

BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE OF YOUNG MICHAEL MAGONE, PUPIL AT THE ORATORY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

jbf

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INTRODUCTION

Dear young people,

One of you who was anxiously awaiting the life of Dominic Savio to be published was Michael Magone. All the time he was collecting things that were said about this model of Christian life; he was trying his very hardest to imitate him, anxious that everything that was being said be written down, as he wanted to model his life on him. He only had time to read a few pages of this life before the Lord brought his mortal life to an end to enjoy, as we most ardently believe, the peace of the just in the company of the friend he had made up his mind to imitate.

The singular, or better, the exciting life of your companion Michael aroused in you a desire to see it in print. You pestered me to do it. Therefore, motivated by these requests and by the affection that I had for our mutual friend, as well as by the hope that this small work would be both pleasing and helpful to your souls, I made up my mind to write down what I knew about him and have it printed in a booklet.

In the life of Dominic Savio you saw innate virtue cultivated to a point of heroism right throughout his life.

In Magone's life we have a lad who, left to his own devices was in danger of treading the sad road of evil but fortunately the Lord invited him to follow Him. Michael listened to this loving call and constantly corresponding with divine grace and came to be admired by all who knew him, thus demonstrating how marvellous are the effects of God's grace on those who make use of it.

You will find here many things you can admire and imitate. You will also come upon certain acts of virtue, expressions that seem beyond a fourteen-year-old boy. But just because they are uncommon I felt that they merited

being written down. Every reader, anyway, is aware of the truth of these incidents. I do nothing more than write down what happened under the gaze of a whole crowd of living individuals who can be questioned about the authenticity of what I have written.

May Divine Providence, which instructs human beings by the lives of old sinners as well as young saints, grant us all the grace to find ourselves prepared at that last moment, the moment upon which depends a happy or unhappy eternity. May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be our help in life and at our death and keep us safely on the road that leads to heaven.

Amen.

1 Chapter 1. An unusual meeting

One evening in autumn I was returning from Sommariva del Bosco and had reached Carmagnola where I had an hour's wait from my train to Turin. It was already seven o'clock, the weather was cold and the whole place was shrouded in a heavy fog, turning into a misty rain. This made the whole place so dark that a person could not be recognised a few feet away.

The dull glow of the light on the station lit up with a pale glow a very limited area. All the rest was in darkness. Only a gang of boys drew the attention of everyone as they romped around and deafened the spectators with their racket. The words "Wait! Catch him! Run! Grab this! Stop that one!" could be heard. But in the midst of all this shouting one voice stood out and dominated all the rest; it was the voice of a leader whose commands demanded respect and obedience. I felt that I wanted to get to know this lad who obviously was able to gain ascendancy over this unruly mob. I waited until everyone was crowded around him and then with a couple of quick steps I stepped in amongst them. They all fled, as if terrified - only one remained and he stood in front of me, his hands on his hips and, with an imperious air, began to speak:

"Who are you, breaking up our game like this?"

"I'm a friend."

"And what do you want of us?"

"If you are agreeable, I'd like to play with you and your friends."

"But who are you? I don't know you."

"I repeat! I'm a friend. I want to join you and your friends in the game you are playing. But who are you?"

"Me? I'm. . ." he said in a serious voice, "I'm Michael Magone, the general in charge of this game!"

Whilst he was saying this, the other boys, who had fled in panic, surrounded him once more. After saying a few words to some of them, I once more addressed myself to Magone:

“My dear Magone, how old are you?”

“Thirteen.”

“Have you made your first confession?”

“Oh, yes,” he replied with a smile.

“And your First Communion?”

“Yes.”

“And have you learned some sort of a trade?”

“Yes, I have learned the art of doing nothing!”

“Up until now, what have you done?”

“I’ve gone to school.”

“How far?”

“I’ve done sixth year primary.”

“And have you still got a father?”

“No, my father’s dead.”

“And your mother?”

“Yes, my mother is still alive and does work for others. She does what she can to earn bread for me and my brothers who do nothing but drive her to desperation.”

“And what do you intend to do with yourself in the future?”

“I want to do something but I don’t know what.”

This frankness of speech, combined with a certain air of wisdom and logic, made me realise in what great danger this lad would be if he continued in this abandoned state. On the other hand, I realised that if his lively nature and evident leadership qualities were to be cultivated he would do great things. I took up the conversation once more:

“My dear Magone, would you like to leave this kind of life and learn a trade or even take up some studies?”

“I would certainly like that,” he replied, “because this sort of life does not appeal to me — some of my friends are already in prison and I fear that I will follow, but what can I do? My father is dead, my mother is poor, so who can help me?”

“This evening say a fervent prayer to our Father in heaven; pray with all your heart, trust in Him and He will look after me, after you, after everyone.” At that moment the station bell rang and I had to leave. “Take this,” I said “take this medal and go to the assistant priest, Fr Ariccio, tomorrow. Tell him that the priest who gave it to you wants to know something about you.”

He accepted the medal respectfully. “But what is your name? What town do you come from? Does Fr Ariccio know you?” These and other questions Magone put to me, but I could not give him an answer because the train was already in the station and I had to depart for Turin.

2 Chapter 2. He comes to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales

Not being able to learn the name of the priest he had been talking to made Magone very curious and he could not wait until the next day but went straight away to Fr Ariccio and told him what had happened. The assistant priest understood everything and the following day he wrote me a letter in which he gave me details of our little “General’s” life. He wrote:

Young Michael Magone is a poor lad who has no father. His mother is so busy providing bread for the family that she cannot look after him and so he spends his time on the street with all the local hooligans. He is of above-average intelligence, but his liveliness and unruly behaviour have caused him to be suspended more than once from his school. All the same he did fairly well in sixth grade.

As far as behaviour is concerned I feel he has a good and simple heart but he is hard to manage. At school and in the catechism classes he is forever a disturbing element. When he’s away all is peaceful and when he leaves all breathe a sigh of relief!

His age, poverty, nature and intelligence make him very worthy of charity. He was born on the 19th September 1845.

On the basis of this information I decided to enrol him amongst the boys at this house, either as a student or in the trade section. As soon as he had received his letter of acceptance, our friend was impatient to come to Turin. He dreamed of all the delights of this earthly paradise and how great it would be to live in the Capital City.

A few days later I saw him.

“Here I am,” he said, running to meet me. “Here I am — I’m that Michael Magone you met at the Carmagnola railway station.”

“I know. I know. And have you come along willingly?”

“Yes, for sure.”

“If you have good will, make sure you don’t turn this place upside down then!”

“Don’t worry, I have not come to cause you any trouble.”

“Would you like to study or would you prefer to learn a trade?”

“I’m prepared to do whatever you wish but, if the choice is left to me, I would prefer to study.”

“And if I put you to study, what do you intend to do when you are finished?”

“If a ruffian . . .” he said, bowing his head and laughing.

!Carry on — if a ruffian . . .”

“If a ruffian like me could become good enough to be a priest, I would most willingly become one.”

“We’ll see then what a ruffian can do. I will put you to study; whether or not you will become a priest will depend on your progress in your studies, your conduct and the signs that will point out whether you have a vocation or not.”

"If good will is all that is needed I can assure you that I will succeed and will never do anything to displease you.”

First of all he was assigned a companion who acted as his ‘Guardian Angel’ to help him, advise him and to correct him if necessary. Without Magone realising it, this lad, in the most practical and charitable way, never let him out of his sight. He was in the same class and study as well as in recreation. He played and joked with him. But whenever the need arose he said: “Don’t speak that way because it’s not right, don’t say that word or call upon the name of the Lord in vain.” And, for his part, even though he showed his impatience from time to time, Michael responded: “Good, you did the right thing to warn me; you are a good friend to have. If in the past I had had such a friend I would not have formed these bad habits which I now find so hard to break.”

In the first few days the only things he really enjoyed were the recreations. To sing, to yell out, to run, jump, play around were the things which most appealed to his lively nature. When, however, a companion said to him: “Magone, the bell has rung to go to class” or to Church, to prayers or the like, he gave a longing glance at the games and then went off to wherever duty was calling him without any further objection. But it was great to see him when the bell rang to signal the end of some duty and recreation lay ahead! He appeared as if he were shot out of a cannon! He simply flew to all parts of the yard. Whenever a game required bodily agility he was its leading light. The game that we call Barrarotta was his favourite. Michael found life very much to his liking.

3 Chapter 3. Difficulties and moral reform

Michael had been at the Oratory for a month now and his many occupations helped the time to pass quickly. He was happy provided he was only jumping around and enjoying himself without reflecting that true happiness must have its origin in peace of heart and tranquility of conscience. All of a sudden he began to lose that mad desire to play! He became very pensive and began to take no part in the games unless he was expressly invited. The 'Guardian angel' noticed this and took the occasion one day of saying to him:

"My dear Magone, for some days now I have noticed your face has lost its happy smile; are you sick or something?"

"No, no my health is very good."

"Then why are you looking so sad and downcast?"

"I am sad because I see my friends taking part in all the practices of piety. To see them so happy whilst praying, going to Confession and Communion makes me feel very sad."

"I don't understand how the devotion of others should be the reason for your sadness."

"The reason is easy to understand: my friends, who are already good, practise their religion and become better still whilst I am a 'no-hoper' and can't take part and this is the cause of great remorse and uneasiness."

"What a silly kid you are! If your friends' happiness makes you envious, why don't you follow their example? If you have something on your conscience, why don't you get rid of it?"

"Get rid of it! That's very easy to say! But if you were in my shoes, you'd even say that..." and with that, throwing his cap down in anger and frustration he fled into the sacristy.

His friend followed him, and when he caught up with him he said: "My dear Magone, why are you running away from me? Tell me what's bothering you. Who knows I might even be able to suggest a way to get over it."

"You're right, but I'm in such a mess."

"Whatever mess you're in, you have a way to get out of it."

"But how can I find peace when it seems there's a thousand devils in me?"

"Don't worry.. Go to your confessor, open up your heart to him and he will give you all the advice you need. When we have something on our conscience that's what we do. That's why we are always happy."

"That's O.K. but ..." Michael broke down and started sobbing. Several days went by and he grew more despondent. He no longer enjoyed his games. He no longer laughed and smiled. Many times when his companions were

enjoying the recreation he retreated to some corner to think, reflect and to cry. I was keeping a close watch on him so one day I called him and the following conversation took place.

“My dear Magone, I want you to do me a favour and I will not take ‘no’ for an answer.”

“What is it? I am ready to do anything you ask.”

“I want you to give me your heart for a while and tell me what is causing you to be so sad these days.” “It’s true - I have been sad ... but I am desperate and I don’t know what to do.” Having said this he broke down crying. I let him cry for a little while then, jokingly, I said:

“Come on now! Are you the same ‘General Micky’, the leader of the Carmagnola gang? What a fine general you are! You are not even able to tell me, in a few words, what is weighing on your soul.”

“I’d like to but I don’t know how to begin - I don’t know how to express myself.”

“Just say one word and I’ll say the rest.”

“I have a mixed-up conscience.”

“That’s enough — I understand everything. You had only to say that for me to say the rest. I don’t want to enter into matters of conscience just for the moment. I’ll just tell you what to do to put everything right. So listen: if your conscience bothers you regarding the past, simply make a good confession, relating what you have done wrong since your last confession. If out of fear or for any other reason you did not confess something or if you feel your confessions lacked some necessary conditions, then go back to your last good confession and confess what is lying heavy on your conscience.” “Here’s where the difficulty is. How can I remember all that has happened over the past years?”

“That’s easy to put right. Just tell your confessor that there is something in the past that is troubling you and he will take up things from there and put certain questions to you which you will only have to answer yes or no to, and how many times you committed that sin.”

4 Chapter 4. Michael goes to confession and begins to frequent the Sacraments

Michael spent that day examining his conscience. So great was his desire to put things right that he did not want to go to bed before he made his confession. “The Lord,” he said, “has waited for me so long and may not be prepared to wait until tomorrow. So if I can go to confession this evening, I

should not put it off: it is time to make a definite break with the devil." He made his confession with great feeling and many times broke down crying.

Before leaving he said to his confessor: "Do you think all my sins have been forgiven? If I were to die tonight would I be saved?"

"Go in peace," was the answer. "The Lord in His great mercy waited until now for you to make a good confession so I am sure He has pardoned all your sins and if, in His adorable plan, called you to Himself tonight you are absolutely certain of your eternal salvation."

He was very moved by these words and blurted out:

"Oh, how happy I am."

Then, sobbing once more, he went to bed. It was to be a night of excitement and emotion. Later on he was to speak to his friends about all the thoughts that went through his mind that night.

"It is difficult to put into words all that I felt that unforgettable night. I hardly slept at all. In some little time I dozed off but soon my imagination made me see hell open before me, populated with hosts of devils. I drove that thought away as I reflected that all my sins had been forgiven. Then I saw a whole host of angels who showed me paradise, saying to me: See what happiness lies in store for you so long as you keep your resolutions!

About halfway through the night I was so overcome by emotion that I had to get up, kneel by my bed and say over and over again: Oh, how wretched are those who fell into sin! But how much more unhappy are those who live in sin. I believe that if they could only experience for even a single minute the great consolation that being in the state of grace brings they would all go to confession to placate the anger of God, to remove remorse of conscience and to experience peace of heart. Oh, sin, sin! What a terrible curse you are to those who allow your entry into their hearts. If I ever have the misfortune to commit even the smallest sin again I am determined to go to confession immediately."

In this way Magone expressed his remorse for having offended God as well as his firm resolution to be faithful in His service in the future. He began to frequent the sacraments of Confession and Communion and began to find great joy in those practices of piety he previously found boring. He also found confession so pleasing that I had to ask him to go less frequently lest he become a victim of scruples. This is a real danger to young people when they make up their minds to serve the Lord with all their hearts. This wreaks great havoc since the devil uses this means to disturb the mind and the heart and so make the practice of religion burdensome. It often causes those who have already made great strides in virtue to retrace their steps.

The most powerful means to avoid this disaster is to abandon oneself to

complete obedience of one's confessor. When he says something is bad, let us do everything to avoid it. If he assures us that such and such a thing is not evil, then let us follow his advice and go ahead in peace. In summary, obedience to the confessor is the most effective means to be free of scruples and to persevere in God's grace.

5 Chapter 5. A word to young people

The uneasiness and the worries of young Magone on the one hand and the frank and resolute way he went about putting his soul in order on the other, gives me opportunity, beloved young people, to suggest some things that I believe would be useful for your souls. Receive them as a sign of affection from a friend who so ardently desires your eternal salvation.

In the first place I recommend that you do whatever you can not to fall into sin, but if unfortunately you should commit sin, never allow yourself to be convinced by the devil to be silent about it in confession. Always remember that the confessor has power from God to remit every kind of sin, any number of sins. The more serious the sins confessed, the happier his heart will be because he knows quite well that the mercy of God by which your sin will be pardoned will be manifested all the more and that the infinite merits of the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ by which He will wash away the sins from your soul will the more be applied.

My dear young people, remember that the confessor is a father who ardently desires to help you as much as possible and who tries to keep every evil far from you. Do not be afraid that a confessor will think less of you because you reveal to him serious faults you have committed nor should you be afraid that he will speak of these faults to others. A confessor cannot make use of any information he has received in the confessional no matter what it costs him. Even if he had to pay for it with his life he could not divulge even non-important things he has heard as a confessor. I can even assure you that the more open and sincere you are with him, the greater his confidence in you will become and the more likely will he be in a position to give you the best advice possible for the welfare of your soul.

I have stressed these matters lest the devil tempt you to keep back some sin when you go to confession. I assure you, my dear young friends, that as I pen these lines my hand begins to tremble as I think of that great number of Christians who are eternally lost because they either did not confess their sins or were insincere in confession! If anyone of you, going back over your lives, discover that you deliberately kept back a sin or if you have any doubts

about the validity of past confessions, I say to you immediately: Friend for the love of Jesus Christ, and for His Blood shed for the salvation of souls, I beg you to put your conscience in order the very next time you go to confession, putting all in order as if you were at death's door. If you do not know how to explain yourself, just tell your confessor that there is something in your past life that is worrying you.

The confessor will understand. Follow the advice he gives you and you will be certain that everything is in order.

Go to your confessor regularly, pray for him, follow his directions. When you have chosen a confessor who is able to understand and help you, do not go to another unless you have solid reasons for doing so. Until you have a regular confessor in whom you can put all your trust, you will always lack a friend for your soul. Trust in the prayers of your confessor who prays every day in his Mass for his penitents that God may grant you the grace to make good confessions and persevere in doing good; also pray for him.

You can change your confessor without scruple if he goes elsewhere and it would be most inconvenient to go regularly to him or if he is sick or, on the occasion of some great solemnity, there are great numbers wishing to go to him. Likewise if you have something on your conscience which you do not want to divulge to your ordinary confessor change your confessor a thousand times rather than commit a sacrilege.

If what I have written is read by someone who is destined by divine providence to hear the confessions of the young I would like, among countless other things, humbly and respectfully to suggest the following:

Lovingly receive every class of penitents but especially the young. Help them to open their hearts and insist that they come to confession frequently. This is the most secure means of keeping them away from sin. Make use of every means to see that they put into practice the advice given them to avoid sin in the future. Correct them with kindness; never scold them because if you shout at them today they will not come to confession tomorrow or, if they do, they will not speak of those matters which upset you.

When you have gained their confidence, prudently find out whether all their confessions in the past were well made. I say this because famous, experienced authors in both the field of morals and ascetics, and especially a famous author who warrants belief, agree in stating that the first confessions are often null or, at least, defective because of the lack of instruction or the willful omission of matters for confession. Invite the penitent to ponder the state of his conscience well from when he was seven up until he was ten or twelve. At this age he is already aware of certain serious sins but makes little of them or does not know how to confess them. The confessor whilst

he must be most prudent and reserved must not avoid asking questions in the area of the holy virtue of modesty.

I would like to say much more about this topic but I will not as I do not want to appear an expert in those fields where I am simply a poor and humble learner. Here I have only said those things in the Lord that I felt would be useful for the souls of the young to whom I am determined to consecrate every moment of that life which the Lord leaves me here on earth. Now let us return to young Magone.

6 Chapter 6. His exemplary concern for the practices of piety

In addition to the frequent reception of Confession and Communion, Michael added a lively faith, an exemplary concern and an edifying attitude for all the practices of piety. In recreation he was like an unbridled horse. At first he was ill at ease in church but soon controlled himself so as to become a model for any fervent Christian. He prepared himself well for Confession; whilst waiting he allowed others to go in ahead of him; as he waited till the confessor was free, he was recollected and patient. Sometimes he was seen to wait four, even five hours in recollection, still, on his knees on the bare floor, waiting for the chance to go to confession. One of his friends wanted to imitate him, but after two hours he fainted and decided never again to imitate his friend in that kind of penance. This would seem almost unbelievable for someone of such a tender age if the one who is writing about it had not been an eyewitness to the facts. He took delight in speaking of the edifying way in which Dominic Savio went to the sacraments and tried his hardest to imitate him. When he first came to the Oratory he barely tolerated going into church. After several months he found religious functions very comforting no matter how long they lasted. He used to say that what we do in church we do for the Lord and what we do for the Lord never goes unrewarded. One day the bell had already gone for a church function when a friend urged him to finish off the game.

“Yes,” he answered “provided you pay me the same wages as the Lord will.”

Another friend said to him one day:

“Don’t you get fed up with functions in the church when they are long?”

“Oh,” he replied “You are just like I was some time back; you don’t know what’s good for you. Don’t you know that the church is the Lord’s House? The more we go to church here, the greater chance we will have to be with

Him in the eternal triumph of paradise. As well as that, if practice makes perfect in temporal things, why can't this happen with spiritual things? By remaining in the material house of the Lord in this world we acquire the right to stay with Him one day in heaven."

After the customary thanksgiving after Confession or Communion or after the sacred functions he remained a long time before the Blessed Sacrament or before the Blessed Virgin to recite some special prayers. He was so attentive, recollected and composed that he seemed insensible to all external activity. Sometimes his companions, going out of church or passing him, gave him a bump; often they stood on his toes and even hit him. But he carried on with his prayers or meditation as if nothing had happened.

He had great esteem for all kinds of devotional items. A medal, a little crucifix, a holy picture, were all objects of great veneration for him. At any time when he discovered that Communion was being distributed, or some hymn was being sung inside or outside of church, he immediately broke off his recreation and joined in. He had a great love for singing and had a very fine voice which he cultivated. In a short time he was proficient enough to take an active part in solemn and public functions. He assured me, and I leave it in writing, that he did not want to open his lips to utter a word if that was not for the greater glory of God.

"Unfortunately," he said to me, "this tongue of mine has not always performed in the past as it should have done; at least it is in my power to right that for the future!"

He left his resolutions written down on a page, one of which was:

O my God, make this tongue of mine shrivel up between my teeth rather than to utter a word displeasing you.

In 1858 he took part in the Christmas Novena which took place during a retreat in this capital. One evening his companions were singing his praises for the part he had played in the day's function. He became embarrassed and went off on his own. When someone asked him why he acted like that, he started crying and said:

"I have laboured in vain because I enjoyed myself so much when I was singing and lost half of the merit; now this praise has made me lose the other half; all that's left now for me is that I am tired."

7 Chapter 7. Punctuality in performing his duties

Michael's fiery nature, his vivid imagination, his heart full of affections naturally made him a lively lad and, at first sight, distracted. By constant effort

he learned self-control. As we have already said, he was completely at home during recreation. In a few moments after beginning a game all corners of the courtyard echoed to the sound of his feet. There was no game in which he did not excel. But once the bell went for study, classes, rest, meals, church functions, he at once broke off what he was doing and ran to fulfill his duty. It was marvellous to see him who, a few minutes before, had been the soul and inspiration of recreation suddenly being the first to arrive wherever duty called him.

As regards his scholastic duties I feel it could be useful to quote the assessment made by his Latin teacher Fr John Francesia. He writes:

I most willingly and publicly testify to the virtues of my dear student Michael Magone. He was in my class all the scholastic year of 1857 and for a part of 1858-59. As far as I remember there is nothing extraordinary to note in his first year. He conducted himself well. By his application and diligence he did two years of Latin in one so that, at the end of the year, he was able to go into Third Year High School. This is enough to show that his progress was out of the ordinary. I do not remember ever having scolded him because of his behaviour. He was very quiet in class despite his natural liveliness which he gave full vent to in the playground. He made friends of the better elements and tried to copy their example. In 1858-59 I had a very fine class who were determined not to waste a minute of time and were most anxious to make progress in their studies. Michael Magone stood out. Among other things I was amazed by the change in him both physically and morally. He became more and more serious and thoughtful. I believe that this change was brought about by his determination to grow in piety and he could really be put forward as an example of virtue to others. I can still see you there in front of me, my dearly lamented pupil, in that attitude of rapt attention to me, your teacher whilst I was, at the same time, a great admirer of your virtue! He really gave the impression that he had completely put off the old Adam. In seeing him so attentive to his duties, so unusual for a boy of his age, I could not help applying to him those words of Dante: Under these fair locks lay hid an old mind. I recall how, one day, to test how well he was paying attention and how much he was absorbing, I asked my dear student to scan some lines I had just dictated to him. "I'm not very good at it," Michael modestly replied. I then asked him to do as much as he

could. He did it so well that I could not restrain in joining in the spontaneous applause of the class! From then on that 'I'm not very good at it' became a catch phrase in the school to indicate a student outstanding for his diligence and attention.

These were his teacher's words.

In the fulfillment of his duties he was an example to all. The Superior of the House had often said that every moment of time is a treasure. Therefore, he used to say, if I waste a moment I am throwing away a treasure.

Motivated by this thought he did not let a minute go by without doing all that his strength permitted. I have here before me his marks for conduct and diligence for all the time he was with us. In the first weeks he had only 'fair', then they changed to 'good', then 'very good'. After three months they became 'excellent' and that is how they stayed.

In preparation for the Easter of 1858 he made his Retreat to the great edification of his companions and to the consolation of his heart. He wanted to make a general confession and then to write down some resolutions to guide him for the rest of his life. Among them was a proposal to make a vow to never waste a moment of time. He was not given permission to do this. Then he begged to be allowed to promise the Lord to always aim at excellence in his conduct. His director agreed to this provided it did not have the force of a vow. He then got a notebook in which he wrote down the days of the week as follows:

With the help of the Lord and under the protection of Mary most holy I want to spend:

Sunday excellently,

Monday excellently,

Tuesday excellently, etc.

Every morning his first act was to look up this notebook which he read through several times a day and each time he renewed his promise. If he did happen to make some minor slip he punished himself with some sort of penance such as to miss out on some game, to abstain from something he really liked, to say a special prayer and the like.

This notebook was found by his companions after his death and they were very much edified by holy efforts he employed to advance in virtue. He wanted to do all things excellently. Therefore when the signal was given to do something, he broke off his recreation or cut short his conversation and

even put down his pen leaving a line unfinished to promptly go wherever duty was calling him. He often said that it was a good thing to finish off what he had in hand but he got little satisfaction out of doing it and he was often disturbed about it. He said he found the greater satisfaction in performing his duties as indicated by his superiors or by the bell.

Exactness in performing his duties did not prevent him from showing all those signs of courtesy which good manners and charity require. Therefore he was quick to write letters for those who asked him; to clean the clothes of others; to help carry water; to make beds; to sweep; to serve at table; to give up a game, to teach catechism or singing; to explain difficulties in various school subjects to weaker students - these were all things which he did most willingly as the occasion arose.

8 Chapter 8. His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary

It must be said that devotion to the Blessed Virgin is the support of every faithful Christian. This is especially true for young people. This is how the Holy Spirit speaks of her: He who is small, let him come to me. Magone was aware of this important truth, which was revealed to him in a providential fashion. One day he received a holy picture of the Blessed Virgin at the bottom of which was written; Come, my child, listen to me and I will teach you the fear of the Lord. He began to consider this invitation seriously and wrote a letter to his Rector in which he stated that the Blessed Virgin had made her voice known to him and called upon him to be good and that she herself had taught him how to fear, love and serve God.

He began to perform certain practices in honour of her whom he invoked as his heavenly Mother, his divine teacher, his most loving shepherdess. Among the main ways in which he manifested his filial devotion was to go to Communion every Sunday for the soul in purgatory who was most devoted to Mary whilst on earth.

He most willingly forgave anyone who offended him, as an act of devotion in honour of Mary. Cold, heat, nuisances, tiredness, thirst, and similar inconveniences due to climate were for him so many ways he could utilise by joyfully offering them up to God through his heavenly and loving mother, Mary. Before settling down to study, to writing, he took out from one of his books a holy picture of Mary on which was written: Virgin Mother, always help me in my studies.

He recommended himself to her at the beginning of everything he did.

He used to say that whenever he found any difficulties in his studies, he had recourse to his divine Teacher and she explained everything to him. One day a boy congratulated him for the good marks he got for one of his assignments. You should not rejoice with me, he replied, but with Mary who helps me and brings to my mind many things of which I was ignorant before.

To always have present before him some object that would remind him of Mary's patronage in his ordinary occupations, he wrote, wherever he could: Seat of Wisdom: pray for me. This was written on all his books, on the covers of his exercise books, on his desk, on his seat and on any other surface that could be written on.

In May 1858 he decided to do everything possible to honour Mary. Throughout that month he practiced mortification of the eyes, tongue and all the other senses. He wanted to deprive himself of part of his recreation, to fast, spend whole nights in prayer, but he was forbidden to do these things because they were not compatible with his age.

Towards the end of that month he presented himself to his director and said:

"If you think it is a good idea, I would like to do something beautiful in honour of the great Mother of God. I know that St Aloysius Gonzaga was very pleasing to Mary because he consecrated to her the virtue of chastity. I would like to make her this gift also and I would also like to take a vow to become a priest and be chaste forever."

The director told him he was too young to make such important vows.

"Yet," he broke in, "I have a strong urging to give myself totally to Mary; and if I consecrate myself to her she will help me to keep that promise." "Do this," suggested his director, "instead of taking a vow just make a simple promise to embrace the ecclesiastical state if, at the end of your classical studies, it seems that there are evident signs calling you to do this. Instead of a vow of chastity, simply make a promise to the Lord that you will in the future, take every precaution not to do anything or say anything, even jokingly, that would be contrary to this virtue. Every day call upon Mary with some special prayer to help you keep this promise."

He was happy with this proposal and joyfully promised to do all he could to put it into practice.

9 Chapter 9. His concern to preserve the virtue of purity, and what he did about it.

Besides the practices already mentioned there were others to which he gave the greatest importance and which he used to call the fathers, guardians and even policemen of the virtue of purity. We have evidence of this in a reply given by him in a letter written by one of his companions towards the end of the above mentioned May. This letter had been written to Michael asking him to suggest some practices which would help in the preservation of that queen of virtues, purity. The friend passed the letter on to me and I quote as follows:

To give you a complete answer I would have liked to speak with you personally rather than write to you. I will merely pass on the advice given to me by my Rector on how to preserve the most precious of all virtues. One day he gave me a little note on which was written: Read this and put it into practice. I opened it and this is what I read:

Five recommendations that St. Philip Neri gave to young people to help them preserve the virtue of purity. Flight from bad companions; Do not pamper the body; Avoid idleness; Frequent prayer; Frequent reception of the Sacraments especially Confession. He often enlarged upon these five hints and I will explain them as I heard them from his lips. Here they are: Place yourself with total confidence under the protection of Mary; confide in Her, trust in Her. It has never been the case in the whole world that someone had recourse to Her and was not satisfied. She will be your defence against the assaults aimed at your soul by the devil. When you realise you are being tempted, make yourself busy immediately. Idleness and modesty cannot coexist. Therefore, by combating idleness, you will at the same time combat temptations against this virtue.

Often kiss a medal, or the crucifix, make the Sign of the Cross with lively faith saying: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, help me to save my soul. These are the three names which are most terrible and formidable to the devil.

If the temptation continues, turn to Mary with the prayer proposed by Holy Mother the Church: Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners. Besides not pampering the body, and cus-

tody of the senses, especially the eyes, be on your guard against bad literature. Even if you feel there is no danger for you in reading these things, put such literature down immediately. On the contrary, read good books and, amongst these, prefer those that speak of the glories of Mary and the Blessed Sacrament. Flee from bad companions, instead choose good companions, namely those who are praised by your superiors for their good conduct. Speak willingly with these, play with them but especially try to imitate them in their carrying out of their duties and especially the practices of piety.

Go to Confession and Communion as often as your confessor suggests and, if what you have to do allows it, visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament often. These were the seven counsels that Magone in his letter calls 'the seven policemen given to us by Mary to act as guardians of the holy virtue of purity'.

To have some particular inspiration for each day, he practised one of these counsels, adding something in honour of Mary. Thus his first counsel was joined to a consideration of the first joy which Mary enjoyed in heaven and this was for each Sunday. The second of Mary's joys was for Monday and so on. Throughout the following week, Michael meditated upon the Sorrows of Mary.

Perhaps some will say these sort of practices are trivial. But it has been my experience that the splendour of virtue can be obscured and even lost by the slightest whiff of temptation, so if anything, no matter how small, can help to preserve virtue, then it is to be treasured. For this reason I most heartily recommend simple things that do not frighten or tire people, especially young people. Fasts, long prayer and similar harsh practices are either put aside or endured with reluctance and difficulty. Let us keep to easy things but let us persevere in them. This was the path that led Michael to an outstanding degree of holiness.

10 Chapter 10. Exquisite charity extended to others

In addition to his lively faith, his fervour and his devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Michael was outstanding for the charity he showed to others. He knew that the exercise of this virtue was the most efficacious means to grow in the love of God. He practiced this virtue on every occasion

offered him, even if it be a very minor one. He enjoyed recreation to such a degree that he did not know whether he was in heaven or on earth. But if he happened to notice that a companion wanted to play the game he was involved in, he immediately gave way and got involved in something else.

More than once I saw him withdraw from a ball game or some other game to make place for someone else; or get down off his stilts, give them to someone else and help him get balanced on them to make the game more enjoyable and to see that his friend did not have a fall.

If he saw a friend in trouble, he went up to him immediately to see if he could help in any way, or to tell him a story to make him forget his hurt or worries. If he came to know the reason for the trouble, he tried to give some counsel or advice or to mediate for him with a Superior or to find someone who could help.

Whenever he could he explained a problem to a companion, got him a drink, made his bed — anything to help. He found great delight in all this. One winter's day he noticed a boy standing out of recreation because he had chilblains — he also discovered he could not carry out his duties for the same reason. Michael wrote out his assignment for him; he helped him to dress, made his bed and even gave him his own gloves to keep out the cold. What more could a lad of his age do? Because of his fiery nature, he easily lost his temper but it was enough to say to him: "Magone, what are you doing? Is this the way a Christian gets even?" This was enough to cool him down, even to humiliate him so he often went to apologise to his companion immediately, beg pardon for any scandal he may have given.

But if in his first months at the Oratory he had to be corrected quite often for his outbursts of bad temper, soon, with his goodwill, he conquered himself and even became a peacemaker among his own companions. However, if some argument arose he put himself, small as he was, between the litigants and even used force to calm them down.

"We are rational beings," he used to say, "and must act as such and not solve our arguments by means of brute force."

At other times he used to comment:

"If the Lord were to use force every time we offended Him, we could all be exterminated very soon. Therefore, if Almighty God, when offended, uses mercy in pardoning the offender, why do we miserable creatures not use our reason and tolerate displeasures and even insults without seeking revenge?" He said to others:

"We are all sons of God, therefore we are all brothers; he who takes revenge on his companion ceases to be a son of God, and by his outburst of temper becomes a brother of Satan."

He willingly taught catechism; he willingly made himself available to serve the sick and earnestly asked to spend the night with them if their sickness was serious. A friend, moved by the many kindnesses he had done for him, said to him: "What can I do for you, dear Magone, to repay you for all the trouble I am giving you?"

"Nothing else but a single offering of your sickness in penance for my sins" was the reply.

One of his friends was always in trouble. He was handed over to Michael to see what could be done to bring him to his senses. Michael set to work on him. He started by getting to know him and befriending him. He played with him in recreation; he gave him little presents; he passed on to him little notes on which were written pieces of advice and so got to know him very closely but did not speak about religion with him.

Seizing the opportunity of the feast of St Michael, Magone approached him:

"In three days time we have the feast of St Michael; I want you to give me a present."

"Of course, but I am sorry you did not speak about it before as you have caught me unprepared."

"I wanted to speak to you about it because I want to choose the gift."

"Yes — go ahead. I am ready to do what I can to please you."

"Are you ready?"

"Yes."

"If it costs you quite a bit, will you still do it?"

"Yes, I promise you I will do it just the same."

"I want you on the feast of St Michael to give me the present of the gift of a good Confession and to prepare yourself for a fervent Holy Communion." Considering the situation and because of his promises his companion did not dare to refuse this request; he surrendered and the three days previous to the feast he was occupied in practices of piety. Magone used all his best efforts to prepare his friend for this spiritual feast, and on the day itself both went to Confession and Communion to the satisfaction of the Superiors and to the edification of their companions.

Michael spent a happy day with his friend and, as evening came, he said to him:

"We have had a beautiful feast, I'm very happy and you have really given me great pleasure. Now tell me: Aren't you pleased with what we've done?"

"Yes, I am extremely pleased and, more so, because you have prepared me for it. I thank you for the invitation you gave me. Now if you have some good advice for me, I would welcome it."

“For sometime now, my friend, your conduct has left much to be required. Your way of living has displeased your Superiors, hurt your parents, cheated yourself, deprived you of peace of heart and then . . . one day you will have to give an account to God for all the time you have wasted. So, from now on you must flee from idleness, be as happy as you like provided you do not neglect your duties.”

The companion he had half converted was now fully converted. He became Michael’s close friend, began to imitate him in carrying out his duties fully and presently by his diligence and morality he was the consolation of all who had anything to do with him.

I thought I would give this episode some importance and develop it in a detailed fashion because it emphasises Michael’s character and also because I would like to report in full what his companion himself told me.

11 Chapter 11. Facts and sayings

What we have recounted so far deals with easy and simple things that anyone could imitate. Now I want to relate certain facts and sayings that are to be admired because they are agreeable and pleasing but not necessarily easy to follow. However they are useful to underline the goodness of heart and religious courage of this young lad. Here are some among many which I have witnessed.

One day he was talking with his companions when some of them introduced topics that a young well-educated Christian should avoid. Magone only listened to a few words — he then put his fingers in his mouth and gave such a loud whistle that it almost split open the brains of the bystanders.

“What are you doing?” said one of the lads, “Are you mad?”

Magone said nothing and gave a whistle even louder than the first.

“Where are your good manners?” yelled another. “Is that the way to act?”

Magone then replied: “It’s you who are mad, talking like that, so why can’t I be mad too, to stop such talk? If you want to break the rules of good manners by introducing talk that is not fitting for a Christian, why can’t I do the same to stop it?”

Those words, one of his companions assured me, were a wonderful sermon to them all. “We looked at each other; no-one dared to carry on with the talk which consisted of a lot of grumbling. From then on every time we noticed Michael in our company we chose our words well for fear we would have our heads split open by his whistle!”

Accompanying his Superior one day in Turin they came upon a hooligan taking the Holy Name of God in vain. Hearing those words Michael seemed to go crazy; without thinking about the place or the danger, with two jumps he flew at the blasphemer and gave him two punches whilst saying:

“Is this the way to treat the name of the Lord?”

But the hooligan was taller than he was and, without thinking and urged on by the shouts of his companions and by the blood running freely from his nose, he flew at Magone angrily. There followed kicks, blows, punches that did not give either time to draw breath. Fortunately, the Superior ran to the scene and, putting himself between the two belligerents, managed with a great deal of difficulty to re-establish the peace to the satisfaction of both parties. When Michael was master of himself once again, he realised his lack of prudence in correcting that silly fellow like that. He repented of his action and gave an assurance that he would be more cautious in the future and limit himself to giving friendly advice.

On another occasion some lads were discussing the eternity of the pains of hell and one of them said facetiously,

“I’ll do my best not to go there, but if I do . . . patience!”

Michael pretended he had not heard the remark but he quietly left the group, found a box of matches and then returned. Lighting a match he put it under the hand of the lad who made the remark.

“Ouch!” was the startled cry. “That hurts, are you crazy?”

“I am not crazy,” Michael answered, “but I was just trying to test your patience; considering that you reckon you could bear with patience the pains of Hell, you should not be unduly upset by a burning match, the pain of which only lasts for a minute.”

Everyone burst out laughing, but the burnt companion had to admit: Hell must be an awful place to go to.

Other companions wanted him, one morning, to go with them to make their confessions to a confessor who would not know them, and they offered a hundred excuses for doing so. He refused, saying that he did not want to go anywhere without the Superior’s permission. He also added he was not a bandit, afraid of being recognised by the police, feeling he had to go to places and persons unknown for fear of being recognised.

“I have my own confessor and I confess all my sins to him without fear, big or small. The mania for going to confession elsewhere must be due to the fact that you do not love your confessor or you have very serious sins to confess. At any rate, it’s wrong to leave the House without permission. If you really have a serious reason to change your confessor you should make use of the extraordinary confessor who comes along to hear the confessions

of all the Oratory boys on feast days.”

In all the time he was with us he only went home for his holidays once. He would not go again although I advised him to and his mother and relatives were affectionately expecting him. He was often asked the reason for this but his only reply was a smile. Finally one day he gave the reason to someone he trusted.

“I went once,” he said “to spend some days of the holidays at home but, unless I am forced to do so, I will not do that again.”

“Why?” asked his friend.

“Because at home there are still the dangers that were there previously. The places, the amusements, the friends tempt me to live as I did previously and this I do not want to do.”

“You should go with good intentions, determined to put into practice all the pieces of advice our Superiors give us.”

“Good intentions are like a fog that disappears bit by bit as you live away from the Oratory; the advice helps for the first few days and then companions help you to forget all about it.”

“Then, according to you, no-one should go home for the holidays, not even to see one’s relatives.”

“No, according to me, only those who feel they are strong enough to resist temptations should go. I do not feel strong enough to do that. I strongly believe that if our companions could see inside themselves many would be discouraged from going home because they go with the wings of an angel and return with two horns on their heads like so many devils.”

From time to time Michael had a visit from an old friend whom he tried to win over to a life of virtue. This friend used to argue that this was not necessary since he knew a person who had not gone to church for a long time yet was doing very well, was thriving and prosperous looking. Michael took his friend by the arm and brought him over to a carter who was unloading building materials in the courtyard and said:

“See that big mule? He is prosperous looking, big and fat, yet he has never been to Confession and never goes to church. Would you like to become like this animal who has neither soul nor reason. His only concern is to work for his owner and then fertilise the fields after his death.”

His friend was silent and never again offered such frivolous motives for not carrying out his religious duties.

I will pass over many other anecdotes; these are enough to make his goodness of heart better known as well as his great hatred for sin which often led him to excesses when, in his zeal, he tried to prevent an offence against God.

12 Chapter 12. Holidays at Castelnuovo d'Asti. Virtues practised on that occasion

Seeing that Michael was most unwilling to spend his holidays at home, it was decided, in order to give him some relaxation after the pressure of his studies, to bring him with me to Murialdo, a district of Castelnuovo d'Asti, where the boys from the House often went to enjoy the countryside, especially those who had no relatives of place to go where they could spend the autumn season. Taking into consideration his good conduct I asked him and several others, by way of a reward, to accompany me on the trip. Whilst we were walking together I had a chance to talk with this young lad and to discover that he had reached a degree of virtue much greater than I had ever imagined. Leaving aside the beautiful and edifying conversations he had with me on this occasion, I will limit myself to revealing several incidents that serve to let you know how advanced in virtue he was, especially as regards the virtue of gratitude.

Along the road we were caught by a sudden downpour of rain and reached Chieri like a bunch of drowned rats. We took refuge in the home of Mr. Mark Gonella, a benefactor, who welcomed this little band from the Oratory every time they went to or returned from Castelnuovo d'Asti.

He dried our clothes and then prepared a feast which was a generous gesture on his part and which was very much appreciated by the boys.

After a couple of hours rest we set out once more. For some time Michael lagged behind the group and one of his friends, thinking that perhaps he was tired, fell back with him. He found him quietly speaking to himself.

"Are you tired, Micky?" his friend asked. "Are your feet feeling the effects of this long walk?"

"Oh, no! I am not at all tired; I could walk to Milan."

"What were you saying to yourself just now as I came along?"

"I was saying the Rosary for the intentions of that kind gentleman who was so kind to us; I cannot repay him in any other way and so I am asking the Lord and the Blessed Virgin for many graces for his family that he might be repaid a hundredfold for all he did for us."

It is well here to mention in passing that Michael had the same grateful thought for even the smallest favour, but towards his benefactors he was most sensitive. I would be tiring the readers if I transcribed the many letters and notes he wrote me to express his gratitude for having accepted him into this House. I just say that he went nearly every day to make a visit to Jesus in the Blessed sacrament and that each morning he would say and Our Father,

Haily Mary and Glory be for anyone who had been his benefactor.

Not infrequently he took my hand affectionately and looking at me, eyes filled with tears, he would say:

“I don’t know how to express my gratitude for the great charity you showed me by accepting me into the Oratory. I will try to repay you with my good behaviour and by praying to the Lord every day to bless you and your efforts.”

He often mentioned his teachers, those who had gained him admission into the Oratory or who had helped him in any way; he always spoke of them with respect and was never ashamed to mention his poverty on the one hand and his gratitude on the other.

“I regret,” he was often heard to say, “that I have not got the means of showing my gratitude as I should but I know full well what I owe to so many people and as long as I live I will continue to pray to the Lord that He will reward them for all they have done.”

He also expressed his gratitude when the parish priest of Castelnuovo invited our boys to his house for a meal. That evening he said to me:

“If you think it is a good idea, I would like to go to Communion tomorrow for the intentions of the parish priest who entertained us today.”

I not only approved of the gesture but made it a point to recommend the same thing to all the boys, since we must always be grateful to our benefactors. Whilst we were at Murialdo I noted another fine act of virtue which bears relating. One day our boys went for a walk in the nearby woods. Some went looking for mushrooms, whilst others searched for chestnuts and other nuts; others heaped up leaves or other things - in short, they were really enjoying themselves. Whilst they were busy Michael quietly slipped away and went back to the house. One lad saw him, however, and fearing that he might not be well, followed him. Michael, convinced that no-one had seen him, reached the house but, without saying a word to anyone, he went straight to the church. The boy who followed him found him kneeling before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament rapt in fervent prayer.

Questioned later why he had disappeared so suddenly from the company of the rest to pay a visit to the Blessed Sacrament, he replied with all simplicity: “I greatly fear that I might fall into sin again and so I go to beseech the dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament that He will give me the help and the strength to persevere in His grace.”

Another striking incident occurred at the same time. One evening all the boys had gone to bed when I heard someone sighing and sobbing. He went quietly up to the window and I saw Michael in a corner of the threshing floor, looking up at the moon and crying his heart out.

“What’s wrong, Michael?” I said “Aren’t you feeling well?”

He thought he was alone and that no-one could see him and he did not know what to say. I repeated my question, he replied with these exact words: “As I admire the moon I cannot help crying because it has for so many centuries regularly lit up the night without once disobeying the orders of its Creator. I, instead, who am so young and a rational creature who should have been faithful to the laws of God, have disobeyed Him so many times and have offended Him in a thousand ways.” Having said this, Michael broke down once more. I comforted him with a few words, calmed him down and saw him back to sleep.

It is certainly a matter for admiration that a boy scarcely fourteen years old had already attained such wisdom and has such beautiful thoughts. But this is a fact and I could bring forward many other episodes that would show how young Michael was capable of reflections much superior to his age, especially in recognising in everything the hand of God and the obligation all creatures have of obeying their Creator.

13 Chapter 13. His preparation for death

After the holidays spent at Castelnuovo, Michael lived for only about three months longer. He was rather small but healthy and well-built. He was quite intelligent and had no trouble in mastering anything he took up. He had a great love for study and was making better than average progress. As regards his piety, he had reached a standard where I could honestly say that I would not know what to add or subtract in order to present him as a model for young people. He was lively by nature but he was pious, good, devoted and highly appreciative of the little acts of virtue.

He performed them joyfully, naturally and without scruples - because of his piety, his love for study and his affability he was loved and esteemed by all whilst, at the same time, because of his liveliness and gentle manners, he was the idol of the playground.

There is no doubt that it was our earnest wish that this model of Christian living would be spared to us until his ripe old age so that, whether he felt was his calling was to be a priest or a layman, he would have done honour to his country and his faith. But God had decreed otherwise and wished to take this beautiful flower from the garden of the Church militant unto Himself and transplant it in the Church triumphant in Paradise. Michael, too, without realising it was preparing for his approaching death with an even better and more perfect way of life.

He made the novena for the feast of the Immaculate Conception with particular fervour. I want to put before you those things he proposed to himself for these days and they are as follows:

I, Michael Magone, wish to make this novena well and so I promise:

To detach my heart from all earthly things so as to give it completely to Mary. To make a general Confession in order to ensure a peaceful conscience at the hour of my death. To skip breakfast every morning as a penance for my sins and to recite the Seven Joys of Mary to merit her assistance at the last hours of my life. To go to Communion every day provided my confessor advises it. To tell my companions an anecdote in honour of Mary each day. To place this sheet at the feet of Our Lady's statue and, with this act, to consecrate myself completely to Her and, for the future, I wish to be entirely hers until the very last moments of my life.

All these resolutions were approved except the General Confession which he made only a short time before. Instead of skipping his breakfast he was advised to say a prayer each day for the souls in Purgatory.

Magone's behaviour certainly gave rise to much amazement in those nine days of novena for the Feast of the Immaculate Conception - he showed extraordinary happiness, but this was always accompanied by efforts to tell good little stories to the others, or invite others to do the same. He gathered whichever friends he could to go and pray before the Blessed sacrament or the statue of Our Lady. During the novena he gave up sweets, fruit, other snacks. He gave away to some of the less devout boys any little books, holy pictures, medals, crucifixes or other items he had been given. He did this either to reward them for their good behaviour during the novena or to encourage them to take part in the practices of piety he suggested to them.

With similar fervour and recollection he celebrated the novena and feast of Christmas. "I really want to make every effort to make this novena well," he said as he began it, "so that the Baby Jesus will come and be born in my soul with an abundance of His graces."

On the eve of the last day of the year (1858), the Superior of the House urged all the boys to thank the Lord for all the favours granted to them over the past year. He encouraged them to promise strongly that they would pass the New Year in God's grace because, he added, this may be the last one for

one of you. Whilst saying this his hand was resting on the head of the lad nearest him and that was Magone.

“I understand,” Michael said with an air of surprise “that it is I who should get things packed up to depart for eternity.” His words were greeted with laughter, but his companions remembered these words and Michael himself often recalled them. Notwithstanding this thought he did not lose his joviality and air of happiness and continued to perform his duties faithfully and well.

The last day of his life was really close at hand and God wanted to give him an even clearer warning of it. On Sunday, January 16th the members of the Sodality of the Blessed Sacrament to which Michael himself belonged got together for their usual Sunday meeting.

Here are the main rules for this Sodality:

1. The main aim of this sodality is to foster adoration for the Blessed Sacrament and to make up for the blasphemies committed against Jesus Christ in this most august Sacrament by infidels and heretics and bad Christians.
2. For this reason members will try to arrange their going to Communion in such a way that someone can receive Communion each day. Each member, with his Confessor’s permission will see to going to Communion on Sundays and once during weekdays.
3. They will be ready to offer special assistance at all functions to do with the worship of the Holy Eucharist, like serving at Mass, taking part in Benediction, accompanying the Viaticum when it is being taken to the sick, visiting the Blessed Sacrament in the Tabernacle and especially during exposition at the Forty Hours Devotion.
4. Each one will try to learn how to serve Mass well, performing all the rites exactly, and repeating the responses that belong to this holy mystery distinctly and devoutly.
5. Each week there will be a meeting on spiritual matters which each member will do his best to attend and invite others to do so punctually.
6. The meetings will involve matters to do with the worship of the Blessed Sacrament, such as encouraging Communions made with great recollection, instructing and helping those making their First Holy Communion, helping those who need it to make preparation and thanksgiving, spreading books, holy pictures, written material for this purpose.

7. After each meeting some spiritual resolution will be made to be put into practice in the coming week.

After the opening prayers and the usual reading and having discussed those matters that seemed most opportune, one of the members took the little box which contained little slips of paper on which were written maxims to be practised over the following week. This did the rounds and each boy picked one out at random. Michael plucked his out only to read: At the judgement seat of God you will be on your own. He read it and then, as if caught unaware, he said aloud to his companions, "I am sure that this is a message sent me by the Lord to warn me to hold myself in readiness."

After this he went to his Superior and said with a little anxiety that he considered it as a warning from the Lord Who was soon to summon him into His presence. His Superior urged him to keep himself in readiness not because of what was written on the slip of paper, but because of the advice that Jesus clearly gives in the Gospel where he urges us to be always ready.

"Then tell me," insisted Michael "how much longer I have to live?"

"You will live as long as God wants you to."

"But will I live until the end of this year?" he begged again with a trembling voice.

"Courage, Michael, calm down. Our life is in the hands of God Who is a good Father. He knows how long to preserve us. Besides, it is not necessary to know the hour of our death to go to heaven. It is sufficient to prepare for it with good works."

Then he grew sad: "If you don't want to tell, it is a sign that my end is near."

"That is not necessarily so but, even if it were, I am sure you would not be afraid of going to pay a visit to the Blessed Virgin in heaven."

"That's true! That's true!" He became his old cheerful self and ran out to take part in the recreation.

He was as happy as ever on Monday, Tuesday and the morning of Wednesday. His health was good and he was punctual in all his duties..Only on the afternoon of Wednesday did he stand on the balcony watching the games and taking no part. This was most unusual and surely a sign that he was not feeling well.

14 Chapter 14. His illness and the circumstances attending it

On the evening of that day (Wednesday, 19 January, 1859) he was asked what was the matter with him and he answered that there was nothing. He had an upset stomach which was nothing unusual for him. He was given some medicine and went to bed. He passed the night peacefully.

He got up the following morning at the usual time with his companions, went to church and received Holy Communion for the dying which was his usual custom every Thursday. Later he went into the playground but he could take no part because he was feeling very tired and experienced difficulty in breathing. He was given some more medicine, the doctor was called but, finding nothing serious, advised him to keep on taking the same remedy.

His mother was in Turin at this time and was told of his sickness. She came to see him and told us that he had suffered similar illnesses ever since he was quite young and the remedies we were giving him were the same as she had given.

He wanted to get up on the Friday to go to Holy Communion in honour of the Passion of Christ which he used to do every Friday to obtain the grace of a happy death. He was not allowed to do this as he seemed to have got worse. He had had problems with worms, so he was given some more medicine and something special to relieve his breathing. Up to this time, there were no signs that he was seriously ill.

At about two in the afternoon matters suddenly changed for the worse. He was experiencing great difficulty in breathing and was beginning to cough and spit up blood. Asked how he felt, he replied that he was still feeling a certain heaviness in his stomach. However, I noticed that he was by now a very sick boy so the doctor was called for once more, to dispel doubt and make sure we were doing the right thing. At that moment his mother, in a true Christian spirit, suggested he go to confession whilst waiting for the doctor.

“Yes, mum, yes! I only went to Confession yesterday and went to Holy Communion but if the sickness is serious I would like to go to Confession once again.”

He prepared himself for a few minutes and made his Confession. After that he calmly and smilingly addressed himself to me and his mother:

“Who knows but this Confession will be for the Exercise for a Happy Death for the real thing!”

“What do you think? Would you like to get better or go to heaven?”

“The Lord knows what is best for me; I only want to do what pleases him.”

“If the Lord gave you the choice of getting better or going to heaven, what would you choose?”

“Who would be mad enough not to choose heaven?”

“So you would like to go there?”

“For sure I would! I would like to go there with all my heart. That’s what I have been asking the Lord for now for some time.”

“When would you like to go?”

“Right away if that is according to the Lord’s pleasure.”

“Right, let us say together: In everything, whether in life or in death, may the adorable will of God be done!”

Just at that moment the doctor arrived. He found that the sick boy’s condition was serious.

“The case is very serious,” he confided. “The lad has a hemorrhage in the stomach, and I am doubtful whether we can stop it.”

He did what he could. Blood letting, blistering, medicines — anything possible was done to stop the internal bleeding that at times hindered his breathing.

All in vain.

At nine o’clock that night (Friday, 21 January) Michael asked to go to Communion once more before his death which he had not been able to do that morning.

He was very anxious to receive the Christ which he had been receiving now for some time with so much fervour.

Before he received it he said to me and those around his bed:

“I recommend myself to the prayers of my companions; may they pray that the sacramental Christ be my Viaticum. To lead me to eternal life he received Communion and was helped to make his thanksgiving.

At the beginning of th’e Viaticum he told me in the presence of the others:

“I recommend myself to my companions’ prayers. Let them pray that Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament will really be my Viaticum, my companion into eternity.” He received the Host and then began his thanksgiving with the help of the Assistant.

After a quarter of an hour he stopped repeating the prayers that were suggested to him and, since he did not say anything we thought he had suddenly passed away. But after a few minutes he opened his eyes and in a seemingly joking way, said:

“On that slip of paper last Sunday there was a mistake! It said — At the judgement seat of God you will be on your own — That’s not true. I shall not be alone. The Blessed Virgin will be there to help me so I have nothing to fear - I am ready to go at any time. Our Lady wants to be by my side at the judgement seat of God.”

15 Chapter 15. His last moments and a beautiful death

It was ten o’clock and Michael’s condition worsened. It seemed that he would not last the night. Therefore it was arranged that Fr. Zattini, a cleric and a young infirmarian should sit with him for half the night and the Fr. Alasonatti, [B][B] This good priest, after a life given in most exemplary fashion to his sacred ministry and various works of charity, died at Lanzo, 8th October 1865 after a long illness. We are now putting together a life of his activity which hopefully will please his friends and anyone else who wants to read it. Prefect of the house, with another cleric and an infirmarian should watch by his bedside for the rest of the night.

I did not think there was any immediate danger so I said to the patient: "Michael get a bit of rest. I am going to my room for a few moments and then I will return."

“No, please don’t abandon me” Michael begged.

“I’m only going to say some of my breviary and then I’ll come back.”

“Then come back as soon as you can.”

I gave instructions that I was to be called at the first sign of a worsening condition because I loved that young lad very tenderly and I wanted to be at his side in his last moments. I was no sooner in my room that I was called back to the sick-bed because it seemed that Michael had entered upon his death agony.

This was so. He was slipping away quickly so the Holy Oils were administered by Fr. Zattini. Michael was still fully conscious.

He answered the various prayers of the ceremony for the administration of this august sacrament. At every anointing he added some special prayers of his own. I remember his words at the anointing of his lips:

“O my God, if only you had struck me dumb before I had used my tongue to offend you, how many fewer offences there would have been! My God, pardon the sins of my tongue - I repent of them with all my heart.”

At the anointing of the hands he added:

“How many times have I not punched my companions with these hands! Pardon me, O God, and help my companions to be better than I am.” The Anointing over, he was asked would he like us to call his mother who had gone to take rest in a nearby room, also considering his condition was not serious.

“No,” he replied, “it is better not to call her. Poor Mum! She loves me so much that witnessing my death would deeply disturb her. Poor Mum! When I’m in heaven I’ll pray much for her.”

He was urged not to excite himself and to prepare himself for the papal blessing, with a plenary indulgence. During his life he had always held religious practices in high esteem to which indulgences were attached and did his best to utilise them. Hence he was delighted to receive the Papal Blessing. He took part in all the prayers but wanted to recite the Confiteor himself. He pronounced every word with the greatest fervour, devotion and lively faith and the bystanders were moved to tears.

He then seemed to drowse off and so we did not disturb him but he soon awoke. His pulse indicated that death was fast approaching but his face was calm. He smiled, and was as fully conscious as a man in perfect health. This was not because he did not feel any pain because his internal bleeding caused suffocation - he was panting and was generally exhausted. But Michael had often asked God to allow him to do all his Purgatory on earth so that he could go straight to heaven. It was this thought that enabled him to suffer with joy and that very pain which normally brings sadness and distress produced in him nothing but joy and pleasure. Therefore through a special grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Michael not only seemed insensible to pain but showed that he felt only consolation in putting up with these very sufferings. It was not necessary to suggest any prayers to him because he himself, from time to time, was making moving spontaneous prayers.

It was 10:45 when he called my name and said to me:

“This is it. Help me.”

“Take it easy,” I replied. “I shall not abandon you until you are safe with the Lord in heaven. But if you are really convinced you are about to leave this world, don’t you want to say a last good-bye to your mother?”

“No, Father. I don’t want to hurt her.”

“Then, won’t you give me a message for her?”

“Yes, ask her to pardon me for all the suffering I caused her. Tell her that I am sorry. Tell her that I love her and that she should courageously continue her good work. Tell her that I die willingly and that I am leaving this world in the company of Jesus and Mary and that I will be waiting for her in heaven.”

At these words, all those present began to sob. I controlled myself and, to fill those last moments with good thoughts, I kept on asking him questions. "And what do you want to leave as a message for your companions?"

"Tell them to always make good confessions."

"Michael, tell me what thing of your past life gives you the greatest consolation at this moment?"

"What consoles me most at this moment is the little I have done to honour Mary. Yet, this is the greatest consolation. O Mary, O Mary, how happy are those at the hour of death who have been devoted to you! "But," he continued, "there is one thing that puzzles me. When my soul is separated from my body as I enter heaven, what must I do? To whom must I turn?"

"If Our Lady wants to accompany you, leave all that to Her. But before you leave for Paradise I would like to give you a commission."

"Go ahead, I'll do all I can to obey you."

"When you are in heaven and you see the Blessed Virgin, give her our humble and respectful good wishes, from me and from everyone in this House. Beg Her to give us all Her blessing, to take us all under Her powerful protection. Beg her to make sure that none of us who are in this House at present or anyone that Providence will send us in the future will lose their soul."

"I'll do that willingly. Is there anything else?"

"Not for the present," I replied.

It seemed as if he wanted to have a sleep. He appeared quite calm although his weakening pulse signalled his imminent death. For this reason we began to recite the Profisciscere; towards the middle of the prayer he awoke as if from a deep sleep and, with a smile on his lips, said to me: "Within a short time now I will deliver your message. I'll do my best to make a good job of it. Tell my companions I await them all in heaven." He took the crucifix in his hands, kissed three times and then uttered his final words. "Jesus, Joseph and Mary, I place my soul in your hands." He parted his lips as if to smile and gently fell back in death.

That blessed soul left this world to fly, as we ardently hope, to the bosom of God at 11 p.m. of January 21, 1859, barely fourteen years old. He suffered no agony. He was not agitated or in pain nor did he manifest any of the symptoms that naturally accompany the terrible separation of the soul from the body. I hardly know how to describe his death except by calling it a sleep of joy that bore away that soul from the sorrows of life to the joys of eternity. The bystanders were more moved than saddened. Fr. Zattini could no longer control his emotions and exclaimed:

"O Death, you are not a punishment for innocent souls! For these you are the great benefactor who opens the doors to joys that will last for ever.

Oh, why cannot I be in your place, Michael? At this moment your soul has been judged and the Blessed Virgin has already conducted you to the enjoyment of the great glory of heaven. Dear Magone, may you live happily for all eternity - pray for us — we will fulfill our duties as friends by offering fervent prayers to God for the eternal repose of your soul.”

16 Chapter 16. His funeral - Final thoughts - Conclusion

At daybreak Michael’s good mother came into the room to see her son. Her sorrow was great when she learned that he was dead! That Christian woman just stood there for a moment without saying a word, or giving a sigh, then broke forth in these words:

“Great God, you are the Master of all things ... Dear Michael, you are dead ... I’ll always weep for you as a son I have lost but I will thank God who allowed you to die here with every help possible. Such a death is precious in the eyes of the Lord. Rest with God in peace, pray for your mother that loved you so dearly on this earth and will love you even more now that I believe that you are with the just in heaven. As long as I live, I will continue to pray for your soul and hope one day to join you in the homeland of the saints.”

Having said these words, she broke down sobbing and went to the church to find comfort in prayer.

The loss of such a companion caused great sadness to all the boys in the House and to all who knew him.

He was well known for his physical and moral qualities and was most esteemed for the rare virtues that adorned his life.

It can be said that his companions passed the following day in praying for the repose of his soul. They found comfort only in saying the Rosary, the Office of the Dead, going to Confession and Communion. All mourned him as a friend yet all consoled themselves by saying: At this moment Michael is already with Dominic Savio in heaven.

The feelings of his companions and of his teacher Fr. Francesca are summed up in the following lines he penned:

On that day after Michael’s death I went into class. It was a Saturday. Michael’s seat was unoccupied so I told the class that we had lost a student on earth but perhaps heaven had gained another citizen. I nearly broke down as I said this. The boys

were appalled and in the general silence only one thing was said and that was: He is dead. All the class broke into sobs. All loved him and who could not but love a lad adorned with so many virtues? The great reputation he had acquired was only realised after his death. Pages written by him were vied for. One of my distinguished colleagues Fr. Turchi, thought himself very fortunate to have a notebook that belonged to Michael and to have his name on a piece cut off from an examination paper of the previous year. For my part, because of the virtues practiced by him with so much perfection, I did not hesitate to invoke him in all my needs and I must confess he never once let me down. Please accept my sincerest thanks, dear friend, and I beg of you to keep on interceding for your old teacher before the throne of God. Instil into my heart a spark of your great humility, Michael! Pray for all your companions that they may meet with you one day in heaven.

This was his teacher.

In order to give an external sign of the great affection we had for our departed friend, he was given as solemn a burial as was compatible with our humble condition.

With lighted candles, funeral hymns and the brass band, we accompanied the body to the grave where, praying for the repose of his soul, we said our last fond farewell with the hope that we would one day be companions in a better life than this.

A month later we celebrated the Month's Mind. The celebrated orator, Fr. Zattini, preached Michael's eulogy in moving words. I regret that there is no room in this little booklet for it to be reported in full. However, I want to quote the final part as a conclusion to this biography.

After having reminded us of the principal virtues that enriched his soul, he invited his sorrowing and moved audience not to forget him. He asked them to remember him often, to comfort him with their prayers and to follow the wonderful example he had given them.

Finally, he concluded this way:

These examples and these words in death our friend Michael Magone of Carmagnola places before us. Today he is no more, death has caused him to vacate his seat here in church where he often came to pray – that prayer that he found so beautiful and which brought him so much peace. He is no more and, with

his departure, teaches us that every star sets here below, every treasure consumed, every soul reclaimed. Thirty days ago we committed his mortal remains to the earth. If I had been present I would have followed the usual custom of the people and God and would have plucked a handful of grass by the graveside and thrown it in to the coffin whilst repeating in sad tones the words of the Son of Judah: They will flower like the grass of the fields; from their bones will arise other dear young people who will remind us of you, will repeat their example and will multiply their virtues!

Therefore, a final farewell, O sweet, dear, faithful companion of ours, our good, brave Michael! Goodbye! You, the hope of your wonderful mother who shed tears over you more of piety than that of nature and blood. You, the beautiful hope of an adopted father who received you in the name of God, who called you to this beautiful and blessed sanctuary where you learned so well and so quickly the love of God and esteem for virtue. You, the friend of those who followed along with you, respectful to your Superiors, docile to your teachers, kindly to all! You dreamed of the priesthood — even there you would have been a master and example of heavenly wisdom. You have left a void, a wound in our hearts! But you have gone from us or, better, death has stolen you from our esteem and affection — has death anything to teach us? Yes, to the fervent, to the less fervent and the sinners; the negligent, the sleepy, the lazy, the weak, the tepid, the cold. We pray you to let us know whether you are in the land of the living, in the place of joy; let us hear that you at the fountain-head, in the sea of grace and your musical voice now with the heavenly choirs so pleasing to the ears of God! Give us your zeal, your love, your charity. Help us to live good, chaste, devout, virtuous lives. May we die happy, peaceful, calm deaths, trusting in divine mercies. We beg you that death may not touch us with its torments as it respected you. *Non tangat nos tormentum mortis!* Pray for us with those angelic youths from this House who proceeded you into God's presence: Camillo Gavio, Gabriel Fascio, Aloysius Rua, Dominic Savio, John Massaglia. Pray with them above all for the most beloved head of this House. We will always remember you in our prayers, we will never forget you until we have been granted the joy of reaching the stars. O,

blessed be God who formed you, nourished you, supported you and took you to Himself. Blessed be He who takes away life – blessed be he who surrenders it.

17 Appendix A.

Practices of piety which Michael Magone carried out each day.

Daily prayer to Jesus on the cross for all who will die today

O most merciful Jesus, lover of souls, I beg you, through the agony of your Sacred Heart and the sorrows of your Immaculate Mother, to wash the souls of all sinners in your Blood, including those who are dying at the moment and who will pass from life today.

May the sorrowful heart of Jesus have pity on them. Amen.

Another prayer to be recited in the morning, at midday and in the evenings for the dying

My God, apply to the faithful in agony and dying at the moment, the infinite merits of the most Precious Blood of Our Saviour Jesus Christ, his sorrowful passion and death, the martyrdom which Mar suffered at the foot of the Cross, and the prayers that she addressed to you at this moment. Hail Mary. . .

Useful ideas for saying prayers, performing other meritorious works for the dying

How many thousands will die today, like grass, harvested by the Grim Reaper! All of them must appear before God-s fearful tribunal to hear the sentence of eternal life or death! Alas - perhaps all will be in a state of grace or thousands in a state of mortal sin!

A good Confession or an act of true contrition is enough to save them! Our prayer today, our fasting, or any other religious practice can obtain one or the other grace from the Heart of Jesus in agony: there will be no time tomorrow!

How many there are dying today who are our friends, our benefactors, perhaps even our brothers, husbands or wives, maybe even accomplices in our sinfulness or who have been scandalised by us! Each of them for one or other reason has the right to our charity.

They day will come when we too will be listed amongst the number of those who are dying. What a consolation it will be for us in our last difficult and final moments if there is someone to pray for our soul! What a sweet memory will our prayers be, and the good works we did for those who were dying.

Note

Those who say three Our Fathers and Hail Marys when they hear the bell toll for someone who is dying, will gain 300 days indulgence applicable to the holy souls in Purgatory.

Divine praises

Blessed be God.

Blessed be his holy name.

Blessed be Jesus Christ true God and true man.

Blessed be the name of Jesus.

Blessed be Jesus in the most holy Sacrament of the altar.

Blessed be the Mother of God Mary Most Holy.

Blessed be the name of Mary, Virgin and Mother.

Blessed be God in his angels and in his saints. Amen.

Note

Pius VII grants one year's indulgence each time these are said.

DECLARATION BY THE AUTHOR

In whatever has been said or written about young Michael Magone the author offers no authority except for simple historical truth, putting everything to the judgement of the Holy Church whose greatest glory he still holds in honour every time that he can profess himself to be its most obedient son.