

An account of the life of young Luigi Comollo who died at the Seminary in Chieri, beloved by all for his exceptional virtue. Written by his fellow seminarian, Fr John Bosco.

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TO THE READER

Since the example of virtuous actions is worth much more than any elegant discourse, it would not be unreasonable to offer an account of the life of a young man who in a short period of time practised such beautiful virtues that he could be proposed as a model for any faithful Christian who looks to the salvation of his own soul. There is nothing extraordinary here, but everything is done with outstanding perfection so that we could apply to young Comollo the words of Holy Scripture: *Qui timet Deum nihil negligit*; whoever fears God neglects nothing that can contribute to making progress in the ways of the Lord.

Here we find many deeds and just a few reflections, leaving each one to apply whatever seems appropriate to his own state.

Everything you read here was almost always something passed on in writing at the time of his death, and already published in 1844. I take great consolation in being able to promise you assuredly of the truth of what I write. They are all public matters that I have heard or seen personally or have come to know from others of whose faith I would have no doubts.

Indeed the Superiors who were in charge at the seminary in Chieri themselves wanted to read and correct every little detail that was not quite exact. It is worth noting that this edition is not just a copy of the earlier one, but contains many new items which it did not seem appropriate to publish at the time, and other items that came to our attention later.

So, Christian reader, read on gladly, and if you stop to meditate on something along the way, you certainly will have something to savour, and something to gain for a truly virtuous tenor of life.

And if, while you are perusing what I have written, you should feel encouraged to pursue one of the virtues highlighted here, give glory to God to whom alone I dedicate these pages. I pray that you will gain every benefit.

1 Chapter I

Luigi Comollo's home town and his parents - His childhood - First hints of virtue

Luigi Comollo was born on 7 April 1817 in the fertile countryside and town of Cinzano in the hamlet of Apra, belonging to the Turin Diocese. His parents were Carlo¹ and Giovanna Comollo, both farmers by occupation.

¹Carlo Comollo, indeed a native of Cinzano, was truly a model father of a family.

Although their circumstances were not easy they had other fine things, much better than precious wealth, such as virtue and fear of the Lord. Luigi grew up as a naturally good soul, compliant, docile and gentle of heart, and when he had reached the age of reason the first seeds of virtue and devotion were seen to be taking root in him. They then continued to grow wonderfully towards perfection throughout the course of his life. From the time he had learned to pronounce the holy names of Jesus and Mary, from then on he kept them as the object of tenderness and reverence. He never showed aversion to or slackness in prayer, something common in children; in fact the longer the prayer time, the more content and happy he was.

And it often happened that when he had finished saying his usual prayers he would tell his mother: "Mother, one more *Pater* in suffrage for the poor souls in Purgatory". He easily learned to read and write, and since charity had already sprung deep roots in his tender heart, he made good use of his early education for his own spiritual advantage. On weekends and feast days, while others of his age were heading out to play, he would gather a few around him and read to them or explain what little he knew, or tell them a story of some edifying nature. This won the respect and admiration of his peers such that when he was around, nobody dared use indecent or questionable language. If something like that happened inadvertently, they would soon warn one another: "Quiet, or Luigi will hear you". On his arrival, any even slightly 'off' conversation would immediately be curbed. If he heard any talk that was unbecoming or disparaging of religious matters he would say, in his admirably pleasant way: "Don't talk like that, words like that don't sound good in the mouth of a young Christian."

One of his own friends from the same place, who was the same age as him, had the following to say:

"I spent many years of my life with young Comollo, and although

Throughout his life he sought nothing else than to support his family in its needs, doing all in his power for the good of world and to live in holy fear of God. He was always calm in the face of difficulties, as if nothing had happened, such was his resignation to God's will. He knew how to make himself loved by all, was charitable in whatever he could do for the needy, kept out of arguments, was not proud, nor violent, not easily given to anger. He drank little, was modest in dress and in speech, and never bore anyone ill will; he loved and esteemed others as he loved and esteemed himself. He was town councillor for some years and was finally elected as mayor. He never spared himself any effort in this role if it could contribute to the public good of his town, and everyone considered him to be a friend and father of his fellow citizens. In a word, he was a true follower of his brother, the late-lamented parish priest (and Rector) Comollo. Finally, after a long but painful illness, with joyful mien, and with all the comforts of our holy Catholic Religion, he quietly fell asleep in the Lord on September 1862. He was over 70 years of age.

he was a little angel and I was a bit wild, he put up with me just the same and often gave me advice that remains with me. It made a great impression on me. One day I invited him to spend some money during the local feast day.

'What do you want to do with the money', he asked 'what do you want to spend it on?'

'Buy some sweets.'

'But I have no money.'

'Don't you know how to get some?'

'No, I have no idea how.'

'Wait till your father is not looking then take some from his purse'.

'And when he finds out, and lays about my shoulders and ears...?'

'Oh your father will never find out.'

'So you need to face up to it; there's nothing else we can do. We should do nothing wrong and this I want with all my heart. So let's not talk like this'. 'Look just grab a few coins, let's buy the sweets, eat them happily and you father will know nothing about it.'

'Oh stop carrying on like this; you've let me down. Whether my father finds out or not, as soon as a steal I become a thief. Even if my father didn't find out, I could avoid being punished by him but not by God who sees everything in heaven, on earth and everywhere.'

That thought that God sees everything and is everywhere served me well on many an occasion. More than once I was on the point of going astray and doing something wrong at home or elsewhere, but recalling that God sees me and could punish me at any instance, I soon gained a horror of doing wrong and stopped myself.

According to his circumstances, Comollo led wild animals to pasture, but always far from the opposite sex, and with spiritual books in hand, which he read by himself or with others. Inviting his friends to pray, telling them interesting stories, singing hymns were amongst the practical ways in

which Luigi kept his young friends happy and away from wrongdoing. With this tenor of life, while he edified others with his good example he was the admiration of older people who were amazed at so much virtue in one so young. One father said:

I had a son and I just didn't know what to do with him: I had treated him kindly but firmly, but all in vain. The idea came to me to send him to Luigi, and maybe he could succeed in making him more obedient, so he would no longer be reason for me thinking so badly of him. My little rascal at first was reluctant to go with someone who had little in common with his view of things but soon, enticed by what he saw of Luigi, he became a friend and companion in virtue to the point that he still now shows the moderation and goodness he absorbed from that kind soul.

He was outstanding in his obedience to his parents. From his uncle Comollo, learned ecclesiastic and parish priest of Cinzano, he had learned the obedience that embraces, sustains and preserves all the other virtues; therefore, in everything he did whatever obedience proposed. He was ready and attentive to whatever his parents asked of him, and was anxious to carry out any indication of theirs, making every effort even to see what they would want in advance. He was the consolation and joy of his paternal home. When drought, hail storms or loss of animals befell them and his parents were affected by it, Luigi was the one who comforted them and urged them to see whatever happened as coming from the Lord. "We need this" he would say; "whenever the Lord's hand touches us, he always treats us with kindness; it is a sign that he remembers us and wants us too to remember him."

He would never leave his parents without their express permission. He was always very careful about that. Once he went to Caselle to visit some relatives, which he had permission to do for a brief time. Attracted by his kind manner and edifying speech, they would not let him go in time. He felt so regretful about it that he went away to cry in private when he saw that he would have to disobey, and as soon as he got home he asked forgiveness for the disobedience that, despite himself, he had committed.

He kept away from others sometimes, but to withdraw to some quiet corner of the house to pray, or meditate. "I often saw him eat in a hurry", one person who had grown up with him told me, "quickly do all his assigned tasks and while others were taking time for some recreation, he would look for a pretext to leave and go off to some furrow amongst the vines, if he

was out in the countryside, or in the hay shed if he was at home, and there he would pray aloud, or read devout books and learn to tell edifying stories that he would retell his friends". It is true that even amongst the least of us God knows how to lead the simple and unlearned and guide them towards the sublime paths of holiness.

2 Chapter II

First Confession - First Communion - Desire to become an Cleric

Real features of devotion and great tenderness in religious matters were tied strictly to these wonderful signs of virtue. This became evident after he made his first Confession. His parents looked after him as the apple of their eye, someone God had entrusted them with, and even though he had not yet reached seven years of age they had already instructed him on everything he needed in order to make a good Confession. A few days before he made this act of piety he prayed more than usual and withdrew somewhat. On the morning of his Confession he made a careful examination of conscience; he then went off to present himself to the confessor. When he was there before him, he recalled the wonderful thought that the confessor in the tribunal of penance represented Jesus Christ himself, and this made him emotional, given his reverence for the sacrament. He felt apprehension over his faults (if indeed he had committed any), and felt so sorry for his sins that he broke down in copious tears and needed to be comforted in order to begin and then continue with his Confession. He made his first Communion to the similar edification of those around him. One could say that as soon as he had reached the age of reason he used all means available to him to prepare himself worthily to receive this august Sacrament. The Lenten season prior to this great occasion he spent in the constant exercise of Christian devotion. The ten days just preceding his great day, as he used to call it, he spent with his uncle, and dealt with nobody else except his confessor. Having heard often enough in sermons that God richly rewards acts of charity towards the poor, he too wanted to do something special.

"Dear uncle", he said to him one day during his retreat, "you would know that I have made an effort to save up three francs. If you would be happy, I would like to use them to buy a pair of pants for a young lad that lives nearby. He might not be able to attend Mass for Easter because his own pair are completely worn out". His good uncle was overcome, agreed to the expense, but on the day of his Communion he gave his dear nephew precisely that sum of money to use as he thought best.

From then on he became so fond of the Sacraments of Confession and Communion that approaching them gave him the greatest of consolation; he never let an opportunity go by to benefit from them. In this regard he once told a close friend and confidante: "Confession and Communion were my support throughout all the perilous years of my youth". But however frequently he allowed himself the opportunity for Communion, just the same, when he was not able to satisfy his fervent love for Jesus, he found ways to do this through spiritual communion. When he became a cleric and found himself at the Seminary he was often heard to say: "It was because of the important work of St Alphonse with the title: *Visits to the Blessed Sacrament*, that I learned how to make a spiritual communion, which I can say has been my comfort through many dangers when I was a lay person".

Frequent visits to the Church were added to spiritual and sacramental communion. He felt so embraced by the presence of Jesus that often he would spend entire hours there, pouring out his fervent and tender feelings of affection.

He was often sent to the church to do particular tasks, and he often went there himself on the pretext that he had things to do, but he would never leave without spending some time with Jesus, and recommending himself to his dear mother Mary. There was no solemn occasion, catechism or sermon, or benediction or other function taking place at church that he did not attend, happy and contentedly offering whatever service he was able to. But someone will be wondering and saying: how come a young lad could learn such exceptional virtue at such a tender age? I can offer a quick answer. His uncle was Giuseppe Comollo, of happy memory, the provost of Cinzano, a truly good soul, who thought of nothing else but the good of the souls entrusted to his care. He loved his nephew, who also loved him tenderly. So it was that Luigi, directed by such a prudent and devout director in spiritual and temporal matters, began to emulate those virtues little by little as he grew in years.

Comollo's nature was so alien to the childish mischief normal to his age. He put up with whatever happened to him so calmly, was friendly and pleasant with his peers, modest and respectful with whoever was his superior, obedient in all things, devout, ready to lend any service which the Church allowed him to and which was compatible with his age, and did everything in such a way that it seemed to predict that the Lord had destined him to a state of greater perfection. Convinced of the great importance he should give to choice of state, he had more than once put the question to his uncle the Provost, in whom he confided every secret of his heart, and he had received an answer inasmuch as he could understand it, that God was calling him to

the ecclesiastical state. He was very happy about that since it was also his very keen desire. His uncle, seeing his nephew so keen, and so promising, wanted to encourage him in his holy resolutions. So one day he called him to come and see him:

"So you are firmly bent on becoming a priest?" he asked him.

"It is precisely this that I want and nothing else" he answered.

"Why?"

"Because priests are people who open heaven to others, so I hope I can also open heaven to myself."

So he was sent to grammar school, the middle school classes at Caselle to a priest called Strumia. And refining even more the virtues which had made him well known as a model of Christian living, there too he was admired by all who had occasion to meet him. Eyewitnesses speak with wonder about the particular progress he made in the spirit of mortification. Already as a small child he used to make little offerings to Our Lady by abstaining from some food or fruit that would accompany his main meal: "This I should give to Mary" he would say. He went still further in Caselle; as well as offering a fast each week for Mary, he would often, under some pretext, abstain from the best food. It would be enough for there to be something which he particularly liked for him not to choose it, and he always did this out of love for Mary.

"For me", wrote his teacher Strumia, "Comollo was a walking wonder. With his angelic face, always happy, always attentive to his duties, he was the delight of everyone at recreation, a model of study and moral behaviour in everything; his sober approach was not that of a child but of someone older and more practised in virtue."

Such tenor of life effectively contributed to his progress in his studies and in devotion, because it is a long-proven fact that a sober, moderate disposition in the young, especially in students is especially beneficial to health of mind and body.

3 Chapter III

Student in Chieri - his reputation for virtue precedes him - a heroic act of patience - a number of testimonies to his commendable behaviour. - Practical examples

At the beginning of the school year 1835, when I was attending school in Chieri, I found myself on one occasion at a boarding house where they were talking about the good qualities of some of the students. "I was told"

the person running the house began, "that a very holy student should be coming to such-and-such a place. I laughed, considering the matter to be a joke. "But it's true," he added "he would be the nephew of the Provost in Cinzano, a young man of remarkable virtue."

I did not take much notice of it, except that one particular fact made me remember it. It was just a few days ago that I had seen a student (without knowing his name) who showed such poise, such modesty as he went on his way, was so pleasant and courteous with whomsoever he spoke, that I really was wonderfully taken by it all. This wonderment grew when I observed the way he carried out his duties so precisely, and how he always turned up exactly on time at school. As soon as he got there he would take his assigned place and not move, unless there was something he had to do, unless his duties meant he had to.

It was the usual custom for the students to pass their time while coming to school joking, playing around, even doing dangerous somersaults and sometimes wrong things. This modest young man was also invited to get involved in these things; but he always excused himself saying that he wasn't the practical type, he didn't have the skills. Nevertheless one day one of his schoolmates came up to him and wagging a finger at him, told him to take part in the rather wild games they used to engage in at school. "No, my good friend", he replied kindly, "I'm not very good at that, I'd end up making a fool of myself". The cheeky friend, when he saw that he wasn't interested, insolently and quite unacceptably whacked him across the face. I was appalled to see this, and given that the one who did it was not as strong nor as old as the one he had assaulted, I expected that he would give back as good as he had got. But the attack turned entirely in another direction: he turned to the one who had hit him and seemed happy just to say: "If doing this makes you happy, then go in peace, knowing I'm ok with that". This made me recall what I'd heard said, that there was a saintly lad coming to our school, and when I asked what his name was and where he came from I knew then that he was Luigi Comollo, whom I had heard spoken about in such a praiseworthy manner at the boarding house that was then being run by Marchisio Giacomo.

Given that Comollo was someone with such a good heart, so well-behaved and easy to deal with in terms of his studies and his diligence, I could think of no better way to express this than with the words of this good teacher of his (and my teacher too). He wrote to me in these words:²

²Comollo's teacher was John T. Bosco from Chieri, who had graduated in Arts and Philosophy from the Military Academy in Turin and taught Sacred Rhetoric at the Royal

Although the character and nature of this fine young man Comollo might well be already well known to you since he was a fellow student, so you would have seen him close up, just the same I most gladly send you this letter with the opinion that I had already formed then when I had him as a student for two years from 1835 to 1836 in Humanities and Rhetoric at the School in Chieri. He was a talented young man with a most pleasant disposition. He worked diligently at his studies, was always so attentive to everything, and was so scrupulous and watchful of every detail concerning his duties that I cannot recall a single instance of having to scold him for something he might not have done properly. I never saw him get into arguments with other friends; instead he would answer injury or insult patiently and pleasantly. He could be proposed as a model for any young person because of his conduct, obedience, pliability; so I wished him all the very best when I heard that he was entering an ecclesiastical career. I saw him as destined to comfort his venerable uncle, the worthy Provost of Cinzano, in his old age, who loved him dearly and had sown such rare and remarkable virtues in his heart. So I was very sad to hear of Luigi's death, and my only comfort was the thought that by his virtuous life he had achieved ahead of time and in such a short time what he might have done over a long ecclesiastical career. Perhaps God wanted to call him to Himself through his untimely death because God looked beyond his age to all the good that he had done and the merit deserved, and we must accept the divine will.

You have asked me to speak of what I observed that was remarkable in him; but what else could I say that is more remarkable than his even-temper, his steadfastness at such a young and normally fickle age? From the first day that he came to my school until the end of the two years he was always the same - always good and always intent on practising virtue, piety, diligence. . .

These were his teacher's words.

And outside of school these wonderful gifts were equally put into practice. The man running the boarding house said:

I came to see in young Comollo all the virtues proper not just to

University. Now a bit old in the tooth he had nevertheless not ceased to be a good teacher of science and Religion.

his age, but to someone who was long practised in them. He was always happy and even-tempered, unperturbed by whatever was going on, and he was never looking out for what might be particularly of his own taste. He was always happy with whatever was on hand; one never heard him say: this has no taste, or it's too hot, or very cold; one never heard him say anything that was less than honest or intemperate. He spoke willingly of spiritual matters, and if someone spoke badly of religion, he demanded that they speak about sacred ministers with the greatest reverence and respect. He was very fond of solitude and never went out without express permission, always giving the time, place and reasons as to why he would be absent. For all the time he lived here, he was a great encouragement for others to live in a virtuous way, and the others were sorry when he had to change abode to put on the clerical habit and go and live in the Seminary, thus depriving us of an exceptional model of virtue.

I could also say the same, since on various occasions when I spoke with him, or we worked together, I never heard him complain about things at the time, or about the seasons, or that he had too much work to do or too much study; in fact whenever he had some free time, he would hurry off to see a friend to help him with a problem, or talk about things to do with study or devotion.

He was no less zealous about religious observances and vigilance in everything to do with devotion. This is what the spiritual director of the schools had to write. He would certainly have come to know him very well.³

You have asked me to say something about this young man whose memory is very dear to me, so I am very happy to respond. Young Luigi Comollo is not one of those people about whom I need to speak vaguely, nor will I be exaggerating in giving the most praiseworthy testimony. You already know that he belonged to a very special class of student, of the kind given to devotion and study, but Comollo stood out and shone amongst these. I am sorry to say that the Prefect of the schools, Professor Robiola, has died, since he would have been able to say many wonderful things about his studies, his excellent conduct including his conduct outside of school hours. As for me, other

³The spiritual director at the school in Chieri at the time was Fr Francis Calosso, Canon and Prior of the college of clerics, completely dedicated to zealous and devout works.

than assuring you that I never had reason to scold him for any fault, no matter how slight, I can also assure you that he was keenly present at our meetings, very self-assured, always listened attentively to the Word, was very devout in attending Mass and other sacred ceremonies, frequented the Sacraments of Confession and Communion regularly, and was truly diligent in every pious duty, exemplary in every act of virtue. I would willingly have been able to offer him as a shining and exceptional model of virtue to the other students. As for his behaviour in class, the Rhetoric year was a demanding one and only the most outstanding students in study and devotion were granted access to it. We wanted then as we want now, young students of character and habits like Luigi Comollo had. His name reminded one of St Aloysius and he emulated many of his virtues in what he did.

There's no other student that I would more willingly give testimony about than this one; I could speak of everything that is good in a young man: *Raptus est, ne malitia mutaret intellectum ejus*. I hope that he is praying for me now in heaven.

That is what the spiritual director of the public Senior schools in Chieri had to say.

The gifted Professor Robiola, then Prefect of the schools, and the Government Appointee for Studies in Chieri, also left us this honourable note about Comollo. "I would like this marvellous young man to serve as a model for all scholars in our time."

From all these reports each one can easily understand how Comollo's behaviour was made up of lots of little virtues, but done in such a way that he was universally admired for outstanding virtue. And here I add some things that I noted particularly about his external behaviour. As soon as the exercises of piety, held at weekends in the Congregation's chapel, were over, most of the students would go for a walk or some other form of relaxation. But Comollo, who preferred fewer such pastimes, would immediately go off for Catechism classes for youngsters held at St Anthony's church. And as with all other religious functions, he was a devout participant at these classes. It could have been the result of his good nature, or it could have been the result of virtue acquired by self-control, but it seemed that he had none of that anxious curiosity which youngsters normally have when they come from the villages into the city and want to see and hear everything around them. Coming to and going from school he was recollected and modest, never dilly-dallied here or there either physically or in looks, other than to offer

due respect to Superiors, churches, or some wayside shrine or other statue of the Blessed Virgin. It never happened that he would pass such by without uncovering his head as a sign of veneration. Often when walking with him I saw him tip his cap without knowing the reason why; but looking around I would then notice some picture of the Madonna on some wall or other.

Our Rhetoric year was about to finish when I asked him about some of the interesting features or monuments in the city, and he told me that in fact he was not well-informed about these, as if he were just a visitor. "How come", I said to him "that so many people come from far away to see all the exceptional things about Chieri and you live here and never think to go and see them?" "Ah my good friend," he said jokingly, "whatever is not going to help me tomorrow I don't run around looking for today." I suspect that he meant that if all these special things could contribute to his eternal welfare, which tomorrow was all about, he would not have neglected them.

4 Chapter IV

Various edifying details - His ease in speaking - Speaking of Religion - His teacher's Name Day - Flight from public shows - His happiness in setting fire to a bad book - His decision to embrace the ecclesiastical state

The more Comollo was far from temporal occupations and things of interest, the more he was well informed and instructed on things pertaining to the Church. If there was a Forty Hours devotion or other public religious function he would know about it and, if he had the time, would take part. He had a timetable for prayer, spiritual reading, visit to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and he observed it scrupulously. Circumstances had it that for a few months I went to the Cathedral precisely at the time that Luigi went there to spend time with Jesus. So I would be happy to describe what he was like there. He would take up a place near the altar if he could, kneel down, join his hands, bow his head slightly, cast his eyes down and would stay absolutely still; he would be insensitive to any voice or sound. It would often happen that when I had finished my duties, I wanted to invite him to come home with me. So I would nod my head or, coming a bit closer, would cough, to get him to move; he would always stay the same until I actually came up and touched him. Then, as if woken up from sleep, he would move and although a little unwillingly, would accept my invitation. He willingly served Mass even on school days; but on holidays it would be normal for him to serve as many as four or five.

Although he was so focused on things of the spirit, you would never see him with clouded face or sad but always happy, always content, and with his pleasant way of speaking he made everyone he spoke with happy. He used often say that he liked the words of the Prophet David: Serve the Lord in gladness: Serve the Lord in holy cheerfulness. He liked to talk about history, poetry, the difficulties of Latin or Italian, but humbly, amiably enough such that while offering his opinion he always deferred to others.

He had a special friend, a confidante with whom he would speak of spiritual matters. He gained great consolation when dealing with and speaking of such topics. He considered that Jesus showed immense love by giving himself to us as food in Holy Communion. When he spoke of the Blessed Virgin, one saw him full of great tenderness, and after telling or hearing tell of some grace of healing for the body, at the end he would blush or break down in tears exclaiming: "If Mary is so good to our miserable body, how much more will she do something for the soul of whoever calls on her?" Oh! If everyone was truly devoted to Mary, what happiness there would be in the world".

Such was the esteem he had for religious matters that not only did he suffer when someone spoke disparagingly of them but he could not remain indifferent. It happened to me once that I spoke jokingly using the words of Holy Scripture, and I was reminded of the fact immediately. He told me not to joke about the Lord's words.

And here I would like to say something that gives me much pleasure and talk about some pleasant and at the same time edifying episodes that happened to this model for youth. His devotion and kind heart never faltered when it was a case of showing some sign of gratitude. He did this especially when he came to know about the Name Day of his Humanities teacher in Fourth Year. In 1835 this was Dr John Bosco. His charity, patience and the kind way he treated his pupils, his concern that we make progress in our studies and devotion had made him, we could say, a favourite of all the students, so that everyone was just waiting for his Name Day to make whatever gesture of gratitude he could think of. Luigi did not want to be the least amongst these. On the morning of 24 June he went in good time to make his Confession and serve the Mass, where he also received Holy Communion. This offering and these prayers gave our teacher great pleasure because, he used say, they came from the most virtuous of his pupils.

For his part the good teacher did not want to be outdone in generosity. He established the following Thursday as a day for an outing with all his pupils to the Palermo fields as they were called, some three kilometres from Chieri. He prepared a sumptuous repast there. During the first course a

number of recitals were given and the teacher responded. There was plenty of applause and clapping of hands. Then later came afternoon tea and everyone could eat and drink whatever he wanted. Once they had eaten well and had something to drink, they began to jump, run and sing until they could do so no more.

But at a certain point in the recreation, word spread that Comollo had disappeared. The concern was that something had happened to him, especially since a few days earlier one of the boys had died, drowned in the waters of the Fontana Rossa not very far from there. Everyone therefore was afraid and went looking everywhere around, but to no avail. Finally they found him somewhere nobody had expected to find him. He was tucked away near a nearby chapel between a bush and a pillar.

"Comollo," they asked, "what are you doing here?" Everybody is asking what happened to you and is anxiously looking for you. Come."

He gave them a look as if he had been disturbed from something he liked doing and said:

"I'm sorry you were so worried, but today I had not yet recited the Rosary, and I wanted to pay this tribute to the Blessed Virgin".

So his friends, after saying good bye and thanking the teacher, left for Chieri.

While they were going through the town to the Piano Piazza as it was called, we found ourself near an acrobat who was amusing the lazy good for nothing types with his games and antics.

"Look here a moment", two of Comollo's friends said, "look at these clever things he is doing, He can really make us laugh."

Comollo immediately left his two friends saying: "He might get us to laugh with the first ten words, but the eleventh one will be a bad word and will give scandal. My uncle has often advised me not to hang around with charlatans, acrobats, dice throwers, or other public shows, because he used say that you could go there with an innocent soul but it would be a miracle if you came back still in that state."

One day some of his friends wanted to go with him while coming back from school. But as they were walking, little by little the talk turned to things that didn't please him at all. He started to walk faster to leave them behind. So his sham friends said: "Since you are in such a hurry take this book. You'll find some great examples in it."

Luigi took it, but once at home he found that although it was not exactly a forbidden book it was, just the same, dangerous for a simple youngster. Without hesitation, and almost as if he were enjoying himself, he lit a small bonfire, called the owner of the house, and throwing the book into the fire

began to laugh, jump, and joke saying: "Here you are O book! You wanted to put me into the fire, and now I'm burning you. Yes! Burn in these flames so I don't end up in eternal fire because of you."

He used gladly listen to his friends talking, his superiors and in general also, priests. But when someone wanted to start talking about them, he would jump in saying that either they speak well of them or not at all, because they were ministers of God. This is how Luigi prepared himself to receive the clerical habit, speaking of it always with great veneration and joy. "Could it be possible", he used say, "that I, a miserable cowherd, could become a priest, a pastor of souls? I don't feel inclined to do anything else: the confessor tells me this, my own desire tells me, only my sins tell me otherwise. I will go and sit for the exam and the results will judge what is the divine will concerning my vocation". He often asked some of his close friends to pray for him that the Lord would enlighten him and let him know if he was called to the ecclesiastical state or not, And so it was that with the esteem of his classmates, the love of his superiors, and honoured and considered by everyone as a model of every virtue, he finished his year of Rhetoric in 1836.

5 Chapter V

Preparation - Clerical clothing day - His mother's words

Conollo's preparation for his clerical clothing day could certainly serve as a norm for young students wanting to make a choice of state of life, and especially for those who aspire to the ecclesiastical state. The vocation or call to the priestly state must come from God, therefore a young man should not take account of what relatives with their temporal interests might say, or what vainglory and the desire for earthly comforts might suggest. Do you want to be sure of your vocation? First of all choose a good confessor, and open your heart to him and inasmuch as it is possible, never change confessor. When for some reasonable motive you might have to change, at the time you are making your choice of a state of life open your conscience to him and ask him for his opinion, and then regard it as certain and follow the Lord's voice; because he says in the Gospel: Qui vos audit, me audit, that is, whoever listens to the voice of his spiritual director, listens to God's voice; this is with regard to the moral qualities which are essential indeed absolutely necessary for a young man wanting to embrace the ecclesiastical state.

A friend had asked him about some things pertaining to vocation; he

replied with this letter.

My dear friend,

You ask me how the desire to embrace the ecclesiastical state came about for me and what are the ways to know about one's vocation and persevere in it. It is not my job to be giving you advice on such an important matter, but since I am dealing with a friend, I open myself up to you in all confidence and tell you what I myself did. Other than my liking for the Sanctuary, which I had had since I was little, and for frequenting the Sacraments, the example I constantly had before my eyes from my good uncle the Provost really urged me on. His simplicity of life, his holy habits, his even-temper in every difficulty, his spirit of piety, his charity to the poor, the peace and constant cheerfulness of this good soul were all a constant encouragement to me to improve myself and to love the state that he had embraced.

And he told me to go ahead in confidence on the way the Lord was calling me. I opened my heart to him in Confession, never held back the least secret of my conscience from him, indeed I gave him from the outset full freedom to help me in whatever way would be to my advantage, including outside of Confession, with whatever I had told him". The prudent man that he was, he was always able to guide me securely.

I never omitted two items of advice from him. Meditation and examen of conscience daily. To young people especially these things seem boring. But whoever perseveres for a while in these two practices of piety, as well as the spiritual advantage, will find great consolation and pleasure and will never let them go. And in order to discover my vocation I added the following prayers to my usual morning prayers.

Here I am at your feet, O merciful Virgin, to implore from you the most important grace of my choice of a state of life. I seek nothing other than to perfectly do the will of your Divine Son throughout my life. I earnestly desire to choose that state that will give me most consolation at the hour of my death. Oh! Mother of Good Counsel, let me hear a voice that will eliminate any doubt in my mind. You are the Mother of my Saviour and I expect that you will also be the Mother of my salvation; because if you, O Mary, do not share a ray of the Divine Sun with me,

what other light will enlighten me? If you do not instruct me, O Mother of eternal Wisdom, who will teach me? Hear O Mary, my humble prayers. Doubtful and wavering as I am, point me in the right direction, guide me on right paths that lead to eternal life, since you are the only hope of virtue and life whose results are non other than results of honour and honesty. Then I used conclude with three *Paters*, an *Ave* and a *Gloria*.

So, my good friend, that is what I did in order not to make a mistake about my vocation. Do the same, but especially open up your heart to your confessor and see his decision as a voice from heaven.

As far as study is concerned, and it is very necessary, submit to the judgement of your examiners and recognise the will of God in your exams. This is what Comollo did when he found himself in a similar situation in life.

Having presented for the exam and obtained a favourable result he then prepared himself for his clothing day as a cleric with keen sentiments of fervour and devotion. I would not know how to clearly express all the feelings of tenderness that he experienced in that situation. He prayed and asked others to pray for him, fasted, often broke down in tears, spent a lot of time in church so that when the day arrived for his feast (as he called the day he received the clerical habit) he made a general confession and received Communion with great fervour. He was as happy as if he had received the most honourable job in the world. He was caught up in a spirit of devotion and religious sentiment, recollected and modest. He seemed like an angel, dressed as he was in the ecclesiastical habit that he so much longed for and respected. That day was always a memorable one for him and he used say that his heart was completely changed: from a pensive and gloomy type he became amiable and cheerful, and every time he thought back to that day his heart was overwhelmed with fondness and joy. A letter he sent to one of his teachers has preserved for us his holy impressions of that day.

Meanwhile the opening day of the Seminary had arrived. He would duly take up residence and stand out not so much for extraordinary virtues, but for accomplished ones.

After his clothing day and before he left for the Seminary he spent the days in retreat and in devout practices. His parents never ceased to remind him to carry out all his duties well and to keep away from bad companions. "Dear Luigi," his mother said to him on the evening before he left, "you are leaving for the Seminary and I will be with you in my prayers and thoughts. You will have Superiors there who will know how to guide you on the way of

virtue; be obedient to them. But for God's sake do not ignore the ongoing dangers in these holidays from a bad companion. You thought he was good, but we all judged him otherwise and we sadly became aware that here was a wolf to flee from. If it ever happens that you meet up with friends who speak with little respect for devout things, murmur against their superiors or disapprove of their approach, let them never be your friends and try to stay far away from them."

6 Chapter VI

He enters the Seminary - He does his best - The sound of the bell - respect for and obedience to superiors - He patiently puts up with insult - His conversations - His affectionate devotion

Having arrived at the Seminary he was soon convinced that the place alone was not sufficient to take in knowledge and virtue, but detailed observance of the rules was necessary and the exact fulfilment of one's duties. The greatest concern for his duties of study and devotion, a burning desire for mortification were the thoughts that occupied Comollo during his Seminary days. So that he would never forget, he had written on a piece of paper kept in a book or an exercise book which he would use every day: whoever does a little does a lot by doing what he must do; but he who does a lot does nothing if he is doing what he shouldn't be doing.

He had read how Saint Alphonsus made a vow never to waste time. This was cause for his highest admiration and he sought to imitate him in it in every way possible. So from the very moment he first entered the Seminary he applied himself with such diligence to study and devotion that he benefited from whatever occasion, whatever means would keep him busy all the time. When the bell went he immediately interrupted what he was doing to answer God's voice (which was what he called the sound of the bell), calling him to his duty. I noticed more than once that even if the bell rang just once, it was impossible for him to continue what he had in his hands; he became confused and didn't know what to do. The virtue of obedience was so firmly rooted in him.

I won't speak of the superiors, for whom his obedience was prompt and heartfelt without ever asking why he was being asked to do something. But the college assistants, and his equals received the same attention and ready obedience to any order or advice, as well as his superiors. When the bell went for study he was there most punctually, and applied himself in such a recollected way that any noise, chatter, or frivolous behaviour from anyone

else went as if he did not notice it. He did not move unless there was another bell.

One day it happened that a classmate, passing behind him, knocked his coat to the floor. He was content to make a simple remark about it being better if he looked where he was going next time. His classmate, forgetting that he too was a cleric, and forgetting that charity demands we put up with the faults of others and not insult them, got angry and raised his voice using offensive and threatening words. So Comollo, taking no notice of the insults thrown at him, settled himself again at his desk and continued to study calmly as if nothing had happened or been said.

In recreation, in groups, when going out for a walk he liked to always talk about academic matters, and in fact at study time he used to mentally prepare a series of things that he didn't fully understand so that he could soon raise them with a classmate in free time, someone he had special confidence in and who could explain them. He would usually always use Latin in such discussions. This became of great advantage to him since he then gained proficiency in and familiarity with this language in his seminary studies.. He knew how to liven up conversations with various items of useful research and with anecdotes, but constantly observed his praiseworthy trait of good manners, keeping quiet when someone else was talking. And often enough he would stop halfway through a word to make room for someone else to speak.

He greatly abhorred the spirit of criticism or complaints about others; he spoke of his superiors but always reverently and respectfully; he spoke of his friends but always charitably and with moderation; he spoke about the timetable, the constitutions and rules of the Seminary, meals, but always expressing satisfaction and contentment. He did this in such a way that I could in all honesty say that in the two and a half years that I was at the Seminary I never heard him once offer a word that was against the principle he had firmly established in his mind: speak well of others or not at all. When he was forced to offer his opinion on someone else he always tried to interpret them in the best sense, saying that he had learned from his uncle that if an action had a hundred possibilities, ninety-nine of which were bad, one ought take the one that was good and judge things favourably. On the other hand speaking of himself he remained quiet about anything that might rebound to his benefit without ever speaking about things that would give him importance or honour. In fact when he was being praised he would joke about it, putting himself down while others were putting him on a pedestal.

One of his friends, full of wonder at seeing a young cleric adorned with so many virtues, told him one day: "Comollo, you are a saint". Without

comment on these words of praise, he took two sticks of bread which we Piedmentese call grissini, and placing them on his head like two horns, answered jokingly: "Here's your saint, I mean, your little devil."

Those little 'flowers' of devotion that we had seen him adorned with amongst the clods, in the fields, in his studies, far from withering with the years, flowered in all their charm and perfection. It was wonderful to see how Comollo, given the bell for prayer or other sacred function, immediately ran there with the greatest diligence and kneeling or sitting up straight, in edifying recollection, he carried out his religious practices; one never saw the least reluctance in him about going to chapel or any other place to be there for his religious duties. In the morning at the first sound of the bell he got straight out of bed and adjusting whatever he needed to was there in church a quarter of an hour before everyone else to ready himself for prayer.

Every time the seminarians attended solemn functions in church they no longer recited the Rosary there, but Comollo never left that devotion aside, so once the public functions were over he would, with another friend, withdraw to the chapel to 'pay his debt' as he used say, to his good Mother by reciting the most holy Rosary. On holidays and especially over the Christmas holiday period, or Carnival, and the Easter solemnities, he would, even more than once a day, draw apart from common entertainments and recite the penitential psalms, or the Office of the dead, or of the Blessed Virgin in suffrage for the souls in Purgatory.

He loved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament and as well as frequent visits or spiritual communion, he took advantage of any occasion for spiritual communion to the great edification of those who were nearby. He would fast for a day in honour of Mary most holy before receiving Communion. After Confession he did not want to speak about anything except the greatness, goodness and love of Jesus whom he was going to receive the following day. When it was time for him to approach the sacred table I saw him taken up with the most lofty and devout thoughts. With full composure, walking slowly and deliberately with his eyes cast down, and at times trembling with emotion, he would approach the Holy of Holies. When he had returned quickly to his place he seemed beside himself, deeply moved and fully taken up in devotion. He prayed, but his prayer was interrupted by sobs, groans and tears; he could not quieten his rapture of affectionate piety until Mass was over and the morning hymn began. He was often warned to curb his external show of emotion since it might offend others: "I feel so full of affection and so happy of heart," he told me, "that if I can't express it I feel I will suffocate." "On the day I go to Communion," he said at other times, "I feel so full of joy and goodness that I cannot understand or explain it." From

this anyone can see clearly that Comollo was well advanced on the way of perfection. Those movements of love of God, of gentleness, of contentment in spiritual matters are the result of his keen faith, his burning charity which was deeply rooted in his heart and constantly guided him in his actions.

7 Chapter VII

Modesty of the eyes and mortification of the senses - His penances - His holidays - His recollectedness - His first sermon - Its good results

The exemplary mortification of all his external senses went hand in hand with his inner devotion. He was modest in the use of his eyes when there was often an outing to gardens or villas, so that he saw little of the remarkable things around him which all the others used admire. He never let his eyes wander but would carry on a conversation with a friend in Latin taking no notice of anything else that was happening around him. It sometimes happened that on return from an outing he would be asked if he had seen his father, since they had passed nearby and if he had greeted him. He would answer that he hadn't seen him. He was often visited by some of his cousins in Chieri, but he found this a real cross, having to talk to people of the opposite sex. So as soon as they had said what they wanted to and needed to, he would encourage them kindly to visit him as little as possible, then would quickly take his leave. He was sometimes asked if his relatives (those he treated with such reserve) were little or big, or particularly pretty, and he would reply that they looked tall in the shade but he knew nothing else about them since he had never ever looked them fully in the face. What a wonderful example and worthy to be emulated by youth especially those who aspire to or find themselves in the ecclesiastical state!

The simplest and most indifferent of activities became a way for him to exercise virtue. He had a habit of crossing his legs and resting his elbow on the table when at the table or in the study hall or in school. Out of love for virtue he wanted to correct this too, and to succeed he asked a friend to tell him immediately he did it and even to give him a small penance every time he saw him take up that position. This is where his exterior composure in church came from; from the study hall, in school or in the refectory he edified and charmed anyone who saw him.

Mortification in food was something he practised daily: ordinarily the more he felt the need to take something (breakfast), that's when he would stay away. He was extremely frugal at table: he drank little wine and what

he did drink was watered down. Sometimes he did not eat the main course or drink wine but was content to eat bread dipped in water, using the specious pretext that it was better for his health, but in reality it was his spirit of mortification. In fact, when he was told that this way of eating would be bad for his head or his stomach, he replied: "For me it's enough that it doesn't harm my soul". Every Saturday he fasted out of love for the Blessed Virgin; and on other vigils in Lent even before he was obliged to fast, he fasted so severely and took food in so small quantities that a friend he sat near at table said on a number of occasions that Comollo wanted to commit suicide! These were the main external acts of penance that I noticed, from which one can imagine what he practised in his heart, and how Comollo's soul was constantly taken up in affectionate love for God, active charity towards his neighbour and a burning desire to suffer for love of Jesus Christ.

He liked talking, so if anyone felt a bit down, speaking with him brought some consolation. He was so modest, edifying in word and in dealing with people that even the most indiscreet individuals were obliged to recognise in him a mirror of modesty and virtue. One of his companions used say that Comollo for him was a constant sermon; he was like honey that sweetened hearts, including the most bizarre types. Another said several times that he wanted to do everything possible to become a saint and to succeed he had decided to copy Comollo; and although he saw himself way behind such a model of virtue he was, just the same, very happy with the little he had been able to emulate.

As far as his behaviour during the holidays was concerned, it was the same as in the Seminary. He went very regularly to the Sacraments, frequented sacred functions, was punctual in teaching Catechism to the youngsters at church (he did this dressed in lay attire), and we met along the way each time. This is how he described his timetable in a letter he wrote to a friend.

I have already spent some two months on holidays which, even though it has been very hot, have been very good for my health. I have already studied what was left over from logic and ethics, which I had left aside during the year; I would willingly take up reading Giuseppe Flavio's Church History as you suggested, but I have already started reading the history of heresies, so I won't have time. I hope I can do it another year. As for the rest my room is a little piece of earthly paradise; I go in and do exercises, laugh, study, sing, and the only thing missing is you to joke with. At table. at recreation, going for a walk I always enjoy the company of my dear uncle who, despite his age is always happy

and gracious and every time he tells me something better than the one before, all of which makes me very content.

I am waiting for the moment we agreed on, be happy; and if you think well of me then pray to the Lord for me etc.

He was extremely fond of anything regarding the ecclesiastical ministry and was very happy when he could be busy about those things, a clear sign that the Lord was calling him to the state that he aspired to. His uncle the Provost, in order to nurture such fertile soil and encourage his nephew's inclinations, gave him the task of giving a sermon in honour of Mary most holy. He wrote about this task in another letter addressed to the usual friend.

I have to tell you about something that makes me happy on the one hand but has left me a bit worried on the other. My uncle has given me the job of preaching on the glorious Assumption of the Virgin Mary. My heart is full of joy and excitement at being able to speak of my dear Mother. But on the other hand, knowing my own inadequacy I can clearly see how I am far from being able to worthily thread her praises together. Be that as it may, with her support, which I must speak of, I am ready to obey; I have already written it out and studied it a bit; on Monday I will come to you and you can listen to me give it and make observations which I will find very acceptable, regarding gestures and content.

Recommend me to my Angel Guardian for the trip. . . . See you.

I still have this sermon with me which, although he used various quotes from creditable sources, is no less written by himself, and one notes expressions of those keen sentiments with which his heart burned regarding the great Mother of God And he was a great success in delivering it. "Just as I was about to stand before the people", he wrote, "my strength and my voice failed me, and my knees were knocking together. But Mary quickly put her hand on me and I became vigorous and strong; I started and then continued without the least hesitation. Mary did this, not I. Praise to her."

A few months later when I was in Cinzano, I asked what people were saying about the cleric Comollo and the sermon he had given. Everyone answered full of praise for him. His uncle said he saw God's work in his nephew. It was a sermon delivered by a saint, someone said. "Oh", another exclaimed, "he seemed like he was an angel in the pulpit, so modest and so clear in his argument!" Others spoke of the wonderful manner in which

he preached. And then they repeated some of the ideas and even the very words which were still fixed in their memory. Without doubt a farmer of such good will would have done great good in the Lord's vineyard. Such were his uncle's expectations, such was the hope his parents had, and such was the desire of his townsfolk, superiors, and friends. But God saw that he was pretty much ready for heaven. And so the evils of the world might not affect his intellect, he wanted to recompense his good will and call him to enjoy the fruits of the merits already acquired and the merits he earnestly still wanted to acquire.

8 Chapter VIII

Hints of his impending death - A view of the countryside - Words addressed to Cavaliere Fassone - His last look at his home town - His father's words - He comes back to the Seminary - His fervour was extraordinary

It is not my intention to talk about matters I consider to be supernatural; I intend only to speak of facts that happened, leaving everyone free to judge as they see best.

In the autumn holidays of 1838 I went to Cinzano to arrange for some matters pertaining to the coming school year. One nice day I went walking with Comollo up a hill where we could look down on the vast expanse of fields, meadows and vineyards.

"See, Luigi," I began to say, "how poor the harvest is this year! Poor farmers! So much work and almost all of it in vain!"

"It is the hand of the Lord," he replied, "weighing on us. Believe me, our sinfulness is the reason. In the coming year I hope the Lord will give us more abundant results."

"I hope so too, and good for those who can enjoy them. But let's keep going and leave these melancholy thoughts aside. We'll be patient this year, but next year we will have a more abundant harvest and make better wine."

"You will be drinking it."

"Maybe you intend to keep drinking your usual water?"

"I hope to be drinking a better wine."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Forget it, forget it. . . the Lord knows what he is doing."

"That's not what I asked. I asked what you meant by the words: I hope to be drinking a better wine. Would you like to be going to heaven, perhaps?"

"Although I only expect to be get to heaven after death purely through the Lord's mercy, just the same for some time now I have had a strong desire to taste the ambrosia of the Blessed and the feeling that my days are numbered."

Comollo said this with a smile on his face at a time when he was in the best of health and was getting ready to go back to the Seminary.

He said almost the same once when he came to Turin. At the end of the holidays he went to the Capital and spent a few days at the home of someone who was a good judge of things,⁴ and I quote the following words of his:

We were very much edified by the modesty of good Luigi.

Courteous, pleasant, simple, he inspired devotion in every thing he did, but especially when he prayed, he seemed like another St Aloysius. It was our great wish that he would spend some more days with us, but he really wanted to go. As he was leaving I said: "Goodbye, perhaps we will see each other again."

"No, no," he replied, "we will not see each other again."

"It wasn't you I was thinking of when I spoke that way," I replied, "but because of my advanced age I would like, indeed I hope, that you will come to celebrate one of your first Masses."

"Well then", he replied frankly and resolutely: "I will not be saying a first Mass; you will still be here in the coming year, but I will not be. So pray to the Lord for me. Goodbye." These last words, said so frankly by someone so beloved, left us quite moved and we found ourselves often asking if good Luigi had some inkling of his death? So when we heard the sad news of his death we said, full of admiration, that he knew all too well.

I lend much credence to this story since I have checked it out with other people and noted the same ideas and words.

When these holidays were over and we were heading back to the Seminary, we reached a spot from which we could look back over his home town. While

⁴The home of Cav. Fassone, intendant at the Royal Park de' tabacchi.

we paused, he looked out over the countryside with unusual seriousness. His father took a couple of steps towards him and said: "What are you doing Luigi? Are you not feeling well? What are you looking at?"

"I'm in good health, I'm feeling fine, but I cannot take my gaze off Cinzano."

"What can you see there? Are you sorry to be going back to the Seminary?"

"Not only am I not sorry, but I want to get to that peaceful place as soon as possible; what I am looking at is our dear Cinzano that I am looking at for the last time". When he was asked again if he was not feeling well, if he wanted to return home, he said: "Nothing, it's nothing; I'm fine, let's move on happily, the Lord is waiting for us." "These words", his father says "we have often repeated in the family, and every time I go past that spot, even now, I find it hard not to burst into tears". This detail was reported to me and others before Comollo's death.

Despite these forebodings concerning the end of his mortal life, ones that Comollo had uttered on more than one occasion, in his usual calm way and with his customary imperturbability and even-temper he got back to his studies again and continued to be exemplary in his practices of piety. At the half yearly exam he won (as he had done the previous year) a prize of seventy lire which was usually awarded each year to the one who stood out most for studies and devotion.

Although he showed the same care in carrying out all his duties, the same cheerfulness and conviviality in discussions and at recreation, nevertheless I had noticed something mysterious about his behaviour, I'm not sure what. He seemed even more attentive in prayer and all the other exercises of piety. At that time in the Seminary, we only had the opportunity of receiving Holy Communion on Sundays. Comollo felt unhappy about that and to satisfy his devotion somehow, on Thursdays he asked if he could serve some Masses at the St Philip church next to the Seminary. Doing that meant missing out on recreation and on breakfast, but he put up with this willingly judging that it was well recompensed by the Communion that he could easily take while serving Mass. He always wanted to talk about the (Turin) Martyrs. "These are real pastors of the Lord Jesus Christ's sheep," he said, "since they gave their lives to save the lost sheep. How much glory will be reserved for them in heaven". At other times he exclaimed: "Oh, if I could at least, as I am about to depart this world, hear the Lord's consoling words – *euge, servi bone*; come faithful servant!"

9 Chapter IX

His thoughts on Paradise - His recollection in prayer - Meditations on hell - The Retreat

He spoke about paradise in joyful rapture; and one of the most beautiful things he used say was this: "When I am alone or unoccupied I when I can't sleep at night then I go for the most beautiful walks. I imagine that I am on a high mountain and from its peak I can see all the beauties of nature. I contemplate the sea, the land, towns, cities, and all the magnificent things about them; I exalt when I see the peaceful sky, I admire the firmament where all the scattering of stars form the most wonderful spectacle. Then to all this I add the idea of beautiful music, that with voice and sound seems to echo through the mountains and valleys. My mind takes delight in my imagination, I turn around, lift up my eyes and there I am before the City of God. I see it from the outside, then I come closer and can penetrate within; just imagine all the innumerable things I then see up close.

Continuing on his 'walk' he would then talk about all the interesting and edifying things that he would inspect closely during these sessions in Paradise. It was in this year, too, that he discovered the secret of praying without distraction. "Do you want to know," he told me, "how I begin to pray? It is a very material image that will make you laugh. I close my eyes, and in my thoughts I am carried into a large hall whose ceiling is held up by many columns that are most exquisitely decorated, and towards the back of the hall a huge throne rises up above which I imagine God is in all his majesty; then around him all the choirs of the Blessed. This material image is a wonderful help to me to lift up my thoughts to the infinite Divine Majesty before whom I prostrate myself and then with all the respect I can muster, I begin to pray."

Following what the spiritual teachers say, this demonstrates how much Comollo's mind was detached from sensible things and how much control he could exercise in gathering up all his faculties of mind to enter into spiritual conversation with God. It is all a sign of the highest degree of perfection. In this same year, while he was hearing Mass during weekdays, he would read meditations on hell by P. Pinamonti, and I heard him often comment on this: "During this year I have been reading meditations on hell in the chapel. I had already read them and I read them again, and even though the contents are sad and frightening, I want to keep on reading since while considering the intensity of those torments while I am still alive, I might not have to experience them in real terms after death."

During Lent (1839), and with keen devotion, he also made his retreat.

After this, he said that he did not have long to wait in this world and that the greatest favour the Lord could grant a Christian was that of making a retreat. "It is the greatest of graces", he told his friends rapturously, "that God can give a Christian, to give him time to arrange matters of soul in full awareness, at his leisure, and with the support of all kinds of favourable circumstances such as meditation, instructions, readings, good example. Oh! How good you are to us, Lord!" How ungrateful would the one who did not make use of all this goodness from God"

10 Chapter X

Symptoms of illness - God's judgement - A frightening dream - Peace

While I attempt to tell about matters regarding Comollo's final illness and death, I consider it good to repeat that what I say here is what was written down during his illness and immediately after his death: things that were read and re-read by his superiors at the Seminary. and by friends who were eyewitnesses, before it was all sent to the press. They all say that there is nothing here that does not conform to the truth. It is also good to note that an innocent soul adorned with so many virtues as was Comollo's, tells us that there is nobody who does not dread the approaching hour of death. He too experienced great apprehension. Ah, if good souls are so afraid to present themselves before the divine Judge and render account of their actions, what will happen, O readers, what will happen to someone who gives no thought to anything but the pleasures of life! What a terrible moment that will be for the sinful person!

But let's get on with the story. It was the morning of 25th March 1839, the Feast of the Annunciation, when I met Comollo in the corridors as I was going to the chapel. He was waiting for me. I asked him if he had slept well and he replied frankly that he was all done in. I was very surprised, given that the day before we had walked a good bit together and I had left him in perfect health. I asked him why he had spoken thus. He replied: "I feel cold throughout all my body, my head aches and my stomach seems blocked; but my bodily ills don't hurt all that much, what terrifies me (this he said in trembling voice) is that I must present myself before God's grand judgement." I encouraged him not to be so anxious, even though these were serious matters, but rather remote for him and he still had time to prepare himself. We went into the chapel. He heard Mass after which he suddenly became very weak and had to immediately go to bed. Once the functions

were over in the chapel, I went to visit him in the dormitory. As soon as he saw me amongst those standing around, he made a sign for me to come closer, as if he had something of great importance to show me, and then he began saying: "You were telling me that it was something remote and that I still had time to prepare myself before going, but that's not the case; I am certain that I must appear before God soon; I have little time left to get myself ready; need I say it more clearly? We will be saying goodbye". Nevertheless I encouraged him not to worry and not to make himself anxious with ideas of the kind. "I am not worried, and I am not anxious," he interrupted me and then said "I am only thinking that I must go before this judgement, judgement which has no appeal, and this makes me feel agitated". I was much affected by these words; so I was constantly asking if there was any news about him and every time I visited him he repeated the same things: the time to present myself to divine judgement is at hand; we must say goodbye." During his illness he would have said this not once but more than fifteen times. And from the first day of his illness he told others the same when they went to visit him. He also said that his illness would be misunderstood by the doctors, that operations and medicines were to no avail; and this in fact was the case. These matters which at first I attributed to mere fear of divine judgement, when I saw that little by little things were happening as he had said, I spoke about them with some friends and with our Spiritual Director. At first he did not take much notice but then he was very surprised when he began to see the effects.⁵

Meanwhile Comollo was still in bed and feverish on the Monday; Tuesday and Wednesday he got up but seemed sad and melancholy, all taken up with the thoughts of divine judgement. On Wednesday evening he went to bed sick again and never got up again. On the Thursday, Friday and Saturday of that week (Holy Week), he was bled three times, took various medicines, broke into copious sweats, but there was no improvement. On the Saturday evening, Easter Vigil, I went to visit him: "Since we must leave one another and soon I must present myself before the judgement seat," he said to me, "I would dearly like you to stay beside me tonight." The Director, Fr Gisueppe Mottura, seeing that the patient was getting much worse, willingly granted me permission to spend the night at his bedside. It was the 30th March just before the solemn day of Easter. "Be on the lookout" the Director told me, "and if you see that things are serious, call me immediately. Take note of

⁵The Spiritual Director at the Seminary in Chieri at the time was Fr Giuseppe Mottura, who was then made canon of the distinguished college of canons at Giaveno when he was of advanced age. This worthy ecclesiastic, after living an honourable life, finished his days with his edifying death in 1876.

anything special about the illness and give the doctor details about it in the morning". Around eight o'clock the fever became very strong; at a quarter past eight he begun to go into convulsions and lost his senses. At first he cried out at length as if he were terrified by some frightening object or some grim spectre. From then until half past eight he came back to his senses somewhat and looking at those standing around he cried out in a loud voice: "Oh, judgement!" Then he began writhing with such strength that five or six of us around him could hardly keep him in the bed.

This went on for a good three hours after which he returned fully to his senses. He spent a long time then looking pensive as if caught up in serious reflection, then discarding all that atmosphere of mournfulness and terror that he had shown for the last few days concerning divine judgement, he began to look peaceful and calm. He spoke, laughed, answered questions and we thought that he had almost returned to his regular condition of health again. He was asked why the sudden change given that he was so melancholic earlier and now so happy and amiable. He seemed a bit embarrassed to answer that question; then, with his eyes darting here and there as if nobody would hear him he began to speak in a whisper to someone near him:

Up until now I dreaded dying for fear of divine judgement; this terrified me utterly; but now I am at peace and have no fear of what is to come and what they will tell you about in friendly confidence. While I was extremely agitated out of fear of divine judgement, I seemed suddenly to be transported into a wide, deep valley where the power of the wild currents and a strong wind sapped all the strength of anyone who was there. In the middle of this valley was a great abyss like a huge deep furnace, with flames flaring up from it. Every now and then I saw souls, some of whom I recognised, fall into it and then huge bouts of fire and smoke went up into the heavens. At this frightening scene I cried out for fear of falling into that frightful chasm. So I turned back to flee and there was a countless number of monsters all of horrible and different shapes trying to hurl me into that abyss. . . I cried out more loudly and even more terrified, without knowing what I was doing and I made the Sign of the Cross. When I did that all the monsters sought to bow their heads but unable to do so they began squirming in agony and drawing away from me somewhat. Still I was unable to flee and get away from that accursed place; then I saw a multitude of armed men like strong warriors coming to my aid. They vigorously attacked the monsters, some of whom

were torn apart, others were lying on the ground while others still hurriedly took flight. Freed from danger I began walking through that broad valley on foot until I reached the foot of a tall mountain which could only be climbed by a staircase. But the stairs were full of fat serpents ready to devour anyone who tried to climb up. But there was no other way and I did not dare to go forward, fearing that I would be devoured by the serpents. I was beaten by weariness and anxiety, without any more strength left in me, when a lady whom I consider to have been the Mother of us all, dressed in great magnificence, took me by the hand and made me stand up straight, saying: 'Come with me. You have worked in my honour and called upon me many times, therefore it is right that now I take pity on you. The Communion in my honour deserve that you escape from the danger that the enemy of souls has put you in.' Meanwhile she signalled that I should follow her up the stairs. As she put her feet on the steps, all the serpents turned their deadly heads away and did not look at us until we were quite a distance from them. When we had reached the top of the staircase I found myself in a delightful garden where I saw things that I could never have imagined existed. When I felt safe, the kind Lady added these words: 'Now you are saved. My stairs are the ones that will lead you to the greatest good. Courage my son, time is short. The flowers that are such a wonderful ornament in this garden will be picked by angels who will then make a crown of glory for you so that you can be numbered amongst my children in the kingdom of heaven.' And saying that she disappeared.

"These things", Comollo finished by saying, "filled my heart and made me feel at peace so that instead of fearing death I wanted it to come quickly so I could join the angels in heaven and sing the praises of my Lord.

So much for hell.

Whatever you might want to say about this story, the fact was that however great was his fear of appearing before God, he then demonstrated his desire that this moment should come immediately. There was no more melancholy or sadness on his face. He was all smiles and happily wanted to sing psalms, hymns or spiritual praises.

11 Chapter XI.

Last Confession - Holy Viaticum - Advice for his friends - Devotion to the Blessed Virgin - Choice of good companions - He recommends himself to his friends asking them to pray for him

Although Comollo's state of health apparently seemed to have improved, nevertheless when dawn came I judged it to be a good thing for him to receive the Sacraments given that it was the Easter Sunday Solemnity. "Willingly", he replied, "And since they say that the Lord rose from the tomb about this hour (it was four thirty in the morning) I would like him to rise in my heart with the abundance of his grace. There is nothing that bothers my conscience, but just the same given the situation I am in, I would like to speak to my confessor for a moment before receiving Holy Communion."⁶

Here is something worthy of note: a young man of our time, in the bloom of life, convinced that he must soon present himself before the divine judgement, says frankly that there is not the least thing to reproach his conscience... that he is at peace. You might say that it was his well-regulated life, his pure heart and pure soul.

Good reader, may this be an encouragement to me and to you from now on to settle matters concerning our soul so that at the final moment of our lives we can also say: I have nothing that weighs on my conscience. May God grant us this!

His Communion was a truly edifying and wonderful spectacle. When he had finished his Confession and prepared himself to receive Holy Viaticum, the Director, who was the minister, followed by the seminarians, entered the infirmary; as soon as he appeared the patient, deeply moved, his face bloomed, his appearance changed, and in holy rapture he cried out: "Oh what a beautiful sight. So wonderful to see. Look how the sun is shining! Look at the crown made by the stars! Look how many are prostrate in adoration and do not dare to lift their heads! Oh! Let me go and kneel with them and adore that sun like I've never seen it before". While he was saying this he tried to get up and made strong efforts to approach the Blessed Sacrament. I made every effort to hold him down in bed; I was crying tears of affection and wonder; I did not know what to say nor how to answer him. And he struggled all the more to approach the Holy Viaticum; he was not satisfied until he had received it.

After Communion, all focused on his affectionate thoughts of Jesus, he

⁶Comollo's regular confessor was Fr Bagnasacco, canon of happy memory in the honourable college of canons in Chieri. In his two years at school and in the two and a half at the Seminary, he had always gone to the same confessor.

remained unmoving for a while then, breaking into raptures of joy once again, cried: "Oh! Marvel of love! Who am I to be made worthy of such a precious treasure! Oh! The Angels in heaven exult, but I have more reason to be happy since He whom the prostrate Angels respectfully see revealed in heaven, is now held within me to look after: *Quem Coeli capere non possunt, meo gremio confero: magnificava Deus facere nobiscum*: the Lord has done wonders for me, and I am filled with heavenly joy and divine consolation: *et facti sumus laetantes*." These and many other similar brief prayers he continued to pronounce for a good period of time. Finally he lowered his voice, called me to him and then asked me not to speak to him about anything else other than spiritual matters, saying that these final moments were too precious, that there was not much life left in him, and that he had to spend all the time glorifying God; therefore he would answer no other questions other than something to do with these matters.

In fact all that time when he was writhing and convulsing and being asked about temporal matters, he was raving; but when asked about spiritual matters his answers were more lucid.

Given that his condition was getting worse, his relatives sought opinions from various good doctors who proposed remedies and did various things: in other words they did what doctors do and what surgeons could suggest but all without effect, verifying in every way what Comollo had already predicted.

Meanwhile the patient, looking very weak and drifting off to sleep, was left to rest awhile. The seminarians went off to the sacred functions at the Cathedral. After a short sleep he awoke and finding himself alone with just his usual friend he began to speak thus:

Here we are my dear friend, we are just about at the moment when we must leave one another for some time. We thought we would comfort one another through life's vicissitudes, help one another, advise one another in everything that would be of benefit to our eternal salvation. But it was not written thus in the holy and ever adorable will of the Lord. You have always helped me in spiritual matters, in gaining knowledge and in temporal matters too, and now I thank you. God will reward you. But before leaving one another, listen to some reminders from your friend. Friendship is important not only to do what your friend asks while he is alive, but to do the same as we promised one another after death. Therefore the agreement that we made, our many promises to pray for one another to be saved, I want that

to extend not just as far as the death of one of us, but of both of us; as long as you spend your days down here, promise and swear to pray for me.

Although hearing these words from my friend I felt like weeping, I held back my tears and promised to do as he wanted. He went on:

So this is what I can say concerning yourself: you do not know if your days on earth will be short or long; but however uncertain may be the hour of death, it will certainly come; therefore do things so that your entire life is a preparation for death, for judgement. . . Men only think of death occasionally, they believe that this hour will come even though they don't want it to, but they do not ready themselves, so when the moment arrives they are agitated and afraid, greatly embarrassed in finding themselves needing to sort out matters of their soul. Whoever dies amidst such confusion must be very afraid of eternal perdition. Happy those who spend their days doing holy and devout works and find themselves ready for that moment. If you are called by the Lord to become a guide for other souls, always nurture this idea of death, judgement, respect for the church, because one sees even important people who have little reverence for God's house; it sometimes happen that simple people, simple servants have holier attitudes while the minister of the Sanctuary goes around without reflecting that he is in the house of the living God!

Since for all the time that we struggle in this vale of tears we have no other more powerful advocate than Mary most holy, you must therefore profess a special devotion to her. Oh! If people could be persuaded of the happiness that comes at the hour of death from devotion to Mary, everyone would be competing to find new ways to give her special honour. It will be her, with her son in her arms, who will be our defence against the enemy of our soul at the final hour. Even though all of hell might be arrayed against us, with Mary in our defence, victory will be ours. Look for other things from those who recite some prayer to Mary, or offer some simple mortification, and then believe they are protected by her, while they lead a shameless life. Instead of this kind of devotion it would better not to be devout at all, because if they act like this, it is pure hypocrisy to think they

will be favoured in their evil designs and even more so, if it were possible, given approval for their dissolute lives. May you always be truly a devotee of Mary by imitating her virtues, and you will experience the sweet effects of her goodness and love.

Add to this frequenting the sacraments of Confession and Communion which are the two tools or two weapons with which you will overcome the assaults of our common enemy, and all the shoals in this stormy sea of the world, Try to have a steady confessor: open your heart to him, obey him and you will have a secure guide in him for the way that leads to heaven, But Alas. . . so many go to confession without any results: confessions and sins, confessions and sins, but no change. So remember that the sacrament of Penance is supported by sorrow and good resolutions, and where one of these essentials is missing all our confessions become sacrilegious or to no avail.

Finally, be careful with whom you deal, speak and where you go. I am not speaking of people of the opposite sex or other lay people, who are evidently a danger for us and whom we should avoid; I am speaking of our very companions, clerics and even seminarians. Some of them are bad, others are not so bad but not very good, while others still are truly good. The first group you must absolutely avoid, and deal with the second group when you have to, without developing any particular familiarity; it is the last group you must spend time with and draw both spiritual and temporal benefit from. It is true that they are few, but precisely for this reason you need to exercise the greatest caution looking for them, and then when you find them, spend time with them. Form spiritual friendships with them and draw much profit from this. With the good ones you will be good. With the bad ones you will be bad.

I have one thing still to ask of you and I ask you this kindly. When you go out for a walk and you pass by my grave you will hear our classmates say: 'our classmate Comollo is buried here'. Suggest prudently to each of them that they say a *Pater* and a *Requiem* for me. This way I can be freed from the pains of Purgatory. There are many other things I would like to say to you, but my illness is getting worse and weighs on me, so recommend me to our friends' prayers, pray for me to the Lord, and we will see each other again when he wishes that to happen.

Sentiments like these expressed from the depths of his heart draw a true picture of his soul. These thoughts about eternal maxims, frequenting the Sacraments, tender devotion for the Blessed Virgin, fleeing dangerous companions, seeking out those from whom to draw some benefit for one's studies, devotion, were the scope of all his activity.

12 Chapter XII

The illness gets much worse - His parents visit him - His words to them - He is anointed - His prayer to Mary - His last words - His special death.

On the evening of Easter day he was so exhausted that he could hardly articulate any words. He was then attacked by an even stronger bout of fever, with painful convulsions to the point where it was very difficult to talk to him. But our holy Catholic religion makes such an impression on the heart of good souls that it was of great help to Comollo to calm him down. Despite losing consciousness, or agitated by the violence of his illness, as soon as someone said: "Comollo, who are you suffering for?" He would immediately smile and become amiable, "For the crucified Jesus."

Without a single complaint about his severe pain he spent the night and almost all the following day in this state. Meanwhile he was visited by his parents whom he barely recognised but he recommended to them they be resigned to the divine will. These words were like barbs which stung the heart of his sorrowing mother who so loved such a loving son, and who so loved her.

"Luigi," she said, holding back her tears, "do you feel a little better" Take courage."

"Yes, my dear mother, I do feel a little better, but from here on I hope to feel even better. This really is the time for courage! Let's hope in the Lord". "Your uncle the Provost greets you and prays for you and gets others to pray for you". "Give my greetings to my uncle. Yes, dear uncle, how much I thank you for the good you have done for me. If I did not get led astray by bad companions I owe it to you. With all my heart I thank you". After a short pause he began again: "It gives me great consolation to see you here, my dear parents. I beg forgiveness for displeasing you when I was disobedient":

"My child, you have no need to ask for forgiveness; you were always our consolation."

"You are too kind. Thank you once again for what you have done and

suffered for me. I recommend myself to your prayers. Never forget me. If my uncle was here it would give me great pleasure to see him."

If he could have he would have flown here to your side. But it is Easter time. He cannot leave the Parish."

"Oh dear uncle I will never be able to see you again here on earth but I fully trust that I will see you in heaven. And you, my beloved mother, tell my uncle the Provost, tell him that I will wait for him in Paradise."

"Dear Luigi", his mother said between tears, "will you also remember me and your father?"

"Yes, my beloved parents; you always gave me good example; I loved you in life and if as I die I am accepted as I hope by the divine mercy I will not forget to constantly ask for heavenly favours to be bestowed on you."

His sorrowing mother could no longer hold back her tears and broke down completely.

"Beloved mother!", he added, "Don't cry, O my parents. God wants this: courage, courage! Lift our hearts to heaven! In heaven is all our consolation! Heaven! Goodbye dear mother! Goodbye dear and beloved father! We will see each other again in blessed eternity."

From time to time he began to sing in an extraordinary voice and kept this up in such a way that he might have been considered to be in good health. He was singing the *Miserere*, the Litanies of Our Lady, the *Ave Maria Stella* and spiritual praises. But since the singing wore him out completely, we suggested some prayers to him; so he stopped singing and recited what we suggested to him.

At seven in the evening of the 1st April, things began to get worse and the Spiritual Director considered it wise to administer the Holy Oils. He had hardly begun the sacred function when the patients seemed to appear to be perfectly recovered, answered whenever he needed to, to the point where the priest commented that while a few minutes ago he seemed to be in agony he was now able to assist correctly and respond to all the prayers and responses which are part of this rite. The same thing happened at eleven thirty when the Rector, seeing a cold sweat break out over his pallid face, gave him the papal blessing.⁷

Once he had received all the comforts of our holy Catholic religion, he seemed no longer to be a sick patient, but someone lying in bed to take a rest; he was fully aware, his soul at peace; he was happy and at any one moment said brief prayers to the Crucified Jesus, Mary most holy, the Saints. The

⁷The Rector of the Seminary was Fr Sebastian Mottura, Canon, Archpriest of the Chieri College of Canons. He died at the age of 83 there in 1876.

Rector said: "He does not need others to recommend his soul; he is doing this sufficiently for himself". At midnight, he intoned the *Ave Maris Stella* in a strong voice and went on until the last verse without stopping despite his friends around him telling him not to tire himself out. He was so taken up in himself and his face was resplendent with heavenly joy that he seemed to be an angel. An hour after midnight on 2nd April he asked one of those around him how much time there was still; he told him: "Still half an hour."

"There is more", the patient added.

"Yes," he replied believing that he was raving; "still half an hour and then we start again."

"Ah my good friend" he replied smiling, "what a great repetition! There is more than repetition."

When a friend asked him to remember him in Paradise, he replied:

"I will remember all of you, but especially those who help me escape from Purgatory":

Another friend asked him if he was not sorry to be leaving this world, his relatives and friends.

"No, no, I do not regret that; I will soon see my father and mother in heaven; the holy angels will be my friends for eternity."

"What give you the most consolation at this moment?"

"Having done something for love of Mary and having gone to Holy Communion."

At half past one, although his face was as serene as usual, he seemed to be very weak and unable to breathe. Rallying a little soon after and gathering what strength he had left, with halting voice, eyes raised to heaven, he broke into this prayer:

Holy Virgin, kind mother, dear mother of my beloved Jesus, of all creatures you alone were worthy to bear him in your immaculate womb. Through the love with which you gave him suck, held him on your arms, suffered with him in his poverty, saw him ill-treated, spat upon, flogged and finally die suffering terribly on the cross. Through all of this obtain for me the grace of courage, keen faith, firm hope, ardent charity, sincere sorrow for my sins; and to all the favours that you have granted me throughout my life add the grace that I might die a holy death. Yes, dear and merciful Mother, assist me at this moment when I am about to present my soul to divine judgement; you yourself can present me in the arms of your divine Son; if you promise me this here I am with ardent and

frank spirit, dependent on your clemency and goodness and I present my soul through your hands to the Supreme Majesty from whom I hope to receive mercy.

These were the exact words he said so emphatically and penetratingly that everyone around him was deeply moved to the point of tears.

When he had finished this fervent prayer he seemed suddenly overcome by a mortal lethargy. To keep him with us I asked him if he knew at what age St. Aloysius had died and he answered:

"St Aloysius was twenty three and I am dying when I've not yet turned twenty two."

Seeing that his pulse was failing, I thought about getting close to him right at the moment that he was about to abandon this world and his friends; so I thought of saying something to him that came to mind in similar circumstances. He was all attention to to what was being said to hi, his face and lips smiling, maintaining his peacefulness, eyes fixed on the Crucifix which he held tightly between his hands joined on his breast, and he made every effort to repeat every word suggested to him. For about ten minutes before he expired, he called each of those standing around him by name, and said:

"If you want something for eternity, I... goodbye, I'm going. Jesus and Mary, I place my soul in your hands."

These were his last (spoken) words. Because his lips and tongue had stiffened he was unable to vocalise the brief prayers we whispered to him, but he mouthed them with his lips.

There were also two Deacons present, Deacon Sassi and Deacon Fiorito who read him the *Proficiscere*. When that was finished and as they were recommending his soul to the Holy Virgin and to the Angels to offer him to the Most High, just as they were saying the holy names of Jesus and Mary, his beautiful soul quietly left his body and flew, as we devoutly hope, to its rest in the Lord's peace. His face was serene and a smile played about it as if he was seeing something marvellous. His happy release took place at two after midnight, before the first rays of dawn on 2nd April 1839. In another five days he would have turned 22.

Thus was the death of the youthful cleric Luigi Comollo, he was able to plant the seeds of virtue in his heart through the most ordinary of occupations, nurture them amidst all the words illusions, perfect them in two and a half years as a cleric, then bring them all to maturity through his painful death. And while everybody counted himself fortunate to have had him either as a model, or to be guided by his advice, or as a loyal friend, he left us all in the world in order to go to heaven and protect us from there.

It would seem, at first, that such a good Christian soul as was our Comollo would have nothing to fear of divine judgement. But if we observe things well, this is the ordinary behaviour of God's elect. When they consider that they must present themselves before the rigorous divine seat of judgement, they are filled with fear; but God comes to their aid in his own time and instead of the fear of a sinner, which continues in agitation, remorse and desperation, the fear of the just changes to courage, confidence and resignation and produces the most wonderful happiness in the soul.

This is really the point where God has the just savour the hundredfold of their good works as the Gospel promises. The bitterness of death is sweetened by tranquillity of soul, contentment and inner joy which restores faith, confirms hope and inflames charity. Evil loses its violence and there is the advance sense of the enjoyment of the goodness that God is about to share with them for all eternity. This should be sufficient encouragement to lead us through the travails of life and to help us to put up with them with resignation and govern all our actions according to the divine precepts.

13 Chapter XIII

*Consternation over Comollo's death - Permission granted to bury him in the church - Fr Arduino's eulogy - Solemn burial°

Once daylight came and word spread of Comollo's death, the entire Seminary was in a state of great consternation. One said: "Comollo is already in paradise praying for us"; while another said: "How well he predicted his death!" And another: "He lived as a just man and died as a saint"; while yet another: "If as a human judgement we can say that a soul departing this world flies to heaven, we can certainly say that about Comollo". So each person competed with the other to find something especially relevant to him. One did his best to get his crucifix, others to have some of his holy pictures. Others considered themselves fortunate if they could have one of his books. There was one even who, not able to get hold of anything else, took his collar as a way of preserving the memory of usch a beloved and venerated colleague.

The Rector of the Seminary, also very much moved by the special circumstances that had accompanied his death, and unhappy at the thought that his body would be brought to the town cemetery, went to Turin to ask the civil and Church authorities for permission to bury him in the church of St Philip adjacent to the Seminary itself.

The professor for the morning conference, Fr Prialis, began school at

the usual hour, but when it came time for him to speak, seeing the sadness written across the faces of all his listeners, also became emotional, and left the hall sobbing and in tears, without the strength to continue his conference. The other professor, Fr Arduino, also came to class in the afternoon but instead of his usual talk offered a eulogy on Comollo's death wherein he expressed the sorrow that everyone felt at the loss of such a beloved companion. He also indicated that each one should take heart in the hope that given such an edifying life and wonderful death, he would now have a protector in heaven. He urged everyone to take him as a model of propriety and virtuous clerical behaviour. He described his death in various ways: the death of a just person, a death which was special in the eyes of the Lord, and concluded by recommending that we cherish this moment as a dear memory and try to imitate him in virtue.

On the morning of 3rd April, all the Seminarians present, along with the superiors, the Parish Priest (Canon) and the other Canons and clergy, the body was carried in through the streets of Chieri and after a lengthy procession during which funeral hymns and prayers were sung, was brought to the Church of St Philip. There was a huge downpour at that point and the city's streets were flooded and muddy. Despite this a huge crowd accompanied the bier with great devotion and recollection. The bier was placed in the church accompanied by the funereal music and the Director presided at the solemn sung Mass. After Mass the coffin was laid in a prepared grave close to the communion rails, almost as if Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, to whom he had turned with such love and with whom he had converse so willingly, also wanted him close to him in death.

Seven days later there was a solemn funeral Mass again celebrated with all pomp and circumstance, lights and decorations.

These were the final honours bestowed on him by his fellow clerics who, despite their sorrow spared nothing to celebrate such a dear friend.

14 Chapter XIV

Holy remembrance of Luigi Comollo in the Seminary - His modesty and purity - He appears to a group of friends

It is an undeniable truth that the memory of good souls does not finish with their death but that their example is passed on to the benefit of posterity. An illness and death accompanied by such signs of lively faith and sentiments of virtue and devotion reawakened in many Seminarians the desire to imitate Comollo. Not a few, therefore, began to follow the advice he

gave them whilst still alive, and others followed his example and virtue such that some who earlier had not demonstrated much the vocation they aspired to, used his death to make firm resolutions to become models of perfection.

"It was at the time of Comollo's death", one of his friends said, "that I decided to lead the life of a good cleric and become a holy ecclesiastic; and although my determination might thus far have not had great effect, just the same my commitment will continue, indeed I will redouble my efforts each day". Comollo's virtue did not just produce these first good resolutions, but they have continued even until today. The Rector of the Seminary a short time ago assured me that "the change of behaviour in our Seminarians on Comollo's death has continued until today."

But we have not spoken so much, amongst all these details, of the virtue of modesty that was precisely the characteristic feature of Comollo. Such good outward behaviour, such exact conduct, such edifying composure, mortification made up of all the sense but especially the eyes, leads us to say that he possesses such a virtue to an eminent degree. And I do not believe I am exaggerating when I say and maintain the view that he took the beautiful stole of baptismal innocence into the next life. I argue this not just from his scrupulous reserve in dealing with or speaking with the opposite sex but more so from certain theological subjects that he could not understand at all, and from the questions he would ask, that demonstrated his simplicity and purity. My view was confirmed by what his spiritual director revealed when, after a long talk with him concerning Comollo, he concluded that he saw in him an angelic behaviour as he fervently and devoutly tried to imitate St Aloysius. In fact whenever he spoke about this Saint (other than the fact that he said a special prayer to him morning and evening), he always spoke in tones of rapture and joy. He glorified in the fact that he bore the same name. "Ah", he would say, "my name is Luigi! Maybe I could be Luigi in fact, one day". It follows that if he did his best to emulate St Aloysius' virtues, he would certainly have emulated what is that Saint's special characteristic: his innocence and purity of behaviour.

It seems appropriate for me here to observe that the reason why Comollo's death made such a great impression was the two appearances he made after his death. I limit myself to speaking of just one of these which was witnessed by the entire dormitory. It was an event that was heard both within and beyond the Seminary. This extraordinary visitation was made to someone with whom Comollo was friends while he was still alive. Here is how that friend describes the fact.

As part of our friendship, according to what we had read in some

books, we had agreed to pray for each other and that the one who would be the first to be called to eternity would bring news of this to the other one who remained in the world. We had often reconfirmed this promise always with the condition that God would allow it and would be pleased about it. These were the sorts of things one does as a child without really understanding its importance. Just the same we considered it a serious promise which we were intent on keeping. During Comollo's illness, this promise was renewed several times and when it came time for him to die not only I but a number of other friends who knew about it expected the promise to be kept.

It was the night of 4th April, the night following his burial, and I was resting along with other students of theology in the dormitory that overlooked the courtyard. I was in bed but I wasn't asleep - I was thinking about the promise, and almost as a prophecy of what was about to happen, I was very much caught up in all my emotions. Then, on the stroke of midnight, I heard a sombre noise at the end of the corridor a noise that got louder and louder as it approached. It sounded like the rumbling of a carriage, or a railway train, or a shot from a cannon. I wouldn't know quite how to express it but it was like a lot of rumbling and strong vibrations, violent enough to cause terror and render the listener speechless. As it approached the walls, ceiling, floor shook as if great iron plates were being moved by a strong and powerful arm. Its approach was not of the kind that one could measure the distance. It was like when you can't work out where a steamship is and the only way is to judge by the smoke from its stack.

The seminarians in the dormitory woke up, but nobody spoke. I was terrified. The noise came closer, ever more frightening; it was close to the dormitory; the door swung open by itself and the noise carried on although nothing could be seen, except a pale but variegated light which seemed to be controlling the noise. At a certain moment there was a sudden silence, the light shone more brightly and one could distinctly hear Comollo's voice calling his friend's name three times one after the other, and then it said:

"I am saved!"

At that moment the dormitory became even brighter, the noise

that had stopped was heard even louder and longer, almost like the rolling of thunder that seemed to shake the house to its very foundations. But then it quickly stopped and the light disappeared. My companions jumped out of bed and fled who knows where; some gathered in one corner of the dormitory, others huddled around the prefect who was Fr Giuseppe Fiorito da Rivoli; everyone spent the rest of the night anxiously waiting for the light of day to come.

I had really suffered and such was my fright that I would have preferred to die right then and there. I then fell ill and the illness brought me to the verge of the grave. I remained so ill that it took me some years to recover my health.

I leave each reader to judge this appearance as he sees fit, noting however that many years later there are still people alive today who were witnesses to the fact. I am happy to have described it in its entirety, but I recommend all my boys not to make agreements of this kind because when we mix up the natural with the supernatural our poor humanity suffers sorely, especially in matters that are not essential to our salvation.

15 Chapter XV.

Heavenly favours which we are sure were obtained through Comollo's intercession - Freedom from serious temptation - From serious illness - The report of the Geometrician G.B. Paccotti

I believe it may be appropriate to speak of certain heavenly favours obtained through the intercession of Comollo. Although I have an exact memory of these, I limit the details to just three facts to which I add the character and dignity of the people who attest to them, which for me lends credence to the facts.

The first regards someone who was freed from serious temptation. She was someone very much involved in God's service but had been tempted for a long time, now by one thing then by another but she had always succeeded in overcoming the temptation. One day the temptation was so strong that it seemed she would succumb and the more she tried to distance herself from her sinful imagination the more it went wild. She was unable to pray - her prayer was arid, dry; but turning her gaze to the table she saw something on it that had belonged to Comollo and it reminded her pleasantly of him. "I began to cry out", the same person says, "You are in Paradise,

O virtuous Luigi, so if you can intercede with the Lord, ask him to free me from this terrible predicament. Then something wonderful happened. I had hardly uttered these words and was about to say something else when this unwanted temptation ceased and I found myself at peace. From then on I have never neglected to invoke that young angel in all my needs, and I was always answered."

The other fact I write just as the person, who was an eyewitness, put it to me. "One morning I was called to go quickly to recommend the soul of a friend to the Lord. He was in his last agony. Having arrived there, I found things just as they had been described to me. Deprived of his senses and unable to reason, his eyes were watery, his lips stiffened, and he was bathed in a cold sweat. It seemed his blood had ceased to flow and one would have said that he would breathe his last breath within a few minutes. I spoke to him several times but he did not respond. Not knowing what else to do, I broke down in tears; in in that predicament I suddenly thought of the cleric Comollo and all the wonderful virtues of his I had heard about. To vent my pain I thought of calling on him. "Come on", I said, "If you can do something with the Lord, pray to him to raise up this poor soul and free him from the anguish of death". As soon as I had said this the dying man suddenly dropped the end of the sheet which was clenched between his teeth, shook himself, and then began to speak almost as if he had not been ill. His improvement was such that after eight days he was fully recovered from his illness, although he needed several months more of convalescence, and he was able to resume his previous work."

The final fact I consider should be provided just as the person who received the heavenly favour wrote it. He declares that he recognises it as coming from the Lord through Comollo's intercession. He is Mr Giovanni Battista Paccotti, geometrician and landowner in Cinzano, eyewitness to the admirable virtues which Comollo practised in this town.

Here is the thrust of his report.

Very Rev. Sir,

Cinzano, 16 September 1847.

Following up on the promise made last autumn to Your Reverence, where I said I would write down the facts that happened before and after the death of the cleric Comollo, I am now fulfilling that task, although late, by informing you of a fact that happened to me in 1845, again in 1846 and then again last August in this current year, 1847.

I was troubled by an acute illness which at a certain time of the year turned much nastier. In October and November of 1845 I had a particularly violent attack. It had reached the point that despite all the suggestions of the medical profession and especially those of the celebrated Mr Cavalieri, Professors Ribi and Gallo, as well as others of equal merit, it got much worse and intolerable, and was declared to be without remedy.

On the night of the said month, November 1845, as I said, lying in bed as usual and almost exhausted, I thought more seriously than ever before of the sad situation I had been reduced to and to what lay ahead; as I dozed until morning came and after a difficult night, I don't know if I awoke or just thought I had but the fact is that I heard something saying to me: why not ask Luigi Comollo, who could help you in this critical situation? I believed I was truly awake.

Giving serious reflection to these words and since I believed that the behaviour of this very worthy cleric was irreproachable, indeed an example to everyone, I resolved to invoke him, saying: "If you are amongst the Blessed, Luigi, ask the Lord to heal me and I will inform Don Bosco about it so that along with other details about you, he can include this to redound to your glory."

I was a little calmer after I had said this and then the following day I found myself almost free of an illness that I felt I would succumb to or I would at the very least become a burden and inconvenience to the family.

Meanwhile, when I had fully recovered my health, amongst business matters, and my profession as a measurer, I completely forgot to do what I had promised cleric Luigi Comollo I would do. But the following year, that is in autumn 1846, the illness returned suddenly and more strongly; that is when I remembered the obligation I had taken on. In fact, renewing the same promise that I have just described to Your Reverence, and freed as before, I was overcome by feelings of affection. But since Your Reverence had in a certain way obliged me to make a genuine account of what had happened to me and I, having accepted that, had not done it, the illness assailed me a third time just a few days later. It got more serious by the day and I became of the opinion that this derived from the fact that I had not fulfilled the obligation I

had taken on. And indeed, having renewed my promise by saying that if I felt better today I would write to Your Reverence without further delay and fully explain what had happened to me, yet a third time I was granted a notable improvement I can say that I am almost certainly healed of an illness that the medical profession almost certainly would not be able to free me from.

And since I fully recognise that my recovery is due to the intercession of the cleric Luigi Comollo, I hasten to ask Your reverence to publish this true and sincere fact that has happened to me for the greater glory of God and so that in the future respect and veneration for this model of virtue, Luigi Comollo, may grow more amongst others and especially amongst those who had the good fortune to know him while he was alive.

Herewith what I can and must confirm by this act with which I have the honour.. etc.

Your humble servant,

PACCOTTI GIO. BATT.

From what has been written thus far each one can easily understand how Comollo's virtues, although not extraordinary, are nevertheless singular and accomplished such that I can propose him as an example for anyone be he lay or religious; certainly, whoever follows Comollo will become a virtuous young man, an exemplary cleric, a true and worthy minister of the Sanctuary.

However, while we admire Comollo's virtuous actions I would like us to fix our thoughts on the divine Religion which forms such wonderful models of virtue. Someone who belongs to the Catholic Religion alone has the Saints and other people outstanding in virtue; only in this Religion is there an abundance of means to comfort one in all of life's needs; she instructs and guides one through adolescence along the way of truth; she comforts one with the Sacraments, with the word of life into adulthood; she doubles her care during illness leaving aside nothing that could contribute to one's spiritual and eternal benefit, as well as temporal benefit. She alone comforts one at the hour of death, in death or after death.

O Catholic, holy, divine Religion! How great are the good things you procure for the one who practises you, hopes in you and confides in you! How fortunate are those who are in your bosom and practice your precepts!

Meanwhile, O reader, while we admire the virtuous actions of the heroes of Catholicism, let us even more keenly give thanks to God who through his

goodness has created us and kept us in the holy catholic religion. And as a pledge of our gratitude, let us show that we are zealously observant of the precepts of this divine Religion of ours. Let us never cease to implore God's mercy with all our heart, so that he may preserve us in this religion until the last moments of our life.

So, dear reader, we will also be very happy, and when our soul abandons earthly things to present itself for the first time to the Supreme and Divine Majesty, we can be certain that we too will hear the sweet invitation proclaimed by Jesus Christ in the Gospel: "Come, O faithful servant, come, you were faithful to me in life, now come and be crowned with glory in heaven where you will enjoy for eternity the joy of the Lord: /Intra in gaudium Domini tui." May the Lord God grant this grace to the one who writes, to you who are reading, and to all faithful Christians.

Amen.

THE END

Nulla osta for printing.

Turin. 7 March 1884

CUMIO DOMENICO Prov.Gen.