

he served us at table, dishing out the food, helping to clear up after, mending our boots, patching our clothes; it was a real home, with a father who loved us and cared only for our spiritual and bodily welfare.”

Michael Rua came to live in about that time and Don Bosco gave him the job of being in charge of the little group going to Don Bonzantino's school. But he could never put a bridle on Cagliero. As soon as they got outside the gate, he skipped away, racing through the market, laughing at the jugglers and the buskers; but when the group got to the school there he was, red in the face, before them. Rua disapproved. “Why can't you come with us?”

“If I want to go another way, and look at a few things, what's the difference?”

“You should do as you are told.”

“I do. I am told to go to school. Here I am. I am told not to be late, I am always here before you. So what?”

Rua, quiet, serious, steady, Cagliero, extrovert, exuberant, sparkling, two pillars of the Salesian Society. Rua the first Salesian, first successor of Don Bosco, Cagliero shortly after him, the first missionary, the first Salesian Bishop, the first Salesian Cardinal. Both of them would have died for Don Bosco.

Schoolboys in Army Jackets

Winters can be bitter in Italy and Don Bosco wrote to the Ministry for War for discarded army clothes for the boys. The earliest photograph, in 1861, shows some of them wearing army jackets and caps. The overcoats were somewhat worse for wear and when the well-to-do sons of Turin Society in Don Bonzantino's saw the scruffy group from Valdocco, they turned their noses up. Fees were high for those who could pay; for Don Bosco, there was no charge. “We're a school for young gentlemen and young tramps,” sang the boys. Don Bonzantino would have none of it. “What matters here is what you have in your heads, not what you have on your backs!” Indeed, because the Valdocco boys had no ‘social distractions,’ they worked hard and their results were uniformly brilliant, to Don Bonzantino's great satisfaction. And Don Bosco's.

Fifty years Guarantee of Life

One day Michael Rua and Giovanni (John) Francesia were having a discussion, though there was little coming from Rua. Francesia lost patience; they were two kindred souls and it was not like Rua to be silent.

“What's the matter with you?” “My brother John has died and I'm the last one. It'll be my turn next.” Don Bosco was standing by. He had just written a pamphlet on the Turin miracle of the Blessed Sacrament, centuries before, when certain animals gave the reverence and respect to the Host which their owners had refused.

He turned to Rua. “In fifty years' time it will be the centenary of the miracle. I'd like you to have the pamphlet I've written reprinted.”

“Fifty years, Don Bosco, 1903! Oh, I am afraid long before then death will have dealt me a low trick!”

“Death will not have dealt you any kind of trick, low or lovely. You'll be here; remember what I've asked you.” (He did.)

When the holidays started, Michael Rua went with Don Bosco, Margaret and twenty-six boys, to walk to the Becchi and stay on Joseph's farm. On the way, Don Bosco said to the boy, “On October 3rd, it will be the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The parish priest will come to Becchi and I'll ask him to formally clothe you with the clerical cassock. All right?” “All right.” Michael took the opportunity when they were alone to ask, “You remember when we first met and you were giving out medals, there were none left for me but you made as if to cut your hand in half. What did you mean?”

“Why, Michael, it means that you and I will from now on share everything: the work, the problems, the debts, the responsibilities. You will be like the Israelites, having a lot to suffer; you will have to cross the Red Sea, go through the desert and the wilderness; but you will see great things done for God, when you get to the promised land, and at the end of it all, we shall be together for ever, in Heaven. Now you know.”

flowers, but after the first steps realised that the roses hid sharp thorns and he went back. "You see," said Our Lady, "you need good strong shoes to walk this path." Others joined him for a while but most of them left him, saying, "We have been deceived!" As he pushed on through, he was lacerated on every side and soon bleeding. Then a group came from the other end and they went through together, all sadly hurt; but at the end, their wounds were healed. Our Lady told him, "You will have to go through many trials and need the strong shoes of mortification; but if you persevere, you will truly enter into a garden of roses without thorns". "But," added Don Bosco, "while we were pushing our way through, we could hear people saying, 'How fortunate Don Bosco is, walking through roses!' They could not see the hidden thorns."

A Valuable Recruit

Don Alasonatti was a teacher-priest, three years older than Don Bosco. They were good friends and Don Bosco used to tease him. "Why, look, you have thirty boys to look after, I've hundreds! Come along and help!"

"What wages will you pay me?"

"Bread, work and heaven at the end. But you'll be able to store up some sleep for the future."

They joked but Don Alasonatti began to think seriously. He was a serious minded teacher, a touch demanding of obedience at times but generally well liked by the boys. In 1854, he made up his mind when a brief letter arrived from Don Bosco, "Come and help me to say my breviary". Shortly after, he presented himself at the door of Don Bosco's room, with a bag and with his breviary under his arm. "Tell me where I can go to say my breviary."

"Come; I'll take you to what we'll call the bursar's office; you can do the books, use your arithmetical skill; this will be your kingdom."

"All right. Just tell me what you want and I'll carry out, as best I can, all your ideas, even if sometimes I don't agree. Heaven has to be won!"

He was to prove an immense help to Don Bosco and the Oratory, taking a great weight of worry and business off his friend's shoulders. But his first duty as a priest, the next day, was to go on a sick call to a man suffering from cholera.

Death Stalks the Streets of Borgo Dora

Cholera came to Turin at the end of that July, 1854. The Court fled to the castle of Caselette. The epicentre of the pestilence was around the slums of

Chapter Twenty-Three WE SHALL CALL OURSELVES SALESIANS

THE NUMBER OF students went on increasing, thirty-five in 1854, eventually 121 in 1857. The problem was to find 'sheep becoming shepherds' to look after them. One day Don Bosco called yet another four boys to his room: Rua already knew what to expect but listened with the others: "You boys know that Don Bosco (he usually spoke of himself in the third person) does what he can for all of you but he is alone. If you will give me a hand, I tell you that thousands of boys are waiting for us; Our Lady will send us great oratories, schools, workshops, churches, many priests who will help . . . and not only in Italy but in Europe, America . . . Our Lady wants us to form a society, to help realise all this work."

The boys looked at him astounded. That night in a notebook Michael Rua recorded what happened: "Four of us, Rocchielli, Artiglia, Cagliariero and Rua proposed, with the help of God and in the spirit of St. Francis of Sales, to make a practical exercise of charity towards our neighbour. To implement this proposal, we shall all make a promise, and if possible, later make a vow to the Lord; all who do this now or in the future, will call themselves Salesians."

It should be stressed that this 'society' was understood only to be a group promising to help Don Bosco in his work; at this stage there was no question of forming a religious order or congregation. In Don Bosco's mind, it was however, a first step towards that aim.

The Rose Walk

Many worthy men and women still, of course, looked upon Don Bosco as a visionary, a little unbalanced; some others saw his ability to build and to expand as having some secret banker; it seemed all too easy. Some years later, talking to some of his early Salesians in 1864, he spoke of this, telling them of an early dream, in 1847, when Our Lady showed him an enchanting garden, through which was a rose walk, a covered portico, entirely of beautiful roses, even the path through it. She first suggested he take his shoes off, which he gladly did as he did not want to crush the

Borgo Dora, where the undernourished immigrants offered little resistance to the attacks. Eight hundred fell victims, five hundred died, in the first month. The mayor appealed to the courageous to help; in an atmosphere of death in every street, it needed courage to help. On August 5th, Don Bosco spoke to the boys. "The mayor has asked for help. Many of you are too young but some of the bigger boys could help. I know this disease is contagious but I promise you that if you keep in the grace of God and avoid all mortal sin, you will not contract it. If any of you feel you could come with me to the hospitals or to people's houses to find out the sick, it will be a good work that God will bless. Think it over."

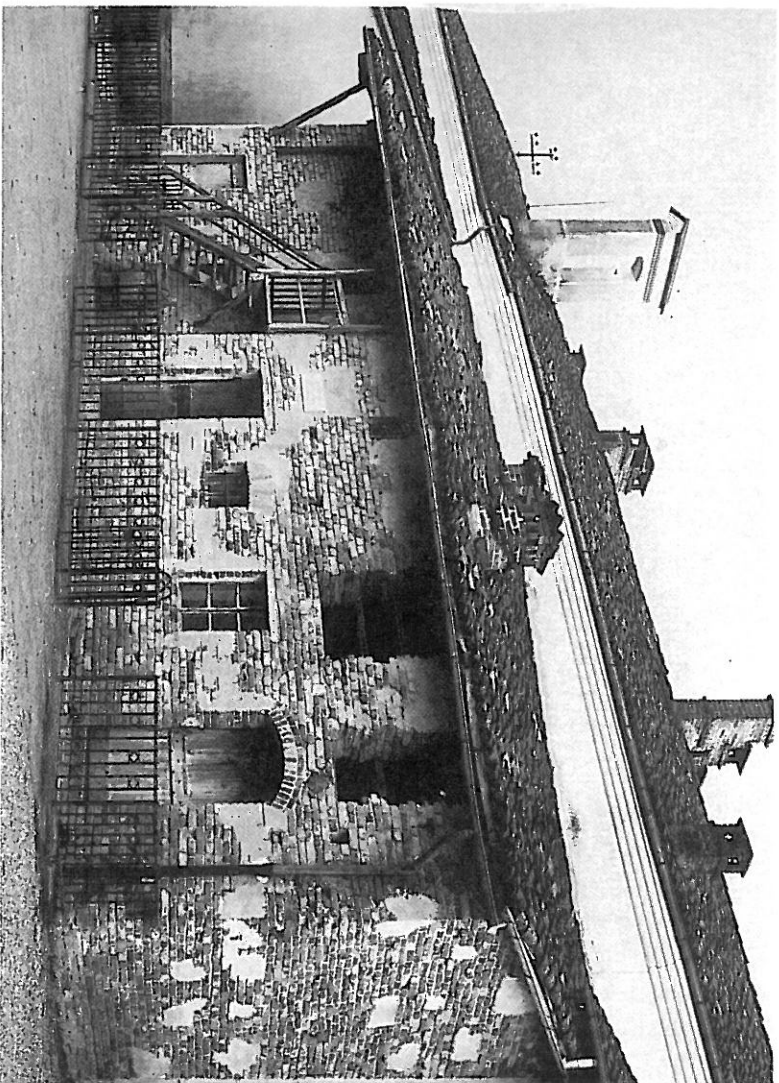
That evening fourteen boys put their names on the list, a few days later there were thirty, some of them quite young. Don Bosco divided them into three groups, the oldest to help in the actual care of the victims in the hospitals, a second group to go round the houses looking for stricken families, and a third group, the youngest, to hold themselves ready to run any errand, take any messages. It was hard and unpleasant work. Don Bosco insisted on taking all precautions, carrying out the instructions of the doctors. The boys were heroic; Margaret too, was their ready helper. When she had no more linen to give and yet another boy was in the kitchen begging for something to cover a sick woman, she got out the last spare altar cloth. "I am sure Our Lord won't mind." The wedding dress had long ago been sold. None of the boys fell sick of the cholera. By the end of November, the plague ended, with 1,400 dead in the city.

Bronze Giants with Sad Faces

Sixteen year old Giovanni Cagliero returned from a hospital feeling ill, probably from eating bad fruit. The doctor diagnosed not cholera but typhus. The fever lasted through September without improvement; his condition worsened and two doctors, called in for consultation, could only shake their heads. They advised that the boy should be given the Last Sacraments. Don Bosco was so upset that he could only ask Giuseppe Buzzetti to break the news of this gently to Cagliero while he went to the chapel. When he got back to the sick room and was walking to the bed, he stopped, looked fixedly at something over the bed, and, then after a few seconds, smiled.

"Is this my last confession? Am I going to die, Don Bosco?" the boy said in a weak voice.

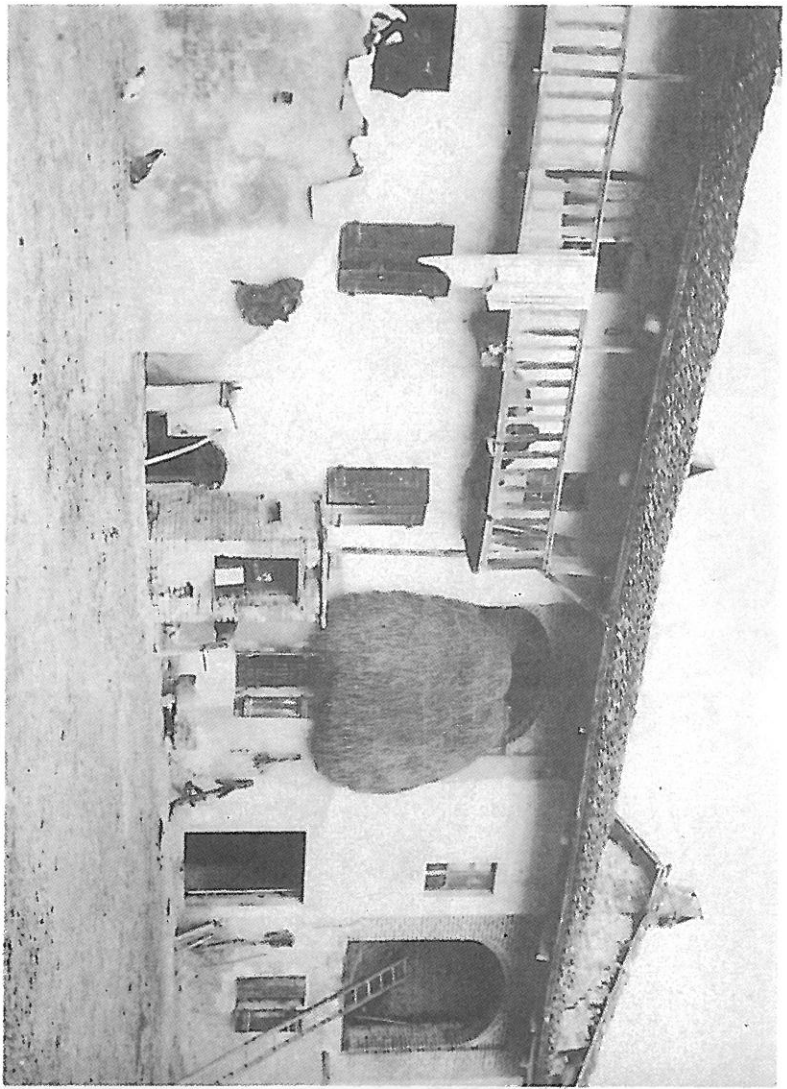
"No, Giovanni," replied Don Bosco, "you are not going to die; you are going to get better, to become a priest, to do a great deal of work, far, far



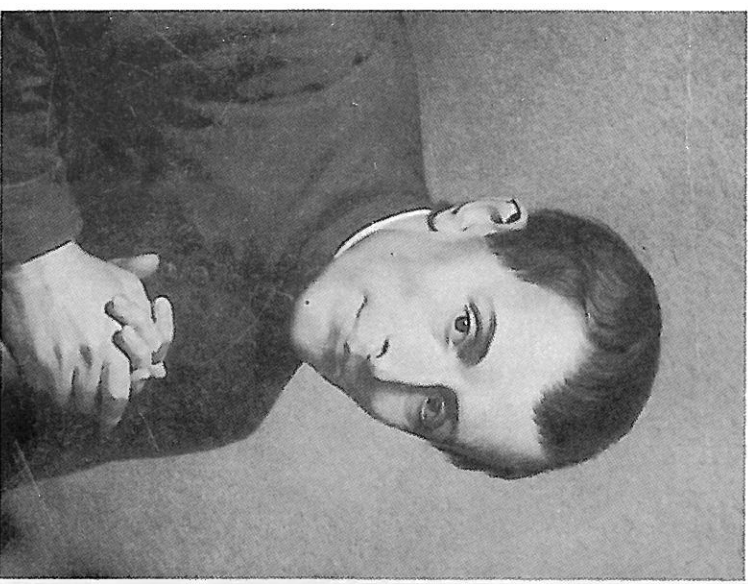
The house of the Bechi, home of John Bosco's childhood, now preserved as it was.



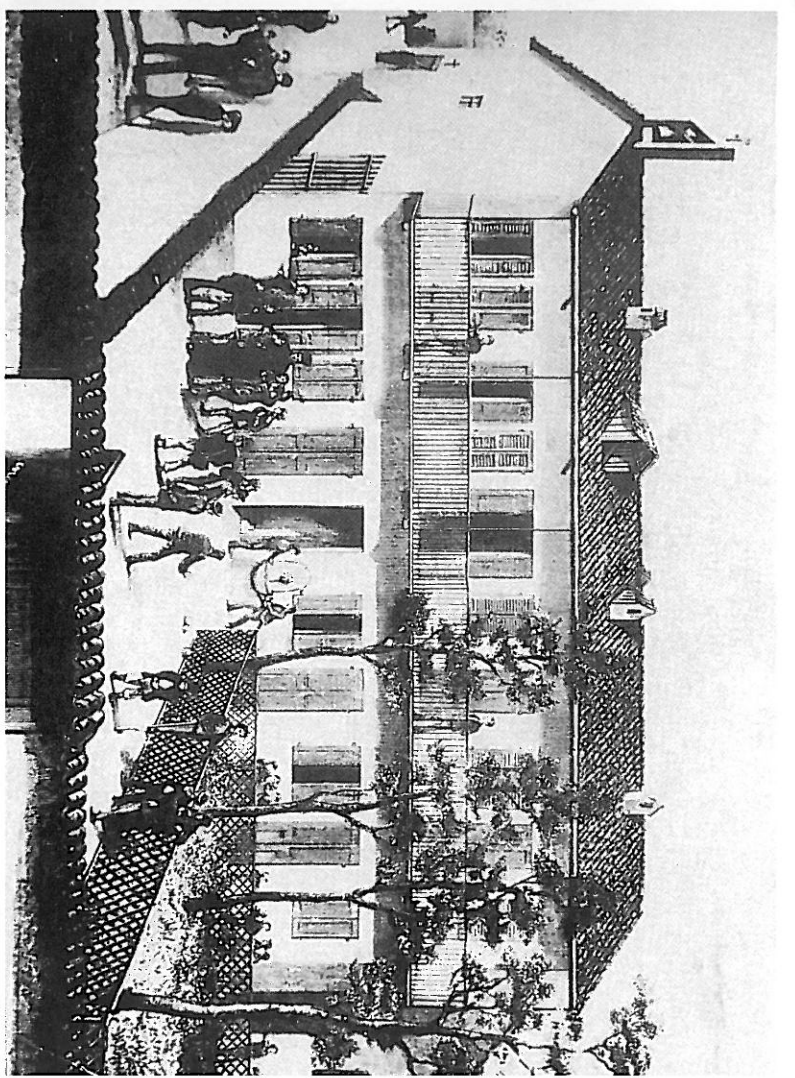
Don Bosco's Mamma Margaret, from a drawing. She died in 1856, after mothering Don Bosco's boys at Valdocco for ten years.



The Moglia farm where young John Bosco spent nearly three happy years.



An artist's conception of Don Cafasso, now St. Joseph Cafasso, Don Bosco's dearest friend and guide.



The Pinardi House, restored and enlarged with the Oratory well established. It has now been demolished, with a small chapel on the site.

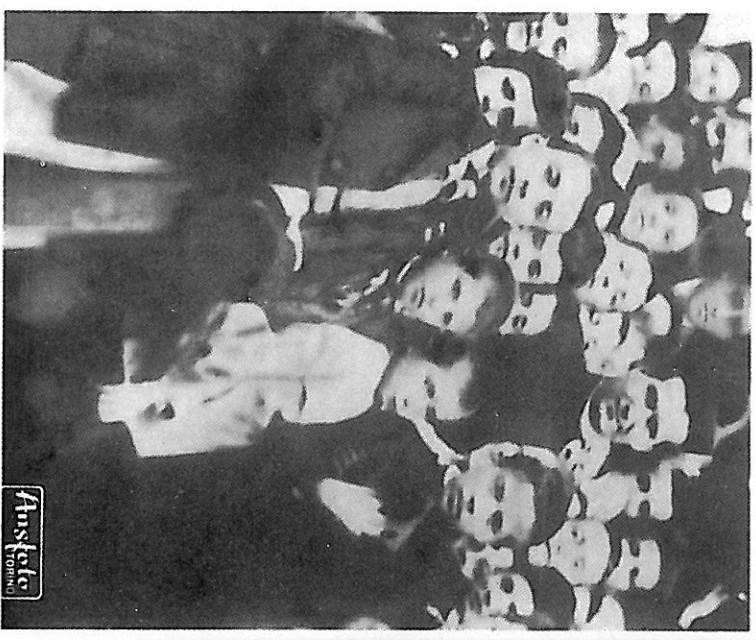


How Don Bosco heard confessions outside before Pinardi. The boy was Paul Albera, his second successor.



1870 group of Salesian priests and clerics with Don Bosco, seen here to be short of stature. Future missionaries, Don Costamagna and Don Cagliari, on left, marked with a cross.

This photograph of 1861 is of great historical interest. The boy in the left foreground is wearing one of the military coats and caps procured by Don Bosco: several others can be made out. The small boy in front of Don Bosco is apparently holding on to his brother, one of the quite young seminarians given shelter by the Saint when the diocesan seminary was closed. Others can be seen wearing birettas and cassocks.



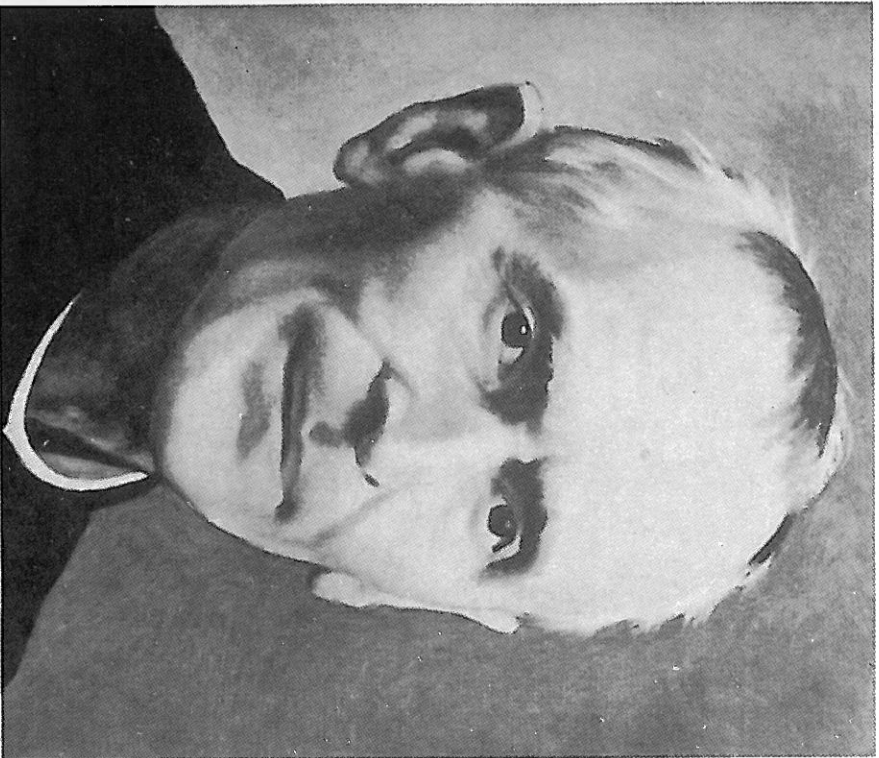
Bei modo di proteggere le industrie! A Torino il Tasmatungo *Dominus* *Lignus* fabbricava semolci d'italia con macchinie non patentate dal Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione: gli fecero chiudere la fabbrica! Dovremo forse vederle emigrare per l'America in groppa ad una nube ad ingrannarle colà le sue sucerrati!

Satirical cartoon of the 'miracle worker' don Bosco (*Dominus Lignus* = Bosco = Wood) who has been fabricating 'enemies of Italy' in his priest factory, and suggesting the sooner he emigrates to America the better!

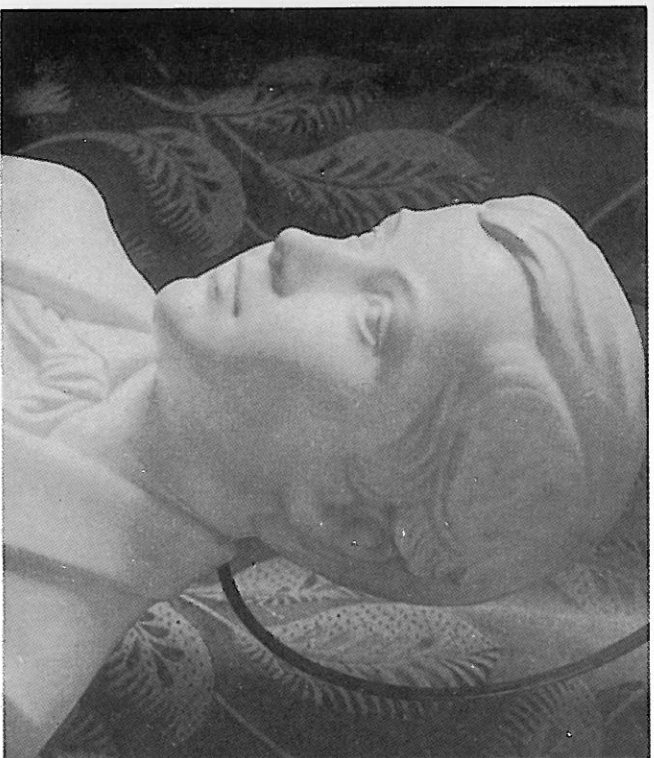
Canonisation painting of M. Mary Mazzarello Rome, June 24th 1951. With St John Bosco, she founded the Salesian Sisters, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, in 1872. She died only nine years later, after founding 25 Houses, convents, orphanages, hostels, etc.



The only extant photograph of Saint Mary D. Mazzarello, centre front row, with departing second missionary expedition, 1877.



Ascetical Blessed Michael Rua, who shared everything with Don Bosco, was the first Salesian, the first Successor, a great force in establishing the Salesians in the Anglo-Irish Province. He died in 1910. He visited England three times.

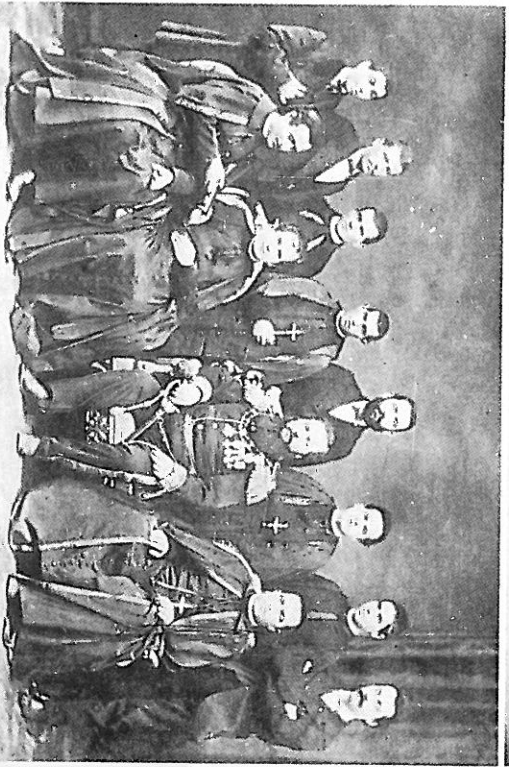


Dominic Savio, the Boy saint, flower of Don Bosco's work, died before his fifteenth birthday, canonised 1954.

'A Salesian House without music is dead!' said Don Bosco, seen sitting on a raised chair. On his right is the bearded one and only Giuseppe Buzzetti, next to him the youthful Don Cagliero, master of music.



The first missionary expedition, 1875. Don Bosco is handing the Salesian Rule book to Don Cagliero, leader of the group. The military gentleman is the Argentinian Consul.



Barcelona 1886. Don Rua is bending over the ailing Don Bosco. The white face of the lady between the two boys over the bearded priest is that of Dona Dorotea de Chopteva, Mother of the Salesians in Spain, now 'Venerable'.



Front row centre: Don Paul Albera second successor of Don Bosco. On his left, legs crossed, the inimitable Bro. Pietro Enria.



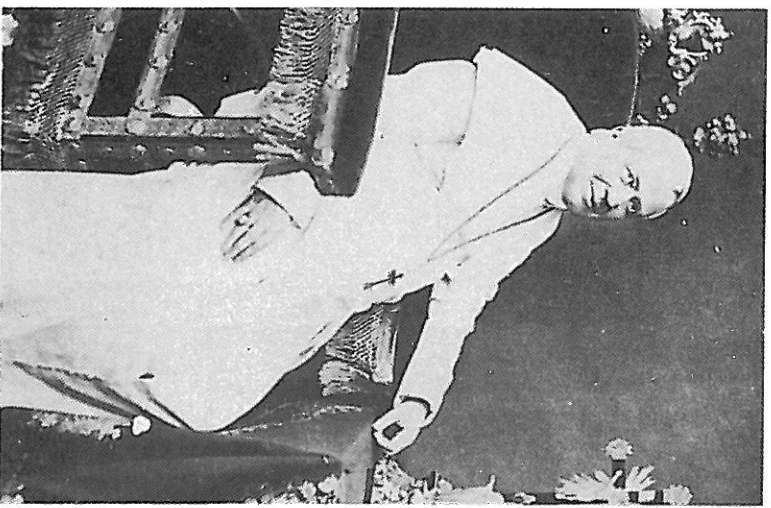
Cardinal John Cagliero, first Salesian Bishop and Cardinal.



Top: Don Philip Rinaldi, the reluctant boy who became the third Salesian Rector Major.



Bottom left: Pope Pius IX, the priest who loved humanity, Don Bosco's good friend and supporter.



Top: Father Charles Macey, young English convert, who took over from Father McKiernan and was the founder of Salesian work in the English-speaking world; under the practical assistance and encouragement of Don Rua, he built schools and churches in Battersea, Burwash, Chertsey, Farnborough, initiated Salesian work in Malta and South Africa and introduced to England the first Salesian Sisters.

Bottom: Father Edward McKiernan, the young Irish priest sent by Don Bosco, November 1887, to head the English foundation. Sadly he died scarcely a year later, aged only 27.





Don Bosco, old and infirm, in Barcelona 1886.

We Shall Call Ourselves Salesians

away . . . ” and with that left the room without more ado. Cagliero did indeed soon get better and left for his home in Castelnovo for a long convalescence. Some time later on his return to Turin, he and Buzzetti asked Don Bosco what had happened.

“Well, when I got to the door, I was going across to your bed when I saw a bright light; over your head was a shining white dove, carrying an olive branch which it slowly dropped over your forehead. Then the scene changed, into wide spaces, then round your bed I saw gigantic figures, men with bronze skin, tattooed in red paint, looking sad and anxiously whispering, ‘If he dies, who will come to help us?’ It all vanished in seconds; but I knew you would get better and there was no need for the Last Sacraments.”

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The next day he was off with Michael Rua and the rest to Don Bonzani's school, possibly wearing one of the shabby army coats like the others. "From that day," wrote Don Bosco later, "he fulfilled even the least duty in a manner no-one could ever surpass."

World Joy, Balloons and Processions

December 8th, 1854, was an historic day for the Catholic world. It was the Feast of the Immaculate Conception and Pope Pius IX chose the day to proclaim, in St. Peter's Rome, in the presence of a vast congregation of prelates and people, that it was of faith that, from the first moment of her existence, that is, from the moment of her conception, Mary the Mother of God had never been subject to original sin. The Pope was simply confirming what had been the belief of the Church for centuries. Four years later, at Lourdes, Mary herself declared to the child Bernadette, who asked for her name: "I am the Immaculate Conception." To those who might question this manner of giving a name, one could reply that it seems to run in the family, since her Son, Jesus declared, "I am the Resurrection and the Life".

But the world that day was not concerned with linguistic niceties. For a while Italy, with its traditional love for the Madonna, forgot its troubles and gave everywhere expression to its joy and pride. All along the river that flows through Turin there were lights and altars, thousands of coloured balloons were released and as night fell, a great procession went to pay the homage and devotion of the people of Turin at the church of the Consolata, the ancient Marian shrine. Proudly and happily in that procession was Don Bosco leading his boys, singing and praising God in honour of Her to whom had been shown great marvels.

Cholera Orphans

A last memory of that intense year of 1854 for Don Bosco was a result of the cholera outbreak. Many children had been left orphans and the mayor of the city appealed to charitable people to take care of some of them. Although he had not an inch to spare, Don Bosco accepted twenty. One of them was a boy called Pietro Enria. He remembered that when the little group arrived at Valdocco, there were no beds for any of them; for the first few nights he and the others slept on a bag of leaves. Many of these children were very young and Don Bosco found time to teach them the elements of reading and writing. "More than that!" said Pietro, "I had only the clothes I was wearing and I remember I had to stay in bed so that Don Bosco and his

THE BOY WHO WAS MADE OF
GOOD STUFF

Chapter Twenty-Four

THE CURATE AT Mondonio was a fellow student of Don Bosco's, a Don Cugliero, who came to him one day, to say, "I hear you have amongst those street arabs of yours in Turin, some boys who seem to have signs of a vocation. Well, I've a little lad here, his name is Dominic Savio, who is another Saint Aloysius Gonzaga in my opinion!"

"Another exaggeration! Well, I'll be here a couple of days; ask the father to bring the lad along and we'll have a chat."

Domenico Savio, Dominic in English, was twelve, born in 1842, his father a blacksmith. His first interview with Don Bosco so impressed the priest that he recorded it later almost verbatim. "For candour and intelligence, here was no exaggeration. I was amazed," wrote Don Bosco, "at what I saw, how the power of grace had already wrought marvels in this soul, still so young in years." He gave him the memory test, beloved of Italians of that age, a page to learn a day, which Dominic brought him back word perfect within minutes.

"I see you are made of good stuff, Dominic."

"What can this stuff be used for, Father?"

"To make a fine garment for the Lord."

"Well, if I am the stuff and you are the tailor, perhaps we can both together make this fine garment."

"Well, you can come with me to Turin and start Latin; and then what?"

"Then, Father, if it's God's will, I should hope to become a priest."

When on October 29th, Dominic arrived at the Oratory he saw over Don Bosco's desk a card with the words, *Da mihi animas, coeterna tolle*. He asked what they meant and the priest explained, literally, "Give me souls, take away the rest"; in other words, all we are interested in here is the spiritual good of people; riches, power, glory, these things don't matter and we don't look for them. These five Latin words were the mainspring of Don Bosco's apostolate from the first.

Dominic remarked, "I see, here we are not in the business of making money, but in saving souls. I hope I will be able to take part in this business".