

THE LIFE OF YOUNG DOMINIC SAVIO, PUPIL AT THE ORATORY OF ST FRANCIS DE SALES

by Father JOHN BOSCO

TURIN

G. B. PARAVIA & Co. Press

1859

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Extract from a Pastoral Letter by Archbishop Gianotti, Giovanni Antonio

To the Rev. Parish Priests of the diocese, regarding the *Letture Cattoliche* (*Catholic Readings*).

Before closing this Letter of ours, we should at least encourage you to propagate a small journal, the reading of which we believe will be of the greatest value for Christian families given the times we live in.

You would know, good Fathers, that some years back in an appropriate Pastoral Letter addressed to the faithful in our Diocese, we pointed to the serious harm done to faith and morals by so many godless and free-thinking books and broadsheets that are flooding our streets. Seeing that this remains a deplorable problem, unfortunately, we suggest you join us in our vigilance in preventing the enemy of souls from secretly sowing tares in the evangelical field, and work lovingly to sow the good seed of God's Word and Catholic teaching everywhere. This can be done not only with the instructions you give in church but also by distributing the aforesaid journal we have earlier recommended, the *Letture Cattoliche*, amongst Catholic families. Its choice of topics, its clear presentation and style, and its modest cost, [A][A]An approximately 108 page booklet that comes out once a month. Subscription costs Cent. 15 a month, that is L. 1. 80 a year. Subscriptions and monthly distribution of the booklet is looked after by the Archpriest at the Cathedral. seem to us to make it most appropriate for the people's understanding and needs. And you have even more cause for recommending it inasmuch as the supreme Pontiff of the Church, Pius IX, has deemed it worthy to encourage collaborators in this good work to continue. Furthermore a Circular from His Eminence the Cardinal Vicar, encouraged all Archbishops and Bishops in the Pontifical State to disseminate the *Letture Cattoliche* as much as they could throughout cities and towns under their spiritual jurisdiction.

Let us beg our merciful God, dear Fathers, to look mercifully upon the afflictions of the Church,

so that clear and peaceful skies may shine on our dear country, through our Holy Catholic Religion, and that meanwhile he may give us the patience, courage and zeal that we need as His faithful Ministers to fight his battles, triumph over his enemies, and lead the souls entrusted to our spiritual care to the long-awaited gates of blessed eternity.

Saluzzo, 9 October 1858.

GIOANNI ARCHBISHOP AND BISHOP

G. GARNERI Secretary

My Dear Boys,

You yourselves have often asked me to write you something about Dominic Savio, and having done what I could to satisfy your earnest wishes here then is his life, briefly and simply written.

There have been two difficulties in particular in writing this life for you. The first one is the comments that come from writing about things many people still living have seen and heard. I think I have got around this by only writing about the things which we ourselves saw. The second one is that, since Dominic lived here for three years, I have had to speak about myself in different ways. I have tried to overcome this by treating things in as historical a way as possible. If, however, in spite of this I seem to refer to myself unduly, consider it to be the result of the the great affection I have for Dominic and for you all; this lets me talk freely to you and keep no secrets from you.

You might ask me why it is I have written Dominic's life and not that of some of the other boys who had such a reputation for virtue and whom you were so fond of - Gabriel Fascio, Louis Rua, John Massaglia come quickly to mind, apart from many others. It is quite true that the goodness of these boys would make their lives very well worth writing, but Dominic stood out even above these. But if God gives me the health and grace, I have in mind to collect information about these other virtuous friends of yours and satisfy both yours and my wish to read about them and imitate them in whatever is compatible with your state in life.

In the meantime, as you read about Dominic's life say to yourselves what the great St. Augustine said in similar circumstances, Si ille cur non ego? That is, if a boy of my age, just like me in every way, who had to meet the same temptations as I have to or worse, could follow Christ with such courage and wholeheartedness, why should I not do the same? Remember that true religion does not mean simply saying things, but doing them. If you read something that you admire, don't content yourself with saying: "This is great," say rather, "I am going to do the same."

May God give you and all those who read this little book the grace to benefit from it. May the Blessed Virgin whom Dominic loved so much, grant that we may, all of us, love God with all our heart and soul. For He alone deserves all our love and service.

Fr John Bosco

Chapter 1. Home - The boy's character - His early goodness

Dominic's parents, Charles and Brigid Savio, were poor, hard working people and belonged to Castelnuovo d'Asti a little town about ten miles from Turin. In 1841 they went to live in Riva.

When Dominic was two years old his parents decided to return to their native place and they found a home at Murialdo on the outskirts of Castelnuovo d'Asti.

His parents dearly loved their son and had only one idea - to bring him up as a good Christian. Dominic was naturally good and his heart was a fertile field for the things of God. He learned his morning and night prayers readily and could already say them by himself when he was only four years old. He was constantly beside his mother, eager to help her in every way. Sometimes, it was only to go into some corner and try to say some prayers.

"From his earliest years," said his parents, "when children find it very difficult to keep still, and are always wanting to touch and pull things about, Dominic was not only obedient and ready to do anything we asked but was also always trying to do whatever made us happy."

When his father came home at night from work, Dominic would run to meet him, take his hand, or jump up into his arms, something they noted with interest and with pleasure.

"Dear Dad," he'd say, "how tired you must be. True? You work so hard for me and I'm not always good, in fact I cause trouble. I pray to God to give you health and to make me good."

And with that he would offer him a chair or stool to sit on, would keep him company and do a thousand little things for him.

"This was real comfort for me in my work" the father said, "and I was impatient to get home and kiss my Dominic who had won over my heart completely."

His love did not stop at his parents; his love of God was older than his years. He wanted to say his prayers and never had to be reminded, much less forced to say them at night and before and after meals. The *Angelus* too. Rather, it was he who reminded others, should they happen to forget.

One day, distracted by something unusual, his parents sat down to the meal without saying grace. Dominic immediately said,

"Dad, we have not said our grace yet," and began to make the Sign of the Cross and say the prayer.

On another occasion there was a visitor in the house who was asked to stay for dinner. When the meal was put on the table, the man sat down and began eating without making the Sign of the Cross or saying any prayer. Dominic did not presume to correct the visitor, but left the table and stayed away until the visitor had gone. When asked by his parents why he had acted in this very unusual way, he said, "I did not like to be at table with one who eats just like animals do."

Chapter 2. Good behaviour at Murialdo - Signs of virtue - Attendance at the village school

In this chapter there are facts which some might find difficult to believe. In giving them I quote from a statement given me by Dominic's parish priest:¹

Soon after I came to Murialdo, I would often see a small boy about five years old coming into the church with his mother. I was very struck with the serenity of his face and his unaffected piety, and was not surprised that others noticed the same. If, when he came to church in the morning it was locked, you would see something very interesting. He would quietly kneel down and say his prayers, instead of beginning to play about in some way or other as boys of his age would do. It did not matter if the ground was muddy or the snow was thick on it, he knelt down just the same. Curious to know who he was, I made inquiries and found out that he was the son of the blacksmith, Charles Savio.

If ever I met him on the road he would wave while still some distance away and his face would light up with a smile. At school he made rapid progress not simply because he was clever, but also because he tried very hard. Some of the boys he had to mix with were rather rowdy and far from good, but I never saw him quarrelling. If they did try to involve him in some disturbance, he would patiently hold on and at the first opportunity quietly slip away. If they wanted him to join with them robbing orchards, damaging property, making fun of old people or suchlike, he not only refused but stated quite convincingly why he thought it was wrong to do so.

This spirit of piety did not drop off as he grew older. He was only five years old when he learned to serve Mass and he always did so with great attention. He tried to be at Mass every day, and if there was someone else serving he would hear Mass from the benches. As he was rather small, he could not reach the missal when it was on the altar. It brought a smile to one's lips to see him anxiously coming up to the altar, standing on tip-toe and reaching as far as he could in the effort to get hold of the missal-stand. If the priest saying Mass wanted to please him, on no account should he change the missal over himself, but pull the stand right to the edge where Dominic could get hold of it and carry it triumphantly to the other side.

He used to go regularly and frequently to confession, and since he already knew how to distinguish heavenly bread from the earthly kind, he was allowed to make his First Communion. Communion was something he did with great devotion. Seeing how grace was working in his soul so marvellously, I often thought to myself, "What promise there is here for the future; may God open up the way for him to reach the heights he is capable of attaining."

That is what the priest at Murialdo wrote.

¹ The chaplain there then was Fr John Zucca from Moriondo then living at Buttigliera d'Asti.

Chapter 3. His first communion - Preparation, recollection and memories of the day

Nothing stood in the way of Dominic's being allowed to make his First Communion. He knew the basic catechism by heart, and understood very well what the Holy Eucharist was. He had also a great desire to receive Jesus into his heart. There was only one difficulty, his age. At that time boys and girls did not normally make their First Communion until they were eleven or twelve years old. Dominic was only seven. To look at him, he seemed even younger, and so the parish priest hesitated to put him forward. He sought advice from some of the other priests and they, knowing Dominic's state, said that he need not hesitate. The way was now clear and Dominic was told that he could make his First Holy Communion.

It is not easy to describe the joy which filled him at this news. He ran home trembling with excitement and joy to tell his mother. Much of his time was given to praying and reading; he made visits to the Blessed Sacrament and it seemed as though he was trying to out rival the angels in his devotion.

The evening before he went to his mother and said:

“Mother, tomorrow I am receiving Jesus in Holy Communion for the first time; forgive me for anything I have done to displease you in the past: I promise you I am going to be a much better boy in every way.” Having said this, he burst into tears. So did his mother as she put her arms round him, unable to say anything except,

“Pray for me and for your father, pray that God may keep you always his own.”

Dominic was up early next morning, dressed himself in his best clothes and hurried off to church. It was not yet open so he knelt down on the steps, as was his custom, and tried to pray until the other children arrived and the church was opened. With Confession, preparation, thanksgiving and sermon, the service lasted five hours. Dominic was the first in church and the last to leave. Time seemed to mean nothing to him and he scarcely seemed to know whether he was on earth or in heaven.

It was a wonderful and never-to-be-forgotten day for him; it was a renewal of his life for God, a life that can be taken as an example by anyone. If one got him to talk about his First Communion several years later, his face lit up with joy and happiness as he said:

“That was the happiest and most wonderful day of my life.”

He made some promises on that day which he preserved carefully in a little book, and often re-read them. He let me have this little book to look at and I give them here just as he wrote them.

Promises made by me, Dominic Savio, when I made my First Communion in 1849 at seven years of age:

I will go often to Confession and I will go to Holy Communion as often as I am allowed.
I will try to give the Sundays and holy days completely to God.
My best friends will be Jesus and Mary.

Death, but not sin.

These promises were the guiding light of his life until he died.

If among those who read this book there are any who have yet to make their First Communion, I would urge them strongly to try to do as Dominic did; to let him inspire them in their preparation and all that they do. With all my heart too I recommend to parents, teachers and all those who are responsible for the young, to give the greatest importance to this great act. Be assured that the First Communion very well made is a solid moral foundation for the rest of the child's life. It will certainly be an extraordinary thing to find anyone who has made this great act with real devotion and care and has afterwards gone astray. On the other hand there are thousands of young people who have gone astray and who are the despair of their parents and those responsible for them; I would not hesitate to say that the trouble began with the little or no real preparation for the First Communion. It is better to delay making it, or not to make it at all, than to make it badly.

Chapter 4. School at Castelnuovo d'Asti - An edifying occasion - Wise answer to bad advice

It was clearly high time for Dominic to go to another school as he had gone as far as he could in the little village school. Both his parents and himself desired this very much but they had not the money which would make this possible. They could only turn to God, the supreme master of everything, and who would see to all that was needed to make it possible.

"If only I were a bird," Dominic would say sometimes "I would fly morning and evening to Castelnuovo, and so I would be able to carry on with my lessons."

His keen desire finally overcame all difficulties, and it was decided that he should go to the county school, although this was about three miles away. Dominic cheerfully walked the six miles there and back every day. The varieties of weather, the dust and the very hot sun in summer, mud, rain, storms and fierce winds at other times of the year, never got him down or stopped him from going to school, although he was barely ten years old when he started. He was obedient to his parents, which helped him to look after his health and to put up with any discomforts. A local farmer used sometimes to see Dominic on the road, and one afternoon when the sun was beating down mercilessly he approached the boy and started talking.

"Aren't you afraid to be on your own on this lonely road, especially in the dark winter evening?"

"But I am not alone: my guardian angel is with me."

But don't you get fed up having to go backwards and forwards in heat like this?"

"No, I am doing it for a Master who pays well."

"Oh, and who is that?"

"God the Creator, who rewards even a cup of water given for his sake."

The farmer used often to recount this incident and predicted a great future for Dominic.

Some of his school companions were not very good, and on one occasion he was in grave danger of doing wrong. In the hot weather some of the boys used to go swimming in the streams and other water pools where water was available. Bathing has its physical dangers and, not infrequently, the death by drowning of young people and adults has to be lamented. It can also have its dangers for the soul in certain circumstances, when boys are stripped together and have little care and respect for each other.

Dominic was persuaded by some of his companions to go swimming with them on one occasion. But when he saw what was done and said, he was profoundly grieved and made up his mind never to go again.

A short time afterwards two of the same boys came to him again.

“Dominic, are you coming to play?”

“What are you going to play?”

“We’re going swimming.”

“I’m not going. I am afraid of drowning.”

“Come on, be a sport: we’ll have a great time and feel much fresher in this heat.”

“But I’m afraid.”

“Don’t be afraid. We’ll teach you, and soon you will be swimming like a fish, and leaping about like the rest of us.”

“But isn’t it wrong to go to such dangerous place to swim?”

“Not at all. If so many go, how can it be wrong?”

“Still, I feel uneasy about it and don’t know what to say.”

“Come on, take our word for it, we’ll look after you.”

“I think I’ll go to ask my mother if it is all right for me to go.”

“Don’t be stupid - don’t say anything to your Mum. She won’t let you go, and she will also tell our parents and we will be in for a good hiding.”

“Well if my mother won’t let me go, I’m not going. In any case if you want the truth I’ll tell you. I went once before, but never again; not simply because it is easy to get drowned there, but more still because from what I saw last time it is also easy to offend God; so don’t talk to me any more about swimming. In any case if your parents don’t want you to go, you know you should not go. God punishes children who disobey their parents.”

This is how Dominic answered the harmful suggestions of his companions and in doing so avoided a grave danger through which, if he had allowed himself to go, he might well have lost his innocence, the loss of which leads on to so many sad consequences.

Chapter 5. His behaviour at school at Castelnuovo d'Asti - What his teacher had to say

From his experiences at this school Dominic learned how to get on properly with the other boys. If he saw one who did his best, was obedient, tried hard at his lessons, he made him his friend. Those who were always giving trouble, making no effort to learn, ready with bad talk and such like, he avoided like the plague. Those who were in between he tried to help, if he could, in whatever way was possible; but he never made them his close friends.

Dominic's life at the school at Castelnuovo can be a model and an inspiration for any boy who wants to get on, to follow God and also prepare himself for life. I give here what Father Allora, the priest who was the head of this excellent school, wrote about him:

I am very glad to write what I know about Dominic Savio, who in a very short time won my admiration and esteem. I have an unfailing memory of his exemplary life and happy disposition.

I cannot say very much about his piety and devotion as he was excused from taking part in the school religious services, on account of his living so far away.

He passed the entrance examination with distinction and was admitted to Class 2 on June 21st, the feast of St. Aloysius, Patron of Youth. He was not very strong physically, but he had a very pleasant appearance and was very well mannered. He was always cheerful and good tempered and never imposed himself on anyone. He made a very good impression on his teachers by his diligence and made up for some of the others who never bothered or showed interest, no matter what was done for them. He lived up to his name [*Savio*=wise] not only in his lessons, but in everything he did and said. Right from the first moment he made progress in his studies. He quickly got to the top of his class and remained there getting high marks in all subjects. This was not simply because he was clever but because he worked very hard and came to have a great love for his lessons. It was also because his studies were not simply for himself but for God.

Although he was not very strong physically he never missed a day off school. It should be remembered that he had over two miles to walk four times a day in the mud, snow and cold of the winter and the oftentimes intense heat of the summer. I had great hopes for Dominic and it was with great regret that I saw him go away. His parents had to move to another district and so it was necessary for him to leave; I was afraid that for one reason or another he might not be able to continue with his studies; this would have been a tragedy for so wonderful a boy.

It was a great joy for me when I heard later that he had been accepted at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales; I knew that there he would have great opportunities both for his mind and soul.

This was the testimony of Father Allora.

Chapter 6. School at Mondonio - He puts up with a great injustice

It seems that Divine Providence wanted to help Dominic to realise that this world is a place of exile where we have no resting place, it may be, on the other hand, that it was God's design that he should be known in as many places as possible, so that his goodness and strong virtue might be a source of inspiration to all who saw him.

Towards the end of 1852 his parents left Murialdo and set up house in Mondonio, a village near Castelnuovo. Here Dominic continued the same way of life and I need to repeat what other teachers had said about him earlier. His teacher, Father Cugliero,² among other things had this to say about him, though I have been selective in order not to repeat myself too much:

I can truthfully say that in twenty years of teaching boys I have never had one to equal Dominic. He was only a boy in age but he had the sense and judgement of a fully mature man. He was very diligent and applied himself to his lessons, and his good-naturedness and readiness to help won him the affection both of his companions and teachers. I could not help marvelling at the way he could fix his attention in church, and I often said to myself 'This is certainly an innocent boy, whose heart and affections are already in heaven'.

The following is an incident among others recounted by Father Cugliero.

One day, an incident of so serious a nature took place at the school such that expulsion was the obvious punishment for those responsible. The culprits realised this and sought to save themselves by coming to me and laying all the blame on Dominic. I could not imagine that the boy had done anything so stupid, but his accusers were so insistent and emphatic about it that I believed them. I was very annoyed and went to the classroom. I left the boys in no doubt as to what I thought about the whole affair, and then I turned to Dominic and minced no words in telling him off, saying that he deserved to be expelled and that he would have been, had it not been the first time he had done such a thing, and that he should make sure it would be the last time. Dominic did not say a word, but stood there with his head bowed, accepting humbly all that was said to him.

God, however, protects the innocent, and next day it came out who the real culprits were. Somewhat ashamed of all the abuse I had heaped on his head, I took him aside and asked him: 'Why did you not tell me you were not responsible?' He replied: 'I knew that these boys had already been up to so much mischief that this would certainly earn them expulsion, and I thought I would try to save them, as I probably would not be expelled, seeing that it was my very first time ... also, I remembered that Jesus had been blamed unjustly and had not said anything, and I thought I should do the same'.

No more was said, but all admired Dominic's patience, which was able to return good for evil and was even ready to accept serious punishment to save those who had told such lies about him.

This was Father Cugliero's testimony.

² Fr Joseph Cugliero is currently chaplain at Barbasio, a hamlet belonging to Moncuoco

Chapter 7. The first time I got to know him - Some curious moments when we met

What follows in the succeeding pages can be given with more detail, because I shall be dealing with things which happened before my own eyes and also in the presence of many boys who can bear testimony to their truth. This period begins in 1854 when Father Cugliero, already mentioned, came to see me about one of his pupils.

“You may have in your house,” he said, “boys equally good and clever, but there are none who are better than him. Give him a chance and you will find you have another St. Aloysius.”

It was arranged that Dominic should come to see me when next I visited the Becchi. It was my custom to spend a few days there each year with some of my boys round about the time of the Feast of the Most Holy Rosary.

It was on the morning of the first Monday of October that I saw a boy coming towards me with his father. His serene expression, and charming but respectful manner captured my gaze.

“Who are you and where do you come from?”

“I am Dominic Savio. Father Cugliero has spoken to you about me and I have come with my father from Mondonio.”

I took him aside and asked him about himself and his studies. We found common ground immediately and a relationship of trust and mutual confidence sprang up spontaneously.

I recognised in him a soul where the Holy Spirit reigned supreme, and I marvelled at the way grace had already worked in his young heart and mind.

We talked together for quite a time and, as I was going to call his father over, Dominic said to me:

“Well, Father, what do you think? Will you take me to Turin to study?”

“Well, I think there is good material in you.”

“Good material for what?”

“To make a beautiful garment for Our Blessed Lord.”

“Wonderful! I am the cloth and you are the tailor. You will work on me to make something beautiful for Jesus.”

I then said that I wondered if he were strong enough for a long course of studies.

“Don’t worry, Father, Our Blessed Lord has helped me so far and I am sure he will continue to do so.”

“And what are you going to do when you finish school?”

“I should love to be a priest, if that were God’s will.”

“Very good. And now let’s try a little intelligence test. Take this little book, go over this page (it was a copy of the *Catholic Readings*), learn it by heart and tomorrow come back and both explain it to me and recite it by heart.”

I then left him free to go and play with the other boys while I had a talk with his father. No more than ten minutes had gone by when suddenly Dominic appeared, smiling, by my side.

“If you wish I will repeat my lesson now.”

I took the book and, to my surprise, he not only recited the page by heart but explained simply and clearly the meaning, showing that he understood it very well.

”Splendid,” I said, “you have been quick and so shall I. I will take you to Turin, and from this moment I consider you one of my chosen sons. From now onwards, often ask Jesus to help us both to do God’s holy will in all things.”

Not knowing how better to express his happiness and his gratitude he took my hand and kissed it several times and then said:

“I hope always to act in such a way that you will never have reason to complain of me.”

Chapter 8. He comes to the Oratory of St Francis de Sales - His approach at the beginning

It is characteristic of youth to change suddenly. Not infrequently does it happen that what is wonderful today is far from being so tomorrow. At one time a boy can show great promise and soon after he can act in a way that would show the exact opposite. And if one is not careful, a career that began with the highest hopes can end with disappointment and sorrow to all concerned. It was not so with Dominic. All the virtues which had begun to grow at different stages of his life now continued their growth in a wonderful way, without any of them impeding the others.

As soon as he arrived at the Oratory, he came immediately to my room in order to put himself, as he used say, completely in my hands. Almost immediately his gaze fell on the wall where a piece of cardboard displayed a saying in large letters, which I often used: *Da mihi animas caetera tolle*. He looked at them attentively and I helped him to translate them as follows: *Give me souls, and take away everything else*. He thought for a moment and then said:

“I understand; here you do business not with money, but with souls; I hope that my soul will have its share in this business.”

For a time his life was quite ordinary. He studied very hard and was very faithful in carrying out the school rules. He always listened to talks and sermons with great joy, as he was already convinced that the word of God was a sure guide along the road to heaven. He was not worried if sometimes they were a bit long. If there was anything he did not understand, he never hesitated to ask for further explanations. This was the root and source of his exemplary life and steady progress in virtue which could hardly have been surpassed.

In order to make sure that he understood the rules and discipline of the school well, he went to one of the teachers and asked him to help and advise him how best to be faithful to them and to correct him if he neglected any of his duties.

His relations with his companions showed the same wisdom. He refused to have anything to do with those who were rowdy, disobedient and who showed little respect for the things of God. He made friends with those who tried hard, made good use of their time and were a source of good example and good spirit in the school.

December 8th, Feast of the Immaculate Conception, was drawing near. It was the director's custom to say a little word of encouragement and exhortation to the boys so as to prepare them to keep the feast in a way worthy of Mary most holy. He insisted especially that they should ask Mary for the grace they had greatest need of.

That year, 1854, the whole Catholic world was in a state of excitement because of the approaching definition of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception at Rome. At the Oratory we did our very best to keep the feast with fitting solemnity and devotion.

Savio was among those who had a great desire to keep the feast very well. He wrote out nine deeds to be done in honour of Our Lady and drew out one by lot each day. He prepared himself well, and made a general confession so that his soul might be as pleasing as possible to Mary Most Holy.

On the eve of the feast he went to Our Lady's altar and, on the advice of his Confessor, renewed the promises he had made at his First Communion, and then he repeated many times: "Mary, I give you my heart, please keep it always as your own. Jesus and Mary, always be my friends. Please, please, rather let me die, than that I should ever offend you seriously."

So he took Mary as the guide for his spiritual life, and with such effective results that I began from that time to note down the different incidents or facts of his life, so that I should not forget them.

I have thought it better in what follows to group together the various facts according to their relationship with each other, and not just to give them in chronological order as they happened. This will make for greater clearness and understanding.

Accordingly I will divide the remainder into as many chapters as there are matters to be treated of, beginning with his classical studies which were the chief reason for his coming to this House in Valdocco.

Chapter 9. Grammar year - Curious incidents - School - He prevents a fight - He avoids danger

Dominic had begun his grammar year at Mondonio and, with the progress he made by his hard work and more than ordinary intelligence, he was very soon moved from fourth class or, as we say today, second year grammar. Here he came under the care of the devout and kindly Joseph Bonzanino, because as secondary classes had not yet been set up at the Oratory like we have

them now, I had to send some of the boys out each day to his school. I have to speak of his behaviour and example even here along the same lines as earlier teachers have done. I will just pick a few things from this year and two in particular which were noted by others who knew him and admired him for them.

Father Bonzanino said on a number of occasions that he could not remember having had a better pupil than Dominic, one who was more attentive, better behaved, more respectful. He was a real model in everything. His clothes were poor, but he was always neat and clean and his manners and bearing were easily equal to those of boys who came from richer and nobler families. These boys eagerly made friends with Dominic and accepted him as an equal, being drawn by his manners and good qualities. Whenever there was a boy who was a bit scatterbrained and talkative the teacher would put him beside Dominic, and his influence and example would lead the boy to better behaviour and application.

It was during the course of this year that an incident took place which shows clearly the heroic stuff of which Dominic was made, something hard to believe in a young man at his age. Two of the boys fell out very badly and they became so angry with each other that they determined not only to have a fight but to have a stone fight. Dominic got to hear of it, but he wondered how he could manage to stop the duel, as the boys were both older and much stronger than he was.

He tried to reason with them and persuade them to give up and become friends again. They refused. He wrote a letter to each of them. He threatened to report them, and thereby get it stopped, but this only increased their anger and determination to have it out at all costs. Dominic was very worried both on account of the serious injury which was likely to happen and also for the serious offence against God.

Dominic had no idea what to do but divine inspiration led him to act thus: he waited for them after school and since he was able to speak with both parties he said:

“Since you are determined to see your wretched argument through to the end, I want you to agree to just one condition.”

“We agree” they said, “as long as you don’t stop our challenge.”

“He’s a ratbag” one of them said of the other, while the other one said he could never be at peace with his opponent until he had bashed his head in. Savio was quite scared by this fighting talk but was determined to stop worse things happening, so he controlled himself and said:

“The condition I want to impose will not stop you from facing up to each other.”

“What’s the condition?”

“I’d simply like to indicate the place where you can start throwing stones at each other.”

“You’re trying to trick us or stop us.”

“I will be with you and I won’t try to trick you. Don’t worry.”

“Maybe you’re going to call someone.”

“I should, but I won’t. Let’s go. I’ll be with you. Just give me your word.”

They promised and immediately set off for the Cittadella fields past Porta Susa. Dominic had his work cut out stopping them from coming to blows as they went to the spot.

Once they had got there, Savio did something certainly nobody would have thought of. He let them take up positions opposite one another. They already had stones in their hands, and were counting down when Dominic said:

“Before you start I want you to fulfil your promise,” and having said that he took out the small crucifix hanging around his neck and, holding it high, said:

“I want each of you to look at this crucifix and throw the first stone at me, saying clearly these words: ‘Jesus Christ who was innocent died forgiving his enemies; I, a sinner, am going to offend him by this deliberate act of revenge’.”

Then he ran to the angriest boy and, kneeling before him said:

”Throw the first stone at me.”

The boy, who wasn’t expecting anything like this, began to tremble and said:

“No, no, I have nothing against you, and would be only too willing to defend you against anyone else.”

Then he went to the other boy:

“You throw the first stone at me.”

“No, never: you are my friend; I would never do a thing like that.”

Then Dominic rose to his feet and standing between them with his crucifix and a stern look on his face said:

“There you are, because I am your friend, you would not throw a stone at me who am only a poor creature. But yet you are ready with this terrible act of revenge to offend Jesus who is not only your best friend but God also, and who shed the last drop of his blood for you.”

He stood there motionless between them with his crucifix held high and the boys gave in at the sight of such courage and kindness.

One of the boys said later:

“At that moment I was shaken to the depths and began to shiver all over. I felt thoroughly ashamed that a boy like Dominic had had to go so far to make me see sense. I had no difficulty in forgiving my companion and I asked Dominic to take me to some understanding priest to whom I could make a good confession and do better in the future. He agreed and a few days later I went with my opponent and we made our confession. After we had made friends again I was reconciled with the Lord whom I would certainly have seriously offended through hatred and desire for revenge.”

This example is well worth imitating by any Christian lad if he were to see some similar attempt at revenge or be offended or hurt by others.

Dominic never mentioned anything about this incident and nothing would have been known of the part he played in it if the boys concerned had not related all that happened to their companions.

For boys from the country not very used to the excitement and varied activity of the town, going backwards and forwards to school from the Oratory had its dangers and difficulties. Dominic used it as an opportunity to do something for Our Blessed Lord. He carried out implicitly whatever was laid down by his superiors, and made the journey without letting his eyes roam everywhere or his ears listen to things that were far from good. He did not let himself be drawn into mischievous pranks, or waste time in the silly escapades that easily suggest themselves to schoolboys.

“I enjoy myself most in doing what is expected of me and, if you are really my friends, you will help me to do this and not the opposite,” he would say, if some silly prank were suggested.

Nevertheless he was nearly caught out one day when the group he was with decided to play truant and spend the day at the fair which had come to the town. Dominic had agreed and had started off with them, when he suddenly realised what it was he was doing, and refused to go any further.

“I am going to school. If we stay away we are displeasing God and also our superiors. I am sorry I agreed to do wrong, and I hope this is the last time you will try to persuade me to follow you in doing wrong. If it is not, we will not be friends any more.” Dominic won the other boys over and they all went to school, and there was no more trouble in the future.

At the end of the year his hard work won him promotion to a higher class, but, when the new school year began, it was decided to let him study privately at the Oratory, as he seemed to be failing in health. In this way it was felt he could be better looked after.

This plan succeeded and when he came to pass into the next class his health was very much improved. He was sent to attend the classes of Father Matteo Picco. These were considered to be among the best in Turin, and Dominic was admitted free, because of the good things this good priest already heard said of him.

There are many edifying things said or done by Savio during this next year at school and the one to follow, and we will continue to tell you about them bit by bit as we outline the deeds connected with them.

Chapter 10. His decision to become a saint

Now that we have given an indication of his studies we will speak of his great decision to become a saint.

When he had been about six months at the Oratory, Savio heard a talk about an easy way to become a saint. The preacher made three points which made a huge impact on Dominic.

1. That it is God's will that each one should become a saint.
2. That it is easy to become a saint.
3. That there is a great reward waiting in heaven for those who try to become saints.

This talk was like a spark that set off into a consuming blaze the love of God in his heart. For some days he said nothing, going about very quietly without his usual joyful spirit. His companions noticed this, and I did also. My first thought was that he was not feeling well, and I asked him was there something wrong.

"No," he said "it is something good."

"What do you mean?"

"I feel that I must become a saint. I never saw before that it was both possible and easy. Now that I see it, I can have no peace inside until I really begin to do so. Please will you help me?"

I praised Dominic's good desires but urged him not to let himself get too worked up, because in that state it is not easy to know what God wants. I said to him that for the moment he should regain his customary cheerfulness, persevere in his regular life of study and piety, and especially not neglect being with his companions in games and recreation.

I said to him one day I would like to make him a present of something that would please him, and that I would leave the choice completely to him.

His prompt and immediate reply was: "I want you to help me to become a saint. I want to give up everything to Jesus and for always. If I am not trying to be a saint, I am doing nothing at all. I will not have any peace if I don't keep on trying."

On another occasion the Rector wanted to show his affection for the boys and make them a little present, so he said that they could ask for whatever they wished and, if it were possible, he would give it to them. The requests were to be written down, and it can be imagined that there were some strange and bizarre requests made by some of the boys. Dominic took a piece of paper and wrote these words: "I ask one thing only, that you help me to save my soul and make me a saint."

Another day explanations were being given about the meaning of words.

"What does Dominic mean?" he asked.

The reply was: "Belonging to God."

"There you are," he said, "you see how right I am in asking you to make me a saint. Even my name says that I belong to God, so I must at all costs become one. I can't be happy if I do not."

This 'bee in his bonnet' that Dominic had about becoming a saint, did not spring from the fact that he was not living a saintly life but from the fact that he wanted to go the whole way, including severe penances and long hours in prayer, and his Rector would not allow these on any account.

Chapter 11. His zeal for the good of souls

The first advice Dominic was given to help him become a saint was to set out to win souls for God, because there is no holier work in this life than to work for the good of souls for whom Jesus Christ shed the last drop of his blood. Dominic grasped this completely and often was heard to say:

“How happy I would be if only I could win all my companions for God.”

He never let any occasion slip for giving a friendly word of advice or of quietly recalling anyone to duty who said or did anything contrary to God’s law.

What really shook him, affecting him even physically, was hearing any form of blasphemy or God’s name being taken in vain. If, going through the streets, he happened to hear anything of the kind, he bowed his head in sorrow and reparation, saying fervently to himself: “Praised be Jesus Christ.”

One day when they were walking through the town a companion noticed him taking off his cap and murmuring something to himself.

“What are you doing? What did you say?”

“Did you not hear that carter, cursing and swearing? If I thought it would have done any good I would have spoken to the man, but as he is in a temper I am afraid it would only make things worse. So I was trying to make a little act of reparation by taking my cap off and saying: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ’.”

His companion was very moved at hearing this, and to this day never tires of inspiring others by telling them about it.

One day on his way back from school he heard an elderly man utter a horrible blasphemy. He trembled when he heard it and said his short prayer. Then, on a sudden, he went to the man and with great respect and politeness asked him if he could tell him the way to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. The man was completely taken by the boy’s charm and politeness, and said very affably:

“I am very sorry, I am afraid I have no idea.”

“Oh,” said Dominic “I wonder, since you can’t do that, could you do me another favour?”

“Certainly, certainly. What is it?”

Dominic then went very close to the man, and speaking softly into his ear he said.

“Do you think that, when you are in a temper, you could say something else instead of blasphemies about God?”

The man was both astonished and full of admiration for the boy, and said: “Well said, you are quite right. I see that I have a very bad habit and I promise you I will try to overcome it.”

Another day, near the gates of the school, he came across two boys of about nine years old,

quarrelling. While doing so, one of them used the Holy Name of Jesus in a curse against the other. Dominic felt justly indignant but, restraining himself, he separated the two boys and got them to make peace. Then he said to the one who had sworn:

“Come with me. I’ve something special for you.”

The boy agreed and Dominic took him by the hand and led him into church. He led him to the high altar and then, kneeling down beside him he said: “Tell Jesus you are sorry for having taken his Holy Name in vain.” As the boy did not know the act of contrition, he said it with him. Then he said: “In reparation say after me: ‘Praised be Jesus Christ. May his holy and adorable name be always praised’.”

Among the lives of the saints his preference was for those who stood out for their work for souls. He spoke readily of those on the missions who endure so much to save souls. He had no money to send them, but he prayed for them every day and never failed to offer his Holy Communion once a week. Several times I heard him say:

“How many souls there are in England waiting for our help. If only I were strong enough and good enough, I would go there immediately and by preaching and example try to win them all for our Blessed Lord.”

He also often remarked with grief how little help children received to know and love God.

“As soon as I am a seminarian, I will go to Mondonio and get the children together so that I can teach them their catechism, tell them stories and encourage them to become saints. How many young people may perhaps lose their souls, for want of instruction and encouragement.”

These were not only words. He used to teach catechism at the Sunday school and on other occasions. And he would coach individual boys privately at any time they wanted, gladly giving up his recreation for this purpose. He was always happy if he could speak to them of God and lead them to an understanding of the wonder and value of their immortal soul. One day a light-headed companion made fun of him for telling a good story to a group of boys.

“Why do you bother telling stories like those?” he asked.

“Why do I bother?” replied Dominic “I bother because we are all brothers and we should all help each other in the most important thing of all, the saving of our souls, which cost the blood of Jesus. I bother because God himself has urged us to do this and because I know also that, if I can succeed in saving one soul, I will make sure of saving my own.”

This concern for others was not simply a term-time one. During the holidays when he was at home he kept up his good work. Any little gifts he got, or prizes that he won during the term time, were set aside carefully so that he could use them during the holiday to gain the good will of the boys and to encourage them to do better. He would also make the rounds of his superiors before he went home, to ask them if they had any little things to spare, which he might take home with him, “to make my companions happy.”

Very soon after he got home he would be in touch with many boys, big and small. He would give out his presents and discreetly find out how things were going. With the ascendancy he gained

over them he could get boys to go with him to Mass, to Sunday school and so on.

I am assured that he devoted not a little time to instructing one of his friends.

“If you succeed in making the Sign of the Cross really well,” he used say “I will give you a medal and I will recommend you to a priest who will give you a good book. But I want it done properly, saying the words you right hand starting at the forehead, then to your chest, then to the left and right shoulders and finishing up with your hands joined, saying ’Amen’.”

He had a great desire to see the sign of the cross well made, and was never shy to make it well in front of others, so as to encourage them to do likewise.

He took two little boys living nearby under his special care, teaching them to read and write and to learn their catechism. He would say morning and night prayers with them and take them to church, show them how to bless themselves properly with holy water, and how to behave well while there. Time that he might have legitimately spent in walks and various pastimes was spent in helping others, by word or by any other means possible. He made a point of making a visit to the Blessed Sacrament every day, and it was a great joy for him when he managed to get someone to come with him. It may be safely said that he never let slip any occasion of helping anyone or of speaking a word which could do good to a soul.

Chapter 12. Various episodes and his way of dealing with his friends

The thought of winning souls to God never left him. He was the life of the games at recreation. He did not monopolise the conversation or keep butting ins but if silence came he was always ready with something interesting, a difficulty which had cropped up in class or an interesting story. The others were always glad to be with him. If someone started grumbling or criticising, he would raise a laugh over something else and so distract them and dispel any word of criticism.

His cheerful smile and spirit of zest made him popular also with those who were not too fond of religious things. They were always glad to be in his company and whenever he gently chided them it was taken in good part.

On one occasion a companion wanted Dominic to go with him and dress up. Dominic would not go, and said to the boy:

“Would you really like to be what you are going to dress up as - two horns, a big nose and a clown’s costume?”

“Of course not,” replied the other.

“Well, why make yourself look like something you would not want to be and in addition deface the nice face that God has given you?”

Another time a stranger came into the playground. He soon had a group around him. which quickly became a crowd as the laughter of the boys at his stories attracted more and more. As soon as he had a crowd he changed his tune and was soon trying to poison the minds of the boys

with all sorts of horrors, including making fun of holy things and persons. Some of the boys moved off when they heard this but more still stayed on, hanging on his words as though hypnotised. At this moment Dominic came along and as soon as he grasped what was going on, cried out:

“Come on, let’s get away from this unfortunate man who wants to ruin us.”

The spell was broken and all the boys, obedient to a friend whom they loved and respected, scattered, leaving the man talking to the wind. He was never seen again.

On another occasion some wanted to go off swimming. This, without due care, can be dangerous anywhere, in more senses than one, and it is especially so round Turin where there is deep and fast-moving water, claiming many young victims each year. Dominic heard about it and tried to make them forget it by occupying their time with him in an interesting way. But when he saw that their minds were made up he spoke out boldly.

“Don’t go, it’s better not to.”

“But we are not doing any harm.”

“You are being disobedient, you are putting yourselves in danger and running the risk of getting drowned and you say you are not doing any harm!”

“Yes, but this heat is terrible.”

“Maybe, but it is not as hot as another place I know, and what will you do if you end up there?”

Moved by Dominic’s attitude they changed their minds and also did not dodge the evening service in church as they had intended to.

Some of the boys had formed a little group pledged to try to lead the not so good to better things. Dominic was one of its most earnest members and used to use various things given him - an apple, orange, crucifix, little book - to help him in this work. He would appear in the playground holding up whatever he had, and crying out: “Who wants it, who wants it?”

There were many cries of “I do” and there would be a concerted rush. “Just a moment,” he would say, “I will give it to the one who answers this catechism question best.” He would confine himself to the least good boys, and as long as they made a shot at it the prize was theirs.

He also had other methods, such as talking and walking with them, playing a game with them that they liked, and so he might be seen one day carrying a large stick on his shoulders like Hercules with his club, on his way to play the game which was most in vogue at the time. During the game he might suddenly stop and say to a boy.

“What about coming with me to Confession on Saturday?”

The other boy, because Saturday seemed a long way off, and because he was anxious to get on with the game, or just to please Dominic, would say: “Oh, all right.” Dominic did not say any more, but in the succeeding days he kept his quarry in view, and when Saturday came would go with him to church, make his own Confession first of all, and if necessary ask the priest to go out

of his way to help the boy coming in after him. He would then stay in church with the boy and they would make their thanksgiving together.

These incidents were by no means uncommon and were a great source of joy and consolation to Dominic. They were of great benefit to his companions and boys who were insensible to sermons and exhortations in church would often yield to his gentle but persistent persuasion.

It also happened sometimes that a boy did not keep his promise and at Confession time on Saturday, Dominic would look for him in vain. When next he ran into him, he said, good-humouredly:

“Hey, you rascal, you led me up the garden path properly!”

“Well, I wasn’t ready. I didn’t feel like it.”

“My poor friend,” Dominic would reply “it was the devil who was tempting you and you fell for it completely. I can see that you are not in the mood for it now, but I promise you, if you take the plunge and go to Confession, you will be much happier than you have been for a long time.” In most cases, after the boy had taken Dominic’s advice, he would come to him smiling and full of happiness: “What you said was quite true. I am very happy and I have made up my mind to go to Confession regularly in the future.”

In any school of any size there are always some boys who are left on their own by their companions. This can be because they are rough in their ways, labouring under some disability, difficult to get on with. What they need is to experience real friendship, and as this is what they normally do not find, they suffer accordingly.

Dominic made it his business to be their friend. He would play with them during recreation, willingly talk to them, so that when they were ready to do something wrong and he suggested otherwise, they would listen, because they realised it was a friend who spoke to them, who wanted only what was best for them.

So it was when boys were sick, Dominic was always asked for: those who were discouraged and in trouble would go to him and pour their troubles into his ear. Thus the way was opened to him to do good to those around him at all times and to increase in merit before God.

Chapter 13. His spirit of prayer - Devotion to the Mother of God - Mary’s month

Among the gifts with which God had enriched Dominic was fervour in prayer. As a result of his efforts he got so accustomed to talk with God, that no matter where he was, or what noise was going on round about him, he could briefly recollect himself, sending his heart soaring to God.

When he was praying with others, he seemed to be quite angelic. There was no fidgeting and continually changing position; he knelt there motionless, his face radiant, head slightly bowed, eyes lowered. Just to see him this way was an inspiration.

In 1854 Count Cays became President of Honour of the St. Aloysius Sodality which was

established in the school. On the occasion of his first visit to take part in the church services, he noticed a boy obviously praying with great devotion and attention and he was so struck that he afterwards asked who he was; he was told that it was Dominic Savio.

He used to try to spend a part of his free time in reading a good book, or in making a visit to the church. He would normally have some other boys with him and they would pray together and also visit Our Lady's altar.

There was no limit to his devotion to the Mother of God. Every day he made some little act of mortification in her honour. He never let himself gaze or stare at a girl, and when walking through the streets, did not let his eyes roam about.

Things happening on the way that his companions were all eagerness to see, he never bothered about and often even never saw. When on one occasion he was asked what he thought about something which he had not even noticed, one of his companions burst out impatiently:

“What is the use of having eyes, if you don't use them to look at what is going on around you?”

Dominic replied:

“Instead of using my eyes on useless things, I should like to keep them to gaze on the beauty of Mary Most Holy, when, by God's mercy, I shall be in heaven.”

He had a very special devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. Every time he went to church he would pay a visit to her altar, and kneeling there before her, beg her to keep his heart free from all impurity with the following little prayer of his own:

“O Mary, I want to be your son always. Please let me die rather than that I should ever sin against holy Purity.”

Every Friday he would get some of his friends together and take them to church with him where they would say together the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows of Mary or the Litany.

He was never happier than when he could succeed in bringing someone else to Mary's feet to honour her and ask her help. He did not always succeed easily. One winter Saturday he asked one of his companions to make a visit to Our Lady and they would say the Vespers of Our Lady's Office together. The boy objected that his hands were cold; so Dominic took off his own gloves and gave them to him. Another time in similar circumstances he gave the other boy his coat and made him put it on so he would come with him to the church and pray. Who could not be filled with admiration at such acts of generosity?

But it was in the month of May that his devotion to Mary reached its peak. He arranged with a group of his friends to do some special deed in her honour every day. He got together a collection of interesting stories and facts about Our Lady and willingly told them to others in order to inspire them with devotion to her. He urged his companions during recreation to frequent Confession and Communion every day, showing great recollection and devotion.

The boys in his dormitory had decided to put up in their dormitory a little altar for Our Lady. They had a meeting to decide what each one should give, and Dominic, who was enthusiastic

about the project, found that he had no money to pay his share. He was at a loss wondering what to do and then an idea struck him. He hurried off and got a very nice book that had been given him as a prize, and brought it back to his companions telling them to raffle it and so get money that way.

Others were inspired by his generosity and produced little treasures of their own; a very successful raffle was held and with the proceeds all the required materials were brought. The boys worked hard to get the altar ready but in order to finish it in time it was necessary that some of them stay up late the night before the feast.

Dominic wanted to be one of these, but because he had recently been ill, he was not allowed. He was very disappointed, but accepted the decision as an act of obedience.

“At any rate,” he said to one of his companions, “come and wake me up as soon as you have finished; I want to be one of the first to see our altar in honour of Mary Most Holy.”

Chapter 14. He goes frequently to Confession and Communion

Experience has amply shown that the greatest helps and aids to development in time of youth are the sacraments of Confession and Communion. Any boy or girl who receives these sacraments regularly and well, will develop in time of youth, reach great maturity and go on to old age, if God spares them, exemplifying a way of life which is an inspiration to all who know them.

Would that all our young people could grasp this and try to carry it out; and that all those concerned with their upbringing and education could grasp it likewise, in order to help in its fulfillment in the young.

Before coming to live at the Oratory Dominic used to go to Confession and Communion once a month as was usual. After he came here he started going more frequently. One day he heard a talk in church which recommended three things. Go often to Confession: go often to Communion: choose a priest as confessor that you can easily talk to and open your heart to and don't change to another priest unless there is real need for it. Dominic grasped these counsels immediately and completely.

He chose a priest as confessor and went regularly to him all the time he was here. So that the priest might know him completely and thereby be better able to help him, he made a General Confession to him. He began by going to Confession and Communion every fortnight and then every week. His confessor seeing what great progress he had made spiritually, suggested receiving the Holy Eucharist three times a week and at the end of the year suggested to him to go every day.

For a time he was troubled with scruples and wanted to go to Confession every three or four days and even more often, but his spiritual director would not allow this, and kept him at weekly Confession.

Dominic had the most complete confidence in his spiritual guide and would speak to him with

the greatest simplicity about his soul and matters of conscience also outside the confessional. Someone advised him to go to another priest sometimes, but he would not hear of it. He replied:

“The confessor is the doctor of the soul. People do not go about chasing one doctor after another unless they have lost confidence in their own doctor or their case is pretty desperate. I have full confidence in my confessor who is so kind and helpful to me and I don’t think I have any trouble that he cannot cure.”

Nevertheless his confessor did suggest that occasionally, e.g. at the time of retreat, he should go to another priest and Dominic did so without any hesitation.

Dominic was very pleased with this state of affairs. He said: “If I have any problem I take it to my confessor and he solves it for me according to what God wants. Jesus has said that the voice of the priest is the voice of God. If I have some particular need I go to Holy Communion in which I receive the body, blood, soul and divinity *quod pro nobis traditum est*. What more do I need to make me happy? Nothing in the wide world. Only one thing remains - one day to see him whom we can only see with the eye of faith here below revealed in heaven.”

Filled with this spirit, Dominic’s days were full of happiness. This was the source of that wonderful cheerful spirit which was the soul of all his actions. It should not be imagined that he went about in a dream half the time or that he did not realise what sort of life it was necessary to live, if one went to daily Communion. He was fully alive to everything and his conduct was irreproachable. I have asked his companions to tell me of anything wrong they found in him or any good quality which he did not show evidence of, during the three years he lived amongst us and all have agreed that there never was anything that they needed to correct in him, or anything they could suggest for him to do that he was not already doing.

His preparation for Holy Communion was most thorough. Before going to bed the previous evening, he said a special prayer to prepare himself, which always ended as follows: “Blessed and praised every moment be the most holy and divine sacrament.” In the morning he carried on his preparation, but his thanksgiving was liable to have no end to it. If he were not reminded he would forget about breakfast, recreation and even morning school, so caught up was he in prayer or rather, in contemplation of the divine goodness who wonderfully and mysteriously passes on to mankind the treasures of his infinite mercy.

It was really a joy for him to be able to pass some time before the Blessed Sacrament, something he did invariably at least once a day and as often as he could he would get others to come with him. There was a little group of prayers in reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the many sins of mankind - heretics, unbelievers and bad Christians - which he was very fond of saying when making such visits.

In order to make his Holy Communion as fruitful as possible and to encourage himself to renewed fervour every day, he made a plan for his Communions as follows:

Sunday: In honour of the Most Blessed Trinity

Monday: For all those who have been kind to me and done me good

Tuesday: In honour of my guardian angel and St. Dominic

Wednesday: To Our Lady of Sorrows for the conversion of sinners

Thursday: For the Holy Souls

Friday: In honour of the Passion of Jesus

Saturday: In honour of Mary Most Holy, and to obtain her protection in life and in death

He took part with great joy in any ceremonies connected with the Blessed Sacrament. If when out in the town he met the Viaticum being taken to the sick, he knelt down no matter where he was and if he were free he would reverently accompany the little procession to its destination.

One day when such a little procession with the Viaticum was passing by, it was raining and the ground was very muddy. Dominic knelt down without any hesitation. His companion said that in such circumstances it was not necessary, God did not expect you to dirty your clothes like that. Dominic replied quite simply:

“Everything belongs to God including our clothes and so everything must do him honour. I would not only kneel down in the mud when He passes by, but I would throw myself into a furnace if by so doing I would gain a spark of that love which moved him to give us this wonderful sacrament.”

On a similar occasion a soldier was standing near him but made no effort to kneel down. Not daring to ask him to do so, he took out his handkerchief and spread it on the muddy ground in front of him. The soldier looked a bit startled but took the hint and went down on his knees there on the road, not on the handkerchief.

On the Feast of *Corpus Christi* he was sent with some of his companions to take part in the procession of the Blessed Sacrament being held in the parish. Dressed in cassock and surplice, Dominic was overjoyed. No other present could have given him more joy.

On a similar occasion a soldier was standing near him but made no effort to kneel down. Not daring to ask him to do so, he took out his handkerchief and spread it on the muddy ground in front of him. The soldier looked a bit startled but took the hint and went down on his knees there on the road, not on the handkerchief.

Chapter 15. Penances

Dominic's youth, his far from robust health and his innocent life would certainly have dispensed him from any sort of penance; but he knew and understood that only with the greatest difficulty can a boy keep himself intact without some penance, and so the path of mortification seemed to him to be strewn with roses. By penance and mortification I do not mean patience in meeting the unpleasant things of daily life, nor do I mean the self-control and sacrifice necessary to be able to pray at all times and in all places; such things were part and parcel of his ordinary way of living. I am referring only to penances which affected him physically.

He decided in honour of Our Blessed Lady to fast every Saturday on bread and water; his

confessor forbade him to do this. He started off fasting for Lent, but after a week his Rector heard about it and stopped it. He wanted at least to go without breakfast, but this was not allowed him either. The reason of course was that his superiors did not want his health to be ruined. What was he to do then?

Dominic was not daunted; he took to afflicting his body in other ways. He put pebbles or bits of wood under his sheet so that he would be uncomfortable in bed. He got hold of a very rough shirt, very irritating to the skin and wore it. These penances were also forbidden him. He tried again. When summer passed into autumn and winter he did not add any blankets to the very thin covering which was sufficient in the hot summer. In the bitter cold of January this was all he had. His director came to see him once when he was sick in bed. When he got to the bed he saw Dominic lying there shivering violently and he realised that there was only thin summer covering over him.

“What on earth are you up to?” he asked him. “Do you want to die of cold?”

“No,” he replied, “I will hardly die of cold, but Jesus in the stable of Bethlehem was much worse off than this.”

He was then forbidden absolutely to undertake any kind of penance whatsoever without the express permission of his Rector. Dominic accepted this obedience, but one day I came across him looking somewhat sad, and I asked him what was the matter. He replied:

“You’ve got me in a real bind. Our Blessed Lord says that if I don’t do penance I will not get to heaven. I am forbidden to do any penance; what chance then have I of heaven?”

I explained to him that the penance Jesus wanted from him was complete obedience; obey and that’s enough.

“Can’t I do some other penance?”

“Yes, you can allow yourself the penance of being patient with others and the unpleasant things of life; to accept equally the heat and the cold and the rain; to be cheerful when tired and not feeling so well and so on.”

“But,” said Dominic, “these things come to you whether you like it or not.”

“Precisely,” I replied, “offer them willingly to God; there is nothing that will please him more, and you will be doing real penance.” Thus reassured, Dominic was very happy and completely at peace.

Chapter 16. The Immaculate Conception Sodality

The whole of Dominic's life can be said to be an act of love for Mary most holy. He never let slip any occasion of pleasing and honouring her. The dogma of the Immaculate Conception was solemnly defined in 1854. Dominic had a very great desire to leave behind him at the school some lasting reminder of this great event. He said: "I would like very much to do something in honour of my Mother Mary; but I will have to do it quickly, as I do not think I have much time left."

Spurred on by his present desire to help his companions, he asked some of those whom he knew well and relied upon to join him in forming the Sodality of Mary Immaculate. The aim was to obtain the special protection of the Mother of God in life, and especially at the hour of death. Dominic proposed two means to this end: to honour, and to bring others to honour, Mary by different means, and to encourage frequent Communion. In agreement with his friends and after much careful thought, he drew up a set of rules. On June 8th, nine months before he died, he went with his friends before the altar of Our Lady and they read it over together. I give these rules here so that they may be an inspiration and guide to others.

We, Dominic Savio, etc. (the names of the others follow), after receiving the sacraments of Confession and Communion, this day, June 8th, give ourselves completely to Mary Immaculate and promise to work unceasingly for her and with her: to help ourselves to do this and to maintain our love for her we, here before her altar, solemnly promise, in agreement with our spiritual director, to follow in Luigi Comollo's footsteps to the best of our ability.³ Here we bind ourselves as follows:

To carry out with the greatest exactness the rules of the school.

To help and encourage our companions: helping them by pointing out in a friendly way whatever needs correcting; encouraging them by being first in doing the right thing and supporting their own efforts.

To be always busy with something useful.

To make it possible to be faithful to these obligations and to help us to persevere in them, we submit the following rules to our Rector.

We will be very exact in carrying out what we are expected to do and have great confidence in those over us.

The carrying out of our own duties will be our first and special concern.

A true spirit of charity will unite the members of the group in genuine friendship among themselves and also with their companions. We will not hesitate to correct anyone when so doing in a friendly way would help.

We will meet each week for half an hour and after a prayer to the Holy Spirit and a short spiritual reading we will consider how the Sodality is getting on in its work for Jesus and Mary.

We will help each other to get rid of any faults or wrong habits which we have. This we will do privately.

³ Luigi Comollo was born in Cinzano in 1818 and died a holy death in 1839 at the Seminary in Chieri at 22 years of age. The life of this model of virtue was reprinted a second time in Year IV of the *Letture Cattoliche*.

We will try hard to be even-tempered and good-humoured, being patient with each other, and with those who are awkward and troublesome.

There are no special prayers to be said; whatever time is left over after having carried out our own duties should be devoted to whatever will be most useful for our souls.

However, we do take upon ourselves these few practices:

We will go as often as possible to the sacraments.

We will receive Holy Communion every Sunday, holy days of obligation, the novenas and feast-days of Our Lady and our patrons.

We will also receive Holy Communion on Thursday, unless we are prevented by some necessary obligation.

Every day, especially in the Holy Rosary, we will ask Our Lady to bless our Sodality, and give us the grace to persevere.

Saturdays will be kept in honour of Our Lady and on that day we will offer her some special act done in honour of the Immaculate Conception.

When praying and at the services in church, during lessons and at study time, we will try to make our exterior behaviour and manner such as to edify others.

We will treasure the word of God and we will go over again together the talks we have heard.

We will carefully avoid any wasting time, to safeguard ourselves from the temptations which come so easily and so strongly at times of idleness.

Therefore whatever time remains after the discharge of our own duties will be spent in useful and good reading or in prayer.

Recreation times are best or at least allowed after meals and after lesson time and study time.

We will make known to our superiors whatever will help our spiritual progress.

We will not abuse the goodness of those over us by constantly asking for those permissions which in their goodness they are willing to give. The exact observance of the school rules to which we have pledged ourselves should help us to avoid this abuse of too many exceptions.

We will not grumble about food and we will try to prevent others from doing so.

Those who want to join our society must first of all make a good Confession and receive Holy Communion, spend a week on trial, read these rules carefully, and promise Jesus and Mary Immaculate to be faithful to them.

On the occasion of anyone being received into the Sodality, the others will assist at Mass and receive Holy Communion, praying that God will give their new companion and the grace of perseverance, obedience and real love of God.

Our Sodality is placed under the care of Mary Immaculate whose name we bear and whose medal we always carry with us. A sincere, filial and limitless confidence in Mary, a constant devotion and loving affection for her, will make us overcome all obstacles, clinging tenaciously to our resolutions, be firm with ourselves, gentle and kindly towards others, exact in everything. The members are urged to write the holy names of Jesus and Mary first of all in their hearts and minds and then on their books and similar objects, so that they can be easily reminded of them. Our director is asked to go over these rules and if necessary change them according as he thinks best. We accept completely whatever he

decides in the matter.

Mary, bless our efforts, since the idea of the Sodality is all yours. Smile on our hopes, accept our promises, and thus under your mantle and made strong by your loving care, we will come safely through the storm-tossed sea of this world and be victorious over the temptations of the devil. So too will we be able to help our companions by what we do, give joy to those over us, and in all things be your loving sons. And if God gives us the grace of becoming priests, we promise you to give all our energies and powers to this work, distrusting ourselves, trusting completely in God; and so after our exile on this earth we trust that, consoled by Mary at our side, we shall safely receive the eternal reward that God reserves for those who serve him in spirit and truth.

The director of the Oratory read the rules very carefully and gave it his approval under the following conditions:

That the promises have not the force of vows.

None of them bind in any way under pain of sin.

Some external act of service or help should be undertaken by each one at the weekly meeting.

The week will be arranged so as to have some members go to Communion every day.

No special religious practice may be added without the express permission of the director.

The principal aim of the Sodality will be to further devotion to Mary Immaculate and Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

Everyone before being accepted must read the life of Louis Comollo.

Chapter 17. His special friends - Relationship with young Camillo Gavio

Everybody was friendly with Dominic. Those who could not understand him completely, at least respected him for his good qualities. He could get on well with everyone. He was so confirmed in the things of God that he was asked on occasion to associate with boys who were far from good, so that he might try to win them over to God. To do this he made use of free time, different kinds of games, conversation, using them all in different ways for the spiritual advantage of those concerned.

His best friends, however, were the other boys in the Sodality of Mary Immaculate. With these he had regular meetings, and they would gather together also for acts of devotion. These meetings had the permission of the director, but they were presided over and carried through by the boys themselves. In the meetings they decided how best to help an active participation in the novenas and solemn feasts, how to maintain and increase love for the Blessed Sacrament and frequent Communion; how to help boys who easily got into trouble and were going astray. Each of them would adopt one such boy and make it his business to help him and encourage him in every way possible.

Dominic was the soul of the meeting, its guide and mentor. There is much I could say about many of the boys who took part in those meetings, but as most of them are still alive, it is better I should not. I will mention two only who are already dead: Camillo Gavio of Tortona, and John

Massaglia of Marmorito. Camillo Gavio was only two months with us but it was long enough to leave a wonderful memory of himself.

His outstanding character and the great promise he showed in painting and sculpture encouraged his town council to send him to Turin, so that he might have a real chance of developing his talents. He had been very ill not long before and was not yet fully recovered; also it was his first time away from home, and among so many boys whom he did not know, it was little wonder that he was somewhat downcast and stood sadly watching the others playing their game with great zest. Dominic saw him and immediately went over to talk to him and make friends. The following dialogue took place. Dominic began:

“Hello, don’t you know anyone yet?”

“No, but I am enjoying watching the others playing.”

“What is your name?”

“Camillo Gavio, and I come from Tortona.”

“How old are you?”

“Fifteen.”

“You are looking sad; have you not been well?”

“Yes, I have been very ill with some sort of heart trouble and I am not yet fully better.”

“You would like to be completely better soon, wouldn’t you?”

“No, not absolutely. I only want to do God’s will.”

These last words made Dominic realise that Gavio was a boy of more than ordinary piety, and his heart warmed to him. With renewed interest he went on:

“Anyone who only wants God’s will has a real desire to become a saint, do you want to become a saint?”

“Oh yes; I want that more than anything else.”

“That’s great; you can be one of our special group, if you like, and share completely what we do together to help us to live for Jesus and Mary.”

“Yes, I would like to do that; but what have I got to do?”

“I will tell you in a few words. For us here it means making holiness consist in being happy. We hate and detest sin as something that robs us of God’s grace and makes us very unhappy inside; we try to be very faithful to all our duties and to be foremost in taking an active part in all exercises of piety. Try taking for your own special motto: *Servite Domino in laetitia* - Serve the Lord in gladness.”

These few words were like a ray of sunshine in the gloom, and greatly comforted the boy. From

that day he became a close friend of Dominic and followed him faithfully in the path which he trod. However, his illness flared up again after two months and despite every care he grew steadily worse and in a few days he died. He received the last sacraments with great reverence and joy and gave up his soul to God on December 30th, 1856.

Dominic visited him regularly while he was ill and as the end drew near wanted to spend the night at his bedside. This he was not allowed to do. As soon as he heard that death had come, he went to his bedside and with tears in his eyes said:

“Goodbye Camillo; I am sure you have gone straight to heaven - get a place ready for me there also. I will always be your friend as long as I live. I will pray for the repose of your soul.”

Afterwards he got the boys of the Sodality of Mary Immaculate together and they all went to pray beside the body. They also said many other prayers for him and received Holy Communion in reparation for his soul. Dominic himself did this a number of times.

He said to his friends several times: “Do not let us forget the soul of our friend. Please God he is already in heaven, but we must carry on praying for him. All that we do for him God will get done for us in due course, when our own time comes.”

Chapter 18. His relationship with young John Massaglia

Dominic’s relationship with John Massaglia was more intimate and maintained over a longer period of time. They both came to the Oratory at the same time, they were from neighbouring villages, both wanted to become priests, and they had a common desire to become saints.

Dominic said to his friend one day,

“Don’t let us stop at saying we want to be priests, but let us get busy trying to grow in the virtues that are needed by a priest.”

“Quite true,” the other replied, “but if we do all we can, God in his goodness will give us the great grace of becoming Ministers of Jesus Christ.”

At Easter time there was the annual retreat; this they made with great fervour. When it was over, Dominic said to John: “Let us be friends in the best way possible, anxious for the welfare of each other’s soul. We could be that if we were to correct each other in whatever way might be needed. So will you tell me whenever you notice me doing anything I should not, or if you see there is some good I can do and I am not doing, please point it out.”

“Very gladly, although you don’t really need anything like that. It’s me that needs it, as I am older and exposed to greater temptations. So will you do that for me?”

Dominic replied with a smile: “Let’s cut out the compliments and be really serious about helping each other.”

From that moment Dominic and John became true friends. Their friendship was lasting because it was founded on their life for God, striving earnestly together to help each other to resist evil and do good.

After the examinations at the end of the school year, the boys used to go home for the holidays. Some boys for a variety of reasons used to ask to remain at the school during the holiday period. Dominic and John were among these. I knew that their parents were very anxious to have them at home and I also thought it would do them a lot of good to go home for a while since neither of them was very strong, so I suggested this to them.

Instead of replying they both began to laugh.

“What are you laughing at?”

Dominic replied: “We know that our parents would be very glad to have us at home, but we know also that while the bird in the cage loses its liberty, still it is safe from the claws of the vulture; outside the cage he may fly where he likes but also at any moment he can fall a victim to the evil bird of prey.”

In spite of this, I judged it advisable for them both to go home for some time and they went without hesitation in a spirit of obedience, remaining just the time that I suggested.

If I were to write about the good example and virtues of John Massaglia I should be largely repeating what I have already written about Dominic, whose faithful follower he was, as long as he lived. He enjoyed good health and showed great promise in his studies. When he had finished his humanities, he passed with distinction the exam prior to receiving the clerical habit. But he was not able to wear the cassock for long that he had looked forward so eagerly to having.

After a few months he became unwell, but not thinking much of it, he did not want to interrupt his studies. His parents were worried, however, and took him home, so that he might have a good rest away from his books. But, he did not improve and after some weeks Dominic received the following letter:

Dear Dominic,

I thought I should only be a few days at home, so I did not bring any books or notes home with me. However, my sickness is going on and on, and I am wondering how it will all end up. The doctor says I am getting better; my own private opinion is that I am getting worse. We shall see who is right!

I am lonely, dear Dominic, so far away from you and the others; there are not the same opportunities here for all the spiritual things we had at school. I comfort myself with the memory of the days we helped each other to prepare well for Holy Communion. I am sure we are still united in spirit.

Would you go to my desk in the study and get the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a Kempis which you will find there and some notes which are lying beside it? Please parcel them up and send them to me. I am tired of doing nothing, but the doctor won't let me study. I sometimes walk up and down my room thinking, 'Shall I ever get better? Shall I ever rejoin my companions at school? Is this my last illness?' God alone knows the answers. I think I am quite ready to do his holy will, whatever it may be.

Send me any advice you think will help me. Let me know how you are getting on and remember me in your prayers, especially when you receive Holy Communion. Let our friendship be sealed in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and if we are not destined to be united

long in this life, please God we shall be together for ever in heaven.
Tell all the boys I was asking for them and remember me especially to those of the
Sodality of Mary Immaculate. God be with you.
Your affectionate friend,

John Massaglia.

Dominic sent John what he had asked him to get from his desk and together with it he sent the following letter:

Dear John,
You don't know how pleased I was to get your letter - at least it let me know that you were still alive. As no news had come since you left, we did not know quite, whether to say the 'Glory be to the Father' or the 'Out of the depths' for you. I am sending what you asked me to. I should like to say that Thomas a' Kempis is a good friend, but he is dead. He needs to be made to come alive by your own efforts to understand what he says. Think it over, and see how it can be carried out in your own life. You sigh for the wonderful chances we have here of spiritual things; so did I when I was at Mondonio. I tried to make up for them by a daily visit to the Blessed Sacrament and when going I tried to get as many others to come with me as possible.

Besides the Imitation I read The Treasure Hidden in the Holy Mass by St. Leonard of Port Maurice. If you feel like it, read that also.

You say you don't know if you will ever come back to the Oratory. To tell you the truth I have a feeling that I am coming quickly to the end of my own life. At any rate we can pray for each other so that both of us may die happily in God's grace. The one who goes to heaven first can prepare a place for the other and when he arrives stretch out a helping hand to pull him in!

May God keep us always in his holy grace and help us to become saints, but quickly because there is little time left. All your friends look forward to your coming back and send their very best wishes. With theirs I send you my own best wishes and prayers.

Always,
Your loving friend,

Dominic Savio.

John Massaglia's illness at first seemed of little consequence. Several times he seemed completely recovered only to relapse again, and then suddenly he was at death's door, and passed peacefully away. His parish priest, who was also his spiritual father during holiday time, wrote:

"There was time to give him the Last Sacraments and he received them with the greatest devotion. He died the death of the just individual who leaves this world to go straight to heaven."

Dominic grieved deeply at the loss of his friend and although he accepted it completely as God's will, he was in tears for several days. It was the first time that I had seen that wonderful face of his sad and tear-stained. His only comfort was to pray for his friend and get others to do likewise.

He could be heard to say sometimes,

“Dear John, you are dead, and I hope you are already with Camillo in heaven; when shall I be with you in that happy place?”

He never forgot John Massaglia in his prayers right up to the time of his own death. He never assisted at Holy Mass or at any exercise in church without remembering him before God. Dominic’s sensitive heart suffered greatly from this loss and even his health was affected.

Chapter 19. Special graces and particular deeds

There is nothing extraordinary in what I have written about so far, although we might call Dominic’s exemplary and innocent life, his spirit of penance extraordinary. The liveliness of his faith, his constant hope, his tireless zeal in doing good and helping others might also be called extraordinary. This went on until his last breath.

Now I would like to present some incidents and special graces which were out of the ordinary. I am conscious that these may give rise to some doubt in those who read about them. I should like to state categorically that anything recounted here which seems paralleled by incidents in the Scriptures or the lives of the saints, was seen with my own eyes and that the accounts written of them are written with a scrupulous concern for the truth. I leave each one free to form his own opinions.

On a number of occasions when I have been in church when Dominic was making his thanksgiving after Holy Communion, or visiting the Blessed Sacrament exposed, I have seen him obviously quite oblivious to what was going on around him; he would continue in this state without noticing the time unless he was reminded it was time for something else.

One day he was missing from breakfast, morning lessons, the midday meal and no one knew where he was, he was not in the study room, not even in bed! The matter was referred to the Rector, who suspected what might be the case, that he would be in the church. He went to the Church and there in the little chapel behind the high altar he saw Dominic standing motionless like a statue. One foot was on top of the other, one hand resting on the reading lectern; his other hand was on his breast and his gaze was fixed immovably on the tabernacle.

He called him but there was no response. He shook him, and he looked around at him saying:

“Oh, is Mass already over?”

“Look,” said his director, showing him his watch “it is two o’clock.”

He asked pardon very contritely for having been absent without permission, and the director sent him to get some dinner, saying to him:

“If anyone asks you where you have been, say you were doing something for me.” He said this so that he might be spared the curious questions of his companions.

Another time, as I was going out of the sacristy after finishing my thanksgiving, I heard a voice which seemed to be engaged in argument. It came from the little chapel behind the high altar and

when I went there I saw Dominic. He was speaking and then stopping as though waiting for someone else's reply. Among other things I heard quite clearly these words:

“Yes, my God, I have already said it and I say it again: I love you and I wish to go on loving you till my last breath. If you see that I am going to offend you, let me die: I much prefer to die than to offend you by sin.”

I asked him sometimes what went on at these times and he replied with great simplicity:

“It is silly of me; I get a distraction and lose the thread of my prayers and then I see such wonderful things that the hours pass by like minutes.”

One day he came into my room saying:

“Come quickly! There is some good work to be done.”

“Where do you want to take me?”

“Come quickly! Come quickly!”

I hesitated, but on his renewed insistence, went with him: similar instances had happened before. We left the house and silently he led me through one street after another for quite a distance. Finally we arrived at a block of flats and he led me up to the third floor:

“Here you are. This is where you are wanted,” he said as he rang the bell and immediately went away.

The door was opened:

“Oh come in, come in quickly before it is too late. My husband lapsed from the church and became a Protestant: now he is dying and begging for a priest.”

I entered and there saw the dying man, overcome with anxiety to set his conscience in order. Speedily I set matters right with a good Confession, and as I was just finishing, the local priest from St. Augustine's parish arrived with the holy oils. As he was in the act of administering the last anointing the man died.

One day I asked Dominic how he could have known that there was a dying man there. He looked at me somewhat sadly and burst into tears. I did not question him any further.

The innocence of his life, his love of God and great desire for the things of God so developed Dominic's mind that he came to be habitually united with God.

Sometimes he would stop playing a game and withdrawing from his companions walk by himself. When asked why he did this he replied.

“These distractions come to me suddenly, and sometimes I seem to see heaven open above me and I have to go away from my companions so that I do not say things which could only seem ridiculous to them.”

One day during playtime the conversation turned to the great reward God has prepared in heaven

for those who preserve their innocence. Among other things it was said that those who have kept their innocence are the nearest in heaven to the person of our Divine Saviour and that they sing a special hymn reserved to them for all eternity. This was enough to send Dominic's spirit soaring towards God; he stood still completely motionless and then fell as though dead into the arms of his companions.

This being carried out of himself would happen sometimes during study time and even in the street on his way to and from school.

He often spoke of the Holy Father and how much he would like to see him before he died. Several times he said that he had something very important to tell him. I asked him what this very important thing was.

“If I could speak to the Holy Father, I would say that in spite of his many worries and cares he should not cease to give his special attention to England; God is preparing a great triumph for the faith in that country.”

“What makes you say that?”

“I will tell you, but please don't tell anyone else, as I don't want them to laugh at me. If you go to Rome perhaps you will tell Pius IX about it ... One morning as I was making my thanksgiving after Communion, a very strong distraction took hold of me. I thought I saw a great plain full of people enveloped in thick fog. They were walking about like people who had lost their way and did not know which way to turn. Someone near me said: 'This is England'. I was just going to ask some questions, when I saw Pope Pius IX just like I have seen him in pictures. He was robed magnificently and carried in his hand a torch alive with flames. As he walked slowly towards that immense gathering of people, the leaping flames from the torch dispelled the fog, and the people stood in the splendour of the noonday sun. 'That torch', said the one beside me, 'is the Catholic Faith, which is going to light up England'.”

When I went to Rome in 1858, I told Pius IX about this, and he listened to it with great joy and pleasure and said to me:

“What you say strengthens me in my determination to do everything possible for England, already the object of my care and solicitude. The message you give me, if no more, is at least the advice of a privileged soul.”

There are many other similar incidents, but I do not give them here. I have, however, written them down and leave it to others to publish them when it will be for God's greater glory.

Chapter 20. His thoughts about death - His preparation for a holy death

Those who have read what I have written so far about Dominic will easily realise that his life was a continual preparation for death. For Dominic the Sodality of Mary Immaculate was a sure means of securing the protection of Our Lady at the hour of his death, which many now felt could not be far off. I cannot say whether he had some revelation from God of the day and

circumstances of his death or whether it was just a presentiment. He certainly spoke about his death long before it happened, and so clearly that he could not have described it more accurately after it did happen.

In view of his state of health everything was done to put a brake on his life of study and piety. However, by reason of his constitution, various physical weaknesses and the ardour of his spirit, each day saw his strength decreasing. He was aware of this himself and sometimes he would say:

“I must hurry up or I will be overtaken by night, while I am on the way.”

By this he meant that he had not much longer to live and that he must do as much good as he could before death caught up with him.

It is the custom in this House for the boys to make the exercise for a Happy Death each month. Part of this exercise consists in making a Confession and Communion as though they were to be the last. Pope Pius IX in his goodness has enriched this exercise with many indulgences. Dominic used to make it with great earnestness. It is the custom at the end of the exercise to say one Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory be to the Father for 'the one amongst us who will be the first to die'. One day he said smiling:

“It should not be for the one amongst us who will be the first to die, but for Dominic Savio who will be the first to die amongst us.” He said this many times.

At the end of April he went to his director to ask him how he might keep Our Lady's month in the best way possible. He was told to fulfill all his duties as well as he could for Our Lady, to tell some story or fact about her every day and act in such a way that he could go to Holy Communion worthily every day.

“I will do that faithfully: what grace shall I ask for?”

“Ask Our Lady to obtain for you from God, health and the grace of living completely for God and the saving of souls.”

“Yes, may she do this and also be with me when I am dying and lead me to heaven.”

Dominic lived so fervently during this month that he seemed already to be living in the next world and all his thoughts, words and actions were for Mary. He always had his story about her ready each day and would tell it sometimes to one group of boys, sometimes to another.

One of his companions said one day: “But if you do everything this year what will be left for next year?”

“Let me do what I can this year; if I am here next year I'll let you know what my plans are.”

In order to do everything possible for his health, I called in several doctors to consult together. All were taken by his brightness, his cheerfulness and his quick and ready replies. One of them, a very eminent physician, Doctor Vallauri by name, now of happy memory, said to me with admiration: “What a wonderful boy!”

I asked this doctor to tell me plainly what was the underlying trouble which was steadily sapping

his strength.

“There is no basic disease: but given his delicate constitution, the keenness of his mind and the intensity of the spirit continually at work in him are gradually wearing him away.”

“What is the remedy?”

“To my mind the best remedy would be to let him go to heaven: he seems to me to be very ready for it. The only thing which is likely to preserve his life is to take him away from all study and keep him busy with manual work proportionate to his strength.”

Chapter 21. His care for the sick - He leaves the Oratory - His words on that occasion

Dominic’s ill health was not such as to confine him to bed. He passed his time between some classes, some study and little jobs about the house. It gave him great joy to help in the school infirmary when there were any of his companions sick there. He said sometimes:

“I don’t get any merit for working in the sick room or visiting the sick , because it is something I like doing very much.”

While attending to their physical needs he would also with due prudence suggest things for their spiritual benefit.

One of his friends was finding it a bit hard to remain in bed. Dominic said to him:

“Our bodies are not made to last for ever; it is understandable that they gradually wear out until finally death comes. Think how wonderful it will be when our souls, freed from hindrances of the body, fly straight to God to begin an eternity of happiness and joy!”

Another boy refused to take his medicine because of its bitter taste. Dominic said to him:

“Medicines also come from God who has made them so that we can get better and stronger. When we take them we are doing what God wants us to do and if they do not taste very nice we get all the more merit. However unpleasant they are, it is nothing to what Jesus suffered on the cross for us.”

These observations of Dominic’s were said so unaffectedly and with such sincerity that they always won the boys over.

Dominic’s health was steadily deteriorating but he did not want to go home: he wanted at all costs to try to keep up his studies and his life for God at the school. A few months previously I had sent him home, but a few days afterwards he turned up at the Oratory again. I have to confess that the unwillingness was on both sides. I wanted to keep Dominic with me at all costs. My affection and esteem for him were those of a father for his special favourite son. But I felt that the doctor’s recommendation should be carried out and this especially so as he had recently developed a bad cough. I wrote to Mr Savio and Dominic’s departure was fixed for March 1st 1857.

He accepted this decision and offered it as a sacrifice to God.

“Why are you so unwilling to go home?” I asked him. “You should be glad to be going to your parents.”

“I want to end my days here at the Oratory.”

“Alright; when you get better at home then you can come back.”

“That is all very well ... but I know that if I go home, I shall never come back.”

The evening before his departure, he could hardly be persuaded to leave my side - there was always a new question to be answered or another assurance to be given. The following is some of the dialogue which took place between us:

“What is the best thing a sick person can do to gain merit before God?”

“Frequently to renew the offering of his sufferings to God.”

“What else can he do?”

“Offer his life to Jesus.”

“Can I be certain that my sins are forgiven?”

“I assure you in God’s name that all your sins have been forgiven.”

“Can I be certain of being saved?”

“Yes, through the mercy of God which shall never be lacking for you, you can be certain of being saved.”

“If the devil comes to tempt me what shall I say to him?”

“Tell him that you have sold your soul to Jesus and he has paid for it with his Precious Blood. If the devil continues to worry you, ask him what he has ever done for your soul, and remind him that Jesus shed his blood so that you might be free from his power.”

“When I am in heaven, shall I be able to see my companions here at the Oratory and my family at home?”

“Yes, you will see everything from heaven - what is happening here, at home and lots of other things besides.”

“Shall I be able to visit you here?”

“Yes, if it is according to God’s will and for his greater glory.”

From these and many other questions which he put to me it was easy to see that Dominic was already standing on the threshold of eternity, wondering greatly about the joys it had in store for him.

Chapter 22. He says goodbye to his friends

The morning of his departure Dominic made the Exercise for a Happy Death with his companions. He showed such devotion in his Confession and Holy Communion. It is quite impossible for me to try to describe it.

“I must make this exercise very well,” he said, “because it will be indeed my preparation for death. If I were to die on the journey, I should already have received the Holy Viaticum.”

He spent the rest of the morning putting his things in order: he packed his trunk with the care of one who is doing something for the last time. Then he went round saying goodbye to his companions, saying a little word of encouragement to one or trying to spur another on to greater efforts.

He owed a few pence to one of his companions and he took care to settle this little debt so that, as he said, his accounts would be all right with our Blessed Lord. He had a farewell meeting with the members of the Sodality of Mary and with great earnestness he exhorted them to persevere in keeping the promises they had made to Mary Immaculate, and to put no limit to their confidence in her.

About to depart, he came to me and spoke exactly as follows:

“You will have nothing of this body of mine (this carcase or skeleton) so I have to take it with me to Mondonio. You would only have been troubled with me for a little time longer . . . but God’s holy will be done. If you go to Rome, don’t forget the message for the Holy Father about England. Please pray for me that I may die a holy death: and goodbye till we meet again in heaven.”

He kept a firm hold of my hand and when we got to the door he said to his friends who were waiting to wave goodbye to him:

“Goodbye, everyone, goodbye! You are all my friends, pray for me and we will all meet again once more where we will not be separated ever again.”

He had moved off a few paces when he turned and came back to me: “Would you give me a keepsake to remember you by?”

“Certainly, with all my heart, what would you like, a nice book?”

“No, something better still.”

“What, money for your journey?”

“Yes, that’s it, money for my journey to heaven. You told us that you had got from the Holy Father some plenary indulgences at the hour of death that you could give to people. Will you give one to me?”

“Yes, my son, I will put your name on the list as soon as you have gone.”

Then he went off; he had been three years with us. It had been a time of great joy for him, and a

great edification for his companions and superiors. Now he had gone never to return.

There was general surprise at his solemn farewell. It was known that his health was far from good, but as he generally managed to keep out of bed, his illness was never considered to be very serious. In addition as he was always bright and cheerful, no one guessed that he was suffering so much anguish of body and spirit. And so it was that although everyone was a bit shaken by the finality of his farewell, there was a general expectancy that he would soon be back again.

But it was not to be so: he was ripe for heaven. What he had done for God and the saving of souls in his few short years of life was though he had lived to an advanced age. God wanted to take him to himself in the flower of his youth, also to free him from the perils and dangers in which even the best of souls can be shipwrecked.

Chapter 23. The progress of his illness - Last confession and Viaticum - Edifying details

It was two o'clock on the afternoon of March 1st when Dominic left Turin. He had a pleasant journey, and the change of air and being with his parents seemed to be doing him good. The first four days at home, he went about as usual, but his lack of appetite and his increasing cough, made his parents send him to the doctor. He was quite alarmed when he examined Dominic and immediately sent him to bed.

The doctor diagnosed inflammation and had recourse to bleeding. Knowing how young people are afraid at the sight of blood, he told Dominic not to be afraid and to turn his head the other way, and he would not see anything. The boy smiled and said:

“What is this compared with the piercing of Jesus’ hands and feet with the nails?”

He then quite calmly watched the doctor at work, and showed no alarm at the sight of his blood streaming out. This was done several times and there seemed to be an improvement. The doctor felt quite certain there was, and Dominic’s parents were quite reassured. Dominic, however, thought differently and being quite convinced that it was better to receive the sacraments too early rather than too late, he said to his father when the doctor had gone:

“Dad, let us give the heavenly doctor a chance. I would like to go to Confession and receive Holy Communion.”

To please him his parents sent for the parish priest, although they felt it was unnecessary, as he was apparently getting better. The parish priest came and heard his Confession, and then to satisfy him brought the Holy Viaticum. It can easily be imagined with what devotion and love Dominic received Jesus in what he felt was his last Holy Communion. His heart overflowed with love and there came spontaneously to his lips the promises he had made at his first Holy Communion:

“Yes, yes; Jesus and Mary, you are my greatest friends, now and for always. A thousand times, death rather than sin.”

When he had finished his thanksgiving he said:

“Now I am happy; I have a long journey to eternity but with Jesus by my side I fear nothing. How I wish I could say it to the whole world, when Jesus is with us there is no fear of anything - not even of death itself.”

He was patience itself in all his sufferings. He made great efforts to do everything by himself so that as little extra work and trouble as possible should be given to his mother. Unpleasant medicines he took without any sign that they were unpleasant, and he submitted to being bled ten times without showing any sign of resentment.

After four days of illness the doctor congratulated Dominic on the big improvement and told his parents that the disease had been overcome and it was now only a question of a good convalescence. His parents were overjoyed to hear this, but Dominic smiled and said: “The world has been overcome, it only remains to make a good appearance before God.”

He then begged his father to get the parish priest so that this time he might receive the last anointing. His parents agreed to please him though neither they nor the parish priest could not see in Dominic’s serene and joyful face any sign of death. In fact from the happiness in his voice one could only judge he was improving. Dominic, though, either moved by devotion or inspired by the divine voice speaking to his heart, was counting the days and the hours almost arithmetically and wanted to devote every moment to preparing himself for death. Before being anointed Dominic said these words aloud:

Dear Jesus, I love you and I wish to love you for all eternity — forgive me my sins. Let this sacrament wipe out all the sins I have ever committed by my eyes, my ears, my lips and my feet: may my soul and body be made holy by the merits of your Sacred Passion. Amen.

He then made all the responses in a strong clear voice, like the voice of one who is in perfect health.

It was March 9th, his fourth day in bed, his last on earth. He was very weak now on account of his sufferings and ten bleedings and other remedies, so he was given the papal blessing. He said the *Confiteor* himself and made the necessary responses. He was filled with consolation when he was told that with this blessing of the Holy Father he received a plenary indulgence.

“*Deo gratias*,” he whispered, “*semper Deo gratias*.”

Then fixing his eyes on the crucifix he murmured this little verse which he knew by heart:

O Jesus, my liberty I give completely to you: My body with all its powers I give completely to you.
Everything I have is yours, O God, And I abandon myself completely To your holy will.

Chapter 24. His final moments and his wonderful death

It is a truth of faith that at the hour of death we gather the results of what we have done during life. As a man has sown so shall he reap. If during his life he has worked for God at his last moments he will be wonderfully consoled. It does sometimes happen nevertheless that good

people are very afraid at the approach of death, in spite of the fact that they have led holy lives. This is part of God's providence which wishes to purify these souls of the results of their weaknesses in life, and so prepare them for a more glorious crown in heaven.

It was not like that with Dominic. I believe that God willed to give him that hundredfold which he reserves for his chosen souls before they enter the glory of heaven. Without any doubt, his such strong faith, his spirit of prayer and penance, his never having offended God grievously, his work for the saving of souls, had all merited for him peace and joy at the hour of death.

And so as death came to him he looked at it serenely and unafraid. Normally the body suffers considerable desolation and distress at the great stress of the soul separating itself from the body; but with Dominic it was not so - He fell asleep in the Lord.

It was the evening of March 9th 1857; he had received all the helps that the Church has for us at the approach of death. Anyone who just heard him talking quietly and saw the peace and serenity on his face could only have thought that he was having a quiet rest in bed. If you add to this his complete mastery over himself and his happy spirit, it is little wonder that nobody imagined that his end was near.

About an hour and a half before he died the parish priest came to visit him and was quite amazed to hear the brief prayers with which he so calmly and constantly recommended his soul to God. All the phrases expressed his great desire to go quickly to heaven.

In the circumstances the priest was somewhat perplexed as to what way he might help; he said some prayers with the boy and then as he was about to go Dominic said to him:

“Father, before going, leave me a parting thought to keep with me.”

“Really I don't know what to suggest.”

“Something that will strengthen and comfort me.”

“All right; try to keep in mind the Passion of Our Saviour.”

“*Deo gratias*,” replied Dominic, “May the Passion of Our Lord Jesus Christ be always in my mind and heart and on my lips. Jesus, Mary and Joseph help me now when I am dying; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I die at peace with you.”

After that he fell asleep for half an hour. When he woke up he looked round him and said:

“Dad, are you there?”

“Here I am son, what do you want?”

“Dad, it is time; get my *The Companion of Youth*⁴ and read me the prayers for the Exercise of a Happy Death.”

4 He was indicating a book addressed entirely to young people, with the title: *The Companion of Youth* in fulfilling their duties, for the exercises of Christian piety, for reciting the Office of the Blessed Virgin, Vespers throughout the year, etc.

At these words his mother burst into tears and hurried from the room. His father's eyes filled with tears, but choking back his sobs, he got the book and read the prayers. As he went through them Dominic answered clearly.

“Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me ...”

When his father reached the final part which runs: “When for the first time my soul will see the wonderful majesty of God, do not drive it away, but take it to heaven to sing your praises for all eternity ...” he said:

“Yes, Dad — that is what I want so much, to sing the praises of Jesus for all eternity.”

He dropped off to sleep again, but it was like he was reflecting on things of great importance. He awoke after a short while. Then in a clear voice he said:

“Goodbye, Dad, goodbye. What was it the parish priest suggested to me ... I don't seem to remember ... Oh, what wonderful things I see”

And so saying, with a beautiful smile on his face, and his hands joined on his breast he gave up his soul to God without any struggle.

Return, pure soul, to your Creator; heaven is open to you, the angels and saints are waiting for you. Jesus, whom you loved so much, calls you with sweet words:

“Come, good and faithful servant, you have fought the good fight and gained the victory; enter into the joy of your God”

Chapter 25. Announcing his death - Fr Picco's words to the students

When Dominic's father heard him say these last words and saw his head bending forward as though in sleep, he really thought he had fallen asleep again. He waited a few moments and then suddenly filled with apprehension he called to the boy and as he looked again he saw that he was dead.

It can easily be realised how great was the sorrow of Dominic's parents at the death of their wonderful son, whose innocent life and appealing ways had spread such happiness in their home.

At the Oratory we were anxiously waiting for news of how he was getting on, when a letter came from his father which began as follows:

“With my heart full of grief I send you this sad news. Dominic, my dear son and your child in God, like a white lily, like Aloysius Gonzaga, gave his soul to God on March 9th after having received with the greatest devotion the Last Sacraments and the Papal Blessing.”

His companions were stunned by the news and some wept at the loss of a great friend who never failed them when in need; others were sad at realising that they would no longer be helped by his constant inspiration. Others got together to pray for the repose of his soul; but the majority said: “He was a saint, he is already in heaven.” Some began immediately to pray to him and there was

great competition to try to get hold of something which had belonged to him.

When Father Picco, head of the school where Dominic went for special classes, heard the news, he was profoundly moved and gave the sad news to his boys in the following terms:

Only a short time ago I was speaking to you of the uncertainty of life and how death does not spare even your years. As an example I pointed to someone two or so years ago who had gone to this same school, sat here amongst you and listened to me, full of life and vigour and who a few days later passed from this life, his parents and his friends.⁵ When I said that to you I was very far from imagining that one of those listening to me would very soon testify to the truth of my words. It is with great sorrow that I tell you that your companion Dominic Savio, so exemplary in his life, died a few days ago. You will remember how he was racked with a painful cough during his last days at the school, and it was no surprise to any of us that he had to stay away from school. He went home on the advice of his doctors to be better looked after but already foretelling his death as he had told some of you. But the illness was advanced and continued, and after just four days he gave up his innocent soul to his Creator.

Yesterday I read the letter describing his death, which his father wrote to Don Bosco. He had no other words to describe him than to call him another St Aloysius Gonzaga both for the holiness of his life and the beautiful resignation of his death. I am very sorry that he was not long at our school and that his state of health prevented me from knowing him better and dealing with him in a large school like this. I will leave it to the superiors to speak to you about his holiness, his fervour, devotion and piety. I will leave it to his friends and companions who were around him daily to speak of his modest behaviour, his conversations. I will leave it to his parents to tell you about his obedience, respect, his docile nature. And what can I say myself that you would not already know?

I shall never forget he used to come to school with such recollection, how eagerly and attentively he used to listen to what I said, do his duty. I would be so happy if each of you decided to follow his holy example.

Before he was old enough or had done sufficient study to come to our school, he was enrolled at the Oratory of St Francis de Sales. I often had occasion to speak with the Rector of the Oratory and had heard him talk of one of his students who was amongst the best students and the most virtuous boys in the House. Such was his zeal for study, the rapid progress he made in his early studies that in brief I was anxious to have him enrolled amongst my own students and had great hopes for this. Before he came here I heard some of my own students speak of him as a model as much in study as in virtue. In my frequent visits to the Oratory I noted his good character which you all know of, and he looked so innocent that you couldn't but love and admire him. And as for the fine hopes I had he did not disappoint me in this scholastic year. I appeal to you, my beloved young people, who have witnessed his recollection and application, not only when it was his duty to listen to me but equally at other times when many youngsters have no scruples about getting lost, even those who are diligent and well-behaved. I ask you, who have

⁵ Leon Cocchis student in 2nd Rhetoric year, a boy who gave good reason for hope who died on 25 March 1855 at 15 years of age.

been his companions not only in school but in other ordinary ways, if you have ever seen him overlook any of his duties.

I still see him coming to school with that special modest style he had, entering the classroom, taking his place not with the light-headedness of so many boys of his age, but following his lessons, taking notes, or doing some useful reading. And then classes would begin with him applying himself — I recall his angelic face as he hung on every word from me! It is no wonder that despite his young age and poor health he profited so much from his studies. The proof is that amongst so many boys, most somewhat ordinary in their efforts, even though he had an illness that would take him to the grave and was often absent as a result, he was always amongst the best in the class. One thing struck me most of all and attracted my admiration. This was seeing how close he was to God as a young lad, how affectionate and fervent in his prayer. It is something we see in the better boys, even where there a natural liveliness and distraction common to your age, where there is very little reflection given to prayers they have to say and little heart given to the effort. For most of them there is little in it except lips and voice. If there is such habitual distraction in youth even in prayers said in the silence and peace of the church, or quietly in their room, in daily prayer, so, boys, know how this can happen even more so for the brief prayers we say usually before and after class. It was here that he showed such piety and union of his soul with God. How many times I saw him with his face fixed on heaven, the heaven that would soon be his place of abode, recollecting his thoughts and offering them to the Lord and his Blessed Mother. He did so with the kind of affection that our prayers should really have. These thoughts, my beloved boys, were the thoughts that enlivened his fulfilment of his duties. They made everything he did and said holy. They directed his entire life to the glory of God. Blessed are the boys who take their inspiration from this! They will be happy in this life and the next, they will make their parents who have brought them up just as happy, their teachers who have taught them, and everyone who did something with and for them.

God gives us life to love him and to gain merit for a blessed eternity. That's how it will be if everything we do is to offer ourselves to the supreme Giver like Dominic did. How foolish the boy is who goes on day after day with never a thought for God and intent only on indulging himself in selfish pleasures. What can we say of the boy who does everything possible to distance himself from these sorts of things or smothers or fights against them? Think about the holy life and the holy death of your beloved friend and his happy lot, something we can be sure he now enjoys. Set your life beside Dominic's and whatever difference you find between his and yours, make up your minds to conquer yourselves as he did, and thereby enjoy the same joy and peace that he had and which made him such a wonderful companion to you all. Just listen to me once more as I conclude these words. If I see any of you better in fulfilling your duties or better at your prayers, I will attribute it to the effects and example of our Dominic and will see it as a grace from above coming from his prayers and from his being amongst you as his companions and me as the teacher.

Thus we have the testimony of Fr Picco to the boys, expressing his deep sorrow and sense of loss at the news of the death of his beloved pupil Dominic Savio.

Chapter 26. Imitating Savio's virtue - Many pray to him to obtain heavenly graces and are heard - A reminder for everyone

It will not come as a surprise to those who have read what I have written about Dominic that God soon showed in extraordinary ways how pleasing his life had been in His sight. While he was still alive many graces were obtained by people who got him to pray for them and their intentions. After his death confidence in his intercession and veneration grew rapidly.

As soon as news came of his death a few of his friends were already calling him a saint. They met to recite the Litany for the Dead but instead of saying "Pray for him," that is, "Holy Mary pray for the repose of his soul," they said Pray for us: Holy Mary, pray for us." "Because," they said, "by now Savio is enjoying the glory of Paradise and no longer needs our prayers."

Others added: "If Dominic has not gone straight to heaven or is not there by this time who on earth is going to manage it?" From then on many of his friends and companions made him a model. They had admired his virtue in life and tried to make him a model for good works. They began to pray to him as a heavenly protector.

No day passed without favours being received for soul and body, not only in the school but also by people outside. I saw a young lad suffering from severe toothache who recovered from it. He prayed to Savio his friend with a short prayer and was immediately recovered.⁶ He puts it this way:

"The loss of my son," he says "was a source of deep sorrow for me and was further stirred by the desire to know what had happened to him in the next life. God wanted to give me consolation. About a month after Dominic's death, one night after I had been unable to sleep, I thought I saw the ceiling of the room spring wide open and there, surrounded by a bright light, Dominic appeared, smiling and happy but majestic and striking. I was beside myself at such a sight and cried out to Dominic: 'How are you? Where are you? Are you already in heaven?' 'Yes, yes father', he answered, 'I really am in heaven'. 'Well', I replied, 'if God has been so good as to let you enjoy the happiness of heaven, pray for your brothers and sisters so they may be with you one day'. 'Yes father', he answered, 'I will ask God on their behalf that they may be able to enjoy the immense happiness of heaven with me one day'. 'And pray for me, for your mother too' I said, 'so that we may be saved and be together with you one day in heaven'. 'Yes, yes, I will pray for that'. And having said that he disappeared and the room returned to darkness as before."

His father gives assurance that he is simply witnessing to the truth and says that neither before or after this, either when awake or asleep, did a similar consolation happen again

Many prayed to get over a fever and did so immediately. I was witness to one case where someone immediately gained the grace of being freed from fever. I have received many accounts and testimonies from a great variety of people. Although the character and authority of these

⁶ Such veneration and confidence in young Savio grew largely from an event told by Dominic's father, who is ready to confirm what he says in any place and in the presence of anyone.

witnesses are worthy of trust whichever way you look at it, just the same, since they are still alive I think it better to leave them out for now and be content to refer to just one special grace concerning a seminarian who had known Dominic personally. It was 1858 and he became very ill and what with being in the hospital for a long period of treatment and having to rest after it, he was not able to take the examination at the end of the school year. He thought he would at least manage it in the autumn for the Feast of All Saints and so avoid the loss of a school year, but when he returned to Turin and started to study again his illness returned with renewed force. He testifies thus:

It was getting close to the exams, and my health was in a deplorable state. Stomach aches and headaches robbed any chance of sitting for my exam which was of the greatest importance to me. I turned to my beloved friend Dominic and begged him to help me. I made a novena in Dominic's honour. Amongst the prayers I set myself to do was this one: Dear friend, you were my schoolmate, to my consolation and in my good fortune, for more than a year. You worked away at your studies with me in our class so you know how much I need to pass this exam. Ask the Lord for me, I beg you, for sufficient health so I may prepare myself. By the fifth day of the novena my health improved remarkably and I was able to resume studying. With extraordinary ease, I was able to make up for lost time and very successfully pass the necessary examination. The great improvement in my health has continued for more than a year. I acknowledge this grace obtained from God through the intercession of my friend, my companion in life, my help and my comfort. He now enjoys the glory of heaven.

With this fact I bring this life of Dominic Savio to an end, reserving an occasion to print other facts by way of an appendix so they can give greater glory to God and be of greater advantage to souls. For now, good reader, so that you will benefit from what has been written about this virtuous young man I would like to make the conclusion a very practical one for me, for you and for anyone who should read this book. We should be moved to follow young Savio in whatever good ways are compatible with our state in life. In his poor situation he still lived a very happy, virtuous and innocent life, crowned by a holy death. Let's imitate him in his way of life and we will have a chance to be like him also in his wonderful death.

Let us not fail, too, to imitate Savio in his frequenting the Sacrament of Confession. This gave him support in his regular practice of virtue and it was a firm guide which brought him to life's end so gloriously. We should go frequently and with the right attitude to draw from this source of salvation in our life. Whenever we go we should not fail to consider past confessions to assure ourselves that they were well made, and if not we should remedy this. It seems to me that through these sacraments received well and often we can live happily in the midst of the sorrows and trials of this life, and like Dominic, when our time comes, see death approach with peace and joy in our hearts. How happy we will be then to meet Jesus Our Saviour who will judge us according to his mercy, and in his goodness lead us to an eternity of happiness. Amen.

Protestatio auctoris.

Cum SS. D. N. Urbanus VIII. Pontifex die 13 martii 1625 decretum ediderit, illudque die 15 julii 1634 confirmaverit, quo prohibuit imprimi libros hominum, qui sanctitatis vel martyrii fama

celebres e vita migraverint, gesta, miracula, revelationes, seu quæumque beneficia, tanquam eorum intercessionibus a Deo accepta continentes, sine recognitione atque approbatione Ordinarii, et quæ hactenus sine ea impressa sunt, nullo modo vult censi approbata; et cum idem SS. D. N. Urbanus Papa VIII die 5 junii anno 1641 illa explicaverit, ut nimirum non admittantur elogia Sancti, vel Beati absolute, et quæ ad viros spectant tantummodo; sed ea, quæ ad mores et opiniones spectant cum protestatione, iis nullam adesse auctoritatem ab Ecclesia Romana; sed fidem tantum esse penes Auctorem: huic decreto, eiusque confirmationi et declarationi observantia et reverentia, qua par est, insistendo, profiteor me haud alio sensu, quidquid in hoc parvo volumine refero, accipere aut accipi ab ullo velle, quam quo ea solent, quæ humana dumtaxat auctoritate, non autem divina catholicæ Romana; Ecclesiæ, aut Sanctæ Sedis Apostolicæ nituntur.
