy ending and a still happier beginning of the year. I ask you to impart your fatherly blessing to me that I may be successful in my task as mistress of the Magdalenes for the glory of God, the advantage of others and the salvation of my own soul.

I kiss your hand respectfully and with the greatest veneration I declare myself to be

Your humble Daughter and servant in C.

*Sister Madaline Teresa*

This approaching the Sisters of the Refuge in person, even in years when he was in poor health and overburdened with work of every kind, while it shows the refinement of gratitude Don Bosco nourished for the benefits received from the Marchioness Barolo who had died in January 1864, and the happy memories of his first apostolic labors, does suggest that there was in his mind the knowledge that he had to found an institute of women religious for the education of poor and needy young girls. Therefore he must have wanted to see with his own eyes how institutes dedicated to this work were run. He wanted to evaluate the good and make it his own; to sense with his own heart how in moving away from his system, the educational work he loved could be obstructed; and to adapt in anticipation the educative norms that had proved their worth in Valdocco to the aptitudes and needs of the female soul.

### **Don Bosco and Mary 'Help of Christians**

For Don Bosco the year 1865 began with a twofold thought in mind: the extension of the land required for the temple of Mary Help of Christians and the execution of a picture of this heavenly Mother for the high altar.

Don Bosco's biographer illustrates the sacrifices to which he had to subject himself in order to succeed in his intention to build such a church, and how he was always supported by special helps from heaven.<sup>10</sup>

But why was it that he had become so warm in his feelings and so completely devoted to Mary Help of Christians when as a child, a youth and a priest and also, when initiating his work, he was completely devoted to Mary Immaculate, and placed her pictures in his books and on his writing desk?

Born in 1815, the very year in which by order of Pope Pius VII the feast of Mary Help of Christians was celebrated for the first time, he must have understood right from childhood that there was a bond between himself and the

Blessed Virgin, the bond of special protection on the one hand and of unlimited trust on the other. Hence, even before becoming fully conscious of his mission there would have come spontaneously from his lips and more so from his heart, the cry, "O Mary, help me! Thank you, Mary, for your help! O Mary, you are my only support, my help from heaven."

It is known that already in 1858 at the end of the month of Mary Don Bosco hung a card with two pictures of Our Lady bearing the Divine Child in her arms, on the wall of his room. On one was written, *Souvenir of Marian Month in the Church of the Trinity in Turin 1858* and underneath, *Mother of beautiful Love I love you . . . you know it; grant that I may love you more, that my love for you may be very great.* On the second picture could be read, *Remembrance of the Month of Mary celebrated in the Church of the Adorers, 1858,* and underneath, *Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus, make us saints.* From this card hung a third inscription, *O Immaculate Virgin, you who alone have overcome every heresy, come now to our aid; with all our hearts we have recourse to you. Auxilium Christianorum ora pro nobis.* Don Bosco had added in pencil, *Terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata.*<sup>11</sup>

Could not this be considered as coming from an innermost sentiment? A memory? A cry from the heart? A program?

Many more reasons could be cited, all of them very well grounded and of immense consolation to one having the happiness of belonging to the family of the venerable Don Bosco, "... During his life Don Bosco had to blaze new trails and his work was as to take on colossal proportions. It would have been impossible to carry out what was in his heart to perform without extraordinary help from Our Lady. From this there sprang spontaneously his idea of placing the whole complex of his works under the protection of the Queen of Heaven invoked under the title of Help of Christians."

Don Bosco always loved the glories of his native land and rejoiced when an occasion presented itself which made it possible for him to place it in a good light and exalt it. This title is certainly one of the glories of his country. The first to illustrate this was Saint Pius V, a Piedmontese who more effectively than anyone else worked for the liberation of Vienna. The first confraternity bearing the title of Mary Help of Christians was founded by Innocent XI, who was himself a glory of Italy. Another shining glory of the fatherland was Pope Pius VII who established the feast of Mary Help of Christians. Finally the title and feast of Mary Help of Christians records Italian victories and can therefore be called glories of the fatherland.

Don Bosco's predilection for the title was certainly also suggested by his love for the Roman Pontiff and by the wars, violent and non-violent waged on the angelic Pius IX. He understood that he could not do better than oppose these wars with help similar to that which saved Pius VII from the Napoleonic persecutions.

In the almanac, *The Gentleman*, (*Il galantuomo*) of 1860, he noted for the first time, "May 24, feast of Mary Virgin Help of Christians." In that of 1861 there was noted, for the same day, the Most Holy Virgin under the well deserved title of "Help of Christians, *Auxilium Christianorum*." Therefore the *Letture cattoliche*, which were also destined to celebrate the glories and graces of Mary Most Holy, Help of Christians had the advantage of forestalling all the popular almanacs in pointing out the date of her feast.<sup>12</sup>

Don Bosco, then, was at this time already preparing the ground. To all these wonderful and exhaustive proofs there could be added that Don Bosco, on the night of May 24, 1862 precisely, related to his boys with great satisfaction, the prodigious manifestation of Mary in the neighborhood of Spoleto in the preceding year, and he told how the bishop of that region had ordered a sanctuary to be built where the Blessed Virgin should be venerated under the title of *Auxilium Christianorum*.<sup>13</sup>

Would it not have been astonishing if he, conscious of the debt of gratitude he owed to his heavenly benefactress

had not felt the urgency of being second to none in giving public testimony to his love?

On May 30, scarcely six days afterwards, he related the dream commonly known as “the dream of the two pillars” in which he saw a large ship (the Church) being tossed about by a turbulent sea (life) and attacked by many enemy vessels. All at once there rose from out of the waves two mighty pillars. They were just a short distance apart and very tall. On one of them was a statue of the Immaculate Virgin with *Auxilium Christianorum* inscribed on a placard at her feet. The other pillar which was much larger and towered higher bore a placard with the inscription *Salus credentium*.<sup>14</sup>

In this the word from heaven was very clear. The Immaculate Virgin was announcing herself to Don Bosco as *Auxilium Christianorum*. What more could the obedient son of the Blessed Virgin do but obey and speak and make known to the world that Our Lady, precisely because she is Immaculate, is the powerful Help of Christians?

On the other hand Don Bosco did not wait for the temple of Valdocco before giving Our Lady the title of Help of Christians. For some time already, when speaking and writing and with his most intimate friends, he had given her the name that symbolizes her charity and synthesizes his own program of work.

He (Don Bosco) used to ask her (the Countess Callori di Vignale) for advice about many things because she knew perfectly the spirit and aims of the Servant of God. When he decided to build the temple of Mary Help of Christians he discussed it with her and without mentioning the title asked,—“To whom shall we dedicate this church?”

“To Mary Help of Christians,” was the Countess’ prompt reply.<sup>15</sup>

Although charitable and very pious, the Countess was not hasty in her speech, neither was she making a guess. The fact that she replied without hesitation, “to Mary Help of Christians,” reveals that she knew the mind and

heart of Don Bosco well and that she must have heard him speak of the Blessed Virgin under this title.

Father Lemoyne again speaks on this subject:

Father Paul Albera tells us that one Saturday in December, possibly the 6th, he was alone with Don Bosco when the latter said, . . . "Our church is too small. It does not hold all the boys, who are packed in on top of one another. Therefore we shall build a larger and more beautiful one and it will be magnificent. We shall call it the *Church of Mary Help of Christians*."

Father Cagliero also declares:

In 1862 Don Bosco told me that he was contemplating the erection of a grand church worthy of the Blessed Virgin. "Up until now," he added, "we have celebrated the feast of Mary Immaculate with pomp and solemnity and it was on this day that the first work, the festive Oratories, started. But Our Lady wishes us to honor her under the title of Mary Help of Christians. Times are sad, we really need the Holy Virgin to help preserve and defend the Christian faith. Can you tell me another reason?"

"I think," I replied, "that it will become the mother Church of our future Congregation and the center from which all our other works for the benefit of young people will emanate."

"You have guessed rightly," said he. "Mary Most Holy is the foundress and will be the support of our works."<sup>16</sup>

From the moment the construction of the sanctuary began this devotion of his became so evident that among the faithful to speak of Mary Help of Christians and to speak of Don Bosco was one and the same thing. Everyone knows how the beautiful title of Mary Most Holy Help of Christians received a singularly dear synonym in the language of the people, who called her *Don Bosco's Madonna*.

Our venerable Father himself writes, "As I was deliberating on the title I should give to the new edifice, an incident occurred which dispelled all doubt. When the Sovereign Pontiff Pius IX, who stopped at nothing which could

advance the cause of religion, was informed that a new church was needed in the district indicated above (Valdocco), he sent his first kind offering of 500 francs letting it be known that Help of Christians would be a title very pleasing to the Queen of Heaven."<sup>17</sup>

After this Don Bosco's firmness in willing the title of Help of Christians for the church he was building no longer caused wonder. He insisted on it even against the objections of the architect, who thought it "unpopular, inopportune, and savoring of bigotry."

Since it was the wish of the Vicar of Christ that Don Bosco's Madonna should be called the Help of Christians, what more authoritative voice was there to approve his intentions and the throbbing heartbeats of his gratitude?

#### **Father Pestarino at the Oratory for the conference of Salesian Directors**

Exterior opposition was never known to quell the joy of the Salesians, so in the midst of consolations brought about at the Oratory by the feast of Saint Francis de Sales on January 29 kept "according to established customs but more solemnly than in previous years, there took place the annual meeting of all the Salesians as was prescribed by the Rule. Father Dominic Pestarino had come from Mornese to be present."<sup>18</sup>

What joy must have filled Father Pestarino's heart to be in such close contact with the Salesian Family and to hear from the lips of the Directors, Father Rua and Father Ruffino about the good being done in Don Bosco's houses.

Father Pestarino also made a report since the work of the school was going ahead, aided by the generous activity of all the Mornese people, young and old, men and women, including the three Daughters who helped with their work-room pupils and the girls who came on Sundays.

Petronilla relates,

This is what we did. After morning mass we hurried home to complete the necessary clearing up. Then one of us, usually Mary, accompanied by the boarders, went through the streets clapping her hands. Then all the children would gather round her and proceed to a prearranged place. Then the women would arrive. At a certain time Father Pestarino would provide breakfast for all. The men were separated from the women and we were in another spot with the children. Father Pestarino sent breakfast to where we were working. Work stopped at about 11 o'clock for mass which had been arranged for this time in the parish church.

Don Bosco closed the meeting, assuring everyone of Our Lady's protection. Father Pestarino returned to Mornese with this assurance and to the workroom with both the assurance and the greetings of the apostle of Valdocco. This filled all hearts with a holy joy that made work light and sacrifice a thing to be desired.

### **New lights**

Was it Don Bosco's greeting or his blessing that gave Mary Mazzarello new light? The truth is this. The dance which in former years she herself had proposed and supported because of having to choose the lesser of two evils, had never been more than a substitute which she felt she now could and ought to do without. She understood this much better after having seen Don Bosco's boys happy and contented with just an outing, and noted how reserved those young boys were even among themselves. She had seen purity and piety together with serene happiness shining in their eyes.

Father Pestarino told her that everything and everyone at the Oratory at Valdocco breathed the same happiness, the same joy in living and the same reserve of which Don Bosco himself was a shining example. Saying, "We shall do the same," she took the advantage offered by the transportation of stones and, at the first whispers of Mardi Gras

she told the girls that if they did not mind, she thought that this year they could manage without the concertina and the barrel organ in order to enjoy the evenings together in a sisterly fashion.

This stone gathering is very tiring, [she said.] What is the use of jiggging up and down and round one another like puppets? Let us stay here for a while together. We shall make our delicious *bugie*, have a nice supper or two, play a little and maybe sing. Would you not be better pleased with this? We shall talk about beautiful things and amuse ourselves as we relax in the company of our Guardian Angels. Then we shall go to bed happy having made our carnival holy. Shall we try it out?

When the young know they are loved, and they are very quick to realize this, they only want what those who love them want. The girls willingly gave up dancing for a friendly evening in the workroom and never had their carnival been more joyous or peaceful than it was that year. They began to cultivate a taste for the life of the Spirit and preferred no other pleasure to that of remaining with Mary and listening to words which gave glimpses of her pure and fervent soul.

### Voluntary workers

In March, 1865, [says Father Pestarino's chronicle,] it snowed very much. Seeing that I continued to work, some citizens told me that they would be willingly to help even on weekdays, whenever I needed them. There were four or five at first, then six or seven, then ten or twelve. They received no pay for their labors but a snack and a drink of wine. The number continued to increase to twenty, thirty and then sixty, young men and old. The whole town pressed me and urged me on. I too wanted very much to get on but I lacked everything I needed and, most of all, money, because I began that building with no more than one hundred *marenghi*.

Poor Father Pestarino! But did Don Bosco not begin the Church of Mary Help of Christians with only eight cents, which was much less, yet his work was so much greater!

Yet it went ahead helped by the gifts of the rich and supported by the alms of the poor! The following beautiful episode which happened at Valdocco places in the same light of charity the poor of Turin and those of Mornese.

While the erection of the walls was continuing up to the roof something happened which astounded the laborers.

A poor tradesman came to that part of Valdocco to sell his fruit. Hearing that the Church of Mary Help of Christians was being built by private contributions of the faithful he wanted to do his part. Calling the construction manager he generously sacrificed all his fruit so that it could be divided among the builders. Then wishing, in his own words, to complete the work begun, he made them help him load a huge stone on his back. Then he began to climb the scaffolding. Everyone trembled to see the good old man under such a heavy load, but he regarded it as light because of the religious aim he had in mind. Having reached the top he deposited the stone and joyfully exclaimed: "Now I shall die in peace because I hope in some way to share in all the good which will come from this church."<sup>19</sup>

The aim in Mornese was more practical but the charity was no less beautiful and blessed by God. Father Pestarino's chronicle continues,

The townsfolk and those from the nearby villages, chiefly St. Stefano, St. Rocco di Parodi, St. Remigio, Tramontana, Parodi, Lerma and a few from Casaleggio, all got together to help us with cartloads of sand. Some Sundays there were as many as twenty-two pairs of oxen, sixty beasts of burden and two hundred or more people carrying stones on their backs from the vineyards and the houses. Every day about noon when they were not so busy, many women and girls made one or two journeys for stones, so much so that the builders were provided with all the materials for a whole

week and more.

On some Sundays as much as three casks of wine containing 100 liters each were consumed and a thousand francs worth of hay was needed for the animals and there were also other things. But I loved the union, the brotherliness.

It was wonderful to see the helpers from outside being met by the towns-children carrying branches of trees to the pealing of the bells and the sound of fireworks. There was never the smallest impropriety, dissension or shadow; rather, many graces were received. In town all helped, from the oldest inhabitant of eighty-six who asked to carry the flag in front of a massive band of youths, to the young eight-year-olds who wanted to go to the school with their small stones almost every day and who vied with one another in filling their own little carts and struggling up to the building site with them. It was a very touching sight.<sup>20</sup>

### **Laying the foundation stone of the school**

With so much help it was but natural that the work should proceed quickly, so much so that Don Boco sent Fathers Savio and Ghivarello for the planning and the latter remained for a time to direct the work. Thus the foundation stone would be laid very quickly. Father Pestarino chose one of the great feasts of the town for the purpose so that everyone could take part in a celebration which would not easily be forgotten.

Let us hear about it from Father Pestarino himself:

... that year the 13th of June, feast of Saint Anthony of Padua, was also the day for the official closure of the month of Mary. It was decided that on that day the foundation stone at the lower corner facing the town should be laid. A parchment stating the object of the work and the people present, was sealed in a bottle and placed in a cavity made in the stone.

It was blessed by the parish pastor Father Valle in the presence of myself, Father Dominic Pestarino, Father Ray-

mond Olivieri the Archpriest of Lerma, the Directors of Casaleggio, Tramontana and Parodi and also the Mayor and Municipal Council.

The so-called “Solomon” of the Pious Schools, [a zealous Piarist from Ovada who often came to preach in Mornese—so Petronilla tells us] gave a beautiful sermon in keeping with the occasion and, although it was raining and a storm was threatening there was a great number of people, including visitors. Once the foundation stone was in place the Mayor and Counselors who were holding a covering stone suspended by a rope, began to let it down slowly to the joyful music of the Lerma band.<sup>21</sup>

Oh how Father Pestarino must have been reminded of the laying of the foundation stone of the temple of Mary Help of Christians where everything had been magnificent! That celebration took place in the presence of H.R.H. Prince Amadeo, illustrious members of the Turinese aristocracy and many priests and, that which meant still more to Father Pestarino, the presence of Don Bosco himself. The ceremony at Mornese was much simpler but who could stop his reflecting that the grand temple in Turin and the humble school born at almost the same time had one common aim: that of praising God and saving souls, and one might say, both were traveling along parallel paths toward that objective?

This was so consoling to him that he scarcely felt the fatigue and discomfort inherent in the building project. How much greater would his joy have been had he been able to tear aside the veil of the future. But the humble look only for humble joys in which, no less than in greater ones, there shines the radiance of the divine light.

#### **The Daughters and their pupils were not absent from the festivities**

The Daughters were also present at the laying of the foundation stone. The school did not involve them directly

but such a feast could not leave them or the girls indifferent. The latter were eager to take part and after all, they had carried a great many stones!

Mary Mazzaello, adverse as she always was to any show, gathered all the girls both boarders and day pupils in the workroom and recommended them, together with those who attended the Sunday reunions, to behave as would the angels of God. She took them all to the garden of the Carante's house. This was a country house adjacent to the grounds where the school was being built. Although higher up it was also in part the property of Father Pestarino.

As the place was private there were no people and the girls had not to mix with the crowds and could enjoy the spectacle from higher up without being separated from the Daughters. As soon as the function was over they were all ready to proceed to the church in an orderly fashion.

Thus their just wishes having been fulfilled, they in their turn tried to satisfy those of Mary and the workroom prospered, becoming a temple of domestic and social virtues.

The Sunday meetings filled the young girls with serene joy and a distaste for all those things which had once filled their minds. The whole of Mornese assumed an air of seriousness and piety that made heaven rejoice. Father Pestarino's tactics had not been wrong. He had said that by winning over the mothers the children would also be influenced in a salutary manner.

### **Don Bosco's reply to Miss Parigi**

During the autumn of this year or more precisely, during the novena of Our Lady of the Rosary, Don Bosco uttered a phrase which reveals the maturing of his idea of working for girls in the more or less near future. Canon August Parigi, a past pupil of the Oratory writes:

It was autumn, 1865, and Don Bosco with a group of his rascals was crossing Chieri on his way to Becchi for the feast of the Holy Rosary. They were led by a band of musicians. When the group reached 10 Moretto Street, now known as Garibaldi Street, he halted them and came into my house. Scarcely had he greeted us all in his pleasant and decorous manner than looking into my eyes scrutinizingly he said, "Come to Turin with me. You will be able to continue your studies and then we shall see what God wants from you." I remember those words quite well as does my sister who asked him if he were not going to open a house to make (as she said), a regiment of Sisters, Don Bosco smiled at her and answered, "Yes, yes, at the right time, but not for you."<sup>22</sup>

Don Bosco's silence on such an important topic was only broken from time to time with short flashes which were always positive. This gives the impression of a commander who knows the complete plan of the battle and holds it clearly in his mind but unfolds it from time to time in a quick allusion which is enough to give assurance of victory, without however revealing where, when or how.

### **Heaven blesses the building of the school**

In the meantime the school was going ahead visibly in Mornese. Father Pestarino writes in his chronicle,

The parish priest, the Mayor and the Counselors were often on the site to give encouragement. The first part, double and with porticoes, was raised in four months right to the roof. There was still greater fatigue in carrying the large but necessary pieces of lumber on one's back along these bad roads, if they could be called roads, and on steep, tortuous paths. Not only was there danger of personal harm, but even of being crushed beneath the wood. However nothing ever happened even though it was sometimes necessary to work from after Vespers until midnight and even at midday under the scorching rays of the August sun in order

to reinforce the roof with strong beams.

October 25 saw the completion of the first part of the building and the foundation of the wing facing the town. Work was then suspended for the cold season.

### **Father Pestarino reports to the meeting of Directors**

#### **1866:**

Father Pestarino went to the Oratory for the feast of Saint Francis de Sales, celebrated this year on February 4, Sexagesima Sunday, and for the customary meeting of the Directors held that day in Don Bosco's antechamber.

All the confreres at the Oratory were present to hear the usual report. Don Bosco was absent because of the death of Count de Maistre, so Father Rua presided over the meeting in his place.

Father Pestarino spoke first about the building of the school in Mornese. He said the people were enthusiastic, the bishop had given permission for Sunday work and for that day the builders worked gratuitously while more than two hundred people struggled to carry the materials needed. The common desire to see the work advance had bound together priest and people, authorities and those governed, families and families. Instead of going to dances the young people met to pass the evenings at home or in church. There were many frequent communicants.

The Lord had shown His pleasure in the undertaking by granting special favors. The wheels of a cart had passed over a boy's foot without harming him. A blacksmith had fallen from a frame on to a heap of stones and had not suffered the least injury. A quarter of the school was completed.<sup>23</sup>

Between what he could see with his own eyes and the enjoyment he felt to be in Turin with his brethren, all deeply interested in what was happening in Mornese, Father Pestarino went back firmly persuaded that the school would bring about much good because God was showering it with His blessings. The graces that followed the work progressively gave the impression that it was protected by

the Blessed Virgin as were all Don Bosco's works. Since Father Pestarino had made his religious vows he had placed all his possessions in the hands of his Father, so he considered it a natural consequence that the school should also be his, although for motives of discretion and for love of peace this was not revealed.

The loyal-hearted apostle of Mornese was worthy of Don Bosco's affection and had need of special consolation from heaven, especially this year in which he saw all his dear Mornese people oppressed by the burden of war with Austria. Many families were grieving for their faraway sons, captured by the enemy. They were left without active men to work in the fields. God gave him the comfort of witnessing the virtue of those same compatriots.

### **A wartime carnival**

Carnival days were not very noisy that year. Mary had no need to use many words to make the girls want to stay away. The evening gatherings were held as usual for Mary Mazzarello wanted to keep up the spirit of the girls so that they would have the strength to bear trials in a Christian manner and also the fear they suffered for their individual selves and for their country. Then also, she wanted them to be prepared when need should arise to keep up the morale of their parents. Faced with suffering her words found a way to their hearts with all the supernatural motives which strengthen the soul in faith and, through the faith, in doing God's will.

### **Strong women**

Father Pestarino tells us in his chronicle how capable the girls were becoming.

One of the Buzzetti brothers came from Turin and organized the building of the wing facing the town, with a corridor on the chapel side. All was to be paid for by the cubic meter. He began by arranging some vaulting under the porticoes to serve as a passage . . . the people here were a little discouraged because war was imminent and nearly all the young men were either soldiers, national guards or at work in the fields. Not much help was available. However I did not allow myself to become disheartened but made use of whatever was possible. Then, in spite of the hard work of last year, the women took the place of the young men. All of them were animated by a true spirit of union and together transported the materials needed for the new wing of the building in loads from the vineyards.

The building certainly did not interfere with church functions. The weaker sex in Mornese were able to find time for everything. The Lenten catechism sessions were as well frequented as ever. The Easter feasts were celebrated with fervor also by the men and the month of May was celebrated with ardor in order to obtain the help of the Blessed Virgin. The pupils at the workroom had now increased to twelve or fifteen and Sundays were divided between church, work at the school and sessions with the Daughters before and after the religious functions.

### **The month of May as suggested by Don Bosco**

Don Bosco had to be away from the Oratory often during these days in order to preach, so he wrote practices known as *fioretti* to be explained one by one to the boys who would offer them to Mary Most Holy in the month consecrated to her. There was always a tender devotion to Our Lady at the Oratory and always special practices of piety in her honor, carried out every day in the chapel during the month of May. On Saturdays especially there would be a special reading or short sermon on her glories. But regularly from 1852 there began the custom in the

dormitories, to offer her in the month of flowers, spiritual blossoms also. Every evening Don Bosco would announce the practice *fioretto* and an ejaculation for the following day.<sup>24</sup>

For fourteen years there existed the splendid custom of a daily practice for the month of Mary. Then why is it that the biographer details only those of 1866? These are certainly filled with the Father's spirit and show clearly how he suggested to the boys not only the immediate aim of good school behavior but also the formation of a firm, upright conscience capable of probing the spirit and scrutinizing the cause of one's personal actions, of living supported by faith after having carried out one's own duties conscientiously.

They synthesize his preventive system which weaves powerful cables of moral salvation with the tiny threads of the smallest daily observance, supported by the enlightened motive of heavenly love and religion. This is made familiar by devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and filial recourse to Mary Most Holy. They could be called the expressions of his heart and his psychological tact for young people. This is why the biographer felt it necessary to bring them to the notice of the great Salesian Family so that they might rediscover their Father and know from whence they can draw with security when preparing a scented bouquet for the Most Holy Virgin. Let us too welcome these precious jewels.

1) When passing before the Blessed Sacrament make a devout, respectful genuflection saying with all your heart: Praised be Jesus Christ. Ejaculation: O Mary, I consecrate my heart to you.

2) Say a fervent prayer to Our Lady that none of our companions may fall into mortal sin during the month. Ejaculation: Refuge of sinners, pray for us.

3) Let each one ask a companion or some other capable person to suggest something he should do to give greater pleasure to Our Lady and then do it. Ejaculation: Virgin

Mary, obtain for me the grace of advancing in virtue continually.

4) Declare your wish to be always devoted to Our Lady. See that you wear her medal round your neck and kiss it lovingly every night before going to bed. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, accept me under your mantle and defend me from all evil.

5) Great attention and diligence in reciting the prayers of a good Christian, especially those before and after meals, class and study. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, make me love you more and more.

6) To bear with patience and for love of Mary those defects we see in our neighbor and which are not easily corrected. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, light the fire of charity in my heart.

7) Offer Mary all the devotions you practice during this month and ask pardon for your neglect of them. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, grant that I may always be devout towards you.

8) Use time well, see that not even a minute is passed in idleness but employed for the glory of God. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, help me to win paradise.

9) Do some corporal or spiritual mortification in honor of Mary. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, give me a clean and pure heart.

10) Correct with gentleness a companion you know who has some defect either in speaking or acting. Ejaculation: Holy Virgin, help me to control my tongue.

11) On rising in the morning give your first thought to Mary promising to do some good works in her honor during the day. Ejaculation: Oh how happy I shall be if I am on good terms with Mary.

12) Say a short prayer to the Blessed Virgin asking for her help in making a firm resolution to cultivate the virtue of modesty. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, give me a great love for your virtues.

13) Make a diligent examination of conscience and prepare to go to confession as if it were the last of your life. Ejaculation: O Mary, free me from all sin.

14) Exact obedience to Superiors, especially to the confessor in spiritual matters and to the teacher in school matters. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, Seat of Wisdom, pray for us.

15) Mortify the tongue, abstain from words that could offend charity, morality and good habits. Ejaculation: O Virgin Mary, make my body pure and my soul holy.

16) Observe rigorous silence in the dormitories, morning and evening and as far as possible do not raise your voice when going from the parlor to the dormitories after prayers. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, grant that I may use my tongue to give glory to God.

17) Every time you say the Glory Be to the Father or hear it said, bow your head as a sign of your veneration for the Blessed Trinity. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, temple of the holy Trinity, pray for us.

18) Look among your manuscripts, your pictures and your books and if you find anything not quite decent, burn it in honor of Mary. Ejaculation: O Mary Gate of Heaven, pray for us.

19) Think seriously of those duties of your state which you transgress most often. Implore the divine help and promise Mary to do better. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, obtain for me that I may serve God perfectly.

20) Make a declaration before the altar of Mary to overcome at all costs the interior defect each one knows. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, help me to know myself.

21) Take holy water and make the sign of the cross with faith and devotion every time you enter the church. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, grant that I may never be indifferent to acts of religion.

22) For love of Mary refrain completely from placing hands on one another even for fun. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, obtain for me the grace of discretion in conversation with my companions.

23) Let each one invite a companion to go with him to make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and to Mary. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, help me to become holy.

24) Give some good advice to a companion who will try to practice it for the love of Mary. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, obtain for me the gift of piety.

25) Great diligence in performing well all the works duty obliges us to do. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, help me to fulfill all my duties well.

26) Extreme discretion and jealous modesty in undressing and going to bed at night and in rising and dressing in the morning. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, Mother of holy purity, pray for us.

27) Do not commit the smallest fault against the school rules especially those that refer to the dormitories. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, obtain for me the virtue of obedience.

28) Great attention to the holy sacrifice of the mass and a short prayer for the one among our companions who has little love for Mary. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, obtain for me the virtue of humility.

29) Let each ask of the one who knows him best to name the defect he needs most to correct in order to give better example. Ejaculation: Virgin Mary, grant that I may know myself.<sup>26</sup>

The practices written for the dear school at Lanzo also reflect the deep devotion of Don Bosco for his heavenly Mother. They place the accent on piety, holy mass, modesty, obedience, peace with everyone, cheerfulness and the correction of personal shortcomings.

### **Don Bosco's esteem for religious poverty**

Don Bosco went from Turin to Cuneo where he expressed a judgment and made a prophecy which cannot be ignored. Sister Arcangela V. and another Sister of Charity had been called to Cuneo to open a house for training poor, deprived girls for domestic tasks. Two little girls were already there in a house not yet adapted and with no income, insecure and deprived of everything.

This was the state of the Institute when Don Bosco arrived at Cuneo. The Jesuit, Father Cirivegna invited him to go and see it.

As soon as he saw the place Don Bosco recognized in that extraordinary poverty the principles of a work blessed by God. He said to the good Sisters, "See that you are not oppressed by superfluities. You cannot, it is true, continue in this condition but take heart: God will bless you and cause all your works to prosper and in good time will give you a large comfortable building where you will do a great deal of good." Then as he left he blessed them.<sup>27</sup>

At that moment he must have remembered with emotion what Divine Providence had done for him poor, alone and thwarted. It was just because he was poor and alone that the key to the heavenly treasure was his in a heart full of charity for the suffering. How he must have loved, even more if possible, that poverty that raises mind and heart with assurance to heaven whence help comes. He desired this poverty for himself and for his works. He blessed it with warmth wherever he found it, serene because he was certain that there humility also dwelt in prayer and loving trust.

### **Repeated invocation of the Help of Christians dispels the storm**

Another notable fact concerning Don Bosco occurred during this month. It speaks of the trust he had in the Help of Christians, how he spread this devotion and how this tender Mother responded to his filial expectations.

During this year Don Bosco also went to Revello di Saluzzo when suddenly storm clouds began to gather and the wind became violent. It began to hail and many people hurried to the church to pray in order to avert the imminent loss of the harvest. The parish priest hastened to get a surplice and stole for Don Bosco who, realizing the urgency

invited the people to invoke Mary Help of Christians. He prayed *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* to which the people responded *ora pro nobis*. At the third time the wind suddenly dropped and the sun appeared again. The parish pastor and the people were beside themselves with joy because of such a remarkable grace.<sup>28</sup>

It could perhaps be added that they took a firm resolution to invoke Mary Help of Christians in all their needs. By this fact Don Bosco seemed to say, “Honor Our Lady in your daily lives by any name you choose; they are all hers, but in your hour of greatest need, the moment of greatest danger call her the Help of Christians. Call her not only once but many times—as often as is necessary to cross the barrier of your demerits, your infidelity, tepidity and doubts, to obtain the grace.”

In fact at that moment he used no other prayer but *Maria Auxilium Christianorum* repeated twice and even three times. Once calm was restored everyone gratefully acknowledged to whom the grace was due and proclaimed it with spontaneity and affection. The Help of Christians was Queen of their property, their families and their hearts. Don Bosco had achieved his aim.

### The school buildings go ahead

It would seem that at the end of May or the beginning of June, before the people became fully involved in work in the vineyards, the second wing of the building would reach roof height. Father Pestarino writes,

I thought it would be possible to raise the walls about half-way. Instead, in less than four months they have reached roof height. The people themselves marvelled and said that the walls seemed to go up by themselves without people and without forethought. The fact is that they got to the roof successfully. I was able to meet all expenses and never found myself in serious difficulties or embarrassment regarding this.

Rather God helped me always . . . I trust God and the Blessed Virgin will continue to protect me and my collaborators as well as all we do and all our works, which we wish to be for the greater glory of God and the good of souls, especially those of the young.<sup>29</sup>

### **Don Bosco reveals his idea to Father Lemoyne for an institute for women**

At the end of June Don Bosco's biographer gives us great news which must be related as it stands, even if the narrative seems rather long.

It is a page of major importance.

On the evening of the 24th Don Bosco was in his room. He already had a new project in mind, which was to found an institute for women for the purpose of instructing young girls and collaborating with the Salesians in their mission. He confided his idea to the Director of the school at Lanzo, who immediately transcribed what he had heard. Here is the account.

The sun had set on the day dedicated to Saint John the Baptist and the moon was already shining in the sky while a light breeze cooled the summer heat. I went to Don Bosco's room and was alone with him for nearly two hours. From the courtyard below there rose the constant murmur of the boys as they walked happily up and down. In all the windows of the Oratory and between the railings of the balconies, hundreds and hundreds of lights were burning in colored glasses. In the center of the courtyard a band played beautiful music from time to time. It was exquisite. Don Bosco and I went to the window and stood facing one another in the alcoves. The spectacle was ravishing and ineffable joy filled my heart. We could not be seen because we were in the shadow. However from time to time I waved my white handkerchief and when the boys noticed it they broke out into enthusiastic cries of *Viva Don Bosco!* (Long live Don Bosco!)

Don Bosco smiled. We were silent for a long time, each absorbed in his own thoughts. Then I exclaimed:

“Ah, Don Bosco. What a beautiful evening! Do you remember the dreams of old? Here are the boys, the priests and the clerics that Our Lady promised you!”

“How good God is!” Don Bosco replied.

“And for close on thirty years bread has never been wanting! Everything has been done with nothing! What is man in this work? If the undertaking had been human we should have been bankrupt fifty times over!”

“You have not said everything. Observe how rapidly the Pious Society has increased both in members and in works. Every day we say: ‘Enough, we must now call a halt,’ but a mysterious hand urges us on.”

As he said this his face was turned towards the towering cupola and remembering the dreams of old he gazed at it. Clothed in the silver moonlight it seemed a heavenly vision. The glance and the countenance of Don Bosco seemed at that moment to be inspired. We again lapsed into silence, prey to a thousand emotions.

At last I broke the silence for a second time.

“Tell me, Don Bosco, do you not think that there is still something needed to complete your work?”

For a moment I hesitated but then I went on.

“Are you going to do nothing for girls? Do you not think that if we had an institute for Sisters affiliated to our Pious Society and founded by you, it would crown your work? Our Lord had pious women among His followers and they ministered to him. What an amount of good our Sisters would be able to do for our poor pupils. Then, could they not do for girls what we are doing for young boys?”

I had been rather hesitant in manifesting what I felt because I thought Don Bosco was adverse to this.

He thought for a while then, to my astonishment answered,

“Yes, this will also come about. We shall have Sisters, but not yet, a little later on.”<sup>30</sup>

This was the third time Don Bosco had said yes, without hesitation and without wavering. He had said to Miss Provera in 1863, “If you could wait awhile;” to Miss Parigi in 1865, “Yes, yes, when the time is ripe;” and now to Father Lemoyne, “A little later on.” There was no room for

doubt that our Father had definitely determined to give life to another religious family.

### **How Don Bosco soothed the Superior of Tor de' Specchi**

On September 29 in a letter to Mother Madaline Galeffi, President of the Noble Oblates of Tor de' Specchi Don Bosco repeated his opinion of the worth of religious women: "Do not worry about the number of your Daughters because it is not the number of persons but charity and fervor that give glory to God."<sup>31</sup>

Here Don Bosco did not find poverty. He did not expect it. Therefore he encouraged humble faith in the *panem nostram quotidianum*. Here where vocations were lacking for a recollected, devout, but not uncomfortable life he limited himself to saying, in a sense, that the vitality of the Spirit can be increased in the few who also raise their hands to heaven for evangelical workers.

### **The school building again**

Father Pestarino closes his chronicle for the year with the following:

... having reached the roof of the wing of the building which faces the town, some vaulting was made over the porticoes and in the two rooms to the north which were ready for use. In the same way, ramps were made up to the second floor. The stairs will be put in place next spring while the three top rooms are being put in order.

It must be noted that even the few families that did not help directly in building the college contributed secretly in one way or another, directly or indirectly and I wanted to say this because it gives me pleasure to tell the whole truth.

To such faithful love of truth nothing could be added but the exclamation of Dante, "Oh, conscience upright and clear!"

### **New pupils**

**1867:** The year began with changes in the workroom. The merchant's two children had to leave the Daughters they loved to go with their father who was settling elsewhere. There came as boarders in their place, two young fourteen-year-old girls from nearby Saint Stephen. They were Maria Grosso and Maria Gastaldi, two young plants who would thrust their roots so deeply into the soil of their new garden as to want never to leave it but to adorn it with the beauty of their blossoms.

### **Father Pestarino in Turin**

In early March Father Pestarino went to the Oratory for the Directors Conference usually held on the feast of Saint Francis. But this year both feast and conference had been transferred to March 3, Quinquagesima Sunday, in order to await Don Bosco's arrival from a journey to Rome.

Father Pestarino reported on the progress of the building. He said that some rooms on the ground floor were ready for occupation and that when, in a short time, the stairs were finished, some upstairs rooms would be ready. In the meantime work would be started on the chapel, and on Sunday boys would meet in the courtyard for catechism and some pleasant conversations.

### **Mornese dedicates itself to Mary Help of Christians**

Once again, filled with what he had seen in Valdocco, Father Pestarino returned to Mornese. He could not help relating, publicly and privately, the miracles Don Bosco continually obtained by invoking the name of the Help of Christians.

Had he not already related the incident where the threatened storm had been averted at Revello by the triple invocation of the Help of Christians? It was only natural that the good Mornese people, themselves preoccupied with a drought threatening the harvest as well as with the fear of storms which could destroy the vineyards, should promise a tenth of the harvest if this tender Mother showed herself their protectress. Father Pestarino was very comforted by this and returning to Turin for our Father's feast took with him the cordial promise, written and signed by the principal landowners of Mornese.

### **Don Bosco gives assurance of the protection of Mary Help of Christians on Mornese**

Don Bosco was pleased with the trust of those simple people and gave Father Pestarino the task of reassuring them in his name and that of Our Lady.

On July 15 a new list of committed people went by letter from Mornese. Here it is in full.

Dear Reverend Father Director,

I hasten to send you the names of eight people who came to me to make a voluntary offering of a tenth of their harvest in order that your Reverence may add them to the other names from this town. Their prayer is that Mary Help of Christians may keep free from misfortune, both their souls and their farms. These, like the others, first intend to offer a tenth based on the harvest of silkworms, and some up to the end of the year having in view a second harvest of silkworms.

Father Lawrence Pestarino—Joseph Pestarino, late Anthony—Mrs. Nina Ghio—Lawrence Mazzarello late Josephine Lencin—Stephen Mazzarello late Francis Baroni—Louis Maglio—Joseph Mazzarello di Valponasca [father of Mary Mazzarello]—the Mazzarello brothers with their father Biondin.

At the same time I give you the sad news of the death of the young organist Mazzarello, who died a holy death. He kissed the crucifix frequently as a token of his resignation to God's will and died with it still on his lips.

The arm of the Superior of the Institute of Our Lady Immaculate is healing well. She sends her greetings and thanks and asks you to continue prayers to Our Lady for her. She has already experienced the assistance of Mary Help of Christians. I take the opportunity of recommending myself to your prayers and although my prayers are weak I never cease to offer them to you. I am,

Your affectionate son in J.C.

*Father Dominic Pestarino*

Many of these names belonged to persons well known to Don Bosco and very dear to him. Mrs. Nina Ghio was one of the wealthiest and most devout people of Mornese. She had given a home to Felicina Mazzarello, Mary's sister, for many years and treated her as a daughter. When Don Bosco was visiting the town she retained for herself the honor of providing food for him and for his guests. It would arrive cooked, piping hot and tasty, at the moment they sat down to eat. The youth, Mazzarello, (Mornese is full of Mazzarells and Pestarinos), was the son of a certain Maria, very dear to Don Bosco. He had been at the Oratory for awhile where, among other things, he had learned to play the organ and gave many promising signs of holiness. Ill health brought him back to his home town. Angela Macagno had met Don Bosco with the other Daughters and since she was afflicted with arthritis, which impeded the use of her right arm, as Petronilla tells us, he prayed for her and obtained an improvement and then a cure.

To be remembered by Don Bosco in his prayers even for only one of them, was for these good Daughters a consoling assurance of God's blessing on them all since they were already in the habit of not thinking of themselves as individuals, but as united in heart and spirit by the bond of the Pious Union. To Mary Mazzarello it was a fresh impulse to that veneration she had felt at just seeing him, a greater urge to love God more intensely and of making every effort to see that the girls also grew in the love of God and the horror of sin.

### **Ingenuity of the Daughters in doing good**

What a number of little industries were thought up to make a certain girl understand that she was too vain! To reach that other who, weak in affection, failed to respond to her mother's smile and was very secretive. It did not matter if they kept away from her or had no relationship with her! The town was small and Mary used friends and acquaintances, making it her business to meet the girl concerned as she was coming out of church. She knew that by saying the word she would easily get her to walk part of the way with her. This was enough for sowing the good seed. If the seed did not bloom immediately it was not left alone but followed up with kind, intuitive affection and a word of faith, but most of all with prayer. It was a very rare thing for even the most arid earth not to bear at least some fruit.

The possession of practical instinct made her, one might say, almost infallible in observation and attention. She was able to adapt herself and be pleased with the amount of correspondence possible to each individual.

When it seemed absolutely impossible to win over a soul she knew to be in danger she had recourse to an expedient learned from Father Pestarino and which Don Bosco himself used with success. Petronilla relates:

The Daughters learned from Father Pestarnio how to be ingenuous in doing good. Once, for example, we bought a hundred copies of the pamphlet, *A Girl Who Wants to Belong Completely to Jesus*,<sup>32</sup> with Pious Union money and, realizing that the time was ripe, we left them around or pretended to forget some. Naturally anyone picking up the little book would read it and often benefited by it. During the holidays Father Pestarino's niece, Rosalia, a pupil of the *Madri Pie of Novada* picked up one of them. We had put it in her door just a moment before thinking it might produce good fruit.

Mary could not but have been in the forefront of that swarm of busy bees. When serious or dangerous matters were involved she would send for the girl's mother and after having attracted her interest through some message or other or by praising her or her family she would lower her voice and whisper what was close to her heart. She never kept silence when something was wrong. She could not be at peace but discreetly and prudently would move heaven and earth until the danger was averted. She had always before her eyes the words written for them by Don Bosco and repeated on his visit, "Work, work to prevent sin, even a single venial sin."

### The school chapel

In August the chapel was completed.

...This chapel, [says Father Pestarino's chronicle,] was built in a very short time and with very little expenditure. It was scarcely noticed before it was up. The townsfolk are very happy to see it completed and looking quite nice almost before they realized it, especially those among them who remember the broken down sheds that were there before.

The altar and flooring were brought from my father's house which he left to me with all its furnishings, etc. Every-

thing went into place beautifully and the whole was discreetly adorned.

So, when he went for the annual retreat which had been arranged by Don Bosco at Trofarello for his Salesians, he carried good news and asked that if Don Bosco thought it convenient he, Father Pestarino would like to move to the college where he could keep an eye on the builders and the surrounding farmlands. He did not feel he should leave everything in the hands of the builders any longer. Besides this he felt he could already make use of it for his boys.

### **Don Bosco approves the transfer of the Daughters to the "Casa Immacolata"**

By going to live at the school Father Pestarino would leave his own house free. This, as Don Bosco knew, had been built more for the use of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate than for himself.

This would allow the Daughters to live with their boarders and have a workroom on the premises. It would mean a saving in rent and more freedom for the Sunday gatherings. It would also offer the possibility of increasing the number of pupils because the premises were larger and more suitable.

Don Bosco thought a moment and then with the prudence of the saints gave his consent. The idea was a good one and should be carried out as quickly as possible. First of all though, it would be better to ensure that the Daughters could support themselves and provide for the necessities of life through their work, thus avoiding the sad necessity of turning to Father Pestarino for help or, worse still, turning back to the grief of all and making a poor impression on the people.

Father Pestarino already knew that the Daughters earned more than was needed for their frugal requirements. However he was grateful for the advice which would make

him more cautious and attentive. As soon as he got back to Mornese he moved to the school with his secretary, Francis Campi (who sometimes acted as valet) after the teacher Bodrato became a Salesian.

Campi, instructed by Father Pestarino, had kept an account of all that the Daughters had handed over. Now, following the further orders, he obtained a knowledge of their average daily expenditure and what they received both in money and kind.

As has already been stated Mary was very quick with her needle and, given her preference for dressmaking, earned two to two fifty lire a day while Petronilla, who specialized in linen wear, was very precise but somewhat slower than her friend. She earned one and a half or two lire a day. These were considerable sums for women at that time. There was also the small monthly fee of the pupils and whatever the boarders earned. This was a laughable income for those who loved an easy life with a good table, but for those who had less, it sufficiently reassured Father Pestarino about their future. Therefore they were told to be ready to move to the house next to the parish church soon after the harvest. This house was placed at their disposal and that of any other Daughters who wished to join them.

### The "Casa Immacolata"

There are conflicting stories about what was called from then onwards, *Casa Immacolata*. On one hand we have Father Pestarino's words and on the other those of the Daughters.

It would however seem to be preferable to rely on the statement of Father Joseph Pestarino, nephew of Father Dominic, who passed most of the time away from the seminary with his beloved guardian. He would, therefore, be well informed.

He writes thus,

The house occupied by the Daughters of Mary Immaculate was built by my uncle at his own expense. However the Daughters of Mary Immaculate did contribute to its construction in various ways. Teresa Pampuro took a major part by generously donating all the money obtained from the sale of her property. Angela Maccagno also gave a large sum to this work. The others gave little or nothing either because they were still dependent on their parents, or too poor. The rest of the expenses were borne by my uncle himself.<sup>33</sup>

Petronilla adds to this,

Yes, Angela Maccagno gave most because she was rich but Teresa Pampuro also gave something in the form of a sum of money together with the interest on her invested capital. The large amount intended as her dowry was to be given to the school.

Mary Mazzarello, myself and the others who were still living at home could give nothing. So we gave our labor. We knew that the house was intended for the Daughters and during any free time we had after attending to our own affairs and our duties we used to carry stones, sand, bricks and sometimes even lime, so that it was we who prepared the material required by the builders. We were very happy when ordered to move into the house but we were not surprised because we were certain that one day this would happen. Father Pestarino told us sometime previously but we did not move until October when the weather began to get cold.

When Petronilla was asked if all the Daughters were notified about the transfer and if they were asked publicly or privately whether others wished to go, she replied, "No, the others were living at home and the house was for those who had left home. Besides Father Pestarino had no need to question us in order to know who could and wanted to go. Was he not our Director?"

Cechin Mazzarello, an excellent blacksmith, assures us that when he was a young man, he helped his father make the iron parts needed in building the *Casa Immacolata*.

He tells us that it was built where there was once a hovel with a roof that could be reached from the ground and it belonged to an old woman known as Ciarabattina. On the death of their father the Pestarino brothers, in 1861, decided on the division of the property. While awaiting a decision regarding the villa at Borgoalto, Father Pestarino wanted to liberate himself from pressure and settle close to the parish church for the benefit of the people. At this same time the Daughters of Mary Immaculate were becoming New Ursulines, while Mary and Petronilla had come together to work as dressmakers, and since Teresa Pampuro was alone, consideration was being given as to whether the three would be the first to make use of article 142 of the Rules. This article states, "It is however to be noted that it is not forbidden for the independent spinsters of the Pious Union to live together in small numbers such as, three, four or five at the most, as if in a family." It was therefore necessary that a dwelling place should be prepared for them.

The house in question contained eight or nine rooms. As soon as it was ready Father Pestarino moved into it himself, with his secretary Francis Bodrato. It was very near to the parish church and very convenient for the time being until circumstances should counsel otherwise.

### **Mary detaches herself completely from her family**

With the news of fresh accommodation Mary received permission from Father Pestarino to detach herself completely from her family. She was very happy because living in common with the others she felt she could be more recollected and more deeply united with God. However she could not help feeling a little disturbed at the thought of the pain she was about to inflict on her dear parents, especially her mother who wanted her to follow the usual way and marry.

How often that good lady came back to the subject!

How often when faced with what she thought was Mary's thoughtlessness concerning her future would she hammer home her point! "But what will happen to you when we are gone? Your brothers and sisters will have homes of their own, but where will you live? What will you do, my poor child?" It was useless for Mary to tell her not to worry because God would look after her. Her mother's heart trembled and was unable to reach the heights of faith attained by her daughter. How then could Mary take away all hope from her? How make her mother able to accept something completely opposite to her own views? Mary suffered to see the pain of others but was pleased on her own account and so, happy and eager to make the break quickly, after recommending herself to God in fervent prayer she decided to speak to her father. He who loved her with a love of predilection and had supported all her wishes would surely understand the new need and, in spite of his own suffering not deny his consent.

Thus it was. Good Joseph Mazzarello was very hurt and tried to oppose this separation from his daughter. But she was moved neither by his reasoning nor his tears and proved herself able to put forward God's reasons very well. Since this was the path to which God had called her, was she not in duty bound to follow the divine call? Poor Joseph consulted Father Pestarino and then gave in. He then influenced his wife to give in too.

"What can we do?" he said to her. "Children must follow their own inclinations and parents should only oppose them if these inclinations are leading them astray. Up until now Mary has always done well. We cannot oppose her now. In any case she can no longer work in the fields because of her health. As a dressmaker she is useful to herself and others. If she wants to set up house with her companions, what can we do about it? She is on the right path and Father Pestarino has also told us to let her do as she wishes because she will do well." He was not only firm but even gave Mary the two hundred lire he had set aside for her dowry, so that she would be able to provide what

was most needed.

Mary thanked him. She was deeply touched. Then as if to assure them that she would always think of them as parents on whom she could depend she said, "This is still my home, you are always my dear parents and in my hour of need I know you will always allow me to come to you for help." This raised the spirits of her loving parents and Mary could leave them comforted in the assurance that even if she went to live in another house she would always be their dear daughter.

## NOTES

1864 - 1867

1. *M.B.*, VII, 579-60.

2. Bougaud, Emile, *Storia di S. Giovanna Fremyot, Baronessa di Chantal e dei primordi della Visitazione*, First Italian version on the second French of Serverino Ferreri (Turin, Marietti, 1876) p. 174.

3. *M.B.*, VII, 764.

4. Cf. *M.B.*, VII, 768.

5. Rather than *Chronicle* (cronaca) it should be called "chronicle notes." These were jotted down at odd moments with no regard to order or literary style. Father Pestarino himself states this when he writes on page 17, "These records were set down by me, Dominic Pestarino, priest, in a few hours in order not to leave it too long in case events should be forgotten. I put down whatever came to my mind truthfully and faithfully, but without attention to order and style so that it should not be forgotten. I may have forgotten some things but I have never strayed from the truth."

6. Cf. Pestarino, D, *Cronaca*, cf. Letter D of his nephew, Father Joseph Pestarino to Father Lemoyne, October 12, 1915. (Sales. Arch.).

7. *M.B.*, VII, 652.
8. *M.B.*, VII, 718-19.
9. *M.B.*, VII, 718.
10. Cf. Lemoyne, G.B., *Vita* (Turin, SEI, 1930) II, Ch. 1 and following.
11. *M.B.*, VI, 17.
12. Barberis, Giulio. *Il Culto di Maria Ausiliatrice* (Turin, SEI, 1920) p. 58.
13. *M.B.*, VII, 166.
14. *M.B.*, VII, 169-70.
15. *M.B.*, VII, 286-87.
16. *M.B.*, VII, 333-34.
17. Cf. Barberis, G., *Il Culto*, pp. 56-65.
18. *M.B.*, VIII, 20.
19. Lemoyne, G.B., *Vita*, II, 28-29.
20. See also letter D of Father Joseph Pestarino, Father Domenico's nephew, and eye-and-ear witness to many facts.
21. Father Pestarino's *Chronicle*.
22. *Bollettino Salesiano*, XLII (March, 1918) 47.
23. *M.B.*, VIII, 296-97.
24. *M.B.*, IV, 405.
25. This gives us to understand that the parlor was still being used for recreation on days that were wet or cold.
26. *M.B.*, VIII, 351-53.
27. *M.B.*, VIII, 346.
28. *M.B.*, VIII, 347.
29. Father Pestarino's *Chronicle*.
30. *M.B.*, VIII, 416-18.
31. *M.B.*, VIII, 475.
32. From *Frassinetti*, ed., 1851.
33. Letter F dated 1-11-1921 of Father Joseph Pestarino to his sister, Sister Rosalia (Gen. Arch. FMA).

**THE DAUGHTERS OF MARY IMMACULATE  
AND THE FATHERLY THOUGHTFULNESS  
OF DON BOSCO  
(1867 – 1870)**

The Daughters in the "*Casa Immacolata*"

October arrived and the Daughters got ahead with their easy task of moving. There was very little to be transported: a desk and a few chairs from the Maccagno house and some beds from Bodrato's. The rest of the furniture came from Teresa Pampuro who, having put all her affairs in order moved in with the Daughters permanently.

So the new occupants of the *Casa Immacolata* were the two Daughters Mary and Petronilla Mazzarello, Joan Ferretino and Teresa Pampuro. The celebrated concertina player, Catherine Mazzarello, would gladly have joined them and never stopped saying how she envied them. Unable to do this she comforted herself by generously increasing the amount of fresh bread and good wine she sent once or twice a week to the workroom. This she did in agreement with her brother who was also very generous and wanted to do all the good he could.

Their father was very old and unable to keep astride of the charities of his son and daughter. He often said, "What is happening! We used to have a lot more grain and wine! Now everything is diminishing. How is it? I am sorry for you two. I cannot understand it."

The two smiled and said, "Do not worry about us. We have more than enough of everything and are quite happy with the way things are going."

Three girls went to the *Casa Immacolata* with the Daughters. They were Maria Grosso, Maria Gastaldi and Rosa Mazzarello, Petronilla's niece. Thus a new family was started. They were as poor as the family of Nazareth, and in imitation of them were serene in their complete

abandonment to Divine Providence. Following the advice of Don Bosco, Father Pestarino told them, "For the time being continue as you were doing in the other workroom. We shall review the position later. Nevertheless if anyone wishes to return to her own home she may do so freely whenever she wishes."

Such an idea was far from anyone's mind. It was far otherwise. They felt they had never been so happy before and were only now beginning to be truly alive.

What did poverty, hard work or the lack of a number of things matter beside the fervor of their prayer, the sweetness of their Communions and their peace of soul?

### **Discontent reappears**

Some of the Daughters who certainly had not the necessary light to understand, tried to disturb by arousing discontent because of this event and because it was obvious that Father Pestarino had a special interest in this new family. But Mary said they were not to speak of the matter and among themselves they did not mention it.

Perhaps discontent was accentuated by the fact that Father Pestarino had taken an oil painting he himself had commissioned from Angela Maccagno's house and transported to the *Casa Immacolata*. This painting depicted the Immaculate Mother with Saint Teresa, Protectress of Christian mothers, on one side and Saint Angela Merici, Protectress of the Daughters, on the other. This picture had always been kept in the room where the Daughters and the mothers held their conferences. The poor things had never realized it was not their property.

They had instead, seen it taken away and did not accept the fact that it was only right that it should go to *Casa Immacolata*, their own house, the house of the Pious Union where all of them had the right to go whenever they wished.

"You do not want to start a monastery . . ."

This would seem to be the best place to refer to the commendation of Monsignor Contratto. Father Pestarino had gone to see him reporting, among other things, on the family that had sprung up among the good Ursulines. The bishop said to him, "You do not want to start a monastery, do you? . . . The whole town is already a monastery! Just built a wall around it and . . ."

Father Pestarino certainly did not intend starting a monastery. Far from it. He wanted to form active co-operators for his apostolate of war to the death against Jansenism, which had already contaminated what it could not destroy. Knowing from personal experience that in many cases a woman can do more than a priest he aimed at training some of them to become God's humble workers. Having no special ties and without any other culture than a great love for God; possessing no wealth but their own two arms and an unlimited spirit of sacrifice, it was just because they were detached from self that they would be ready to make use of everything and use every way of doing good without thinking of the morrow except to prepare for it, and prepare themselves for Holy Communion.

Now that he was a Salesian to the very depths of his being and saw that Don Bosco was taking an interest in their moral formation, Father Pestarino thought that the more pious and active they became in a Salesian manner the more apt they would be in responding to Don Bosco's plans for them, whatever they might be.

The fact that he did not want nuns in the accepted sense of the word is proved by his separating them gradually through the development of events, from the Ursulines who were real nuns living in their own homes, and gathering them together in the *Casa Immacolata*. He had stipulated that, apart from meal-times which should be as in any well ordered family, they could continue their own habits even with regard to prayer. Without realizing it the people of Mornese saw eye to eye with him in this. It is true that

early on they had regarded Mary and Petronilla as very pious, even too pious, but when they saw them working with the tailor, then collecting many young girls and playing, singing and dancing with them, they marvelled, said they were very different Daughters from the others and that Mary was becoming a very attractive saint who showed that the way to paradise could be easy and joyous.

### Life at the "Immacolata"

It was true that Mary had the gift of rendering every sacrifice easy. Everything in *Casa Immacolata* was good for the spirit. However on the material side things were rather restricted and in order to keep going it was necessary to live very frugally. Countenances were always serene in spite of this and the praise of God more and more fervent. Divine Providence came to their aid by sending three more girls to the workroom. This made Mary break out into a hymn of gratitude with such enthusiasm as to infect all those around her with the same sentiments. Every extra girl was a fresh heart to offer to God, a new lily for the family. This was enough for her.

On the other hand she did have an eye for the material side. As the cold season approached she went to pay a visit to her home, "Mother," she said, "do not worry about collecting the wood from that vineyard. Let us think about it this year."

There were also good Catherine's gifts and the gifts of the young widow who, noticing they were very busy or short of money would prepare a meal and take it to them or else invite them to come to her. There was also Maria Grosso's father who said, "My daughter knows where we have some woodland. Go help yourselves to wood for the winter." Needless to say, no offer like this was ignored.

When the fuel stock became very low one or two Daughters with some of the girls would go to the woods in the afternoon and cut down suitable branches. These they

would bind into faggots and carry as much as they could, arriving for supper. In order to save time, they were often tempted to cut down and bind up large quantities. This meant working until nightfall and returning very late. Those waiting for them were very worried because the woodland was a good way off and the Roverno had to be crossed in steep descent. This was always difficult but it was treacherous in the darkness.

The following day some would leave the house at about three in the morning to collect the bundles left the night before. They would return immediately well burdened, deposit their load and tidy themselves in time for the eight o'clock mass. After mass without taking any extra rest all would go to their normal occupations. There was a variety of these because each one's individual aptitude was put to good use. Besides the normal workroom routine, feather beds were made, spinning, cleaning, mending and renovating articles for church use were all undertaken.

This last work used to be done in the sacristy on Sundays by the Daughters, but they now found it easier and quicker to do it at home.

### **Beginning of the apostolate for boys at the school**

In the meantime Father Pestarino had settled down in the school using the top floor for himself and gathering his young boys and men for catechism under the porticoes and in the courtyard. They grew to love the church and himself more and more and were drawn to God in a very touching manner. In order to attract as many as possible he wrote in large letters over the door, *Venite o figli*. This was not the elegant work of a scribe, but it was attractive enough for those self-confident youths from whom he expected to reap so much good for his beloved native town.

### **A trying veto**

At this point a storm broke over Father Pestarino without any warning. There had been no threatening skies or dark thunderclouds which might have prepared dispositions.

It is not known how or from whom it actually came nor whether it was received by word of mouth or in writing; whether the voice was that of an authority giving advice or a definite order. But somehow a voice from the Episcopal Curia stated that the idea of a boys' school in Mornese should be dropped because it might harm or hamper the little seminary just opened in Acqui.

This was a bolt from the blue for Father Pestarino. What did it mean? The permission to work on Sundays had come from the same place. Did this permission not imply the setting up of the boys' school? Why the change? The Curia had always been most kind to him and knew he was only seeking to do good. In any case, even if it were only a piece of advice, the very authority from which it had come would make it a command for the obedient priest. It was a veto which tied his hands in a work well on the way to completion and so full of promise.

Trusting in Divine Providence he hoped time would bring light. He did not give up his dream, telling himself that probably only a delay was expected and delay did not mean never. "Was the school not to be opened? In any case it had not yet been completed. The chapel was ready. That could harm nobody and be of use to everybody. Let us then bless the chapel."

### **The blessing of the school chapel**

Father Pestarino wrote to Don Bosco, who as his Superior must be made aware of everything. He asked him to perform the function of blessing the chapel, at the same time accepting the promised tenth of the harvest.

The harvest had been exceptionally good that year. In fact it was better than it had been for many a year.

Our good Father showed his pleasure in his reply. However he suggested that if the bishop would grant leave for the blessing, it should be carried out while the weather was good, adding that he was pleased to hear about the abundant harvest.<sup>1</sup>

The people of Mornese knew they owed this to Mary Help of Christians and were very eager to fulfill their promise in money or kind, but they wanted to give it into the hands of Don Bosco himself. Our good Father however, although wishing to comply with the common desire, could not give an exact date for going to Mornese. It could be in December.

So, Father Pestarino, in order to safeguard himself, asked, through Father Valle the parish pastor, authorization for the blessing of the chapel and the building. Would he see in the answer a mitigation of the former disposition? Time is a good counselor. So he fixed the date for the feast of Saint Lucy, December 13.

Meanwhile Don Bosco wrote to Father Pestarino that he would be pleased to accept his invitation and expected to leave for Mornese on December 9.<sup>2</sup>

Later he had to modify his plans because Monsignor Contratto, dean of the bishops of the ecclesiastical province of Turin, fell seriously ill and wanted to see Don Bosco.

Don Bosco anticipated his journey to December 7 but on his arrival in Acqui what was his grief to find that the bishop had passed away the day before at seventy years of age.<sup>3</sup>

The bishop had wanted him. Did he want to speak of the school as well?

### **Don Bosco at Mornese for the blessing of the chapel**

After the bishop's funeral, Don Bosco journeyed on to Mornese. Father Pestarino's chronicle notes:

The permission to bless the chapel came on December 9, and Don Bosco was expected that same day for that very happy occasion. He had been long awaited. It was dark when he arrived, having traveled in a carriage from Novi to Montaldeo. The children hastened to meet Don Bosco singing hymns dedicated to him. Bonfires had been lit at various points along the route as far as Castagneta because of the cold and these added in a wonderful way to the joy of the feast. The parish pastor and clergy, the Mayor and the Counselors met him with great acclamation at St. Rocco. Don Bosco wanted to alight from the carriage but the parish pastor and the Mayor got in with him and they rode together to the village boundary. It took three quarters of an hour to reach the building. The crowd had increased along the route and was now immense.

We reached the building which was lit up with oil lamps, while fireworks shattered the sky. The portico glittered with lights sent from houses in the town which were off Don Bosco's route. Most of them came from the "Mazzarelli" district. Don Bosco was asked to sit on a throne in order to listen to some addresses interspersed with two sonnets written by the village schoolmaster, Hector Ponassi.<sup>4</sup> Then because of the cold the rest was postponed until the next day.

Before retiring Don Bosco spoke a few heartfelt words of gratitude for the welcome given him. He also bestowed some words of praise for their help in a work which however was still in need of much more time and expense. He assured them that he too would like to help in whatever way he could. But they were not to deceive themselves because there were many difficulties in the way.

Thus, he began to throw cold water on the burning flame of Mornese hopes, trying to avert suspicion, inopportune words and displeasure for those who, even if their aims were justified, were still putting a spoke in the wheel.

### **Don Bosco the first guest received at the school**

Don Bosco was again Father Pestarino's guest, but this time in the school. As in 1864 the Daughters, helped by offerings from the people, gave their services behind the scenes. Mrs. Ninna Ghio sent her usual choice meat dishes and sweets, regularly.

Mornese was one in a delirium of happiness and gratitude. The weather seemed to favor the common joy since, although cold in keeping with the season, the skies were clear and the air dry.

Father Pestarino continues: "Beautiful inscriptions composed by the municipal secretary, Attorney Anthony Traverso, were to be seen in a number of places. There was one in the market place, one at Borgoalto where the school was situated and another over the school entrance.

The next day many parish priests and other priests from the surrounding districts, came to keep Don Bosco company at dinner. During the meal Mr. Traverso read a beautiful poem which Don Bosco asked to take back with him to Turin."<sup>5</sup>

### **The love of Mornese for Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco**

Don Bosco's biographer adds,

On the 10th there was a great assembly under the school porticoes. The servant of God accompanied by his host, Father Pestarino, was acclaimed with great enthusiasm. Before being presented with the promised "tenth" from the hands of the little boys and girls lined up in front, a well-known person of the place announced in the name of all, the reason for what was happening.

"We are greatly indebted to the Holy Virgin Help of Christians," he said. "Last year when many men of this village were forced to go to war, all of them placed themselves under the protection of Mary Help of Christians

and hung medals round their necks. They went courageously and had to face grave dangers, but not one of them suffered any harm in that terrible scourge.

Besides this the surrounding hamlets were stricken by cholera, hail, and drought, but we were spared. The harvest of our neighbors was almost nil while ours has been blessed with an abundance such as we have not seen in the last twenty years.

For these reasons we are happy to express in this manner an undying gratitude to the great Protectress of the human race.

I believe myself to be the faithful interpreter of my fellow townspeople in confirming that what we do today we shall continue to do in the future persuaded that thus we shall become still more worthy of heavenly blessings.”<sup>6</sup>

Father Pestarino continues,

Don Bosco showed himself to be extremely pleased and the guests marvelled at what they saw. After this the mothers demonstrated their gratitude. They, together with their tiny children, carried little baskets of fruit, grapes, butter, bottles etc. to present them to Don Bosco who, moved to tears, accepted everything in his usual kindly manner.

He put these offerings beside him and then received a hundred francs to be sent to Turin for the Church of Mary Help of Christians.

The first mass in the chapel was celebrated by Don Bosco who preached an appropriate sermon. He also blessed the school building with a certain amount of solemnity. This was followed by Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament to the great satisfaction of all the people.

### **Don Bosco's love for Mornese**

Father Lemoyne adds,

The servant of God was continually occupied during those days. He said mass, distributed Holy Communion and preached in the parish church. Then he heard confessions,

visited the sick and gave a conference to the Daughters of **Mary Immaculate**. This was followed by an audience for each one of the many who wanted to ask advice. He distributed pictures of Saint Francis de Sales inscribed: *To our dear charitable subscribers, John Bosco priest*. He went to see the parish priest, Father Olivieri, at Lerma. Long hours were spent at night in conversation with Father Pestarino on a variety of subjects and he also wrote letters.<sup>7</sup>

Don Bosco showed much tender affection and sincere gratitude for the town. He repeatedly promised he would never forget Mornese and would pray, as he said,

“that God may bless everyone body and soul as well as the farmlands, and repay a hundredfold that which has been offered so freely in honor of Mary Help of Christians.” He then conferred with Father Pestarino about the work to be done in the spring and after four days left for Turin. A great crowd accompanied him as far as Castagneta and some went as far as Montaldeo. Everyone received a medal and a crucifix as a souvenir and to those who went to meet him and accompanied him back to Montaldeo he later sent a beautiful book from Turin.<sup>8</sup>

This almost completes Father Pestarino's chronicle. To have continued it would have been to speak of what caused him pain and he preferred to be silent. This renders him more admirable to us and more precious in the eyes of God.

### **Commemoration stone at the entrance to the chapel**

The chapel had been dedicated to Our Lady of Sorrows and above the altar was the picture so dear to Father Pestarino and, as has already been noted, brought from his father's house with all the other sacred and ornamental furnishings.

As a record of the function a stone slab was enclosed in

the wall under the porticoes adjacent to the chapel door. It bore the words, "In the year 1867 on December 13 this little church was dedicated with solemn rite—and the priest, John Bosco—outstanding example of charity and zeal—offered the Immaculate Host—invoking the blessing of God—on the new school—and the people of Mornese."

### **Don Bosco's discourse to the Daughters**

Another more durable stone, more precious and dear to Don Bosco was their gratitude found in the hearts of the Daughters for him. This was especially true of Mary Mazzarello who, more united to God than the others and more on fire with an ardent desire for perfection was better able to understand and respond to him. Who could measure her gratitude at the thought of Don Bosco's deigning to give them a conference, adapting himself to their poverty and ignorance?

This conference was given standing under the porticoes in the cold, in order to infuse into them the spirit of humility, love of sacrifice, the desire of suffering any pain in order to bring souls to God. He began and ended with the recommendation to love and invoke Mary Immaculate Help of Christians together with his favorite saying, "*Keep cheerful, keep cheerful because Our Lady loves you.*"

### **How Mary Mazzarello received the words of Don Bosco**

This time however Mary did not go to the front as she had done on the first occasion. Rather she had placed herself behind everyone else in order to absorb his every word more freely. Her usually pale complexion became gradually suffused with color as Don Bosco continued to speak. She was filled with joy and tenderness as she listened with hands joined as if in fervent prayer. Her eyes at times flashed her agreement but for the most part they were

lowered. During that half hour her whole soul vibrated in unison with that of Don Bosco, aware that she was receiving the light of sure direction.

She said nothing about her spiritual joy yet it was obvious, especially from the way she sought to practice and have others to practice what Don Bosco had said.

### **Mary is elected head of the "Casa Immacolata"**

When all this was over the Daughters settled down to the diligent, joyous work of the *Casa Immacolata* where even the walls breathed happiness and all vied with each other in being cheerful and pure, as recommended.

In the meantime there was something new on the way. Father Pestarino, possibly at the suggestion of Don Bosco, let it be known that as they had increased in number and were likely to increase still more, it was advisable to have one among themselves to whom they could appeal both personally and for the sake of the people. The Daughters asked him what he meant but he said, "I do not want to intervene. You do as you think best. You could also ask your boarders and the girls of the workroom to think about it."

No sooner said than done! One Sunday when there was a good number of girls present they were asked to choose and as expected they all voted for Mary. Then Petronilla stood up and smiling very affectionately said to her, "Very good. Now I want to be the first to use *lei* to you" [a personal pronoun used when addressing persons to whom respect is due.] It was a very happy celebration for all including Mary who accepted that token of trust very simply.

When this incident came to the ears of the townsfolk it was ridiculed as if it were foolishness. But the girls thought it only natural that they should show their respect exteriorly. They started using the *lei* mode of deferential address and gradually the less favorably disposed followed suit.

### The death of Frassinetti

1868: In January, 1868 Father Frassinetti died suddenly of pneumonia. Poor Father Pestarino gave the sad news to Mornese himself. He had lost the friend of his youth. The news was received with great sorrow and grateful prayers ascended to heaven from those faithful hearts. There was a general sense of loss for the priest who had so often come among them to preach and hear confessions. The Daughters of Mary gave him a tribute of praise and prayer, especially the little family of the *Casa Immacolata* where the life of the spirit was more intense, more recollected and closer to God, the inexhaustible fount of affection and gratitude.

Don Bosco too, suffered because of this bereavement since on many occasions he had been able to appreciate Father Frassinetti's zeal and uncommon virtue. Because of his cooperation in the work of the *Letture Cattoliche* Don Bosco regarded him as his benefactor.

### Prepare yourselves for the consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin

Side by side with this sorrow Don Bosco received some very real comfort during the early part of the year. Everything was now ready for the consecration of the church, of *his church* that, inasmuch as it had given him much anxious thought now filled his heart with joy because of the glory it would bring to his Madonna. Wishing everything to be as beautiful and appropriate as was called for by the occasion, in February, he gave the order in Rome for special medals to be struck. On one side there was to be the façade of the church and the inscription *Church of Mary Help of Christians, Turin*, and on the other side the characteristic effigy of Mary Help of Christians with the invocation, *Mary Help of Christians, pray for us*. The medals for distribution to the faithful were to be smaller and thinner, with

the effigy of Mary Help of Christians on one side and the symbol of the Blessed Sacrament on the other.<sup>9</sup>

**Don Bosco is pleased to approve  
the annual report of Father Pestarino**

The feast of Saint Francis de Sales, celebrated at the Oratory on February 3, came in the midst of all these preparations. Father Pestarino was there as usual. As was his wont he made his report in the presence of all the Directors, stating among other things what he and the Daughters were doing for young people at that time especially in order to prevent or at least lessen the harm that could be done by the Mardi Gras.

Don Bosco gave his approval with pleasure to all the zeal that was being exercised at Mornese to keep the dangers of carnival evenings away from the young. He related how consoled he had been to see the solid piety of those peasant folk, and asked Father Pestarino to thank them again sincerely for the offerings given him for his new church. He then encouraged Father Pestarino to go ahead with his holy enterprise.<sup>10</sup>

During his private talk with Don Bosco, Father Pestarino received instructions on how to continue work on the school. The skeletal structure had been completed and the first and second floors were well advanced, but there was still much to do. Yet there had to be a slowing down for two major reasons.

**Difficulty upon difficulty**

The first reason was the veto which was still in force and the second, not less worrying than the first, was the lack of money.

Managing the diocese in place of the Bishop was the Vicar General, Monsignor Francis Cavalleri, Canon Director

of the cathedral. He was a very gentle person like his Superior, the deceased Bishop, and would certainly not have disturbed their plans had he not been induced to do so for reasons independent of his personal will. Nevertheless, for the time being, no one must be given any reason for concerning themselves about what was happening at the school. This would only upset people and turn them against those who had not been very considerate and so create fresh and more difficult stoppages.

Funds! Teresa Pampuro's dowry given to Father Pestarino for the school building had evaporated and it was unlikely that any other of the Daughters would be able to follow her example. Others would certainly have liked to imitate her and no one would have hesitated to place fabulous sums in Father Pestarino's hands if they had possessed them. But who among those good Daughters could produce twenty thousand lire as Teresa Pampuro had? Angela Maccagno perhaps? But she had her mother and besides this she had very little enthusiasm for the school and certainly not enough to carry her to the point of deprivation. Apart from this she had not the high ideals of those Daughters who were already living in community, and she had already given a great deal to the *Casa Immacolata*.

Petronilla's last thousand lire had also been swallowed up. Where did she obtain this? Let her tell us herself:

Knowing that I would not want to stay with any of my brothers and that I was preparing to live with Mary, when my father died he left me a beautiful orchard with a well and also a floor of his house to be left completely free for my use. My brother used this and paid me rent for it regularly. It was not so much for the money because I would never have wanted to take it. But Father Pestarino had arranged this so that my sisters-in-law would respect me.

I sold the orchard when one of my brothers died and the college was already progressing. I knew nothing about business but Father Pestarino called me one day and said someone wanted to buy my property and would pay well and at once. He himself sent an attorney to draw up the instrument.

But listen to this. I had said nothing to anyone and as soon as I had my lovely thousand lire in my hand I hurried to give it over to Father Pestarino in order to have some part in the merit of the school. I had just left Father Director when a man caught me by the apron and said roughly, "What a little fool you are! If Father Pestarino should die tomorrow you would be on the streets with not a penny to your name."

I looked at him without understanding and then I said, "Oh, you mean that Divine Providence never dies and there will always be something left for me as well."

He stood there quite taken aback. Oh, if only there had been a little more Providence!

Father Pestarino still hoped and not in vain. Some help came from the young widow who wanted to live with the Daughters, but it was not enough and no more was in view.

### Effective comfort

Strengthened by Don Bosco's advice Father Pestarino left Turin. Regarding the building of the school he would be like a drop of water steadily falling on stone day by day, leaving little visible trace, but slowly forming a deep hollow in which to rest in peace.

He had quietly done the little possible, trusting in God alone, and from God he hoped for a favorable solution to the setback with the Curia.

His Superiors had also been told how the *Casa Immacolata* continued to give edification and that the number of pupils was increasing. They also heard how another of the Daughters, Assunta Gaino of Cartosio, had already joined the little group of Daughters, and still another, Maria Poggio of Ponti, was about to join. Both had been sent by Canon Olivieri.

On his return to Mornese, Father Pestarino complied with the decisions taken by his superiors. Without adding anything and leaving the third floor incomplete he

attended only to finishing what had been started. With few workers but great care, he did everything Don Bosco wished, strengthening and making everything resistant to the destructive instinct of boys. He was also careful not to show any sign of what was in the air and troubling him, confident that everything would come right and that his poor fellow townfolk would at last have the much desired school for their sons.

### **Don Bosco's first pamphlet on Mary Help of Christians and the first novena**

Everything in Turin, however, was joy, almost boisterous joy. Don Bosco had prepared a pamphlet for *Letture Cattoliche* entitled, *The Wonders of the Mother of God, invoked under the title of Mary Help of Christians*, (*Meraviglie della Madre di Dio, invocata sotto il titolo di Maria Ausiliatrice*), which he distributed freely even to distinguished persons. On May 14 he taught the boys to make the novena to Mary Help of Christians.

This novena had often been suggested privately and many miraculous graces had been obtained. Now Don Bosco offered it to the whole of his family at Valdocco:

I have good news to give you: tomorrow the novena to Mary Help of Christians will begin. We cannot make it in the new church this year, but we hope next year to make it there with solemnity. During the novena we shall do nothing more than what we have been doing for the month of May during past years. But we must make it well. The *fioretti* we read in the evening are good for all. Let each one make some practice of piety during the day. Then let each one say, three times, the Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and three times the Hail Holy Queen to Our Lady. Each one must ask Our Lady for the grace he needs most . . . for my part I shall pray that you may all save your souls.<sup>11</sup>

### The Companion of Catholics, ("Cattolico provveduto")

At that time Don Bosco offered another bouquet to the Help of Christians. He placed on sale a book he had worked on for several years. *The Companion of Catholics: Practical Piety with Suitable Advice According to the Needs of the Times*. It was offered to the Blessed Virgin with the following dedication dated May 24. This dedication is the expression of the deep sentiments of his heart: "To the august Queen of heaven—to the glorious ever Virgin Mary—conceived without original sin—Full of grace and blessed among all women—Daughter of the Eternal Father—Mother of the Incarnate Word—Spouse of the Holy Spirit—Delight of the Blessed Trinity—Inexhaustible Fount of faith, hope and charity—Advocate of the Abandoned—Supporter and Defender of the Weak—Anchor of Trust—Mother of Mercy—Refuge of Sinners—Consoler of the Afflicted—Health of the Sick—Comfort of the Dying—Hope of the Human Race—To you who on this day—the Catholic Church proclaims—the Help of Christians—Your unworthy servant, unable to do more—humbly dedicates this book—May 24, 1868."<sup>12</sup>

We wished to transcribe this dedication here because it tells us once more of the boundless love Don Bosco had for Our Lady. After singing her praises in a cadence of sweet titles through a scale more beautiful than music he ends by calling her simply Help of Christians. We cannot but understand as Don Bosco wished, that this last title is the compendium of all his love for Mary and all her attributes in our favor. This precious lyric is, besides, dated May 24 at the foot of the page. This is a prophetic date in the Salesian records for, from now onwards, this date was to mark the most beautiful and best loved feast of Our Lady in all Don Bosco's Houses.

### **Manifestation of the planned Institute repeated**

Don Bosco promised something else for the glory of Mary Help of Christians in a conversation he had with his best loved son, Father John Cagliero, who relates it as follows: "...In May, 1868—notice May again—he, (Don Bosco) told me of his plan to form a congregation of women with a religious habit and simple vows who, just like us Salesians, would have as an aim the education of the children of the working classes and at the same time look after the clothing and linen of the boys in our Houses."<sup>13</sup>

It was now no longer dreams that spoke but his Sons who asked questions. Don Bosco no longer had any doubts. He knew not only that he had to work for young females but even the manner in which he was to work. He knew the path he must tread and the means to reach the end: a religious congregation that followed the Salesian Congregation and was itself Salesian because it was a branch of the same tree. It would cooperate in the salvation of the souls of the young.

He manifested this determination when his mind and sentiments were wrapped up in the coming consecration of his temple. This proves that he did not consider a marble monument sufficient for the Help of Christians, but wanted to offer her another, living one that, throughout the world in the name of and for the glory of our heavenly Mother, would gather together and lead to God the hearts of young girls, preserved or regenerated in grace for the good of family and society.

### **The picture of Mary Help of Christians**

The last preparations for the solemn consecration were well advanced and Don Bosco and his Sons could already admire the splendid picture to which "both heaven and earth had lent a hand." Both heaven and earth since, as Lorenzoni the artist himself confessed, he had received supernatural help.

One day, [relates a priest of the Oratory,] I went into his studio to see the picture. It was my first meeting with Lorenzoni. He was on a ladder giving the final touches to the face of the sacred image of Mary. He did not turn at the noise I made on entering but went on with his work oblivious of me. After a while he came down and studied the picture to see the effect of his final touches.

Suddenly he became aware of my presence. Taking me by the arm he led me to where the light shone on the picture "Look," he said to me, "How beautiful it is! But it is not my work. It is not I who am painting it. There is another hand that guides mine. I believe you belong to the Oratory; *then tell Don Bosco that the picture will be as he wants it.*" He then proceeded with his work.<sup>14</sup>

Tell Don Bosco that the picture will be as he wants it! Yes indeed! Don Bosco had described it minutely, not as one who explains what is in his imaginative mind but as one who refers to something he has seen repeatedly and remembers in minutest detail.

In more than one of his mysterious dreams he had found himself, "in front of a matronly figure magnificently attired and indescribably beautiful, majestic and splendid, surrounded by a senate of elders resembling princes, and with a retinue of innumerable persons adorned with dazzling grace and richness."<sup>15</sup>

### **Consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians**

The consecration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians took place on Tuesday, June 9. It would not be possible to express adequately Don Bosco's sentiments on seeing so many people filled with emotion, praising his Queen. If the artist Lorenzoni fell on his knees and burst into tears at the sight of his beautiful work hung in that great church,<sup>16</sup> what tears of joy, thanksgiving and supplication must have filled Don Bosco's eyes at the sight of his Lady being applauded by all the people?

How moved he must have been when the archbishop offered the holy sacrifice at the altar of Mary Help of Christians. At the archbishop's side as deacon and sub-deacon were Canon Olivieri, Don Bosco's faithful admirer who had become Archpriest of Acqui, and his own Father Lemoyne, Director of the school at Lanzo.<sup>17</sup> He must have been more in heaven than on earth when he celebrated mass himself and distributed Holy Communion straight after the archbishop. His biographer does not mention this, perhaps because he felt unable to do so. Some sentiments cannot be expressed in words.

Nevertheless the following episode might give a glimmer of light.

Canon John Anfossi was kneeling next to Don Bosco behind the high altar. It was during Vespers and the antiphon, *Sancta Maria*, of Father John Cagliero was being sung. The Canon never remembered Don Bosco moving or speaking in church during times of prayer before. But this time he turned to look at him and his eyes were wet with tears of happiness as he whispered, "Dear Anfossi, do you not feel you are in heaven?"<sup>18</sup>

Why, Don Bosco did you hide yourself behind the altar on such a great day as this? Perhaps in your humility you wished to withdraw yourself from the admiring eyes of the people who through your excellent musician Son might acclaim the Father. Or did your fatherly heart take you among your Sons kneeling wherever they could and where the people might not come? Or were you fearful lest your emotion at seeing the glory of the Help of Christians should betray you before curious eyes?

### **Mary Help of Christians, Mother and Queen**

This was a day of major triumph and just as the Divine Master disappeared from the eyes of the crowd who wanted to make him king, so Don Bosco hid himself in order that

**every** heart should bow and all honor be given to his great **Lady** alone. Let us then ponder and be moved by the **gentle** image Don Bosco gives us of himself and let us remember that it is to his heart, his faith and the holy **power** of *his dreams* that we owe a picture that is so heavenly and devotional.

The Help of Christians is both Mother and Queen! Don Bosco knew that the human race needed the heart of a mother. It was to his delicate sentiments, his educative and eminently psychological art, his love for young people, the devoted affection he had for his own mother, and in consequence the desire to fill the painful void in the lives of so many of his motherless young rascals, that we owe this image of gentle majesty presented to us showing her Son resting on her heart and on her arm. The infant and the young child need the Baby Jesus who was as small and poor as they and a lover of poor children. He was also good, obedient, diligent and submissive to his mother. Children are never so happy and attentive as when they are listening to talks about Jesus. They also need the Blessed Virgin who was the Mother of Jesus and therefore the Mother of all children. She was the smiling Mother, always ready to caress, and she bore Jesus in her arms.

Angels are also necessary to children. They were good, loving and courteous brothers and as Don Bosco knew, they were needed so that his boys might grow in love and in devotion to their Guardian Angels.

So, according to Don Bosco's mind, Mary Help of Christians was a Mother, a gentle Mother holding the Child Jesus close to her heart and at the same time offering Him to us with love. She is surrounded, in the picture, with hosts of happy angels like the children in Salesian Houses.

This is what the picture represented for children. But what about Don Bosco's Sons and those who continue his work?

They must be religious, apostles, evangelists and defenders of the Pope. Therefore at our heavenly Mother's feet and around her are to be seen apostles and evangelists and,

further down the imposing figures of Paul with the preacher's sword and Peter the Apostle with the symbolic all-powerful keys.

For the Sons of her new apostle Mary Help of Christians is Mother and Queen. She points out the heavenly protectors to be imitated and appealed to for an ever greater abundance of grace.

Oh yes, Don Bosco could hide himself in recollection to taste in silence the sweetness of this holy time. That picture showed to all the countenance that had been the light of his life right from early childhood. He could now gaze on that regal beauty without fearing it would suddenly disappear as it had done so often in his dreams. At any time now, when leaving or returning to the Oratory, before settling some business affair, in moments of joy or sorrow, he could always look into those loving eyes that were fixed on him and they would be a comfort and guide to him and his Sons.

### **Mornese takes part in the feast**

We cannot be silent on the cordial participation of the people of Mornese in this dear feast. Don Bosco had obtained a reservation of five carriages from the railway authority for the use of these good people at the return fare of only two lire each. Only about forty were able to make use of this offer as everyone was engaged in harvesting the corn. However with Father Pestarino as leader there were the Mayor and town Council and the heads of the principal families.<sup>19</sup>

Father Pestarino's humility and the haste with which he compiled his chronicle notes prevented him from giving details of that trip and noting the good that his people from Mornese did by the example of their piety. But the *Biographical Memoirs* and the *Culto di Maria Ausiliatrice* of Barberis give a clear report of this.

“... the good people of Mornese ... wished to give

Communion and took part in all the religious events of June 13, 14 and 15. At noon on the 15th they gathered together again and with joy in their hearts and a smile on their lips made their way home again having left behind them a shining example of good religious behavior.<sup>20</sup>

No women went to Turin and good Father Pestarino, who would have liked to give this pleasure to Mary and Petronilla as having a right to go, was forced to tell them, "I would like to take you two but where can I put you?" So the two stayed behind, happy to be able to offer this great little sacrifice as a jewel to enhance the glory of the most holy Virgin.

### Two Salesians' first masses at Mornese

Our Lady did not fail to reward them with two consolations. The first was an exact, detailed report made for them by the tailor, Valentino Campi and his brother, of the wonderful things heard and seen at Valdocco and the glories that surrounded the throne of the Help of Christians in her kingdom. The second was the arrival on Sunday September 20, of two of Don Bosco's Sons to celebrate their first masses at Mornese. They were Father James Costamagna and Father Joseph Fagnano.

Don Bosco wished them both to be in Mornese on Sunday, September 20, the day after their ordination in order to celebrate the holy sacrifice of the mass for the first time. Father Pestarino and the good inhabitants would provide a worthy crown for the ardent fervor of the two young priests, and the soothing air and care of their good brother in Christ would restore the depleted energy brought about by past fatigue.

They arrived on foot about midnight, [writes Father Joeseph Pestarino.] Father James Costamagna went to sing mass in the parish church the following morning and Father Fagnano sang his at about 11 a.m. in the school chapel. The

celebrations were made more solemn by the voices of some singers who had come with the two priests from Turin. Among them I remember the unforgettable Gastini who was always so cheerful and witty. Although these feasts were almost unexpected they were carried out with great solemnity much to the consolation of my uncle and all who took part in them.<sup>21</sup>

For the Daughters the arrival meant an increase of work as in exceptional cases they had to take charge of the cooking and serving necessary for Father Pestarino's guests. But what fatigue could be too much when Don Bosco was involved directly or indirectly?

That name gave Mary Mazzarello strength and enthusiasm for any enterprise. Hence it is easy to see with what kindness she made sure that their stay in Mornese benefitted the two priests as much as their Father wished. Father Fagnano had brought his mother with him and it was but natural that she should spend the greater part of her time with the Daughters in *Casa Immacolata* where she was edified at the sight of so much virtue under the cloak of humble cheerfulness and resourcefulness.

### **Don Bosco in Rome and the approbation of the Pious Salesian Society**

1869: The Help of Christians wanted to console her zealous apostle by obtaining for him from the Holy See the final approbation of the Pious Salesian Society. This was the reason for his frequent journeys to Rome where he suffered many a repulse and humiliation. Now the Blessed Virgin was moved to smooth his path by miracles.

Before leaving for Rome Don Bosco had asked for special prayers. From Rome he wrote asking that the boys take turns in adoration before the Blessed Sacrament on February 19. On that same February 19, the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales was approved by the Sacred Congregation to the great joy of the Holy Father, Pope

Pius IX.

The grace was certainly asked for through the Help of Christians, but Saint Joseph had brought it on the first day of the month in preparation for his feast. There was good reason for Don Bosco and his whole Family to have a tender, trustful love for the patron of the Church.

### **The Family feast and a new indulgence**

Don Bosco returned to Valdocco on March 5 where his Sons were exulting in the approbation obtained and in having their good Father once more among them. The feast of Saint Francis de Sales was celebrated for the first time in the Church of Mary Help of Christians on the 7th and the usual conference of members and Directors, including Father Pestarino, took place. The latter regarded it a duty to be present at every feast of Saint Francis de Sales and he could not be absent from this one which marked still greater joy for everyone.

On the evening of the following March 8, while relating all he had been able to do for his Sons in Rome, Don Bosco said that the Holy Father had enriched the much loved ejaculation, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis* with 300 days of Indulgence. Father Pestarino took back to Mornese an echo of the joy of those days and the fervor with which he relived his visit to Valdocco filled the hearts of his fellow townsmen. They were already all for Don Bosco, especially Mary Mazzarello whose interest became always more lively in whatever regarded the saint who was so far away from her place of work, yet so close to her in spirit.

### **A promise desired, a promise fulfilled**

This time Father Pestarino also brought back great, promising news. In a very short time Don Bosco would

be coming to see the school and make the necessary decisions.

Would he come for Saint Joseph's feast or for Mary Help of Christians? Who could know? They would have to wait and see. They did wait—especially the cheerful inhabitants of the *Casa Immacolata*. It is such a wonderful thing to await someone dear!

Father Pestarino was sure that his Superior would be pleased with the quiet virtue of that House. How those Daughters and their girls worked! How willingly did they rise to the needs of the people while they strove to cut their own personal needs to the minimum. There were smiles everywhere and everything meant joy, even the trips to the Roverno to do the laundry, while there was still the humble request for payment in advance in order to provide what was needed in order to carry out the work.

Don Bosco arrived toward evening on Monday, April 19. He was welcomed with the usual signs of great esteem and general jubilation. As before, he went to the school where the House was more complete than in 1867 and better suited to welcome him. There Father Pestarino and the Daughters had provided for his needs in the least unworthy way possible.

During the three days of his stay in Mornese he celebrated holy mass in the school and in the parish church. He gave some sermonettes as he was in the habit of doing, and Father Pestarino took good advantage of this. He heard confessions for hours on end and blessed the sick. In the time left to him he hurried through his correspondence, made a thorough visitation of the school under construction in order to assign the use of the various rooms, deciding with Father Pestarino how to bring the construction work to an end as soon as possible and to overcome financial difficulties. Doors, windows and locks were still missing. Don Bosco suggested entrusting this work and the school desks to the artisans of Valdocco. As for the rest, at the right time he would send some carpenters from the Oratory.<sup>22</sup>

### Fatherly exhortations

Don Bosco spoke to the Daughters. On many occasions **he** had seen them both inside the church and outside. He **reminded** them of the need and advantages of correct, **simple** behavior which would give good example and do good **without** any need for sermons. It would show people what **true** Daughters of Mary, pledged to imitate their heavenly **Mother**, really are. He advised them not to curve or bend **over** in church, but to remain upright with the head slightly **inclined** and eyes lowered or fixed on the tabernacle. He **insisted** on the duty of being watchful and keeping control **of** the eyes.

Don Bosco also recommended mortification of the **taste** not only by showing contentment with the nourishment God sends but also by never speaking of food and **suffering** every type of privation with joy. In his own **words**, "To think and speak of food is degrading." Petronilla says, "He spoke with so much goodness and his seriousness was so gentle . . ."

Had he noticed some slackening off in them or in the **boarders** who were never very far away from them? It could be and it is not to be wondered at!

Seeing the day fast approach when those Daughters **would** be the instruments chosen by God for a great work, **our** Father wanted them to respond to the divine plans **in** everything. However he said nothing of this. It only **seemed** to shine in his eyes like a new light every time he **mentioned** the use of the school, allowing it to be **understood** that he had great things in mind concerning the **inauguration** of that building, but nothing more.

He left Mornese on the 22nd after having personally **verified** the affection of the people, the ability of the **Daughters** to attract from day to day even the girls from **outlying** districts to piety and virtue through the **workroom**, and their fidelity in overcoming every obstacle to **gather** a large number on Sundays. He witnessed their **assiduousness** in practicing the first piece of advice he had

given them—*Pray certainly but work . . . etc.* That little note had worked miracles and now that he had seen it put into practice he started in earnest to form a program of life for the family of *Casa Immacolata*.

This verification revealed much more to Don Bosco than Father Pestarino's words could do and he placed himself in closer contact with the Daughters in order to give them clear, immediate direction.

### **Timetable—program**

This time, in fact Don Bosco definitely interested himself in the Daughters and, doubtless in agreement with Father Pestarino, he wrote a kind of timetable in a small notebook, a kind of "rule for everyday." It contained about twenty pages. Unfortunately Don Bosco's manuscript cannot be traced but Petronilla seems to have remembered its contents very well. In general terms it was similar to what follows:

1. Daily attendance at holy mass, the people's dawn mass. During mass each one will pray silently, using whatever prayers she wishes. Periods in church will be thirty minutes or forty at the most.

2. Work and meals as far as possible at regular times followed by a period of recreation and relaxation according to the needs of the boarders and the day girls.

3. During the afternoon, again at regular time, a little spiritual reading without interrupting work and, towards evening, the recital of the holy rosary, each one continuing, if possible, her own task.

4. Before retiring to rest, prayers of a good Christian will be said silently and, at one's own bedside, the Hail Mary seven times in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows.

A certain amount of silence to be observed during work and on Saturdays a special act of mortification in honor of Mary most holy.

The principal counsels were:

1. Special practice of the presence of God through the use of frequent ejaculations.

2. Love of work so that each could almost say to herself: I support myself by the sweat of my brow.

3. Constant work on one's own nature in order to form a good, patient, cheerful character that will make virtue pleasant and living together easier.

4. True zeal for the salvation of souls. Therefore in relations with outside people, listen to their views and show interest in their affairs in order to be able to put in the good word at the right moment and exhort parents to shield their children from danger.

Make yourselves loved rather than feared by the girls. Be always continuously and lovingly vigilant, not heavy nor diffident. Keep them occupied continually between prayer, work and recreation and form them to a really serious piety, while combatting untruthfulness, vanity and flightiness.

Father Pestarino took this treasure to the Daughters but there was no need to recommend observance. Obedient as always they would have cast themselves into the fire had Don Bosco so wished. How could they not practice such wise and pleasant advice which conformed so much to their own desires?

### **Precious indulgences for the people of Mornese**

1870: February 8. Don Bosco who had been to Rome for delicate business with the Holy See obtained many indulgences from the Holy Father. Since one special indulgence was for the people of Mornese he sent it to Father Pestarino immediately. The people, pleased and touched by this favor wished to perpetuate the memory of it by placing a memorial stone in the parish church bearing the following inscription:

“D.O.M.—When the immortal Pontiff—Pius IX—yielding to the wishes—and the prayers—of the distinguished priest Father John Bosco—with the brief of February 8, 1870—conceded—to the living parishioners of Mornese—a daily plenary indulgence—by receiving Holy Communion.—This memorial stone—is erected—at public expense—in unanimous gratitude—by clergy and people.”

### **Father Pestarino expected at Valdocco**

On the 14th of the same month Don Bosco advised Father Rua of his arrival on the 22nd and instructed him to arrange the feast of Saint Francis for the first Sunday of Lent. He added, “. . . Since I have a great but pleasant need to speak to the Superiors of the other Houses, ask those from Lanzo and Cherasco who can get away to come, and also Fathers Bonetti and Cerruti from Mirabello. I believe Father Pestarino would also come . . . ”<sup>23</sup>

Is it imaginable that Don Bosco would not remember Mornese or not count Father Pestarino among his dearest Sons?

Father Pestarino went on March 6. No invitation was needed to send him hurrying to the principal feasts at Valdocco; rather it would have taken an order to keep him away. It is easy to imagine him with the other Directors and Salesians enjoying the assurance given by Don Bosco that at last the common Salesian Family had received real and firm consolation.

### **Fatherly thoughtfulness**

Father Pestarino also had his consolation since Don Bosco, after repeated requests, almost promised to come to Mornese for his nephew's, Father Joseph Pestarino, first mass. Therefore he returned to the school filled with joy and hope.

He was right. Don Bosco not only gave him this joy by being present in person but he arranged for Father Pestarino's ex-secretary and friend who had followed Don Bosco and become a Salesian also to be present. Father Bodrato was at that time a priest at Lanzo. Therefore Don Bosco wrote to Father Lemoyne, the Director of that House: "... I think Father Pestarino would like to have Father Bodrato for Sunday. If he passes through Turin I shall have something to give him. I myself shall go on Monday..."<sup>24</sup>

Instead, from Father Joseph Pestarino's records, he left Turin on Saturday evening in order to be in Mornese for Sunday morning. Perhaps it was the insistence of Father Bodrato, using the language of affection, that on this special day Don Bosco's absence would cause pain to the whole Pestarino family and also to the whole of Mornese, that induced him to modify his plan.

### **A double feast in Mornese**

Father Joseph writes as follows:

"Don Bosco came to Mornese for my first mass on May 8, 1870 and Father Costamagna was also present on this occasion. The feast was held in the school chapel and he not only accompanied the sacred music during mass and at Vespers and Benediction during the afternoon but, towards the end of dinner he also read an address in prose which was greatly appreciated."<sup>25</sup>

As usual it was Don Bosco who was the most admired. He was surrounded by about twenty priests who came not only to congratulate the newly ordained priest but also to be in the company of the apostle of Turin. "We could never finish setting the tables," relates Rosalia Pestarino, Father Dominic's niece, who was present at all these festivities "because gifts of fruit and old wine kept arriving all the time."

## **Don Bosco raises thoughts to the heavenly banquet**

Father Lemoyne confirms this saying that

... at the appearance on the table of so many different types of ripe, luscious fruit some of the guests asked jokingly if heaven could provide more tasty food.

Don Bosco then began speaking of heaven. He said that the senses of a glorified body would have an ineffable reward adapted to their new condition, at the solemn banquet given by God to his elect. The Lord himself would serve them with heavenly food.

Then quoting Sacred Scripture he expounded truths so deep yet at the same time so attractive that those good priests, forgetting the food placed before them, listened to him ecstatically and with hands clasped. They were deeply moved for it seemed to them that they were being addressed by an angel of the Lord.<sup>26</sup>

## **The hilarity of Salesian youth**

The above was the serious part, an elevation of the spirit spontaneous in the saints. But at the end of the table the young people, always ready to be cheerful and cheer others were able to intermingle moments of innocent fun with the common joy of the feast.

The unanimously chosen butt of their fun was Father Costamagna. He was already known in Mornese since 1868 when as a newly ordained priest, he became the friend of all of Father Pestarino's nephews who were more or less the same age as himself.

The parish priests who had been invited to Father Joseph's mass all had a certain amount of authority and because of their office were rather on the serious side. Hence they had been given places of honor, while Father Costamagna, the youngest, who was very much at home, stayed at the end of the table with members of the family. His friends remembered his joviality and put it to the test.

On the first day, [writes Father Joseph Pestarino,] I remember a humorous incident thought up by Father Campi (cleric Pipino at that time) which enlivened all the guests. We had reached the end of dinner and were chatting cheerfully about one thing or another when the cleric Pipino arrived with a large dish bearing the great rib of an ox, stripped of meat and quite clean. With much solemnity he placed it before Father Costamanga. The laughter at this episode was beyond recording. There was continuous handclapping and we all rose to congratulate Father Costa (rib)—magna (great).<sup>27</sup>

The rest came on the following day. Nearly every dish had a surprise. First there came the roast. Enthroned on the table was a lamb which had been roasted whole and decorated with flowers. The carver cut it so dexterously and the plates were passed so cleverly that while everyone else was served at pleasure Father Costamagna was left with the rib cage and ligaments, without any meat at all, garnished with an herb salad impossible to swallow and dressed with water. The dessert was salted and the wine well watered, in fact it was just tinted water. This last was perpetrated by Father Dominic himself, perhaps the only one the poor persecuted priest felt he could trust!

The serving at table was the charge of the young men of the town, all Sons of Mary, but the special wines were served by Father Dominic. As he drew near Father Costamagna he quickly changed the bottle for one previously prepared. Then he filled his glass with a beautiful amber colored mixture but, "Oh hear, who could tell what it was!"

The next morning poor Father Costamagna, perhaps tired out by the fatigue of the previous days did not hear the continual knocking on his door, nor was he aware of the troop of friends entering his room. Seeing they could not rouse him, they encircled his bed with huge lighted candles as if it were a catafalque. He woke only to the melodious singing of a formidable requiem.

Such a man was the happy Father Costamagna, as notable for his angelic countenance while saying mass and accompanying sacred canticles as for his swiftness of foot in speeding up and down the steep valleys around the school. He had acquired great popularity because of the way he took

every type of practical joke, accepting it with Salesian philosophy, which is another way of saying, serene, communicative cheerfulness.<sup>28</sup>

### **Don Bosco's precious acquisition for the Pious Salesian Society**

While the young people amused themselves Don Bosco was busy recruiting a valiant soldier for his army. Father Joseph Pestarino writes, "I remember that on the 9th the young cleric John Baptist Marengo presented himself to Don Bosco asking to be accepted into the Salesian Society. He was gladly accepted due in part to the good services of my uncle." Don Bosco, who was in the habit of reading biographies before they had even been lived saw in that frank, open face, those clear, deep eyes the great work his lively, energetic mind and heart would accomplish, once the young cleric became a Salesian.

### **Don Bosco takes a direct interest in the Daughters**

Don Bosco did not lose sight of the secret aims of his frequent visits to Mornese. In fact he very often conferred privately with Father Pestarino and repeatedly spoke of the Daughters who during those days had the full responsibility of managing the house. In this way without even realizing it and certainly without giving it a thought they were able to give a real proof not only of what they could do but also of their simple self-confidence and seriousness.

Some of those who were less busy were able to go to confession to Don Bosco and, zealous as ever, they succeeded in getting Father Pestarino's niece, the good-hearted, lively Rosalia, to go. She had left her school at Ovada for awhile and come for the celebrations. Having heard from the Daughters and from her uncle that Don Bosco was a saint who read consciences and that his words could bring

happiness to a soul she wanted to question him about her own vocation. However she did not want to go to confession for fear of being recognized.

“Wrap up yourself in a shawl,” they suggested, and muffled up in this manner the young girl had no further grounds for excuses. She made a general confession and when she had finished she heard the solemn words, “Become a Sister!”

### **The departure of Don Bosco and Father Costamagna**

After three days Don Bosco left, to the sorrow of Father Pestarino who, when his Father and Superior was present, felt the weight of responsibility lifted from his shoulders and heart. The Daughters were also sad because his words animated them to greater piety and love for God.

Father Costamagna also left and his friends wanted to give him a final proof of their affection. Therefore just when the carriage was about to move off they made Rosalia politely and simply present him with a large bag of sweets for the journey. He thanked them and seemed to be much moved but warned perhaps, by Don Bosco's smile, as soon as the carriage had moved off he looked into the bag. The carriage reached St. Silvestro and there he met his friends and their sister who, by taking short cuts had arrived first. He shook his fist at them saying to Rosalia who was trying to have a last word with Don Bosco, “I shall make you pay for this!” There were far more charcoal sweets in the bag than real ones.

### **A fresh invitation to Father Pestarino from Don Bosco**

On June 10, Don Bosco wrote to Father Pestarino, “The Forty Hours Exposition will take place in the Church of Mary Help of Christians on the 20th, 21st and 22nd of the month. I should be very pleased if you could come

for this occasion, then we can talk about our business . . . safe journey and may God bless us.”<sup>29</sup>

Don Bosco’s business with Father Pestarino drew them closer and closer together. No one knew precisely what the business was, although the most intimate guessed that it must be something connected with a plan to which Don Bosco referred with ever greater clarity.

### **Don Bosco reveals his plans for the good of young girls to Father Francesia**

It was during this year that Don Bosco, without being questioned and with fresh certainty, unfolded his plan to Father Francesia. Here it is as he related it:

It was in the year 1870. About this time Don Bosco felt the urge to provide Christian instruction and education for young girls along the lines of his work for boys, and to gather young working girls together on Sundays for honest recreation and to teach them the most necessary truths of religion.

I remember going to a house to meet Don Bosco at dusk on an autumn evening. The house was near the church of the Great Mother of God.

“Now,” he told me, “we must think of the girls.”

“In what manner?”

“By establishing a pious congregation to provide for girls in the same manner as the Salesians are providing for young boys.”

“Are you going to do this soon?”

“It will depend on the dispositions of Divine Providence.”

“But dear Don Bosco, are you never going to rest from starting something new?”

“God knows that I seek nothing but His glory and He will help me. If He sees any human element entering into it He will know how to destroy it.”

He was not in the habit of doing violence to God and making Him bend to his wishes. Instead he was completely intent on bending and even crushing his own will in order to fulfill God’s will, awaiting events.<sup>30</sup>

## NOTES

1867-1870

1. Appendix No. 5.
2. Appendix No. 6.
3. *M.B.*, VIII, 1009.
4. Appendix No. 7.
5. Appendix No. 8.
6. *M.B.*, VIII, 1013.
7. *M.B.*, VIII, 1014.
8. Father Pestarino's *Chronicle* and Appendix 9.
9. *M.B.*, IX, 50-59.
10. Cf. *M.B.*, IX, 67.
11. *M.B.*, IX, 204.
12. *M.B.*, IX, 222-22.
13. *Memoirs of Monsignor John Cagliero on the Beginnings of the Institute*, Rome, January, 12, 1908. (Gen. Arch. FMA).
14. *M.B.*, VIII, 5.
15. Cf. *M.B.*, II, 343.
16. Cf. *M.B.*, VIII, 5.
17. Cf. *M.B.*, IX, 245 and following.
18. *M.B.*, IX, 248.
19. Father Pestarino's *Chronicle*.
20. Barberis, G., *Il Culto*, 99-101 and *M.B.*, IX, 270-73.
21. Letter M of Father Joseph Pestarino to his sister, Sister Rosalia, 1922 (Gen. Arch. FMA).
22. Cf. *M.B.*, IX, 613-614.
23. *M.B.*, IX, 812; 825.

24. *M.B.*, IX, 867 and Appendix No. 10.
25. Oral and written testimony of Father Joseph Pestarino.
26. *M.B.*, IX, 868.
27. From one of Father Joseph Pestarino's writings (Gen. Arch. FMA).
28. From the memories of Rosalia Pestarino who was present and shared in the jokes at table and was informed about all the others one by one, by her own brothers.
29. *M.B.*, IX, 892.
30. Francesia, G.B., *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, pp. 76-77.

## **DON BOSCO CLEARLY SHOWS HIMSELF TO BE FATHER AND FOUNDER (1871)**

### **Don Bosco's grand ideas about the school**

1871: Towards the end of February Father Pestarino went to Valdocco for the usual conference of Directors and also to confer with Don Bosco, as appears from a sentence written by him to his nephew Father Joseph, "I have been to Turin and it has been definitely decided to open the school with solemnity. Don Bosco has grand ideas. There is still more building to be done according as I understand. The road is still lacking and we are behind schedule, but what more can we do? . . ."1

Don Bosco was, therefore, thinking in terms of an extension and gave assurance that the school was to be opened in a grand style. Father Pestarino seconded him but wondered if the prohibition or difficulties raised by the Curia of Acqui could have any influence on building in stages.

### **The Carante house**

Actually, Acqui was still without a bishop and no one seems to have shown any more interest in the school. Don Bosco's silence on this and his plan for the opening was equal to a trustful: *Let us go ahead in the Lord!*

Scarcely had Father Pestarino returned to Mornese than he set to work carrying out his Superior's wish. The first thing was to purchase the Carante's house which was near the school. Two thirds of the land separating it from the mansion belonged to Mr. and Mrs. Carante who also

owned the house. The other third belonged to Father Pestarino. The two properties were divided by a sufficiently high wall with no opening gaps so the closeness was innocuous and not in the least embarrassing. But if Don Bosco had wanted an extension there was nothing for him but to try to buy the house and the land.

The business arrangements were short and had a happy result so, on March 31, Father Pestarino was able to notify Don Bosco that he had,

In his name carried out the purchase according to the requirements of the law; that the news of the purchase had been received with approval in Mornese especially by the Mayor; that because of unsolicited and unexpected help all expenses had been covered; that if he (Don Bosco) thought proper would he please send a book, as a token of gratitude to the solicitor and surveyor who had given their services gratuitously and he (Father Pestarino) would see to the rest by bottles; that the house would be free at the end of June and in any case, the rent was already coming to them; that it would help if someone could be sent to make some arrangement for the farmhands; and that he meanwhile continued without ceasing to pray and see to making the necessary provisions! . . .<sup>2</sup>

### **Another precious visit of Don Bosco to Mornese**

All Father Pestarino's requirements were to be satisfied beyond his wildest hopes. Don Bosco came himself to Mornese at the end of April to take in hand all the necessary adaptations of Carante's house. It is easy to imagine the joy this visit gave to Father Pestarino and the Daughters.

The people, too, rejoiced at the arrival of their great friend who was always so large-hearted in bestowing comfort and blessings on them. It was during this short stay of Don Bosco in Mornese that a prodigious fact occurred which was engraved on the minds of the people . . .

For six months the baby son of a certain Gerolamo

Bianchi had suffered from a broken arm, result of an accident while swathing him when only five days old. The child cried continuously and the arm became swollen and started festering on either side of the elbow. Because of this the doctors first decided to take away a piece of broken bone from the arm by a surgical operation. This would maim the child. But the pain continued and gangrene set in so the planned operation was stated to be insufficient and the only remaining way to save the child would be to amputate his arm. The mother opposed the decision thinking it better her child should die than be mutilated.

This was the state of affairs when, hearing that Don Bosco was at Mornese, the mother hastened with her child to beg his blessing. At the same time she gave him her bridal jewels as a gift and asked when the child would be cured.

Don Bosco smiled as he replied, "Because you are generous with Our Lady I firmly believe that your prayers will be heard and your son will be cured by the end of May. In the meantime pray."

The arm continued to give serious trouble right through May up until the morning of the last day. Supuration continued without any sign of improvement. The whole family went to high mass leaving the child's mother and grandfather at home. All at once, just as the bells started ringing at midday the baby began to smile and wriggle about, trying to pull away the veil that was covering his cot with the injured arm, which up until that time he had never been able to move.

The grandfather who was watching hurried to call the baby's mother. Beside herself with joy and amazement, she found his arm quite healed without the slightest trace of a wound. The bone was healthy and perfectly formed.

The child was well, alert and intelligent beyond his years. He lived two more years and died of dysentery or inflammation of the intestines. His mother used to call him "Our Lady's child."<sup>3</sup>

### **A dissonant note among the Daughters of Mary Immaculate**

The joy and light of Don Bosco's fresh visit did not prevent a thorn from piercing the hearts of the Daughters during those days.

Canon Olivieri had sent a teacher to Mornese from Fontanile because she said she wanted to stay with the Daughters permanently. But she brought a new element with her. Being more cultured she considered herself superior to the others and did not adapt well to the simple life of Mornese.

Used to commanding in class she thought she could do the same within the walls of *Casa Immacolata*. All began to obey her beginning from Mary Mazzarello who was always first in being the servant of everyone and sought no other honor than that of work and sacrifice. The new arrival observed, scrutinized and questioned. She would have liked to take a walk every day and often let fall from her lips, activated by ill concealed disdain, such phrases as "it would be necessary, . . . instead of . . . oh yes, more education is definitely needed!"

The Daughters looked at one another in surprise and Mary Mazzarello asked Father Pestarino if they should give in to these novelties and allow that Daughter to direct them since she really was more educated and more self-possessed than they were . . .

"Go on doing as you have done all along," replied Father Pestarino, "Don Bosco sees things as I do and if he says nothing you need not worry. Do not answer her remarks. This will be good for your humility. Nevertheless do not allow any changes."

### **What Don Bosco saw among the Daughters**

Don Bosco had noticed this affair as well as other things. He had seen, for example, the fidelity of the Daugh-

ters to the regulation—timetable he had drawn up for them the year before. He had seen the progress made by the young girls attending the workroom and the incipient festive Oratory, and had also been able to verify the perfect concord of views between himself and Father Pestarino as well as the wise, prompt, practical ability of Mary Mazzarello in carrying them out.

Don Bosco saw that if Father Pestarino sustained the spirit from the altar and in the confessional, Mary always and everywhere nourished souls from the life-giving fountain of solid piety, constant activity, purity, obedience, humility and zeal.

Besides the books and pamphlets of Liguori, Frassinetti and of Don Bosco himself which have already been mentioned, there had been for some time in circulation among the Daughters and the New Ursulines, Elizabeth Girelli's book, *Guide and Nourishment for Youthful Piety*.<sup>4</sup> This was a little volume on the basics of the science of Christianity written in a simple style and adapted to the formation of children of the working class, to life in the Church and in the home. It aimed at training in prayer, work and apostolate for those near at hand and those far away in a spirit of simplicity, holy union with God and pure joviality.

During those years terms like, "liturgical periods," "feasts and functions of the liturgy" were foreign to the people. But Girelli's book with its short instructions and practical devotions for the principal solemnities and events of the Church's year, without saying it, led to a liturgical life and roused an ardent attraction to the mysteries of Jesus, the glories and virtues of the Most Holy Virgin and the greater among the holy protectors of Christian youth.

Mary Mazzarello certainly could not have omitted to make good use of it even for her dear pupils, especially after Don Bosco arranged a little spiritual reading for the afternoon during workroom time. How advantageous this must have been both for herself and for the others!

Even this could not have escaped Don Bosco. It confirmed him in his opinion that Mary Mazzarello was leading

others to virtue and to God by making herself loved rather than feared. He returned to Turin with a plan concerning the little group of Daughters that was concreting and giving shape to his forethoughts.

### **Persons and activities increase in "Casa Immacolata"**

In the meantime, Virginia Magone had come to *Casa Immacolata*. But an increase in young people meant an increase in domestic needs, while the work was not sufficient to keep all the girls busy. In order to provide more work Petronilla even went so far as to do the rounds of the homes in order to cut out shirts and other articles of clothing, then bring some back to be sewn.

She obtained leave from Father Pestarino to do her task this way on condition she kept as close to the door as possible, an order meticulously obeyed.

But even this was now not enough. What could be done! After talking it over between themselves Mary and Petronilla bought some silkworm eggs and both children and grown-ups went in search of mulberry leaves as well as keeping a vigilant eye on the mats. At this stage something new happened. While Petronilla made her usual round of the homes looking for work she also searched for mulberry leaves. Because a great many of these were needed she tried to get payment for her needlework in leaves rather than money. Then she accepted the offer of a good little man who placed his donkey's foal at her disposal to carry heavy burdens. She came and went with two or three girls who helped to load and lead the beast of burden. All this meant extra work and those who work with silkworms know how heavy this can be. But to what lengths those good Daughters would go in order to practice Don Bosco's advice. He had said, "Try to support yourselves by your work." Hence nothing seemed heavy to them when they saw themselves surrounded by an ever-increasing number of girls and companions!

May had arrived. It was the month of greatest spiritual joy to Don Bosco as well as important decisions, because of his tenderness for the Queen of heaven without whom he undertook nothing.

### **Don Bosco's first revelation to the full Salesian Chapter**

At the start of Mary's month Don Bosco called together the Council of the Pious Salesian Society. It consisted of Fathers Rua, Savio, John Cagliero, Durando, Ghivarello and Albera. His eyes shone with the supernatural light noted on the most solemn occasions. His face was serenely thoughtful as with a voice filled with emotion he said he had called them together for an important communication.

Many worthy people have repeatedly exhorted me to do for girls the same little bit of good we are doing for boys by God's grace. If I listened to my inclinations I should not embark on this type of apostolate. But since the plea has been repeated so often and by persons worthy of esteem I feel I would hinder Divine Providence by not giving the matter serious consideration. I therefore put the proposition to you, inviting you to reflect before the Lord weighing the pros and cons in order to come to a decision for the greater glory of God and the advantage of souls. So all our community and private prayers during this month will be directed to this end, *to obtain from God the light necessary in this important matter.*<sup>3</sup>

As already seen this idea was not new to his Sons. Nevertheless on that day our Father spoke so seriously that as Father Lemoyne writes, "The assembly retired deeply impressed," resolving that all their prayers and good works should be for this end.

Don Bosco prayed and had others pray. Although he again called his Council together for other urgent business he did not touch on the subject of work for girls until the end.

### Unanimous consent

Father Lemoyne continues:

The month passed. He called his Council together again and asked them one by one to give their opinion, beginning from Father Rua who answered, "I would say yes because if a girl is good she can do a lot of good in home and society. However if she is bad she can be the cause of much evil."

When Father Cagliero was questioned everyone laughed because all knew how zealous he was in his work for the various female institutes of Turin and what great aptitude he had for this type of work. They smiled because they did not see how his vote could be other than most favorable.

In fact all declared unanimously that Don Bosco should provide Christian education for girls as he had done for boys.

### The school for the Daughters of Mary Immaculate

Don Bosco concluded, "Very good, now we can be certain that is the will of God that we should work for girls. Let us now get down to something practical; I propose that the house Father Pestarino is now building in Mornese be used for this work."

You know that this building was intended for boys but the Curia of Acqui does not agree. We shall invite Father Pestarino, a member of our Society, to place the Daughters of Mary Immaculate in that house. He is their Director in that parish. Those who wish to belong to the new Institute will form the nucleus of a religious family that will open festive oratories and educational establishments for girls."<sup>6</sup>

### Don Bosco clarifies part of his plan for Father Pestarino

The matter having been established with his Council,

about halfway through June the worthy priest, Father John Bosco, explained to Father Pestarino of Mornese in private conference at the Oratory of Turin, his desire to

start his plan for the Christian education of girls of working class parents. He said that Mornese seemed to be the place most suited for this Institute because of the healthy climate and the religious spirit reigning there. Seeing that the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate or New Ursulines had already been working there for some years, it would be easy to choose from among them those who were most suited and called to lead a common life in everything, secluded from the world. In fact as the Daughters already had some idea of a more regular life and spirit of piety, it would be simple to initiate the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, that would endeavor by its spirit, its example and salutary instruction to train children of all ages. They would also follow the pattern of Don Bosco's Oratories for boys in Turin and the schools which under his direction had spread to other areas. Making the necessary exceptions and variations required by sex, they would work for poor girls and give them Christian instruction. After all this explanation he asked Father Pestarino to say exactly what he felt about the matter.

Without any hesitation Father Pestarino replied, "If Don Bosco will accept the immediate direction and protection, I place myself in his hands, ready to do in every way I can the little I can for this end . . ."

"Good," replied Don Bosco. "That is enough for the present. Let us pray, reflect and hope in the Lord that this matter may be for his greater glory and for the good of souls."

After a few more observations and reflections on the choice of Daughters and the fundamental rule to be formulated, Father Pestarino left Don Bosco for the time being,<sup>7</sup>

returning immediately to Mornese.

### **Don Bosco tells the Holy Father about his new project**

On the 23rd of that same June Don Bosco went to Rome and in a private audience with the Pope spoke about the light he had repeatedly received in his dreams from "his divine Inspirer" regarding the care of girls. He also

gave the reasons why up to that time he had refrained **from** beginning this delicate undertaking. Yet recent events **had** made him believe it to be the will of God. Means **suited** to the task had been presented to him still more **clearly** and he begged advice about it.

The Vicar of Jesus Christ listened. Then he said, "I **will** consider what you have said and in another audience I shall tell you what I think." Don Bosco returned **after a** few days and heard Pius IX say before he himself **had** mentioned it, "I have thought over your plan to **found** a congregation of religious women and I feel it will be **for** the glory of God and the good of souls. Therefore **my** advise is that it should have as its primary aim to do **for** the instruction of girls what the Society of Saint Francis de Sales does for boys. Regarding dependence, let them depend on you and your successors just as the Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul depend on the Lazarists.

Formulate their constitutions on these lines and **give** them a trial. The rest will come in time."<sup>8</sup>

Having received both the approval and the directive counsel of the Pope, whereas he had before taking only small steps, Don Bosco now felt he had to hurry.

### **Don Bosco reveals the whole of his plan to Father Pestarino**

Therefore, perhaps on the occasion of his postponed feastday on July 9, when Father Pestarino was present Don Bosco told him what the Vicar of Jesus Christ had said regarding his Institute for women, explaining the Pope's idea of making it resemble that of Saint Francis de Sales and dependent on its Superior.

Let us eavesdrop on Don Bosco's explanation to Father Pestarino who listens with concentration in order not to miss a syllable.

"All this runs parallel to the opinion of my Chapter. You see, Father Pestarino, before speaking to the Holy Father I wanted to have the opinion of my most trusted collaborators. Therefore in a special meeting of my Chapter, I ordered prayers throughout the month of Our Lady in order to obtain light for this purpose. We prayed much, especially on the feast of Mary Help of Christians because it is *in fine*, a matter above all concerning the glory of this heavenly Mother of ours. We met again before I left for Rome and all were of the opinion that a congregation of women should be started. Thus we can be sure of the will of God and the help of heaven. We must now formulate a rule more or less on the lines of our own with, you will understand, the necessary modifications. We shall give to the new religious the beautiful name of *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*. Do you feel happy about this Father Pestarino?

As to the house . . . well . . . to avoid possible conflict with the Curia of Acqui, they would go to live at the college."

### **Father Pestarino caught between two loyalties**

As he spoke Don Bosco could see in the eyes of Father Pestarino the interior struggle caused by these last words **and** our good Father continued with an affection that **seemed** to share the anguish of his Son as he tried to console him:

"We shall finish the building properly and the Carante **house** will serve for the chaplain or director, for you, dear Father Pestarino. You will see . . ."

Poor Father Pestarino must certainly have felt himself **caught** between two loyalties. On the one hand there were **the** difficulties he saw as insurmountable and on the other **the** full adherence of his heart to his beloved Father and **holy** Superior. How would the town view this affair? They **were** all eagerness for a boys' school and now it was to be **for** girls! for Sisters! Would they accuse him and Don **Bosco** of betrayal?

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Those Daughters too, no matter how pious and virtuous they were, could they possibly be thought ready to become Sisters? He knew they were content with their state of life and no one had spoken to them of becoming religious. As a young girl Mary Mazzarello might have sincerely wished it and her extraordinary inclination towards a perfect life might be a sure sign. Petronilla too had been advised by her father to become a Daughter of Charity, but it was only a passing fancy. Besides, those Daughters had become so useful in the parish, and how would their families take it?

**"How can I tell who has a vocation?"**

Nevertheless we know that when Don Bosco had finished talking about his project all that came from Father Pestarino's trembling lips was the question, "How can I tell who among the Daughters has a vocation?"

Our good Father replied, "*Those who are obedient even in the smallest things. Those who are not offended when they are corrected and who show a great spirit of mortification.* For the rest, Father Pestarino," Don Bosco must have continued, "do not be upset. Let us do things calmly trusting in Divine Providence regarding the time and manner of carrying out our plans. Let us do one thing at a time."

The talk was over. Never before had Father Pestarino put so much feeling into his action as he reverently and with faith kissed the hand of his Superior. Don Bosco had spoken to him with such fatherly affection and had held his hand in his as if to give him supernatural support. Never, as on that day had he felt the gentle yet binding weight of his vow of obedience. Yet although suffering he was pleased to have a sacrifice, the greatest sacrifice of his life, to offer the good God.

He left for Mornese and although longing to arrive he would, in one way, have wished himself at the North Pole, so sure was he that everyone would be able to read in his face what only for the love of God and Don Bosco he had to do. Nor was he wrong.

### The Daughters share a secret concerning them

At *Casa Immacolata*, as soon as they saw Father Pestarino they looked from one to the other, astonished and frightened. They had been jubilant because they had sold the cocoons and wanted to offer him the total profit of about 500 lire. But they were taken aback and speechless to see their Director sad and seemingly aged in just a few days.

"At other times," said Petronilla, "he returned to Mornese in an ecstasy of joy, but this time . . . whatever could have happened? Had there been some misfortune? Was Don Bosco ill perhaps? When he was alone with just Mary and Petronilla he said immediately:

"Serious things are going to happen, serious things! You will not believe it. Instead of boys and clerics Don Bosco wants to put the Daughters in the college!"

"The Daughters?"

"Just think of the outcry in the town! But in the meantime we must say nothing, only pray!"

Once Father Pestarino had left the two friends looked at one another as if trying to read the future in each other's face. Then after a moment of silence Mary said, "Yes, let us pray and pray much for poor Father Pestarino! May God help him. But as for us . . . if Don Bosco wants to put the Daughters in the school all the better. We shall be able to go too."

As always, Mary looked at things from the easiest and most pleasant viewpoint, though both of them, humble as they were, could not even imagine what was going to happen. Petronilla even added, "That we were being thought of did not enter our minds. All we understood was that the change would mean an upheaval in the town and cause a great deal of worry to our poor Director."

### A grieving heart does not tie Father Pestarino's hands

Father Pestarino's heart was not closed by his grief. He was touched by the generosity of the Daughters who, in their own need, had placed all the profit from the cocoons in his hands, the cocoons over which they had also lost a good deal of sleep. He brought a little present for the girls who had taken part in this work and promised Mary and Petronilla a rosary which he most likely forgot to give them. But for them it was enough to have given him some little proof of their gratitude and to know that he was pleased.

His pleasure had been so great that he regarded the gift as the voice of Divine Providence, in whom Don Bosco had told him to place his trust as to the time and manner to carry out his plan. Therefore he immediately began his twofold work: the material work concerning the Carante house for which he used the donation of the Daughters and their pupils; and that of studying the Daughters and their pupils according to the norms received from Don Bosco in order to discern with security whom among them God was calling to the religious life.

### The "Letture Cattoliche" for feminine youth

The summer of 1871 was filled with toil and consolation for Don Bosco but it was also the summer that marked in a certain way the laying of the foundations of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Living already with the thought of preparing mystical gardens for his divine Inspirer, he had ordained that at a suitable time the eighth booklet of the *Letture Cattoliche* of the current year should offer its readers, *The Crown of Virginity*, (*La corona della verginità*) and the ninth, *The Young Christian Girl*, or (*La giovane cristiana*).

With the first, a translation from the French of an unknown author of the fifteenth century he presented an insert composed of five flowers: the lily of purity,

the violet of humility, the red rose of charity, the sunflower of patience and the lily of the valley of faith secured by the ring of obedience and the thread of constancy.

With the second which was the responsibility of S.D.N.Z., he offered considerations and readings on the relations of a Christian girl with God, family and friends; on how to guard against inconstancy of humor, flightiness, affectation etc.; on norms for study, and considerations on the value of neatness, order, courtesy and politeness.

Thus, while the two pamphlets went into the better homes sowing the heavenly seed of elect Christian and civil virtues, arousing sublime ideals of purity to consecrate to the Queen of Virgins, the Apostle of Youth was setting out in regular form for the first time, his plan regarding the future religious.

### **The first outline of the Rule**

During that same summer in fact, and probably while he was at Countess Corsi's in Nizza Monferrato, or at Lanzo during the spiritual retreat, Don Bosco, as he had promised, handed Father Pestarino the first outlines of the Rule telling him to look at it. It was only a sketch that would surely need to be worked on and corrected but on the basis of it he could begin forming those good Daughters in the Salesian spirit, seeing which of them would attain the end in view. It was what Our Lady wanted and success was bound to come a little at a time.

Father Pestarino received the copybook as a gift from heaven and broke into the spontaneous exclamation, "Oh now I can do something! With this notebook I know how to proceed."

Our good Father smiled. His vision was broad and he had great esteem for his humble, generous Son.

On his return to Mornese to study the precious booklet Father Pestarino placed on the cover in his own hand, a date that says everything both for him and for us, May 24,

1871, signifying that it was a flower which blossomed on the feast of Mary Help of Christians.

The booklet reveals all Don Bosco's loving interest in the nascent institution.

Mother Petronilla says it was written in his own hand.<sup>9</sup> What an amount of work our Father must have had to do at that time! How could anyone not be moved at seeing the understandable fatigue so willingly undergone.

As usual he was ready to use what had been tried out by others and gave a certain assurance of success and approval for his own affairs. In this work he followed the same procedure he used in compiling the Salesian Constitutions.

We read in Volume V of the *Memoire Biografiche* on page 693, "He tried with much effort to obtain the Constitutions of the principal Religious Orders and Congregations, and how many vigils, readings, interviews and written correspondence took place with eminent persons who, because of their doctrine and experience, were qualified to provide enlightenment. This was all the more so because he insisted that his Congregation assume an external form that would distinguish it from others, so he removed certain practices and customs that he considered too ascetic."

This first outline of the Rule has something in common with other active institutes of women, especially with the Institute of the Sisters of Saint Anne, but it was distinctive in the formation of the spirit, especially regarding poverty, obedience, etc. It specified the nature and aim of the Institute and its system of government through dependence on the Major Superior of the Pious Society of Saint Francis de Sales. It gave a daily timetable, establishing community practices of piety among which are a daily half hour's meditation, weekly confession, the rosary and spiritual reading, the Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and special devotion to the Sorrows of Mary Most Holy. It prescribes moderate silence all day except at recreation, and strict silence from night prayers until after those of the morning. A note is made regarding uniform and there are various disciplinary articles.<sup>10</sup>

Here we experience the loving Father who, without imposing detachment from old habits all at once, opens up a path proper to religious.

## NOTES

1871

1. Original of Father Domenico Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).
2. Cf. Letter of Dominic Pestarino to Don Bosco, Mornese, March 31, 1871. (Gen. Arch. FMA).
3. Deposition under oath of Gerolamo Bianchi and his son, Father Giuseppe (Sales. Arch.).
4. (Brescia, Episcopal Press, 1863 — 2nd Ed.).
5. Lemoyne, *Vita*, II, 126.
6. Unedited Memories: *Schiarimento sugli inizi dell'Istituto* (Gen. Arch. FMA).
7. Incomplete manuscript A repeat, of Father Dominic Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).
8. Lemoyne, *Vita*, II, 127.
9. This is what Mother Petronilla stated, but this handwritten exercise book of Don Bosco has never been found and the one on which Father Pestarino made an addition as stated above, was not written by Don Bosco. See also correspondence of Father Lemoyne with Father Joseph Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).
10. Appendix No. 11.

## TIME OF TRANSITION (1871 – 1872)

### **The same path but new light**

The Daughters had to go to church for the evening visit like all the people of Mornese and Don Bosco did not touch that part of the timetable. They also used to go to look after a few sick people when they were asked, and were subsequently permitted to do so by Father Pestarino. Don Bosco allowed that article although he did not seem too pleased about it; it was later withdrawn and this work was permitted only in exceptional cases. The Daughters were used to a mortified life and conforming to the custom of the religious of those days Don Bosco added a permission not included in the Salesian Rules. It was not intended for general use but he did not seem to be completely against it. This was the use of the discipline, which he permitted in extraordinary cases and sometimes even advised.

Father Pestarino read the Rules with attention, as such a work demanded. But he also used the freedom allowed him by Don Bosco and made notes and signs as he studied. We can imagine him saying to himself: "This title, 'Daughters of Mary Help of Christians,' is beautiful and the Daughters will certainly love it, but not just yet. Now as I see it, the title should be infiltrated gradually, almost without their noticing it. They are not yet ready to lose the title 'Daughters of Mary Immaculate.'

On the other hand Don Bosco also loves Mary Immaculate. This title joined to the other will change nothing and do no harm. The title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians was therefore modified by him in the exercise book and became, "*Daughters of Mary Immaculate and Mary*

*Help of Christians.”*

It was his hand too that added to the frontispiece: “under the protection of Saint Joseph, Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Teresa”; saints already named in the text of the Constitutions under Chapter IX as special Patrons of the Institute.

The copybook must have been not only the special object of his study, but the faithful guide he followed in the task he had been given to do.

**Father Pestarino opens up new horizons  
for the Daughters**

One day he arrived at the house of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate when the day girls had gone to dinner. Speaking as though it were the most natural thing in the world he let it be understood that Don Bosco had in mind to found a religious congregation for the care of young girls and wished to choose some of their number as the foundation stones in this new work.

The tranquility with which this news was received persuaded him at once that it had not been fully understood. This did not worry him. All the more so since the words, “Congregation” and “Don Bosco” had brought a flash of light into Mary Mazzarello’s eyes and he knew that whatever she had even partly understood would become comprehensible to others at the right time.

**First steps on a new path**

So he went on to say that it would be better to start doing something more perfect in their daily lives. They could begin by speaking Italian instead of dialect. Daughters and girls would be coming from other places to join them and they would be at a disadvantage. He added that the practices of piety could be made in common and, said Petronilla,

Turning to me he asked, "Do you know the mysteries of the rosary?" and he made me recite them again and again in the presence of others. Seeing that I had not mastered them completely, he told me to learn them from the book.

We used to say the rosary with our families and our fathers led the prayers. However during the carnival and the whole month of May we said it in church led by one of the more devout men; I think it was the doctor. We were used to reflecting on the mysteries without bothering about the words. When we started saying it with the girls in the work-room, we began with an Our Father before each decade and a Glory be or an Eternal rest at the end and all of us meditated as best as we could. We now had to say it as it was written in the book and our memories, not well exercised in this regard, found it rather hard. Just imagine then what happened when we had to stop speaking dialect! Everything seemed to become more difficult.

Father Pestarino came at other times to teach me the *Angelus* and the *De profundis* in the same manner and when he was sure I could say it aloud he told me, "Now you will be able to lead the prayers." So I was the first to do this and to give, outside the House, a good demonstration of the Italian language.

You know that our Italian consisted in giving an extra twist to the tongue and especially to finishing off the words that are shortened in dialect. At times something would come out that made us burst out laughing if we were alone but if other people were present they laughed with us. But we also blushed crimson as cherries.

On one of the early days of this difficult period I met the parish pastor, who stopped to ask me something, I cannot remember what. The thought of answering an educated person in Italian muddled me more than ever and I really do not know what he thought of me. He looked at me in such a way that I felt more ashamed than I did at the laughter of the townsfolk. Next time I saw Father Pestarino I told him what I had done and how ashamed I had felt. All he said was, "Well you did nothing more than your duty!"

The Daughters continued to go to the parish church for holy mass and since it was not possible to pray aloud, they

said the morning prayers together at home. If the mass bell was delayed they made a little meditation. Then, in church they would hear mass silently, each praying on her own.

Later Father Pestarino taught them a set method of meditation in the half-hour prescribed, but in the early days it took the form of a slow reading with a few pauses. Those good young people were used to living a practical life of faith and they would have been discouraged at having to penetrate a thought during that specific half hour and to follow it up with affections and a concluding resolution.

In practice they could have been teachers of others in a certain type of spiritual life but they knew nothing of forms, theories and systems and, delicate to the point of scruple in obedience, they might have been lost if led too quickly by another way.

### **Absolute silence**

Thus it was regarding silence. Hearing that silence all day had been advised outside recreation times, they made it a matter of conscience and were even scrupulous over singing a hymn. Since they were already inclined to silence which was a spontaneous need for their union with God, they now thought they ought to impose it on the girls who naturally found it a burden and not infrequently transgressed.

One day it happened that the children were more hilarious than usual. One of the noisiest had been separated from the others so that by keeping quiet herself she would allow the others to be quiet too. But . . . the spirit of youth cannot be quelled and the girls started holding a conversation in sign language which culminated in a spirited farce made up of repressed laughter instead of words. Then finally, Rosina Mazzarello, more at home than the others, said aloud in order to excuse herself and the others, "We cannot continue like this with our mouths always closed." What was to be done? Laugh with them for the moment

and then Mary would speak to Father Pestarino. She did and he permitted them to allow the girls, when they showed signs of tiredness, to read a page or so from a book. It was but a small thing but at that time it meant a good deal to them and when they were not praying aloud the girls themselves offered to read. Needless to say those were chosen for preference whose tongues seemed to need most exercise.

### A new formula for an old devotion

The prayers of the Seven Sorrows of Mary Most Holy had also to be learned. This devotion had been a favorite of Don Bosco from his childhood. He had possibly learned it by heart from Mamma Margherita. Certainly one of his earliest writings concerning the Blessed Virgin was his little book entitled, *The Crown of the Seven Sorrows of Mary with Seven Brief Reflections in the Form of Stations of the Cross*, (*Corona dei Setti Dolori di Maria con Sette Brevi Considerazioni Sopra i Medesimi Esposte in Forma di Via Crucis*). This was written in 1844, before he left the ecclesiastical school on the occasion of the novena and feast of Our Lady of Sorrows. It carried the following introduction: "The primary aim of this little book is to help the memory and assist the meditation on the bitter sorrows of the tender heart of Mary. This is very pleasing to her as she has revealed many times to those devoted to her and it will be an effective means of obtaining her patronage." Changing times did not change our Father's heart and he inserted this devotion in his *Companion of Youth* also.

The Daughters already had devotion to Our Lady of Sorrows, as has been noted. It was before her picture in the chapel of Father Pestarino's house that they received the medal of the Daughters of Mary and poured out their hearts in filial tenderness to the Queen of heaven. Before that beautiful picture they took their turns in sorrowful vigil on Holy Thursday night and after the first timetable

Don Bosco gave them they were most faithful in reciting the Hail Mary seven times to the Sorrowful Virgin the last thing before going to rest. How pleased they were now to say daily at seven separate times a special commemoration of those sorrows that martyred our heavenly Mother's heart. How fervently they added the short prayer said frequently during the day, *Eternal Father, we offer you...* etc., so dear to the heart of the Christian.

**The serene abandonment of Mary Mazzarello,  
asking neither how nor when**

These little unpremeditated similarities of soul between Father and Daughters made Mary very happy with the new path along which she was wending her way and eager to see the shining dawn that would place her and the others under direct dependence on Don Bosco in whatever religious family he wished to insert them. It was the happy abandonment of a simple, optimistic heart in the hands of Divine Providence. When she had heard that Don Bosco wished to build a school for boys with Father Pestarino, in Mornese she had said joyfully, "Oh how nice! We shall then finish devoting our time to fashion models, and work for the boys."

Later when she heard that the Daughters would be going to the school instead she said immediately, "All the better, we shall be able to go too."

Finally when it was announced that Don Bosco was thinking about founding a religious family and wanted to choose the foundation stones from among them she asked neither how nor why. She spent no time pondering over difficulties of any sort and if they did crop up she immediately found a way of overcoming them. Far from placing importance on the words, "*foundation stones*," she awaited the coming of the new religious in order to join them in humble, pious dependence. So sure was she of the pliability of her companions and the boarders that despite the difficulties

caused at that time by the haughty behavior of the teacher from Fontanile already mentioned, she herself gave an example to the whole house of the composure of religious life.

Father Pestarino silently observed the work of grace and tried to assist through the guidance of the Rules. He had chosen Petronilla rather than Mary to lead the prayers, not so much because Mary, always rather delicate, often had to rise later, but for a much stronger reason.

Freed from the pre-occupations of directing her companions with her voice, and because of her natural discernment and outstanding ability for government, she could continue to watch over behavior, fervor and those little nothings that anyone else might overlook, but which are really the key to knowledge of the inclinations of the spirit, which can then be guided in the ways of God. But while he was careful not to give the reasons for his choice he could not help admiring Mary's initiative in helping Petronilla learn quickly and fulfill her task in a praiseworthy manner. Mary, day by day definitely confirmed the hopes he placed in her.

### **Comfort and hope of Father Pestarino in the storm**

This treasure of virtue that gently yet firmly attracted souls and directed them according to the wish of Don Bosco was, for poor Father Pestarino, his only comfort in the trouble caused him by the storm he foresaw approaching. He felt it gathering over his head as the work pressed on and he seemed to hear the menacing outcry around him every time they spoke about the school. He hoped the goodness of those Daughters would obtain for him from heaven the strength to bear everything meritoriously, and for the townsfolk the grace of resignation to the disillusionment without harming piety. The people of Mornese were very far from expecting such an unpleasant surprise. There was much to be feared for those proud souls who might consider they had been tricked.

### Another blossom: Corinna Arrigotti

To distract him a little from his troubles and sad thoughts God sent a fresh blossom to the little family at *Casa Immacolata*.

Father Pestarino knew the contractor for the Mornese to Gavi road. He asked him to find a place among the Daughters for his niece, the child of his dead sister, whose father put her in grave danger by taking her around, young, beautiful and educated as she was, from one amusement to another. The young girl, scarcely eighteen years of age and with an ardent nature was likely to be ruined. She was accepted and as her father was adverse to religion he was told by his brother-in-law that the young girl would be able to go ahead with her piano lessons at Mornese without any cost, since while she herself studied she could give lessons to the younger children. The father who was a businessman as well as an organist was won over by ambition and the desire of gain. His Corinna, without damaging the family interests, would become a better pianist and learn how to work. He himself brought her to Mornese.

The two were given a festive welcome although Corinna brought to the *Casa Immacolata* a vanity unknown heretofore. Her father was so touched by the welcome that he seemed unaware of the extreme simplicity of their habits and the overall humble and pious atmosphere into which he had brought Corinna. Father Pestarino took him with his daughter to his own home for dinner where he was given great hospitality. One of the Daughters went with Corinna to accompany her father part of the way and he left for his home very contented.

Corinna had come to study music and the Daughters were very happy about this because Father Pestarino had said that she could play the beautiful piano in the house. It was the property of Father Pestarino's nephew who was away from Mornese almost the whole year. It was hoped they would now be better able to learn hymns.

### Mary's motherly work for Corinna

New admissions meant fresh needs and as Mary soon found out, new dangers. Corinna was ardent by nature and refined, but she was also very obstinate. Would this have any effect on the others? Up until now the girls had been so easy to manage.

Could habits contracted during a life of distraction such as Corinna's, be corrected before the poison of bad example did its work? Would that well-groomed head ever bow to the recollection of the others? In all probability yes. Mary understood that she was basically good and in the near future, promising for the glory of God. In the meantime not wanting to manifest her conscience to a priest who knew her and under the pretext of being unable to express all the foolishness of her past life she absolutely refused to go to the sacraments. She adapted herself fairly quickly to common prayer and began to lessen the once extravagant care of her person, but she said she would never go to confession.

Mary Mazzarello was vigilant in preventing scandal. She prayed that the wild rose might soon be clothed with grace and surrounded her with affectionate care in trying to win her heart and move her with arguments of faith.

One evening when the others had gone to bed she talked to Corinna and sought to break down the last resistance. Finally she tried to reach her through her heart by speaking to her kindly about her dead mother.

Corinna began to weep at the thought of the void her mother's death had caused her while she was still so young. Then Mary said gently, "Supposing your mother was still suffering in purgatory and waiting for a good Communion from you, would you dare to refuse her? Purgatory is very painful you know. Could you with your good heart leave your mother in that lake of fire?"

The young girl was taken aback and broke down. She promised she would do her duty and the following day, helped by the light Mary had given her and the fire lit with

the exquisite tact of maternal charity, she was able to straighten out the entanglement of her confused conscience and make a good confession and Communion. God rewarded her sacrifice by speaking so gently to her heart that Corinna was conquered and soon emulated the most obedient and fervent of her companions.

### **Don Bosco's visit to Albissola**

During his first visit to the incipient school of Varazze Don Bosco took advantage of a fairly fine day in early December to go to Albissola where pressing invitations from Father Francis Piccone had brought together many of his good friends and benefactors.

Father Piccone had founded the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate there just fifteen years before and he needed a word of encouragement in order to go ahead with his not too easy undertaking.

Don Bosco went to see those good religious and finding the Superior busy sweeping said at once, "This is enough for me. The Institute is small but its foundations are good. It will grow rather slowly at first, but it will grow!"<sup>1</sup>

### **Don Bosco ill at Varazze**

On the evening of that same day December 6, Don Bosco went back to Varazze but he felt so ill that he had to go to bed. Father Rua was informed and the sad news was passed on to all the Houses in order to obtain a harvest of prayers.

Father Francesia writes, "French visitors went to the school every day and there was more than enough to do, answering the telegrams and letters arriving from everywhere."<sup>2</sup>

As for poor Father Pestarino, as if there were not

already enough clouds enveloping him, the illness of Don Bosco made his sky still darker.

### Father Pestarino and the Daughters for a sick Don Bosco

The following letter shows what was happening in the heart of Don Bosco's apostolic Son:

Mornese, Dec. 17, 1871

Very Reverend and dear Father Rua,

I was extremely pained to hear that our beloved common Father is seriously ill. Let us place all our trust in Mary Help of Christians.

Last evening I called a meeting of all the Daughters of Mary Immaculate; all those in the town came also and I gave them the sad news. They all promised to pray as much as they could to obtain a cure.

Arrangements have been made to start a triduum in the parish church in honor of Mary Help of Christians and expenses will be defrayed among them. Holy Communion will be received for this end and all those who are free have promised to make a special visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day. I did, however, receive some consolation in my grief when I was asked by one of them for permission to offer her life to God for the life and health of Don Bosco, and this was repeated by others who declared themselves ready to die in order that God might spare Don Bosco's life. This holocaust was offered at Holy Communion.

I willingly went along with these suggestions and offerings, and because I was unable to continue speaking I closed the meeting.

Such example, I am bound to confess, encouraged me to do the same during the holy sacrifice.

Let us hope that God will listen to the prayers and offerings of these souls who, of their own free will and without any suggestions, determined on such an offering. This morning I held a meeting for the men and boys and I recommended prayers and Holy Communions. I said the same at

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the meeting of Saint Teresa's group of women and girls. I then sang mass at the altar of the Blessed Virgin and ended with a blessing recommending all the people to pray for Don Bosco and have prayers said in their home.

I have written to the Archpriest of Acqui asking him to notify the parish pastor and other priests of the sad news about Don Bosco's illness. I asked him also to get a message to the Daughters of Mary Immaculate who are in the vicinity of Acqui that they too may pray and get others to pray.

The groups and parishes near here have already, I hope, been notified as I have recommended.

I repeat, let us hope and trust that the prayers of so many good souls may obtain from God and Mary Help of Christians the desired grace. Do not forget me. I assure your Reverence I do not forget you. Believe me *ex corde*.

Yours affectionately,

Father Dominic Pestarino,<sup>3</sup>

It is not possible to say what this letter reveals most: Father Pestarino's great charity or his humility, or perhaps both virtues. It contains not a word of his personal grief, no thought of self. His whole attention is directed towards one end: to interest pious souls in praying and imploring from divine mercy the grace of health for Don Bosco. He forgot no one, men, women, boys and girls, his priest friends and friends of Don Bosco, Daughters of Mary Immaculate in the parish and in distant centers. All the prayers must repeat the same name, every Holy Communion must impetrate the same grace and all sacrifices must have the same intention.

Who could that particular Daughter have been who spontaneously offered her life for Don Bosco and had such an effective influence on all around her that others and even Father Pestarino were inspired to offer themselves to Jesus in Don Bosco's place? The name of Mary Mazzarello comes immediately to mind because of the deep veneration she felt for the apostle of Turin and her innate need of sacrificing herself for others and for the greater glory of God.

But neither could Father Pestarino with his great affection for Don Bosco, with the new project concerning the Daughters still uncertain, with the sorrowful prospect of the possible loss of his Father, counselor, trusted and venerated support, ever limit himself to letters and telegrams to obtain secure and frequent news bulletins! Must he not often have followed the dictates of his heart and made flying visits to Varazze even for a brief stay, in order to assure himself personally of what interested him most?

There are no records of this except where Father Francesia speaks of his personal emotion when he surprised Don Bosco dictating his last orders to Father Pestarino.<sup>4</sup>

What is certain is that the month of December also passed in Mornese in alternating hopes and fears for Don Bosco's cure and that the cave of Bethlehem, the straw of the crib, the tender adoration of the Blessed Virgin, the song of the shepherds and everything else, called for one united plea from those devoted souls: Jesus, Savior of the world, *save Don Bosco!*

### **In the footsteps of Don Bosco and for Don Bosco: the first orphan**

In order to move the Heart of Jesus to listen with solicitude to their prayers, Mary Mazzarello performed an act of charity that won still more approval from the townspeople as well as the admiration of heaven.

At that time when dinner was as meager as supper, and every method had to be used in order to eke out their hand-to-mouth existence, she brought to *Casa Immacolata* the nine-year-old Rosina Barbieri. The child had no mother and lived with her father who had become an alcoholic making himself incapable of fulfilling the duties of a father.

They used to call him *Cinin* in Mornese and his daughter was known as *Cinina*. She was a poor, wan little flower in danger of being swallowed up in life's quagmire, but Mary

wanted to enclose her in a well-secured hothouse where the care of loving gardeners and the warmth of saving, regenerating charity would not be lacking.

### **The men of Mornese with Don Bosco at Varazze**

1872: Don Bosco came through the various crises of his painful illness and began a long period of convalescence. Father Pestarino went to Varazze on January 2, to be with him for a few days and if possible take the opportunity of using those precious moments to speak about personal matters and the Daughters. He ended up by arranging something to warm the hearts of a group of his most trusted men. It was a trip for twelve of them to see Don Bosco at Varazze and cheer him up as they had planned to do if he were cured.

According to the statement of living witnesses they started out after mass on the feast of the Epiphany, dressed like valiant, courageous mountaineers. They left with the pilgrim's staff of the Poor Little Man of Assisi and had provided themselves with food for two days and a surplus to be presented to Don Bosco.

After a number of weary hours on foot the last stage of the journey was made by train. They arrived at Varazze station on the evening of the same day. The people of Varazze marvelled and were taken aback by that strange, happy band of men dressed in old fashioned clothes and seeking only Don Bosco.

We shall not speak of the festive welcome they were given at the school nor of the happiness of Don Bosco the moment he knew they were in the House.

The following morning which was a Sunday they all attended mass and received Holy Communion. These devoted and faithful friends were then free to visit Don Bosco.

It was Father Pestarino who took them to Don Bosco's room. He was convalescent but still confined to bed and,

propped up on the pillows he smiled at them affectionately. Then his eyes rested on each one individually as he called them by name and accepted their good wishes and that of the town they represented. He even began to show curiosity over what they had brought with them.

Nothing was more joyful. It seemed to be an actual scene of the shepherds of Bethlehem around the crib of the Baby Jesus. Some produced doves, some chickens and others good, aged wine of the type reserved for great friends and special occasions. Don Bosco was very happy but so touched that he could not restrain his tears as he spoke of his pleasure.

After the presentation of gifts the guests sat round the bed as the moment came for an exchange of news. Don Bosco wanted to know all about his old friends and they enjoyed telling him everything in the minutest detail. He also had something to tell them, something they least expected to hear; something that would pierce them to the heart. Therefore their loving Father started slowly to prepare them because to keep silence any longer would appear to betray their trust, a thing Don Bosco certainly would not do, loyal as he always was even to those who were against him.

Father Pestarino had assured Don Bosco that those twelve men would have faced anything rather than displease either himself or Don Bosco. So Don Bosco with infinite discretion in word and argument unfolded to them what he and Father Pestarino had decided regarding the college and the Daughters.

The heads of the twelve began to bend forward and while Father Pestarino's heart beat in trepidation, Don Bosco in his own gentle humility rendered more expressive by the marks of recent pain left upon his face by his illness and the importance of the moment, spoke slowly and in measured tones as he studied the faces of his listeners.

One of the group still remembers the impression of those moments. He says,

It seems to me that I am living that half hour again. It was a most solemn half hour . . . The more excited we got in speaking about the school the more uncertain were the answers we received from Don Bosco and Father Pestarino until Don Bosco, sighing deeply, came out with the great secret.

“The school! To you who are so affectionate and upright we may speak the truth, may we not? Even if it should be painful and contrary to your wishes and ours. But . . . Perhaps it was not written in heaven that dear Mornese should have a boys’ school. Many difficulties have arisen and there are so many obstacles that it would be useless to list them. Times were proving very difficult! This means that your sons will come to school in Turin or here in Varazze. There will always be a place for the boys of Mornese in Don Bosco’s schools. You know this to be true. If Providence does not direct things another way, the school . . . ! Would you not be pleased if Mary Help of Christians should choose Mornese as the place for a religious family bearing her name? You are so devout to Mary Help of Christians. Would it not please you if your Daughters became Sisters and Daughters of Mary Help of Christians? . . .

You know those Daughters . . . with Our Lady’s help we must also think of girls, and then the *Casa Immacolata* would not be large enough because who knows how many, even from outside Mornese, would like to come! . . . We must expand. After all the school would always be for your Daughters. Nothing is yet settled. In fact it would be better if you did not speak of it. It is a matter of confidence between friends and we shall keep it for ourselves . . .”

To tell the truth we were all of us caught between two poles: surprised indignation and the will to bow to the just reasoning of Don Bosco. We were grieved also for Father Pestarino who was obviously sorry for our disillusionment and yet was stimulating us by his glance to adhere to the new dispositions of Providence and Don Bosco.

When by tacitly questioning one another among ourselves the wrinkles had been somewhat smoothed out we conceded to Don Bosco’s wishes saying sadly but sincerely, “Whatever you do, Don Bosco, is always well done.” Another long sigh came from Don Bosco. Now, however,

it was a sigh of relief as was that of Father Pestarino. But we regarded it as a "thank you" which came from their hearts that had suffered the sudden storm, as ours had, and were now relieved at the return of serenity.

**"Now my friends, you must dine"**

After a short exchange of friendly talk, wishes and cordial greetings Don Bosco said, "Now my friends you must dine and dine well, because you have a long journey ahead of you . . . and a tiring one! . . ."5

Father Pestarino, who was not going back to Mornese, dined with them. When he left Varazze he intended going to Canelli where his nephew Father Joseph was ill with bronchial pneumonia. During dinner Father Pestarino took the opportunity of repeating Don Bosco's recommendation. He said, "It is better to keep silence for the time being about what you have been told in confidence. I myself will let you know when and how you can divulge the news to the people."

Between two and three o'clock in the afternoon of January 7, the group saw Don Bosco again for a moment. "Good-bye, get well quickly, Don Bosco! Bless us, our families and the whole of the town," they said. To which our good Father replied, "Yes, yes," and added his usual kindly, "Thank you! Let us all be cheerful, let us keep cheerful!" And they left that school where in the course of almost twenty-four hours they had rejoiced much, suffered much and left behind them a living, cheerful memory of themselves. Once Father Pestarino was alone with Don Bosco they reverted again to the subject of the Daughters.

### **The Epiphany of Don Bosco's Institute for women**

Don Bosco had certainly been given an account of them already but since the most difficult knot, that of the use of the school, had now been untied before those good, brave leaders of Mornese, he felt the moment had also come to take a step forward. Reassured once more that the Daughters gave every hope of success and that Father Pestarino guaranteed that those living community life were prompt in their obedience and ready to make any sacrifice for the good of their own souls and those of others, Don Bosco concluded, "We can now start what we spoke about in the summer. If you think it possible, once you are back in Mornese, call all the Daughters together. Get them to cast their votes for the formation of a council and call also those of the town who belong to the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate or the New Ursulines.

Tell them to pray and be courageous. Everything must be done for the greater glory of God and the honor of the Blessed Virgin. I shall pray to God and the Blessed Virgin for them and for the blessing of heaven on the new Institute, here from my bed."<sup>6</sup>

In the mind of Don Bosco the Institute had already emerged since he asked heaven to bless it, and he revealed this on the feast that records the manifestation of God to the Gentiles through the Magi.

**Epiphany of 1872:** Let us write this date which marks the birth of Don Bosco's Second Family in letters of gold! Everything took place in silence, in the shadow, but this did not make it less important. Heaven spoke to Don Bosco in dreams. Its will was expressed in no uncertain terms and was sanctioned by the words of the angelic Pontiff and with the same serene docility of Don Bosco to the designs of Divine Providence.

The world knew nothing of this any more than it knew of the miracle of God in the hearts of the Magi. The exterior signs would be seen only later with the necessary forms for

establishing such a beautiful work before men. But this was the day on which Don Bosco's Daughters came into the light and brought to the heart of their convalescing Father the smile of hope that would never fade.

### **The first Rule in the hands of the Daughters**

Father Pestarino returned to Mornese after he had passed through Canelli. He went to see the Daughters and while giving them the greetings of his Superior he told them about the interest Don Bosco took in their future. He then gave them a copy of the Rule they had been practicing lovingly and little by little during the last five months. He recommended that it should be read attentively and with faith. Then each one was to go to him and say whether she did or did not intend to accept it and whether they wished to offer themselves for the new Institute Don Bosco was about to form. He added that naturally they were perfectly free to choose what they thought would be better for them spiritually. They should therefore think and pray in order to be able to recognize God's voice.

To read and to understand! It was not a very easy thing to decipher a manuscript when the greater number of them scarcely managed to read print.

Fortunately—at least this once—the teacher from Fontanile was there and, for those who wanted to have it read and reread with comments and explanations there was the young Corinna now quite at home, and who under the beneficial influence of the piety and affection of Mary Mazzarello became better and more manageable every day.

### **Mary Mazzarello for Don Bosco at once**

Mary had very little need for long reflections. If Don Bosco had thought it out and written it or had it written

just for them, it was certainly what God wanted from her. She would have been ready to walk through fire in order to make her assent more complete.

She was so sure of being on the right path that, having her sister Felicina with her at the time, she induced her to leave Mrs. Ninna and stay at *Casa Immacolata* in order to be ready for whatever Don Bosco should decide.

Felicina had for some time wanted to join her sister, attracted by the same ideals for good. But the tears of Mrs. Ninna who loved her as a daughter always held her back. Now however, following her sister in fervor she herself became eloquent. She said so much and spoke so much about God and Don Bosco that without displeasing the person who had cared for her for ten years she won the battle and went to live at *Casa Immacolata*. Her parents were astonished and also a little annoyed, but they knew that if Mary had spoken in the name of Don Bosco neither they nor anyone else would be able to move either of the girls an inch.

### **Petronilla thinks**

Petronilla instead found it hard to give in. To be a Sister and especially one of Don Bosco's Sisters was a beautiful thing. But that . . . doing as others did at the time set . . . She found it impossible to go to confession and receive Holy Communion on the days prescribed. Everyone would see she was missing if she did not feel disposed to go. What did that uniformity in dress signify? What a lot of questions! Poor Petronilla! And as for the discipline! This question was soon solved. All of them, even Mary, were of the opinion that they did not want it. They said, "We shall certainly say no to this." Hence, at least in one point Petronilla could be at peace.

After a little hesitation she went to Father Pestarino and said, that she did not feel she could accept that Rule. She expected a rebuke but heard an almost nonchalant,

“Then you will remain as you are, a simple Daughter of Mary.”

She would have preferred a scolding or even an imposition . . . but being able to do as she chose embarrassed her. Having her freedom of choice accepted with such indifference by the voice she paid most attention to made her begin to look at things from another angle. After working with Mary for so many years would they now be separated? What would she be able to do on her own? Felicina would probably take her place. Those ardent young girls would be listening to Mary as she upheld the reasoning of the Rule and the happiness God had in store for religious souls, of the good they would learn about and do once the Superiors and Sisters sent by Don Bosco arrived. Mary was sure that Don Bosco would send them. What would Our Lady have done in her place? Oh dear!

To this and all the other difficulties Mary replied, “What is all this in comparison with the grace of being consecrated to God?” Petronilla went again to her Director and told him that she would be as Don Bosco wanted because she understood that this was what the good God wanted.

### **A decisive meeting with the other Daughters in the town**

Those among the New Ursulines who went to see their companions at *Casa Immacolata* were informed by them of what was in the wind and even encouraged to read the Rules in order to see their worth . . . The others were provided for directly by Father Pestarino, who kept them well informed and invited them to reflect to see if any of them felt called to the new institution.

Then on January 29, the feast of Saint Francis de Sales, he did what his Superior had told him to do. Without saying anything to anyone else he gathered those who were living in the house near the church with all the others of the town. Following Don Bosco’s advice he recited the *Veni Creator Spiritus* in front of a crucifix which had been

placed on a table between two lighted candles. He then proceeded to the business of voting.

Twenty-seven Daughters of Mary Immaculate were present and Angela Maccagno acted as scrutineer.

The result of the scrutiny gave twenty-one votes to Mary Mazzarello, daughter of Joseph and known as Mary of Valponasca, three to Petronilla Mazzarello, two to Felicina and one to Joan Ferrettino. Hence Mary Mazzarello was elected Superior by an almost unanimous vote which speaks clearly of the standing she held among all the Daughters, even those who did not share her ideals. However, that same Mary Mazzarello got to her feet and after thanking everyone asked to be dispensed from the burden she felt she could not carry.

Some of the electors suggested that if the votes had been given her she was duty-bound to accept. But neither their insistence nor their reasoning could move her and she said she would only accept under obedience. Father Pestarino said he had no authority to make such an order before consulting Don Bosco. This name brought new light to Mary and turning to her companions she asked them to place the choice of the first Superior in the hands of Don Bosco saying that this would be the best thing for all concerned. The others agreed on the condition that she should be the first assistant with the title of Vicar, according to the Rule. This was accepted.

The second assistant was next elected and Petronilla received nineteen votes. These two now withdrew and Felicina was nominated Novice Mistress and Joan Ferrettino, Bursar. Angela Maccagno was reelected Superior of the Daughters in the town or New Ursulines.

The names of those elected were promulgated by Father Pestarino who added a few words of encouragement. Then followed the recitation of the *Laudate Dominum* and the meeting closed. It was a meeting outsiders knew nothing about, but the Daughters were bound to feel its full effects.<sup>7</sup>

## NOTES

1871 — 1872

1. Letter of the Superior General of the Daughters of Mary the Immaculate Virgin, Sister Flavia Delfino, Savona, March 31, 1939 (Ten. Arch. FMA).

2. Francesia, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, p. 85.

3. Original in Sales. Arch.

4. Francesia, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, p. 86.

5. Francesia, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, p. 89.

6. Cf. Manuscript A of Father Dominic Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).

7. Cf. Manuscript A of Father Dominic Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).

FOUNDATION STONES  
OF THE LIVING MONUMENT  
TO MARY HELP OF CHRISTIANS  
(1872)

**Agreement on the first religious habit**

Following the sequence of events it must be stated that while Father Pestarino was at Verazze during Don Bosco's convalescence, he spoke of the recent visit to Albissola. He mentioned the pleasant impression he had had of the good Daughters of the Immaculate Virgin and how he had admired their simple habit. It appeared to be so adapted to religious who shared day-to-day life with their pupils and even joined in their games. At the same time it was not very different in style from the dress generally worn by young women dedicated to piety.

This leads us up to an account given us by Petronilla.

One day, [she says,] I was looking everywhere for Mary. I wanted to ask her advice about a dress that had been ordered but I could not find her anywhere. She put in an appearance some hours later and when I saw her I could scarcely restrain my impatience. Mary looked at me and her eyes seemed to smile more than usual. She told me that she had hidden herself away because Father Pestarino had ordered her to make a religious habit according to his description so that Don Bosco could decide if we should dress that way. She showed me a brown habit similar to the one friars wear but without the cord and having a cape reaching to the elbows.

It was only then that I understood the meaning of the word *uniform* written in the Rule. It had given me such an amount of thought yet my self-love would not allow me to mention my uncertainty because I did not want to appear so ignorant.

We find another record in the memoirs of Brother Peter Enria, who was Don Bosco's infirmarian at Varazze. He gives us to understand that Father Pestarino paid him a further visit. This was probably to tell him the outcome of the meeting, show him the model habit and for another purpose, not very comforting but foreseen.

This is the record set down by Enria after Don Bosco's death:

At that time, (while Don Bosco was ill and then convalescent at Varazze) Father Pestarino was alone with him after the visit of the men from Mornese, and they spoke of the future Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Since no decision had yet been made regarding the habit they were to wear Father Pestarino presented Don Bosco with a light coffee-colored model in order to have his opinion.

Don Bosco examined it well and then said, "Someone should put it on so that we can see it better. "

"How can we do that?" said Father Pestarino.

Don Bosco looked at me, then said, "You put it on and see how handsome you are dressed up in this style . . .!" I obeyed and Don Bosco burst out laughing to see me dressed up in such a manner. He thought the habit quite well made but said he would have preferred a darker color.

Such was the first habit of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

Don Bosco continued to discuss matters of the new Congregation with Father Pestarino but since rather delicate affairs were mentioned it is not my place to speak of them!

### **Towards a transfer to the school**

What was at the time reserved through the discretion of good Enria can now be revealed. In *Casa Immacolata* everyone did her own work with habitual serenity of spirit. It was good to be alive and looking ahead to new horizons of hope which was still more joyful. But things outside were far different.

A word dropped here and there in an undertone began to spread the idea that perhaps the school would never

open. Stony face could be seen even among the once most affectionate and trusted. Soon groups of men would break up at the approach of Father Pestarino and sad glances were cast towards the school. All this gave the poor Son of Don Bosco to understand that the hard truth was beginning to leak out in some quarters. Full of thought for his fellow townfolk and the anguish which, in spite of himself, he would have to cause them, his heart could not but suffer. Sensitive by nature he felt and suffered more and more at each reference to the matter.

The Daughters too had heard more than one phrase here and there, against their Superior and they were deeply hurt. Besides this, how could even those pious young people, New Ursulines or not, who did not wish to join the new religious family, be happy at the turn of events? They demonstrated this with distant greetings and ill-concealed coldness which must have weighed heavily on the affectionate hearts of Mary and her companions of Mary Immaculate.

Everywhere there was something to suffer, pray over and to keep in silence.

However Father Pestarino had to make a report on the undercurrent of discontent percolating through Mornese to his Superior and Father.

Don Bosco said, "Well, Father Pestarino, do you not think the Daughters should know definitely about their having to move to the school? Tell them clearly and at the first opportunity. But do it discreetly, you understand, in order not to be the cause of too many bitter words . . ."

### **Don Bosco returns to Turin**

Don Bosco left Varazze on February 15 to return to Turin. Father Francesia tells us that Father Pestarino was among those who accompanied him.<sup>1</sup>

This seems very likely because Canelli is on the same line and it would cut his traveling time by half. His nephew

Father Joseph was still very weak and allowed up only a couple of half-hour periods a day.

Because of the transferred feast of Saint Francis de Sales the prescribed annual meeting of the Directors in Valdocco took place after Don Bosco had arrived, that is, on February 17 and 18. Father Pestarino read his report concerning the beginning of the new Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians to the Directors and also the other brethren of the Pious Society. Don Bosco was present and listened to the report with much pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

### **More about the religious habit**

It was not surprising, therefore, that from those who already knew about the steps that had been taken, the following question, which Father Francesia tells us about, should have been asked.

"Don Bosco, what do you expect your Daughters to wear?" They received one of those answers which our good Father used to give when he was not completely ready to manifest his ideas, "For the time being let us be contented if they have the habit of virtue . . ."<sup>3</sup>

However we know already about Enria's light-hearted wearing of the model habit and can add a particular that came from Father Joseph Pestarino. It gives us to understand how in fact even Don Bosco did not completely neglect the subject of a habit for his future religious.

Father Cagliero knew nearly all the Institutes of Sisters in Turin. After he had discussed the matter with Don Bosco he tried to obtain the loan of a habit from each of them. There was no idea of copying them but just to get an exact idea and not run the danger of being too different from what was usual among religious. However Father Cagliero was not very successful because all of them courteously and capably avoided complying with his request.

Since this attempt failed it was decided as a provisional measure to keep to the model already mentioned, which

could be modified according to need and at the suggestion of time and circumstance.<sup>4</sup>

According to the verbal testimony of Petronilla Father Pestarino turned to the practical side of the matter.

"Shall I think of the material needed and get in touch with the economer of the Oratory or does Don Bosco think that I should approach some other reliable person?"

"See to it directly yourself, dear Father Pestarino, according to our former arrangements."

"Well Don Bosco, if you have nothing to the contrary, would it be possible to give the Daughters the satisfaction of paying for the material from the money they receive from the sale of the silk coccons? This has been one of their industries for the past two or three years. They have always wanted to hand the profit over to me intact. I think this gesture would give them great pleasure."

"Yes, certainly. It is a good thing to draw on sufficient resources. Our economer might be able to point out shops where prices are more in keeping with our purse. Now in order not to have to return to the subject again let us be a little more certain about the move to the school and the date of the clothing with the habit."

"We hope the decision will be for when Don Bosco comes to return the visit of the men of Mornese. Do not forget that we are expecting you. You promised and you must keep your promise."

"Yes, I will come, but not yet."

### **Filial hope**

Was it this confirmation that gave wings to Father Pestarino's hopes? It certainly must have been because he approached his dear Father James Costamagna, asking him to put to music the words of a song for the occasion. This was to be lively and spirited like their own hearts and the hearts of the Daughters, who were all loyal to their venerated Father.<sup>5</sup>

There was another particular to be noted concerning this sojourn of Father Pestarino in Don Bosco's Oratory. It was the acquisition of a beautiful, large picture of Mary Help of Christians, to be given to the Daughters. The time was ripe for them to have before their eyes at every hour of the day, the image of her to whom they were before long to give the sweet title of Mother.

This good Director reentered Mornese bearing the picture of the celestial fountain from which Don Bosco received his mission and the power of miracles together with other supporting features for his trust. But this did not mean that he would be freed from previous preoccupations or from subsequent ones.

In fact, [as Petronilla relates,] the first large picture of Our Lady as venerated in Valdocco entered the house secretly and, in order not to disturb the *wasps* who continually stung poor Father Pestarino and to a certain extent also us, it was placed quietly in the school chapel which was still under construction.

I remember it hanging in the recess of a dummy window, on the right facing the altar of the chapel. It was a little more than a meter in height and a beautiful representation of Our Lady and the Child Jesus.

We accepted it immediately as a sign of approaching happiness and in our hearts and minds we hoped it would augur favorably for Don Bosco's plans.

Father Campi adds, "There was a picture in a type of niche. Father Pestarino had hung a cord in front of it for devotees to attach there the lamps or other symbols of promises made and favors received.

### Cheerfulness and apprehension

Father Pestarino told the Daughters about the good and beautiful things that had taken place in Turin and how pleased Don Bosco had been to hear that they were per-

severing in their will to belong wholly to God and to Mary Help of Christians, concluding:

Even more, he told me to tell you: "I will come and together we will sign the great promise to live and die working for God under the beautiful title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians."<sup>6</sup>

It is easy to imagine the enthusiastic joy these words aroused.

Regarding their move to the school, although their new dwelling might seem magnificent and Don Bosco's prophecy enticing, (for Father Pestarino had repeated it to them, "Young girls will come even from a distance,") still they could not enjoy the prospect very much. How could they move without raising a storm, perhaps a hail-storm? Thus they said amongst themselves. "Poor Father Pestarino and poor Don Bosco too, when that day for moving dawns, if it ever dawns!"

The good Director did not breathe a word about the habit at that time but concentrated rather on his work of spiritual formation of the Daughters, leading them to an ever greater union with God, to simple, prompt obedience even in the smallest things, to humility, mortification and sacrifice. This was what Don Bosco suggested in order to discern better who were more suited to the religious state. He would cut short the confidential word of fear from those who allowed themselves to become too impressed by Mornese gossip and ill-humor saying gently yet brusquely: "Those who want to stay with Don Bosco keep silence and leave everything to Our Lady."

### **Providential circumstances**

Our Lady came to show how easy it was for her to smooth out every difficulty and Don Bosco had reason to repeat to Father Pestarino, "Let us wait in peace; who knows . . . perhaps time . . ."

The rectory at Mornese had badly needed repairs for many years, but this had been put off because of lack of means. Now the house had become really dangerous and another had to be found for the parish pastor to prevent possible accidents. But where was there to be found in Mornese a house sufficiently large, decorous and close enough to the church? Thoughts turned to the house built by Father Pestarino which had been ceded to the Daughters.

When the Hebrews saw the false prophet Balaam ascend the mountain they feared his maledictions. But it was then that joy came for Balaam was forced to bless them. Thus while some (and they were not just a few), were striving against Father Pestarino and trying to place obstacles in the way of his plans, those very people opened up the way for him to attain the end willed by God.

On May 8, the Council met in the town hall to deliberate among other things, what house should be chosen as a rectory. One of the Counselors "... stated that as they had to demolish the old rectory a temporary dwelling was needed for the parish priest. Then turning directly to Father Pestarino he asked him to let the Council rent his house, the one near the church, which was the only one suitable for the purpose.

Father Pestarino said that as everyone knew the house was occupied by the Daughters who worked for and made themselves very useful to the town. It was true that as the association had not a religious character a transfer could take place but that would mean disturbing them. Therefore he asked the Counselors to dispense him from such a thing."<sup>7</sup>

Counselor Mazzarello replied that the said young people could move to the school where there were already rooms prepared for use; then he could cede his house to the Council for the time being. This would bring him still more merit for public service. He already had done much in this regard sacrificing both his person and his patrimony for this end.

Father Pestarino thanked the Counselor and said if that

was the case even the Council could profit by using his house. However, with discretion and refinement he declared that he would rather not share in the deliberations . . . The result was that the key should be handed over for the 25th of that same month.

What refinement of goodness on the part of God! What a number of ways Father Pestarino had tried to think up in order to escape from the fix he had been in! What trouble he had gone to, to weigh up the pros and cons and found every path bristling with thorns! Yet Providence had opened up the least expected way!

"It must be noted," writes Father Campi, "that the Counselor who suggested sending the Daughters to the school was notoriously against Father Pestarino and this only serves to make the will of Divine Providence appear still more clear!"

Besides letting Don Bosco know, Father Pestarino hastened to inform the Daughters so that they might gather their few things together and without letting it be noticed even by the workroom girls, would be able to leave the house free and clean for the 25th of the same month.

What better day could be chosen for the move by a son of Don Bosco than the day nearest to the feast of Mary Help of Christians? It was not by chance that he agreed on the 25th, neither before nor after, with the Salesian sense of love for the Help of Christians. He must have settled for the actual move to take place on the evening of the 23rd because the Daughters left the *Casa Immacolata* after having paid their respects that day to the parish pastor. They thanked him for what he had done for them spiritually, letting him know at the same time that as they were moving to the school they would fulfill their practices of piety in the attached chapel, according to the wish of their Superior Don Bosco.

### **We have to move house so we move**

“What about the silkworms?” the Daughters objected timidly. “We have set more than ever this year, Father, because expenses are increasing. If they do not succeed it will be a great loss.”

“The silkworms! Let them change house too. Only their trip must take place when it is getting dark so that they may not be shy of the people. They will not suffer, as you will see. Obedience will work miracles for them too.”

The Daughters obeyed as usual. On the evening chosen, after making sure that the people had retired to their houses for the night and in order not to expose their poor household goods to public view, everyone took on her back as much as she could carry and off she went to the new house. Thus by making the journey once or twice in perfect silence they completely emptied the house they were giving up. The following day they would return to clean the place before handing over the keys to Father Pestarino.

All that belonged to the workroom was deposited in a large room on the ground floor of the school where the Daughters would pass most of the day. Father Pestarino had already been in residence on the top floor since the autumn of 1867. All their other belongings were taken to the Carante house where they would stay until such a time as the school would be placed completely at their disposition.

Mary and Petronilla had already been in the house a few days before in order to do the necessary cleaning and determine how the various rooms should be used. To tell the truth they were a little dark and gloomy. Everything was in place relatively quickly that same evening. We hope their tiredness took over. Otherwise, the thought of what would be said in town next morning might have driven sleep from their eyes.

### The first 24th in the school

In spite of the clouds on the horizon how cheerful they were when next morning they crossed the garden to hear holy mass celebrated just for them and to receive Holy Communion in the prayerful chapel of the school. They were there close to Our Lady of Sorrows who seemed to be asking them, "Will your sorrows ever be as great as mine?" Then there was the Help of Christians, the smiling, beautiful Lady who showed them the scepter of her power as she had shown it to Don Bosco. She held out Jesus to them, the omnipotent merciful Jesus. It was actually May 24, and at the same time, Don Bosco was celebrating with solemnity the feast of the Blessed Virgin in her own sanctuary!

What was it that Jesus said to those hearts He was so happy to embrace and who promised Him greater love in thanksgiving for His gifts, in preparation for the fresh battles to be fought for him? We shall know in heaven. Father Pestarino could not resist saying a few words to them before giving them Holy Communion. He spoke from a heart overcome with emotion. Let all hell be loosed against him tomorrow; today on her feast day our ever tender Mother wanted her Daughters in the house she had with preventive love prepared for them. Doubtless Don Bosco's heart also beat with his Mornese Family for whom he begged the graces of great serenity and unlimited love.

After mass Father Pestarino read for them from Muzza-relli's book. He used to do this every morning during May in the parish church. He then blessed them with the relic of Our Lady and said he would continue this until the end of May in order not to interrupt the Month of Mary.

Then they quickly arranged the workroom in order to give the girls a festive welcome. They were all excited at the prospect and very happy to enjoy the beautiful school even if only for a short time. It was useless to expect silence or even work that day. The girls had a thousand things to talk about, a thousand things to see and they praised without restraint the convenience offered by the big house.

### **All was not serene**

The Daughters listened silently and with only half a smile. They knew that for just a short time those good girls would ignore the truth, and then—who knows? Perhaps their faces would darken and they too would keep away. What would happen to the workroom then? Would it become empty? This would mean less work for souls, for apostles who wished nothing else. Besides this, earnings would be less, because if the girls left, orders would also take another direction. If life became poorer and more mortified not everyone would be able to endure it. However, they would not doubt Divine Providence, so lifting their hearts to heaven with a fervent ejaculation, serenity returned.

### **The first two recruits**

A tangible proof of help from heaven came before nightfall. Rosina Mazzarello, Petronilla's niece, and Maria Poggio who had both come to the school but were still uncertain of what they should do, now presented themselves to Mary, resolved at last to become part of Don Bosco's religious family. Mary Mazzarello had never doubted them and now she rejoiced because she knew them both to be pious, hardworking and possessed of a good spirit.

The presence in Mornese of Canon Olivieri of the collegiate church of Acqui might have contributed to this happy decision.

This supposition is not without foundation since, after the death of the worthy Father Frassinetti he had been extraordinary confessor to all the Daughters, whether they lived in community or at home. The Pentecostal Ember Days occurred on the 22nd, 24th and 25th.

Canon Olivieri was a great friend of Don Bosco and close confidante of Father Pestarino. He could have been invited to come preferably before the Ember Days proper,

to the place where the already determined transfer of the Daughters to the school needed a paternal and authoritative word of comfort for all concerned.

### **Observing the Rule immediately**

As soon as they were more or less settled in their new surroundings Father Pestarino told the Daughters to start observing the Rule with exactitude including the practices of piety. Since rosary and spiritual reading were set for 4:45 p.m. the Daughters now interrupted their work and went to chapel where these practices were performed in common. The day girls stayed in the workroom with one of the Daughters. There was also something new in the evening. After night prayers the subject for the meditation of the following morning was read.

“Once we were in the school we began seriously and regularly to make our meditation,” says Petronilla, “but whenever it suited Father Pestarino.”

Suited, in a manner of speaking. The poor priest had stopped saying mass at the Oratory (the chapel beside the parish church), but he could not give up hearing confessions. This work was left almost entirely to him. Don Bosco himself would not have allowed it, both because it was such an important and efficacious ministry, and because of the risk of giving further cause for criticism. Missing Father Pestarino in the parish church, many said clearly and openly, “How is it that the whole town is deprived of an extra mass because of those four stupid girls?” It was, therefore, very necessary to proceed with caution.

Father Pestarino was always the one who suffered most. Well before dawn every morning he hurried to the parish church to hear the men’s confessions. Then he would return to say mass for the Daughters and afterwards go back to the parish church for the women’s confessions.

Besides the Daughters there were nearly always some of the pupils of the workroom in the school chapel, and it

was not rare for one or other of those faithful to Angela Maccagno to be there.

"We said prayers similar to those found in the *Companion of Youth* of Don Bosco," says Petronilla, "then if Campi did not light the candles because Father Pestarino had not come back from the parish church we made our half hour's meditation on our knees. If instead the priest was ready, we had mass first because Father Pestarino could not wait."

We can imagine the charming little scene which preceded mass. As they did not have permission to reserve the Blessed Sacrament, an exact number of particles had to be consecrated every morning. To prevent embarrassment Father Pestarino placed a board near the inner door of the chapel. This board had a number of holes drilled in it and in each hole was a moveable cord. Those who wished to receive Communion would pull down one of the cords. The cleric Campi counted the cords hanging down from the board and prepared the correct number of hosts to be consecrated.

During mass each one prayed on her own, but straight after the elevation Petronilla would start a hymn in preparation for Holy Communion. Thus was established a beautiful Salesian custom which highlighted Don Bosco's fine sense of psychology because singing is to the soul what sun is to the eyes.

At midday the little community again gathered in chapel for the particular examination of conscience and the recitation of the *Angelus*.

Then as has already been stated, they went again to chapel at 4:45 p.m. for the rosary and spiritual reading. Finally at 9:30 p.m. they made a visit to the Blessed Sacrament and said night prayers.

### **The feast of Corpus Christi**

Meanwhile the feast of Corpus Christi came around and, according to the orders of their Director the Daughters got to work decorating the windows and the boundary wall because the procession from the parish church would be passing there. The girls all helped, even those of the Sunday gatherings. They had enjoyed meeting there on Sunday with Mary and the other Daughters without having to go to Saint Sylvester's. How they had enjoyed running about the courtyard and then singing! How happy they had been! All too soon had come the time to go to the parish church for Vespers and catechism, accompanied by the Daughters with whom they had walked back.

The feast of Corpus Christi made them really happy. They went from the Carante house to the school, mounted the stairs leading to the upper stories, opened the windows wide and as though they were at home looked out of the school where they had thought never to have placed a foot. It seemed a dream, a pleasant dream.

The procession passed by and Jesus blessed the school in festal attire. He blessed the humble Daughters on their knees in prayer for all the children around them; for the beloved people who would so soon be a cause of grief to them; for their Director near to becoming the target of many discordant tongues and for Don Bosco from whom they expected the fulfillment of a great promise.

Jesus passed by and blessed them. From those humble hearts uncertain of the morrow yet happy to give themselves entirely to Him there rose an effusion of loving trust.

### **In search of work**

Mary's month ended with the feast of Corpus Christi and during June the workroom girls became fewer because of the pressure of working the land. However the fervor of the Daughters did not diminish, neither did their hope

and intense desire for work. But this threatened to become insufficient to keep everyone occupied.

The arduous work of tending the silkworms was also coming to an end. Father Pestarino's prophecy had been fulfilled and far from resenting the change of domicile they seemed to want to make up for the worry moving them had caused by producing more abundantly than ever. Father Pestarino was, therefore, able to purchase the material for the Daughter's religious habits.

However, more work was urgently needed if they were to support themselves. So Petronilla went with one of the older girls to the nearby villages in search of needlework. Everyone was aware of the moderate prices charged, which made the trip a success in orders and provisions. So, trustful serenity continued to reign in the House.

### **The gossips**

Thinking it the right thing to do, some of the girls would occasionally report the town gossip. "They say you are silly women to shut yourselves up like this . . . the people say you will soon get tired of it . . . that you will have to give up." Some of the younger ones were rather dismayed, but Mary Mazzarello, serene and jovial as she always was, replied, "Let them say what they like, we shall give all our attention to becoming saints!" She wanted no serious faces and had the gift of making the sun shine even on the most overcast days. Disagreeable talk, monotonous tasks and heavy work, all became pleasant.

For those fervent young people, especially herself, it was hard not to have Jesus sacramentally present in the chapel. They were also too far distant from the parish church to make visits during the day. In order not to upset the timetable this was only possible when work had to be delivered. But love like hers is ingenious, and she would often stimulate the girls who stayed at the school for their midday meal and recreation, to take a walk. The little group

would make its way to Casaleggio, about a quarter hour's distance, where there was a little chapel with the Blessed Sacrament reserved. There would be a ten-minute visit to the King of kings, a fervent prayer to Our Lady, a hymn and then back to work with a warmer heart and a still more cheerful smile.

From that time Don Bosco's program of work and prayer was also the program of all who resided at the school. They were not aware that they already loved the holy idea of Don Bosco with surprising similarity of aim, and were already treading the same path with unhoped for success. Prayer and work! Uninterrupted prayer because while the hand worked the heart was beating for God alone. Work became prayer because while the members worked actively to earn their meager daily bread the spirit raised to God repeated lovingly: "All is for You, Lord. Everything is for You and for souls, the fruit of Your precious blood."

Mary Mazzarello was foremost in piety and activity. With her lively, lovable and witty character she cheered her companions even when after working hard all day there was only a little *polenta* (Maize meal porridge) with which to satisfy their hunger. She was foremost in the practice of virtue and, encouraged by her example, her companions cheerfully carried out the most painful sacrifices and willingly bore the hardest privations.

### **How Mary Mazzarello encouraged herself and encouraged everyone**

Mary was eminently serene and made everything a reason for joy.

For example, the laundry could now be done easily in the House because the school had plenty of water. But since everyone else went to the Roverno and they, too, had always gone there before . . . Down they all went to do the rinsing at the Roverno. She was always first on the road, first to plunge her hands into the water and first to inter-

rupt work with a witty remark. Then she would start the simple preparations for dinner in the fresh air or light a fire between two large stones to heat a little soup.

As if she had tired herself less than the others, she would see that everyone had what she needed. She came and went, garnishing everything with charity and humor so that even those less used or less inclined to certain sacrifices, almost longed for wash day to come more often.

### **The bishop of the diocese comes to Mornese in search of health**

Another great work was on the way. It required scrubbing every corner of the school and helping workmen finish the best rooms on the second floor. All windows, doors and floors had to be cleaned.

There were beds and the best of Father Pestarino's furniture to put in place. Window and door curtains were hung and special cooking learned; cooking suited to a delicate and important person. For the bishop of the diocese, Monsignor Joseph Mary Sciandra, was to be given hospitality at the school for a period of time.

According to Campi, Monsignor Sciandra was "one of the names listed by Don Bosco and presented to the Pope as suited for the task of pastor of souls in those troubled times." He entered the diocese on the feast of the Epiphany, 1872. After pontifical mass on the feast of Corpus Christi he had walked in the long procession under the scorching sun. Wet with perspiration he went into a room to rest, not noticing the open windows. He contracted bronchitis and became seriously ill. Now on the road to recovery, he needed a period of convalescence in a place where fresh, healthy air would speed his recovery. He was unable to use the bishop's country house at Strevi because he had not received the royal *placet* and, therefore, was deprived of temporal privileges. Not belonging to those parts, he did not know where to turn.

Aware of this, Canon Olivieri who knew both the respect Don Bosco and Father Pestarino had for the princes of the Church, and their regal hospitality, immediately suggested Mornese.

Father Pestarino was extremely happy. He saw this as a disposition of Divine Providence to ease the foundation of the Institute.<sup>8</sup> He wrote to Turin immediately not only to ask Don Bosco's permission, of which he was certain, but also to come to an agreement with his Superior regarding the Daughters, in view of this unforeseen though favorable event.

#### **Don Bosco determines to prepare the first religious function for his Daughters**

In all his works Don Bosco was in the habit of awaiting a sign from God, that the time was ripe for action. In this case he quickly understood that this circumstance was an order from heaven.

Therefore, after first allowing the Bishop to recover a little in health, get to know the Daughters, witnessing the way they were carrying out their mission and practicing their Rule, he had Father Pestarino establish with the Bishop a period of spiritual retreat. Canon Olivieri who knew all about the matter and understood the spirituality of the Daughters, could preach it together with the Rural Vicar of Canelli, Father Mark Mallarini. The clothing with the religious habit for all who had requested this, could take place at the end of the retreat. Some might even be permitted to make religious vows: the older ones or those who already belong to the Daughters of Mary Immaculate or who were bound by private vows. However before that time came, Don Bosco would go to Mornese himself.

### The Bishop becomes Father Pestarino's guest

The Bishop arrived with his secretary, Father Francis Berta and both were pleased to take up residence in the apartment prepared for them on the second floor. They appreciated the light pure air, the far horizons and freedom of the place, which meant far more to them than any comforts cities or less hilly regions might offer.

As to the rest Father Pestarino and his nephew did not spare themselves. They were well aware of the honor that had come to the town and the school. The Daughters would have gone on their knees to accomplish their new duties, so eager were they to do everything well.

The Bishop was served by his own domestic, called Franchino, while the Daughters, chiefly Felicina, saw to the cooking. She was helped by her godmother and kind hostess who, as she had done on Don Bosco's visits, prepared and sent the choicest of dishes already seasoned. The decorative work such as flower arrangements for table and chapel were reserved for Rosalia, Father Pestarino's niece of whom we have already heard. She had come from Ovada especially for the purpose. Father Pestarino was adverse to such lordly hospitality for himself but regarded it as a duty towards his diocesan superiors.

Work increased but consolations were not lacking. All the priests had to celebrate mass and the Daughters alternated in order to assist at all they could.

The Bishop celebrated late but he often saw the Daughters, especially Mary Mazzaello with some of the older girls intent on their devotions. He interested himself in them during the day, saw how they observed their Rule, and the seriousness and ease with which they sacrificed themselves for their ideal of sanctity for themselves and others. So much so that he not only approved but encouraged the suggestion of Father Pestarino in Don Bosco's name, to arrange for the first clothing and religious profession of those fervent Daughters.

The Bishop himself must have felt heaven's approval of

his stay at Mornese. Certainly he found it a comfort that counterbalanced the many sorrows and crosses a bishop carried on his shoulders, especially in those difficult times. He wished to proceed quickly and Don Bosco, when questioned on this point, submitted to his decision. The retreat was fixed for August 1, feast of Saint Peter in Chains.

### Loving preparations

Father Pestarino immediately informed the Daughters to prepare them for the important step, allowing them to finish the urgent work still in hand, and sew habits for those fortunate enough to be clothed. Thus they would have no preoccupations during the retreat.

The material was already in the House. Just a few days before, Petronilla had gone to meet the courier and relieve him of a weighty parcel from the Quenzati Firm of Milan, without realizing what it contained. What a pleasant surprise she had a little later!

Sixteen were to be chosen for the first clothing ceremony, among them the young Corinna who had continually begged to be received as a postulant. However, Mary was rather uncertain about one of the sixteen, who was obstinate in her opinions especially regarding practices of piety. Hence she hesitated to make her a habit, hoping that as a result of the retreat sermons she herself would withdraw. Failing this they would consult Don Bosco about the matter.

During this period of consoling change for the school how was the teacher, Angela Maccagno, conducting herself?

According to Angelina Pestarino and Maria Livia Gandino neè Gastaldo, who was still a very lively old lady in 1938, Angela although still sad at the "swarming of her bees under *Main* (nickname for Mary)," kept up her habitual cordial relations with each of them. She herself did not appear ready to give up her own ideal concerning her New Ursulines.

The incomplete Rule which we have before our eyes<sup>9</sup> and the short notes on the origin of the New Ursulines of the Archdiocese of Acqui<sup>10</sup> give us to understand that Angela Maccagno made use of Monsignor Sciandra's stay in Mornese in order to present him with her own plan of organization, a partly modified version of the New Ursulines securing its life by placing it under Don Bosco.

But her paths were too different from those pointed out to Don Bosco by Divine Providence. She, therefore, had to resign herself to go on living in hope. Meanwhile, the good prelate consoled her as he animated one group of Daughters to proceed cheerfully along their new path and told both groups to consider themselves sisters in serving the Lord with works of charity.

### **Ladies share in the first spiritual retreat**

Added to the consolation of seeing everyone at peace there was another spiritual consolation for Mary and the whole school in those days.

Some lady benefactors of Don Bosco and penitents of Canon Olivieri asked him the reason for his trip to Mornese. They then asked if they too might share in the spiritual retreat and be present for the ceremony of religious clothing and profession. Don Bosco did not refuse them so they arrived at the school where they were given hospitality in a separate apartment and dining room. But they were allowed to take part in the common practices of piety. In this way, side by side with Don Bosco's second family there was born one of its specific good works: retreats for ladies.

At the commencement of the retreat the care of the few boarders was given to a certain widow named Maccagno who had been allowed to live at the school although not aspiring to the religious life. The House became a cenacle where all were peacefully recollected in God, awaiting in prayer and ardent love the hour of the great grace.

### **The Founder must not be absent and he was not**

The Bishop wanted Don Bosco but he, alleging ill health and a spiritual retreat in Turin, wished to be excused. He replied to the insistence of Father Pestarino that the Bishop sufficed for the function. For the rest, if there was anything else to be done, Father Pestarino could do it himself.

Seeing that letters would not move Don Bosco from his resolve (it seemed he wanted to give others the glory of this important work), on August 3 the Bishop sent his secretary Father Berta with the definite order to return with Don Bosco the following day.

Hope was diminishing as the hour of arrival approached. Therefore the preacher of the meditation thought it better to prepare the Daughters for a disappointment so they would accept it generously. The poor things, already sad because of the uncertainty, were complaining to God in their hearts. Suddenly the sound of horses' hoofs was heard on the cobbled pavement outside, together with the wheels of a carriage.

Carriages were not seen frequently at Borgoalto but this one stopped right there, noticed by both retreatants and preacher. Having developed his theme already he quickly brought his sermon to a close and went out. The Daughters waited for Benediction suspended between hope and fear, until the quickened steps of the Bishop and priests were heard going towards the entrance. The name of their Father was whispered near the chapel door, then joyously repeated soft and loud. It made them rejoice and unleashed in their hearts a hymn of loving gratitude to Jesus who had so blessed them.<sup>11</sup>

Don Bosco was really in Mornese! Neither work, poor health nor profound humility kept him from obeying the Bishop who, deeply moved, took him in his arms as he came down from the carriage.

After the greetings and a brief talk with the Bishop he went to greet Jesus and the Daughters who were still in

chapel. The few ladies making the retreat were also present. Don Bosco expressed his pleasure at seeing them and told them that as he had to go away again the following day and could not return, the Bishop had permitted an alteration in the retreat timetable, holding the clothing and profession ceremonies on the morrow. He added that since a retreat is so important it should not usually be interrupted but this time the Bishop had suggested it and his voice expressed God's will. On the other hand no better day could be chosen to start a new religious family than when the Church kept the feast of Our Lady of the Snow. The retreat would be continued afterwards and he was sure the little interruption would do no harm because of the great grace God was giving them.

He concluded by saying with obvious pleasure that they would be called *Daughters of Mary Help of Christians* and their Institute would be the *living monument of his gratitude to the Blessed Virgin under the title of Help of Christians*.

He then went to supper with the Bishop and the other priests. After supper, tired though he must have been, he called Mary Mazzarello, Petronilla, and Joan Ferrettino, the elected leaders of the little family. Petronilla says,

It was to choose who of us would receive the habit only and who would be admitted to profession according to what Father Pestarino had already arranged with him. We understood immediately that only those who had private vows would be allowed to profess.

Among other things, we spoke to him about the postulant who wanted to receive the habit but in whom we placed little confidence because despite all her good qualities she had an obstinate attachment to her own special devotions. For example she wanted to say the Office of Our Lady everyday; he had told us that the seven sorrows or joys took its place.

While waiting for Don Bosco's word we had not even made a religious habit for her. On the other hand she had been recommended by the Bishop of Biella and we did not want to cause him distress. Our holy Father said he would

Speak to Monsignor Leto himself. In the meantime he did not think the young girl should be clothed for she would not persevere. To mitigate her grief he told us to give her the material for the habit letting her understand that since the function had had to be anticipated there was no time to make it but there would soon be other clothings.

Lowering his voice as if speaking to himself Don Bosco finished with, "It will not be long before she leaves of her own free will."

After settling certain matters with the three of us, Don Bosco spoke to all of us together except the ladies. He explained in a few words the importance of the ceremony and how it should be carried out, naming those who were to receive the religious habit only, and those who were to be professed.

He then made us read the answers we were to give according to the formula that the foreseeing Father Pestarino had had written out for each of us and made us learn almost by heart, before the retreat began.

To save time he got us to read together the formula of the vows, informing us clearly, however, that in chapel we should read it one by one. He taught us how to carry our habit to the altar. Then he instructed us about the manner of wearing the religious habit in order to honor it and our new title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

"Your gait," he told us, "must be correct, neither too quick nor too slow. Your whole behavior should be discreet, recollected, not affected but self-possessed, revealing your peace of soul. Your head should be held high but your eyes lowered, in such a way that not only your habit but your whole deportment will show you to be religious, that is, persons consecrated to God. You must walk like this."

Then, as the room was a large one Don Bosco, knowing the poor peasant girls we were, had the goodness to walk up and down demonstrating how we should be at the same time both grave and easy. He continued saying that we should be very reserved in our manner of speaking, not raising our voices too high and that our laughter should not attract notice because being cheerful does not mean being noisy and dissipated. Such things do not concern us any more.

He even taught us how to greet one another saying that

Saint Francis de Sales told the Sisters of the Visitation, "The Jesuits always uncover their heads when they meet one another even if they meet a hundred times a day. I should think that following this example our Sisters could greet each other with an inclination of the head." Don Bosco concluded that it would not be a bad idea for us to follow the example of the saint who is our special protector.

Then as it was already late and we still had several things to see to, he let us go with this happy wish, "Tomorrow at nine o'clock you will be religious!"

### Immediate preparations

Happy and much moved, we went to our rooms in the Carante house to practice reading the responses, the formula of the vows and the other things Don Bosco had taught us.

Then Mary and I prepared the tray of novices' medals and the crucifixes for the professed. Don Bosco had sent them to us in a box a few days previously but Father Pesarino gave them to us at the last minute recommending us to have them set out suitably for the Bishop's blessing. The medals were yellow, large and heavy. They had an image of Mary Help of Christians engraved on one side with the ejaculation, *Mary Help of Christians, pray for us*, and on the other the façade of the church at Valdocco. The crucifixes were also yellow on a black wooden cross. Our preparations made us so happy that we no longer felt tired or sleepy.

Did they close their eyes that night awaiting the great moment? Or were the wings of their Guardian Angels ever spread wide taking transports of love from those happy hearts to the throne of the Most High, with the humble acknowledgment of their unworthiness and the promise of a more faithful response?

At the crack of dawn the whole Carante house was in motion. Never before had a day been so eagerly awaited.

### **Don Bosco places himself completely at the disposition of the Daughters**

Although usually rising much later because he was still convalescent, during the retreat the Bishop wanted to celebrate the community mass and distribute Holy Communion with his own hands. That particular morning however, he wished it to be celebrated by Don Bosco, thus obliging our Father to give his Daughters that justly desired consolation.

After mass Don Bosco spoke to some individually and then went into the confessional for those who wished. He had already been hearing confessions during the preached meditation.

I was prepared to make an annual confession, [relates Petronilla,] but Don Bosco asked me immediately: "Do you intend to make a general confession?" Mary had no time to go to Don Bosco for confession, much as she would have liked to. There were still so many things to see to for a feast suddenly anticipated by three days and we were inexperienced. But generous by nature as she was, and used to the spirit of sacrifice, she never manifested her desire or her sorrow at not being able to satisfy it. Smiling and active as usual she attended to the thousand preparations needed to make the celebration a success.

### **The hour of God strikes**

At nine o'clock, just after the Bishop's mass, the function began. Monsignor Sciandra was in full pontificals. He was flanked by Don Bosco in surplice and stole and by Father Dominic Pestarino, and assisted by his secretary, Father Francis Berta, by Father Thomas Ferraris, vice parish priest of Canelli, by the preachers Canon Raymond Olivieri and Father Mark Mallarini and by the parish priest of Mornese, Father Charles Valle.

As the inner doors of the chapel opened, the choir and

clergy intoned the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. The fifteen fortunate Daughters dressed in their best secular attire and their eyes shining with joy, entered and knelt at the foot of the altar. Each carried her own religious habit on her arm.

Monsignor asked them, "My children, what do you ask?" The Daughters answered joyfully that they asked to be allowed to wear the religious habit of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

The Bishop approved, questioned them again and finally pronounced the important words, "Go then, discard your worldly attire and clothe yourselves with the habit of religion." He then solemnly blessed the habits.

The group formed again and filed out while the clergy remained in prayer at the altar.

A few minutes later the doors opened and the fifteen novices reentered humbly attired in their brown habits and wearing on their heads a light blue veil in memory of their first title of Daughters of Mary Immaculate.

Their eyes lowered at the murmurs of surprise and whispered comment from those who had come to see, as with hands joined they returned to the altar and genuflected.

The Bishop blessed the medals and gave them out saying, "Behold my Daughters the image of her whom you have chosen as your model. The holy Catholic Church proclaims this heavenly Mother the sure Help of Christians. Love her, imitate her, invoke her often. No one ever had recourse to her without being heard immediately."

Then they went slowly to Don Bosco who took the medals one by one and invested the four novices: Corinna Arrigotti, Maria Grosso, Rosina Mazzarello and Clara Spagliardi. They then repeated together in a trembling voice which touched even the unfavorably disposed: "Most Holy Virign, dear Mother of Jesus, powerful Help of Christians, comfort of my soul, from this moment I place myself in your hands; protect me, defend me and help me to persevere in the service of God."

The four novices left the altar while the Bishop turned

his attention to the eleven remaining on their knees. He questioned again:

“My children what do you ask?”

Eleven voices answered firmly: “We ask to profess the Rule of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.”

There was fresh whispering among the people as the Bishop went on, “Have you practiced these Rules?”

The affirmative response called for other questions:

“Have you considered what it means to profess the Rules of this Congregation?” “. . . Are you ready to profess by vow what you have said?”

“Yes, we are ready. With all our hearts we desire it and with God’s help we hope to keep our promise.”

“For how long do you intend to make these vows?”

“Although it is our intention to spend our whole life in this Congregation, nevertheless in order to conform to what is laid down in the Rules we begin by binding ourselves for three years.”

The Bishop continued:

“May God bless your resolution and grant you the grace to keep it faithfully. Now place yourselves in His presence and recite the formula of the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience according to the Rules of the Congregation.”

Up until then the eleven had answered in chorus and in the excusable confusion of the moment they forgot Don Bosco’s instructions and began the formula of the vows in unison. The Bishop turned to Don Bosco and whispered, “No, no, this must not be said together.” The good Father smiled, understanding the emotion of the moment. Then he made a sign to the novices.

Immediately a single, energetic voice full of emotion was heard, “I, Sister Mary Domenica Mazzarello, mindful of my own weakness and distrusting the inconstancy of my will place myself in Your 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 you, Your Excellency and I make the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience for three years. You, oh

my most merciful Jesus, have inspired me to make these vows; help me with Your holy grace to observe them. Immaculate Virgin, powerful Help of Christians, be my defense and my guide in all the perils of life; my Guardian Angel and all the saints of heaven, pray for me. Amen."

It was only just that she who preceded all in love of God and encouraged all on the new way by word and example should now be the first to give herself the title of Sister, publicly binding herself with the holy vows which consecrated her to Christ.

Next came her faithful companion Petronilla Mazzarello and then Felicina Mazzarello, Joan Ferrettino, Teresa Pampuro, Felicita Arecco, Rosa Mazzarello and Catherine Mazzarello from Mornese. These were followed by Angela Jandet from Turin, Maria Poggio from Acqui and Assunta Gaino from Cartosio. One after another the eleven consecrations were received by the Pastor of the Diocese assisted by the Founder, to be presented by the Help of Christians at the throne of God.

Monsignor blessed the crucifixes and presented them. With the assistance of Don Bosco they were then placed round the necks of the newly professed.

### **Don Bosco speaks and names his "monument"**

Don Bosco turned humbly and almost pleadingly to Monsignor and said, "Your Excellency, please say a few words to the new religious."

But the Bishop refused saying, "No, no Don Bosco. You speak to your Sisters," and he sat down surrounded by his priests.

Don Bosco who was evidently overcome, began to speak. He spoke of the importance of the action that had taken place, the sanctity of the vows and the duties they entailed. He noted discreetly that ill humor might surround them because all the things of God bear the signs of suffer-

ing but, he added, it would all work out for their sanctification, making and keeping them really humble:

Among all tiny plants is one with a powerful scent. It is the spikenard, often mentioned in Sacred Scripture. In the office of the Blessed Virgin we read, *Nardus mea dedit odorem suavitatis*, (*My spikenard gives out a sweet perfume!*) But do you know what must happen before its scent is diffused? The plant has to be well crushed. Therefore do not be upset if you have to suffer. Whoever suffers with Jesus will reign with Him for all eternity.

You now belong to a religious family that is all Mary's. You are few, deprived of means and not supported by human approval, but let nothing disturb you. Things will soon change and you will have so many pupils you will not know where to put them, and so many postulants that you will find it hard to choose from among them. Yes, I assure you that the *Institute will have a great future if you remain simple, poor and mortified.*

Be faithful then, to all the duties of your new state as religious and, protected by our tender Mother Mary help of Christians you will come unharmed through all the troubles of life and do much good to your own soul and the souls of others.

Let your beautiful title of Daughters of Mary Help of Christians be your glory and often think that your Institute is to be a living monument of Don Bosco's gratitude to the great Mother of God under the title of *Help of Christians*.

Another prayer or two, the triple blessing of the Bishop, and the celebration was over. Mary Help of Christians now had the family she had sought from Don Bosco for many years. A mystical snowfall lay on the hills of Mornese just as real snow had fallen on that same day in Rome, many years before. A gentle fall of fresh, pure flakes that would consume themselves on God's altar in order to diffuse the candor of virtue and faith.

**In Mornese also, a fresh snowfall  
wins admiration and . . . ill humor**

The people left the church and the Sisters followed, their eyes still glistening with tears of emotion. But they had smiles on their lips and paradise in their hearts. They would have liked to speak and yet keep in reserve the happiness which seemed to envelope them in an atmosphere of heaven. Finally Sister Mary broke the silence with a cry that came spontaneously from her heart, "Oh Sisters, let us all become saints; we must all become great saints!"

Boarders, day girls and parents surrounded the new religious who listened without understanding the unflattering comments uttered by some of those present. They looked without seeing the sullen faces which were unable to hide interior bitterness behind a smile. The new Sisters were too happy, too absorbed in the inner reaches of their hearts with that eternal heavenly Goodness who had bent down to their lowliness in order to call them spouses.

**Life resumes its course while hearts  
are, as always, raised on high**

They would willingly have remained in the chapel still under the influence of their consecration, but . . . life must go on and the duties of hospitality must be carried out because today the ladies of the retreat were to dine with them and everything had to be festive. The agape was less poor than usual and even rich for them since at Don Bosco's orders, sweets were included. There was a cordial and affectionate atmosphere and from time to time the voice of Sister Mary Mazzarello could be heard over the festive chatter saying with her characteristic enthusiasm, *Viva Maria Ausiliatrice!*—a daughter's awareness of where festive gratitude is due!

After dinner and when the priests had all been served, those in charge of the kitchen utensils and the dining room

continued their humble tasks singing as they worked. But their hymns were soft and individual because they remembered they were still in retreat. They did not want to fall short of their duty even for a moment by expressing their joy in too noisy a manner.

### **Our Lady's vicar**

Don Bosco was due to leave at 5:00 p.m. Therefore while the Bishop was resting, he spoke to Father Pestarino recommending him to limit his activities as counselor and aide, to a purely spiritual direction from then onwards, leaving the Sisters to manage their internal government by themselves, with the superiors they had elected on the feast of Saint Francis. That was, unless Father Pestarino had any objections.

Objections! Father Pestarino needed no other motive for praising Mary Mazzarello once again to Don Bosco. Here is an extract from one of his notebooks:

Among other things we read,

Mary Mazzarello has always manifested a good spirit and a heart very inclined to piety. She frequents the sacraments of confession and Communion and is very devoted to Mary Most Holy. Her fiery character can always be moderated by obedience. She spurns comforts and luxuries and if the voice of obedience had not intervened she would have worn herself out in a short time with mortifications and penances. She is a lily of purity, simple and open. She reproves evil wherever she discerns it. Shunning all human respect, her only aim is to work for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. She is scarcely able to write and reads but a little, yet she speaks on matters of virtue with such refinement, clarity and persuasion that she often seems inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Her decision to join the Institute was immediate. She was always the most dedicated in doing good and the most submissive to superiors.

Together with her quick, open disposition she is very

sensitive. Nevertheless she shows herself willing to receive any advice her superiors may give her and gives proof of her humble submission and respect towards them. During the period when she had to act as superior she conformed her will and judgment to mine completely and was so 'at one' with me and my orders that she said she was willing to give her life and sacrifice everything in order to obey me and promote good. Holding the position of superior she was fervent in suggesting and supporting whatever she thought reasonable. However she always ended by begging her companion to tell her when she did wrong.<sup>12</sup>

Don Bosco must have remembered the praise Saint Francis de Sales had for Saint Jane Frances de Chantal, who was in many ways similar to the humble daughter of Mornese: "She is as simple and sincere as a child, solid and sublime in judgment. In holy undertakings she is a great and courageous soul, to a far greater extent than is usual in her sex.

I found in Dijon what Solomon had great difficulty in finding in Jerusalem. I found the strong woman in the Lady de Chantal."<sup>13</sup>

Don Bosco found the strong woman he needed for his work in Mornese. He found her in Mary Mazzarello. Therefore in greeting his Daughters briefly but affectionately, he assured them that he would soon return or if he could not come himself he would send someone else to represent him. Then he presented her to them as their Superior.

### **Our Lady is the real Superior**

I wish, [said Don Bosco] that for the time being the Superior be the one who was first among you to face the difficulties brought about by the new state of affairs and who has the confidence of your superiors. The little community has been launched in God's name. You have received the blessed habit at the hands of the Bishop and the greater number of you have made your profession. It only

remains for you to persevere in the resolution you have taken.

I cannot add anything more to the common exultation than to admonish you to continue your dependence on her. Recognize in Sister Mary Mazzarello the Superior to whom you must listen and whom you must obey. For the time being she will be called the vicar because *Our Lady is the real Superior*.

He then instructed the others to continue their various offices; Sister Petronilla as First Assistant, Sister Felicina Mazzarello as Second Assistant with responsibility for postulants and novices, and Sister Joan Ferrettino as Bursar. Since there were only four members on this Council and not five as would be required for balloting purposes he told them that if they found a Sister capable of helping them they could freely choose her. He ended by reminding them of the necessity for unity among the superiors themselves and said they should help the vicar, Sister Mary Mazzarello in her efforts to do good . . . Then moving as if to go he repeated his usual, "*Keep cheerful, keep cheerful.*"

Then Sister Mary humbly came forward from her place in the background and asked him to send the promised superior quickly since she was utterly incapable of taking her place. Don Bosco's sunny smile lit up his face as he told her to trust in God completely and he would provide.

### **A touching good-bye at the Founder's departure**

Don Bosco left at 5:00 p.m., his heart rejoicing in the Help of Christians who had directed and sustained the difficult work of bringing a new religious family to birth.

But the ill-humor of the people of Mornese, those good people for whom he had true affection, painfully wounded his tender, sensitive heart. The town that had once given him a princely welcome and which produced strong hearts that braved the hazards of the Appenines in order to visit him when he was ill, had now received him with marked

indifference and coldness and with words which ostensibly held him in the old esteem but which were perhaps but a preparation for throwing in the faces of himself and Father Pestarino the terrible phrase, "You have *deceived* us!"

Don Bosco was under no illusion. Mornese was against what had taken place and did not yet understand the gift of God. The birth of the Salesian Society in a struggle for bread, shelter and studies had not worried him much. Neither had the formation of the nucleus of his Sons there, in his poor little room in the silence of the night under the eyes of the crucifix, bother him. It had been like a ray of sunshine that scattered the storm clouds at dawn and gave hope of a clear, calm day. In fact, people claimed Don Bosco walked on a bed of roses. Then the storm had broken and the hail threatened to destroy all his work.

Instead, this family, which had been initiated with pastoral support, found its dawn tempestuous, and a harvest of thorny brambles prepared for it. He thought of the avenue of roses he had seen in his dream<sup>14</sup> where thorns pierced right from the first steps. But it belonged to *the Help of Christians* and Our Lady would be its comfort.

In his tender affection Don Bosco must have pitied his Son. Poor Father Pestarino! He had always cooperated so helpfully with him. He had a faithful heart always ready for heroic sacrifice. He had been provided by God to help the Founder in his abandonment to Divine Providence regarding his work for the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. Yet now Don Bosco was involuntarily causing him pain. But this was what heaven willed and they would both be content even with this storm as long as the anger of Mornese was turned on them alone.

### **The retreat continues**

As Don Bosco traveled by train to Turin his heart remained in Mornese. The Daughters of Mary Help of Christians continued their retreat grateful for the silence

of the House which assisted their recollection and helped them to reflect on the manifold graces showered upon them by the good God. It also prevented the voices of criticism and ill-humor from reaching them. There were two more days of complete peace during which the first outbreak had time to settle. The Bishop would not be leaving for a while but would remain to enjoy the peace of God and the God of peace a little longer . . . Then . . . whatever happened would be by God's permission and nothing else. Why worry about the morrow when the morrow belonged to God?

### **Poor Father Pestarino**

However Father Pestarino was not making the retreat, and once Don Bosco had left he began to feel the emptiness of solitude, although the house was full of people. Was there any chance that his fellow townsfolk were deceived as to the use of the school,<sup>15</sup> and regarded the stay of the Daughters as only a temporary arrangement? The unusual coldness with which they had received Don Bosco was already a manifestation of the trend their thoughts were taking. What would be their attitude to the Daughters? Although bitter, surely the Sisters' families at least, would defend them from the people!

The presence of the Bishop at their ceremony placed the Sisters under a strong protector against whom even the most hotheaded would not dare to raise a hand, even when he left to return to Acqui. Still there was always the agony of knowing that the people were upset, convinced that they had been deceived, and he was unable to enlighten them cost what it may. Instead of his being a help would he not now become a hindrance to the poor Sisters? In his deep humility he feared himself to be an obstacle and saw with pain the approach of the day on which the Bishop would depart and the house be deprived of his valid protection.

### Louise Arecco

On the morning of August 8 the Bishop celebrated mass for the Daughters as usual. They had been told not to pray fervently in chorus, in order not to disturb the Bishop who was still weak and suffering. However they were certain that the voice of Louise Arecco would speak to his heart without disturbing him and that, therefore, they would not be transgressing the recommendation by letting her sing a hymn at a solemn moment during the mass.

Louise Arecco was a little orphan girl, poor and in danger because of her increasing good looks and her beautiful voice, both of which could be used to exploit her vanity and lead her to sin.

Mary Mazzarello had taken charge of her while still living in *Casa Immacolata*. She kept her in the workroom during the day teaching her needlework, instead of letting her go round on errands. She also provided her meals although there was very little to spare.

The singing during the profession festivities had brought her to the notice of the Bishop. Once he had heard her story he offered to be protector and father to the young girl. The Sisters thought that the renewal of the impression would remind him of the good he proposed doing and would give him satisfaction.

### Closure of the retreat and the Bishop's souvenirs

At about ten o'clock everyone gathered again in the chapel for the souvenir sermon given by Canon Olivieri. He gave them the practice of thanking God every day for calling them to the religious life and to Don Bosco's family.

When this ended the Bishop, who had been listening in the adjacent sacristy, advanced to the altar and while the candles were being lit for Benediction he too said a few words. Don Bosco their Father was absent so he wanted

the Sisters to feel his interest and to tell them as their Bishop how proud he was that an Institute in which "a series of circumstances manifested the special Providence of God," should be born in his diocese, under his eyes and even with his collaboration. He heartily thanked the good Lord for this and left them three thoughts as a souvenir of the event. They were meant as a manifestation of his heart and his affection for Don Bosco's new work.

1. They should strive to keep humble in spirit so that the good God who chose them to form a religious institute just because they were of humble birth and means, could fulfill His adorable designs in them.

2. That they become daily more perfect in obedience in order to render themselves capable of taking on the physiognomy the Founder wished to give them.

3. That each one study how to practice the holy Rule in order to become a model for those who would come after.

The *Te Deum* was then sung and Monsignor imparted the Eucharistic blessing, his face revealing the consolation he felt in his heart. The solemn festive notes of the harmonium could be heard from the choir. It was played by Sister Corinna with exquisite musical taste meriting for her the title of first music teacher of the Institute.

### **Record of Foundation**

On coming out of the chapel the Bishop wanted to perpetuate the memory of what had been carried out in his presence on August 5 and 8. He drew up a record of events which he and all the priests present signed. This document also shows the goodness of the prelate towards the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians for which they will be eternally grateful.

*Document Relative to the Foundation  
of the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians  
Erected in Mornese in the Diocese of Acqui*

The following document was compiled in the year of the Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-two, in the House of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians in Mornese in the presence of the undersigned:

The Very Reverend Father John Bosco, Founder and Director General of many schools for the Christian and social education of boys, had for a long time desired to open a house to begin an institute where the same benefits should accrue to young girls, especially those coming from working-class families. Finally his wishes were fulfilled.

On the fifth day of the current month, in the chapel of this House the following were clothed with the habit of the new congregation. Mary Mazzarello, daughter of Joseph, Petronilla Mazzarello of Joseph, Felicina Mazzarello of Joseph, Joan Ferretino of Joseph, Teresa Pampuro of Lorenzo, Felicina Arecco of John Anthony, Rose Mazzarello of Stephen, Catherine Mazzarello of Joseph, all from Mornese; Angela Jandet of Louis from Turin; Maria Poggio of Gaspari from Acqui; Assunta Gaino of Anthony, from Cartosio; Rose Mazzarello of Joseph from Mornese; Maria Grosso of Francis from St. Stefano Parodi; Corinna Arrigotti of Peter from Tonco; Clara Spagliardi of Lawrence from Mirabello. The first eleven mentioned made their profession, taking vows for three years in the hands of His Excellency the Very Reverend Monsignor Joseph Mary Sciandra, Bishop of the diocese. A short time before he had blessed the religious habits they were then wearing and invested the novices with the medal of Our Lady Help of Christians and the professed with the crucifix.

The ceremony was very touching and through a special grace from God the above-mentioned Don Bosco was present. It was feared that ill health would prevent this. The new religious had the consolation of receiving from him advice on how they should correspond to the grace of vocation in the religious institute they had embraced. A series of circumstances manifested the special Providence of God for this new institute.



The greater number of these young women from Mornese had already received the medal of Mary Immaculate from the hands of Monsignor Modesto Contratto of venerated memory. Monsignor Sciandra, his immediate successor, unaware of this, accepted hospitality in this House for the only reason that the healthy air would help him recover from a serious illness, and completed the good work by presiding himself at the celebration.

This should have taken place at the end of the retreat given by Raymond Olivieri, Canon and Archpriest of the Diocese of Acqui and the Very Reverend Prior, Father Mark Mallinari, Rural Vicar of Canelli. This retreat began on the evening of July 31 but, given the longed-for presence of Don Bosco who had to leave the following day for Turin, the ceremony was brought forward to the fifth, a day sacred to *Our Lady of the Snow*.

The retreat finished today. The Bishop, who celebrated the community mass and distributed Holy Communion, assisted with all solemnity at the closure. He addressed a few words of encouragement and gave some helpful thoughts as souvenirs to his new Daughters in Jesus Christ and with all his heart he imparted to them his pastoral blessing.

The present document was compiled for the verification of what is stated above. A copy is to be placed in the parish archives in Mornese by order of His Excellency the Bishop and another copy in the Bishop's Curia of Acqui.

† Joseph Mary, Bishop  
Dominic Pestarino, Priest. Director  
of the Institute  
Raymond Olivieri, C. Archpriest  
of the Cathedral of Acqui  
Mark Mallarini, Prior. Rural Vicar  
for Canelli  
Charles Valle, Parish Pastor  
of Mornese  
Joseph Pestarino, Priest. witness  
Thomas Ferraris, Priest. witness  
Francis Berta, Priest.  
Bishop's Secretary

### **The Bishop's benevolence towards the new religious**

Before Monsignor Sciandra left it seemed as if he wanted to give tangible proof of the good he expected from the Institute. So he handed over the complete care of the young Louise Arecco to the Sisters in order that she should be educated according to the system of the Founder, become a serious young woman and be useful to herself and others in the field of labor destined for her by God. He paid Father Pestarino the sum of money needed to cover her expenses.

But he gave a still greater gift to the Sisters which they appreciated at its true value. During his stay the Blessed Sacrament had been constantly reserved in the chapel and both Sisters and girls had shown their reverent piety in keeping company with the divine Guest at every possible moment. Now the Bishop gave them the right to have the Blessed Sacrament permanently reserved in their chapel.

The Bishop took his departure on September 10 after the feast of Saint Nicholas of Tolentino who was the special patron of the town. The Sisters and girls were much moved and blessed his presence among them. He too was moved and promised to return the following summer to enjoy the benefits of the Mornesian air and Salesian hospitality.

### **We shall not belong less to Our Lady Immaculate because we belong entirely to the Help of Christians**

The school started once more on its regular routine of daily life and the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians continued in their active, serene piety which they could now call Salesian. They dedicated themselves to the most faithful observance of the Constitutions because they had to give to the tiny seed of the Institute the robust growth of the mustard seed.

As if to counteract the accusation of being publicly unfaithful to their first undertaking as Daughters of Mary

Immaculate or New Ursulines the Sisters commented joyfully, during community recreations, "By becoming Daughters of Mary Help of Christians we are not less Daughters of Mary Immaculate. The formula of our vows ends with the beautiful invocation, *O Mary Immaculate Virgin, powerful Help of Christians . . .* and we do not end a single one of our practices of piety without the ejaculations, *Blessed be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God*, followed by the no less loved, *Maria Auxilium Christianorum, ora pro nobis!* Father Pestarino tells us that in all Salesian Houses the feast of the Immaculate Conception is celebrated with the same solemnity as that of Mary Help of Christians and, in the Constitutions Don Bosco recommends, regarding the vow of chastity, a tender devotion to Mary Immaculate.

It is a fact that Don Bosco did not detach us from our primitive devotion but rather perfected it. We are now Daughters of Mary Help of Christians precisely because we had great love for Mary Immaculate.

Who knows—perhaps all the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians who come after us will have equal love for Mary Immaculate, having been her Daughters right from their youth?"

They were right in uniting inseparably the two aspects of Marian devotion.

Don Bosco had also belonged completely to Mary Immaculate right from his youth and this dedication did not cease when he gave himself completely to the Help of Christians. He fused the two devotions into one, calling his Lady the *Immaculate Help of Christians*, or sometimes the *Immaculate Virgin Help of Christians* and at other times, *Our Immaculate Mother, Help of Christians*.

He wanted a golden image of Our Lady Immaculate in the attitude of blessing Turin to shine in the sun, on the exterior of the cupola of her sanctuary, while over the high altar there was to be the most beautiful painting of the Help of Christians, Mother and Queen of his works.

Sister Mary Mazzarello sensed this with wonderful

clarity and made of it an inexhaustible fountain of joy that rendered the observance of the Constitutions a pleasure. She easily drew after her the Sisters Divine Providence had placed on her path and irresistibly attracted the pupils to follow her teaching and virtuous example.

## NOTES

### 1872

1. Francesca, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, p. 100.
2. Cf. Manuscript A of Father Dominic Pestarino (Gen. Arch. FMA).
3. Francesca, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, pp. 100-01.
4. Cf. Letter of Father Joseph Pestarino, March 10, 1922 (Gen. Arch. FMA).
5. Appendix No. 12.
6. Francesca, *Suor Maria Mazzarello*, p. 101.
7. Copy of the minutes of the Town Council's meeting of May 8, 1872. (Gen. Arch. FMA).
8. Letter C of Father Joseph Pestarino to Father Lemoyne, August 30, 1915: to his sister, Sister Rosalia, April 19, 1921. (Gen. Arch. Arch. FMA).
9. Appendix No. 13.
10. Appendix No. 14.
11. Appendix No. 15.
12. Father Pestarino's manuscript is no longer to be found but its contents were related by Father Lemoyne in the first short biography of Mary Mazzarello written for the *Salesian Bulletin*, December, 1881, p. 16.
13. Bougaud, *Storia*, I, 175.
14. *M.B.*, III, 32.
15. Divine Providence disposed that after a hundred years the aspirations of the good people of Mornese should be fulfilled. The college is now (1974) opened also to the boys of Mornese and the district, who are attending a detached section of the Middle School.

## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX No. 1

### *The first Rule of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate (draft of Angela Maccagno) – 1853*

We wish that the following be the *special aim* of the anticipated Union:

1. To be united in Jesus Christ heart, spirit and will under obedience in everything and for everything to the spiritual director and Father confessor, who shall be the same for all, and not be changed at will except once or twice a year on the advice of the same. Thus we shall all be ruled by the same spirit for the same end. Those who live outside the area and cannot always come, may have another as advised by the director upon whom they must depend by letter and be regulated by the spirit and aims of the work.

2. We confirm that we wish to maintain this will and Pious Union by the temporary vow of chastity according to the advice of the director and for a period not longer than one year at a time. So too with the vow of obedience to the director or one of the companion spiritual Sisters, if this is so wished and there is enough esteem.

3. It will be the special aim and spirit of the Union to leave relatives, the world and property rather than their sister companions in J.C.; to do good for the glory of God and the good and advantage of one's neighbor and to have everything in common with the Sisters, goods, clothing, equipment and everything else.

4. When a Sister comes to die she should be ready to leave everything to the other Sisters of the Pious Union, to be used for them, for the Pious Union and for its increase. Should the Union be dissolved, then everything belonging to the dead Sister shall be used for charitable works for the Church and the poor. If relatives are in extreme need the Sister can in death on the advice of the director leave half her property to them. If anyone wishes to leave or detach herself from the Pious Union a third of her property should be left to the work and the Pious Union.

5. If any Sister should be abandoned by her relatives or without any help from them she should not live alone without the advice of the director but should combine with some one of the Sisters nominated by the director and if she cannot do this the director will state with whom she should stay, whether they be relatives or other persons, and all will help her and be obliged to assist her in every way possible as becomes good Sisters.

#### *General aims*

1. To cooperate for the glory of God and religion in these times and always, by good example, frequenting the sacraments, devotion to the passion of O.L.J.C.; a special tender devotion to our Most Holy Virgin Mother and this shall be the special mark and aim of the Pious Union; to promote it to the best of our ability having no other aim in view in our dealings with young girls, married women, and also boys and men when the occasion presents itself. For example, a word of advice may be given to those who speak evil or blaspheme against God, His Church or his ministers, when the occasion arises or advice is asked. Otherwise there is to be no contact with evil men in order to convert them nor with the good to help them do good. Even seeing them must be avoided, and still more speaking to them and making an appearance in the world, but to be in fact, even more detached and away from the world than those who live a retired life. To be ready to give one's life rather than withdraw from these aims and although piety and all religion should become cold we shall keep it alive in our Sisters at the cost of persecution from our relatives, friends and the people, and even from religious who preach the opposite, recognizing and knowing from experience that the increase of good in us, in souls and in religion depends chiefly on the means set out above.

2. To seek other Sister companions for the Pious Union even if possible from other villages whether they be rich or poor matters not, provided they have the same spirit. But they must be tried and nothing must be done without the definite advice of the director. They must be totally detached from the world and their own wills, from their relations and from all worldly tastes and ideas in order that the spirit of Jesus Christ may reign (the spirit of the Pious Union) who is the salvation of souls.

3. To win over and cement a union with pious persons, married women also and through these, with men if possible and others in order to maintain and defend goodness and religion, through frequenting the sacraments, devotion to Mary Most Holy etc. These persons should help by good example to promote and sustain goodness and religion everywhere and obtain from God other helpers. Although united in spirit with these people, nothing connected with the Union must be made known to them in order to obviate diffidence, jealousy or envy. However spiritual relations should be kept with girls and women who demonstrate its spirit by the frequent use of the sacraments, in particular devotion to Mary, to God, to goodness. To serve God faithfully is the aim of our Pious Union, to be united as Sisters in spirit, heart and will but in our own homes, except in cases indicated in 5 above, and to embrace if possible, all the countries of the world obtaining for them that little by little they become Sisters of the Union, or persons who promote good. Learning from evildoers in the world who propagate evil through secret societies, destroy religion and are united in every country and city, we too secretly, with no other insignia than union of heart, will and spirit, the spirit of J.C. and, better than if we lived together in one house, will seek to procure the sanctification of our own souls and the good of the souls of the people, our brothers and sisters, the growth of the true religion and, consecrated in soul, heart, will, belongings and body in a true spirit of renunciation and abandonment for his love alone.

One of the principal admonitions to be observed scrupulously is that of avoiding all confidentiality and special friendship within the union of Sisters so that if it should be noticed that one acts in a confidential manner with another she should be admonished immediately and, if after the third time she still does not understand she should be warned that unless she amends the director will be informed. Should she still not want to understand, she should be notified that she has not the spirit of the Union.

Likewise there should not be such friendship with the other girls and women, as to exclude all others except one or two, even with the excuse of doing good, in the sense of creating a following. This should not be done. It is obligatory to make reports to the Sisters on matters dealt with and results obtained. All must seek together the good of all.

Before J.C. all souls are equally precious. Therefore, there must not be selection, an immediate setting apart, but other Sisters must be allowed to speak if they wish to the one in question.

## APPENDIX No. 2

### *Memoria of Cardinal Cagliero*

I remember Father Pestarino telling me that he first met Don Bosco in the house of the parish priest, Father Frassinetti of St. Sabina. Hearing him speak of his Oratory, about his youngsters and the Society of Saint Francis de Sales, he was seized with veneration for his virtues, and evinced a strong desire to go to Turin. I remember him coming and spending a few days at the Oratory and asking to become a Salesian. It appears he already made up his mind on this count when discussing the boys' college at Mornese. Other meetings followed in 1860, '61, '62 and '64 when there was a trip to Mornese in which I took part.

It was on that occasion that in the company of Don Bosco and Father Pestarino I first became acquainted with the Daughters of Mary Immaculate who eight years after were to become the foundation stones of your Institute and ours.

*Rome, February 15, 1922*

† JOHN, Cardinal

Original in the Gen. Arch. FMA — Rome

## APPENDIX No. 3

### *Father Cafasso's Letter to Father Pestarino*

Very Reverend Father,

It is my pleasure to inform you that your wishes can be satisfied. You are accepted for the approaching spiritual retreat to be preached

in the sanctuary of St. Ignazio.

The retreat begins on July 8, and it will be necessary for your Reverence to arrive in Turin the evening before, that is, the 7th of the same month.

In humble esteem I am,

*Turin, June 23, 1857*

Your devoted servant,

JOSEPH CAFASSO, Priest

Original in Gen. Arch. FMA — Rome

## APPENDIX No. 4

### *Declaration of Sister Carolina Provera of the F.C. of Jesus*

For the greater glory of God and of the Venerable Father John Bosco I declare that before I entered religion, in November, 1870, I had heard my family speak many times of the Pious Union of the Daughters of Mary in Mornese hoping that it might develop. I do know that the Venerable Don Bosco took a special interest in the Mazzarello sisters. I remember my brother Francis telling me that Don Bosco might be able to place me temporally in a religious institute in Turin such as that of Saint Anne in order that I also might be able to help later to cooperate better in the development of that institution.

*Turin, March 30, 1910*

Sister CAROLINA PROVERA

of the Faithful Companions of Jesus

Seal of the Institute.

Original in the Gen. Arch. FMA — Rome

## APPENDIX No. 5

*Don Bosco's Letter to Father Pestarino concerning the blessing of the college chapel.*

Dear Father Pestarino,

So the chapel is finished. Excellent! If the Bishop is willing to bless it fix the date before the good weather leaves us. On that day I will be united with you and all the good people of Mornese in praying for Mary's protection on the town.

I am pleased to hear that while all around there is a great scarcity, Mornese has had a good harvest. I have great confidence that Mary Help of Christians and Saint Joseph will obtain still greater graces next year not only by keeping away the scourge of cholera that is infecting so many places but by bestowing on all the blessings of health, religion and fruitful fields.

Regarding the collection of wine proposed from among the people of Mornese I leave it to your discretion and that of the reverend parish priest. But whatever you do insist that nothing be done for the love of Don Bosco but only for the love of Mary Help of Christians in order that she may bless and protect the fruit of the land and in honor of Saint Joseph that he may obtain from God the gift of health during life and assistance at the hour of death. But whatever you collect will be used for the work of the new church.

God bless you, dear Father Pestarino and with you may he bless all our brothers in J.C. who live there. Pray for me and for these boys of ours, and believe me to be in brotherly affection.

*Turin, Oct. 4, '67*

Your affectionate friend in J.C.

JN. BOSCO, Priest

Original in Salesian Arch. — Rome

## APPENDIX No. 6

*Don Bosco's Letter to Father Pestarino announcing his arrival for the blessing of the college chapel.*

Dear Father Pestarino,

Following your kind invitation I have arranged to go to Mornese on Monday, the 9th of the current month. I shall be leaving Turin at 7:45 a.m. and if I can meet the Archpriest Olivieri at Alessandria I will go wherever he takes me. Otherwise I shall take the bus to Novi and go as far as it takes me on the road to Mornese, where my orders will come from your dear self.

My plan would be to spend the whole of Tuesday and half of Wednesday with you. If the parish priest agrees I could give a short sermon in thanksgiving and to encourage devotion to Our Lady.

Afterwards in your house I would accept offerings or tithes for the Church of Mary Help of Christians, and I would like to give a medal to every individual person in the families who make an offering and also to the others if they so wish. This is only an idea. Speak to the reverend parish priest about it and we shall do as he wishes.

Regarding the other matters we shall discuss them quietly face to face by your fireside in your house.

God bless you, your labors and all those of Mornese, especially the dear parish priest and the good mayor of the town. May the grace of O.L.J.C. follow you in all the necessities of life. Amen.

Pray for me who am with all my heart,

*Turin, Dec. 3, '67*

Your affectionate friend,

JN. BOSCO, Priest

Original in Salesian Arch. — Rome

**APPENDIX No. 7**

*A Greeting for Don Bosco from the schoolmaster Ettore Ponassi  
on the occasion of his visit to Mornese – December 9, 1867.*

**I**

All hail to Xavier's follower!  
Who wished to honor this town  
with your presence; and oh, how my heart rejoices  
who offer with this rhyme, my heart!

You must sense true love in our hearts  
feel charity sublime and alive,  
and much glory will rest in this place  
who follows his Maker with you.

Hail O Paster, father of the poor;  
I too admire you working for all,  
and hope one day to join with you the ranks of the elect

Oh turn to the eternal God  
in your prayer, and breathe  
for me one of your holy sighs!

**II**

*Another: to Father John Bosco, the Father of Poor Boys*

O Shepherd who from pole to pole  
gather the little lost sheep,  
and group them elect and lovable  
to dwell one day above the stars.

Though I cannot fly upon wings  
or sing to you beautiful strains,  
still I love to speak to and of you  
that the world may resound with your name.

Known is your virtue, piety renowned  
obvious the charity burning in your breast  
and people in reverent devotion bow.

O keep me, John, as beloved  
my soul is void of piety  
O hold me still in your precious affection.

## APPENDIX No. 8

*Verses by the Lawyer, Antonio Traverso, Town Secretary on the  
occasion of the visit of Don Bosco to Mornese – December 9, 1867*

### SONNET

This towering edifice you see before you  
became in a few moons this marvellous work;  
and you, Father of children, will use it  
quickly to harbor young boys.

From the quagmire of lay schools withdrawn  
young minds will unfold and discover  
the spirit that moves you and all that you do  
all that you think and all that you will!

With hands raised to heaven tender and pure,  
scores of young boys will say: Blest be the name  
of him who surrounds us with such gentle care.

And all of these valleys and all of these hills  
will ring with your venerable name  
And exult in a harvest so glad.

## POLYMETRE

## I

A few moons ago there was nothing  
naked earth and silence all round  
where we are now seated there was once  
a covering of ivy  
and a daytime residence for the night hooting owl  
a rough and empty dwelling.  
O wonder! What now do I see?  
No longer waste ground all abandoned,  
not the horror that weighed on my heart,  
in the front, at the near and the rear sides  
life is alert everywhere,  
and there towers a magnificent hostel  
and a church that invites all to love  
while children soon praying in chorus  
will turn in their hundreds to God.

## II

Not only do they pray, for on the path  
along which they are led they will learn that vain  
is love for this valley  
in which man is a pilgrim to a better goal.  
They will learn that forbidden and uncertain things  
are not virtues and that the human spirit,  
is made for higher things  
is wrong and lost if he nor loves nor yet believes;  
they will learn how in vain the sad and the evil  
try to make havoc of eternal truths.

## III

In an age that is still called barbarous,  
when Italy was overrun and dominated  
by foreign peoples,  
only within the poor convents  
did wisdom find a sure home:  
gone with the hope of revival  
reappearance or coming to life  
with the dustclouds of armed invaders  
coming over the mountains and down  
to rob; yet never was seen there  
through the darkness the stress of those times  
those who assaulted God's Christ:  
but profaned now is everything holy  
by reason insane,  
faith, knowledge and virtue, and war is waged  
dare I say it? on that God who gives life and destroys.

## IV

O Italy, Italy how changed you are  
from the day when virtue made you great  
my soul comforts itself alone and blesses  
the ancient memory and the past  
remembering your greatness  
when thrusting forwards with courageous hands  
the ancient ships towards remotest shores  
you gave new peoples to the world and faith.  
But then you were not heavy  
with wickedness and vileness, not the mother  
of shameless children, at your feet trailing  
chains disgraceful, and the already  
second mind lives no more, now robber bands  
defame your treasure and you now appear  
no longer lady, woman, but less than abject servant;  
O Italy, my Italy you are no longer what you were!

## V

Praise to the Generous One, you who intent  
on repairing your country's ills  
saw and inspired the strong building  
in which I sing while I on wandering wings of thought  
see here another child  
unfettered. Oh that fire  
is not yet spent.  
Our many *Aves* for its kindling saved it.  
You show it minister of God  
to the century that reaps and derides  
God's Holy Anointed: but the Anointed of God  
now pours scorn on impure lips  
may he be blest through maturing ages.

## VI

The hour is here; a mysterious movement  
like a whirlwind sweeping  
the Italian countryside; a wish for everyone,  
ample measure for the present age  
then sighing and despairing it falls silent;  
peace demands peace  
my country, but who is there to listen to your wish?  
Rouse yourself, Italy and listen to me:  
to Rome, to Rome  
fly to *Peter* (and if there you land)  
discard your heavy burden  
then your mind will be adorned with new light  
and your ancient splendor will return.

VII

I see well, O song of mine  
 That you are an impoverished channel  
 and that you dare not do what you would before him;  
 other ways and other adornments are needed today  
 for the Man we honor, yet I have no secret  
 to make it less malformed; but  
 what could I do if my intelligence does not help me?  
 But let it say that under the uncultured spoils  
 a homage open and sincere may be gleaned.

SONNET

This mad, audacious and this wicked age  
 tears away from Christ His beloved Spouse  
 and as if equal to a human being  
 a tomb already has prepared for her.

But when the scouraging whips redouble  
 she becomes more strong, more vigorous  
 and when she seems slower and indifferent  
 more honorable her triumph and her beauty.

Look at him, foolish era, look at this Man  
 In Him is gathered all that mystic power  
 that routs the kingdom of darkness.

Celestial Power is this and supernatural,  
 'tis Christ who tells it to his messengers;  
 cease, O foolish era, all your work is vain!

ANTONIO TRAVERSO, Secretary

## APPENDIX No. 9

*Don Bosco's Letter to Father Pestarino after the blessing of the school chapel.*

In due course I received the box containing part of the offerings of the charitable people of Mornese and now I have received 56 Fr. which is the amount obtained from the famous auction after expenses had been deducted.

There is still something to settle with good, courteous Campi. Among other things the expenses of the train ticket at Novi station.

You will also receive in the same way, that is, by rail, a parcel containing medals to be distributed to all those who did not get them and also for all those who would like one. There are also twelve copies of the *Companion of Youth*, seven for those who accompanied me beyond Montaldeo, and the others can be given to those whose domestic arrangements were most upset because of me. There are also three copies of *The History of Italy*: one for the Mayor, one for Mr. Traverso and the third for Dr. Pestarino. Ask them to accept them as a little token of my great gratitude.

Now, what shall I say to you, dear Father Pestarino! What gift can I give you? I can only say that I thank you with all my heart and am always at your service with everything in our Houses. I pray for you everyday during holy mass.

I do not know what I can say to the town. They have my heartfelt gratitude and I shall pray that God in His goodness may repay their charity to me a hundredfold; may He grant grace to all and concord in their families together with abundance in the market and in the fields.

Let that person from Parodi know that I am praying to Mary Help of Christians for her and I shall get the boys here to pray also. I advise her to say every day for a month three *Our Fathers*, *Hail Marys* and *Glory Bes* with three *Hail Holy Queens* in honor of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and Mary Help of Christians.

I have just received the news that Countess Buffa who just the other day was dying, began the same prayers and received a blessing. After a few hours she was perfectly well. Today she went to hear the three masses and receive Holy Communion. Many relate stories of

the same type. May God be praised.

Dominic Pestarino is on trial; we shall see. His uncle, Mr. Campi, tells me he will pay his fees. Arrange it with him if you please. Regarding the young singer, I shall have no difficulty in placing him at the second table. This means 35 Fr. per month. Little by little as he begins to earn the fee will go down. Regarding the French classes he needs there will be no charge.

I am suffering a little in health from the effects of the upset I had in Mornese with prolonged vomiting.<sup>1</sup> Now I am beginning to feel much better except that I am very hoarse. However this will I hope soon disappear as I begin to get a little better.

My greetings and thanks to all those you meet who were kind to me. May God reward them in this life and give them a real reward one day in eternity. Amen.

I recommend myself to the prayers of everyone and I profess myself to be in the Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary,

*Turin, Dec. 25, '67*

Your affectionate friend,

JN. BOSCO, Priest

P.S. *The History of Italy* (5): three as above, one for the judge and the other for you or for whomsoever you wish.

Original in the Salesian Arch. — Rome

## APPENDIX No. 10

*Don Bosco's Letter to Father Pestarino announcing his arrival in Mornese.*

In order to give a sign of benevolence to you and all the good Mornesian people I have managed to accept your kind invitation. But I cannot go on Sunday. I shall leave by the 7:40 train and shall be at Serravalle a few minutes after ten. After reaching Gavi I shall take the same route as I did last year. Do not worry about me. I will look after myself, *pedibus meis vel aliensis*.

If, however, Father Olivieri wishes to come on that day also and

wishes me to stop at any other station I shall do as he wishes. Father Bodrato may go whenever he wishes. Only he must make some arrangement with you.

I will bring leaflets of the indulgences with me so that everyone from Mornese may have a souvenir of the Pontifical blessing and of that epoch.

I should also like to speak to the Director of Casaleggio who wrote to me on confidential matters and also the parish priest of Fogliolo, if he can come to see us. We shall also see what has to be done regarding the house and school at Mornese.

God bless you, my dear Father Pestarino, pray for me and greet all my friends especially the teacher, the parish priest and the Mayor, and believe me in the Lord.

*Turin, May 2, '70*

Your affectionate friend,

JN. BOSCO, Priest

Original in the Salesian Arch. — Rome.

## APPENDIX No. 11

*First Draft of the Rule proposed by Don Bosco  
to the First Daughters of Mary Help of Christians*

[1871 — May 24] \*

Constitutions — Rules  
of the Institute

of the Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and]  
of Mary Help of Christians

under the protection of Saint Joseph

Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Teresa

[1872 — January 29 — First Chapter is formed]

### PART ONE

#### Chapter 1

##### *Object of the Institute*

1 — The object of the Institute of the Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians is to seek not only their personal perfection, but to cooperate in the salvation of their neighbor by giving a moral and Christian education to the children of working class families.

2 — They will take special care to instruct the young girls of the villages and poorer districts and cultivate the spirit of those unmarried women desiring to lead a spiritual life and strive for Christian perfection.

For this end they will form a congregation of young unmarried women who after having proved themselves constant in good conduct and solid piety, may be admitted to the Pious Union of the Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians.

\* The words added by Father Pestarino are set in brackets.

The Sisters will likewise be ready to assist poor people who are ill and be prepared for other types of service to their neighbor in charity, when this is conformable to their state and commanded by their lawful Superior.

3 — Likewise they may receive girls of the middle classes into their Houses. However these should never be taught those sciences and arts proper to the higher social classes and the nobility. It shall be an obligation for the Sisters to train them in piety and all that will help them to become good Christians and good mothers of families.

4 — The Institute will be composed of maidens who profess to live the common life in everything. They will make temporary vows every three years. There will be no strict enclosure.

5 — All the Houses and establishments of the Institute will depend on the Central House and immediate obedience will be given to the Superior of that House who may appoint Sisters to offices, move them and employ them as she judges fit before God and no one may refuse obedience. Neither is it lawful under any pretext to refuse any office or task for which she is elected.

## Chapter 2

### *General Organization of the Institute*

1 — The Institute of the Sisters or Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians is under the immediate dependence of the Superior General of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales whom they will call their Major Superior. Should he so wish he may delegate another priest to represent him bearing the title of Director of the Sisters.

The Superior of the House will turn to this director in all her needs and will undertake nothing of importance without consulting him, especially in matters concerning religion and morality.

2 — In matters of religion and morality all the Houses of the Institute shall be totally subject to the jurisdiction of the Ordinary. The Sisters' confessor shall be the parish priest suggested to the

Bishop of the diocese by the Major Superior and subsequently approved.

3 — The Sisters who live in the institutions will be subject to the supervision of the parish priest.

4 — The Sisters' confessors whether of the House or the institution have no right or authority over the government or discipline of the House or the establishment.

5 — When they enter the Institute the Sisters do not surrender their civil rights even after they have taken vows. Therefore they reserve the ownership of their goods, their right of succession, and their right to receive an inheritance, legacy or gift. But they may not administer these goods except within the limits and in the manner willed by the Major Superior.

6 — The interest on immovable and movable goods brought into the Congregation must be ceded to the same, that is temporally, since if the Sister leaves, the obligation naturally ceases.

7 — The Institute will provide for each one all she needs in food, clothing and everything else that may be required for the various needs of life whether in health or sickness.

8 — Should anyone die without making a will succession will be ceded to whomsoever has the right.

9 — The vows bind the individual as long as she is a member of the Congregation. If anyone for a reasonable motive and on the advice of the Superiors should leave the Institute she may be dispensed from her vows by the Major Superior. Otherwise let everyone persevere in her vocation until death, always remembering the words of Our Divine Savior, "Whoever puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not ready for the kingdom of heaven."

10 — If a Sister leaves religion she cannot expect remuneration of any sort for the time she spent in the Institute no matter what office she might have held. However she may take with her the immovable and also the movable objects of which she retained owner-

ship when she entered the Congregation, in their present state. But she has no right to require an account from the Superiors of the interest and administration of the same, for the time she lived in the Institute.

### Chapter 3

#### *Superiors and Assistants*

1 — Every House of the Institute shall be governed by a Superior to whom the Sisters shall give their simple obedience. The Superior herself will depend on the Superior of the Central House.

2 — In the Central House the Superior will be aided in her task by two Assistants. The first of these who will be called the Vicar will take the place of the Superior when she is absent or ill. Should the Vicar be absent the Second Assistant shall act for the Vicar.

3 — The election of the Superior shall be made by the professed Sisters on sealed ballot papers which will be placed in a small urn provided for the purpose and resting on the table where there is also a crucifix. The election will be presided over by the Major Superior or his delegate. He will gather the Sisters together and intone the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. He will then give a short but appropriate allocution and then the Sisters will go in order to place their ballot papers in the urn. The Sister who receives more than half the votes will be elected Superior. The President of the Chapter will then officially confirm the election. Should it happen that two Sisters receive an equal number of votes the President may cast his vote for the one he considers before God to be more suited for this office. Apart from this he will never vote.

The same method will be used in electing the two Assistants. The Chapter will end with the singing of the *Te Deum Laudamus*.

4 — For a Sister to be elected Superior or Assistant she must 1st, — be forty years of age and have completed ten years of profession. But in case of necessity the Major Superior may, by a dispensation, permit the election of one who is over thirty years of age and has

been professed for at least five years; 2nd, — she should have sufficient health; 3rd, — she should also have been exemplary in the observance of the Rules; 4th, — she must be endowed with great prudence, charity and zeal for regular observance.

#### Chapter 4

##### *The Bursar and the Novice Mistress*

1 — Once the election of the Superior has been approved, she shall proceed with her Assistants, to the election of the Bursar and the Novice Mistress.

2 — Since the office of Bursar is one of the most important in the Community she should be at least thirty years of age and have been professed for six years. Her health should be robust and she should be full of charity towards the Sisters and have given unmistakable proof in the previous tasks allotted to her of prudence, discretion and zeal for the good of the Institute.

3 — The Novice Mistress should be a Sister who has more than ordinary prudence and virtue.

She should not only have a deep, clear knowledge of all the Rules but something more than this, namely, a really sound spirit which pays great attention to piety. She must have already given proof of humility and patience and finally, she should possess a good deal of discretion.

4 — When all the elections have been completed the community will be gathered by the President and informed. Then each will immediately set to work on the task for which she has been elected for the period of three years.

## Chapter 5

*The Chapter of the Central House and the Council*

1 — With the consent of the Major Superior the Chapter will meet every three years in the Central House. It will be presided over either by the Major Superior himself or by his delegate.

2 — The Chapter will elect the two Assistants in the manner stated above. Then the House Council consisting of the Superior, the Assistants, the Bursar and the Novice Mistress will elect the Superiors of the establishments, the principals and teachers for the schools and for all the other offices.

3 — The same Council will be called for the opening of new Houses or establishments, or for any other important business. But no House can be opened or the administration of any institute, nursery school, or other schools be assumed before the Major Superior has made arrangements with the bishop and is in full agreement with him regarding the ecclesiastical authority.

## Chapter 6

*Conditions for Acceptance into the Institute*

1 — Young girls wishing to be admitted to the Institute of the Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians will present themselves to the Mother General who will examine them and collect the necessary information regarding conditions, conduct etc. If they have the necessary qualities she will admit them to the Novitiate.

2 — Personal conditions: Legitimate birth. Excellent morals, good character. Sincere inclination to the virtues proper to the Institute. Testimonial of good conduct from the parish priest. Testimonial of the good repute of the postulant's family from the Mayor; a certificate of vaccination and good physical health, whether she has suffered

from smallpox. Aged between fifteen and twenty-five years approximately. Parental consent.

3 — The postulants will pay a fee for a year and a half of Novitiate at the rate of 30 lire per month. They will bring with them a sufficient outfit which will be supplemented at the time of profession.

The dowry shall not be less than 1000 lire. The Superior General may modify this article when she judges it to be for the greater glory of God.

## Chapter 7

### *Steps towards Profession*

1 — The young girl who has been accepted into the Novitiate will remain there for more or less a year according to the judgment of the Superior General. She will practice the virtues characteristic of the Institute and acquire its spirit. She will train in all that may prove useful in the various offices, but most of all in teaching and in catechism.

2 — If the postulant shows signs of success the Superior will apply to the Major Superior for the faculty of examining her in her vocation and of holding a Chapter where the professed Sisters may also examine the conduct of the young girl.

Voting will take place and if the candidate obtains more than half the votes she will receive the religious habit with the prescribed ceremonial. If the outcome is negative she will return to her family unless it has been decided to prolong her period of trial.

3 — After the clothing there will be two more years trial. Therefore a month before this ends the Superior will ask for the same faculty mentioned above. The conduct of the novice will be examined anew. If she receives a two-thirds majority vote in favor she will be admitted to profession, but if not she will return to her family unless the Chapter assembled judges that the Novitiate should be prolonged for six months. After this a definitive vote will be taken.

## Chapter 8

### *Principal Virtues for the Novices to Study and the Professed to Practice*

1 — Simplicity and virginal modesty, the spirit and the observance of poverty.

Patient and zealous charity not only for the salvation of young children but also for young maidens.

A spirit of prayer by which the Sisters keep themselves in the presence of God and abandoned to His Providence.

Obedience of will and judgment.

These virtues must be all the more deeply rooted and practiced by the Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians inasmuch as dispensed from strict enclosure they are more exposed to dissipation.

## Chapter 9

### *Arrangement of the Various Hours of the Day*

1 — Since we are only pilgrims here below on the way to eternity, it is necessary not to stop on the road but to hasten on our way to our last goal. Therefore it will be very helpful to arrange an accurate distribution of the hours of the day for the various occupations so that time may not be wasted.

2 — From the first of April until the end of September the rising bell will ring at 4:30 except for the two months of June and July when, because of the long daylight hours it will ring at 4:00. From the first of October until the end of March it will ring at 5:30. A quarter of an hour will be allowed for dressing. At the sound of the bell the Sisters will meet in their chapel for community prayer according to the set formula.

This will be followed by half an hour's meditation for which the subject will be read aloud.

They will then assist at holy mass. However the Superior may arrange for mass to precede meditation. Then, until dinner they will

engage in their occupations or in the manual work assigned by obedience.

3 — A quarter of an hour before dinner they will go to the chapel for the particular exam of conscience which will last ten minutes. In strict silence they will then proceed to the refectory. There will be reading throughout the meal from some spiritual book which is instructive and also raises the spirit.

4 — After dinner there will be about half an hour's recreation. During this the Sisters will relate to one another with sisterly affection, animating one another in the divine service and rejoicing to see themselves in God's house away from the danger of offending Him.

5 — The bell will then ring for silence which will last throughout the hours of work. However it is allowed to speak quietly when a duty requires it as, for example, to give some advice about the work in hand, following up an order or, to give directions regarding things and work suggested by strangers to the House.

In this manner useless conversations will be averted and the thought of the presence of God will be better preserved.

After dinner the timetable at the end of these Rules will be followed.

6 — On Sundays and all holy days of obligation the Sisters will recite the Office of the Blessed Virgin unless they take part in parish celebrations or assist in some sodality having a similar office. The Sisters will endeavor to learn the catechism and teach it to others as suggested by the Superior [and in other practices of piety and charity].

7 — The Sisters will approach the tribunal of Penance regularly every eight days. In confessing their sins let them be careful to omit all useless circumstances; let them be brief and mention their faults with simplicity and humility as to Jesus Christ himself. They should have for their confessor such respect and reverence as is due to the one appointed by God to be the father, master and guide of their souls.

8 — Every six months or so they will have an extraordinary confessor approved by the bishop of the diocese. If anyone has a need outside these times she will ask the Superior.

9 — Ordinarily the Sisters will receive Holy Communion every Sunday and holy day of obligation, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays of every week; on each Sister's anniversaries of birth, clothing and profession.

The Sisters may receive Holy Communion everyday if they have received the express permission of their confessor.

They are encouraged to celebrate with special devotion and solemnity the feasts of the Immaculate Conception, Mary Help of Christians, Saint Francis de Sales and Saint Teresa, who are the special patrons of the Institute.

The Sisters will prepare for these feasts proper to the Institute with sentiments of piety, by approaching the sacraments and thanking God for having granted them the grace of a vocation to the religious life.

10 — No special rule is laid down for the Sisters regarding fasting and abstinence apart from those prescribed by the Church; neither can anyone do as she chooses in this. She should obey her confessor and her Superior. In the same way they may not perform even the lightest of corporal penances without first asking permission. Nevertheless should the Superior think it opportune they can follow the praiseworthy custom of fasting every Saturday in honor of Mary Immaculate. Should a Saturday be a feast day they might fast on Friday in honor of the passion of Jesus and the sorrows of Mary.

They could also do this on the day preceding their clothing and profession. These fasts should unite them in spirit to the rigorous fasts of Jesus Christ and of many of the saints.

\* (The discipline may also be used)

\* The whole paragraph relating to the discipline was canceled out.

## Chapter 10

*Enclosure*

1 — Although it is not possible to observe strict enclosure in the Institute on account of the works of charity undertaken by the Sisters, they should observe the following rules: —

Seculars should only be introduced into those parts of the House set aside for them or, when there is need in the rooms used by the boarders. It is not lawful to introduce lay persons into those parts of the House occupied by the Sisters except when duty or need require it or when, in an extraordinary case, the Superior General allows an exception.

2 — The Sisters shall not leave the House for walks or in the exercise of their vocation without the permission of the Superior who, under no circumstance whatsoever will permit them to go out alone, but will provide them with a Sister or a secular as a companion.

3 — They should not stop in the street to talk to anyone who-soever, apart from a grave necessity which is justifiable in the eyes of those who see it.

4 — They should never take food in the houses of seculars or even of their relatives unless on a journey or when there is serious need.

5 — If Sisters have to pass the night away from their own convent in the course of a journey and there are Sisters of the same Institute in the place they should choose to stay with the Sisters rather than with friends and relatives. The Sisters who are the hosts should receive the travelers with sisterly joy and kindness and accept no payment for expenses.

6 — The Sisters will not frequent the houses of parish priests or other priests or render services to them. Neither shall they stay for dinner or take part with them in recreational or devotional gatherings.

## Chapter 11

*The Vow of Chastity*

1 — In order to practice works of charity to one's neighbor continually and to work fruitfully with the young an indefatigable study of all the virtues is needed and this in a more than ordinary fashion. But the vow of chastity, the angelic virtue, the virtue dear above all others to the Son of God should be cultivated in an eminent degree by the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians because first, 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 should 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 a 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 the doors through which the enemy of souls enters. They must 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, through a conversation that is immaculate and angelic, bearing in mind the words of Our Lord who says, "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God."

3 — In order to preserve so great a treasure they shall call to mind the presence of God, turning to Him often with acts of lively faith, firm hope and ardent charity, not neglecting the great means of preservation suggested and practiced by all the saints, that is interior and exterior mortification. The first, without limit and the second in the measure permitted by obedience. Let the Sisters foster a special devotion to Mary Immaculate, to glorious Saint Joseph and to their Guardian Angels. If with deep humility they put into practice their Rules and all that this chapter suggests trusting in Jesus Christ, they will one day go to sing to the Immaculate Lamb, in heaven, the hymn reserved by God for those to whom He has given the grace of living and dying in the state of virginity.

## Chapter 12

*The Vow of Obedience*

1 — Since the life of the Daughters of Mary Most Holy should be a perfect holocaust, the best part of the sacrifice would be missing if the offering of the will did not enter into it. This is accomplished by the vow of obedience. Besides this we know that Our Divine Savior said He had come into this world not to do His own will but that of His heavenly Father. He assures us that in the observance of the vow of obedience there is the certainty of doing the will of God.

2 — By the vow of obedience we are obliged to occupy ourselves only with what the Superior judges to be for the greater glory of God and the good of one's own soul and the souls of others, according to the holy Rule of this pious Institute.

3 — The Sisters should obey in the spirit of faith seeing God in their Superior. Their obedience should be trustful, expectant and full of hope, convinced that what is ordained by obedience will redound to their greater spiritual advantage and the advantage of the work they have in hand. Let their obedience be prompt and cheerful and without delay, dispute or sadness, letting it be seen to come from the heart. Finally, where sin is not involved, let it be blind, without judging or criticizing the hidden reason for the command.

4 — The observance of this vow does not oblige under pain of sin except in those things contrary to the Commandments of God and holy Church.

5 — Let no one be unduly anxious to ask for anything or to refuse, but on perceiving that something is harmful or necessary let her mention the fact to the Superior who will provide what is required.

6 — The Sisters should place great confidence in their Superior and look upon her as a loving mother having no secrets from her. They should turn to her in all their needs, tell her all their troubles and make her acquainted with their griefs, their doubts and their difficulties etc.

## Chapter 13

### *The Vow of Poverty*

1 — The observance of the vow of poverty in the Institute [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians consists essentially in detachment from temporal goods. It is practiced by observing the common life regarding food and clothing and keeping nothing for personal use without the permission of the Superior.

2 — It is part of this vow to see that the rooms are very simple, with more emphasis given to decorating the heart with virtue than one's person or the walls of the room.

3 — No one may use money in a spirit of ownership either in the Institute or outside, neither may she use it as a deposit for any reason whatsoever without the express permission of the Superior.

4 — The regulations concerning this vow should seem easy to the Sisters if they reflect on the strict poverty practiced by our Divine Redeemer from the first moment of His human existence until His last breath on the cross. This vow is not only a help to those who want to follow Jesus Christ crucified more closely but becomes an absolute necessity for those who wish to live in an Institute completely dedicated to works of charity. In the exercise of charity they should have no other object nor expect any other reward [personal] than God alone, Who is the source of all good and the support to whom the Sisters should turn to in their every need.

## Chapter 14

### *Rules Common to All the Sisters*

1 — On seven separate occasions during the day the Sisters shall make the commemoration of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the end of each one they will recite the following prayer which may be repeated at other times during the day: "Eternal Father, we offer You the precious blood of Jesus Christ in expiation for our sins, for the wants of holy Church, for the relief of the souls

in purgatory, for the conversion of sinners, the perseverance of the just and in thanksgiving for the benefits received from Your infinite mercy."

From Vespers of Holy Saturday until the evening of Low Sunday, and throughout the octave of Our Lady's Assumption into heaven, the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin will be said instead at the same times.

2 — During the quarter of an hour's spiritual reading only those books shall be read which have received due approbation from the Superior. Books useful to all are: the *Imitation of Christ*, Rodriguez' works, the *Monaca Santa* of Saint Alphonsus, the autobiographies of those saints whose lives were dedicated to the apostolate and the education of the young.

3 — All the Sisters in the various establishments shall go once a year to the Central House or the House from which they depend to take part in a spiritual retreat. Should it not be possible to make the retreat all together because of the works of charity, they may make it in one or two separate groups according to the arrangement of the Superior.

4 — All the letters addressed to the Sisters shall be opened at the discretion of the Superior who may, or may not pass them on to the Sisters. They may not write or send out any letters without the permission of the Superior.

5 — However they are allowed to write letters without asking permission to the Superior, the Ecclesiastical Superior and the Superior of the Central House and letters coming to the Sisters from these Superiors may not be opened.

6 — When their relatives or other people come to see them the Sisters will go to the parlor accompanied by another Sister delegated by the Superior. The Sisters are warmly recommended to be prudent and modest in the indispensable visits they receive. All the caution necessary will be taken to obviate inconvenience. Since the Daughters of Mary have many occupations, except when for business or some special need the same persons should not be allowed to visit more than once a month.

7 — No one is permitted to send out messages through the school children or their parents or through anyone else without the permission of the Superior to whom any incoming message should be referred.

8 — Each one should consider herself the least of all. Therefore no one should absent herself from humble occupations or excuse herself from performing the most menial offices in the House as directed by the Superior, which she, with discretion and after taking into consideration physical strength sees best in the Lord.

9 — Whether in the House or out of it the Sisters shall always be gentle in speech never upholding their own personal views, avoiding every harsh or bitter word and all reproach. They shall not raise their voices excessively and refrain from expressions of vanity with regard either to themselves or any good which God may deign to draw from their work. All their actions, whether private or community should be reserved for the eyes of God alone, and they should not speak of their birth or riches if they happen to have had any in the world.

10 — They will take every care to show themselves in their manner, in their works and in their whole demeanor, such as they ought to be, namely, imitators of Jesus Christ and poor servants of the poor.

11 — The Sisters will take their refreshment all together in the refectory from the food of the poor which is provided for them. Never let them complain of their food or discuss it among themselves, but if they have a particular need let them make it known to the Superior in confidence.

12 — If the premises permit it each one may have a separate bedroom. However they may not lock their rooms. They will not use mattresses unless they are ill or have some special need. Near the bed there will be a holy water font, a wooden crucifix and pictures of Mary Help of Christians and the Immaculate Conception in a black frame.

13 — All clothing must be uniform, modest and plain, such as is suited to poor religious. The color shall be . . . and the style, that which will be decided upon. Shoes shall be made of black leather [and

even if it comes into general use, never of silk] as becomes the poor. They may not wear gloves made of silk, fine leather, or of light color. Around the neck they will wear a crucifix, the distinctive sign of their profession. The linen will also be suited to the poor.

14 — Cutlery and crockery should be as durable as possible.

15 — Every Saturday the Sister in charge of the linen [which is kept in a communal store] will place on each one's bed whatever is needed for her to change. Each Sister must put the changed linen in the place prepared for it.

16 — All gifts received by the Sisters must be handed to the Superior who will use them as she thinks best without feeling obliged to give an account of what she does. The Sisters will give neither small nor large presents to seculars without express permission. Neither will they do this among themselves because they are not even allowed to lend or exchange anything without the Superior's permission.

17 — When a Sister feels unwell she must inform the Superior so that she may provide what is necessary for her health. During the period of illness the infirmarian and the doctor or surgeon will be obeyed so that they may care for the body as they think best before God. The Sister will be patient and resigned to God's will, preserving an imperturbable tranquility of spirit in the hands of that God who is always a loving Father whether He gives good health or inflicts illness and pain.

18 — The Sisters will strive always, to keep closely united by the bond of mutual charity, for it would be a deplorable thing if those who have engaged themselves to imitate Jesus Christ should neglect to keep that commandment which He died on the cross to fulfill. 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 or at least before retiring to rest. That charity 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.

19 — The Sisters should desire and do all the good they can for their neighbor, always striving to help and serve Our Lord Jesus Christ in the person of His poor.

20 — The Sisters will make great progress in perfection by opening their hearts to their Superior since after the confessor, she is the one destined by God to direct them along the path of perfection. Therefore at least once a month they will speak with their Superior about their exterior conduct with all simplicity and frankness and she will give them the advice and counsel necessary to succeed in the exercise of mental prayer, mortification and the observance of the Rule of the Institute.

21 — All the Sisters will assist at the conference which the Superior gives every Sunday to instruct them in their duties and correct those defects which tend to lessen the fervor and the observance of the community.

22 — Finally, the Daughters [of Mary Immaculate and] of Mary Help of Christians will apply themselves seriously to doing the will of God as perfectly as possible without deliberating, to the prejudice of their duties, what God and their Superiors have in mind for them in the future. Let each one tend to perfection without flattering herself that in another charge she would be able to attend to this better. This would be to deceive herself, waste time and cause her to grow cold in the spiritual life.

Let the Sisters put all their efforts into doing the practices of piety well. It is from these alone that interior fervor derives and it gently moves us to conform ourselves in all things to Jesus Christ our divine Model and the Spouse of our souls.

## Chapter 15

### *Short Declaration of the Obligations of the Daughters of Mary [Immaculate] Under the Protection of Mary Help of Christians on the Observance of These Rules*

1 — Although the present Rules are not of themselves binding under pain of sin, nevertheless the Sisters should fear to transgress

them reflecting that their vocation is a special grace from God for which they will have to give an account at the hour of death. Let them always have in mind the text of Wisdom, "He who deviates from her path shall be cut off." Now the path of the Sisters of Mary Immaculate is their Rule. It is the path along which they must walk from virtue to virtue until they meet their eternal Spouse in heaven. Therefore walk wisely and attentively without turning either to the right or the left.

#### TIMETABLE

- 5:30 Rise and make bed
- 6:00 Community prayers and meditation
- 6:45 Mass in the parish church
- 7:30 Distribution of work and special assignments
- 8:00 Breakfast
- 8:30 Work
- 12:00 Angelus and particular examination of conscience  
[10 minutes]
- 12:30 Dinner and Recreation
- 4:45 Third part of the rosary and spiritual reading
- 5:30 Work
- 9:30 Visit to the Blessed Sacrament and reading points  
of the next day's meditation.
- Retire to rest in strict silence

## APPENDIX No. 12

*For Father John Bosco on regaining his health*

## SONG \*

To be sung by the new Institute of Mornese  
under the title of Mary Immaculate and of Mary Help of Christians

My Father, who can tell  
the grief your children felt  
when they heard it said  
an illness had attacked you?  
Every tongue grew silent,  
every lip was sealed.

They were ours, O good John  
your illness, your misfortunes,  
ours the painful anguish  
that rent your heart apart  
and in these walls around us  
an air of sadness trembled.

When evening bells were sounding  
all Italy was weeping  
each plain and every hillside  
the seas themselves were troubled,  
all hearts and spirits quavered,  
were fearful for your life.

The miserable, the orphan,  
patrician and the mitred,  
in cell-like quiet murmured  
their prayers to heaven for you.  
Eternal God we thank you,  
for Italy you spared him.

The gentle pontiff, Pius,  
from his secluded dwelling  
raised his prayers to heaven

for his faithful son  
and from the heavenly height  
the King of heaven smiled down.

O powerful those prayers were  
of just and of elect!  
The fearsome storm is over,  
resplendent shines the sun,  
again he returns to cheer us  
our Father, now grieving is o'er!

Grief is o'er and the sweet voice  
[of gladness  
to the stars from your people ascend,  
from his heart has dispersed all  
[the worry,  
less heavy his days have become.  
May Abraham's God now be blessed  
who to us our good Father has spared.

Humbly His Name we entreated  
and the voices of children prevailed  
Ah! turn not away as we pray you  
when sincerity springs from our hearts,  
O grant that he stay long among us  
your servant, your well beloved Son.  
May his members so tired, find  
[repose here,  
and his strength never dare  
[to grow less  
with the rigor, O Lord, of his age.

\* Father Pestarino arranged for Father Costamagna, the music  
master in the school at Lanzo, to set it to music — 1872.

**APPENDIX No. 13**

*Incomplete draft of Angela Maccagno's new attempt — 1872.*

*Rule of the Mother House of the Daughters of the Institute of Saint Angela Merici, Daughters of Mary Immaculate and of Mary Help of Christians.*

**Chapter 1***Object*

The object of this Mother House is to form girls intent only on their own sanctification and in cooperating with all their strength in doing good to their neighbor. Therefore they will be thoroughly instructed in the practice of every virtue: 1 — They will be taught detachment from the world. 2 — Detachment from themselves. 3 — Conformity in all and for all to the divine will. 4 — They will also be taught all types of work. 5 — Also letters, (however only those the Superiors consider the most able) an aptitude for work in towns, districts, cities and rural areas as elementary and private teachers, dressmakers, embroidresses, shops assistants etc. However they will never be sent alone but in pairs or even larger numbers if feasible. Wherever they are sent they should give good example to all and be a leaven to young girls and children, attracting some to become part of the Institute itself, some to become nuns, and inspiring others with the will to live a more moral life. Girls will also be accepted for education in the Mother House.

It will be regarded as a duty to strive for an increase in the numbers of nuns already observing the Rule given them by the Reverend Director General. These also will be under the direction of the Reverend Local Director and the Superior General. They too must be ready and prepared to transfer to whatever place the Superior wills to send them.

## Chapter 2

The Mother House will be presided over by the Reverend Director General and by a Superior, also General.

The Director General is the Very Reverend Don Bosco and if he is absent it will be one of his successors that is, whoever directs his schools. He will assign or provide a local director who will take every possible care of the Mother House. It will also be his duty to see that the Sisters will be helped by one or two priests according to need.

The first Superior shall be elected by the Director General and she must reside in the Mother House. The Superior General will have a Vicar and the Assistants will be elected every three years and they may always be reelected. When the Superior General has to be changed the Director General will either nominate a new one by common consent or there will be a ballot. The diocesan superiors and the local superiors will take part in the ballot. Should they be unable to present themselves their votes should be sent by letter.

## Chapter 3

On all Sundays and frequently on weekdays there will be a conference at the time appointed by the Reverend Director and by common consent. All the Daughters in the House will be present at this conference except those who have been appointed by the Superior to supervise the girls. Every eight or fifteen days the other Daughters of the Institute who are working in the town shall be invited. The conference will be assisted by the Superior and every fifteen or twenty days the director or another invited priest will deliver an exhortation. The parish priest will be invited two or three times a year. The conference will treat in the main of the object of the Mother House, how to behave when working in the world, the good that can be and must be done for society; the method and means of doing good and gaining more souls for God etc.

Also of the great merit to be gained by fulfilling one's duties with prudence, courage, constancy etc. The greatness and the sublimeness of the work must also be stressed, that is, to be destined by our heavenly Spouse to be animators of His honor and glory and to resem-

ble so many magnets spread around to attract many hearts to love and serve Him faithfully by word and good example.

There will also be a conference for the boarders once a fortnight or once a month and the subject will be chosen at the discretion of the director and the Superior. At all the conferences the Daughters will be invited to explain what has been read and to give their opinion. In this way the conference will become a spiritual conversation in which hearts will open up, be corrected, disenchanted and made fervent in charity.

Once the Daughters have been well-trained in virtue they may be sent out to practice the craft decided upon by the director and the Superior as best suited to the aptitudes of each one. They will remain in the same place at the discretion of the director and the Superior.

#### Chapter 4

If there are Daughters of the Institute in the towns and villages to which the Daughters from the Mother House are sent they will try to get into contact with them to the best of their ability, and encourage them as much as possible, (but with great prudence). Therefore they should be welcomed kindly when they come for advice and instruction or consolation etc. Every eight days they should get together for a conference at an appointed place. In fact, if the directors approve, one of the two sent from the Mother House could very well be nominated Superior and the second, with others of the place could be assistants.

When away from the Mother House the common Rule will be observed. This is the Rule observed by the Daughters of the Institute who live with their families or in house service. However their observance shall be more exact.

#### Chapter 5

The object of the Daughters of the Mother House is not to live there constantly but to separate as so many branches drawing sap from the same trunk, and giving a variety of fruit according to the grafting each has had. They have to carry out a type of mission in

society without any apparent protection and they have on occasion to deal with every type of person. Because of this they have no uniform habit. However it order not to have too many differences among them they will all wear woollen dresses. Regarding quality and color, this will be supplied by the Mother House if it is fairly near, otherwise it will be supplied by the Mother House through the diocesan Superior. Regarding the style and the cut they will follow the costume worn by the more pious in the village where they are. This will be modest and very simple. Let us remember that we have doubly renounced the vanity and pomp of the world, first by the duty every Christian has and secondly, by becoming the spouses of a jealous Lover who does not look kindly on those spouses who are vain. Hence we must dress ourselves according to the customs of the pious of our times, not because of ingenuity or natural inclination, but of necessity, in order to obtain in this way and with more ease the second aim or object of the Institute.

## Chapter 6

### *Qualities of the Daughters*

The Daughters of the Mother House should be taken from those already in the Institute and those chosen should be ones who show a great deal of good will. Therefore where there are known to be Daughters of the Pious Union, choice will be made from among them for a member to come to the Mother House. The reverend parish priest and directors will not mind depriving themselves of these treasures because after a short time they will be returned enriched and of more use to them in the cultivation of souls. The quicker the Daughters advance in virtue and techniques and in the observance of their Rule, the quicker will they be returned to their original destination.

## Chapter 7

The reverend directors both general and local should be considered as the animators of the Institute.

The duties of the Director General are: first, to provide the Mother

House with a spiritual director and a temporal one. They should give all the service needed. Therefore the one appointed should be zealous, very discreet and scholarly. He should live close to the Mother House. Secondly, he should be well informed of the principal matters operated by the spiritual and temporal directors and the Superior, the Vicar and the Assistants. It is not permitted to the directors to frequent the Mother House too much. Neither shall the Daughters frequent the house of the directors and they shall not keep Daughters to serve them, etc.

## Chapter 8

The Reverend Local Director is dependent on the General. His duties are: first, to have nothing at heart but the glory of God and his own sanctification; to have the care and duty of seeing that the Rule is observed with as few exceptions as possible. He will pay particular attention to the way things are going and if the Superior, Vicar and Assistants are doing their duty. He will receive confidence at the time stated. Thirdly, it will be his duty to have a deep insight into the hearts of the Daughters, especially of the Superior, Vicar and Assistants from whom he will receive information about the others, and on whom in a particular way the well-being of the House and all the Daughters working in various places depend. Fourthly, it will be his duty to increase the number of Daughters in the House and pay continual attention to the way they are being instructed in their duties and once he knows that they are sufficiently instructed he will do all in his power to send them out. It is also his duty to do his best to see that there is a priest to care for the Daughters of the Houses in the places to which they are sent. It would be best if the parish priest took this responsibility but if not, the best religious that can be found in the area and who will be able to observe and hear how the Daughters working there behave in order that they may continue or be returned quickly to the Mother House.

It will also be the Local Director's duty to see that there is a Superior in every diocese who will look after others in the diocese. In order to appoint this Superior, the General or Local Director will speak to the bishop of the diocese and if it is thought right, she will be brought to live in that particular city.

The Local Director will have a confidential relationship with the parish priest, will help him in the confessional, with celebrations, doctrine for children etc.

## Chapter 9

### *Duties of the Superior General*

The Superior General will be submissive and obedient to the directors; she must esteem and respect them and recognize God's will in them. She will do her part in helping her Daughters to discover this will in their minds and hearts. She will follow up all her Daughters both internally and externally. She should keep them individually in her heart and recommend them all to God and the Immaculate Virgin Help of Christians every instant, but especially those most in danger. She will show no partiality and will see that her Vicar and Assistants do their respective duties with charity, good sense and constancy. She will take care that all her Daughters have all they need with regard to food and clothing and will care much more should they be ill. It will be her care also, to see that they live and behave according to the spirit of the Institute.

The Superior General may make an unexpected visit to those working outside or she may be represented by her Vicar or one of her Assistants. She will have an affable, gentle and cheerful manner with them. Should she have to recall one of the outside workers she will do it with gentle words. The Daughters should find in her a loving, tender and compassionate mother, deeply interested in their spiritual and temporal welfare. The Superior, Vicar and Assistants will observe who of the Daughters is most suited to be sent to a certain place and will inform the Reverend Director.

The Superior with her Vicar and Assistants will see that the House is, and is maintained, in order to the best of their ability. Therefore she will see that each one does the task assigned to her and where someone is missing she must be checked kindly and alone. If the task was a public one then the correction could be public. If the fault was against the Superior herself she should be silent and the matter should be referred to the director who will deal with it.

The Superior, her Vicar and Assistants must have, and practice,

long-suffering patience with the Daughters and God will bless their efforts.

At times the poor Daughters are greatly afflicted, disturbed and sorely tempted over a long period. They may do all they can to overcome these difficulties but often the vehemence of the trouble prevents this. In these circumstances they have a great need to be helped, compassionated, supported and corrected with charity. Where can they find tangible comfort? They should be able to find it in their own director and especially in their Superior.

The Superiors in the dioceses should be invited to the Mother House for the spiritual retreat every year together with the local Superiors who are within reasonable distance.

## Chapter 10

The Superiors of the dioceses shall always be in contact with and submissive to the Superior General. Therefore they should notify her before, or immediately after, matters of some importance occur. They should love her, respect her, fear her and obey her in everything.

Their task is to supervise the Local Superiors in their particular diocese. Once a year in agreement with the Superior General and at a time fixed by the directors they will call together the Superiors of their area for a spiritual retreat. Finding someone who is either reluctant or lax in spirit they will immediately advise the Superior General so that she may quickly be recalled to the Mother House.

## Chapter 11

The Vicar and the Assistants of the Mother House should help the Superior General in her vigilance over the Daughters, but they will supervise in a special way those who have some particular task in the House such as the Novice Mistress, the Assistants to the boarders, the bursars etc. Should something untoward be observed the Superior or her Vicar should be notified first of all and having examined the matter well, will, if it is only a small account, deal with it themselves, otherwise it should be put right as quickly as possible with the help of the Reverend Director.

Should the Vicar or Assistants notice any defect in their Superior

they should speak to her frankly about it, but with respect and charity, remembering that we are all made of clay and therefore are liable to make mistakes. If someone has no courage to tell her herself, she will speak to the director who will get the one he thinks best to mention it. In the same way if they have something against the director they will speak to the Superior or her Vicar only, and never to their companions, because it is a very delicate matter and therefore they must be very careful.

## Chapter 12

*Duties of the Local Superiors  
towards the Superiors General and Diocesan etc. . . .*

. . . .

## Chapter 13

*Duties of the Daughters towards their Superiors and Directors. . . \**

\* The original manuscript of Angela Maccagno—in the General Archives FMA—was interrupted at this point.

**APPENDIX No. 14***Brief Summary of the Institute of the New Ursulines of Acqui*

This was initiated by Canon Olivieri in the January of 1882 with five Daughters of Mary Immaculate living a community under the title of "New Ursulines of Mornese." In December, 1885 they were considered by Monsignor Sciandra as an incipient Institute and approved for three years with their own Rule but without a religious habit.

Monsignor Sciandra died before the three years were completed and Monsignor Marello followed the development of that Institute giving it, on October 2, 1889, a further approbation after a certain modification of the Rules. A habit was established and the title changed to "New Ursulines of Saint Joseph."

With the publication of canonical legislation regarding institutes of religious women, Monsignor Disma Marchees, the successor of Monsignor Marello wished to conform the Institute of his Ursulines to this legislation. From that time, 1905, with the modification of the Rules and the habit, the title too was changed, and became the Institute of the "Ursuline Sisters of the Holy Spirit."

N.B. — Canon Olivieri, the initiator of the New Ursulines wanted to cede them immediately to Don Bosco, but he received the answer, "Not now, go ahead for now; later on, yes."

On this is based the annexation, much later, of the New Ursulines of the Holy Spirit to the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians.

That Diocesan Institute numbered several daughter houses all dependent on that of Acqui. The Rules were still in manuscript form.

## APPENDIX No. 15

### *Concerning the arrival of Don Bosco in Mornese on August 4, 1872*

With regard to the arrival of Don Bosco in Mornese on the evening of August 4, 1872 there are conflicting accounts. Some say he arrived at 7:00 p.m., others at 9:00 p.m. and others at 11:00 p.m.

Mother Petronilla holds to 7:00 p.m., that is, just after the evening meditation. She gives these reasons:

When Don Bosco came to Mornese on other occasions he always arrived about 7 o'clock in the evening. Why should he have come later on this occasion? There were very few trains for Mornese especially at that time. I questioned my nephew about this. He has always driven a carriage and he told me, "The trains arriving from Turin and going to Gavi and Novada always arrived at about 6:00 p.m. and by 7:00 p.m. at the latest we would arrive in Mornese. There were no other arrivals as there were no more trains."

Father Berta objected assuring us that he arrived with Don Bosco at 11:00 p.m., but Petronilla replied:

No. no! I know for certain the impression I had when we heard the carriage arrive when we were in church. I also remember that Don Bosco had his supper with the preachers. After this he came to speak to us and he told us, "Tomorrow at 9 a.m. you will be clothed as religious." I am sure I am right because I cannot get it out of my mind and heart that Don Bosco arrived while we were in church. Otherwise, if he had arrived at 11:00 p.m., we would have remembered having to get out of bed to offer him a hot drink . . . instead there is no record of this.

This is confirmed by Joseph Campi who asserts, "... Since we were not sure whether he would come or not there was no one to receive Don Bosco except the clergy headed by the Bishop who embraced and kissed him." Now would the clergy have allowed their

Bishop convalescing from bronchitis to remain up until 11:00 p.m.?

However Father Berta supports his statement declaring, "I went to fetch Don Bosco and we left I believe at 7:00 p.m. and arrived in Mornese at about 11:30 p.m. Don Bosco had just got over a serious illness and I placed my mantle over his shoulders to shield him from the cold night air of the mountains."

Is it possible that the Salesians, so rightly devoted to their Father would have let him travel at night without giving him a mantle? Cold is felt in the hills even without its being night and it is probable that when the sun was setting over Mornese and the cool, never absent wind was blowing Father Berta preferred to remove his mantle and suffer from the cold air himself rather than jeopardize Don Bosco's health. Apart from this who is not aware that at 10 o'clock at night in the smaller center carriages are very difficult to come by? But to meet the trains the mail coach is at the service of the public and travels from village to village.

Besides this, within the time of Don Bosco's arrival and departure the following day to be present at another spiritual retreat, in Turin, he, the Founder and Father, needed to see the Daughters and come to an understanding with them, especially with the leaders. This would certainly not have been possible had he arrived at almost midnight.

## NOTES

### Appendices

1. Father Francesia had written on December 15 that he had returned from Mornese rather tired and slightly ill.