

# Conquistador



The story of  
**JOHN CAGLIERO**  
Prince of the Church  
and  
Pioneer in Patagonia  
and Central America

By  
**Peter  
Lappin**



Peter Lappin, born in Belfast, Ireland, is a member of the Salesian order. By any standard he is a successful writer. His more important works include his first book, **General Mickey**, the story of a dead-end kid. This was a Catholic Literary Foundation selection. It was later made into a movie which won third prize and \$20,000 at the Venice Film Festival. **Dominic Savio: Teenage Saint** was a national Catholic best-seller and a Literary Foundation selection. His novel about Northern Ireland and its desperate struggle between Catholics and Protestants — **The Land of Cain** — was a Catholic Family Book Club selection and received high critical acclaim. **Stories of Don Bosco** ran into several editions and at present is circulating in at least a dozen countries. His **Prince of the Pampas** is being considered for a movie.



Father Lappin spent many years on the China Mission, was interned by the Japanese during World War II, and remained in China until the Communist take-over.

On his arrival in the United States he toured the country giving talks and lectures on China and the Far East. Later he was appointed Editor of the **Salesian Bulletin** of the U.S.A. At present he is a member of the Editorial Board in charge of the translation and publication of the 20-volume **Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco**.

A one-year tour of the South American countries at the request of his superiors resulted in the present book **Conquistador and a Prince of the Pampas**, the story of Zepherin Namuncura, whose cause for canonization is making rapid progress.

His "bread - and - butter" job, as he smilingly calls it, is enthusiastically promoting the order's Marian Shrine — 250 acres of scenic beauty in the Hudson Valley, the most beautiful and the most historic spot in the United States. In great demand as a speaker, he has appeared frequently on radio and TV, and has been written about times without number by columnists and feature writers.

Bob Considine says:

"In doing research for this highly readable biography, Father Lappin spent over a year of travel in South America, journeying by plane, jeep and even horse and donkey, the length and breadth of the continent, checking old mission records and archives for details of the extensive accomplishments of Cardinal Cagliero and his companions.

The result is a valuable contribution to the social and religious history of the period, told entertainingly, lucidly, and with rare insight.

The book deserves wide distribution and readership. Aside from its inherent value as biography it can increase our understanding of the conflux of South America's cultural strains. It should whet our interest in the South America of today. And, ideally, it can become another link in the chain of friendship between our two continents for the spiritual betterment of each."

**Cover design by: john wolters**

**Conquistador** evokes for the reader the romance that went into the foundation of the republics of South America. Since religiously, economically, and politically South America is destined to play an increasingly important role in the affairs of the world, it is imperative to have some idea of its background. **Conquistador**, while telling the story of its hero, and providing us with some remarkable insights into the way in which these nations came into being, offers us this important background.

For some readers **Conquistador** will also offer a first glimpse at the work of one of the most modern and most successful orders of the Church — the Salesians of Don Bosco. They have earned a large share in the credit for the development of these South American republics. Indeed, their achievements there form one of the brightest jewels in their crown.

In South America alone Salesian Sisters, Brothers and Priests now number over 12,000 and their activities cover slums, camps, hostels, orphanages, workshops, schools, colleges, seminaries, universities . . . From the borders of Mexico to the most southerly city in the world, Ushuaia, in Tierra del Fuego, it is hard to find a town that does not have a street, avenue, or monument, dedicated by a grateful public to these pioneers. Within this territory alone they count among their alumni ambassadors, ministers, presidents, and some of the Church's most illustrious prelates.

All of which stems from the initiative and zeal of one man — John Cagliero.

**Conquistador** shows Cagliero to be a man of heroic stature who made his influence felt in two continents. In his utter dedication to the fulfillment of a dream, Cagliero provides the world with an ideal of the highest order. In this book he is depicted with rare discernment and clarity as a strong individual, a born leader of men, warmhearted, impulsive, generous, of unlimited physical and moral courage, at all times overflowing with optimism and the spirit of youth. He emerges as a true **Conquistador**, not of kingdoms or of empires, however, but of the hearts of men, of their loyalty, of their trust.

After having read this book the reader feels that he has lived through some of Cagliero's most hair-raising exploits, laughed with him in some of his most hilarious episodes, shared some of his most tragic moments. He will come away convinced that he knows intimately one of the most exciting and most colorful characters of our time.

Bob Considine, journalist, globe-trotter, best-selling author, provides a sparkling and informative introduction in the style that has made him the highest-paid journalist in history.



# CONQUISTADOR





BY THE SAME AUTHOR

General Mickey

The Land of Cain

Dominic Savio: Teenage Saint

Noah's Ark

The Story of Job

Samson and Delilah

Stories of Don Bosco

Prince of the Pampas

Conquistador





# CONQUISTADOR

BY  
PETER LAPPIN

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*To the Salesians of South America  
who were more than kind to the Author  
in the hope that it may  
forge another link in the golden chain  
that binds them to their brothers  
of the North  
this book is humbly dedicated*



## Contents

Introduction by Bob Considine	...	...	v
1. Trailblazing	...	...	1
2. <i>La Boca</i>	...	...	15
3. Imitating the Martyrs	...	...	28
4. European Interlude	...	...	45
5. The Promised Land	...	...	56
6. The Making of a Bishop	...	...	67
7. Early Obstacles	...	...	80
8. The Roughrider	...	...	93
9. <i>El Zorro</i> - The Wolf	...	...	106
10. Disaster in the Cordilleras	...	...	116
11. Death of a Dreamer	...	...	129
12. Murder on the Missions	...	...	142
13. Cannibals at Large!	...	...	156
14. Mission in Danger	...	...	166
15. The Changing Winds of Fortune	...	...	179
16. The Last King of the Pampas	...	...	192
17. <i>Adios Patagonia!</i>	...	...	212
18. Defender of the Weak	...	...	226
19. New Horizons	...	...	240
20. Waterloo!	...	...	260
21. Homeward Bound	...	...	276
<i>Envoi</i>	...	...	295
<i>Bibliography</i>	...	...	297





## INTRODUCTION

Francis Cardinal Spellman once said, "No one during the last century did so much for so many as Don Bosco."

He was referring to the remarkable priest, born in 1815 on a poor mountain farm in Becchi, Italy, who died on January 31, 1888, and was declared a saint on Easter Sunday, 1934, by his old friend Pope Pius XI.

St. John Bosco, "the Apostle of Youth", is too little known in the United States even though the Salesian Society, the religious order he founded in Turin at the dawn of the industrial revolution, now ranks as the third largest order of the Catholic Church.

Father Peter Lappin, a former Salesian missionary turned writer, has done much in recent years to inform the reading public about the amiable Saint John Bosco and his contemporaries. In several previous books he has told lively tales of Don Bosco, of Dominic Savio "the teenage saint," and of other sons of Don Bosco. Now, in this engrossing historical biography, he turns his attention to another follower of Don Bosco, a towering 19th century Cardinal, and to the continent of South America where the first Salesian missions were established.

Having a brother John who is a Maryknoll missionary and who at this writing is Director of the Latin-American Bureau of the National Catholic Welfare Conference, I have a deep appreciation of the spirit that moves such men. It is always inspiring to observe their selfless serenity and to learn of their almost casual commitment to intrepid exploits.

Considered historically, the growth and global spread of the Salesians of Don Bosco has been truly amazing — perhaps the word should be miraculous. At least one admirer, Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, has compared it to the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Don Bosco's dynamic Society now numbers 24,000 members — the Salesian Sisters, of whom he was also cofounder, number 22,000 — teaching and doing missionary work in 73 countries around the world, everywhere in fact but behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains.

The world-encircling fervor and zeal that was to bring into reality Don Bosco's striking vision started, as Father Lappin relates, on November 11, 1875, when a missionary band of ten priests and brothers, including Father John Cagliero, head of the group and later Cardinal, left Italy for Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego, the most remote tip of South America.

During his lifetime, St. John Bosco sent out seven more missionary expeditions, but, although he always had a strong desire to personally carry the Gospel abroad, he never went to the missions himself. He sacrificed that ambition to devote himself to the vital work demanding his attention and guidance in Turin.

Don Bosco's particular dedication — the Christian education of youth with special emphasis on poor and abandoned boys — was an inspired apostolate for his age, an age when social upheaval and the exploitation of child labor disrupted family life, fostered juvenile delinquency, and created youthful street gangs. By one of history's odd parallelisms, his apostolate, having lost none of its inspiration, would seem highly applicable to our own troubled times.

In 1846, five years after his ordination, Don Bosco located a shed in the part of Turin called Valdocco where he could base the much-needed work with boys he had undertaken. There he founded the "Oratory of St. Francis de Sales" as a clubhouse or meeting place the purpose of which

was, as he put it, "to entertain boys with pleasant and wholesome recreation after they have assisted at Church services." He called it an Oratory (*orare*, to pray) to indicate that it was not just a recreation center but was a place of religion as well. A few years later, Don Bosco added a hostel for homeless waifs and orphans, a home for his apprentices and students that was the first of many subsequent "Boys Towns". He conducted classical and trade schools, and he instituted the first free evening classes for the poor.

Understandably, the Salesians of Don Bosco have come to be known as the "Boy Order of the Catholic Church." When he founded the Society as a religious congregation in 1859, Father John Bosco dedicated it to the saint whom he admired so much "for his charity and kindness" — St. Francis de Sales. From this, Don Bosco's sons came to be called Salesians.

It would be difficult to evaluate the influence Don Bosco has had on education and welfare work throughout the world, but it has been considerable. He developed a highly practical system of "preventive education" which has had tremendous results and far-reaching effects in the decades since then. His pioneering work is reflected today in countless youth movements, academic, vocational and farm schools, orphanages, and other havens and places to get a fresh start. In North and South America alone, the Salesians conduct, among their 2,000 institutions, more than 100 agricultural and 225 industrial schools. In the United States, in addition to academic subjects, they teach much needed technical skills: electronics, industrial electricity, cabinet-making, photography, graphic arts, automotive power, and architectural and mechanical drawing.

In doing research for this highly readable biography, Father Lappin spent over a year of travel in South America, journeying, by plane, jeep, and even horse and donkey, the length and breadth of the continent, checking old mission records and archives for details of the extensive

accomplishments of Cardinal Cagliero and his companions.

The result is a valuable contribution to the social and religious history of the period, told entertainingly, lucidly and with rare insight. Father Lappin's dramatic biography-within-a-biography, the story of Namuncurá, last Indian Prince of the Pampas, is a bright bonus, the kind of remarkable true-life tale that almost certainly will become a motion picture, as have several of Father Lappin's previous stories.

This book deserves wide distribution and readership. Aside from its inherent value as biography, it can increase our understanding of the conflux of South America's earlier cultural strains. It should whet our interest in the South America of today. And, ideally, it can become another link in the chain of friendship between our two continents for the spiritual betterment of each.

— BOB CONSIDINE

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BOB CONSIDINE, noted journalist and internationally syndicated columnist, is the recipient of many awards including the 1959 Overseas Press Club Award. The author of *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo*, *MacArthur the Magnificent*, *General Wainwright's Story*, *The Jack Dempsey Story* and many other bestsellers, his latest is his autobiography, *It's All News to Me*.



## 1. Trailblazing

A warning bell tinkled in the engine-room; the indicator swung to *Dead Slow* and the S.S. *Savoie* of the Messageries Maritimes cut her speed almost to a stop. She was leaving the green sea of the Atlantic and entering the muddy fairway of the broad La Plata River which would lead her to the port of *La Ciudad de Santa María del Buen Aire*, the City of Holy Mary of the Good Air, or Buenos Aires. Far to the starboard across that broad stretch of brown waters the passengers could see the clean-swept city of Montevideo whose shell-white beaches made it the envy of its neighbor.

The month's crossing from Genoa along the route of the *conquistadores* might have been rougher, at least on the European side, where it was mid-winter. But it had been such smooth sailing that even the poorest sailor among the passengers had enjoyed the voyage and eaten his complement of meals. As the ship had approached the American continent, the weather had grown from warm to unbelievably hot and damp. The *Savoie* was to dock that morning of December 14, 1875, mid-summer in Buenos Aires, where those inhabitants who could afford it had already fled the discomforts of the capital for the cooler climate of the Andes.

In and out of the hustle and bustle of sailors preparing to dock and passengers scrambling for baggage or awkwardly negotiating steep ladders, dodged a sprinkling of black-robed figures who, like the rest, were excited and inexperienced travelers. One of those clad in a black robe stood apart from all this, his gaze fixed on the approaching shoreline, his half-closed eyes straining to distinguish the low buildings now lining the horizon. Arms folded and one foot slightly advanced, his stance suggested a conqueror. In his mid-thirties, he measured five foot five, was broad at the shoulders, and possessed the deep chest of the athlete. The rough hands showed no disdain for hard work. Although under a sedentary regime he might incline to obesity, his long black soutane lent a slim appearance to what was actually a stocky figure. Nor was there any softness in the face now bronzed from sea and sun. The mouth wide, resourceful, yet sensitively curved; the eyes, deep brown and alive; the longish nose; the jutting chin; the expansive brow under unpampered chestnut hair—all these tended to give the face a slightly domineering expression. This was modified, however, by the dimpled chin and the warm friendly smile that was forever lighting up the eyes and face. The whole bearing and the quick step of the man bespoke energy, directness, and that indefinable quality of total commitment which leadership demands.

In coming to Argentina, John Cagliero knew that he was not, as his countrymen so aptly put it, *scoprendo l'America*, discovering America, or doing something novel. Men had long since forgotten the frenzy of excitement that once had gripped Europe at the first news of this great land with ancient civilizations, strange peoples, and most important of all, untold hoards of gold, silver, and precious stones. Argentina had been included in the Spanish colonial empire in 1516 when Díaz de Solís discovered the sweet waters of the river the *Savoie* was now slowly navigating; twenty years later Pedro de Mendoza had founded the city of

Buenos Aires. Magellan, by finding the Straits, rounded off the territory of the Republic, although neither the discoverers nor their descendants paid much attention to the southern half of the territory.

Nor was he coming out to plant the first cross. The great missionary orders had done that centuries ago when they had accompanied *los conquistadores* on the dual adventure of conquering new worlds for the crowns of Spain and Portugal, and for Christ. Franciscans had founded monasteries in Santiago, Corrientes, and a hundred other places; Jesuits had established a center of learning at Córdoba, later known as *Roma Argentina*; founded Sao Paulo; and carried out an epoch-making experiment in the Reductions of Paraguay. Dominicans and Mercedarians had heroically contributed toward establishing the Faith in the New World. . .

The land breeze from the shore was now barely strong enough to blow the thick black smoke from the tall funnels clear of the passengers who crowded excitedly against the ship's rails to catch a glimpse of their new homeland. It brought little in the way of relief from the oppressive heat which, even at that early hour, hung over the wide mouth of the river.

. . . No, he was neither placing the first footsteps, nor planting the first cross. Nevertheless, if his voyage did not hold as much promise of the strange and the unknown as it had held for the *conquistadores*, at least it held as much for him as it held for the hundreds of men, women and children who swarmed the deck below him; who gazed ahead, their fears and hopes clearly written on faces now thin and wan from the rigors of the voyage. The *Savoie* was bearing a portion of the greatest wave of immigration ever to sail to Argentina. Nearly a quarter of a million immigrants created problems for themselves and for the countries which offered them a new home. They came westward to escape the hardships which years of war and crop failure had brought to Europe and, in particular, to the Italian peninsula. It was a

rediscovery of America, of a land which once again held out if not the hope of untold wealth, at least that of a better life.

Cagliero felt his lot paralleled that of the immigrants. If they had come out to seek their fortunes, to build their homes and raise their families, he had come to blaze a trail into areas where the white man or the missionary was a rare figure.

By now he could distinguish far to the left the low buildings which had appeared over the horizon earlier that morning. He heard the ship's bell toll out the hour — "two bells," or 9 a.m. — as her bow slowly knifed through the waves and began the approach to the harbor of Buenos Aires. It would not be long before he and the other passengers landed on the shores of the country which was to be their new home. And what kind of a home would it be? The immigrants below him would leave, some to carve out careers of success and happiness; others to find disillusionment and failure. And he and his little band of pioneers, what lay in store for them? He singled them out from among the crowd. At that moment one of them turned his head and waved his hand in greeting. Cagliero smiled and waved back to him: ten ordinary men with an extraordinary mission!

The great ship slowed her progress still further, for she was now entering the harbor where the water took on a darker, muddier tint. The deep throb of the engines beat time with Cagliero's quickening pulse.

With a sense of uneasiness he reflected that on his shoulders and the shoulders of his companions rested the future of their work in the new continent. For a moment he wondered if perhaps there had not been an element of rashness, even of foolhardiness, in the venture, a little too much enthusiasm and over-confidence, and too little calculation. He had not come to work within the safe confines of the great cities such as Buenos Aires or Montevideo, or among the civilized descendants of the *conquistadores*, or even the immigrants,



but in the largely uncharted regions of Patagonia, where the Indians until recently had raced their wild horses across the pampas from the Cordilleras to the sea . . .

A booming sound plucked him from his reverie; white puffs of smoke burst from a point on the mainland. Gunfire? A sudden silence fell on the crowd of passengers. Each one asked himself the same questions. Firing at the ship? Another revolution? These were said to occur with devastating frequency in these South American republics! Cagliero consoled himself with the reflection that he had made the voyage during Argentina's Month of Mary, November 14 to December 14. There could be no better augury. And the letters he had received had been reassuring. Yes, but that assurance had been only on the part of the Archbishop. What about the government? — and the people? He remembered now that the pastor of San Salvador had even nervously suggested in a letter that it might be unwise for Cagliero and his companions to land in Argentina dressed as clerics!

"Scared, Father?"

Cagliero turned quickly and saw the confident, bronzed face of the captain. "I'm not too sure," he admitted. "What's happening? We had been guaranteed a warm welcome."

"That's it, Father," laughed the captain. "They're firing those guns in your honor."

"Oh, that's what it is!" Cagliero's relief was evident.

This was not exactly true, however. The cannon was a signal to the quarantine authorities of the arrival of a ship. But the explanation did have a reassuring effect on one about to land in an unknown country.

Cagliero had no sooner disembarked than he was surrounded by a cheering throng. To his surprise he discovered that his arrival had received a great deal of publicity and he was delighted to find several former boys of Don Bosco's Oratory waiting at the wharf. Along with them came José Benítez, the eighty-year-old Mayor of San Nicolás, and the first Salesian Cooperator in the New World. He had

traveled 150 miles to greet the missionaries. Archbishop Frederick Aneiros, the one most responsible for their coming, sent his representative, Monsignor Anthony Espinosa, who enthusiastically hugged Cagliero and his companions. For a moment Cagliero was afraid that everybody on the wharf might do the same, including the hundreds of immigrants who had not come to welcome him, but Monsignor Espinosa rescued the travelers by hustling them into carriages and driving off with them.

On their way to *La Matriz*, or Motherchurch, as the cathedral was familiarly called, Cagliero, once having left the slum area surrounding the docks, passed through one of the oldest sections of the river city. This section, like the little towns on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, had a distinctly Spanish air. The wars of liberation against the mother country had not erased the Spanish heritage or destroyed the Spanish blood that coursed in the veins of the old families of Buenos Aires.

"These old families," the Monsignor told him in a running commentary, "form a tightly-knit community and keep themselves aloof from the immigrants. You see, the immigrants for the most part, besides being strangers, are also impoverished and unlettered, and live in the sections close to the docks."

"Nevertheless, a characteristic of this community," Monsignor was quick to point out, "lies in its democratic spirit within the fold. A wealthy *porteño* — as the inhabitants are nicknamed — often lends his fine clothes to a poorer friend for the ball or for the hunt. Coaches will avoid a particular street where they hear someone is lying ill or being waked. In the houses of the well-to-do there is always hospitality for the less fortunate. — But here we are. Now you'll meet the Archbishop — a kindly man, and — I can assure you — one well disposed to Don Bosco and his followers."

When Cagliero led his group to pay their respects to

the Archbishop, he found to his surprise and dismay that the Archbishop — a portly man with a warm disposition — had invited his Vicars General, the Canons of the Cathedral, and many of the leading citizens to meet them. Overwhelmed at seeing himself and his companions the center of so much attention, he was relieved when the Archbishop remarked that he was sure the sons of Don Bosco had brought their music with them. The word "music" was like the drop of a hat to Cagliero. Gathering his friends around the piano, he began an impromptu concert and, from that moment on, he was in charge. As a further triumph, the song that received the warmest ovation was his own composition, *The Chimney Sweep*.

"So," ran the comments, "Cagliero is not only a Doctor of Theology, he is also an excellent composer." Some were not slow even to declare that his success was already assured in Buenos Aires and in the rest of the Republic.

Nevertheless, during his conversations with the Archbishop and the others, then and later, Cagliero received more than one indication that things would not always be so pleasant. Besides, his experiences with Don Bosco had taught him to expect almost as a matter of course that as soon as he set his hand to any work for the good of souls, he would meet with opposition. Or, as he put it, *Il diavolo ci metterà la coda* — "The devil will stick in his tail." Nothing had ever come easy to Don Bosco; Cagliero did not expect it to come easy to him.

And there seemed to be plenty of opportunities in Argentina, he mused, for the devil to use to good advantage against him.

To begin with, there was the political unrest which lay over the country. After gaining its independence in 1816 Argentina made slow, arduous progress through a series of bloody uprisings and dictatorships. President Rosas (*El Gaucha*) established from 1835 to 1852 through sheer terrorism, the elements of order but had earned, from his

admirers at least, the title of "George Washington of the South." At the end of the war of 1873, in alliance with Brazil and Uruguay against tiny Paraguay, Argentina almost went to war against her allies. Two years later, rebellion broke out in the province of Entre Ríos. In 1874, Nicolás Avellaneda defeated General Mitre for the presidency, but Mitre cried "fraud" and attacked the capital by land and sea. The government imposed an uneasy peace which found the streets of Buenos Aires littered with dead. In between times, the city of Mendoza had been almost wiped out by an earthquake, yellow fever had swept through the capital, leaving 26,000 dead, wars within and wars beyond the frontiers, earthquakes, Indian raids, plagues — all these had forced historians to describe conditions of that period as "chaotic," and had made no slight inroad in the national population of less than two million. Finally, Julius Argentino Roca (*El Zorro*, the Wolf) became President, and he lost no time in showing that he was fiercely nationalistic, impatient of foreigners, and utterly intolerant of foreign interference. He summarily deported Archbishop Louis Matera, the Apostolic Delegate, and openly declared his intention of diminishing the role of the Church in the life of the nation.

Cagliero was also greatly disturbed by what he heard from the Archbishop about the Italian immigrants who formed the great majority of the masses now flocking to Argentina.

The Archbishop tried to spare Cagliero's feelings as much as he could, but the message was clear. "Unfortunately for the Church," he said, "they left their homeland during the struggle for the Papal States. The enemies of the Church have very cleverly maneuvered Pius IX into a position which on the surface seems unjust, unpatriotic, and selfishly opposed to the interests of these people. Naturally, the secret societies in Argentina and, in particular, the Masons, are using this unhappy situation to the utmost advantage. Why,

this very year they incited the immigrants to rush out from a meeting and set fire to the Jesuit college and attack my own residence! No wonder the Holy Father himself is concerned! It is also my impression that he has already asked Don Bosco to see if his mission could not help these immigrants."

"Yes," replied Cagliero. "Don Bosco assured the Holy Father that he would."

"As if this were not enough," continued the Archbishop, "we have also to face the opposition of the numerous anticlerical elements in government circles. Unlike many members of the traditionally Masonic governments in South America who can be, at least in their own minds, good Catholics and officially anticlerical..." Here the Archbishop raised both hands and eyes to heaven. "... These are bitterly and openly opposed to the Church. All this stems from the days of the revolutions. The Church, perhaps, was slow to understand the changing nature of the times. When the revolutions did come to the countries of South America, she found herself on the side of the Spanish and the Portuguese—the losing side. But the anticlericals? They were firmly entrenched, and still are, even today. Because of the intransigence of these men it will go hard with anyone, particularly a foreigner, who makes any move calculated to advance the cause of religion."

"*Il diavolo ci metterà la coda,*" repeated Cagliero to himself, when he had heard all this. As far as he could see, the only question was when, where and how he would do it.

The exciting day came to an end when Cagliero and his missionaries were lodged temporarily in the Hotel del Globo in historic *Calle 25 de Mayo*. That night, although extremely tired, he did not go to bed at once. Instead, he waited until the others were asleep and everything around him had grown quiet. Worn out though he was, he knew he would not be able to sleep until he had performed a certain duty. He opened a drawer and drew from it a sheet of writing paper.



As he repassed the exciting moments of an event-filled day he was surprised to discover that what remained impressed most deeply on his mind were not the consolations or the triumphs, but the solemn words of the Archbishop. What an enormous task lay ahead of him! What difficulties, what hidden dangers! How limited the qualities and the resources of his little band seemed in the face of such obstacles! For the first time since he had undertaken the assignment, he felt inadequate and lonely. . . .

"But what's this gloomy picture I'm painting of the future?" he scolded himself. He was not accustomed to contemplating failure. Against the doubts and fears was there no bright side to the picture? Of course there was! Had he not received his mandate from Don Bosco? And was not the very presence of himself and his companions in Argentina proof that his mission had behind it something more than a mere plan mapped out by man alone? What other group of pioneers had left on any mission under such encouraging, if unusual circumstances? . . .

Don Bosco, by now a well-known figure both at home and abroad, had gathered round him a select band of teenagers and with them had formed a new religious society precisely at a time when the government was suppressing all religious societies! This young society was now succeeding beyond all expectations and had opened houses both in Italy and in France. But the missions, Don Bosco confided to Cagliero, had long occupied his attention. He had even thought of going out himself. That was until Father Joseph Cafasso, his friend and counselor, had surprised him poring over an English grammar.

"What on earth are you studying English for?" he asked. "You're not for the missions!"

Don Bosco looked mortified. "Why not?"

"You? With a stomach that can't stand ten minutes

in a carriage! You cross the high seas? Why, man, you'd be a dead duck before you even got there!"

"Very well, then," Don Bosco humbly replied, "I won't think any more of going."

Although he received no less than fifty requests to open missions in different parts of the world, he remained undecided until, in 1872, he had another of his famous "dreams."

"I found myself in a wild, unknown region," he revealed later at the insistence of Pius IX. "A wide plain lay at my feet and in the far distance stretched a long range of mountains." After describing the natives who inhabited this area he continued, "I saw one group of missionaries go out to meet them, but the savages massacred them. A second group of missionaries appeared—my own Salesians! As they approached these wild men I trembled for their safety. To my amazement, however, the savages welcomed them with open arms!"

To find out where these people were, he inquired of every traveler he met, devoured innumerable books and articles. After hearing one missionary he thought he had found the place. He told some of his Salesians to study English since the Holy See had spoken of offering him a mission in India.

In December, 1874, however, the Argentine consul in the city of Savona, John P. Gazzolo, visited the Oratory, Don Bosco's headquarters, bearing an appeal from the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. After talking things over with Gazzolo and obtaining more detailed information from the Archbishop, Don Bosco realized with delight that he had at last found the land he had seen in his dream, the place where providence wanted him to begin his missions.

His followers now numbered sixty-four perpetually professed members, fifty of them priests; 107 members with temporary vows, 84 novices and postulants. He surprised them

one day with the dramatic announcement that he had accepted a mission in South America.

Once the location was decided, the next question to occupy the attention of a thoroughly excited Oratory was, "Who would be the first missionaries? — Who would lead them?"

"I wondered if I myself should accompany them to help them settle down," he confessed to Cagliero.

"That's hardly necessary," Cagliero told him.

"Then I feel I should send some older priest with them."

"If you can't find anybody else," said Cagliero offhandedly, "I'll go."

"We shall see."

Don Bosco always confided fully in Cagliero and, in return, Cagliero's devotion to Don Bosco knew no limits. This was the key to Cagliero's whole life. Although Cagliero always wanted to be a priest, when it was suggested that the little group at the Oratory might be asked to become "friars," he had indignantly protested. The word "friar" had been dragged into disrepute by the anticlerical press. But when it was suggested that they might be asked to join a society of priests founded by Don Bosco, he gave himself up without reserve; so much so, that when a low wall was built around the expanding Oratory, Cagliero considered it an insult to be "forced" to stay with Don Bosco. After jumping backwards and forwards over the wall he exclaimed: "See? If I want to leave, a little wall won't hold me. Either you're with Don Bosco all the way or not at all!" Once ordained, he received several tempting offers to leave Don Bosco. While visiting the curia to see the Archbishop of Turin, for example, the Archbishop let him know that "he would willingly see Cagliero the priest, not, however, Cagliero the Salesian" — the name that Don Bosco had given his followers. Cagliero jumped to his feet. "The Cagliero who is not a Salesian," he exclaimed as he bounded out of the room, "simply doesn't exist!"

A member of the original group which took the first vows under Don Bosco, he was named one of the counselors; ordained June 14, 1862, he was elected Spiritual Director. A Doctor of Divinity, a gifted musician, an excellent organizer and preacher, he was clearly marked out for an important role in the young Society. It seemed improbable, therefore, that he would ever be assigned to lead its first group of missionaries.

Most likely choice was a Father Bonetti. Bonetti's mother, however, was advanced in years and Don Bosco did not wish to ask such a sacrifice from her. He decided, after all, to approach Cagliero.

"John," he said, "were you serious when you said you'd go with the group to South America?"

"Don Bosco, you know I never joke with you."

"Since that's how it is, get ready for the trip."

Don Bosco wrote to Buenos Aires saying that he was sending Cagliero out as head of the expedition with power to act in his name. His assignment: to settle the new mission in Argentina, then return to Turin.

Cagliero led a group of six priests and four brothers to the house in Varazze to spend the summer studying Spanish under Gazzolo. Gazzolo insisted that everyone should speak nothing but Spanish. The result was that by the end of the summer the missionaries had a working knowledge of the language.

On October 29, 1875, the pioneers set out for Rome where Pius IX received them cordially, calling them, "My missionaries." From Rome they returned to the Oratory for a departure ceremony so splendid and so moving that it set a tradition for all future departure ceremonies. To Cagliero's disappointment, however, Monsignor Lorenzo Gastaldi, Archbishop of Turin, refused to attend. Resentful of what he termed Don Bosco's "world-horizon" attitudes, he wanted the Salesians to confine their activities to his archdiocese. This disappointment was offset for Cagliero by

the sound of a choir thundering out his own composition: "*Sit nomen Domini benedictum!* Praised be the Name of the Lord!"

On Sunday, November 14, the missionaries embarked on the *S.S. Savoie*. Sighting a piano in the saloon Cagliero characteristically organized an impromptu entertainment for the passengers and their friends. When the warning gong sounded, practically everyone on the ship, including the captain, knelt down while Don Bosco, who had accompanied Cagliero to the boat, traced a blessing over them . . .

Cagliero remembered how he had fought back the tears as he had watched Don Bosco draw away in the launch. He remembered, too, Don Bosco's parting words before the ship had slipped her moorings and set out on her long voyage. "Seek not wealth, nor honors, but souls. Take special care of the sick, the young, the old, and the poor, and you will be blessed by God and man. Let the world know that you are poor by your dress, your table, and your home. That will make you rich in the sight of God and gain the good will of men. Teach those I have confided to you to love, to guide, and to correct one another; not to bear rancor or envy. Let the good of one be the good of all; let the suffering of one be the suffering of all . . ."

Blinking the moisture away from his eyes, Cagliero slid the sheet of paper under the circle of yellow light shed on the table by the little oil lamp and began to write.

"Dear Don Bosco . . ."

## 2. La Boca

Cagliero was not long in Buenos Aires before he realized to his keen disappointment that he could not simply pack his bags, take a train for Patagonia, and there set up his mission. Even Don Bosco, despite his consuming desire to see his men get to work among the Indians had to agree that it was imperative first to establish a base in or near the capital. This would consist of a nucleus of schools, parishes, and groups of friends and benefactors, which would eventually provide a constant supply of men and money for Patagonia.

Accepting the inevitable, with the pastor of San Nicolás, a prosperous town 150 miles up the River Paraná, he took up negotiations already begun by Don Bosco for the opening of a school, and dispatched Father Fagnano and several other missionaries to prepare the groundwork. That done, he had to figure out how to put his other companions to work. This, he quickly discovered, would not be difficult. The fact was that, given the acute shortage of priests, the Archbishop indicated that he would like Cagliero at least for some time to stay right in the capital. Besides, Cagliero felt that in deference to Don Bosco's wish some of his attention should be turned to the needs of the Italian immigrants.

At this particular stage in Argentina's history, these immigrants provided a serious problem. Up to the year 1860, the rate of entry had been very slow. But, recently, it had increased at such a pace that 1875 saw what amounted to a tidal wave of them enter the country. They were reasonably well-cared for by the authorities who supplied them with medical attention, food, and lodging. Although promised jobs on their arrival by a placement bureau, they were still free to go wherever they chose. Having chosen a particular job, they were met at their destination and taken care of by the bureau. In the main, these immigrants tended to settle in distinct regions, according to nationality. The Germans, for instance, preferred the north of Argentina; the French and the Swiss, the area below them; the English, Irish, and Scotch, the more or less central area; and the Italians and Spanish, the southern half of the country.

The Italians, by far the most numerous, were eventually to make the greatest contribution to the development of the country. Unfortunately, Cagliero discovered for himself that what the Archbishop had told him was quite true. Under the influence of Garibaldi and continental Masonry in the dispute over the Papal States, they were completely out of sympathy with the Pope and consequently with the Church. The Church in Argentina in general, and Cagliero in particular, was to feel this opposition for a long time, especially in the coastal towns, where the majority of the Italian immigrants had settled.

The religious center of the Italian immigrants of Buenos Aires lay just off the Plaza de Congreso in the church of *Mater Misericordiae*. The blue-and-white tiled cupola of the church, the four heavy columns and the narrow, curving passageway to the sacristy on Calle Moreno were familiar sights to them. The history of this church reflects the disturbed lot of the unhappy and disunited immigrants. A group of well-intentioned Italians had banded together to assist in the practice of their religion their fellow-country-



men of the capital who at that time numbered approximately thirty thousand. They had built the church of *Mater Misericordiae*, then founded a Confraternity to support and run it. Gazzolo, the consul and friend of Don Bosco, had been a former president, full of energy and initiative.

Unfortunately, the members of the Confraternity never seemed to agree with the chaplains, of whom there had been a series. Nor could they agree even among themselves. During the presidential elections of 1873-74, to cite one instance, the various factions within the Confraternity split up, fought among themselves, and at times carried the battle even into the church. Insults and blows followed. Worse, the secret societies of the district infiltrated the membership; accusations of fraud and theft of funds were hurled. During the struggle for control, when their chaplain tried to speak they pelted him with what an eyewitness describes as "potatoes and other garden produce!" Under the circumstances, the Archbishop understandably was more than willing to let Cagliero take charge in the hope that he would fare better than the chaplains.

Cagliero had obtained his first glimpse of *Mater Misericordiae*, when, shortly after his arrival in Buenos Aires, he had preached the Christmas novena. In the morning he spoke in his fluent Italian and in the evening in his halting Spanish, but at both services he filled the church. In a nation in which oratory was held in high esteem, he proved to be a genial speaker; "eloquent, energetic, and persuasive" according to the newspaper *El Católico Argentino*. He had a witty tongue, yet at the same time, he knew how to lard his talks with much-needed instruction. But something more effective than mere oratory, he was finding out, was needed to solve the problems of the immigrants.

It was the duty of the members of the Confraternity to take care of the altar, the services, and, of course, the altar-boys. They had not been too successful with the altar-boys, either. There had always been more than a little disorder at

every function. When it was known, therefore, that a new chaplain was coming, the sacristan, after enduring a rougher time than usual with the altar-boys, called them to him.

"Padre Cagliero is coming," he said.

"Who's he?"

"You'll soon find out, *muchachos*," said the sacristan ominously. "He won't take any guff! The strength of the man! They say that with one hand he picked up a boy who was giving trouble and threw him clean through the church window! Do your worst now," he concluded with a false lightness. "When Cagliero comes the fun's all over!"

The sacristan left; the boys held a council of war; and before they broke up, they had laid their plans.

When the news went around that Cagliero was on his way to *Mater Misericordiae*, the better element of the community turned out to welcome him. The boys ran, too, but not in the same direction.

"Ring the bells!" cried the sacristan. "Cagliero is here! Ring out a welcome for the missionaries!"

On the floor of the belfry several sturdy members of the Confraternity seized the bell ropes and pulled. The bells clanged out their festive notes . . . then stopped; and one by one the ropes dropped limply on the heads of the bell-ringers! Thoroughly mystified, the sacristan raced up to the belfry to see what had happened. The bell ropes had been cut!

If Cagliero had noticed the sudden death of the sound of bells, he did not mention it. What he did notice, however, was the total absence of boys. He immediately called attention to that fact.

"No boys here?" he asked in surprise. A glorious, noisy *fiesta*, and no boys shouting and running in and out of the crowds making a nuisance of themselves? This was incomprehensible. Keeping his eyes peeled, he finally spotted two boys peering at him from behind the crowd. When they saw Cagliero staring at them, they turned to run but, as luck

would have it, one of them ran into the arms of the sacristan. Like Cagliero he had been on the look-out for the boys, but for an entirely different reason. Cagliero crossed over to them.

"So there *are* boys, after all, in Buenos Aires!" he exclaimed, stretching out his arms. The boy cringed back in fear, but Cagliero's strong arms folded about him and held him firmly.

For a moment Cagliero was nonplussed. "Afraid, son?" he asked. "What on earth have they been telling you about me?" Then he understood. "Let's see what I've brought from Don Bosco," he said, after a moment's thought. "Just for the boys of Buenos Aires."

Not for nothing had he been, after Don Bosco, the favorite of the Oratory boys. "He exercised a tremendous influence over us, especially over my livelier companions," one of them wrote. "He could sway us all and hold us spellbound." Another had scrawled in a youthful hand over his confessional the words: "*Refugium peccatorum*. Refuge of sinners!"

He now rummaged in his pockets, found a medal of our Lady, and gave it to the astonished boy whose face broke into a smile. Amazed at what he was witnessing — from a safe distance — the boy's friend now slowly came forward. Cagliero gave him a medal, too. Seizing the boys by the hands he continued on his march, this time flanked by two boys who kept shooting indignant glances at the sacristan. "So this is the Padre," the looks said, "you told us was coming to murder us!"

With these two boys in the sacristy of the *Mater Misericordiae* Cagliero began the first Salesian Oratory in South America. Much in the same way Don Bosco, strangely enough, on December 8, 1841, had launched his work for boys in the sacristy of St. Francis Church in Turin.

The Confraternity, he soon discovered, instead of being a source of union and strength among the immigrants was

so infiltrated by the secret societies that it had become a source of danger. Seizing the bull by the horns, he set out to reorganize it and at the same time restore a love of the Faith and a sense of self-respect to the immigrants.

To show that the past was over and done with, that everything was to get off to a fresh start, in a bold gesture he burnt the registers publicly, roundly denounced those who had allowed a few drops of ocean to water down their religion so much that it no longer counted in their lives, and appealed to them to embrace once again the Faith which was so much woven into their history and their personal lives.

"I shall reorganize the Confraternity," he warned. "But this time before anyone may join, he'll have to give me a card signed by his pastor proving that he has made his Easter duty. Also, during the election of the new officers, I'll see to it that no one puts pressure on the voters!" To show that he meant business, when five hundred members failed to produce the required card, he promptly expelled them. His boldness paid off, for this paved the way for the election of a worthy president in the person of one Rómulo Finocchio. But if this courageous act set the Confraternity on a new and solid basis, it also enraged the secret societies. The following day posters and signs had been plastered on the walls of the church and all over the Italian quarter declaring, "*Muera Cagliero! Death to Cagliero!*" It was their warning to him that they had declared war.

Besides the thorny problem of the Confraternity, something else remained to be done if the affairs of the immigrants were to be straightened out.

*La Boca*, or to give it its proper name, *La Boca del Riachuelo*, the Mouth of the Riachuelo, was the southeast district of Buenos Aires. It also went by the nickname of *La Boca del Diablo*, the Devil's Mouth. Bounded on the north and south by the districts of North and South Barracas, and on the west by the River Riachuelo (the evil-smelling, oily-black, final stretch of the Matanza River which runs

into La Plata, and separates the city of Buenos Aires from the province of that name) it was a port-of-call, and inevitably collected its share of the world's riff-raff. It was a haven of revolutionaries, of criminals, of secret societies, and of violent anticlericals. It was from here that the mob had rushed out to attack the Jesuits and set fire to their school, had gone on to storm the Archbishop's palace, and ended by threatening the Franciscan Church of San José! Into such an area were also crowded the city's Italian immigrants — mostly Genoese — and the good had to suffer overall condemnation with the wicked. Its former pastor, Padre Fortunato March, a Franciscan hero of the Paraguayan wars, had been so often threatened that he never ventured from the house without a loaded revolver! The task of running such a wild parish finally proved too much even for him and he quit. Since his departure no one had been found courageous enough to take his place.

*La Boca*, particularly along the banks of the *Riachuelo*, is still one of the ugliest sections of South America's most important city. There are still parts of *La Boca* where it is not safe for a *cuervo* (black crow), or priest, to be seen. Its streets are badly tended, its houses overcrowded, and a large section of its population live in shacks built from corrugated iron sheets or flattened gasoline cans. It takes all the genius of its artistic native son, Quinquela Martín, to interpret its life *simpaticamente*.

Here again, Cagliero planned a frontal attack: he would march straight into *La Boca*! His friends threw up their hands in horror. "Hadn't he heard what had happened to other priests with the same good intention?" But Cagliero had made up his mind: he was going to *La Boca*. "At least bring something to defend yourself with." Very well, he would bring his own weapons; a pocketful of medals of our Lady.

"Yes, of course," his friends insisted, "But take something else with you — like one or two hefty bodyguards."

"I intend to go alone," said Cagliero quietly.

"Well, then, if you insist on going alone, at least wear civilian dress so that they won't know that you're a 'black crow'."

"I'll go alone and I'll dress as a priest," countered Cagliero doggedly.

"*Por Dios!* Alone and dressed as a priest to *La Boca!*"

Cagliero's friends could not know that he had long since had his baptism of fire in areas such as this and more than once had faced situations just as dangerous. Don Bosco's Oratory lay in Valdocco, a section of Turin no better than *La Boca*. Once, while accompanying Don Bosco, he suddenly heard footsteps behind them. Thinking that the man wanted to pass, he and Don Bosco stepped to one side. The man ran so fast that he was already past them before he could stop. But when he turned to face them again, Cagliero, catching the glint of a knife, ran towards the Oratory and called out for help. This took the man by surprise and for a moment he stood in doubt. Then, muttering to himself, he pocketed the knife and slouched off in the darkness. It came to light that he was a half-wit named Andreis who had been put up to the attempt by enemies of Don Bosco.

On another cold afternoon of January, 1854, the boys were in church when Cagliero noticed two men heading for Don Bosco's room. Suspecting something, he followed them, slipped into an adjacent room and listened. He heard the men threaten to shoot Don Bosco if he did not promise there and then to stop writing in defense of the Church. Don Bosco refused. One of them pulled out a revolver and pointed it at the saint's head. "Now will you stop?" he asked.

Don Bosco looked the man between the eyes. "No," he said. "Go ahead and shoot!"

At that moment the door burst open and in rushed Cagliero followed by a group of boys, in time to prevent a possible tragedy. Confused, the men protested that they

had only meant to scare the priest. Then to Cagliero's amazement, Don Bosco, berreta in hand, politely escorted the ruffians to the door. After that, Cagliero made certain that one or two of the bigger boys always accompanied Don Bosco whenever he set out from the Oratory.

Nor could he recall without smiling the night a group of young hooligans had been paid to break down the doors of the Oratory. Unknown to Don Bosco, who was opposed to violence of any kind, Cagliero rounded up some of the braver boys and lay in wait for the second visit. When it came they burst out on the raiders and laid about them with fists and sticks, causing the enemy to retreat in disorder. The defenders then quietly crept back into the Oratory. When Don Bosco later wondered aloud why there had been no further disturbances, Cagliero innocently suggested that perhaps the disturbers had gone away, "touched by grace!"

To *La Boca* therefore, full of courage and hope, went Cagliero. He boarded the old horse-drawn streetcar for a couple of *pesos*, later paid to get past the *peaje* or tollgate, continued on past the ships chandlers, the yards stocked with wood, sand, lime, fruits, fowl... Near the docks, he caught sight of the tall masts of sailing vessels, swaying gracefully. Hardy Italian hands had won the right to man those tillers, by defying an order of the port authorities to the effect that only native Argentinians were to be enrolled in the crew. Close to the river's edge stood Baldaracco's little shipyard which not only built sturdy sailing vessels but which had recently even constructed a steamboat capable of venturing as far south as the ports of Chubut and Santa Cruz, two thousand miles down the coast! The Dante Alighieri Theater stood as testimony to the efforts of these immigrants to preserve their culture. Close to this and to the little schools — a brave attempt to educate the children — huddled the numerous lodges.

Over all this area hung an unhealthy air. From *La*



*Boca* had spread the dread cholera in 1874, wiping out 26,000 of the population, and again four years later an even greater horror — the bubonic plague! Sanitation was primitive; there was no sewerage and the tanks they used only increased the danger of epidemics.

At night the streets, dimly lit by kerosene lamps, were dangerous to walk upon. Muggings and killings were frequent. Repeated protests had been made by the citizens, but even the police were afraid to patrol those streets after dark.

"So, one spring day of 1876, I went alone, dressed as a priest, to *La Boca*," wrote Cagliero. "I *hello'd* to everybody, as I always do. A handful of workmen looked at me without a word, others mumbled something about not having seen a *cuervo* there for a long time and that never would be soon enough to see another. Finally, four hoodlum members of the local lodge advanced on me and threatened to throw me into the river. Things began to look bad when I had a sudden inspiration. Quickly pulling out a handful of medals, I flung them on the ground. Thinking from their color that they were money, the men made a dive for them and this gave me time to escape."

Further along a group of urchins collected to jeer at him. "Stone the 'black crow'!" they cried — and a second handful of medals went flying. The boys eventually brought these medals home and when the mothers saw them, memories flooded back to them of their homes in Italy, of the sound of church bells, of the feast days, processions . . . of all the things that had consoled them and sweetened their lives. They ended by tying the medals round the necks of their children and sending them out for more!

Before Cagliero left *La Boca*, he had earned another title: "The padre of the medals." He had also made up his mind to return as soon as possible, and to keep on returning, until he had completely healed this wound in the hearts of the immigrants and in the heart of Buenos Aires.



He paid his second visit three days later. This time the children ran up to him, bringing their younger brothers and sisters, all begging for medals. Surrounding him, they screamed with delight when he showed them tricks he had learned from the jugglers in the old Oratory days. Soon the parents followed the children and finally the day came when he was a welcome figure, even in the darkest quarters of *La Boca*.

These visits had a sequel in the residence of the Archbishop.

"Tell me, my dear Cagliero, have you been to *La Boca*?" The tone was incredulous.

"Yes."

"Are you aware," said the Archbishop, "that, frankly, I wouldn't allow any of my priests to take such a risk?"

"Well," replied Cagliero simply. "I've been to *La Boca* several times and I'd like to begin work there."

"In *La Boca*?" The Archbishop sat up straight. "*Mi querido padre*, do you know what you're asking? Why, I've given up hope of ever bringing that place back to the Church!"

"I know. Still, I repeat, I would like to work there."

The Archbishop shook his head, smiled. "Very well, Father," he said. "I shall pass on to you a parish of a hundred thousand souls, not one in a thousand of whom go to church. We had already begun to build a church for them but they themselves put a stop to that before even the footings were finished. All I can offer you now is a little run-down chapel of mud blocks, one or two huts and, believe me, the warmest blessing I ever gave to any of my priests! God bless you, indeed, Father!"

Not one whit dismayed by the harsh conditions he encountered, Cagliero took up residence in *La Boca*. All he and his companions had lived in since establishing themselves at *Mater Misericordiae* was a large second-floor room. Its only window faced north so that the sun rarely shone through

it, and it served as dining room, dormitory, study-hall, and reception room.

They had no kitchen. Their food was supplied by a nearby restaurant in a three-level container. Too often it happened that neither Cagliero nor the other Salesians would be home in time. In that case the boy simply set down the container and left. Cagliero frequently came home after an exhausting day to find the food cold and unappetizing. But, he reasoned, it was food and he was hungry.

When the Archbishop paid a visit to the place, he was shocked. "I never thought," he exclaimed, "that my dear missionaries lived in such a hovel!"

Cagliero reassured him. "We were trained at the Oratory and are used to hardship."

"Is that so? Tell me, what sort of life did you have at the Oratory?"

Cagliero vividly described to the Archbishop how he used to rise at four to study music. In winter the water he had put in his basin the previous evening would be frozen over. Rather than use the icy water, he preferred to open the window, scoop a few handfuls of snow off the roof and rub his face with it. The only furniture his room had was an iron bedstead, a table, and a small square bookcase raised on a couple of bricks. But he confessed that he did not feel so badly off because he knew that Don Bosco himself had nothing more. The only "extras" Don Bosco possessed were a picture of a crucifix, a blessed candle, and a sea-shell for holy water.

For food and clothes, it was the same. The boys ate what Don Bosco ate. Cagliero had frequently served the saint's meals and had been amazed at his menu: a dish of beans mixed with tiny pieces of meat, eggs, or squash warmed up and served to him from Sunday to Thursday. From Friday to Sunday Don Bosco's mother prepared a second dish. When these dishes lost their taste, Don Bosco simply poured oil and vinegar over them to make them palatable. He would

never forget, Cagliero told the Archbishop, one evening in particular, when Don Bosco returned, wet through. Going to his room to change, he emerged wearing a pair of white pants and a long black cape! Cagliero burst out laughing at the very recollection! Then he reminded the Archbishop that Don Bosco could never be persuaded to keep a few extra articles of clothing since he considered that a luxury. While his own clothes had been drying, he had used some of the clothing which benefactors donated to the Oratory.

"With a model like that," concluded the Archbishop soberly. "you cannot but succeed!"

*La Boca* thus became the first parish to be accepted by the young Society in either the New World or the Old, and Cagliero dedicated all his energies to its rehabilitation. He put Father Baccino in charge and assigned two Salesians as assistants. Cagliero's warm and direct nature helped gain for them the affection and esteem of the clergy, the people, and, unofficially at least, the authorities.

Nevertheless, the secret societies and the anticlericals made no bones about warning him that they would use every means, lawful and unlawful, to force him out. Just as unequivocally, Cagliero let them know that he accepted their challenge. In this way, a war was declared that was to prove long and fierce, all because one day he had made up his mind to penetrate, "alone and dressed as a priest," into that dreaded section of Buenos Aires known as *La Boca*.

### 3. Imitating the Martyrs

When the affair of *La Boca* became known, offers of foundations came in from centers outside Buenos Aires such as Villa Libertad, and from places as far away as Chubut. Cagliero had an inviting offer from Villa Colón, in Uruguay. Without hesitation, however, he gave his whole attention to San Nicolás to where he had already dispatched Fagnano with a group of missionaries.

Why should San Nicolás have this honor? For one reason, Cagliero believed that a foundation established deeper into the interior would bring him a step nearer to the pampas. San Nicolás lay one hundred and fifty miles west of Buenos Aires along the River Paraná in a prosperous region where wealthy Irish and Italian ranchers tended their cattle and merino sheep in a paradise of tropical vegetation, abundant game, and wooded islands. In a series of letters between Señor Benítez, Mayor of San Nicolás — who wrote in classical Latin! — and Don Bosco, a good school building had been promised. The colonists were anxious to avoid sending their children to distant Buenos Aires, and the government had guaranteed them a generous tract of land. On the whole, it seemed to be an excellent beginning.

Unfortunately, when Cagliero, accompanied by Gazzolo, went to examine the school, he found to his dismay, nothing

more than a shed and a small chapel; and the tract of land was merely on loan. The contract had been handled by a friend who evidently had not read the fine print.

"Let's not waste time in useless complaints," he urged. "Once we get going we'll surely find friends." At once he set up house in a building that lacked both utensils and furniture. When the people, however, saw his determination and self-sacrifice, they stepped in to help.

"All we want in return," they told him, "is to see your Salesians hold the same wonderful services in church we hear they do in Buenos Aires."

Since he had space and teachers enough to begin the first classes, he drew up a program of studies, sent around the countryside a circular to advertise it, and the school was under way.

No sooner had the school opened, however, than another obstacle arose. The locusts were coming! Panic seized the town at the announcement and even the stout-hearted Cagliero was affected by the sight of this panic. Only once before had he witnessed anything like it. That was when cholera had struck Turin and he had seen the lazarettos filled with the dying, and had heard the loaded death carts rumble past the Oratory on their way to the cemeteries.

For three consecutive years, he was told, the people of San Nicolás had been scourged by natural disasters. First there had been drought; then devastating hailstorms; now it was the turn of the locusts. This last was by far the worst.

Cagliero wondered why all this should strike a chord in his memory. Then it came to him. He recalled a scorching day in August, 1846, when he had accompanied Don Bosco on his way to Montemagno, in northern Italy, to preach a triduum in honor of our Lady. The reason for the triduum was serious. For the past three months, the entire countryside had suffered a desperate shortage of water. The people had prayed privately and publicly for rain, but there was no sign of relief.

It was then that a dramatic announcement of Don Bosco from the pulpit aroused fresh hope. "If you make the triduum well," he said, "and go to confession and Communion on the feast of the Assumption, *in the name of our Lady I promise you'll have rain.*"

There were two remarkable things about this announcement. First of all, it was flying in the face of providence in view of the prevailing weather; then, when the pastor complained to Don Bosco for making such a compromising announcement, to everybody's astonishment Don Bosco had asked him in surprise: "Did I actually say that?"

But the people took Don Bosco at his word and at the end of each day the priests came away exhausted from the long hours they had spent in the confessional.

However, this faith in Don Bosco's promise was not shared by everyone. Cagliero heard some deride it openly; others in a nearby village even organized a dance in protest.

Came the feast of the Assumption but no sign of rain. From early morning Cagliero scanned the horizon, but all he saw was the same merciless steel-blue sky, and all he felt was the growing heat of the day. Later he accompanied Don Bosco to dinner at the castle of Marquis Fassati.

"My dear Don Bosco," Cagliero heard the Marquis whisper on their arrival, "this time I fear it's going to be a fiasco."

"John," said Don Bosco toward the end of the meal, "climb the castle tower and see if there's any sign of rain." As Cagliero climbed up the tower, the bell rang for vespers, and the people moved toward the church.

"All I can see," he said when he returned, "is a blazing sun and the sky quite clear except for..."

"What?" interrupted the Marquis quickly.

"Away to the north, a tiny cloud no bigger than your fist."

Don Bosco rose. "Let's go," he said abruptly.

"But Don Bosco," objected Cagliero, "what if it doesn't rain?"

"If it doesn't rain," Don Bosco told him, "it means that we have not merited the grace." He led the others into a crowded church.

"Not for me, dear Mother of God!" Cagliero overheard him repeat fervently on his way to the pulpit, "Not for me, but for your own honor and glory."

Aware of the expectations of the people, Cagliero felt a wave of sympathy pass over him for Don Bosco. He had promised them rain, but if rain did not fall? . . .

Sick with anxiety, he sat listening as Don Bosco began his sermon. The minutes ticked by and the dark cloud which cast its shadow across the window of the church made him feel even more despondent. . . A cloud? He grew instantly alert. A cloud? Impossible! Yes! Mother of God! Yes! The next thing he heard was the faint but unmistakable roll of distant thunder. Inside the church it grew dark. A flash of lightning made the buildings outside take on a strange phosphorescent hue. Moments later long silver pencils of rain streaked the windows and heavy drops pattered against the glass. Don Bosco stopped preaching. The crowd rose. Cagliero rose with it, ran to the church door, and stared speechless at the rain as it poured down in torrents. Never had he seen anything so beautiful as the sight of those dark and threatening clouds and the raindrops dancing in the little brown puddles on the roadway. Suddenly, with blinding clarity, he understood for the first time what power of intercession Don Bosco must have with the Mother of God! Utterly shaken by this thought, he withdrew from the excited crowd, entered the church, and dropping to his knees on the nearest bench, bowed his head and wept. . .

The memory of that day served Cagliero now. Gathering about him as many people as he could in such a short time, he boldly declared to them: "Place your trust in the Madonna and if need be, you will see a miracle. You will see the

locusts pass over the land without harming it. Place all your trust in her and she will save your crops!"

He was taking a grave risk and he knew it. The majority of the people had long since fallen away from the Church and only recently had begun to show a spark of interest. If the miracle happened, it might work a great change. But if it didn't? . . . And what right had he, an ordinary priest, to expect that in answer to his prayer the miracle would be wrought? The meaning of what he had done, and the realization of how much depended upon it, forced the sweat to his brow. From that moment on he began to be haunted by the thought: "If the miracle just doesn't happen, what will become of my work? What will become of me?"

Amazed at this extraordinary outburst, the people at first reacted very slowly. But Cagliero followed up his appeal with an invitation to make a triduum to our Lady, roused their enthusiasm so that they crowded into the chapel in such numbers that many had to follow the prayers from outside.

Not everybody, however, attended. A few scoffers stayed away and made fun of those who, they said, were childish enough to be taken in by Cagliero's foolhardy promise.

"Perhaps they're right," Cagliero thought gloomily as one evening he watched a rust-grey cloud of locusts fly in and settle over the land. They covered the fields, they covered the roads, they covered the trees, they covered the rooftops . . . and at once began to devour everything edible. They even crawled into the homes, leaving behind nothing but an unbearable stench. "In two days," he reflected bitterly, "there won't be a blade of grass left. Where will I stand with the people?" He prayed and urged his companions to pray as they had never prayed before, although it seemed that all was already lost. The scoffers went to bed that night, laughing at Cagliero.

To the astonishment of everyone, however, next morn-



ing the locust cloud lifted and the land was cleared except for a few patches here and there of reddish-grey. But the rains came and a cold wind blew and the remainder of the locusts rose and flew away from San Nicolás. Nor was that all. Despite the slight damage to the crops, the harvest which followed was one of the most abundant within the memory of the living.

In gratitude for the favor that our Lady had granted, the people organized a town-wide collection for Cagliero and took up the surprising sum of five thousand *pesos*.

With the work of San Nicolás now well under way, he left it again in the capable hands of Fr. Joseph Fagnano, and returned to Buenos Aires. On his arrival, he learned from the president of the St. Vincent de Paul Society that a rich lady had left a large sum of money to help the young. In agreement with the Archbishop, the president had decided to hand the money over to Cagliero on condition that he open a trade school, after the style of the one Don Bosco had opened in Turin. When negotiations were concluded and the school was opened, the first to be admitted were twenty-five orphans of the recent yellow-plague victims. This work became the nucleus of the complex of Salesian activities situated in the Almagro district, later to be known all over Argentina as *San Carlos*.

Meanwhile, letters poured in to Don Bosco from Argentina telling him of the success of his missionaries. "The immigrants now fill churches that were once empty . . ." "These missionaries imitate the martyrs . . ." "They will undertake anything for the good of souls . . ." "All Europe," Don Bosco enthusiastically wrote back to Cagliero, "is talking of our project for Patagonia." His happiness was nonetheless tinged with sadness for he confided to Cagliero, "Last night we spent an evening in the theater and Mino [an Oratory boy] sang your *Son of the Exile*. The thought that the composer was far away moved me more than 1

like to say. While Mino was singing, I was thinking of you and my dear missionaries in South America.

"I received your message to the effect that other countries in South America have requested you to accept works for the education of youth. Please let me know exactly how many more men you need so that we can make plans.

"I went to see the Holy Father recently and he offered us not one more mission but twelve! I told him I was overcome by such confidence but pointed out that our Salesians were still very young. On his insistence, however, I accepted one of the missions but asked for twenty months to prepare for it."

In the meantime, he was organizing a second expedition of twenty-three Salesians for South America.

It was at this point that the leading members of the young and expanding Society rose up in arms. They complained that by taking away such sorely needed personnel, he was preventing them from solidly establishing the new houses. Don Bosco, however, was in no mood to listen. "Don't you know that the more men we send to the missions," he chided them, "the more men God will send to take their place? We have already spent every cent we had and more, besides, to prepare these men for South America, but don't worry. Providence will give it back a hundred-fold." A remarkable demonstration of the truth of this came in a further letter to Cagliero. "Six priests leave for America," he wrote, "and six others enter the Society. Seven clerics go and seven clerics ask to become Salesians. Twelve coadjutors leave for the missions and twelve new coadjutors have been received! See how God handles these things?"

This second expedition split into two groups. Father Francis Bodratto led one to Buenos Aires; Father Louis Lasagna, destined to become one of the great figures in the spiritual conquest of Uruguay, led the other to Montevideo. This second group was assigned to the new school of Villa

Colón, a beautiful location outside the capital, and to the church of Saint Rose of Lima.

This foundation is noteworthy in that it marked the entry of the Salesians into the second nation of the New World. It had its beginning on December 13, 1875, the day that Cagliero had disembarked at Montevideo from the *S.S. Savoie* before crossing to Buenos Aires. While admiring the city's straight roads and Spanish-style buildings, to his surprise he ran into an alumnus of the Oratory in Turin. During a conversation this man confessed that since he could afford it, he preferred to send his children to Europe to be educated. He did not care to entrust their education to the schools of South America because of their low intellectual and moral standards. Cagliero went on to visit the Vicar Apostolic of Uruguay. Because the latter was then touring the vicariate, Cagliero spoke instead to Father Yerguá, pastor of the motherchurch of Uruguay. He too, urged Cagliero to open a school.

"It would be an excellent thing," he said. "And if anybody starts one, I hope it will be Don Bosco's Salesians."

Later, in Buenos Aires, Cagliero received a letter from the secretary of the Vicar Apostolic, again referring to the possibility of opening a school and pointing out that there was a good piece of property available. Villa Colón had been founded in 1868 by a company of prospectors. Because of the unsettled political situation, however, the company decided to dissolve and approached the Vicar Apostolic, suggesting that the school and the church included in the town's plans be given to Cagliero. The deed of transfer was signed May, 1876.

When Cagliero returned to inspect the property he learned that, like the Oratory alumnus, the families who could afford it sent their children to school in Chile, or even to Europe. Consequently, they were anxious to open a suitable school in the community. The site offered was "a delightful piece of land with avenues and parks, forty

minutes from the city and in an area gradually being populated by commuters." A generous acreage of land went with the school and approximately one hundred and twenty boarders were expected. At first the authorities wanted Cagliero to grant them twenty places, with free tuition and board for boys of their choice. He countered saying that, while he was willing to accept the twenty boys free of charge, the right to choose them should remain his.

For the necessary construction, however, he had not a cent. "The Jesuits and the Lazarists have the money, but no personnel!" he complained to Don Bosco. "We have the personnel, but no money!"

The Vicar Apostolic, anxious to open his school before the anticlericals opened theirs, set up a committee to raise the funds. Cagliero was just as anxious to open it quickly, but for a very sound reason of his own. "In the event we are chased from Argentina, we shall at least have a place to run to!" — a remark, incidentally, that points up the unsettled nature of the times and the changing whims of Dictator Roca. He immediately wrote to Don Bosco for more men, pleading this time for men with degrees. The Director, he insisted, should have a degree, and be a man "who can deal with outsiders and be able to lean over backwards now and again — something very necessary in these parts." Not prepared to wait until everything was just so, he boldly announced that junior classes would begin in January of the following year, senior classes in March.

When the first Salesians arrived, they were disappointed. Reports of the size and importance of Villa Colón had evidently been exaggerated. But it was not long before they saw it grow from little more than a settlement to a modern town. Almost at once Pius IX School, as it was named, was filled to capacity. It went on to become an important center of culture in the area, and in time, had attached to it a meteorological observatory. The church of Saint Rose of Lima became a national shrine.

With foundations now established in Buenos Aires, San Nicolás, and Villa Colón, Cagliero's thoughts once more turned to Patagonia. This was to be expected, since Don Bosco kept reminding him, sometimes in no uncertain terms, that Patagonia was the reason why he had gone to South America, that this mission was so dear to the Holy Father he brought up the subject in every audience, saying that he was ready to help even materially.

Cagliero, it should be remembered, had been sent out only to establish the work in Argentina. Don Bosco then expected him to attend to various other important projects he had in mind for him. It was evident by now, however, that since it would take much longer than anyone had anticipated to open up a mission in Patagonia, Don Bosco would certainly recall him before that could be done. Yet Cagliero confessed that he had already formed such an affection for the work in South America, that every time he thought of leaving he felt depressed. "Someone else will take care of Patagonia," he admitted ruefully. He even wrote to Don Bosco outlining the type of man his successor ought to be — "a man who can deal with everybody, from the porter to the president."

His first taste of the pampas came when he was invited to preach a mission to a colony of Basques and Italians outside Luján, west of Buenos Aires. He covered the journey partly by train, the remainder by horse and buggy. The very way in which he was announced at the colony held a touch of the romantic. A young girl on horseback, "like another Joan of Arc," dashed off across the immense open pampas to broadcast his arrival to the ranches and settlements. Meanwhile, two boys also mounted on lively horses, dashed off in different directions on the same errand.

"Ah!" exclaimed Cagliero with satisfaction. "Does one good to see such interest in the coming of the missionary!"

"Padre," his guide explained drily, "that interest might also be because they have been let out of school for the

occasion. Kids here would rather handle horses than books!"

The appearance of a crowd of children on his arrival delighted Cagliero, and as usual, he emptied his pockets of medals. He even thought of starting up a catechism contest among them until he discovered to his dismay that they knew absolutely nothing of religion. At first very few adults came, but when they learned that he was "easy" on them in confession, that he was, moreover, a fellow-countryman, they soon filled the church. After the mission he had to continue for three more days to hear confessions.

From John Dillon — Commissioner of Immigration, and an excellent Catholic — he received a message asking him to preach to another Italian colony that had been waiting for a priest for over a year! This was at Villa Libertad, almost 250 miles up the River Uruguay. Taking with him Father Evasio Rabagliati, later famed as the Apostle of the Lepers in Colombia, he reached Concordia by boat in two days. The remainder of the journey he made by train as far as Chajarí, where he was supplied with horses.

These two occasions provided his first coming-to-grips with the famous pampas and in those early days he was exhilarated by the experience.

The pampas are the boundless, eye-tiring open plains (*pampa* is Indian for "plain") lying at sea-level and are characterized by wide depressions, salt lakes, sandy, reddish soil covered with dunes, rushes of scrub, *cardo ruso*, or Russian thistle, and laced with small, slow rivers. They know only mud in the wet season and dust in the dry. Over all this blows a wind which in the southern, colder sections, can be maddening in its constancy.

Deeper inland, however, dense woods spring up to shelter the wild life; and from the tall grass the Indians once sortied out to kill the white invaders and steal their wives and cattle. High plateaus, terraces of volcanic rock, and wide stretches of sand characterize this central zone. On the other hand, still farther back, between the pre-

Cordilleras and the Cordilleras, the region spreads out into a garden of woods, fields, waterfalls, torrents, lakes, and gorgeous panoramas.

Once at their destination, Rabagliati began some much-needed lessons in catechism, while Cagliero and the doctor of the colony visited the families on horseback. It was hard riding and Cagliero, unaccustomed to the saddle, began to suffer intensely. He was also hampered seriously by continuous heavy rains. Still, he had the satisfaction of seeing every member of the settlement make his Easter duty, of baptising a great many children, and of blessing a number of marriages.

Among one of his "conquests" was an Indian *cacique*, or chief, who had under him approximately 600 Indians. Having made peace with the government and having become *manso*, or civilized, he had been awarded the rank of colonel. Since Don Bosco had mentioned sending some Indian children to the Oratory in Turin to verify if they really were the ones he had seen in his vision, Cagliero, with great enthusiasm, suggested taking a little Indian boy away with him. The mother, however, just as strenuously objected and the matter was dropped.

Before leaving he sang High Mass. The music was supplied by two Indians, one playing the violin and the other beating a drum. Later, Rabagliati remarked that the music had not been exactly heavenly. "Let's say," commented Cagliero, "that it didn't even reach the purgatorial stage!"

This brief encounter with the Indians redoubled his enthusiasm for Patagonia. "The thing that most occupies my mind as I prepare to leave for Europe," he confessed, "is the thought of Patagonia." He requested a government free passage to Santa Cruz, intending to work his way from there into Patagonia, but his request, unfortunately, was not granted. Commissioner Dillon promised to obtain it for him later, but by the time it came through winter



had already set in, making travel dangerous. The trip was postponed until the following September.

Cagliero again wrote to Don Bosco to say that he was planning to return to Turin in August. "You, yourself," he says, "will decide, whether I or someone else shall be the first to enter Patagonia, the promised land."

Despite Cagliero's wish to be the first to do so, Don Bosco did not want him to remain any longer in South America. He had already informed Cagliero that he was to open a new mission in Ceylon. "Besides," concluded Don Bosco, "the first General Chapter of our Society will soon be held and how could it be successful without the presence of its greatest missionary?"

When word flashed around Buenos Aires that Cagliero was to be recalled, the people, from the Archbishop down to the humblest inhabitants of *La Boca*, protested vigorously. Influential persons even took it upon themselves to persuade Don Bosco to let him stay. The work he had begun, they said, still needed his inspired leadership.

The Bishop of Rio de Janeiro was one of these. He roundly declared that it would be a mistake to remove him, begging instead that he be sent to Brazil to open schools, and assuring him of every help. "I hear you are sending Cagliero to India," he wrote. "Will you, for the love of God, please send him first to Brazil! This is the greatest charity you can do us. If he comes here I expect to see nothing less than a Christian revolution in my diocese!"

To all these appeals Don Bosco finally yielded somewhat. He replied that he would allow Cagliero to return to South America but only after he had attended the General Chapter and completed one or two delicate missions he had in mind for "his favorite son." "Settle matters in South America," he instructed Cagliero, "and let me know how many more confreres and Sisters you need. Then come back to find a residence for us in Rome. After that? — to India to found another mission!"

In his short stay in South America Cagliero had opened five foundations: the parishes of San Carlos and *La Boca*, the Pius IX School of Arts and Trades in Buenos Aires, and the schools in San Nicolás and Villa Colón. To staff these foundations he had appealed to Don Bosco for more and more personnel, advising him, nevertheless, that men for South America should be "young in age, but old and mature in character formation. This country is difficult for the strong and fatal to the weak." In answer to this appeal, a second expedition of 23 men arrived in Buenos Aires on December 12, 1876.

Apart from the difficulties to be expected in establishing a mission among the tribes of the pampas, there were others of a kind that neither Cagliero nor Don Bosco had even imagined.

To begin with, the Argentinians were reluctant to admit that such things as savages or mission territories existed in their country. It hurt their budding national pride. And even those who did admit as much did not relish the idea of having foreigners operate these missions. To Cagliero this did not make sense, since the priests who on rare occasions did visit Patagonia had their hands full with the Argentinians, the colonists, and the army. Besides, not one of them would ever accept a permanent assignment in that wild and largely unknown region. Another difficulty he encountered lay in keeping his followers faithful to the spirit of the Oratory. Once, while he and some of the confreres were at a banquet offered by Señor Benítez to celebrate their arrival in San Nicolás, cigars were passed around with the coffee. Since Don Bosco had always demanded that his followers abstain from the use of tobacco, the missionaries politely refused. Nonetheless, when some of the guests insisted that it was necessary to smoke in that climate, one or two Salesians accepted the cigars. Cagliero said nothing at the time, but when the Salesians were alone he asked them why they had

smoked the cigars. "Because they told us it was necessary to smoke in this climate," they replied.

"Very well, then," he said; "if we can't live in this climate without disobeying Don Bosco, there we have our bags, still unpacked. Let's take the next boat back to the Oratory!"

There were problems of adaptation, clashes of personalities . . . The latter grew into something serious when two confrères of San Nicolás descended to abusing each other in public. One of them eventually left the Society. Cagliero himself complained to Don Bosco that "A few act as if they were *señores*, gentlemen. I may have to give some of them their passports." "The Director is a model Salesian," he says elsewhere, "but the personnel are not all that they might be." Perhaps he forgot for the moment that the brothers at that time were, for the most part, simple men, whose religious formation had barely been completed; he may have been expecting too much from them.

Outside his own household there was other trouble. The members of the Confraternity at *Mater Misericordiae* kept irritating him by their persistent attempts to reduce his missionaries to the level of servants. And Señor Gazzolo, such a sincere friend in the beginning, revealed a chink in his shining armor when Cagliero tried to buy from him the land he had bought supposedly for the school of San Nicolás. Evidently banking on the need Cagliero had for it, to the latter's shocked surprise he asked a price far beyond its real value! There was also the resistance he found in anti-clerical government circles. He was a foreigner who still spoke Spanish with a foreign accent, and the Argentinians generally were not enthusiastic about seeing foreigners in high places. Those who had no liking for Cagliero used this against him on more than one occasion. Then, too, the priests who had come out to take care of the Italian immigrants unfortunately did not give too good an account of themselves. Archbishop Aneiros had even thought of placing them under

Cagliero's jurisdiction in the hope that he might set them straight. This naturally saddened Cagliero. After all, they were his own countrymen and they were not making his task any easier. Vocations were not coming in the way he had expected. In fact, not one native vocation had appeared so far; what vocations did come were from the sons of immigrants.

Finally there was Don Bosco's insistence on introducing practices which Cagliero knew could only embarrass the missionaries. For instance, Don Bosco wanted him to use the prefix *Don* for priests the way they did in Italy, whereas in South America *Don* was a title of respect for laymen only. He was also opposed to his missionaries wearing long trousers although that was the established practice of the clergy in South America. To Don Bosco, unaccustomed to the style, this seemed the height of worldliness!

All of these worries pressed upon Cagliero to such a degree that, one day, while writing to Father Michael Rua, Don Bosco's assistant, he complained of what he calls his "American headaches." To crown all this, fate dealt him what certainly was the severest blow thus far: the sudden death on June 13, 1877, of his great friend and indefatigable helper, Father Baccino, pastor of *La Boca*. For the first time tragedy had struck the young Society in the New World.

"He works wonders," Cagliero wrote of Baccino. "He takes care of the church in *La Boca*, is well thought of by the people, and never says 'no' to any sacrifice I ask of him. I cannot understand how one man can do so much!"

An unassuming little man, Baccino was always ready for any demand that the parishioners made on him.

"I don't know where the time goes," he once told Don Bosco. "All I know is that I get up very early and go to bed very late. I can hardly remember what happens in between. There are days when I have to stop and think to find out whether it is dinner-time or supper-time, morning or afternoon!" Baccino knew he was writing something which would

please Don Bosco immensely. Had he not often heard Don Bosco say that he counted it a great fortune for the Society when one of his men died "in harness?" It was exactly in this way that Baccino himself had died.

After a day of unusual activity and a sick-call at midnight, he retired to his scantily furnished room under the church steeple. Suddenly, he was taken by a violent seizure and within a few hours, had passed away.

Cagliero took the loss very painfully. Baccino was the first of his original little band of pioneers to die. He had grown very fond of the humble priest who had won back most of the fallen-away souls of *La Boca*. He had come to rely a great deal on his extraordinary spirit of sacrifice and his unquestioning obedience when difficulties cropped up, as they so often did in that troubled territory.

It was a sad Cagliero, therefore, who bade farewell in August, 1877, to the shores of Argentina. In those short two and a half years he had won the complete affection of the people who had accepted him as their own, had given him a welcome he never expected to see repeated no matter where it might please Providence to send him. Don Bosco, it was true, had told him that he would allow him to return to Argentina after he had concluded those "delicate missions." But, he concluded wryly, as the Argentinians themselves put it, "*del dicho al hecho hay un gran trecho*," "there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." A great deal was happening all at once within the fast-growing young Society; Don Bosco might find himself obliged to change his plans for his favorite son. And if he did, what then?

For the present, however, the way was clear. Don Bosco wanted him back in the Oratory. The future lay in the hands of God. He was ready to go.

*Adiós Argentina!*

## 4. European Interlude

When Cagliero arrived a month later, in September of 1877 at the Oratory, his first concern was to organize a third expedition to South America.

Wherever he went he appealed so eloquently for vocations, and the number of diocesan priests who requested to be allowed to go with him was so great that he was embarrassed to meet the bishops!

His energetic recruitment caused an uproar. "Stop sending so many men abroad, when we need them more at home!" was the cry. To offset Cagliero's eloquence diocesan authorities distributed a circular among the pastors warning them to stop all appeals for missionary vocations. Some went so far as to insist that priests should avoid cultivating missionary vocations on the curious grounds that a mission vocation was a special call from God. Cagliero naturally paid little attention to such opposition, and the third expedition left in November of that year. It consisted of four priests, eight clerics, and six coadjutors. In this group were men who later would branch out to the Amazons, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Uruguay, Colombia, Paraguay... men who would write their names in bold characters in the history of South America.

With this expedition also went an entirely new element: the first six members of a second congregation founded by Don Bosco, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, or Salesian Sisters. Their work was to do for girls what the Salesians were doing for boys. Cagliero was intimately associated with this second religious society from its very beginning and was present at the meeting of Salesian superiors which Don Bosco had called to discuss the matter of its foundation.

"I have called you," Don Bosco told them in that meeting of May 1870, "because I have something important to announce. Time and again I have been asked why I have not done as much for girls as I have for boys. Frankly, if I were to follow my own inclinations, I don't think I'd consider such a work. So much insistence on the part of good people, however, has convinced me I should not be doing right if I did not at least give the project serious thought. I invite you, therefore to let me have your opinion."

When the group agreed unanimously that he should start the work, he concluded: "I see now it is evidently the will of God."

He began his second foundation through the cooperation of a group of young women in the town of Mornese called the Sodality of Mary Immaculate. After he had organized them into a regular community, they elected as their first superior Mary Mazzarello, a simple country girl. Mary, however, would not hear of it.

"I am sending this letter to you, Father Cagliero," she wrote, "because I dare not send such a letter to Don Bosco, it is so full of mistakes. Please tell him that I am not capable of directing any community the way he would want."

Don Bosco on the other hand would not hear of Mary's refusal, and she finally gave in. To the Sisters' delight he chose Cagliero as his intermediary with them, and thus it fell to Cagliero to introduce them to the spirit of the saint. This forged a bond between Cagliero and the Sisters that

neither time, nor distance, nor adversity ever weakened.

He quickly proved a staunch defender of their rights, when the Sisters in 1871 moved their mother house from Mornese to Nizza Monferrato. At that time, Monferrato was a hotbed of anticlericals who were determined to force the Sisters to leave, or, failing in that, to make their lives unbearable. On the advice of the Mayor, they based their strategy on accusations that the Sisters were obliging girls to enter the convent against their will; then they called for official action to protect the liberty of these girls. The Vice-Governor of the province, John Magliani, the Mayor, the police, and the leaders of the anticlericals came to investigate, timing their arrival to coincide with the moment when several postulants were taking the veil. Cagliero, who was in the sacristy, was hurriedly informed of their arrival and went to meet them.

"Gentlemen," he said, "what can I do for you?"

"Is it true, Reverend," asked Magliani, "that some young girls are taking the veil today?"

"Quite true."

"Are these young girls acting of their own free will or are they being forced into this?"

"Nobody's being forced into anything!" retorted Cagliero indignantly. "They are here with the permission of their parents." His manner became cold. "But, first of all, I should like to know who *you* are. If you come as a friend you are perfectly welcome, but if . . ." he kept his voice very loud — "you come as public officials, then kindly show me your authority for entering this house. For I give you fair warning: if you have no authorization, or you attempt anything," — he glared at the policemen — "I shall prepare a protest in writing, have witnesses sign it, and shall exact from you every redress under the law!"

"How dare you speak like that to us!" broke in the Mayor, prime mover in the attempt to oust the Sisters. "If I had my way, I'd . . ."



"Mr. Mayor!" interrupted Magliani. "control yourself! Let us do our duty in the proper manner." He turned to Cagliero. "I do not mean to act in any official capacity." He held out his hand. "My name is Magliani, John Magliani."

"Mine is Cagliero, John Cagliero." As the two men shook hands Cagliero realized that the Vice-Governor was of a different stamp from the Mayor. He became more cordial. "I know what some of your friends are after, so I shall show you the only minor in the house, Mary Terzano. You can interview her to your heart's content."

Mary appeared, a little awed at the sight of the deputation, curtsied to Cagliero, then to Magliani. Magliani at first wanted to interrogate her alone. He had been fed reports that her father was keeping her at the convent against her will.

"I'm sorry," objected Cagliero. "But under the law I represent her father who is not here. I insist on being present at the interview."

"Fair enough," said Magliani. He turned to Mary. "Do you really want to become a Sister, Mary?"

"I do indeed, sir!"

"Do you like your life in the convent?"

"Of course, sir! Would I stay here if I didn't?"

"Has your father given his consent?"

"Certainly."

The Superior now entered and Cagliero introduced her to Magliani and the Mayor — "Who doesn't seem to care too much for Sisters," he added. "Probably because he doesn't know them." During a visit to the house the more Magliani saw the more he felt embarrassed at having been inveigled into such a compromising situation by the anticlericals. He finally begged pardon for having come at all. As he left the house, his manner changed abruptly and Cagliero smiled when he heard him tell the Mayor and his clique

in language they could easily understand what he thought of them and their conduct in the affair.

When the first General Chapter for which he had come from South America was held on September 5, 1877, he was elected Spiritual Director, a position which at that time automatically carried with it the spiritual guidance of the Sisters. At this Chapter he heard grave concern expressed over the Sisters' health. Armed with his new authority, he went to examine matters at first hand. His investigation ended, he immediately ordered such changes — modern for the times — as more fresh air, more exercise and games, restraint in zeal, better food, and a greater emphasis on cheerfulness. He also assisted at their first General Chapter and in the revision of certain of their Rules which were based on those of the Salesians.

As Spiritual Director of the Sisters he had the opportunity to study the character of Mary Mazzarello closely. It was not long before he began to admire her extraordinary humility. When he brought the first group of missionary Sisters for an audience with the Holy Father, on the train from Turin to Rome he told them how they were to conduct themselves in the presence of the Pope. Mary, however, who had insisted on accompanying her Sisters until they were safely embarked, seemed very unhappy. Surprised, he asked her what the matter was.

"Don't you think," she faltered, "it would be better for me *not* to go in?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, the Holy Father will expect to see as superior of our congregation a well-educated woman. Once he sees *me* he will lose all respect for us."

Amazed at such humility, Cagliero turned to the others. "Take a lesson from her," was all he could say.

Mary Mazzarello fell ill with pleurisy in February, 1881, while visiting the houses of France. After a month's illness in Saint Cyr, she recovered sufficiently to set out for the

motherhouse. She met Don Bosco at Nice and in her simplicity said that since he had already cured so many others perhaps he'd like to cure her.

"Let me tell you a story, Mother," answered the saint. "It seems that Death once paid a visit to a certain convent. He first invited the doorkeeper to go with him but she told him that just then she was far too busy. Next he asked the cook, but she told him that if she left the kitchen there would be no one to take her place. In this way, Death passed through the convent without finding anyone willing to go with him. Finally he knocked on the door of the superior. 'Come with me,' he said to her. Like the rest of the community the superior, too, made her excuses. This time, however, Death cut her short. 'The Superior,' he reminded her, 'must lead the way in everything.'"

Mary understood, smiled, and as long as possible, kept the secret to herself. When her hour came and she entered into her agony she asked for Cagliero. An urgent call was sent out for him to all the houses. He was then, unfortunately, in Spain, and by the time he arrived she had already received the last rites. They spoke together for nearly an hour; and he was with her when she died. Her last words were for him: "*Arrivederci in paradiso*. We shall meet in heaven."

Of this conversation Cagliero remarked years later: "Had I taken her advice then I should have avoided many mistakes in the beginning of our mission. But what I didn't heed then I heeded afterwards to the great advantage of vocations and religious perfection."

At Mary's death he reported to Don Bosco that there were 280 Sisters working in 28 centers, six of which were in South America.

Don Bosco now instructed him to visit the houses of both the Salesians and the Sisters, and granted him power to accept or refuse new foundations or to make any changes he saw fit in the old. In constant demands for retreats,

conferences, and sermons, he confessed that he never could refuse an invitation to preach, since he believed that this was one of the first duties of the priest. He visited prospective openings in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, and far-away London.

In February, 1878, he accompanied Don Bosco to Marseilles, France, in quest of funds. Here the saint confided to him that things were not going as well as on a previous visit when the city had welcomed him with open arms. Now he received no publicity whatsoever. "We're losing time!" he complained.

Then a mother brought her little girl to him. Even on two crutches she could struggle along only with the greatest difficulty. As Don Bosco blessed the child Cagliero heard him whisper: "Let's begin, Mother! Please let's start here!" — and watched open-mouthed as the child let first one crutch fall, then the other, and began to walk without them. She had been cured! In her frenzied delight the mother seized the crutches and threw them in the air. "A miracle!" she cried. "A miracle!" . . . From that moment on the campaign prospered.

During a second visit to France he witnessed yet another of Don Bosco's miracles — this time one for which he was indirectly responsible. Early one morning, he entered the parlor of the house where they were staying and found several people already seated, awaiting their turn to speak with the saint. One woman in particular caught his attention. She was a picture of despair; huddled in a corner of the room, she sat holding a little child in her arms and the child was blind.

While Don Bosco was giving audiences, the woman made several attempts to see him. Each time she tried to get near the door, however, she found her way blocked by others quicker than she. Around midday, the local pastor came to take both priests to lunch. Two hours later Don Bosco returned, entered the room, and resumed the

audiences. Finally he came out of the room for a second time, but this time, carrying a traveling case; he was ready to leave. This nearly drove the poor woman out of her mind. She was losing her last chance of obtaining help for her child. Seeing this, the warm-hearted and spontaneous Cagliero could stand it no longer.

"Can't you do something for her, Don Bosco?" he entreated.

"How can I, John?" protested the saint. "I have already delayed too long seeing people. It's time for the train!"

"But this poor woman has been here all day!"

Don Bosco hesitated for an instant. Seizing the opportunity, Cagliero called the woman over. Unable to speak for emotion, she stood before the saint and mutely held up her child for his blessing.

Raising his arm, Don Bosco traced the cross over it... the child clapped her hands... opened her eyes... and began to rub them. They were hurting from the light they were seeing for the first time! The mother gasped out her thanks; then, beside herself with joy she ran out of the room.

Cagliero was still deeply moved by the incident as he helped his friend make his way slowly through the crowd to a waiting carriage. Only when they were in the carriage did he notice that the other's soutane was missing several pieces. People had snipped them off to keep as relics!

Witnessing this show of devotion, Don Bosco's eyes grew moist. After a moment of silence he turned to Cagliero. "How good is God," he said, "and how great His mercy! To change the lives of so many people and to do such wonderful things whom does He choose? — a simple peasant of Becchi!"

The two men went their separate ways after that and did not meet again until one evening in February, 1880, when Cagliero accidentally ran into Don Bosco and another priest, in Nice. Since Cagliero was on his way to Spain, he

was wearing Spanish clerical dress, and in the fading light the saint did not recognize him. It was eight years before his death and his eyesight was failing. Cagliero, always full of good humor, thought he would have a little fun with him.

"*Bon soir, mon Père,*" he greeted in heavily accented French.

Don Bosco politely returned the greeting and in a whisper asked his companion who the stranger was.

"A priest who often comes to the Oratory," said his companion, going along with the joke.

"Then invite him to stay with us," said Don Bosco. Once again he addressed Cagliero. "I hope we shall see each other again very soon, Father."

"*Très bien, Monsieur l'Abbé,*" mumbled Cagliero indistinctly.

"But who is that priest?" insisted Don Bosco, when Cagliero had disappeared. "I seem to know him. I'm sure I met him before."

"Could be. That was Cagliero playing a trick on you!"

"Cagliero? John?" Don Bosco burst out laughing. "He pulled my leg and to think I didn't recognise the rascal! He always loved to play jokes, even on poor Don Bosco!"

Perhaps the most outstanding of Cagliero's achievements as representative of Don Bosco was the establishment of the Society in Spain. There is an intriguing story behind this event . . .

Don Diego María Santiago Calvo de la Banda y Aragón was a descendant of several illustrious Spanish houses. What he prided himself on most, however, was his kinship with both St. Peter of Alcántara and St. Theresa of Avila. A sensitive, kindly man, he owned valuable property and a herd of prize cattle in Utrera, a town forty miles southeast of Seville. Unfortunately, rustlers had recently made several raids on his cattle. Therefore, when he received word that on a certain night these robbers were planning another

foray, he informed the police. They assured him that he could leave the matter in their hands.

On the night in question, the robbers did enter Don Diego's property. But the police were waiting for them and as soon as the raiders came close enough, they opened fire at point-blank range killing seven.

The shock nearly drove poor Don Diego out of his mind. Not for an instant had he imagined that the police would take such drastic measures. As a consequence, he suffered a severe emotional crisis and in reparation for the harm of which he believed he was the cause, he determined to devote the remainder of his life to charity. As a first step, he invited the Sisters of the Cross to open a home for the poor children of Utrera.

Next, he wanted to invite the Marist Fathers from Cordova to open a school for boys. But when he went to seek their superior, he was not at home. Don Diego was assured, however, that one of the Fathers would later go to Utrera to discuss the foundation with him. In due time a Father did come to Utrera only to learn that the Marquis was in Seville; the Father went on to Seville. There he was told that Don Diego had already returned to Cordova. The Father went back to Cordova. But when he arrived, he found that his quarry had just left for Palma del Río . . . At this point, the Father gave up the chase!

Slightly discouraged, Don Diego then sought out his friend, Cardinal Joaquín Lluch y Garruga, the Carmelite Archbishop of Seville. No sooner had he mentioned his project for boys than the Cardinal immediately suggested offering it to Don Bosco whom he had seen at work in Italy. In fact, he took it upon himself there and then to write to Don Bosco, urging him to accept.

Sent by Don Bosco to examine the project, Cagliero arrived in Utrera on January 24, 1880, was received with open arms by the Cardinal, the authorities, and, of course, Don Diego. So taken up was he by the welcome, he told Don

Bosco that for a time he dreamt he was back in South America, comparing Don Diego to Don Benítez, his first benefactor in the New World. The roasting of a whole side of beef for a cook-out in his honor also invoked memories of an *asado con cuero* (roast beef in the skin) and the happy days he had spent in similar surroundings in Argentina.

Since Utrera had its good share of churches, the Cardinal graciously offered Cagliero a choice of them. He chose the church of Carmel, because the Cardinal was a Carmelite, because devotion to our Lady of Carmel was strong in that region . . . and because this church enjoyed a central location in town.

Don Diego swamped him with generosity. He paid Cagliero's traveling expenses; gave up a wing of his own home to shelter him and his companions; and even agreed to pay the Salesians an adequate allowance for four years . . . Altogether, it was one of the most favourable arrangements Cagliero had ever encountered. He left, promising in the name of Don Bosco, that the Salesians would accept this foundation, their first in Spain. His personality had prepared the way for the Society in a country where it was to flourish in an extraordinary manner.



## 5. The Promised Land

And South America? And above all, Patagonia?

Did he forget them? Did he cut himself away from them completely? Did he go to India and put all thought of them out of his mind?

None of these things happened. He did not forget South America or Patagonia. Nor did he go to India and cut himself off completely from South America or Patagonia. The fact is that his departure for India was put off indefinitely and, during his absence from South America, through correspondence, he kept in close contact with all that was happening in those regions. It was by means of this correspondence that he heard the story of one of the most important and exciting events in the history of Patagonia.

Before leaving Argentina, he had despatched missionaries to explore the areas surrounding Carhué and Santa Cruz. Carhué, three hundred miles south of the capital, was the most advanced of the line of fortresses which the military had set up in the interior to repel the Indians. Under the guise of coming down to trade, these had too often murderously attacked the colonists. Santa Cruz, on the other hand, was a quiet, dusty little settlement, two thousand five hundred miles down the coast from Buenos Aires, where the colonists

traded food and drink with the Indians for guanaco skins.

Urged on by Don Bosco, by the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, by the President of Argentina, and even by the Holy Father, to begin the mission at once, Cagliero had finally decided to enter Patagonia at these two points and had actually completed plans for an expedition to Santa Cruz. The honor of being the first Salesian to enter Patagonia was not to be his, however, for winter set in, forcing him to postpone the journey, and Don Bosco recalled him to Turin.

This honor, high in the history of the Salesians in South America, fell to Father James Costamagna, leader of the third group of missionaries to Argentina. In a letter he wrote to Cagliero on August 4, 1878, he describes his entry into "the promised land."

"Evasius Rabagliati (another Salesian), Monsignor Espinosa, Father Paul Emilius Savino (a Lazarist) and I set out from Buenos Aires on the *Santa Rosa*, bound for Bahía Blanca, where we would take horse to Carhué and Patagonia. Our assignment was to see what we could do to establish a mission. Unfortunately, the *Santa Rosa* narrowly escaped shipwreck and buried herself in a sandbank in the River Plata. It took three days to get her under way again. Maneuvering *Hell Canal* safely, we ran into the Atlantic and were given a frightening welcome by a hurricane, the terror of sailors in these regions. The *pampero* sweeps down from the Andes across hundreds of miles of pampa, meeting no obstacles to temper its fury. On reaching the coast it is dubbed a hurricane. For a day and a night the *Santa Rosa* tossed about like a matchbox, and when the storm abated, we discovered that we had drifted into the open Atlantic, a hundred miles off Cape Corrientes. Nor was that all. We had lost our sails, our mast, our bridge, our rudder . . . This left us completely at the mercy of the mountainous waves."

The missionaries gave themselves up for lost and the crew who had "seen weather" before, agreed they had not much chance of coming out alive. At this the priests heard

each other's confessions, solemnly offered their lives for the missions, and then began to render what help they could to the other passengers.

Three days later, to everyone's relief and surprise, the *Santa Rosa* had ridden out the storm and, after repairs to the rudder, reversed course to plow her slow and painful way back to Buenos Aires. Once on dry land, the missionaries went straight to the national shrine of our Lady of Luján to thank her for their safe return.

It was not until the following year that a second attempt could be made. This was done under the historic and time-honored union of cross and sword and formed part of what was to pass into Argentine history as the Conquest of the Desert. This was a military campaign of gigantic proportions which aimed to destroy forever the power of the Indians.

At that time, the Indians were the major problem in the development of civilization in Argentina. According to the national census of 1869, the first ever taken, they numbered 93,000 in an overall population of 1,877,000. Most numerous were the warlike and disciplined Araucanos who considered the pampas their private territory; and the Patagonians, who roamed the colder, more southerly, and bleaker regions of Tierra del Fuego. The Indians of the northern parts of Argentina had long since been absorbed into the national life. The others were still masters of the vast stretches of land and inaccessible mountain areas which made up Patagonia. While Argentina was preoccupied with internal struggles, these Indians time and again made sudden and murderous *malones*, or raids, on the white population, killing the settlers and carrying off their wives and cattle.

From 1820 to 1833 a number of campaigns had been organized against them. That of 1876, under President Alsina, for example, freed 2,090 captives and retrieved 17,000 steers, 30,000 sheep, and 40,000 horses — all stolen from the settlers. But after each encounter with the troops, the Indians

simply retreated to the fortresses of the Cordilleras, as often as not crossing over into Chile. The Argentinians repeatedly accused the Chilean Government of allowing the Indians to sell the stolen cattle in Chile; Chile, on the other hand, at odds with Argentina over the ownership of the pampas and Tierra del Fuego, not only refused to do anything to deter the Indians, but even covertly encouraged them.

When General Julius Argentino Roca became Minister of War, in his bold dynamic way he decided to settle the Indian question once and for all. To do so he planned a campaign that would destroy Indian domination along a frontier of 5,000 miles, and at the same time open up to Argentina the boundless territories of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.

On August 18, 1878, President Avellaneda put before Congress a law which formally transplanted the boundaries of Argentina to the borders of the Neuquén and Negro Rivers. This formed the basis for the most ambitious expedition ever organized against the Indians. Roca himself took personal command, and on April 16, 1879, set out for the pampas at the head of five battalions of 1,000 men each. To this was added a group of scientists and three chaplains: Monsignor Anthony Espinosa, Vicar-General of Buenos Aires, Father James Costamagna, and Louis Botta, a Salesian cleric. Curiously enough, it was Roca himself who, despite his lack of enthusiasm for anything which concerned the Church, insisted on the presence of the chaplains. Likewise, he insisted that they should precede the troops wherever possible to accentuate the essentially peaceful nature of the expedition. The chaplains were provided with horses and a cart to serve as an altar, a place of storage for their belongings, and as shelter against the storms.

In a letter to Don Bosco dated April 27, 1879, from Carhué, Costamagna writes: "Thanks be to God, after a long and weary trek, we have at last contacted the Indians of the pampas — your cherished dream! We are now in

Carhué, about three hundred miles south of Buenos Aires, and shall shortly take off on another six hundred mile journey by horse across the dreaded desert to Patagonia... where one sees neither tree nor bush, and one has to wade rivers and lakes on horseback. Fortunately for us, the horses are excellent swimmers!

"Here at Carhué, a fort in the heart of the desert, I tried to get in touch with the Tripanlao and Manuel Grande tribes. They have their *toldería* about fifteen minutes' ride from the fort."

About to make this historic contact, he continues, he found himself at a loss. "What am I going to say?" he asked himself. Suddenly he had realized that he did not know a word of their language!

At that moment a boy came in sight. Costamagna approached him.

"*Buenos días*," he said, more to show his friendly intentions than in the hope of being understood.

"*Buenos días, señor*," replied the boy in Spanish. "*Qué hace usted en estas partes?* What are you doing in these parts?"

Costamagna nearly fell off his horse. Recovering quickly, he questioned the boy and learned that he was the son of the *cacique* Tripanlao. The boy insisted on bringing him to his father. During the meeting with the *cacique*, Costamagna was obliged to drink several bowls of mate. Mate, he was told, was the queen of drinks in South America. The leaves and branches of the *ilex paraguayensis*, a plant as high as the orange tree, are ground to make *yerba mate*, a rough powder. The tea prepared from this, he found, had a bitter taste but they recommended it to him for his kidneys, stomach, liver and anything else that ailed him, at the same time warning him that too much of it could affect his nervous system. Costamagna, a sceptical individual by nature, believed nothing of all this and told his instructors plainly that he thought it a poor kind of drink and drinking it con-

stantly a poor kind of habit. Before the meeting ended, however, he had obtained permission to speak to the other Indians. He immediately called in the two missionaries, and they set to work. Unable to contain himself for joy at the thought that he was making his first contact with the inhabitants of Patagonia, he lost no time in writing a long and detailed account of it to Don Bosco.

As the advance column of two thousand men drew out of Carhué, General Roca asked Costamagna as a special favor to accompany these troops into the more dangerous territory that lay ahead. Without hesitation Costamagna accepted.

The soldiers could not understand this. "Padre," they asked him, "why do you take on a dangerous journey like this across the desert just to meet those crazy Indians?"

Costamagna answered: "Because I want to bring them to God."

After another long month of backbreaking and heart-breaking trek over rough ground and several encounters with armed and hostile Indian bands, the expedition at last rode up to the northern bank of the Río Colorado, nearly a hundred miles north of the Río Negro, their destination. It took the column of two thousand men and five thousand horses three hours to cross. Once on the other side, Roca sent a strong scouting party ahead. Costamagna presented himself to the General, requested and obtained permission to go along. After an exhausting and painful journey over the most difficult riding terrain imaginable, tormented by sandstorms and dense clouds of mosquitoes on May 24 — Feast of Mary Help of Christians — they finally drew rein at Choele-Choel on the Río Negro. Costamagna could scarcely believe his good fortune. He had reached the gateway to Patagonia! Darwin, in 1833, had called it "a cursed land," but Don Bosco's missionaries now christened it instead "the promised land!"

"A barren desert, overrun by the Araucanos, the wildest of all the Indian tribes of Argentina," one traveler

described it. "Their audacity compels the government to maintain a large frontier army. Only the Indian lives beyond these frontiers. Despite the advance of civilization and the visits of travelers to its shores, coastlines, salt lakes, and dense forests, the vast deserts of Patagonia still remain a mystery. Of the area between the Río Negro and the Río Colorado, we are familiar only with the lower reaches and the coast. The rest is the domain of the desert kings."

With the arrival of Roca and the missionaries, however, a new era had dawned in this strange land both for Argentina and for the Church.

It was a moment of high emotion for the soldiers, too. Even the rugged and not overly religious Roca was moved. "Today we sang the *Te Deum*," he wrote in his dispatches, "to thank the Lord God of Hosts for the happy outcome of our campaign. Doctor Espinosa celebrated the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in a beautiful green plain along the banks of the Río Negro, and the troops assisted.

"It was a mighty and imposing spectacle. I assure you that at no other time have we felt so full of religious sentiment and sacred recollection. In no other place does one find oneself so near to God as in the desert."

The dispatches then take a more practical turn. "Tomorrow at dawn we shall be en route to Neuquén, where I hope to meet some of the *caciques* of the Cordilleras. I have already sent a note to Reuque-Curá, reprimanding him for having given refuge to Namuncurá. If he resists, I shall consider him an enemy — Choele-Choel, June 2, 1879 — Julius A. Roca." This warning succeeded in isolating Namuncurá from Reuque-Curá and the other *caciques*.

Immediately following the return of the expedition to Buenos Aires, Archbishop Aneiros jubilantly wrote to Don Bosco: "The hour has come when I can formally offer you what I know is very dear to you — the parish of Patagonia. You will need this as a base for the development of your future mission."



This formal offer of the "parish" (read "mission") of Patagonia created for both the Archbishop and the Salesians several interesting problems, for which both parties had their own equally interesting solutions. In effect, nearly fifty years were to elapse before the matter could be definitely settled.

The question of creating out of Patagonia a vicariate, that is, a region ecclesiastically independent of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, had long been incubating in the mind of the far-sighted Cagliero. Indeed, before leaving Argentina he had already suggested the idea to Archbishop Aneiros and to Monsignor Espinosa. While Monsignor Espinosa was all for it, the Archbishop was against it on the grounds that it was unnecessary, since he was more than willing to grant Cagliero all the faculties he needed for the apostolate. Moreover, he was careful to point out that the government also would oppose it since, according to the Constitution, no foreigner could be consecrated a bishop of Argentina. Added to this was the general reluctance to accept the idea that any part of their nation should be considered a "mission."

And Don Bosco? He was unequivocally in favor of it, even over the objections of both the Archbishop and the government. His reasoning ran parallel to that of Father Paul Emilius Savino, a zealous Lazarist priest who for several years had been trying to establish a mission in Patagones, the chief center of Patagonia, but had already announced that he was abandoning it. He had been unable to obtain either the personnel or the money he considered necessary to continue. The only way to obtain sufficient funds, which the government had so often promised but so rarely sent, he believed, was to place Patagonia under the jurisdiction of the *Propaganda Fide*, the office of the Holy See which has care of all foreign missions, and seek the support of the numerous other mission-aid societies. He, too, pressed for the erection of a vicariate even against



the wishes of the government and of the Archbishop. His personal choice as its first Vicar Apostolic? Cagliero.

Now that the Salesians were set to take formal possession of Patagonia, the question of the vicariate became not only practical but urgent. In 1881 Archbishop Aneiros came to Turin and held several conversations with Don Bosco on the matter. As a result of what he learned from these, Don Bosco suggested to Pope Leo XIII to erect not one mission in Patagonia but three! The Holy Father handed over the project for study to a commission of Cardinals. Cardinal Gaetano Alimonda, the new Archbishop of Turin and a friend of the saint, invited Don Bosco to give his opinion to this commission in writing. After further consideration, Don Bosco modified his views somewhat and replied in a letter of July 29, 1883: "For the present it might be sufficient to erect only one vicariate in the northern section of Patagonia and a prefecture in the south. The central part of Patagonia has not been as yet sufficiently explored..." He proposed Cagliero for the vicariate, Fagnano for the prefecture. At a meeting of the Cardinals, Don Bosco's proposals were discussed, voted on, and finally accepted. But with this modification: instead of a full vicariate Patagonia would be made only a pro-vicariate.

Cagliero was named the first Pro-Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia. At the same time a prefecture was erected, under Cagliero's jurisdiction, which embraced the southern part of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. This was entrusted to Father Joseph Fagnano.

As pro-vicar, Cagliero would indeed be removed from the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires and placed directly under Rome but only as a missionary priest, not a bishop, since neither the title of pro-vicar, nor of prefect apostolic carried with them episcopal status. But it was Don Bosco's firm intention to send Cagliero back to South America as a bishop because of the necessary prestige and authority it would afford him. He therefore

politely insisted with Cardinal Alimonda, who in turn brought the suggestion to the attention of the Holy See. The Cardinal-Prefect of Bishops and Regulars in whose province this appointment lay was opposed on what he thought were very good grounds. He was convinced, he declared, that with the death of Don Bosco the Society he had founded would dissolve and when that happened the new bishop would be left high and dry! Nevertheless, he was finally persuaded to withdraw his opposition, and in a papal brief, Cagliero, as is the customary procedure, was named Titular Bishop of Magida, a diocese of Asia Minor which had long ceased to exist.

Thus Cagliero was not only returning to South America; he was also returning to take possession of Patagonia, "the promised land;" and not merely as a missionary, but as a bishop and founder of the mission! Thus, too, the problem of the ecclesiastical status of Patagonia appeared to have been solved. There were others, however, and these were very important people, who were not satisfied with this solution.

Although "his favorite son" would now be a member of the hierarchy, Don Bosco still refused to relieve him of his position as Spiritual Director of the Society. His reason was that if Cagliero were ever expelled by the government of Argentina in any quick shift of policy, he would always find refuge in the Society. It was a realistic attitude.

Cagliero insisted on being consecrated in the church of Mary Help of Christians in Turin, since raised to the dignity of basilica. As his motto he chose: "*Recto fixus calli ero.*" "I shall be true to the way." The "way," he explained, meant the way of life that Don Bosco had traced out for him.

On the eve of the consecration the saint called him to his room and for the first time revealed the remarkable manner in which some thirty years ago he had learned that Cagliero would one day be a missionary bishop. Cagliero was so moved, so impressed by it that he begged Don Bosco

to repeat it to the other Salesians. Obviously amused at Cagliero's amazement, he promised to do so and that evening at the table told a breathless audience this strange story...

## 6. The Making of a Bishop

On August 7, 1854, a man dropped dead on the streets of Turin. In the short space of three months deaths like these had multiplied until they ran up to as many as sixty a day! The dreaded cholera sweeping up from southern Italy had finally struck Piedmont! Although as early as May of that year the saint had foretold its coming, its invasion caused immediate panic; for death from cholera was sudden and painful and, worst of all, the doctors could do absolutely nothing to prevent it. In Valdocco alone, the district where the Oratory lay, 500 out of 800 stricken persons died. So great was the need for bandages that Don Bosco's mother, Mamma Margaret, used up all her available cloth and in the same spirit in which David used the sacrificial bread, finally resorted to tearing up the altar linen! Fearful rumors raced abroad: the disease was being spread by criminals in search of loot; doctors were killing off the sick either to get hold of their wealth or because there was no hope of recovery... Turin entered into a reign of terror.

The city authorities sent out desperate appeals for volunteers to man the huge lazarettos, or field hospitals, hastily thrown up to take care of the flood of victims. The

people of the city responded generously. On his part Don Bosco recruited the priests of the Oratory. When that was not enough he organized the older boys who volunteered into first-aid squads. Before he sent them into action, however, he was careful to promise them publicly that if they kept in a state of grace, practised mortification, and wore a medal of our Lady, not one of them would fall victim to the disease.

In one particular emergency, however, while all the older boys were out on duty, he needed somebody to accompany him to a lazaretto. He discreetly sounded out several of the younger boys to see if anyone would volunteer, and when they refused he could not blame them. Finally he turned to Cagliero. "How about you, John?"

"Let's go, Father." Cagliero would have followed Don Bosco into a blazing furnace! This time he accompanied him to the lazaretto, assisting him while he administered the sacraments to the dying.

One of the doctors, dubiously eyeing the youthful Cagliero, protested, "This is no place for a boy, padre."

"Don't worry, Doctor, I assure you nothing will happen to him."

Cagliero did not worry either. He trusted implicitly in Don Bosco's promise and faithfully observed the conditions. Nevertheless, after one particularly long and arduous stretch at the lazaretto he came home with a temperature and was sent to bed. As the hours went by he grew worse. Finally, two doctors were called in to examine him. Their verdict: he might not last the day!

The Oratory was stunned. Had Don Bosco's promise failed? Was Cagliero, after all, to die from the cholera? . . . Both the reputation of Don Bosco and the life of Cagliero hung in the balance.

"John," warned the infirmarian as the boy lay gasping. "Don Bosco is coming to hear your last confession." Then he set out lighted candles.

"I'm ready." The voice was barely audible.

With a heart full of sorrow, the saint made his way toward the infirmary, opened the door quietly, entered the room and . . . stopped, unable to understand the scene before him. But the more intently he peered, the more convinced he became that he was seeing something in the nature of a vision, the meaning of which, he felt certain, would be borne out by future events. After all, it was not the first time in his life that he had beheld these visions!

What did this particular vision consist of? He saw a dove hovering about the boy's head, and so luminous was the dove that it shed light around itself. It flew across the room a few times and each time it flew over the sick boy, it brushed its wings against his brow and drew an olive branch it held in its beak lightly across his parched lips. Finally, letting the olive branch fall on him, it rose into the air, changed into a globe of brilliant white light and vanished.

Don Bosco was about to approach Cagliero when a second vision halted him. This time the walls of the room receded and a group of savages appeared and surrounded the bed of the dying boy. Two of them bent over him and from their entreating gestures it seemed as though they were trying to make him understand that they needed him. This second vision, like the first, quickly faded.

Amazed at what he had just witnessed, Don Bosco was about to mention it to the others when he realized from their attitude that not another person in the room was aware of what had happened. He held his peace. On reaching the bedside he took hold of the boy's hand.

"Don Bosco," said Cagliero, "is this to be my last confession?"

"Why do you ask, John?"

"Because I want to know the truth. Am I going to die?"

Don Bosco thought for a moment. "Would you rather

go to heaven right away," he asked, "or live on and go there later?"

It was now Cagliero's turn to think; but he did not take long to make up his mind. "I'd rather do what's best for my soul."

"To tell you the truth, John," said the saint, "it would be better for you to go to heaven at once. But your time has not yet come. God has still a lot of work for you. You'll become a priest and then," Don Bosco's eyes grew dim as he recalled the vision, "with your breviary under your arm, you'll go far, far away."

"If that's how it is, Don Bosco," said Cagliero, "I think I'll wait for confession until I get up."

"That will be soon enough," agreed Don Bosco. These words from one who was able to read the souls of others clearly indicated that Cagliero was already in a state of grace and did not need confession.

Later it was discovered that Cagliero had not been attacked by cholera at all. Characteristically he had overworked himself, and sheer fatigue, together with the insanitary conditions of the lazarettos, had worn down his robust constitution. An attack of typhoid had then brought him to death's door.

Both Don Bosco's reputation and Cagliero's life had been saved!

The sickness ran its course and he soon was convalescing. During this period he received a large basket of grapes plucked from the family vineyard.

"Nothing like home-grown grapes to right a man's stomach!" he said. Impatient with what he called his "starvation diet," he made short work of them.

Next day he was down again and the infirmarian, thoroughly frightened, declared him in even greater danger than before! His mother rushed to the Oratory, dashed into the sickroom and threw herself down sobbing by her son's bed. Don Bosco stood nearby, trying to console her.



"My son, my son!" she moaned. "I can't let you die!"

"Have you prepared my soutane for Clothing Day?" asked Cagliero quietly.

The poor woman stared at him, unable to believe her ears. "He's raving!" she cried at last. "He's out of his mind with pain!" She turned to Don Bosco. "Do you hear him, Don Bosco? He's out of his mind!"

"Quite the contrary." Don Bosco was unperturbed. "Perhaps you ought, indeed, get his soutane ready."

"Oh, my poor boy! The only thing he'll wear will be a shroud!"

Finally convinced that her son was not going to die, she left when the saint assured her that her son would soon be allowed to go home for a rest. But neither she nor anyone else could dissuade Cagliero from taking the soutane on November 22, 1855, the date set by Don Bosco for John and the others who were to form the nucleus of the new Society. He stubbornly refused to put off the event even to attend the wedding of his younger brother Alexander.

"You're getting what *you* want," he told him. "And I'm getting what *I* want. Fair enough?"

Cagliero also recalled how Don Bosco many years before had told a group of Oratory boys that one of them would be a bishop. This was when the Oratory was nothing more than a school for poor boys and the new Society merely a vague idea in the saint's mind! . . . And how against everybody's advice, he had set out for yet another gruelling tour of France. Before leaving he had handed Cagliero a little box. Cagliero had opened it and found the wedding ring of Don Bosco's father. The meaning was now clear: it was gold to make a bishop's ring! . . .

The consecration took place on December 7, 1883, eve of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It was well attended for Cagliero was immensely popular. Cardinal Alimonda was one of the three consecrating bishops. The

principal places in the sanctuary were occupied by Don Bosco and Bishop Macedo Costa of Brazil who had come to plead for missionaries. Five other bishops assisted. In the sacristy opposite the episcopal throne, and surrounded by relatives, sat his mother.

The ceremonies over, the procession made its way back to the sacristy.

In the doorway, berretta in hand, humbly waited Don Bosco. Cagliero stopped in front of him and for a moment they simply looked at each other. Don Bosco prepared to kneel, but the new bishop seized him in his strong arms and held out his ring. He wanted Don Bosco to be the first to kiss it. To keep that privilege safe for the saint, during the walk back to the sacristy Cagliero had buried his right hand in the folds of his vestments.

When his mother also wanted to kneel before him, Cagliero instead caught her up in a warm embrace. "I was so unhappy when you left for the missions," she burst out. "I was sure I'd never rest my eyes on you again. Instead, the Lord has allowed me to see you again, and even wearing a miter!" All this was too much for her and she melted into tears.

Since she was staying in the nearby house of the Sisters, at the first free moment he went to see her alone. They talked a long time together; mostly about the old days back in Castelnuevo.

"We had it hard, John, when you were a boy," she recalled. "Your father died when you were very young and I had you and granny and little Alex to keep. But even as a tot you'd try to help me tie up the vines, although most of the time you were only in the way." She smiled at him with eyes grown small and deep-set with age.

"But I learned fast, Ma, didn't I?" He was content to let her talk.

"Oh, you did, indeed. And you grew up fast, too, for it seems the next thing was you ran home out of breath

one afternoon to tell me about having met Don Bosco. After that you had Don Bosco on the brain! Then you talked about going away with him... and wanting to be a priest..."

"Did that worry you, Ma?"

"I don't know. At the time I didn't want to lose you, but I didn't want to stand in God's way... I was so confused!... until we talked it over together with Don Bosco..."

Cagliero chuckled: "He told you he wanted to buy me."

"Yes, and I said, 'Only cattle are bought and sold' for I knew what he meant. 'If you want him I'll give him to you for the love of God.' And the next morning you were up at daybreak to serve his Mass, and then you both rode off in the coach for Turin."

There was a short silence; then Cagliero's mother asked, "John, what *did* Don Bosco tell you that morning?"

"What did *I* tell *him*, you mean! I talked and talked to my heart's content. Told him all about myself; what I'd said and done; what I'd been and what I'd like to be. Finally, I'd nothing left to say. I just dried up. Then *he* began to talk."

"What did *he* say?"

"He asked me if I'd gone to confession since the last time he'd seen me — four or five months ago. I said, no. Why not? Because nobody told me. They told only the men and women, not the children. He asked me if I wanted to go now. I said, sure. So he heard my confession right there. When we'd finished he talked about confession in a way I'll never forget."

After a short visit to Rome for an audience with Pope Leo XIII, Cagliero returned to the Oratory to celebrate Mass on Christmas Day. His mother, despite her 81 years, insisted on observing the Christmas Eve fast. "I've kept it all my life. Think I'm going to stop now?" She stayed up through Midnight Mass and wanted to attend the solemn Pontifical

Mass her son was to say that morning. But since the weather was bitterly cold the Sisters in the end persuaded her to wait indoors until Vespers.

Long before the hour she was ready, and as she left the convent accompanied by some friends, her eyes were shining. She was about to see her son again in his episcopal robes! Slowly she started to climb the steps to the church. . . Suddenly she weakened, lost her balance, and fell back into the arms of her companions who rushed her to the convent.

Vespers had scarcely begun when word of what had happened reached the church. Immediately after Vespers, the master of ceremonies, instead of seating everyone for the sermon, ordered them back to the sacristy.

"What does this mean?" asked Cagliero in surprise. "Something wrong?"

"I'm afraid so, Bishop. Your mother. . ."

"Oh! Where is she now?"

"At the convent."

Quickly disrobing, he hurried across to the convent only to find that he had arrived too late to assist his mother in her final moments. Lifting up the cloth that covered her wrinkled face he raised his hand to bless her when something snapped inside him. He could not go on. Instead, he dropped to his knees and broke down. . . When he rose again it was with the realization that in this way God had severed the last human tie binding him to his native land.

Don Bosco, too weak to appear at the departure ceremonies, told him to give the farewell sermon on February 1885, to the latest expedition bound for South America. Cardinal Alimonda gave the missionaries the traditional embrace and they left immediately afterward. Cagliero was to leave with them but decided to stay overnight at the Oratory and catch up with them en route. Before supper he climbed the stairs to Don Bosco's room. The saint, aged and in failing health, was still at his desk preparing

to work late into the night. Cagliero sat down but did not speak. Don Bosco went on working.

"Have the others left?" asked Don Bosco after a while.

"Yes."

"They seem rather disturbed because of my poor health. They needn't worry so much. I'm still strong enough to do a little more work for souls. I know I don't look my best tonight, but I am so moved by the thought of how our numbers are growing! — and by the thought that you're leaving. What train are you taking to the boat?"

"Don't mind about trains, Don Bosco. I'll get there in time."

"If you could stay behind a while, and get some rest... Your Excellency." A little smile fluttered about the saint's lips.

"Stop making fun of me, Don Bosco!"

"Yet it's so, John. You are a bishop now, you know. Although" — Don Bosco's eyes dimmed a little — "you hardly looked like one the night you first came to the Oratory."

"Or acted like one either, I suppose." Cagliero could not easily shake off his glumness.

"No; you looked a bit put out — lost — when I announced your arrival to Mamma Margaret and she said: 'Not another one! Why, we're already as full as an egg!' 'But this one is different,' I told her. 'They all are,' she said. Would you believe it we honestly didn't know where on earth to put you! I suggested that we bundle you up in a basket and hang you from the rafters!"

"It's true, Don Bosco. For a moment, I felt Mamma Margaret didn't want me. Until you both started to laugh. She stuffed an old sack with straw and put me up in the only spot available — in the kitchen among the pots and pans... That night she picked up my torn jacket and next morning I found it mended. When I asked her who did it she told me it was the angels! Then I figured that she wanted me all right."

"Know what she said about you, John?"

"About me? What did she say?"

"Well, actually, she said quite a lot — especially when you'd practice for hours without let-up on the old spinet!"

"She once threatened that if I don't get off that stool she'd break a broomstick over my thick skull!"

"And the day you marched your 'soldiers' across her lettuce patch!..." Don Bosco bent over the desk, his mouth creased in good humor. He seemed, as was his way now, to be laughing inside. Cagliero, instead, emerging from his shell of gloom, laughed out loud, slapped his knee, and leaned the chair back on its hind legs. Suddenly he stopped laughing, let the chair come forward, "Yes," he queried. "but what *did* she say about me?"

Don Bosco looked at him with his steady dark eyes. "She said: 'You can trust Cagliero.'"

"Not everybody felt that — at least in the beginning."

Don Bosco's brow wrinkled in puzzlement.

"I mean Rua," Cagliero explained.

"Oh, yes. I remember..."

Cagliero had first met the ascetic Michael Rua — now Don Bosco's right-hand man in running the Society — casually, at Castelnuovo, when the Oratory boys, led by Don Bosco, had trooped into the village with their band, had sung in church, and gone to a hearty meal in the pastor's house. Cagliero had been working for the pastor at the time and that was when he had seen Rua.

Rua had been a serious-looking boy then; he had not changed when Cagliero met him later at the Oratory. It was this very seriousness which had caused the exuberant Cagliero to run afoul of him. In those early days Don Bosco, for want of schools of his own, sent his boys out to study in the city and had put Rua in charge of Cagliero's group. The clash occurred when Cagliero learned that Rua had been taking the group to and from school by a roundabout way. Bluntly asking why, he was told that it was to avoid certain

posters, window displays, and the booths of jugglers. Cagliero's interest was immediately aroused. Posters, window displays, and the like held no attraction for him. But jugglers! . . . Ah! That was different! His one dream was to imitate Don Bosco who used these tricks to draw the young to him. He would have to see the jugglers. But how could he do that and keep up with the group? — Suppose he ran all the way from school to the jugglers, watched them as long as possible, then ran all the way to the Oratory? . . . This is exactly what he did and in the end, he could time things so well he would join the group just as they were passing through the Oratory gates.

To Rua, however, this was a clear breach of discipline. He put up with the abuse as long as his conscience would allow, then he complained once, twice, several times to Don Bosco. The saint, on the other hand, as Cagliero himself put it, *conosceva i suoi polli*, knew his men, and appealed to Rua to have a little more patience, "to put a little more oil in his vinegar."

Finally it became too evident to the whole Oratory that Cagliero was indeed overstepping the bounds. Rua then came right out and declared that in his opinion, for the good of the Oratory, Cagliero should be sent packing! This warned Don Bosco. When Rua spoke like that matters must have reached a serious stage, it was time to act. One evening he called Cagliero to his room.

Nothing of this took Cagliero by surprise. For quite some time, he was well aware, he had not been toeing the line. If anything he was surprised that the call had not come sooner. Entering Don Bosco's room with a certain trepidation, he found the saint busy with his heavy correspondence. Don Bosco nodded to the only other chair in the room, went on writing and for the next fifteen minutes left Cagliero to go through an uncomfortable period of soul-searching.

He was glad when the other finally shuffled his papers



together, looked over at him, and made a few inquiries about his health and studies. Then: "Been a good boy lately, John?"

Cagliero mumbled a vague reply.

"Rua was talking to me about you."

There was no comment.

"He mentioned something about your breaking away from the group. Is that true?"

Cagliero admitted that it was. Then he launched out into a long defense of why he had done so. But even he could see now that it did not sound very convincing. Don Bosco's face remained set and unresponsive.

"You know, John," he went on, as if Cagliero had not spoken, "some people have even suggested that because of your conduct I should send you away. They fear you're giving bad example to the others." He looked straight at the boy. "Are you trying to force Don Bosco to send you away?"

Cagliero was too upset to reply. He lowered his head. Tears began to form. "You know I'd never want that."

"Then why on earth don't you try to help poor Don Bosco? Why don't you pull your weight in making the Oratory run smoothly instead of . . . You know what I mean."

"I didn't think I was doing any harm. I didn't think it was that serious . . . If you give me another chance . . ."

"I'm sure you didn't mean to harm your old friend, John." This time the set features relaxed, smiled. "So let's make a new start, eh?"

Cagliero moved across the room, took Don Bosco's hand and kissed it.

"Go down to the chapel now and ask the Madonna to obtain for you grace of. . ." Another warm smile. "a complete conversion!"

"I'll go down at once. . . Only please don't think, Don Bosco, that I'd ever do anything to hurt *you*."

"Hurt Don Bosco? John Cagliero, the pride of Castelnuevo, hurt Don Bosco? Why, I hope you're going to give me some of the greatest consolations of my life!"

Cagliero followed up that interview by making a retreat. He began to understand why his conduct had so far been none too pleasing to Don Bosco and bravely set about correcting himself. After his first year's failures, the Oratory records say that "the following year Cagliero became more observant of the rules of the Oratory and eventually a good example to the others." Also, despite the thoughtlessness and apparently unruly nature of those years, in 1853 he was voted the third most popular boy in the Oratory...

The two men kept on reminiscing. The saint did not go down with Cagliero to supper because of his bronchitis, and after supper Cagliero returned. He was not his cheerful self.

"Give me your blessing before I go, Don Bosco."

"When do you intend to leave, John?"

"Very soon."

"Why don't you go tomorrow? Eight hundred Oratory boys are anxious to give you a splendid send-off."

"Please, let me leave before then!" pleaded Cagliero. "I'm afraid I'd be too upset by it."

"As you wish. God speed you, my dear John. If we don't see each other again in this life, we shall see each other in heaven. That will surely be a much better meeting."

"You forget, Don Bosco," Cagliero's voice betrayed his feelings. "that I've promised to return for the golden jubilee of your First Mass."

## 7. Early Obstacles

"God save us, Captain! This is a terrible storm!"

"Aye, Bishop. Can't remember anything like it and I've been on the sea . . . Whoa, old girl! Steady does it. Easy. Easy . . ." He thumped the handrail in appreciation. "She's a damned good ship! — if you'll forgive the expression, Bishop. — But we're lucky to have such a tight ship under us in this one."

"Is this the worst storm you've ever been in, Captain?"

"The worst one is always the *last* one." The Captain looked at Cagliero to see if he had gotten the point. Evidently not, for the other's glassy stare was fixed straight ahead. He explained. "That is, the one you're in is the worst for that may be your last." Still no reaction from the Bishop. "But as far as this one's concerned — By God! There's a smacker for you! That made the poor girl shiver! — Lucky we've a bishop aboard to do some praying. I'm not much of a hand at that myself. Forgotten by now, I suppose. And believe me, Bishop, we're going to need a lot o' prayers before this one blows itself out. — See what I mean? Damned near lifted her clean out o' the water! That's one trick I've never seen done before!"

The Captain's breath came across to Cagliero, heavy with the sickly-sweet smell of gin. "If one doesn't have God,"

reflected Cagliero, in a distracted sort of way, "I suppose one must find courage and hope elsewhere." It always annoyed him to think that men such as these who, despite their frequent brushes with death, should care so little about their souls. Gripping the handrail firmly to steady himself against the roll of the ship, he glanced out through the window of the bridge with a kind of fascination.

A courageous man, as he witnessed this struggle between the ship and the fury of the sea, he was filled with fear, and could only stare open-mouthed at the terrible power of the ocean in a storm. He watched the waves loom up gigantically, hover for a moment before crashing down on the side or prow of the ship. It was like an angry and cruel parent striking the face of a helpless child, making it turn this way and that. One mighty wave struck it with such force that the ship veered so far to starboard that it was some time before she found her true course again. As each wave struck, the ship would lean so far over that Cagliero had to strain the muscles of his arms and legs to keep erect. At another moment a particularly heavy sea appeared to suck the ship into its huge concave belly, embrace it with long green arms and pull it under. The ship stayed so long in that green embrace Cagliero thought it would never come up again. But come up she did, panting for breath, as it were, and, breaking loose from the deadly embrace, sent the waters cascading back into the sea. . . . Cagliero let his breath out noisily.

The Captain was speaking to him now. But he could not hear above the roar of the wind and the heavy chugging of the overworked engines pounding their way through the troubled seas. He cupped his hand to his ear.

"You don't look so good," the Captain was saying. "Want to go below?"

Cagliero shook his head. "If it's all the same to you, I'd like to be around in case someone needs me."

"Suit yourself. Just now I'm damned glad to have somebody near me who can pray."

On this trip across the Atlantic, Cagliero braved one of the worst storms Captain or crew could remember. Yet in their letters home his companions wrote that even at the storm's height he went about the ship helping the passengers. And once the storm had blown itself out, characteristically he organized a mission, during which he confirmed several children, and at the closing Mass distributed a large number of Communions. "The storm," he remarked. "had evidently preached a persuasive sermon!"

The last few days of the voyage he spent restlessly pacing the decks of the *S.S. Bourgogne*. His friends remarked on this preoccupied air, for he often detached himself from the group and stood apart to stare out over the tumbling waves. This was not the energetic and optimistic leader they had seen crisscross Europe in his efforts to widen the frontiers of the young Society.

Perhaps his efforts on behalf of the passengers during and after the storm were now beginning to make themselves felt.

"What's on your mind, Bishop?" one of them asked jokingly. "Still thinking about the storm?"

"Not exactly," answered the Bishop pleasantly enough. Then his eyes clouded, and after a moment's hesitation he went on. "But I can't help comparing the wonderfully easy voyage I had last time with this one. If this present one is any portent of the future . . . well!"

This was, indeed, the second time he had made this trip, he reflected. But the circumstances were as vastly different as the voyages. Then he had come as a simple priest; now he was coming as one who had been suddenly projected into prominence, for he had been appointed the ecclesiastical ruler over practically all of Argentina's newly-acquired territory. He had been elected a bishop of Argentina against the law which prohibited foreigners from exercising jurisdiction within the nation's boundaries, even if those boundaries had only recently been extended; he was an emissary of the

Vatican with which Argentina had broken off relations, (Roca, angered by Apostolic Delegate Louis Matera's reaction to a bill against teaching religion in schools, had summarily expelled him!) and finally, as if to compound the error, Argentina had been neither officially consulted nor even officially advised. Don Bosco, it is true, as early as 1880 had proposed the project of the vicariate to the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, but the outbreak of civil war between Roca and Tejedor had prevented the Archbishop from taking up the matter with the government.

If any doubt had lingered in Cagliero's mind about the existence of this opposition, it was quickly dispelled by the letters of the Archbishop. "The government will never agree to the opening of a mission territory within its boundaries. Much less will it agree to the election of a foreign bishop to run it." The Archbishop had even felt compelled to counsel Don Bosco: "Please reconcile Bishop Cagliero to living without the title of vicar apostolic." He advised this to stave off possible attacks from anticlericals. On his part, however, since it was the wish of the Holy See, he promised every help and assured Cagliero that he personally would always accord him the honors due to a bishop.

Cagliero had originally planned to disembark at Montevideo, across the bay from Buenos Aires, and from there see how the land lay. To his dismay he learned of a movement in Uruguay to block the entry of all foreign clergy. Next he thought of going on to Concepción, Chile, when he received word that he could not go there either, "dressed as a friar." His difficulties as a missionary bishop were beginning early!

He consoled himself with the thought that the most serious of these came not from any fault of his but, as Archbishop Aneiros had pointed out at their first meeting, had their roots deep in the history of the young republics of South America.

During the early uprisings, the Church, for the most part, had sided with established authority, or at least had been slow to recognize the changing conditions. Moreover, these revolutions had found a great deal of their inspiration in the French Revolution; and, finally, they had been aided and encouraged by the Masonic movement imported largely from the United States. From there on the power and influence of Freemasonry was something to be reckoned with. At first neither people nor clergy were very clear as to the aims and methods of the movement. In Brazil, for instance, when Pedro I, five years after the country's independence in 1825, abdicated in favor of his son, Pedro II, Freemasonry took such a hold that by 1850 not only all the leaders of the country but nearly all the hierarchy and clergy of Brazil were Masons! In the beginning it was held to be purely political in character, and membership supposedly gave the clergy a voice in national affairs. But it also gave the Masons enormous power within the Church. Masonry was openly defended from the pulpit and one could not even join the Third Order of St. Francis unless one were a Mason! In the long struggle to rid the Church of the movement, suspensions, dissolutions, and interdictions became the order of the day.

All this made for strong anticlerical feelings which in turn produced the phenomenon of almost totally Catholic peoples being ruled by anticlerical, if not outrightly atheistic governments! Governments seized control of the schools, forbidding religious instruction in them so that from the elementary to the university level they became thoroughly laicized. In time, this move was to boomerang against its authors. The institutes of higher learning, becoming for the most part ultra-liberal and communistic, were later to dedicate themselves to the violent overthrow of the very governments which had fostered them.

The Church suffered in Argentina as it suffered in most of the young republics by this early rupture of relations with the Holy See. Worse than that, for almost a quarter



century (1812-1834), it was without even one bishop to ordain or guide the clergy. When Bishop Manuel Metrano y Cabrera was appointed in 1834, Dictator Rosas nullified any benefit the change might have brought by trying to use the Church to strengthen his own hand. The constitution which followed Rosas, however, allowed freedom of worship, declared Catholicism the official religion, and decreed that the salaries of certain members of the clergy would be paid by the government.

In view of all this opposition there was no other course open to Cagliero but to risk landing at Montevideo. On March 12, 1884, therefore, dressed as a simple priest, he quietly disembarked and was met by Costamagna and others. After paying several hurried, *incognito* visits, he moved on to the Salesian school at Villa Colón, where, for the first time, he was welcomed with the honors due to a bishop.

At Villa Colón, however, he had a difficult mission of quite another kind to accomplish. He had to meet the exiled Apostolic Delegate who was waiting for a boat to take him back to Rome. In the ordinary way it would have been the Delegate's task to smooth the differences between the new Vicar Apostolic and the government of Argentina. Unfortunately, the Delegate at that particular time was not only *persona non grata* to the government, but he was also against Cagliero!

The Delegate's quarrel with Cagliero? Some years before, he had requested a Salesian as a secretary. This priest had quickly tired of the endless round of dinners, receptions, and late evenings. And when he could stand it no longer he had fled the delegation! This had so turned the Delegate against the Salesians that when he was informed of Cagliero's appointment he declared: "While I am Delegate, Cagliero will never put his foot in Argentina!"

Despite these precedents, Cagliero made the call and such was his ability to calm troubled waters, that he won

over the Delegate completely. The meeting ended with everything forgiven and forgotten. Before Cagliero left, the Delegate embraced him warmly, later returned his visit and, as a token of friendship, presented him with a pair of embroidered ceremonial slippers.

The time came, finally, when he decided that he could risk the journey to Buenos Aires. Without fanfare, he landed on March 23, his pectoral cross hidden in the folds of his soutane and, accompanied by a few friends drove at once to San Carlos. Later that day, during a cordial visit with Archbishop Aneiros, the Archbishop, in a sudden reversal of his previous stand, told him to take out the cross and place it boldly on his breast for all the world to see. He also urged Cagliero to carry out whatever episcopal functions he pleased, accompanied him to the door of the palace, and in a loud voice instructed the coachman "to drive home the Salesian bishop!" At the Archbishop's insistence, on Easter Sunday at San Carlos he pontificated openly for the first time in Argentina.

Nevertheless, not a single Catholic newspaper of Buenos Aires carried a word of his arrival. The anticlerical papers, on the other hand, pointed up his movements and abused him personally. (South American papers delight in virulent, personal attacks.) It was only after numerous public appearances that the "liberal" paper *La Nación* deigned to mention him. That was when Cagliero, again at the invitation of the Archbishop, presided over a procession of 10,000 people in the Plaza de la Victoria on the feast of Corpus Christi. *La Nación* contemptuously referred to him as "the Bishop of Magida, a place we could not find on any map."

During these days he made several attempts, through influential friends, to meet President Roca. But the proud Roca would not bend. To him Cagliero was a foreign bishop and foreign bishops could not hold office in Argentina. As for the Vicariate — for him it simply did not exist!

It was *La Boca*, of all places, which gave him the most

rousing welcome. The "priest of the medals" whom they once had stoned, they now received with open arms. He confirmed 300 children, distributed 200 First Communions, and was so utterly exhausted by the day's activities that his secretary had to give Benediction in his place. Besides the consolations he received at *La Boca*, the progress accomplished during his absence more than made up for any aggravation and afforded ample proof of the forward march of the young Society he had brought to South America. A new church had replaced the old one in *La Boca*; *Mater Misericordiae* was flourishing; San Carlos (or Pius IX) had gone ahead by leaps and bounds; a new and successful school, Santa Catalina, had been opened in another section of Buenos Aires; San Nicolás was running smoothly; so too, were the schools in Uruguay, Villa Colón and Las Piedras. The Sisters, too, had been making equally favorable progress.

Although it was consoling to know that his pioneering efforts had not been in vain, he discovered to his dismay, that during his absence the paternal system of Don Bosco which he had taken such care to implant in the schools in South America, had been cast aside. In its place had been substituted a rigid, repressive system of discipline. Discreet inquiry and observation revealed that this was due to several causes. Owing to the shortage of personnel, too many outsiders had been engaged who either did not understand Don Bosco's system or else found it too difficult to practice; too many boys had been accepted from places where harsher systems were in use; benefactors insisted that the Salesians occupy themselves almost exclusively with juvenile delinquents. Perhaps, also, the Society was still too young in South America and elsewhere for the system and thought of its founder to have become fully clarified, to have "jelled."

Courageously setting out to combat these errors, Cagliero did not limit his efforts to Salesians and teachers. He spoke to the boys themselves in their reunions, in their sodality meetings, in recreation, using every opportunity to

urge them to follow Don Bosco. He succeeded so well in winning them over that wherever he appeared, older Salesians recalled the way they themselves used to welcome Don Bosco. Boys flocked to his confessional, surrounded him at recreation, and listened with attention to everything he said.

"It was as if Don Bosco himself," wrote an eyewitness, "had come to help us live once more the spirit of the Oratory."

The dormant opposition to him on the part of the government in Buenos Aires now reared its head. General Wilde, Minister of Public Instruction, forced Cagliero to call him a real persecutor and once angrily to exclaim that against the Church such men were "waging the war of Julian and lacked only the cruelty of Constantine!" Yet not every hand in the government was turned against him. General Vintter, Governor of the South, promised assistance; the Minister of War granted him eight free tickets to Patagonia, and as he was leaving Buenos Aires, Monsignor Espinosa brought him word that the government of the Province of Patagonia would assist both in the establishment of the mission and in the erection of an observatory by the missionaries at Viedma. Moreover, President Roca had informed Espinosa that he would have seen Cagliero any time if he had presented himself at the palace!

"Before saying that he made certain that he had waited until it was too late to be of any use," grumbled Cagliero. And, frankly, he would have been in a happier frame of mind as he boarded the *Pomona* on July 2 for Patagonia, if he could have found out beforehand how he stood with Roca. The President's attitude could greatly influence, for good or evil, the future of the mission. Yet Roca for or Roca against, he bravely turned his face southward toward Patagonia, "the promised land."

Six days later the *Pomona* dropped anchor outside the wide mouth of the Río Negro. She was unable to enter the river because a storm had whipped up dangerously high

seas which would have thrown her onto the treacherous sandbars blocking the mouth of the river. Instead, she spent the entire day and night riding at anchor with her bow headed into the fierce winds. Only the following morning did she dare attempt to maneuver past the sandbars, scraping her bottom several times in the process. But at last she got through, and a few hours later Cagliero, with a fervent "*Deo gratias!*" stepped ashore and was greeted by Fagnano, the Salesians and Sisters, their school children, and a handful of friends.

There was little Cagliero could learn about Patagonia from books for the simple reason that little had been written or was known about it. Its very name was still shrouded in mystery. Some claimed that it was derived from the Spanish *patagón*, but where that was derived from, no one was quite sure. Others said *Patagonia* was a corruption of pentagon or five cubits, roughly seven and a half feet, referring to a race of giants erroneously supposed to have lived there. Still others held it came from *pata grande*, "large foot" from the imprint left by coltskin sandals which the Indians stuffed with straw against the cold. A monument in the town of Patagones bears the information that *Patagones* means "the life of the travelers," or "the trail of the aborigines," but this has been dismissed as nonsense. The most plausible interpretation was offered by a Patagonian governor and friend of Cagliero, Eugene Tello. "Patagonia," he suggests, "is a term in Quechua dialect meaning 'hills' and refers to the undulations which distinguish the terrain in these parts from the northern regions which are uniformly level."

The three main centers were the coastal towns of Bahía Blanca with approximately four thousand people; Patagones, headquarters of the mission, and Viedma, across the river opposite Patagones, each with five or six hundred. Smaller settlements inland clustered around the many forts which had been built either to hem in the Indians, or else to pre-

vent them from organizing their fierce and bloody *malones*.

There were no roads across the pampas, but the terrain was fairly level and easy enough to traverse. Communication with Buenos Aires could be made by *galera*, on stagecoach, and by sea. The railroad came later. In 1880 there were only 2,516 miles of railroad in the entire country.

The *territory* of Patagonia, measuring 300,000 square miles, embraced all of Argentina south of the Río Negro and all of Chile south of Chiloé, unexplored until 1869. The *vicariate* of Patagonia was bound on the north by the province of La Pampa; on the south by Tierra del Fuego; on the east by the Atlantic; and on the west by the Andes. Ecclesiastically, all this had previously been under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. The priests sent by the Archbishop stayed only for short periods before hurrying back to Buenos Aires or to Europe. The last order to maintain a permanent mission had been the Lazarists, whose superior, Father Savino, before withdrawing, had rendered every possible service to Cagliero.

Patagones, the little fortress town which now became headquarters of his mission, had an interesting beginning. Thomas Faulkner, an English Jesuit and traveler, in 1774 wrote a book describing his experiences in Patagonia. He also let it be understood that the whole region was practically uninhabited and subtly implied that it was there for the taking. His map depicts it as almost blank and lacking ownership. Indeed, Puerto Deseado, halfway down the coast, between Buenos Aires and the tip of Patagonia, had already in 1669 been formally occupied by Sir John Narborough in the name of Charles II. Faulkner's report, therefore, thoroughly alarmed the Spanish. How easily they could imagine the possibility of another invasion by the English! Coming down in a hurry, they established fortresses in Patagones and, farther along the coast, in San Julián and Deseado. The king of Spain presented Carmen de Patagones, to give it its full title, with a statue of its patroness, Our Lady of

Carmel, which is still preserved. The fort was built on safe, high ground where it could guard the mouth of the Río Negro, gateway to Patagonia.

One hundred years later the settlement of Patagones split in two, one part on each side of the river. The southern part was originally called Mercedes de Patagones, in honor of our Lady of Ransom, but Roca named it Viedma to honor its founder, Francisco de Viedma.

The Río Negro commands the entire region and is navigable for approximately five hundred miles. The natives say it would not be half so dirty or blocked at the mouth if the Río Neuquén, tumbling its way down from the Cordilleras, did not spill mud and silt into it. The area was much frequented by the Indians long before the fortress was built as the number of arrowheads and *boleadoras* found there prove. So do the tiny arrowheads that witch doctors pretended to discover in the bodies of the sick, claiming that an enemy had injected them by sorcery.

Spiritually speaking, Patagonia was much of a desert. The Indians, hostile to both troops and colonists, had enjoyed very little contact with Christianity. For the others it was a frontier region where the knife and the gun settled quarrels, where the escaped convict lived without fear of molestation. The life led by the soldiery, the prospectors, and the pioneers, and the lack of religious assistance created a general spirit of abandon hardly calculated to make Cagliari's work easier.

Yet, he was sure he would not find everything totally wanting. The courageous Fagnano, with three Salesians and three Sisters, had been working there since January 20, 1880. To supply this personnel, Don Bosco said he had gone bankrupt, but that it had been worth it because at last a mission was being established in the land he had seen in his dreams. Fagnano built schools both in Patagones and Viedma; and began a new church to replace the old one in the fort. He also undertook long, arduous journeys into the interior,



once reaching as far inland as the former Jesuit mission of Nahuel-Huapi, in an enchanting region in the pre-Cordilleras.

Fagnano's companions, Milanese and Beauvoir, had already penetrated deep into Indian territory. At that particular historic moment their journeys took on the quality of errands of mercy, since the Indians were being ruthlessly put down by government forces. Between them they had covered on horseback more than 50,000 miles! This warned the new Vicar Apostolic that in the organization of his mission, apart from any other consideration, size and distance alone presented a formidable obstacle.

## 8. The Roughrider

Cagliero realized that before he could put any long-term plan into operation he had first to create a suitable climate at his base. He would also have to build the vicariate from the ground up, employing personnel that was poorly trained for the task and, so far, without any means of support. In the beginning there was such a notable lack of enthusiasm generally for the idea of a vicariate separate from Buenos Aires that one witness was soon writing to Don Bosco in disgust: "Given the little cooperation the Bishop gets, he should shake the dust of Patagonia off his shoes!"

The only dust Cagliero intended to shake off his shoes, nonetheless, was the dust they gathered in his "palace." "Two rooms of mud and wattles; one to sleep in, the other to work in. The wind blows the sand of the pampas through them so that we have continually to wipe it out of our eyes, and clean our clothes and furniture." In contrast to the poverty of his residence, he found under construction in Patagones a beautiful, if somewhat grandiose, church. So far, only one nave had been finished.

Above all else, he was concerned with the opposition he encountered from the provincial authorities. Like those of Buenos Aires, many were opposed to the idea of having

a foreign bishop in their province; others were simply opposed to the Church. So far, the missionaries had made little headway against this opposition. Fagnano, although active and self-sacrificing, may have been rather short on diplomacy. Indeed, the missionaries appear to have antagonized the authorities, sometimes unnecessarily. On this subject Cagliero wrote to the Oratory: "Today I had a long conversation with the Governor and his *alter ego*, the Commandant of Viedma. I let them get off their chests all that they had against some of our men who, indeed, seem to have exercised very little tact. They expect a lot from my presence here..."

One desperate need was for a new church in Viedma to replace the old one destroyed by fire the year before. To build one required money he didn't have, so he set up a committee to collect funds. At the head of this committee stood Governor Vintter himself. Then he persuaded the local bank to advance 2000 pesos on his own name. It was when he started building that he ran into his first open opposition. The municipal authorities stopped the work because, they said, the plans had not been approved. Cagliero overcame this hurdle by appealing directly to the Governor who overrode the objections.

The municipal people took their revenge a month later, however, when they completed a building of their own. Cagliero was invited, yes, but—and this was the subtle touch!—not as a bishop; only as Cagliero. He was allowed neither to bless the building nor to address the people.

Towards the middle of December, the church was completed and the blessing set for the twentieth. But a *pampero* came up destroying several houses and blowing down the walls of the school. Even the towers of the new church were shaken. All this delayed the blessing only a few days, nevertheless, and it took place on Christmas Eve with Cagliero from time to time casting dubious glances at the heavens.

This occasion became a personal triumph for Cagliero who had succeeded in getting the troops of the fort to participate in the ceremony. The 5th Cavalry Regiment presented a splendid sight as they marched, followed by the Governor, his staff, and — marvellous to relate! — the municipal officials on their way to Mass. In the evening, the statue of Our Lady of Ransom, Patron of the Armed Forces of Argentina, was carried from the old chapel to the new church by the Governor, the Commandant of the Fort, and the two most important members of the provincial government. The noisy celebrations continued after the procession — it was Christmas Eve — but, characteristically, Cagliero quietly retired to the confessional until it was time for him to celebrate Midnight Mass.

All this served as an excellent beginning and not long after that he began to make more friends. Even in that godforsaken area there were plenty of good people to contact before moving on to the others. His first thought, as always, was for the young. He made friends with both the white children and the children of the Indians. Although most of the Indians taken prisoner in the interior were sent off with their families to Martín García Island near Buenos Aires, a number were kept in Patagones and Viedma as domestics, in the hope that this would train them in the ways of civilized life.

One of these Indian children who lived with the Sisters in Viedma was anxious to be baptised. She was seven years old when Cagliero visited the Sisters' school to examine a group of children who were preparing for their First Communion. The little girl waited until he was alone, and then ran up to him.

"Can I receive my First Communion with the others, please?"

Cagliero smiled. "I'm afraid not. You'll have to wait a little longer."

"How long?"

"Well," said Cagliero, thinking to put her off indefinitely, "I should say until the mazards ripen." The mazard is a small black cherry common in the area. Then he went his way, happy at having solved at least one problem so easily.

He had completely forgotten the little girl until several months later when she again presented herself. This time she held up for his inspection a handful of ripe mazards. "You see, Bishop," she exclaimed triumphantly. "The mazards are now ripe."

In the face of such insistence there was only one way out. "Very well," he said, "you may make your First Communion with the next group. Run along and tell Sister I said so." Secretly, he was very pleased to find such faith among the Indians.

Once established at his base, he began to lay a long-range plan for the conquest of the Indians who were now his special charge. With this in mind, he sent Milanesio to map out an extensive itinerary for him which would cover the entire mission. Accordingly, on August 25, Milanesio set forth on a long journey which would bring him right up to the limits of the vicariate in the Cordilleras at Neuquén.

Meanwhile, not to be idle, he thought he would start immediate preparations for a shorter trek to Pringles, only two hundred miles inland. At considerable expense, he purchased eight good horses, led them home, and corralled them in the yard of his residence. Next morning when he went to look for them, to his utter dismay, he discovered that they had either been stolen or else had broken out during the night! That was the last he heard of them. Before he could prepare a second trip, bad weather had set in, making the trip inadvisable. When winter had passed, he told himself patiently, he would try again.

While waiting, he tried to contact the Indians, with-

out moving from his base. One morning, while crossing the river from Patagones to Viedma, he saw something which shocked him: a column of fifty soldiers were returning from an expedition in the desert, with a band of captive Indians. The hard life had left its mark on both. The horses, too, had grown thin and they hobbled with a weary gait, empty water-bottles jangling at their necks. The soldiers were doubled over their saddles with fatigue, their heavily bearded faces and red eyes showing signs of strain. Kepis, jackets, wide *bombache* trousers, half-boots, sheepskin saddles, blankets — everything about them was thick with the ochre dust of the pampa. They barely found enough strength to brandish their long sabres and new Remington rifles — the real conquerors of the desert — driving in front of them more than a hundred Indians, men, women, and children.

How changed these were, Cagliero thought, from the once fierce Araucanos who scorned industry and the arts and concentrated on driving back encroaching whites! "False, vain, indolent, and dirty," was how their enemies described them. "They would sell their souls for liquor; they indulged in wild drunken orgies with their women and children." The judgement of the missionaries, however, was more tolerant. They knew that these Indians liked clothes, noisy music, and talk; were hospitable; grateful to their benefactors; cruel to their enemies. The men loved fiery horses and the women took care of the children, even to the point of heroism. While they could suffer hardships stoically, the unproductive desert and the harassment of the military had eventually forced them to depend mainly for their upkeep on the hunt and rapine.

The condition of these Indians was worse than that of the soldiers. Clad in rags and covered with filth, their sullen glances were mixed with exhaustion and dejection. The men were now so broken in spirit that they did not even raise their heads; the women, already fearful of

the separation awaiting them, clutched at the children in their arms; the youngsters stared about them in wide-eyed wonder at the settlements of the white men who had invaded their territory, killed their people, and taken over their land. Were these the fearless Araucanos, Cagliero asked himself, who on fiery horses had once proudly roamed the pampas? The sight of their misery made him more determined than ever to reach out to their haunts in the pampas to help them. His heart had reached out to them first.

Urged on by this thought, he began fresh preparations for the journey to Pringles. Despite his good will, he was nevertheless well aware that if he intended to endure the long, hard rides on horseback, he would have to grow accustomed to the saddle. He began to take riding lessons.

It was no easy task handling those unruly pampa steeds. They were never properly broken in to begin with, and the saddle and stirrups used in Patagonia were not easily mastered. This saddle was a broad, loose affair made up of several layers of sheepskin strapped down with the belly-band. The stirrups were made to accommodate only the toes, so that if the rider were thrown, as happened frequently in that rough country, his foot would not be caught and he himself dragged to his death. But if this kind of stirrup was made for safety, it certainly was not made for comfort.

To help him in his riding lessons he called on the services of Marcos Zanchetta, a servant of the residence, and an excellent horseman. He was also one of the most original characters in Patagonia.

One day, for instance, while Cagliero and the others were at lunch a guard rushed in. "Zanchetta is in prison!" he shouted. The only reaction the announcement raised was a laugh and the question: What had he done this time? All the guard could say was that it had something to do with horses. Quite possible, thought Cagliero, for Zanchetta was crazy about them. Setting out to investigate, he soon discovered why Zanchetta was in jail.

While everyone was at dinner, Zanchetta had slipped out, and, seeing no one around, had considered it a good moment to ride one of the horses that was browsing near the residence. In a trice he was on the back of one, and, grasping its mane, began to ride it around the patio. Then, so that no one would see him, he decided to take it to the plaza in front of the church. Round and round he galloped, rapidly increasing his speed.

"*Alto, la! Alto!*" Zanchetta soon found that he had company. A mounted guard rode up to him. The guard, mistaking him for a drunken *gaucho*\* out on a spree, placed him under arrest. Zanchetta began to make his excuses but the other refused to listen and dragged him off to jail. There he could explain everything to the proper authorities and if he was what he said he was, he would soon be free. Meanwhile . . .

It was some time before Cagliero could obtain the release of his servant.

With the aid and advice of Zanchetta, nevertheless, he progressed satisfactorily in his riding. Early one November morning, therefore, he boldly set off on his first trek into the interior, destination: Pringles. He was accompanied by Fr. Dominic Milanese, who had since returned from his long exploratory tour, by an Indian to take care of the five extra horses brought along as changes, and by Zanchetta. The Governor sent an armed soldier as escort. The party intended to follow the left bank of the Río Negro with their first stop at San Javier, a fortress nearly three hours off.

Before they reached their first stop, however, several incidents took place which helped initiate Cagliero into the difficulties of life in Patagonia.

\* Inter-marriage between the white and the Indian produced the *gaucho*, a romantic version of the cowboy, a carefree child of the pampa, devoted to his horse. Around him has been built a rich literature. Barbed-wire fences ended the era of the *gaucho*, and when he disappeared, the lowly and unromantic *peón* usurped his name but not his place.



Having enveloped himself in a comfortable *poncho* with his head protected from sun and sand by a beret, he entrusted his long clerical overcoat to Zanchetta. "Take good care of that," he warned. "It gets very cold here at night. Besides, it's part of my bishop's dress."

"Leave it to Zanchetta."

A dozen miles or so later, the spare horses grew restless. Suddenly they broke away and Zanchetta and the servant dashed after them. They were gone for more than an hour and during that time Cagliero and his companions had to wait in the open desert beneath a scorching sun. Finally, Zanchetta and the servant reappeared with the horses and the little band set off again. They had not gone much farther when Cagliero turned to Zanchetta. "Is my overcoat still there?"

A short pause. "Something must have happened to it, Bishop."

"I see. How about the portable altar? Perhaps something has happened to that, too?"

Another pause. "How *did* you guess, Bishop? Something *has* happened to that, too!"

Patiently Cagliero retraced his steps and found much of the material which had slipped from the packs and had been scattered about the pampa. But since there was neither road nor track to guide him, he soon abandoned the search. He never saw his overcoat again.

Later, while fording a sluggish river, his horse stumbled. To save himself from falling under the horse he jumped clear — only to land in mud up to his waist! Wading out, he went in search of water to wash off the mud; then he remounted, leaving the sun and wind to do the rest. Farther on, his horse, upset by the antics of the spares, began to buck and rear wildly. Down went Cagliero again! This time he had to take care to roll clear of the flying hoofs. But in a trice he jumped to his feet, seized the bridle, and leaped back into the saddle. The others clapped their hands

in admiration. He was learning the ways of the pampa.

"Is it always like this on your expeditions?" he asked Milanesio.

"Always, no; very often, yes. On my last journey the horse carrying our altar broke loose and we had the devil's own time trying to catch him. He stopped only when he was exhausted. About seventy miles farther on, the horse with the baggage took fright at something and galloped off. His pack worked loose, terrifying him still more. Rearing up in the air he threw our baggage — rosaries, medals, pictures, prayer-books, altar-stone, chalice, everything — to the four winds!"

Along the way Cagliero, anxious to find out all he could about his territory, took keen interest in everything he saw and heard. He discovered, for instance, that it certainly presented no panorama of beauty. In general, the landscape was made up of enormous beds of shingle interlaced with rivers filled with brakish, salt, or sweet water. What vegetation there was consisted of rolling stretches of tussock grass, thorn-bushes and, along the flanges of the Cordilleras, shaggy primeval forests.

"All this," Milanesio embraced the horizon with a sweep of his arm, "was known as the land of the puma and the jaguar. Fortunately, the puma doesn't usually attack humans. He prefers to prowl at night looking for sheep, slashing their throats and sucking their blood. The trouble is that once he does taste blood, he goes after the rest of the flock and leaves behind him dozens of slaughtered sheep. But the jaguar, the 'tiger of the pampas,' attacks anything. His favourite trick is to lie in ambush for a lone rider, leap down, sink his claws into his victim's neck and pull him to the ground."

"Are all the wild animals here as dangerous as that?"

"No; you have the guanaco. He's larger and more graceful than the northern llama, and has a more valuable skin. He travels in herds, swims well, and has quite a noble

air about him. But even when tamed he has an odd habit, if annoyed, of spitting foul-smelling saliva at his offender! His brothers, the vicuña and alpaca, inhabit the more northerly regions. Then we have the fox, the squirrel-like *zorrito*, or little wolf, the striped pampa cat, seals, penguins, condors, ostriches, partridges, armadillos . . . a real natural zoological garden! Excellent hunting, too."

Three hours later, they reached San Javier, a little town founded on the Río Negro by the *conquistadores*. It had no church, no cemetery, and, only since 1868, a small school. By pushing back the benches in the school-house a space was made for Cagliero and Milanésio. They would sleep on boards in a corner of the room; the others would sleep out under the stars.

As soon as they arrived, Milanésio ran a flag up the school flagpole. "The station doesn't have a bell," he explained. "So the Indians see the flag and ride in. Some of them ride three or four hours to get here. They either travel on horseback or bring their families and belongings on the *travois*."

At the close of the mission, one of the leading families invited the Bishop and his companions to a dinner of roast beef washed down by a draught of wine. Even though this was a special occasion, Cagliero found that there was no bread. An old Indian servant noticed what he was looking for, left the room, and returned with something wrapped in a white cloth. Slowly, almost reverently, she unwound the cloth and revealed her treasure — seven slices of bread, quite dry and in places even slightly moulded. These were passed around and eaten with great solemnity. Afterwards, the old woman carefully collected the crumbs, wrapped them up again and took them away with her.

This incident quickly taught him to forego both bread and wine — delicacies little known to the people of the pampas. So, too, were vegetables. Because of the abundance of cattle the most common food was meat, roasted, boiled or

raw. Rice and mandioca — a potato-like tuber — took the place of bread.

The party made several other halts before reaching the next station, Primera Angustura. Meanwhile, for the third time he had been thrown from his horse into a muddy river! At this station he administered baptism and distributed Communion. After that he blessed the wedding of a young couple. When the wedding was over, the guests moved into a large mud hut where a group of young men and — to his surprise — young women as well, were tuning up guitars and mandolins.

"I didn't think the girls here could play such instruments," he remarked to the father of the bride.

"They used to be content, like the gypsies, with playing tambourines," the man told him. "but not any more. We're getting civilized."

"Do they always have so many players?"

"Depends on the importance of the wedding. Some have only a harmonica, but anything goes as long as they can dance."

"They're keen on dancing?"

"Keen? At this affair they'll dance for two whole days!"

"Two whole days?" echoed Cagliero. "But might it not turn into something worse than a dance?"

"Usually does," said the other tersely.

Shaking his head, Cagliero entered the hut. Crude tallow candles, and lamps of lighted wicks floating in coconut shells filled with fat, had been set around the walls. Sitting down on the bleached skull of a steer he accepted a bowl of mate.

The family of the bridal couple then distributed mate to the guests, and since it was a festive occasion they added sugar. Servants began to start the log-fires under the spits.

"Plenty of roast beef, anyway," remarked Cagliero.

"They down enormous quantities," Milanesio told him. "And the rarer the better. Fowl and fish don't

come near it. Although the Indians and the poor settlers when they're hungry will eat anything — herbs, roots, some even with quite a stench. Drink anything, too. They'll even drink melted grease and tallow. We're lucky when we hit the rich estancias. They drink wine."

Both men watched the servants cut the carcass of a calf in two, pierce the sides with long iron bars, stick the bars firmly in the ground and barbecue the meat at the huge fires. When the meat was more or less cooked, the father of the bride drew his dagger, hacked off a generous helping and offered it, dripping with blood and fat, to Cagliero. The others followed. Not all the guests used knives to cut off their portions, however. Some simply tore off chunks with their fingers and stuffed the meat into their mouths.

Despite furtive attempts to hide them Cagliero also noticed bottles of the potent *aguardiente*, (fire-water), making the rounds. This worried him.

"Can't we do something to stop what's sure to follow all this drinking?" he whispered to Milanese. "They're bound to forget that matrimony is a sacrament."

"We can try," said Milanese, patiently, almost detached. And try he did, to limit the dance at least to one night; but it was futile. Cagliero then intervened, but the most he could get was a promise to hold off the dance until he left. Facing the inevitable, he concluded sadly that it would be better to withdraw. His failure hurt him more than he cared to admit. It was one more indication of the obstacles he needed to overcome, even among the Christians, in his task of conquering Patagonia for Christ.

After several minor adventures the party reached Pringles, their final destination. The Justice of the Peace, the Commissioner, and the other authorities welcomed him. They welcomed any kind of diversion in that lonely spot. Although he stayed four days preaching, the results were far from what he had expected. But he was not discouraged. He was well aware that on this trip he was merely planting

the good seed. There would be other trips, better organized, with more men to handle them, and, he hoped, with better harvests for the Faith.

Leaving Pringles, he set out on the return journey, and 25 days later, wearily slid off a tired horse outside his residence in Patagones. He had withstood his baptism of fire; he had seen at first hand the difficulties and the dangers, the shortcomings and the potentialities of his vicariate. He was ready for what lay ahead.

## 9. El Zorro—The Wolf

"Excellency. A priest, Cagliero, to see you. He says he has an appointment."

"Show him in."

The secretary flung the door open and the large figure of Cagliero, followed by the taller, sparser Costamagna entered the room. In a quick first glance Cagliero noted the rich red wallpaper, the ceiling of gold, a crystal chandelier, and several odd pieces of walnut furniture. The next thing he saw was the figure of President Roca... He was standing at the front of his desk, his legs spread out, and his hands dug deep into his pockets, every inch of his stocky figure that of a soldier, a martinet. He shook hands with Cagliero and for a moment, the two men calmly took the measure of each other. Then Roca strode back to his chair behind the desk and sat down. Pointedly, he did not invite his visitors to be seated.

"Not a good beginning," thought Cagliero. "Yet so much depends on the outcome of this meeting!" Inhaling deeply, he braced himself...

He had left his mission for Buenos Aires on January 5, 1886. His principal reason was to visit all the Salesian opera-

tions for, besides being Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia, he was also the direct representative of Don Bosco in South America. Entrusted with the material welfare of the new Society, he was also custodian of the spirit Don Bosco wanted established among his followers. While in the capital, he preached several retreats to the Salesians and to the Sisters, conferred orders on several clerics, and ordained five new priests. But what gave him most satisfaction was the reception into the Society of ten new local members, "almost all of them Americans!"

Because of the heavy debts incurred in the rapid development of the Society, he forbade the opening of new houses. One exception was La Plata. The conditions under which this house was offered were so advantageous that it would have been foolish not to have accepted. While he was arranging the distribution of personnel for areas now as widely separated as Chile, Uruguay, Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego, word was brought to him that President Roca would see him that same day, January 10, at his residence.

That afternoon, dressed as a simple priest, so as not to rouse Roca's ire, he hurried with his usual fast pace along Calle Victoria with Costamagna at his side. So engrossed was he with the coming meeting that he was completely unaware of the beauty of the autumn evening, of the reddening sun, or of the russet leaves that carpeted his way.

"When I think of the fate of the Apostolic Delegate," he remarked to his companion. "I feel more inclined to call this an encounter!"

Julius Argentino Roca was one of the country's great Presidents. Known now as the "Conqueror of the Desert" he had behind him a brilliant military and political record. After the example of his father, his whole life had been spent under arms. He had fought as captain against Paraguay and had distinguished himself for his courage and his knowledge of the art of war, for he was not only a brave soldier,



but also an assiduous student of military history. While only a colonel, he had been given command of the entire government forces against Arredondo. His defeat of Arredondo at Santa Rosa became a subject of study in military textbooks. He was finally awarded the supreme command of the Army of the Republic. After subduing Tejedor in a pitched battle which littered the streets of Buenos Aires with dead, he was elected President, and skilfully settled the vexed question of the status of Buenos Aires by making it the capital, as well as a federal district.

At forty-three, of medium height, with the spade-shaped beard he had worn since his youth, his beard and speech had a military flavour. His strong features, especially his flashing eyes, bespoke energy and resolution. The people had nicknamed him "the Wolf." Nevertheless, he still retained some of the "all heart and brain" which had characterized him since his soldiering days.

"Excellency," began Costamagna, "I should like to introduce Monsignor John Cagliero, the founder of the Salesian work in South America."

Roca glared at Cagliero. "Are you a bishop?" he asked abruptly.

"I am, Excellency."

"But you are not one of my countrymen?"

"No."

"Don't you know our laws? No foreigner can be made a bishop of Argentina."

"I do, Excellency but. . ."

"Don't you know, too, that the Pope can't send bishops here without my permission? Have you forgotten Matera?"

"No, Excellency," insisted Cagliero patiently. "But perhaps I should explain that I am only a titular bishop and my title comes from a place in Asia Minor which not even I can find! I'm a missionary bishop who visits the Salesian foundations of which I am superior. For the rest, everything

else is under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires. I am in Argentina for one thing only: to take care of the children of the people, to teach them useful trades and how to run their farms. After all, Your Excellency has already welcomed to Argentina so many Italian workers. Perhaps you can take in one more." Here Cagliero was subtly reminding Roca that he himself was the son of Italian immigrants.

Roca tried not to smile at Cagliero's way of putting it. "We've been working in Argentina for several years now," added Costamagna. "Your Excellency may remember the expedition I made with you to the Río Negro." He went on to mention one or two incidents of the expedition of 1879, the dangers that Roca and his men had faced. . . . Roca lowered his head for a moment. Costamagna had touched a tender chord. Those had been the days of some of his greatest triumphs.

"Very well, very well," he said gruffly. "But I understand you people belong to a religious organization."

"In a way we do, Excellency," said Cagliero. "But may I point out that on the advice of such eminent statesmen as Cavour and Ratazzi we are organized so as to retain all the duties and rights of citizenship, and to fit in perfectly with the ideas of modern society—especially since we dedicate ourselves to the most precious part of any growing nation: the children of the people."

"Don Bosco must be a wise man," said Roca.

"Don Bosco is a saint," said Cagliero.

"I suppose so," Roca agreed. "I've already had some correspondence with him in which I promised I would. . . ." He stopped. His whole manner changed; he waved his arm in a friendly gesture. "Tell me," he said, "what are you going to do in Buenos Aires, in the pampas, in Patagonia?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you all that in a moment or two," said Cagliero.

"Then draw up a couple of chairs," said Roca, "and take your own time."

"We began our work for poor boys," said Cagliero sitting down, "in a little house in *La Boca*..." He described briefly his early days in Argentina, the hardships he had suffered, the difficulties he had overcome. It took some time to tell the story, but Roca listened attentively to the end. Then he rose and held out his hand to Cagliero.

"Shake hands," he said brusquely. "From now on we're going to be good friends. I'll see to it that the government helps your work."

In view of Roca's favourable reaction, Cagliero decided to advance a suggestion which, if well received, would have far-reaching consequences.

"Excellency," he said, "with your permission I'd like to bring up a point which I hope will afford you, as a son of Argentina and a son of the Church, great consolation."

"What is that?"

"For a long time now, Excellency, Don Bosco at Rome — where he is not without influence — and myself in Buenos Aires, have been working to obtain two auxiliary bishops. And don't you think it would be a fine thing for Argentina if one of her sons were made a prince of the Church?"

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" Roca made no attempt to hide his pleasure.

Cagliero continued: "In the event that two more bishops were appointed whom do you think would be the men most suited?" He held his breath. Suppose Roca were to name two candidates other than those Don Bosco had already proposed to the Holy See?

Roca tugged at his beard. Then he raised his head and fixed Cagliero with his bright eyes: "Espinosa and Boneo."

For a moment Cagliero wondered if Roca heard his sigh of relief. Roca had chosen the very candidates he and Don Bosco had in mind! Riding on the tide of Roca's

satisfaction, he took an important step further. "Excellency, don't you think it a pity that Argentina, a country which the Pope loves as his own, should have broken off relations with the Holy See?"

"Argentina didn't break off any relations," growled Roca. "That was all Matera's fault. What happened was a personal matter between him and me."

"Would you allow me to say that to the Holy Father?"

Roca shrugged his shoulders to show that he had no objection.

"Would your Excellency be willing to re-establish relations?"

"I tell you they were never broken off!" repeated Roca testily. "But if you think something has to be done to set matters right again, why, go ahead."

With that the visit ended. Roca again held out his hand to Cagliero. "We're going to be good friends," he repeated, and insisted on accompanying him to the door.

Delighted with the success of the meeting, Cagliero immediately informed the Salesian Procurator in Rome of what had happened and instructed him to get in touch at once with the Cardinal Secretary of State. This was the first step towards repairing the rift between the Holy See and Argentina, and Cagliero's first success in the diplomatic field. These were not the only dealings he would have with Roca, he knew, on this and many other matters intimately affecting both the Church in general, and his mission in particular. Would they all turn out as successful as this?

After such an interview, the way was now cleared for Cagliero's conquest of Patagonia. He set sail on May 1, 1886, for Patagones, taking with him, besides a personal recommendation to Governor Vintter from Roca, four more Salesians and three Sisters whose passages had been paid for by the Ministry of War. It was a cold day and it was raining heavily as he sailed out of Buenos Aires, but it

would have taken more than bad weather to dampen his new enthusiasm.

As soon as he landed in Patagones another pleasant surprise awaited him. The son of the cacique Sayhueque, accompanied by a brother-in-law and an interpreter, came to visit him. They were not dressed as Indians but wore nondescript European clothes with ponchos thrown over their shoulders.

"Bishop, I bring you greetings from my father and my people." The son of the cacique spoke as if he were repeating a lesson. "We already know something of the Christian religion and I have come in their name to salute its leader." He bowed stiffly and handed Cagliero a calling card of the military commandant of his area.

Cagliero was delighted to make such promising contacts. "Tell your father," he said, "that we are always ready to help him and his people, either by sending a missionary, or in any other way. How many are in your tribe?"

"One thousand and seven hundred in ours and eight hundred in the neighboring Yanchuche."

The Bishop offered his hand and the son of the cacique held it for a moment. "May I ask you in my father's name to send someone to instruct us?"

"Tell your father I shall go there myself," replied Cagliero without hesitation. A picture was forming in his mind of the good to be done among these tribes.

The first of the Indians Cagliero met were a group of twenty-three who were ready to receive baptism and confirmation. They presented themselves in cast-off army uniforms given them for the occasion by the officers who, largely because of the missionary's efforts, no longer regarded them as savages. After Milanésio had baptized them, they approached the altar where Cagliero was waiting to confirm them. Hymns were sung by friends and relatives who had

come to witness the ceremonies and afterward the new Christians were given a holiday.

The next day a second but very different group of Sayhueque came for baptism. The faces of these men were lined with age and the scars they had received in the days when they had terrorized Patagonia with their *malones*. Their appearance was not improved by their ragged shirts and pants. Full of sympathy, Cagliero whispered something to Milanese, who returned with a large parcel. As each one was confirmed, the Bishop reached over to the parcel, took out a cloak and placed it gently over the Indian's shoulders. After such a gesture, the Indians would have gone to war again, this time for the Bishop!

The invitation he had accepted to visit the tribes up the Río Negro was only one reason which decided him to undertake an expedition that would bring him across the Cordilleras and into Chile—a journey that would include two thousand miles travel by horse! Don Bosco wanted him to open a foundation in Chile where both schools and parishes had been offered; and he was anxious to visit as many parts of his enormous vicariate as possible in order to make a report to the Holy See. This trip, besides everything else, would tell him what help he needed from Don Bosco, and would show him where to open strategic centers for the development of the mission.

After several weeks of preparation he finally set out on November 12, 1886, by boat for Roca, almost 300 miles up the Río Negro. There, Milanese, Panaro and Zanchetta were to meet him with horses and whatever else was needed for the expedition.

On the same day another expedition, perhaps the second most important for the young Society, set out from Buenos Aires for the most southerly part of South America: Tierra del Fuego. This was a government expedition headed by

Señor Ramon Lista, and included in it was the first Prefect Apostolic of that territory, Monsignor Joseph Fagnano.

Joseph Fagnano came from the village of Monferrato, Italy, and as a boy was soon caught up in the wave of fierce patriotism which heralded the birth of *La Nuova Italia*, the New Italy. Even as a seminarian he became fired with the idea then sweeping the majority of his countrymen off their feet — an Italy, one and free. Since he was a seminarian but was anxious to aid the government, he volunteered for Garibaldi's legion as an infirmarian. Garibaldi himself gave public testimony of his courage. That same courage, however, eventually involved him in a head-on collision with the members of Garibaldi's forces who were openly against religion. His utter disregard for rank when it came to defending his faith, caused dissension in the legion.

Finally, Garibaldi summoned him. "Fagnano," he said. "You're a brave man and a sincere one. But your defense of religion in quarters where religion doesn't count any more is causing trouble. Since you want to help your country, I suggest you join the regular army. There, things will not be so difficult for you — or for us."

Fagnano did join the regular army, but found there so much irreligion and immorality that he asked to be transferred to a hospital. The hospital to which he was transferred was now billeted in his old seminary, the seminarians having moved to Don Bosco's Oratory in Turin. At this point, Fagnano's vocation underwent a crisis. Should he carry on with the army or should he join his companions now studying with Don Bosco? Although his pastor had painted Don Bosco and his work in glowing terms, he himself had not been favourably impressed by the saint. In the end, however, he made up his mind to go to Turin.

Once in the Oratory, however, he did not by any means fall under the spell of the saint's personality. On the contrary, he avoided Don Bosco as much as possible; and, unlike the others, never went to confession to him. His companions,

noticing this, teased him about it at first, then finally accused him of being afraid of going to confession to the saint. This was enough to oblige Fagnano to go to Don Bosco at least once.

Eye-witnesses say that when he did go he put on a bravado air as he knelt down in the confessional. It was of the open type where both penitent and priest can be seen but not overheard. As the confession progressed the watchers, to their amazement, saw Fagnano's head bend lower and lower until it rested completely on Don Bosco's shoulder, and Fagnano's eyes filled with tears.

When he rose he was evidently under deep emotional stress. As he brushed past his companions, all he said was, "I'm staying here. As long as I live I shall never leave Don Bosco." He kept his word. When he finished his studies at the Oratory, he should have followed his companions to his own diocese. But he stayed on. He left Don Bosco's side only to accompany Cagliero to South America.

He was appointed director of the school at San Nicholas. Later he was chosen to establish the first Salesian house in Patagonia. "Indefatigable," is how Cagliero described him to Don Bosco, crediting Fagnano with preparing the way for him in Patagonia.

Fagnano departed from Buenos Aires with the Lista Expedition to found a new mission — a difficult undertaking in a difficult part of the world. The measure of his success can be gauged from the number of monuments, public and private, churches, schools, centers, roads, streets, squares (even a great lake) named after him, in the once forbidding region known as Tierra del Fuego.



## 10. Disaster in the Cordilleras

After spending the first two months of 1887 in the pampas, Cagliero took time out to write to Don Bosco from Chichinales, his base far up the Río Negro, "We have just finished our mission among the Sayhueque. We live in a *rancho* of poles, mud, and branches. But this is still not half as exposed as the *toldos* of the Indians. The commandant of the fort and I dine together, but like good soldiers we eat only the regular rations of beef and rice. A tree trunk serves for a table, the skull of a steer for a stool.

"Our greatest satisfaction comes when every evening the Indians ride in for instruction. Last night the son of a Yanchuche chief told me that since his people were becoming Christian he wanted to join them. He renounced polygamy and received baptism from my own hands. The same thing happened with the oldest son of Sayhueque and several other chiefs. Even Sayhueque himself helped us instruct the members of his family, urging them to become Christians. He, however, still holds back."

"There was one moment when I felt sure I had broken down his resistance. Then something unfortunate occurred. The government announced that it was taking eighty fami-

lies from his tribe to work on a project two hundred miles away. The Indians suspected that this was part of an overall plan to crush them. They still remembered the years when the soldiers had stolen their goods and cattle, had taken the older boys for the army, and given the children to white families. They rose up in protest. The cacique told me how one infuriated father had seized his child by the feet and swinging it like a club against a cart, had dashed out its brains! 'You devils,' he had cried, 'I'll make sure you won't get this one!'

"It took a long time to convince them that the government was really granting them a favor, since it now considered them entitled to share in the country's growing prosperity. But the cacique was still too upset to be in the mood for baptism."

"Several other caciques came to us but when they heard that they would have to give up their many wives, they went away sorrowing. We had our hands full, anyway, instructing and baptising the families who were to leave with the government expedition. In all, we baptised 400 children and confirmed 900 adults, a total of 1,300 out of a population of 1,700."

In his stay among these tribes he had his first experience with their superstitions. The Indians of Patagonia have neither priests nor temples, nor, indeed, any form of organized religion. They simply believe in one spirit who does good, and another who does evil. They have only one public act of cult and that is the *camarujo* held to request, or thank for a favour. Privately, however, most of their attention was given to placating the evil spirit.

In the great drought which occurred while he was on his long trek, the Indians decided that they had better placate the evil spirit if they were to get rain. In charge of the arrangements they placed a witch who in those very days was taking instruction for baptism! Her pock-marked face was

so rugged and her nature so wild that the Indians nicknamed her *el hombre*, "the man."

After locking up two boys in a hut for three days, she mounted them on roan and white horses before presenting them to the assembly as intermediaries between them and the evil spirit. The Indians greeted them with *tamboriles*, or drums, and *trutucos*, trumpets made from the horns of bulls and long reeds. No one was to leave the place for three days and they were to meet twice daily to placate the spirit.

On the first day they offered prayers and libations. After that, they skinned a cow, gave the warm blood to the children, and ate the meat roasted, washed down with generous draughts of *pulcu*, a potent liquor brewed from apples and herbs. On the second day, while yet under the effects of the liquor they doused one another at the river bank with buckets of water and danced in circles with wild shouts and cries. On the third day they caught a bull, cut off its ears, and chased it into the desert as a scapegoat for their sins. Meanwhile the drinking continued.

The witch had promised them rain on the third day and when the time came, but there was no sign of rain, she found herself in trouble. Sometimes, when the witch fails in her task, the Indians are apt to believe that the evil spirit has taken possession of her. Then, to rid themselves of it they even kill her. While visiting the prisons of Viedma, Cagliero himself had come across five young Indians who, for this very reason, had stomped a witch to death.

In this instance, however, the witch persuaded them to wait a few more days. When the only thing that followed was a furious *pampero*, she sent them on their way, assuring them that rain would fall as soon as they reached their toldos. On the strength of that feeble promise, the Indians disconsolately drifted homewards.

"It was also while on this mission that I witnessed the last *camarujo*. We had already baptized and confirmed the

older boys and girls, and the women were waiting for the men to return from the hunt, to receive baptism together. In fact, while we were waiting, the Indians rode in, their horses laden with meat already seasoned in the salt lakes and dried in the sun. Since the two tribes wanted to thank the good spirit, Yanchuche, who had already received baptism, asked me for permission to hold the *camarujo*. I suggested, instead, that they attend Mass. He agreed, rather reluctantly, I felt.

"Not so, however, Sayhueque. Already suspecting that I wouldn't grant permission, he said nothing and withdrew."

"The following Sunday I waited for the hundred and more Sayhueque youngsters to come to catechism. Not a single one appeared. I did notice that at the bottom of the valley, however, a great swarm of people and a group of horsemen, almost hidden by swirling dust, were riding around in circles, waving spears. After a moment's hesitation, I decided that this was no time for compromise; I would have to act boldly. I sent a message for the cacique to come to see me at once, and he rode up, accompanied by his two sons and a few other chiefs. I remarked on the horsemen, and wondered if it had anything to do with the *camarujo*, reminding him casually that most of his tribe were already baptized, and the remainder under instruction. If they were gathered to thank God for their successful hunt, I told him, well and good; but in that case it was not the cacique who should preside but their Bishop. Since my 'staff' at that moment consisted of three missionaries, a catechist, the commandant of the garrison, and three majors; and the cacique's of only a few minor chiefs, he must have figured he was out-staffed! At any rate, he dropped his usual fierce pose and humbly requested permission to hold the feast only for that day and night. But because of the abuses I knew would follow, I objected, adding that he should not displease his old friend, the Bishop. He rode off saying that he would stop rightaway.

"Not trusting him too much I followed him and arrived just when shouts and cries were rising here and there and the horsemen were forming circles — all preliminaries to their wild dance. As soon as I showed up, however, the children scampered off, the women stopped dancing, and because it would never do to offend the Bishop, the men also withdrew. This was the last time they ever celebrated the *camarujó*, or called in the witch."

The mission with the Sayhueque and Yanchuche tribes ended, Cagliero's expedition drew out of Chinchinales, nosed their horses into the water, and fording the Río Negro, headed for Roca.

The few inhabitants of Roca, Cagliero noted, lived mainly at the expense of the government and were harassed by a merciless wind that swept through the settlement like a hurricane. The desert *pampero* could quickly whip up blinding sandstorms so dense that they hid the sun. Even the *conquistadores* complained about the *pampero*. Don Pedro de Mendoza, assisted on his bed of pain by Rodrigo de Cepeda, brother of St. Theresa, wrote before he died: "The year 1536. The end of autumn. At three in the afternoon. The *pampero* whistles through the cracks in the walls, forcing into our hut the bitter cold of the desert..." Depressed by the sight, Cagliero wondered if the place could stay on the map much longer. After a short visit to Roca he pushed westward for several hundred miles into the difficult terrain of the pre-Cordilleras where there were no roads, only paths and goat tracks.

He reached this region in March. This meant that he had already spent three months travelling in the most trying weather. During this time he had visited the scattered bands living along the banks of the rivers and had mapped out sites for several new mission stations.

This part of the Cordilleras of the Andes is heavily rain-swept, a condition which dwellers of the dust-dry pampas would welcome, but which in turn, brings on other natural

disasters that plague Chile. The abundance of rain is caused by the prevalent humid winds from the Pacific that are forced upwards by the mountains. The ascent up these mountains and through the passes, difficult at any time, in the cold and wet season, is negotiable only by seasoned horsemen. Before beginning the ascent of the forbidding *Cordillera del Viento*, they decided to provide for a change of fresh horses.

Although Cagliero did not relish riding a strange mount, there was no help for it; a tired horse could never have made that difficult climb. At daybreak the party rose and were soon astride the mounts, their destination a pass in the Andes, 200 miles to the north. Several merchants attached themselves to the Bishop's party. It was common custom for travelers to band together for safety when crossing those dangerous regions.

In silence, they began to climb the mountains of *Malal Cawall* or Corral of the Horses. Here the Cordilleras are full of spent volcanoes, mountain ridges, and craggy rocks. They had not gone more than a couple of miles when suddenly Cagliero's mount, for no apparent reason shied, bolted, and to his horror, headed straight for a precipice!

"Save me, Mother of God!" he cried.

As the horse zig-zagged in and out among the boulders he sighted a place to jump, kicked the stirrups clear and flung himself sideways. Landing on the ground with a thud, he rolled over once or twice, then lay still. His horse, instead, continued its mad dash down the mountainside until finally it stumbled, shot over the precipice, and crushed itself to death on the rocks below.

The others ran up and knelt down beside Cagliero. At first, when they spoke to him, he did not answer. Then he stirred, opened his eyes, and moaned. When he did regain his voice all he said was: "*Nada. Nada.* It's nothing, nothing!"

When the tears welled in Milanesio's eyes, Cagliero began to scold him. "Don't start acting like a woman! It's nothing, I tell you. Now stop crying." He attempted to move,

but the pain was too severe. "I must have broken a rib or two. Doesn't matter, I still have plenty to spare."

Since it was too dangerous to move him, they made a rough bed on the spot and sent word back to Lucas Becarra at whose home they had rested along the way. He was reputed to have some knowledge of medicine, and when he arrived he knelt to examine the wounded man.

"All right, Bishop?"

"Of course. But I need a blacksmith."

"Blacksmith? Whatever for?"

"To mend my broken rib!"

"Of course," agreed Lucas, a little confused by the humor at such a moment.

As the morning wore on, the Bishop's temperature rose, giving him a feverish thirst; and obliging them to send scouts a couple of miles for water. After some discussion, Milanesio decided to return him to Neuquén.

"How shall we carry him?" asked Lucas.

"I'm afraid he'll have to ride."

They hoisted him into the saddle of the quietest horse, riding close to hold him erect, and choosing the smoothest path possible over the uneven ground. "All for Don Bosco," commented Cagliero every time his horse jolted him painfully.

After three miles of this, he was suffering so intensely they dismounted him off the horse and laid him on a hastily made bed of branches and blankets in an abandoned hut.

The broken ribs now began pressing against his lungs, making even his breathing painful. "Oh!" he moaned, "if only my old bellows would blow better!" Later when Milanesio gave orders to move on he tried to rise but fell back in a faint. After a few minutes rest, however, he opened his eyes again. "Let's go," he said weakly.

They forded the Neuquén with difficulty and several times the wounded man almost fell into the water. Night came on them as they forced their way down through the trees and

undergrowth, but they kept going, spurred on by the sound of Cagliero's labored breathing. Wading across another river, the Neuheve — a risky business at any time — provided the party that night with a frightening experience. Every moment of the crossing the water threatened to engulf both horses and riders. It was two o'clock the following morning before they halted outside the home of Lucas.

At once the house took on the semblance of a field hospital, and Lucas revealed a surprising ability with natural medicines. With one concoction he lowered his patient's temperature, with a second he lessened the pain, and with a third he put Cagliero into a deep, restful sleep. Meanwhile, no time was lost in foraging for food to nourish him.

These warm-hearted efforts soon produced their effect. On March 12 the Bishop rose for the first time, and the following day insisted upon administering confirmation to members of the household. He was a little premature, however, for a sudden relapse sent him back to bed.

Two weeks later, the door of his room was thrown open and in strode a man dressed like a *gaucho*, his *poncho* covered with dust.

"Rabagliati!" exclaimed Cagliero. "Where on earth did you come from?"

"From Chile."

"Impossible! How did you get here?"

"I raced all the way on horseback. Everybody there is convinced that you were killed."

"How did they get that impression?"

"Well, to start with, you're long overdue. Then we received word that you were dead." He quoted a message from a Franciscan missionary: "I have just received a letter from Father Milanesio reporting an accident — a fall which proved fatal to the Bishop. It occurred on March 3, at 8 a.m., three days ride outside Chillán (Chile) in the *Cordillera del Viento*."

What had happened to cause such an impression?



Before the expedition left Patagones, Cagliero had arranged for six Salesians to leave Buenos Aires for Concepción, Chile. He calculated that by the time they arrived he would have terminated his mission and would have reached Concepción in time to open the new school. In fact, he had telegraphed from Roca: "Let the six leave. They should arrive in the first days of March. I shall reach there first or at least in time for the inauguration."

The six Salesians reached their destination in due course and waited the arrival of the Bishop. The days went by, but still there was no sign of him. On March 14, a message was flashed to Patagones asking for news of his whereabouts. When there was no reply, everybody became anxious. He was needed, not only for the inauguration of the schools, but also for the consecration of the newly-appointed bishop of the diocese, Monsignor Blaitt. In desperation, enquiries were sent out to priests along the frontier, and military outposts were alerted. Finally, word arrived from the Franciscan.

The next day Rabagliati, superior of the new house in Concepción, set out for the Cordilleras, accompanied by a doctor. One look at the forbidding Cordilleras, however, their snow-capped peaks looking like the white fangs of a hungry puma, was enough to convince the doctor that he was needed elsewhere. Rabagliati, to guide him, had a boy who was only vaguely familiar with the mountain paths. Nevertheless, he had decided to go ahead.

Cagliero was shocked when he heard the interpretation his friends had put on the events. "Let's go at once," he said.

"At once?" Señor Lucas cocked a dubious eye.

Cagliero looked at him and smiled. "On the 28th?"

Lucas pursed his lips for a moment. Then he, too, smiled. "On the 28th."

On the appointed day, therefore, the expedition, surrounded by a crowd of Indians who came to see him off, drew out of the settlement. It was slow going for Cagliero

was not completely cured. Indeed, that night, after a hard day's riding, he almost fainted. Once again, too, the horse that carried his luggage bucked and scattered it to the four winds. In gathering it together again, Zanchetta — true to form! — lost the Bishop's shoes and Cagliero had to travel the rest of the way in his slippers.

The next camp was pitched on the top of a high mountain where cold winds moaned about them and they hugged the rocks for shelter. Unable to sleep all night, they were up before dawn. During the morning, the pack-horses broke loose and it took several hours to round them up again. At one point, where a narrow path across the mountain-face forced them to dismount and lead the horses, Cagliero heard a noise like an avalanche tumbling down the mountainside. He froze. Had one of his men gone over? No; it was only a mule — but again it was the one that carried his luggage! They found the mule lying dead at the bottom of a deep ravine.

At another point they could not even walk! On hands and knees they had to inch across jutting rocks, well aware that one slip would send them tumbling to their death. It was a long time before they reached the bottom and when they did, they had to call a halt before attacking the forest that lay ahead. This was so dense it was almost impossible to force the horses through it. It took twelve hours of exhausting march before they broke into an open plain and saw the lighted window of an *estancia*. They had finally reached their destination! It was the end of all the fatigue, the strain, the despair, and the danger. Cagliero could have wept for joy!

The owner of the ranch declared a holiday to celebrate the Bishop's arrival; the farm hands brought gifts of fruit, eggs and chickens. Cagliero blessed them and gave them medals of Mary Help of Christians and with the other members of his expedition spent the next few days regaining his strength.

On the morning of his departure he was wakened by a great noise. Looking out of his window, he saw a crowd of people moving excitedly about the courtyard, evidently waiting for someone. A moment later, enveloped in a great swirl of dust, two horsemen in Franciscan garb dashed in at the head of forty other horsemen who expertly drew rein and dismounted.

"Where's the Bishop?" they roared. "We've come to welcome him to Chile!"

Cagliero at once boarded a berlin-type coach prepared for him and escorted by the horsemen, headed for Chillán. It certainly was a warm welcome to Chilean territory. And there was more to come, for along the way he was met by families and settlements, and rode under arches of flowers. . .

On April 17th, he was greeted at the door of the Franciscan church by the entire community of eighty Franciscans. The people, too, having heard of his narrow escape, crowded around him. The next day, despite orders that he should rest after his ordeal, he boarded a train and a few hours later rode into Concepción.

From his base at Concepción, Cagliero began a series of visits to the outlying areas, baptizing, confirming, ordaining, and laying the foundations of future works. He endeared himself so much to the people that Bishop Blaitt embraced him publicly on the steps of the cathedral. "Don't worry because he's leaving you," he told the little band of Salesians. "You may be losing one father, but you'll find another in me."

He was received in Santiago, the capital, by the President of Chile who grew so enthusiastic over the arrival of the Salesians that he offered to make the Society a juridical body. Diplomatically, however, Cagliero declined on the grounds that if a revolution ever took place, the Society would find itself in jeopardy, and in danger of losing all its property.

His stay in Chile lasted a month and a half and was so successful, Rabagliati wrote, that he could have opened twenty houses. With his mission in Chile accomplished, it was time to return to Argentina. Hearing that, despite his accident, he intended to cross the Cordilleras again, his friends protested, insisting that he should go by boat.

"I may be a bishop," he told them, "but I'm still poor. A boat-ride all the way round Argentina is an expensive item for a poor man." He had hardly finished speaking when he was handed two first-class tickets to Montevideo.

Accompanied by Fagnano, who had come up to meet him at Valparaiso, he boarded the *S S Magellan Liverpool* which brought him down the west coast and through the Straits of Magellan. On May 24, they sailed past Punta Arenas, the center of Fagnano's mission. Because of the dangerously high seas — not unusual in Tierra del Fuego — he was unable to land, and had to content himself with waving a blessing from the ship.

Two weeks later he was in Buenos Aires and at once called a meeting of the superiors in which it was resolved that the two provinces which the Society now had in South America would assume the responsibility of helping the mission of Patagonia since this had been the original intention of Don Bosco. That done, he took his leave of his friends in the capital and set out by the overland route to Patagonia. He made the journey from Buenos Aires to Bahía Blanca by train in 28 hours. From Bahía to Patagonia, there was no train, only the *galera*, or stagecoach which, after the horse, was the most popular means of transportation in the inhabited south. On this particular trip he was somewhat sobered by the sight of another *galera* lying upside down in the Río Colorado, a further reminder — if he still needed one! — of the dangers of travel in Patagonia.

Eight months after setting out on this tour of his vicariate, he entered Patagones on July 1887 to receive a hero's welcome from the entire community — including the mem-

bers of the municipality. Thus the historic expedition which had begun in difficulty, had braved innumerable dangers and had almost ended in disaster, ended, instead, in triumph!

While passing through Buenos Aires he had made arrangements for another trip to Europe. There was more than one good reason for the journey at this time. He had to find more men and more money for the new mission stations he had planned, and he had to make in person a report on his vicariate to the Holy Father. Besides this, there was also an equally strong but perhaps less tangible reason: he confessed that at times he felt a strange inner compulsion to leave at once because Don Bosco needed him.

## 11. Death of a Dreamer

Although not so well informed as those close to Don Bosco, Cagliero had plenty of evidence on which to base his belief.

Of course there had often been rumors in the past that Don Bosco was about to die. In 1885 one such report flashed across Europe and thousands of his friends began to pray for his recovery.

One newspaper, the *Northern Echo* of Lille, went a little further than mere rumor. "We all remember," it reported, "Don Bosco's visit to Paris twelve years ago. A short time after that he left for America and, according to the Italian newspapers, died there within a few days of his arrival. It is now known that his death was kept secret so as not to compromise a certain political party of which he was the life and soul."

"Don Bosco is dead!" Two months later the newspapers again took up the cry. On that same day, March 13, he rose from his bed for the first time in many weeks to meet the crowds who gathered to find out for themselves if he were still alive.

A roar went up when he appeared: "Viva Don Bosco!"

He raised his hand for silence. "I see that you have had me dead for some time — and in Buenos Aires at that! Then

you killed me again in Marseilles and in Paris, and this morning, for the third time, in Turin. The truth is, as you see, that I am not only alive but am even now preparing for another journey to France."

This had been no idle boast, for within a few days he was welcomed in Nice by crowds who had come either to receive his blessing, or just to look upon a saint. During this visit he cured a woman who for years had been unable to move her arms. At his insistence, she had clapped her hands and cried, "Mary Help of Christians, pray for us!" . . . And after a successful fund-raising tour of France he had returned very much alive to the Oratory.

But this time Cagliero had more than rumors to go on. His correspondence from the Oratory itself became more and more foreboding.

"Don Bosco does not feel too well . . ." "He says that he is always tired." "He finds it difficult to breathe . . . worn out with fatigue . . . bent over . . . He complains that he cannot take on any more work."

"He can stand only with difficulty and moves along at a snail's pace. Each day he grows more silent, content to let others do the talking, especially when it touches on the missions and on his Monsignor Cagliero. He is easily moved. When any of us visit him he is very sad when we leave."

"We presented him with a portrait of his mother by Rollini. It is really Mamma Margaret; it lacks only the power of speech! You remember those days? — the spinet? — the vegetable garden we trampled on? — the way she used to scold us? . . ."

Don Rua wrote: "We received the consoling news that you had recovered from your fall. *Caro Monsignore*, we tried to sweeten the bitter pill for Don Bosco. Nevertheless, he remained in great anxiety until word arrived of your complete recovery."

But it was the last letter that decided Cagliero: "We expect you without fail for the coming year. Poor Don Bosco

cannot bear to stay away any longer from his favorite son. He says that he has prepared a large group of missionaries for you but you will have to come yourself to get them . . ."

Accompanied by his secretary, by Mother A. Vallese and Sister Theresa Mazzarello, who had to attend a meeting of their General Chapter, he brought with him a little Indian girl of the Oneta tribe who had been rescued together with other savages by Fagnano. In a last-moment decision he also invited a missionary named Fr. John Cassini.

On the long journey across the Atlantic he often strode the decks meditating on the coming end of Don Bosco. Apart from personal reasons — and they were many — he was deeply moved; for this was no ordinary man who was passing away. This man had left his mark on many people and many events.

If he himself was here was it not because of one of Don Bosco's dreams? Was not the whole work of the two religious congregations the result of another! Had he not foretold a future for South America which even the great Liberators had not dared to imagine! When all he had to go on was a group of poor and ill-instructed boys of the Oratory, had he not foreseen that one of them would be a bishop? And no one, not his nearest confidant, not even Cagliero, himself, was fully aware of the extent of these visions. They were acquainted with only what Don Bosco thought fit to reveal. Did any of them know how much of the wise and illuminated guidance they received was the result of mere human prudence, how much the result of direct inspiration from above?

He had hoped to be in Turin by December 4 to assist at the departure of a group of missionaries assigned to work among the Jívaros of Equador. Unfortunately, bad weather kept him from reaching the Oratory until December 7, 1887, the fourth anniversary of his consecration.

His meeting with Don Bosco was memorable. When he entered the room, the saint with difficulty began to rise, but



Cagliero stopped him, dropped on his knees and embraced him. When Don Bosco held him close, kissed his ring, and wept silently, Cagliero saw for himself how near death was. During the past four months Don Bosco had insisted on continuing his work but it was sheer will power that kept him going. "As long as I have strength," he insisted. "I shall spend it for the good of my boys." Typical of this attitude was his concern for the older boys of the Oratory. Over protests, he had risen from bed to hear their confessions. "It's the last time and I wouldn't like to disappoint them."

Messages kept pouring in from all over the world. Hundreds of friends, from Oratory boys to important people in the world, even members of the hierarchy, offered their lives for him.

Cardinal Alimonda wrote from Rome: "You cannot imagine, dear Don Bosco, the number of cardinals, archbishops, bishops and prominent people who ask about you. Since I come from Turin they think I must know everything! The first thing the Holy Father asked me when I went to visit him was: 'How is Don Bosco?' — And every single day his messenger comes here to inquire after you. He sends his Apostolic Blessing."

All these prayers had their effect, for even after three weeks in bed, Don Bosco was still able to write letters and attend to some of his duties.

"If anyone asks how I can do this," he whispered, "tell them, what God can do through His omnipotence, our Lady can do through her power of supplication."

His head now rested on Cagliero's shoulders. It was some time before either could speak.

"I found him greatly aged," wrote Cagliero later. "He had lost his strength and was unable to stand. I made my confession to him, fearing that it would be the last time. He gave me advice that I never forgot. It was the fruit of the experience of his lifetime and was suited both to my age and to the dignity with which I was invested."

When Cassini, the missionary whom Cagliero had invited to accompany him on the spur of the moment entered, Don Bosco asked him. "Haven't you forgotten something, Cassini?"

"Not that I know of."

"Haven't you forgotten that when you left for South America you lamented that you'd never see me again but I promised that you would?" It was only then that Cassini recalled how Don Bosco, to console him, had indeed made such a promise. Cagliero could only marvel that he had been the unconscious instrument in the fulfilment of yet another prophecy of Don Bosco!

On January 8, the Duke of Norfolk arrived from England on his way to Rome with a special message from Queen Victoria for the Holy Father. Since he was passing through Turin, he declared, he could not leave without first paying a visit to his friend, Don Bosco. For a long time he sat by Don Bosco's bed talking and before leaving asked for his blessing.

The next day Cagliero presented the Salesian Sisters and the little Indian girl. "These are the first fruits your sons offer you from the ends of the earth."

The little girl came forward and uttered a few prepared words in Italian, thanking him for having sent his missionaries to help her tribe. Don Bosco was beside himself with joy. With rapt attention he listened to every word the child said and when she had finished pressed her head with his hands. His eyes shining, he smiled in deep satisfaction at the result of the work of his missionaries in the land he had seen in his dreams. It was his *nunc dimittis*. After such great consolation he was content to leave. From then on he never ceased to inquire about the affairs of Cagliero; what he was doing, what he was planning, how his health was...

On Christmas Eve his condition became critical, and Cagliero brought him Extreme Unction. He received Viaticum with a devotion that moved the bystanders. It seemed

to give him new strength. Cagliero spent most of the time at his bedside, except for the few visits he made outside Turin. Finally he asked Don Bosco if he thought it wise for him to go to pay his respects to the Holy Father.

Don Bosco shook his head weakly, "You can go later," was all he said, but from that Cagliero gathered that the dread moment was approaching. "Your coming is very opportune for the congregation," Don Bosco confided to him. Then, as an afterthought, he added: "But the congregation has nothing to fear now. It has men who are well prepared."

Not understanding the full import of these words, Cagliero could only wonder what Don Bosco had foreseen for his Society.

On January 30, at 10:30 in the morning, Cagliero began to recite the prayers for the dying. The word raced through the Oratory; classes and work ceased; the boys approached the sickroom and lined up to see Don Bosco for the last time. He was sitting up in bed, his head leaning to one side, his eyes half-closed with weakness. They filed past, kissed his hand, touched him with crucifixes, rosaries, medals. . .

"Don Bosco," whispered Rua into his ear, "I'll move your hand, you give a blessing to everybody," While Rua held his hand, now paralyzed, and made the sign of the cross, his lips formed the accompanying words.

A telegram arrived. It was the blessing of the Holy Father.

At 4:30, Cagliero dropped to his knees and watched Don Bosco close his tired eyes as his soul went back to God.

With the passing of Don Bosco, Cagliero found that the burden of dealing with the Holy See on behalf of the Society now fell on his shoulders. In the course of these dealings he became better acquainted with the personalities and the intricate working of the Vatican. In this he had the cooperation of the Salesian Procurator, his cousin, Father Cesare

Cagliero. At the moment he was made to feel the burden because of the irregularity of Rua's position whom Don Bosco had named as his successor. There was still no official document from the Holy See validating the succession. It was left to him to straighten out matters with Rome.

Besides, he had yet to inform the Pope of the state of his vicariate. This he did in an audience which took place on March 22 of that year.

Leo XIII listened attentively to all he had to say about his missions, showing unusual interest in the other's lively account of his adventures, travels, setbacks, successes...

"How many Indians have you converted so far?" he inquired.

"I'd say we have about 25,000 Christians now."

"Good! Let's hope you can double that number!"

Cagliero then presented the Holy Father with a splendid rug of guanaco skins made by the natives of Tierra del Fuego, carefully explaining how they used fish bones for needles and ostrich tendons for thread. "Holy Father," he said, "our new Christians would like you to use it to keep your feet warm."

"Very well. Lay it down at once so you can tell them that the Pope was happy to do as they wish. They have my blessing for their kind thought."

He had further dealings with Rome on the question of the new bishops for Argentina; on the erection of three new dioceses, La Plata, Santa Fe, and Tucumán; on the candidates for the dioceses of Salta and Córdoba; and on the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between the Vatican and Argentina. In all these affairs he was ably assisted by his cousin Cesare who had direct communication with the Vatican Secretary of State and with the Holy Father.

On his second visit to Rome on October 22 he gave the Pope more information on the state of his vicariate and his plans for its future. The Holy Father had some questions to ask him on the religious and political situation

existing in Argentina and Chile. Cagliero answered them, at the same time making the Pope smile more than once with his witty analysis of the characters of their rulers.

In Rome as elsewhere he showed that he could unite gospel frankness with diplomacy. The government of Colombia had long been urging Don Bosco to send missionaries. Don Bosco had promised to do so but had also pleaded lack of personnel. When the saint died, Rua suggested that the Colombian Minister, General Vélez, should discuss the matter with Cagliero since on his part he could only repeat that lack of personnel was still the great problem. There was, besides, the standing order of Don Bosco not to open any houses too soon after his death.

Vélez was not to be put off lightly. "You people gave your word," he charged, "that you would send men to Colombia. You have to keep it. The least you can do is let us know when you will send them. My government is a Catholic government and we want to do something for our youth."

"Look, Señor Vélez," said Cagliero. "As far as I am concerned, I have no wish to deal with any government of South America since — and you know this far better than I — they may be good today and bad tomorrow. You just can't depend on them. Hence we prefer to be independent; we prefer to live in poor houses, provided they belong to us."

But the Minister was persistent. He went first to Cardinal Rampolla, Protector of the Salesians, and when the Cardinal balked, he went right up to the Holy Father, who eventually brought his influence to bear on Rua. The upshot was that the departure of a group of Salesians for Colombia was anticipated and Rabagliati was transferred from Concepción to Bogotá in the face of opposition from both the missionaries and the people of Concepción.

The remainder of Cagliero's time was spent touring Italy, France, Belgium, and Spain in quest of alms to pay for

the next and largest missionary expedition thus far. He was so successful that although in October of that year, Fagnano had left for Tierra del Fuego with ten Salesians and five Sisters, in the beginning of the following year Cagliero took with him fifty more.

A surprise awaited him in Patagonia. How well he could remember the first time he had ridden into town on a tired horse with only a few straggling followers. The friendly greeting which he had waved at one or two curious onlookers had met with hostile stares. This time, however, what a difference! Patagones and Viedma outdid each other in their welcomes. The official newspaper, *El Río Negro*, his former enemy, now proposed setting up a committee to plan the reception. On the other hand, *El Pueblo* balanced things somewhat by calling him the usual offensive titles, among others, "a loafer without a diocese, who comes here to make an easy living!"

Milanesio headed a delegation which accompanied his stagecoach to Patagones where the Commandant, several notables, and the public awaited him. At the official welcome next day he passed around some good wine he had brought from Italy and this helped to make the welcome even warmer.

On Palm Sunday he crossed the Río Negro to Viedma. The Governor's coach with eight prancing horses carried him to the church for the solemn *Te Deum*, and the only troops then present, the prison guards, formed an escort. A number of men, to his great consolation, received Holy Communion, rather self-consciously, it is true, since it was hardly the custom then for men to receive Communion, even at Easter.

But why this sudden change of attitude in the people? Why had he become so popular with the authorities on both sides of the river? More important, why did he at this time decide to change his residence from Patagones, where he had originally established it, to Viedma?

Regarding the change of attitude on the part of the people there had been, of course, a gradually winning over of them by the missionaries. Slowly the people had come to understand that they were self-sacrificing men wholly dedicated to the work of saving souls. This was in contrast perhaps to many other priests who had served short terms in these parts but who had not shown the same dedication. Finally, Cagliero was making headway in bringing back the immigrants who had fallen away from their religion.

But why the changed attitude of officialdom?

Religion had very little to do with it. A rivalry had risen between the two towns, and each had begun to see the advantage of having a bishop — albeit a foreigner! — in their town. While Patagones was perhaps the more important of the two, the fact remained that it was merely a small, neglected town at the extreme end of the huge Province of Buenos Aires. Viedma, on the other hand, was now the capital of the newly-created Province of Río Negro. The Viedmese felt that the capital of their growing province should be the headquarters of the Bishop. That was also why at this particular moment Cagliero chose to move to Viedma.

His residence here, however, was in no way superior to the one in Patagones. A missionary describes it: "In simplicity and poverty the Bishop's room matched my own. A row of low, whitewashed rooms served as a bedroom, a room for archives, and a reception room. In the other wing were the dining room, the classrooms, and the rudimentary workshops. The episcopal palace, except perhaps for its size, differed in no way from the other houses of the town..."

Even after the change he continued to cross the river frequently. But now and then while climbing the banks, he would often call a halt, "Let's take a breather," he would say to his younger companions. "When you're my age, you won't find climbing so easy."

One thing greatly preoccupied him: in all Patagonia there was nothing in the way of a hospital, or for that matter,



even a decent dispensary. After discussing this with his missionaries, he suddenly made up his mind. "Let's start a hospital!" he said.

Being very practical men, his friends asked him: "With what?"

"With prayer," he promptly replied, unaware of the curious way in which his prayer would be answered.

There lived in town a drunken painter, a rabid anticlerical, and a thoroughly bad character. Since he lived alone when he fell sick, there was no one to take care of him. His plight soon became desperate. Quickly forgetting his hatred of *los curas*, the padres, he begged to be taken to the mission center, declaring that he would be content to sleep even in the bell tower.

Scenting the hand of providence, Cagliero at once turned an old stable into a make-shift hospital. The missionaries set to work and had soon cleaned out everything except, perhaps, the odor. The Sisters added the final touches. To solemnize the occasion, Cagliero sent four Salesians accompanied by boys with lighted candles to bring in the hospital's first patient, the anticlerical painter. Waiting for him was the recently appointed Sister infirmarian, nervous at the thought that she was about to receive such an odd first patient in such odd surroundings! Nevertheless, she took such good care of the painter that one month later he walked out cured. With this initial success the hospital of St. Joseph had been founded.

The make-shift hospital, step by step, was improved to such an extent that for the next sixty years it was the glory of Patagonia. Later it was replaced by a modern building and its site occupied by the Bishop's new residence. In gratitude to the missionaries for the part they played in the healing of the sick in those frontier days, Viedma erected a bronze bust of *El Padre Dotor (sic)*, Father Evasio Garrone, the man who carried on from where Cagliero had left off.



What now appeared to be uppermost in the Bishop's mind was a message he had received from Don Bosco at the saint's deathbed. It was simple and clear: "Work, work, work." This had been the keynote of the saint's life. He was forever repeating, "We must work constantly for the salvation of souls. If the devil never lets up, neither can we. We can rest when we get to heaven." In his years of close contact with Don Bosco, Cagliero had become fired with the same ideal, and he always spoke louder with his example than with his words. When he was not occupied with his duties as Bishop, or as representative of Rua — a responsibility which often called him outside the vicariate — he was either preaching sermons, triduums, or retreats, convinced that a pastor who did not use every opportunity of preaching was failing in his duty.

This program of *Work, work, work*, carried out with that consuming zeal which characterized all his actions, he urged on all his followers. It explains, in part, the ardor with which these men carried out the most formidable tasks. Milanesio criss-crossed the pampas and scaled the Cordilleras, not once, but many times; Savio spent not weeks, but months, in the saddle in search of Indian *tolderias*; Beauvoir ventured to such far-off and lonely places as Santa Cruz; Agosta faced the raging waters of the distant Río Neuquén and perished in them . . .

This self-sacrificing enthusiasm became part of the equipment of an ever-increasing number of men and women who now began to swell the ranks of the Salesians in Patagonia, Chile, Equador, Brazil, Bolivia . . . laying the groundwork for an expansion that would later take on remarkable proportions.

He also accustomed his men to fend for themselves, especially during their missionary expeditions. Characteristic of his dealings with them was the manner in which he dispatched Fr. Stefenelli to a station six hundred miles upriver. When the missionary asked for a companion for

such a long and hazardous journey, Cagliero gave him a young man by the name of Povesio.

"How about some money?" inquired Stefenelli.

"Money?" echoed Cagliero. "What do you want that for?"

"At least enough to buy a pair of stirrups for my companion."

Cagliero handed him ten pesos. Since the stirrups cost six, that left him four pesos to carry him all the way! Yet with these four pesos Stefenelli got to Roca and became famous for the part he played in the development of that area. He brought the first steam engine all the way up from the coast by buffalo-cart — an epic which lasted a month! — and was responsible for the irrigation of the Neuquén Valley, today a region renowned for its orchards and vineyards. A grateful people perpetuated his memory by naming their town, Stefenelli.

## 12. Murder on the Missions

"Bishop, why don't you appoint a Vicar-General?"

"I suppose I should. Although I hate to think of unloading my troubles on the shoulders of someone else."

"Well, by now you ought to know that you can't possibly do the work of taking care of the vicariate *and* the Society in South America by yourself. Besides, when for one reason or another, you're absent from the vicariate, you simply must leave someone here who will take your place, or at least represent you."

"All right, I'll do something about it."

For a long time, people had been advising the Bishop that he needed a Vicar-General, or deputy, who would take care of the vicariate when he was away from the center or even from the vicariate itself. And he was being absent more frequently now since the Society was expanding and he was the representative of the Superior General in South America. One recent experience in particular, which had finally convinced him of the need for a deputy, was his trip to Brazil.

The Salesians of Brazil had been clamouring for a visit from their own bishop. Cagliero had put off the visit for as long as he could until finally it was impossible to delay it further without giving offence. During the trip he had been

amazed at the variety, the beauty, and the resources of a country which he had at first thought was some sort of wilderness. What had crowned it all had been the crossing of the bay from Rio to Nictheroi. The deep blue waters reflecting the Sugar-Loaf and the Corcovado greatly impressed him, and he said so. The welcome he received in Sao Paolo was compared by one enthusiastic observer to the "welcome given to a Roman Consul returning to the Capitol." He was guest of honor at the largest reception the city had ever seen.

Yet, in order to make that trip, he had to sacrifice important engagements in Equador, Peru and Chile, and had sent Costamagna in his stead.

Finally, convinced of the need for a deputy of some sort he looked around for a suitable candidate. Since he did not want to remove from office someone already filling an important position, his choice fell on Father Mario Louis Migone.

Cagliero had known him when he was a boy in the Salesian school in Montevideo. He had given Migone a holy card on the back of which he had written: "You have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you." Since this was the beginning of the boy's vocation, Cagliero had always taken a close interest in him. Migone finished his studies in Buenos Aires and when Cagliero had returned from Europe as a bishop, he had ordained him.

Cagliero would afterward greet him, "And how's the apostle of the Angosturas?"

Migone had not the vaguest idea what "Angosturas" were until someone told him it was a place in Patagonia. When he understood that Cagliero wanted him to go to Patagonia, he accepted the invitation and arrived there in 1889.

The Bishop formed him gradually. Migone in his *Memoirs* describes how "Little by little even without my being aware of it he prepared me for the active life of a

missionary. For instance, he asked me if I knew how to ride. I told him of my only adventure — it was really a misadventure! — on horseback. ‘Falls are necessary if you want to learn how to ride,’ he said. And he added: ‘Don’t I know it!’... From then on I began to take rides regularly. Once, when I returned with swollen legs, I was worried, but he reassured me. ‘Keep trying,’ was his comment. ‘You’re just not used to it.’ These short excursions were followed by longer ones as far as Pringles, Conesa, and finally Choele-Choele.”

When Cagliero thought he was ready he asked him if he would like a trip to the Falkland Islands.

“The Falkland Islands? Whatever for?” Migone was hardly bursting with enthusiasm for that outlandish spot.

“They speak English there and you’d have a chance to practise what you’ve studied.”

Migone sighed resignedly, “Am I going alone?”

“Of course not!”

“Who’s going with me?”

“An old friend of yours.”

“Oh wonderful! Who is he?”

“Your Angel Guardian.”

After spending two years on the Falklands with Father Patrick O’Grady, an Irishman who along with three other Irish boys had lived with Don Bosco at the Oratory, he received a letter addressed to: Rev. Mario L. Migone, *Secretary* to *Monsignor Cagliero*. From then on it was his task to accompany Cagliero on visits of a social, official, or fund-raising nature. Migone did not like this kind of life and says so in his *Memoirs*. “I soon learned that I did not count among my gifts the qualities of a good secretary. When I had to wait long hours in antechambers, my patience quickly showed signs of running out. Monsignor noticed this. ‘How many times,’ he would tell me, ‘have I not had to accompany Don Bosco on similar errands! During those days I learnt to accept the *Please wait* or *Please come back tomorrow!* When

it was a question of helping his orphans, it never mattered to Don Bosco if he had to return another day. He knew that the moment of Divine Providence always came."

He accompanied Cagliero on one long and weary train-ride to Mendoza and thence by mule across the Cordilleras to Chile. They reached the frontier at Las Cuevas and had begun the descent into Chile when Cagliero showed signs of fatigue; his temperature shot up alarmingly. "It will soon pass," he said calmly. "All I need is some rest." Fortunately, they were met along the way by two other missionaries. Despite this need for rest, Cagliero's schedule in Chile kept him constantly on the move, paying visits to the authorities from the President down; and smoothing out difficulties which had cropped up between his men and those in authority. Smoothing out difficulties was one reason why his presence was always required in some place or other. So charmed by the Bishop was the President that he placed at his disposal the gunboat *Pilcomayo* for his trip from Punta Arenas, a former penal colony, to Dawson Island, where he met Fagnano.

Fagnano's dream was to establish a series of Indian settlements after the style of the famous Jesuit Reductions of Paraguay. In order to halt the tragic and often malicious destruction of the Indians of Tierra del Fuego, he planned to settle them on places like Dawson Island and train them to be self-supporting. The story of these settlements makes a glorious page in the life of this great and largely unknown missionary. The opposition he encountered, on the other hand, makes a sad commentary on the history of the white man's progress in those regions.

While visiting Dawson Island, Cagliero arranged with Fagnano to bring some of the Indians to the International Exposition of 1892 at Genoa, to which he had been invited.

By this time the pace was beginning to tell, not so much on the older man, as on Migone. But whenever he suggested to Cagliero to slow down, he invariably received

this reply: "Time enough to slow down when we get to heaven." Migone was impressed. "Visits and consultations of every kind made the day too short for this indefatigable apostle. But to me, who am very far from possessing his apparently inexhaustible supply of strength and patience, following him became my Way of the Cross! I never cease to admire him, but I never have the strength to imitate him. Once, as he took off the episcopal robes after one long-drawn-out function, he said to me, 'Pray to God they never make you a bishop!' I most heartily agreed!"

On their return to Buenos Aires, after all this activity, to Migone's horror Cagliero told him that they would have to set out right away on the long and fatiguing journey back to Viedma — and by *galera*!

Their *galera* held twenty-four passengers and a ton of luggage. It had two windows in each side, ran on four solid wheels, and was drawn by six or seven pairs of horses, either spread in tandem where the road was wide, or else strung out singly where it was narrow. Horses were changed on an average of every twenty miles and their speed ranged from ten to twenty miles an hour, depending on road conditions. Although most of the route lay across level pampa, stretches of swamp-land and salt lakes often proved treacherous enough to cause damage to both cargo and passengers, and, not infrequently, even loss of life. At best, the voyage was highly uncomfortable, and Cagliero always arrived with more than one bruise on his body.

The *mayoral*, or driver of the *galera*, was a highly picturesque figure. He wore a tall, conical straw hat, a scarf, wide pantaloons, or *bombachas*, tucked into high boots of buffalo hide, and a leather jacket. He was in command of the *galera*, as absolutely as any captain is of his ship. It was he who decided the route, how fast or how slow to go; he was sometimes polite to the passengers, sometimes not. Two *cuartadores* or assistants, rode the outside horses. These were

dressed like the *mayoral*, except that they wore *gorras*, long night caps with tassels. The *cuartadores* were famous for their ability to compose ditties on the journeys they made; and for their ability to consume extraordinary quantities of *aguardiente*.

The *Galera de Mora*, the company which owned the *galera* that Cagliero and Migone were riding on, had three thousand horses and Marcada Mora himself was certainly the most famous of the *mayorales*. From the driver's seat he could shoot the bottle out of the hand of a *cuartador* trying to take a drink while driving.

Whenever the *galera* ran into difficulties crossing a stream, swamp, or salt lake, the passengers encouraged both men and horses with catcalls and whistles; and when it drove into one of the resting stations along the route it did so to the accompaniment of the trumpets of the *cuartadores*, the shots from Mora's revolver, and the shouts and screams of passengers and their friends. Cagliero willingly joined in the singing of the drivers as they changed horses or when they found themselves along a stretch of good road — but not Migone. He had to close his ears when things did not go smoothly, or the men grew impatient with the lackadaisical Indians who changed the horses. After an experience like that Migone decided that he was not cut out to be Cagliero's right-hand man and began to think of how he could obtain his release.

When Cagliero arrived in Viedma he was met by his friend the Governor. While they were walking together, the Governor took it on himself to advise the Bishop to be careful not to overexert himself. He was getting too old for that.

"You really think so?" said the Bishop. "Well, I'd like to show you that you're wrong." With that he tucked up his soutane and challenged the Governor to a race. The Governor, aware of the other's capabilities, only laughed and said he needed time to think it over.



On his return, Cagliero saw that he would have to improve the poor food of his missionaries; too many of them were falling sick. One thing they needed badly was fresh fruit and vegetables. Trusting in providence, after the manner of Don Bosco, he sought out a piece of fertile land and bought it for 16,000 pesos. Although he did not have the money to pay for it at the time, he knew it would come. His trust was rewarded in a strange fashion.

It so happened that two brothers, Louis and Paul Lanza, had emigrated from Italy to Patagonia to seek their fortunes. Serious and hard-working, in short time they each had accumulated enough to set up homes. Then they wrote to their birthplace inviting two girls to come out and marry them. In due course, the boat arrived in Buenos Aires, but with only one girl on board, not two.

After mulling this over for a while the brothers finally came up with an original solution. "Look," said Louis, "I don't really want to marry after all, I want to become a Salesian. You can have the girl."

To Louis' surprise, Paul shook his head. "That's funny!" he said. "I don't want to marry either. I want to become a Salesian, too!"

"What shall we do then? We've brought this poor girl out here with a promise of marriage and we can't let her down."

"Let's draw lots," suggested Louis. "The winner becomes a Salesian. The loser marries."

Preparing two straws of unequal length he held them out to Paul. With understandable nervousness Paul stretched forth his hand and picked — the shorter straw!

True to his part of the bargain he married Mary Campora and the marriage was blessed with six children; five girls and one boy. Did the Salesians lose out? No; all six joined the Society!

Louis in turn came to Cagliero and before entering the Society, placed his savings in Cagliero's hands. This was the money which paid for the land.

The usual *puchero*, or meat broth, flour, and *galleta* or hard biscuit of the mission table was soon supplemented by a supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. The mission also received several good milch cows, and when the vines matured, good wine helped to nourish them. A fine touch was added when the Sisters learned how to make fresh bread to replace the tasteless *galleta*, one supply of which had often lasted a whole month.

But neither Cagliero nor his missionaries were allowed to enjoy in peace these minor consolations. Between the years 1890 and 1891 Patagonia passed through one of its greatest crises. Although the region is always subject to severe drought, during this particular season, not a single drop of rain fell for seven months. The effects were ruinous to both crops and cattle. The herds ate every blade of grass, devoured the leaves of the bushes, even gnawed away the bark of the area's few trees. It was pitiful to watch them drag themselves to the thin trickle of water that was once the robust, flowing Río Negro, drink the mud and water until they swelled up into great, outsize balloons. Then, unable to move, they lay down, never to rise again. The sheep and goats lasted longest because with their hoofs they could dig up roots. Eventually they, too, died, and the pampas were strewn with skeletons bleaching in the sun. To make matters worse, the fierce *pamperos* rose, pushing before them thick clouds of dust and saltpeter that hid the sun and burned the eyes.

At Viedma prayers were said in private and in public; but no rain fell. Like the others, Cagliero spent many hours on his knees, and like them, was becoming more and more depressed with the hopelessness of it.

"Let's make a final novena," he suggested.

"We've already made several but they didn't do any good."

"Couldn't we make this one to our Lady of Sorrows? She's the last hope of desperate cases. She has suffered so

much herself she can sympathize with the rest of us."

The novena was begun over protests on January 15th. Cagliero preached with all the fervor of which his ardent soul was capable. People flocked to hear him and at his invitation paid special homage to our Lady. Unfortunately, no change was seen in the weather; man and beast went on suffering.

The irreligious scoffed. "At last," they said, "people will find out how useless prayer is and stop supporting the *curas*. Then they'll have to go."

On the eighth day of the novena, Cagliero led the congregation in an act of public adoration. Then, recalling the unlimited faith Don Bosco had always urged him to place in the Madonna, he spoke to them. "Tomorrow is the last day of the novena," he said. "I want you to come to the procession and — listen carefully — I want you to bring your umbrellas and your waterproofs as a sign of your trust in the power of our Lady. Clean your zinc and tile roofs and be ready to catch the water in barrels. For rain will come! Believe me, if you have enough faith, rain will come!"

This announcement caused a sensation. People discussed it excitedly. At supper, Cagliero faced a storm of criticism for having made what the other missionaries considered a rash statement.

"It's all right to have faith," they objected, "but what if it doesn't rain? What then will you tell the people?"

The next day was a field day for the scoffers. They paraded about the town staring at the sky, and mockingly called attention to imaginary clouds. "Look," they cried, "here comes the rain! Up with your umbrellas! Cagliero, the rainmaker, will save the day!"

That evening, despite the scoffers, the crowds poured into the church laden with umbrellas, raincoats, and capes. If so much had not depended on the outcome, Cagliero would have been the first to laugh to see them so well prepared for a thorough drenching under such a clear, blue

sky. Instead, he formed a procession and led them slowly through the dusty streets. The band played; the people sang hymns to our Lady and recited the rosary; the procession marched through the town and returned to the church — but without a sign of rain.

Cagliero made his way up the aisle with his heart full of misgiving. What if, after all. . . ?

Scarcely had he entered the church than it grew dark, then lit up for an instant. In the silence which followed he heard the sound of a distant roll. The sacristy lit up again, and again that distant roll . . .

Disturbed by the crash of thunder, the flash of lightning, and the excited hum of voices, the people could contain themselves no longer. Before Benediction was over, they rushed outside to see *el milagro*, "the miracle." A sudden downpour, however, sent them scurrying back for shelter.

It rained all that night; it rained for the next three nights and three days. Water poured off the roofs into the barrels, gushed down the gutters, drenched the parched soil of the pampas, and flooded into the Río Negro, making it rush to the sea with a fullness it had never known before.

Cagliero's faith was put to a further test when he headed northwards to Bahía Blanca.

Back in 1885, on the feast of the Epiphany, he was passing through on his way from Buenos Aires. At that time Bahía Blanca was an ill-famed seaport town of three to four thousand inhabitants. Since it was a holy day of obligation in the morning he rang the bell of the little church; then waited for the people to come to Mass. The number who came that morning was exactly two.

On inquiry, he discovered that Bahía Blanca had the reputation of being one of the most vice-ridden spots in Argentina. This year, 1890, in the short period of two weeks, eleven murders were committed. Irregular marriages and

illegitimate births were abnormally high. If a mission was given, no one ever came. When a famous Jesuit preacher gave a mission he was not able to persuade one single man to go to confession. Archbishop Aneiros himself paid a visit to the town but when he attempted to speak, the people booed him down! Worse still was the fact that the Church was unable to obtain a footing, for everything was in the hands of anticlericals.

The Archbishop had given up trying to find a pastor for it ever since Father Francis Oreira had thrown up his hands in despair and quit. No one was courageous enough to take his place. When the suggestion was made offhandedly to Cagliero to accept it, to the Archbishop's great surprise, he agreed. He was convinced of the need for a Salesian foundation in the town. Although he did not have the money to pay the fare of his secretary, he nevertheless signed a contract for the purchase of a piece of land for 11,400 pesos.

"This is a challenge," he told objectors. "If we establish a house at Bahía, we shall have made an important step forward. For, mark my words, this will one day become a great commercial and railroad center and a key port of the country!" It took great faith in the town's future to say that.

As pastor, he chose a young priest, Father Borghino. The Archbishop was again surprised, but raised no objection. So Borghino quietly took up residence in a hut standing forlornly in a patch overgrown with nettles, near a little church in ruins.

Sensing what might happen, the anticlericals launched an attack. Their newspapers carried passages, scurrilous beyond belief, against the Salesians and the Sisters. The Sister in charge of the girls' school, wrote to Rua: "The newspapers attack us with the most repugnant names and the blackest calumnies..." But she ends on a courageous note: "We shall see who will win: they or Mary Help of Christians!... The visit of Monsignor Cagliero filled us

with so much courage and good will we are not dismayed any more by the difficulties we face."

Despite the anticlericals, the work went ahead. Later, Cagliero was to write to Rua: "Leaving Patagonia after three days in the *galera* (without Migone for reasons of economy) I reached Bahía Blanca. A pleasant surprise awaited me. I was welcomed by the children of the school — the result of only one month of missionary work. We have already been obliged to start two more school buildings near the church, for which I bought a good piece of land. Bahía Blanca will one day be the leading port of South America for trade with Chile and the southern provinces."

Monsignor Espinosa, in his turn, wrote to Cagliero: "I am very happy with the work your men are doing in Bahía Blanca. Each day I grow more and more content with having proposed to the Archbishop to give you the parish. I only wish we could have your missionaries in all of our parishes!" \*

Four years after his arrival, Borghino invited Cagliero to attend the opening of a new church and a new school. What had brought about such sudden and unexpected progress? — A rich merchant of Bahía, inspired by the dedicated lives of the missionaries, had offered to pay for both buildings. Archbishop Aneiros blessed them in the presence of the President of Argentina, Louis Sáenz Peña, who publicly thanked Cagliero for what he was doing for Bahía Blanca in particular, and for Argentina in general.

The press now changed its tune. Playing up Cagliero's statement on the future of Bahía Blanca it organized a city-wide campaign to develop it into a port and railroad center, and this set in motion a wave of prosperity. The Salesian foundations grew with the town and became so influential they were nicknamed "*El Vaticano*."

\* In those days a "parish" could embrace an entire province of Argentina.

In sharp contrast, however, to all these signs of progress, a letter from Dawson Island in Tierra del Fuego, served to remind Cagliero vividly of the dangerous lives his men continued to lead in that uncivilized territory. In it Fr. Bartholomew Pistone described a gruesome experience from the effects of which he was still recuperating.

"The Indians and their families left for a few days and we assumed they had gone hunting as they had so often done before. Indeed, on the evening of the ninth, some of them did turn up with several fresh skins. Brother Silvester and I were alone when they came. Three of them gathered around me and three more around Silvester. Of the three around me, one stood at my left, another at my right.

"They began to talk about the hunt and then asked us to examine the skins. While I was doing so one of them suddenly drew a knife and came at me clearly with the intention of cutting my throat! At the same time another assassin raised his hatchet and struck at Silvester's skull. The knife caught my jugular vein all right, but the attempt to murder was not successful. I clasped my hands to my throat and dashed into the woods to hide with the blood spurting through my fingers. Seeing that the first blow had not killed us outright, the Indians grew frightened and took to their heels. Like myself, Silvester had escaped death by inches. But his terrible wound did not prevent him from running into the house for his rifle and firing a few shots in the air. Since the savages did not know how to handle firearms, these shots assured me that he was still alive. I came out of the woods where I had been hiding, and took shelter in the residence. I treated Silvester's head and bandaged my throat wound as well as I could. Then we barricaded ourselves in the house and waited for the next move from the savages. We spent two whole days in mortal terror, jumping at the least noise around us or in the woods. On the third day a launch which, fortunately for us, had lost its bearings, pulled in with three men on board. When they saw our



condition — Silvester's was still serious from the blow on the head — they took us away at once.

"As luck would have it, we ran into a series of misadventures and delays from stormy weather. Twelve days after the attack, despite the heavy seas, the launch bravely tried to land Silvester on Dawson Island, for his condition had become critical. Fifty yards from the shore he made a desperate attempt to change to a smaller boat to go ashore. But it was not to be. A huge wave caught up the small boat and capsized it. Silvester shrieked a few terrified cries for help; then he disappeared beneath the waves, and no matter how we tried, we could find no further trace of him. The launch then attempted to go on to Punta Arenas, but the winds and seas were too much for it. They dashed it against the rocks until its sides caved in and in the end, like Silvester, it, too, disappeared beneath the turbulent waters."

Pistone followed this first letter with a second. In this he wrote: "Now that the incident has passed I am waiting for the Indians who attacked us and caused Silvester's death, to return begging forgiveness. And when they do, I shall forgive them with all my heart, for I realize that the devil is hard at work trying to keep them from the grace of God."

"O Lord," prayed Cagliero that evening before the altar. "My heart is too confused, too full of mixed emotions, to pray. I am horrified at the death of one of my sons, Silvester. A tragic death met in your service. *Sanguis martyrum, semen Ecclesiae*. The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church. May his death obtain for us the conversion of our Indians. . . . My heart is also filled with a certain pride because my other son, your priest, has won a tremendous victory over himself, has had both the strength to stand up to this trial and the charity to forgive his would-be assassins. How happy you, too, must be to know that he is filled with your spirit, the spirit of Christ!"



## 13. Cannibals at Large

"The cannibals are coming!"

The news sent the port of Genoa into an uproar.

The port of Genoa knew busy days as far back as the Middle Ages, even long before its favorite son, Christopher Columbus, had set sail from it in the *Santa María*. But it faced some of its busiest days during the summer of 1892 when it began unloading men and material for the International Exposition. While this hustle and bustle was going on, word flashed through the town of the arrival of something out of the ordinary: *cannibals* were being brought in for the Exposition! People flocked in droves to see them. When the S.S. *Mateo Bruzzo* docked there was more than the usual confusion while the ordinary passengers disembarked. After that there was a pause, a hush of expectation. The next ones to appear would be the cannibals!

First to emerge were two dark-skinned little girls with jet-black tresses. They were not naked, however, as the crowd had half expected. They wore long sleeveless dresses, belts dotted with glass and silver ornaments, and capes reaching to the ground. Brooches, necklaces, and bracelets of silver completed their attire. The girls were followed by three dark-skinned boys and a young man. These were dressed more closely to the crowd's expectations: caps of

guanaco skin, ample coverings of sealskin, and moccasins. Behind them, however, strode a well-built man wrapped from neck to ankles in a huge sealskin cloak, the sweep of the cloak making his already tall figure seem almost gigantic. Stepping on to the gangway, and sensing the importance of the moment, he uttered a loud cry and shook a long spear vigorously. The crowd roared. This was what it had come to see! After the "cannibals," a man dressed in the robes of a prelate appeared and he, in turn, was followed by two priests and two nuns. It was some time before the police could make way for the party; but eventually they were safely installed in two carriages that rolled out of the docks, heading northwards in the direction of the suburb of Sampierdarena.

The "cannibals," of course, were Cagliero's group of Indians. The two little girls were from the Sayhueque tribe; the three boys and the man from Tierra del Fuego; the man with the spear was from Patagonia. Milanesio, Beauvoir, and two Sisters made up the rest of the party and they were now on their way to the Salesian school where they had no difficulty finding accommodations for their stay. Besides, the Indians hardly expected or even wanted anything more elaborate than a bed of straw, and some meat and maize to eat.

For the Exposition, Milanesio and Beauvoir reconstructed the natural habitats of the three different tribes the group represented, namely, the Onas, the Alacalufes, and the Araucanos. This exhibit proved such a star attraction that it was honored by special visits from Italian royalty.

Cagliero went on to the Oratory to be received with the usual burst of enthusiasm he could always inspire. Among a dozen other activities, he assisted at a meeting of the General Chapter, exhorting the members to continue along the lines traced out for them by Don Bosco. The fact that all but one of the original superiors were reelected,

demonstrated the influence he now held in the Society.

On October 22 he was granted an audience by Leo XIII. "I had not seen the Holy Father for four years," he writes, "when he was looking all of his 78 summers. Consequently, I expected to find him, at eighty two, bent over and weighed down. Instead, when I entered the room he was sitting up erect, spoke with a strong voice, and his mind was quite lucid. He was even vivacious in his conversation."

The Holy Father sat him down beside him and talked about the work in Patagonia, Tierra del Fuego, and the Falkland Islands. He plied him with questions on the religious, political, and economic state of Argentina and Chile, even interrogating him on the soil, the quality of the crops. . .

"And how are the finances of your missions?"

"We are always bankrupt."

"Never lose hope," the Pope encouraged. "Divine providence is always ready to offer credit on the most favourable terms!"

On another visit to Leo XIII on November 15, he was accompanied by the group he had brought over for the Exposition. Santiago, the young man, read a short address in Italian. Cagliero explained how Santiago's father had fought against the Argentines up to 1882. After his defeat he had fled to the hills but his tribe, about three hundred strong, had been captured and their belongings confiscated. The missionaries had baptized them several years later and had trained Santiago to become a clever shoemaker and musician, who spoke Spanish and understood Italian.

The Holy Father showed his pleasure by speaking first to the Indians. Embracing Marcos, the smallest member of the group, he told them, "This little fellow will be the biggest Christian of them all!"

Cagliero's work at Rome did not finish with these visits. Consulted by Cardinal Rampolla on the new auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires, he gave Espinosa and Boneo his

fullest recommendation — something which played its part in their election. Before setting out in quest of alms and men for his missions, he assisted at the baptism of Daniel, one of the Indians, by the Archbishop of Turin on December 6, an event which provided a happy prelude to the departure ceremony of another group of missionaries.

The most important event following Cagliero's return to South America was the opening of an Agricultural School at Cañuelas, forty miles south of Buenos Aires, the first school of its kind in Argentina. To mark its importance, President Sáenz Peña consented to act as Patron. He also dispatched to Cagliero a warm letter welcoming him back to Argentina and declaring his affection for the rising young Society. Afterwards, when Cagliero paid his respects to the President, their conversation centered around ways and means of developing the lands to the south. Peña presented him with a letter of recommendation for each of the Governors of the recently erected southern provinces. In his letter to the Governor of La Pampa he refers to Cagliero as "*Señor Obispo, Monseñor Cagliero, Prelado Superior de los Salesianos,*" thus recognizing his status as a bishop. Yet with all this sympathy on the part of the President, Cagliero still could not get himself officially recognized as *Bishop of Patagonia*. He confesses as much to Rua when the latter urges him to see what he can do about it. "*Rem difficilem postulasti,*" he answers. "You are asking something very difficult," adding that this might have already been achieved but for the politically unsettled nature of the times.

After a visit to Uruguay he had a second meeting with the President. Since the President was then ill, he was not living at the Casa Rosada, but resting in the country. He therefore sent his private coach for the Bishop who brought Costamagna along with him. The two men tried not to be aware of the impression they were making by driving through the streets of Buenos Aires in the presidential coach!

These repeated meetings with the President were an indication that his star was rising, not only at the Vatican, but also in government circles. Actually he was performing, albeit unofficially, the duties proper to an Apostolic Delegate. Thus he obtained the title of Domestic Prelate for Father Florencio Villanova Sanz, a distinguished editor; and, in response to a request from the Vatican, forwarded a report on the state of the dioceses in Argentina, since Rome was then preparing to increase their number. He also recommended to Cardinal Rampolla the erection of three new dioceses at La Plata, Santa Fe, and Tucumán.

For this reason he was careful to keep his finger on the political pulse. He knew enough of what was happening behind the scenes to assure the Vice-President, Dr. José E. Uriburu, when the latter called on him at San Carlos, "You will be the next President." He also instructed Cesare to insist at the Vatican to send an Envoy Extraordinary to see what could be done about appointing an Apostolic Delegate while Sáenz Peña continued in power. If Sáenz had not renounced the presidency sooner, he explained, it was because he hoped to be the one to renew Argentina's ties with the Holy See.

When Uriburu came to power, Cagliero put to good use his friendship with the new President. While in Buenos Aires to preside at the funeral services for his friend, Monsignor Aneiros, who had died suddenly, he again brought up the subject. Afterwards, he wrote to Cesare, "Something will certainly be done about it. The President has given me hope."

Unhappily for the Church in Argentina, the problem of the resumption of diplomatic relations and the erection of new dioceses was linked with the other and equally important one of the choice of candidates to fill the sees. This, in its turn, was rendered doubly difficult by the fact that the government jealously insisted on guarding and, unfortunately,

also using strictly to its own advantage the privileges of the *Patronado*.

The *Patronado*, originally intended as a system of rewards to encourage Christian rulers, ended up as an instrument used against the Church. Centuries after its institution in South America its abuse still continued to be a cause of friction between Church and State.

*Patronatus* (from *jus patronatus*, or "right of patronage") originally meant the right, or sum of rights, of a person in the handling of an ecclesiastical benefice. Popularly it is believed to have begun in Spain and Portugal and to have had its earliest application in their colonies. Actually, it dates back much further. In the fifth century, for example, both the Oriental and Western Churches granted rulers the right to choose a priest for a church they had erected, later modified to the right to present a candidate for approval.

Pope Alexander VI in 1493 granted Ferdinand and Isabella of Spain the privilege of selecting all missionaries for their South American colonies. Pope Julius extended this to include the appointment of clerics to benefices. Although the Holy See continued to reserve the right to approve these appointments, the Spanish governments gradually assumed that their appointments would be automatically approved. Soon bishops appointed by the throne began to take office without even waiting for Rome's approval. Portugal, in turn, insisted on enjoying the same rights as Spain.

Although the subcontinent owes its swift conversion in great part to the system, it also brought, inevitably, grave disadvantages. The Catholic kings read into the privileges of the *Patronado* far more than had ever been conceived by the Popes. In the end the Holy See could not appoint anyone to a position of importance in South America without the consent of either Spain or Portugal. Not only

that, it could not communicate directly with its bishops or priests; even its correspondence had to pass first through government channels!

The most dangerous element of the *Patronado*, however, was the right that those republics which had emerged from colonization assumed to themselves of approving the Holy See's choice of bishops. Too often this resulted in the selection of men more concerned with pleasing the government than with doing their duty. The choice itself was often made by the government, the Church merely allowed to approve. The *Patronado* continues in practice in many South American Republics with much the same harmful results, especially where anticlerical authorities are concerned.

Despite the obvious anomaly of the situation, Argentina had no intention of giving up the *Patronado*. In 1892, Dr. Vincent G. Quesada was sent to Rome by Buenos Aires to foster closer relations with the Holy See; to obtain approval for the increase in the number of dioceses; and to ensure the appointment of a Monsignor Padilla to the diocese of Salta. Secretly he had also been instructed to defend at all costs the rights and privileges of the *Patronado*!

Only the good will of the President and the well-intentioned members of the government could reduce the harmful effects of the *Patronado* on a rapidly expanding Church. It was exactly such good will which Cagliero strove to foster, despite the fact that his efforts toward building the Church in Argentina would later place in jeopardy the very existence of his own vicariate!

All in all, this proved to be one of the busiest periods in his life and it was a tired, but fairly satisfied Vicar Apostolic who soon after that headed south to his beloved Patagonia.

His reception in Viedma was one the like of which had never been seen in Río Negro.



On disembarking from the S.S. *Litoral* on February 29, 1894, he was met by the sound of fireworks while the old cannon on the square boomed its noisy welcome. The streets were hung with banners, *Welcome to Monsignor Cagliero! From the people of Viedma: Love, Affection, and Gratitude!*

*The Salesian Bulletin* of the time, although in the past it had had to write some dark passages, now came out with such brave phrases as "Today a bright new page has been written in the history of Patagonia!" Such an enthusiastic welcome gave Cagliero the courage to draw up plans for a new residence and a new church to Mary Help of Christians.

It so happened that he was not the only personality Río Negro welcomed about this time. The other was its new Governor, General Liborio Bernal. Bernal gave every sign of being one of Cagliero's best friends, assisting with his staff and the officers of the fort in full dress uniform, at the Mass of St. Francis de Sales. Officers and missionaries later dined together, toasting one another with the choice wines Cagliero had brought out from his native Piedmont. Bernal even sponsored one of the five priests whom the Bishop had ordained. Things could not be running more smoothly.

Two weeks later, however, an event occurred which was to upset the harmony. Father Peter Orsi, pastor of Viedma, found himself facing the moral obligation of having to bless a marriage "in articulo mortis," that is, at the deathbed of one of the couple. When the "liberals" heard this they immediately raised an outcry, accusing Orsi of openly flouting a law they had forced through, which required all marriages to be registered with the civil authorities before they might be blessed by the Church. Orsi eventually had to leave town and withdraw to Buenos Aires.

The next unfortunate event was the publication of the new Governor's report, drawn up after his visit to the institutions of his province, and in particular, to the mission schools. Up to then, Cagliero had been more than favorably



impressed by Bernal. What was his surprise, therefore, when he opened the Report and read in it such interesting items as the following:

"In these schools (of the missionaries) the children are obliged each hour to drop their studies and say prayers. They are, besides, obliged to go to Mass on Sundays and holydays. During these days they must also receive religious instruction."

Bernal went on to accuse the teachers of violating both the Constitution and the instructions of the Education Department, which he nobly declared, had been conceived "under the liberal spirit of the enlightened epoch in which we live." He also charged the missionaries with "using the confessional to dominate the people's minds, to ferret out their secrets, and to sow discord among their families. . ."

Even the hospital did not escape. It had been put up, he declared, simply as a means of imposing Catholicism, since one of the requirements for admission was the practice of that religion. He concluded by saying that it was too small, anyway, for the needs of the population. No mention, Cagliero noted, of the fact that it was the only hospital, government or otherwise, in the whole province.

Cagliero could not, of course, let such a farrago of lies and unfounded accusations go unanswered. At once he dispatched a *memorial* to the Minister of the Interior, pointing out that the sole reason for the attack was that the men and women in charge of these institutions believed it their duty to teach religion to children and to assist others in the practice of it. The accusation that the hospital received inmates exclusively on the basis of their religion he flatly denied. The records would show that the only requirement was the need of medical attention. He added that the people themselves were beginning to marvel at the authorities for attacking religion and allowing such accusations to be published, since all this brought nothing but dishonor on the provinces.

On returning from a visit to Uruguay he found that Bernal, who was simultaneously President of the School Board, had followed up his attacks with a campaign to close the mission schools. In order to embarrass them as much as possible, for example, he sent down as proctor for the examinations, a teacher who had never gone beyond third grade! Yet this man was supposed to examine boys of the top grades in Latin and French — two languages which he had never studied! The examinations ended with his jumping up in a rage, pounding the table vigorously, and rushing out of the room! Despite this crude attempt to fail them, the boys passed with good grades.

It was an extremely trying period for Cagliero. But as though this were not enough, another vexing problem presented itself about this time: the formal occupation of the ecclesiastical territory of Chubut — something he was to accomplish only after a series of unpleasant, yet dramatic events.

## 14. Mission in Danger

This newly created province of Chubut, since it lay between the provinces of Río Negro and Santa Cruz, was clearly included in the territory of the vicariate. Nonetheless, before Cagliero arrived from Europe with the title of Vicar Apostolic, Archbishop Aneiros had already assigned as chaplain of the province, a Canon Francis Vivaldi. After Cagliero had taken possession of the vicariate in 1885, he had twice written to Vivaldi, offering him the help of another missionary. To both these letters he received no reply. Through a third party Vivaldi let him know that all he wanted was to be left in peace for the few years that remained to him.

It turned out, on the contrary, that Vivaldi did not want to be left in peace; nor did he intend to leave Cagliero in peace either! His scheme was nothing less than to make Chubut a separate vicariate, and himself its Vicar Apostolic! To accomplish this, he went directly to Rome, bearing a letter of recommendation from Monsignor Aneiros to Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide*.

When Cagliero learned that Vivaldi was in Rome and with what intention, he at once wrote to the Cardinal and to his cousin Cesare. To his surprise, the reaction of

the Cardinal was one of great reserve. Cardinal Simeoni, it transpired, had little esteem for the new Society and none at all for the "dreams of Don Bosco" concerning its future in Patagonia.

After investigation, Cesare submitted an alarming report: Vivaldi had succeeded in impressing Cardinal Simeoni so favorably that he had actually planned to split the mission in two! This would surely spell disaster for, besides taking away an integral part of the vicariate, it would also cleave a wide rift between the provinces of Río Negro and Santa Cruz.

Given the gravity of the situation, Cagliero insisted that Rua take the matter up directly with the Holy Father. But the Holy Father proved unresponsive to the appeals of both Rua and the Cardinal Protector of the Salesians. It was a time when the Vatican was trying to re-establish diplomatic relations with Argentina and, since the request for the new vicariate had come from the Governor of the territory, the Holy See did not wish to create an unfavorable atmosphere in official circles by dismissing his request. Cesare's summing up of the situation: "These are difficult moments for the Society!"

Vivaldi, on his part, was so certain of his success that he contacted another missionary society for personnel. All that he needed now was for the Cardinals to vote for the vicariate and appoint him its first Vicar Apostolic. His hopes centered mainly around the powerful influence wielded by Cardinal Simeoni.

At this point, however, providence took a hand. Before the fatal meeting of the Cardinals could be held, Simeoni fell sick and died; and with his death, died also Vivaldi's hopes for a vicariate. The mission of Patagonia was saved!

Meantime, it was brought to the attention of the Holy See that Vivaldi was hardly the man to hold such a position. Letters produced in evidence showed that he had lived a chequered career. Born of a noble family in France on

January 12, 1824, he had first entered the Jesuit novitiate. He left the Jesuits, but was later ordained. He edited a newspaper in Italy, but for political reasons he had fled the country and come to the United States to work among the Indians. Here he had trouble with his bishop, left the Church, and attempted marriage. On applying for reinstatement, he had been sent to the Salesians of San Carlos in Buenos Aires for a period of trial. At this moment the Governor of Chubut appealed to Archbishop Aneiros for a chaplain and, no one else being available, Vivaldi was sent down. Always successful at impressing others, he persuaded the Governor to have him named Honorary Canon of the Cathedral of Buenos Aires. Of an imposing stature, well educated, a good linguist, he could exercise great charm when he wanted.

Once his project for the vicariate fell through, however, he quit Argentina forever and ended his days in a Home in France in 1902.

Around 1895 the time arrived for Cagliero to make his promised tour of Chubut. Before leaving, however, he called in Migone and informed him that as his Vicar General from now on, in the absence of the Bishop, he would be responsible for the entire mission.

A look of wonder, almost of terror, spread over the other's face. "But do you realize. . .?" Migone had difficulty finishing the sentence.

"Do I realize what?"

"... that I am so young?"

Cagliero gave him the expected retort: "Time will remedy that!" and set out for Buenos Aires.

The following day Migone crossed to Patagones to give a conference, one of the duties of his new office. Along the way, however, he was seized with fright.

"I was like a child which had found itself alone," he confessed in his *Memoirs*, "in front of a machine I knew

nothing about, yet was expected to run. Where did I have to put my hand first?... The difficulties which began that morning increased with each hour. In that moment I understood how it was not given to all of us to command and that I certainly had not received this gift from above..."

As the days passed Migone found himself less and less able to cope with the situation. He wrote to his superiors and in reply received words of good counsel; but these did little to dispel the clouds gathering on his horizon. Finally, he could stand the strain no longer. "I can find no other solution to my problem," he confided to a friend, "than to leave my problem here and send myself somewhere else!"

In vain his friend tried to convince him that with a little patience everything would work out all right. "The die is cast," was all Migone said as he took off for Buenos Aires. During the stopover at Bahía Balanca, others tried to dissuade him. But to no purpose. Migone continued his journey to Buenos Aires.

When eventually Cagliero caught up with him, he ordered him back at once. This unusually severe attitude, more than anything else, helped Migone come to his senses, and he humbly turned round and left for Viedma. When the Bishop arrived at Viedma he was met by a very subdued Vicar General. Cagliero never brought up the subject either then or afterward, but when Migone later took it into his head to trek north to Montevideo where his brother had just died, Cagliero gave up. He finally sent him to the Falklands to settle some dispute and that was the end of him as deputy.

The reason for Cagliero's departure was that with the removal of Vivaldi, the way had now been cleared for the occupation of Chubut. As his forerunner, he sent in Father Vacchina, a man tempered to mission life by many years in the pampas and elsewhere, promising him that as soon as he had surveyed the mission and had settled things as much as possible, he would pay a visit.

Vacchina left at once, but was not impressed by what he found — a desolate 100,000 square miles occupied by a mere 40,000 people. The land in this region rose on three great steppes from sea level to the abrupt lift of the Cordilleras, which were undergoing an odd phenomenon of corrosion. This in time, it was said, would reduce them to a plateau. Chubut's river system had more rivers running into the Pacific than into the Atlantic — thus providing headaches for arbiters in the endless border disputes between Argentina and Chile. The River Chubut formed the life-line of the province. Although a dozen other rivers began promisingly enough they were soon swallowed up in the arid plains. Vegetation existed only close to rivers or lakes, whose apparent purpose was to supply migrant fowl with an abundant supply of fish. The whole east coast, indeed, was undergoing a vast seismological change, slowly rising from the sea, while the western, or Chilean, coast was sinking into it.

In that dry area, only hardier plants survived: the *mata* brush, the *matorral* which rose to a height of nine feet, the cactus, and the calafate. ("Eat the black berry of the calafate and you will inevitably return"). The wild *roble*, or stunted oak, grew there; farther south, he had seen its branches blown all to one side by fierce and constant winds. The winds of the Chubut Cordilleras, he thought, must be the most violent in the world!

The colder sections produced wheat, oats, and other cereals; alfalfa, potatoes, onions, lettuce, cauliflower; a variety of fruits; apples, pears, and peaches. Groves of poplars helped to break the force of the wind and to keep down the dust; sparse acacias occasionally provided shade.

Wild life was plentiful; in the inland waters the otter, the fresh-water lobita; in the sandy areas the ostrich, the armadillo, the patagonian hare, deer, the tuco-tuco, the graceful huemel, guanaco, and llama. These last when stroked, emitted a high purring sound "like a choir of aeolian harps!"

The largest flying creature in the world, the condor, nested in those parts, as did the eagle, the flamingo, the swan, goose and duck. Often the horizon was darkened by clouds of *loros*, or small parrots. Fleas, mosquitoes and locusts, the pests of mankind, were also there in abundance.

In the open plains lay the bleached bones of goats, sheep, and cattle; scrawny-necked vultures picking on carrion, or else hovering lazily in the air waiting for a weakened or sick animal to expire. These repulsive creatures attacked lambs and young sheep, pecking out their eyes to render them helpless before tearing them to pieces.

The sparse population of the newly founded towns, Rawson, Gaimen, Trelew and Madryn, hardly presented an encouraging field of apostolate. The inhabitants, who lived in hovels or roughly-made houses, were a bizarre mixture of Welsh, Indian, Chilean, Spanish, Italian, Oriental, German, Russian, Turk... even Boers! Only a handful were Argentinians.

The Bishop did not leave for Chubut until the latter part of the year and then he had to go to Buenos Aires first and embark for Puerto Madryn, down the coast, for this roundabout way was the only available route. Puerto Madryn, like nearly every other inhabited area in that era, was a town merely *in potentia*. Apart from government establishments, it had not more than a half a dozen houses. At Madryn he boarded a special coach of the newly constructed private railroad bound for Trelew and was welcomed not only by the missionaries, but also by a very dear friend, Eugene Tello, now Governor of Chubut. The party took a "break" and headed for Rawson, the provincial capital. When they were overtaken by nightfall, Tello discovered that they had no lights. A little sheepishly he invited Cagliero to finish the journey on foot, meantime dispatching a horseman to fetch another conveyance.



Cagliero did an immense amount of good during his stay, preaching, baptizing, and confirming. At the same time, he was able to contact several caciques and their tribes who had been omitted from the government's colonization plans. This meeting became the springboard for both Cagliero and Tello to plan out a large-scale government expedition which would reach every corner of the vast province. Realizing its importance in the future development of the mission, Cagliero arranged for Vacchina to accompany it as chaplain. He also noted that when anyone died, the neighbours simply buried the body in the dunes. But the strong winds blew away the sand and exposed the bones. Purchasing a plot of government land, he blessed it on All Saints Day and raised a large cross over it, thus establishing it as a cemetery.

Although, as usual, he preached with enthusiasm, there were never many people to listen. There were very few in the territory. But one thing was noticeable, whether the crowd was large or small, Governor Tello was always present.

"Yes," explained Vacchina gloomily. "He promised me that if I got you to come down here he would go to the sacraments, but here we are at the end of the mission and he hasn't made a move."

"He'll go," Cagliero encouraged. "When you accompany him on this expedition, take along a book with a good method for an examination of conscience." Cagliero, when he said this, was banking on two things: the good disposition of Tello, and the fact that Tello had once been to a seminary but had left it to embark on a long political career, during which he had gradually allowed himself to fall away from the Faith. Before leaving Chubut, he gave his blessing to those seeing him off. Tello knelt down with them. "Not the usual attitude of government officials!" he pointed out to Vacchina. Later Vacchina told him how the Tello affair had ended.

One day during the expedition Tello, who so far had been wrapped up in himself, started up a conversation with Vacchina. Gradually the conversation took on off-colour tones.

"How about changing the subject?" Vacchina interrupted bluntly.

"Oh, come now, Father!" protested Tello. "Don't be such a child! I told the Bishop that I would go to confession some day, and if you're going to be the judge of my conscience, you have to be aware of the surroundings in which I've lived, no?"

"If that's how you look at it, carry on," said Vacchina resignedly. "I suppose I can accept it as a lesson in pastoral theology." He continued to play the waiting game, patiently hoping that Tello would eventually come round, and a few days afterwards, to his intense satisfaction, the moment of grace arrived. Of his own accord, Tello came forward and said he was ready, and in the little mission chapel opened his soul to the missionary. The following day he received Communion and from there on he made a practice of receiving daily and of serving Vacchina's Mass.

When his tour of the new territory ended, the Vicar Apostolic returned to Buenos Aires in time to welcome back to Argentina the third Salesian bishop, James Costamagna. (\*) Naturally, it should have been a time of great rejoicing, had not the event been overshadowed by the tragic news that on November 6, Monsignor Lasagna, the second Salesian bishop, with several other Salesians and Sisters, had been

(\*) Costamagna, a rugged, picturesque character, led the third expedition to South America in 1877. He was appointed Provincial of Argentina in 1880 and later, in 1895, was elected Vicar Apostolic of Mèndez and Gualaquiza in Ecuador, with the title of Titular Bishop of Colonia. For twenty years the anticlerical government, in an unprecedented action, blocked his entry into his mission; he could make only two visits, in 1902 and 1903. In the meantime, he functioned as Visitor to the Salesian houses on the Pacific coast. Finally, in 1914 he took possession of his mission but five years later, due to ill-health, withdrew and died, September 9, 1921.

killed in a railroad disaster in Juiz de Fora, Brazil. The accident had taken place in circumstances clouded with suspicion. At the express wish of Rua, Cagliero went there to bring some consolation to the stricken missionaries.

The newly-appointed Archbishop of the capital, Monsignor Ladislao Castellano, was waiting for him.

"Monsignor Cagliero," he pleaded, "I have a request which I hope you will not deny me. You know that the Franciscans, for lack of personnel, have withdrawn from the Province of La Pampa. I beg you to take care of it for me."

"But don't you see, Archbishop," protested Cagliero, "that the same reason holds good for us, too?"

"I do, Monsignor. But I also know that you can draw vocations out of stones, out of the sand of the pampas. Get them from wherever you like, but I beg you through the charity of Christ and Don Bosco, do not deny me this favor!"

Against his better judgement and the counsel of his more prudent confreres, Cagliero accepted, and placed in charge of this new territory Father Peter Orsi, who had been forced out of Viedma by the anticlerical authorities. When Orsi visited the Archbishop the latter was so pleased that he gave him a considerable sum of money. He also instructed his secretary to drive him home in his carriage, sent him another generous sum, and obtained free passages to their destination for him and his four companions from the government.

Orsi arrived at the beginning of the year in Acha, the capital of the Province, and was well received by the authorities, for Cagliero was a friend of Governor Pico, who was in his words, "a man who was wise and zealous for the good of his people." He had instructions to go on to Santa Rosa and Victoria and find out what was needed. Later the Bishop would send the necessary personnel.

Establishing bases in La Pampa meant that Cagliero's jurisdiction now stretched from the northern border of

La Pampa to the southern tip of Santa Cruz — a total distance of more than two thousand miles! Like Chubut, La Pampa was not by any means a densely populated region; it had only recently been taken from the Indians and counted barely 35,000 inhabitants. Still, the settlements were the responsibility of the vicariate and had to be provided for and visited regularly.

After allowing his missionaries time to settle down, Cagliero took off for La Pampa. October 15 found him, after an interminable train journey, in Santa Rosa, about eight hundred miles west of his starting point, Buenos Aires. No wonder the Vicar Apostolic became one of the world's most travelled men!

So it was that the first bishop ever to grace these areas, was also the first bishop of Don Bosco's Society. He was given every consideration. The local police placed a permanent guard at his residence. He preached and heard confessions for ten whole days, and in between times he attended banquets and receptions. Then he headed west for Victoria, covering another two hundred miles by *galera* over rough country broken only by sand dunes and a few poplars which tried to temper the merciless winds and keep the soil from shifting.

Here again it was an unceasing round of instructions, meditations, conferences, confirmations, baptisms, visits to the sick and to the prisons; then off to the outlying homes to bless marriages. Only one interlude broke this endless series of apostolic activities. That was when a successful rancher, impressed by his constant movement, offered him a little relaxation at his home and sent a sulky for him. Cagliero's companion, a rather nervous type of man, took the reins to allow the Bishop time to rest. At a certain point, however, the horse bolted across the pampas and ended by trying to dash into an enclosure. Unfortunately, there was a gate to the enclosure. But the horse went straight through, smashed the sulky against the gate-posts and sent both men flying!

The driver broke his wrist in the fall; Cagliero, however, landed on a sand dune and suffered nothing more than a severe shaking.

His final visit was to the capital of the almost deserted province, Acha. Guns went off, soldiers presented arms, speeches were made, and the Governor prepared a huge *asado con cuero*, in the flamboyant Argentine style. Steers and sheep roasted whole over open fires and guests carved directly from the spit. The only unpleasant element was the constant blowing of a rough *pampero*, which covered the *fiesta* with the swirling red dust of the pampa.

Following the same characteristic driving schedule, he began the mission. When this came to an end, to the great regret of the missionaries and the people, he said good-bye to La Pampa. On November 25, he reached his residence in Viedma. As was customary, he was warmly greeted by the people. Somehow by now they, too, had begun to look upon him as their "favorite son."

Much as he would have liked to enjoy a period of tranquillity in which to attend to the new problems of his mission, this was not to be. He had barely seen the departure of the old year 1896 than fresh trouble began to loom ahead.

In the beginning of the year, Monsignor Cavignis, Secretary of the Sacred Congregation for Extraordinary Affairs, informed Cesare that the Argentine Minister at the moment was in Rome to deal with the question of new dioceses. This had been made law by Congress, and could have great bearing on the future of both the vicariate of Patagonia and the prefecture of Tierra del Fuego. In short, the mission was again in danger!

The government offered a plan which made no mention of either, since they had never recognized their existence. Cagliero countered with a plan which preserved their present status, but joined Patagonia to the Archdiocese

of Buenos Aires, by having it administered by apostolic administrators who would be the men then actually in charge. Rua declared himself in favor of this plan and gave as his reasons: the enormous distance between Buenos Aires and Patagonia; the danger of forfeiting the financial assistance which Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego received as missions; both the dioceses to which these territories would be attached (Buenos Aires and Cuyo) were so short of personnel that it would be unrealistic to place extra burdens on them.

Pope Leo XIII eventually solved the problem in a Bull of February 15, 1897, which created three new dioceses but decreed that the existing bishops should govern the new dioceses until new bishops to occupy them could be appointed.

Where did the vicariate and the prefecture stand? It was a moment of great anxiety for Cagliero. While working for the good of the Church in Argentina had he not, ironically, placed in jeopardy his own future and the future of his missions?

Not quite. A month or so after the Bull he received a letter from his friend Espinosa, telling him that "even though in it there is no mention of the Salesians, nevertheless, before issuing it, Cardinal Rampolla wrote to the Archbishop saying that it was the Holy Father's intention that the Salesians should remain in possession of both the vicariate and the prefecture. The Cardinal had also communicated this to the Argentine Minister." The vicariate and the prefecture had been saved all right, but the solution afforded Cagliero no great joy. His vicariate, after all, would remain independent only until the Archdiocese could find personnel to run it; and the very fact of placing it under the Archdiocese was unpalatable.

On the question of the new bishops he could find some consolation in the fact that Espinosa, Lastra, Linares, and Boneo had been elected. His testimony in favour of these

men had evidently been taken into account, and he instructed Cesare to relay to Cardinal Rampolla his satisfaction.

All communication between Argentina and the Holy See, thus far, had been conducted without benefit of an official intermediary. In the manner of protocol this would have been the Apostolic Delegate; but he had been exiled. The Archbishop of Buenos Aires had done much of it up to now, but the government objected on the grounds that (in their minds, at least) he was a state functionary, and consequently did not possess freedom of action. This was the vacuum Cagliero was called upon to fill. As a friend of President Uriburu, of the President of the Supreme Court, and of many ministers and senators, and not least as an independent prelate who enjoyed the confidence of the Vatican, he was obviously well equipped for the task.

These years between 1893 and 1897 had been, perhaps, the most eventful of his life. Besides the problem of organizing Chubut and La Pampa, there had been the election of Costamagna, his comrade-in-arms, as bishop; his tour of Brazil; his triumphal celebration in *La Boca*; the opposition of Bernal; the support of Tello... There had also been trouble with the personnel. Several had deserted their posts; others like Migone had disappointed his high hopes; still others, like the unfortunate Lasagna, had died in the field; more than once he had had to defend the very existence of the vicariate and the prefecture. He had taken innumerable trips inside and outside his mission, either to collect the means to carry on or else to act as representative of the Superior General. Added to this were his activities as unofficial intermediary between the Holy See and the Government; the countless retreats, sermons, inaugurations, conferences... There were times during those busy years when, despite his boundless energy, he had begun to feel the pace and nature had even issued her sharp warnings.



## 15. The Changing Winds of Fortune

Perhaps no year ever dawned more brightly for the mission than 1898. The main reason for this was the appointment of a new Governor for Río Negro to replace Bernal whose one dream seemed to be to drive Cagliero and his missionaries out of the territory. He sent reports against them to Buenos Aires, painting their noblest efforts in the blackest of colors, "in the name of progress and of the enlightened age in which we live." Had Cagliero been without friends in the capital, it would have gone hard with him for there were many whose aim was like Bernal's, to stamp out all religious influence in the life of the young nation.

Fortunately, the Bishop did have sympathetic friends at court, from the President down. Once he realized that Bernal's aim was to destroy the mission, he appealed to these friends and to the President himself to have him replaced by a friend, Eugene Tello, former Governor of Chubut. Tello arrived to take over his new post on January 18. Significantly, he spent his first night in the Salesian school at Patagones before crossing the river next morning to Viedma.

Cagliero made sure that Tello's welcome was a warm one. When the civic part was over and the new Governor



made his way to the church, the Bishop was waiting to embrace him. Not many politicians were in the habit of visiting churches! Eight hundred guests attended the banquet in his honor — a local record for such affairs. But the most important part of the ceremonies were the words Tello uttered in reply to the flow of compliments: "My private life should not be out of tune with my public one. I hold certain profound convictions and I am prepared to defend them at the cost of my life because I know I am in possession of the truth, and because the Constitution of my country protects me." Words, thought Cagliero, which should have been engraved in stone to guide all future rulers!

From the moment Tello took over, the fullest cooperation existed between the provincial government and the missionaries. This, however, did not please the hard core of the "liberals" — a euphemism in South America for anticlerical. So virulent were their attacks on Cagliero that the people themselves, who before had been loath to engage in battle against Bernal and his aides, now came forward and protested. They penned an open letter objecting to the way in which the anticlericals were abusing a man who, after all, did nothing which did not help the entire community. Tello also took up the defense of his friend and in a second open letter, congratulated him for carrying out "the most civilizing work that has ever been accomplished in Patagonia." This title *Civilizador de Patagonia*, was to identify Cagliero for the remainder of his life, and for all time.

The new Governor next took up the defense of the mission schools. Aware of the harm done by his predecessor, he composed a memorandum for the government in Buenos Aires in which he drew attention to the contribution that those schools were making to the welfare of the people at a time when the government itself failed to provide for the education of its own children. Of the fifteen schools functioning in the Province, he pointed out, eight were run

by the mission, seven by the state; 455 children attended the mission schools, 300 the schools of the state; and attendance was better at the mission schools. He also called attention to the amount of money the mission saved the Province every year.

Besides organizing the Christian Family Society for the spread of good literature and the preservation of the home, he wrote a letter to the government in which he publicly withdrew anything he might have previously said or written against the Church. Not only that, he even had copies of it sent to each of the ministers!

To Tello finally goes the credit for the erection of a new cathedral at Viedma to replace the old one which had been rapidly deteriorating. The project received official status in a provincial decree which he signed in the summer of 1898, while Cagliero was in Italy. This cathedral still looks down from the highest point in Viedma as a monument to one who, certainly in the eyes of the missionaries, was Río Negro's greatest Governor.

That year Cagliero attended the election of the General Chapter of the Society. With Tello holding the reins of government, he knew he had nothing to fear in the way of unpleasant upsets during his absence. But before leaving there was something he thought he could do which would be of great importance to the Church in Argentina, namely, to reconcile the government to the idea of appointing another Apostolic Delegate. This motive spurred him to seek a meeting with Roca, who, for the second time, would assume the office of President later in the year. Now on very familiar terms with Roca, he obtained the interview easily enough and once again the two men faced each other in a suite of the Casa Rosada.

Despite their different fields of action, they had much in common. To begin with, both were by nature strong characters, builders, and leaders of men; both were surrounded at this stage by the aura of success. Behind him,

Roca had a long series of successful campaigns, chief among them was the conquest of the desert; he also had a history of political triumphs. For example, he solved the conflict between Buenos Aires and the provinces by making Buenos Aires a federal district after the model of the capital of the United States. Cagliero, on his part, had had his successes, too. He had planted firmly in American soil the roots of Don Bosco's young Society; he had contributed enormously to the spread of the Church in the area under him; he could claim a large share in the spread of civilization in the newly-acquired regions from La Pampa to the tip of Tierra del Fuego; he was one of the key figures in the renewal of relations between the Vatican and Argentina; finally, he was a personality of such stature, that he no longer feared to sign himself *Juan, Obispo*, John, Bishop. It was a far cry from the time when he had entered the country like a thief in the night!

Physically, too, both men had changed. Although Roca still held the stiff posture of the soldier, he had grown paunchy, his cheeks were puffed, and his tufty beard and thick hair showed wide streaks of gray. Cagliero, on his part, was now rather stout; his unruly hair had lost its rich coloring and was quite gray; and the strong mouth had been curved by adversity. The eyes of both, however, continued to flash with vigour.

Besides, it was not the Roca of old with whom Cagliero had to deal. There was the same directness, of course; this was second nature to the man. But he had mellowed with experience. Since he had returned from abroad, his attitude had softened considerably toward the Church; he had learned more about her historic mission, and had, in an oblique way, discerned that this was not to be bound by the limitations of times, places, or personalities.

"I am on my way to Rome Your Excellency," the Bishop observed after the formalities. "If there's anything you'd like me to do..."

"Tell the Holy Father that we are all well," said Roca cordially. "I have already written to him."

"Wonderful! You know how he loves Argentina. He is aware of the generous spirit of the Constitution toward the Church and of the good will of the government. But I also know that he's certainly going to ask me how things stand between you, personally, and the Vatican; when certain differences are going to be settled; certain quarrels patched up..."

"It wasn't I who started the quarrel," Roca flared. "That man always annoyed me! He once..." Followed a colorful, if biased picture of "that man" — Archbishop Louis Matera, the former Apostolic Delegate.

With his usual diplomacy, Cagliero brought Roca back on an even kneel without offending him. Then followed a long and amicable conversation. Before taking his leave of Roca, he inquired, "What message would Your Excellency like me to give the Holy Father?"

Roca smiled. "Tell him to send me his blessing."

Cagliero left shortly afterwards. Before he could see the Holy Father, however, he had first to attend the General Chapter. During the Chapter, he reminded the members that he would like to see them take into consideration the "monuments" of the Society, referring, of course, to those who had worked personally with Don Bosco. The influence of his words is reflected in the re-election of Rua as Superior General by an overwhelming majority of 213 votes out of 217. He himself was once more re-elected Catechist Emeritus. After the Chapter he went for his audience with the Holy Father at which he obtained, among other things, a gold medal for his friend Tello. He had also a long conversation with Cardinal Rampolla on the question of diplomatic relations with Argentina, and when early the following year, he returned to Buenos Aires, he called on Roca who had since assumed the Presidency.

"Your Excellency," he began, "I did what you said and I brought you back the blessing of the Holy Father."

"Many thanks." Roca made no secret of his pleasure.

"But he says that there's a condition attached."

"What could that be?"

"He says that it must be effective."

For a moment Roca looked puzzled. Then he understood and smiled. Pacing up and down the floor of his suite for a few moments, he suddenly stopped and turned to Cagliero. "All right," he said abruptly. "Tell him to send a Delegate. I guarantee that he'll be well received." Then, recalling the events of former years, he added, "But let him be no trouble-maker. Rather a man who is peace-loving and understanding."

"Suppose the Holy See were to appoint a friend of Dr. Yofre, your Minister of the Interior?"

"I see no objection to that," mused Roca. "Yes, he may be appointed."

"Will you allow me to express these views to Cardinal Rampolla?"

"Do as you think best."

Delighted, Cagliero took his leave of Roca and passed through the portals of the Casa Rosada where guards in the traditional uniform of the troops of San Martin clicked to attention. He could feel satisfied with his morning's work. In this short interview he had finally broken down the last barrier separating the Vatican and Argentina. One thing only remained in doubt: Would the Holy See appoint the man he had mentioned to Roca, the friend of Dr. Yofre? Roca as yet did not know that this was Msgr. Anthony Sabatucci. Cagliero had met him in Rome and had learned that he was a good friend of the Argentine Minister. Acting on a sudden inspiration he had suggested the name to Roca. The problem now was to get the backing of the Vatican. Rushing off a letter to Cardinal Rampolla, he explained

that it was Roca's wish to renew relations with the Vatican; that Roca blamed the rupture on a deteriorating mental illness of the Delegate; that, finally, Roca would willingly receive another Delegate. He added that he had spoken with various members of the government and had found them almost unanimously in favour of renewed diplomatic relations. Then he suggested that perhaps the most suitable choice for Delegate would be Sabatucci.

The following year a representative of the Holy See arrived to take up his post in Buenos Aires. His name? Monsignor Anthony Sabatucci.

Not all the fortunes of Cagliero, however, were proceeding so favorably. When he wrote to Orsi in La Pampa that "The winds of the pampas are variable. Sometimes they are beneficial, sometimes they are not," he was undoubtedly referring to the changing moods of the men with whom he had to deal, both inside and outside of the Society. On the other hand, he might well have been thinking of the changing moods of Patagonia's treacherous climate.

For in the summer of 1899 the weather inflicted on Patagonia the greatest natural disaster it had ever suffered. All winter heavy snows had piled up in the Neuquén area of the Cordilleras. A sudden spell of warmth melted these prematurely; to this was added a series of torrential rains. The result was that the five principal rivers, the Limay, the Neuquén, the Colorado, the Chubut, and the Río Negro began to overflow. At first the announcement caused little concern since the people recalled how some fourteen years ago they had also overflowed but the damage then had been nothing more than a few inches of water in the lowlying areas. They were soon to be disillusioned.

The only good feature about the flood was that it came in three stages, thus providing the people with ample warning. But, inevitably, the full force of the waters reached the populated regions, and by the time the rivers touched

their highest levels, they had affected an area bordered by Chos Malal in the northwest, Junin de Los Andes in the southwest, Rawson in the southeast and Patagones in the northeast — a total of more than 100,000 square miles! Worst hit was the Neuquén Valley where the Río Negro is formed by the confluence of the Limay and Neuquén Rivers. The towns along this valley, right down to Viedma and Patagones, bore the fury of the floods. The waters gathered high up in the mountains and, with a mighty rush swept all before them, from the Cordilleras to the coast, flooding towns, settlements, and villages for a distance of 1,500 miles. Neuquén, Roca, Conesa, Pringles, Patagones and Viedma, all suffered heavily.

“Missions of Río Negro flooded!”

When Cagliero dashed off this telegram to the Oratory he was telling all that he knew at the time. It turned out later that this was only half the story. The River Chubut had wrought equal disaster 450 miles farther to the south. Hundreds of huts, houses, buildings, schools, churches crumbled at the onslaught; the whole fertile valley around Neuquén was flooded, laying waste thousands of acres of crops. Thirty thousand people fled for their lives.

Father Vacchina, who had succeeded Migone as Cagliero's deputy, briefed Father Rua on what he himself had witnessed:

“Our beloved missions which had begun to progress in an extraordinary manner no longer exist. An overflowing of the Río Negro reduced them to a mass of ruins. Junín and Chos Malal on the outskirts of the Andes were gravely damaged, Conesa and Pringles seriously affected. Gaiman and Rawson, capital of Chubut; Viedma, capital of Río Negro, and Roca — all were completely destroyed.

“We should be thankful, nevertheless, that no lives were lost. The floods came in three periods, the first of which warned the people to flee.



"The houses of the valley, the colonies, the agricultural establishments, churches, chapels, schools — everything fell before the rising waters.

"The mission of Chubut which cost us eight years of hard work now lies in ruins.

"From Viedma more than a thousand people and three hundred of our children crossed the raging waters to seek refuge in the town of Patagones. The flood destroyed over five hundred houses and every public building, including the residence of the Governor. For three whole days, the 26, 27 and 28 of July, Viedma stayed under water which had reduced everything to rubble. To make matters worse, this is for us the winter season and the winds that come up from the south polar regions are bitterly cold."

In Guardia Mitre, a hundred miles up the river from Viedma, the only priest there at the time was visiting the outlying stations and had left a brother in charge. Seeing the waters rise, the brother finally put on the humeral veil, took out the Blessed Sacrament, and placed it with the other sacred vessels in a little shelter on top of a nearby hill.

Two missionaries at Fort Guanaco near Chos Malal saved themselves by running out of the house in their night shirts!

At Gaimán, the Welsh colony in Chubut, the waters rushed in so rapidly that people did not have time to gather even their necessary belongings. At Rawson the waters rose ten feet. The school and mission population saved themselves by taking to the hills on the morning of July 27th. The missionaries of this region were able to come down from the high ground only in May of the following year.

The embankments at Roca, on which the people had depended so much, were swept away. Father Stefenelli's agricultural plans suffered a serious setback when the



waters pushed over his warehouse, shed, and two mills; his experimental farms were covered with sand. But the worst had yet to come. Reports came in that farther up the river the water had risen 25 feet! Stefenelli ordered the people to evacuate, despite the fact that they had already thrown up dikes. No sooner had they reached high ground than the river began to rise ominously, overflowing the dikes and pouring into the houses. Two priests had barely time to get to the church on horseback, consume the Hosts, and race ahead of the advancing flood.

Towards dusk the waters began to weaken the foundations of the buildings. First to go were the poorly constructed houses of adobe, or bricks of dried mud and straw, and the noise of falling masonry was heard through the night. For a time the missionaries hoped that their church and schools might withstand the onslaught. But toward midnight they saw first the steeple, then the body of the church, tumble into the waters. Next it was the turn of the two schools, and the missionaries, filled with dismay, watched as, with a great rumble and splash, fourteen years of effort sank beneath the waves! So it went on until, in the end, there was not a single building left standing in all Roca.

The missionaries had yet to take care of the seventy orphans they had rescued and led to the hills. After fifteen days they ran out of food, and decided to make the long trek to Bahía Blanca, where they would find permanent refuge. Renting four mule carts they set out on an epic trek through difficult and even uncharted paths. Along the way they lost the mules carrying their water supply. They had reached a dangerous shortage of water — their lips had begun to swell — when, fortunately, they caught sight of one of the mules still loaded with its barrels of water.

Viedma, with its complex of mission buildings and schools, was hardest hit. Warnings of the extent of the flood were brought by the families from up-river. Once

aware of the danger, the whole town joined forces erecting dikes day and night to keep the river within bounds as it made its way to the Atlantic. Day and night, too, Vacchina, Cagliero's deputy, kept watch on the rising waters from the tower of the mission's weather station. But not all the watching, nor all the dikes in the world could restrain the flood. On July 22nd, the full force of the flood overran the dikes, destroyed them, then rushed into the houses. The mission school which occupied the highest point of the town at once became a refugee center. Everybody from Governor Tello down to the prisoners of the town jail were lodged there until the navy came in three days later with a launch and a fleet of barges to ferry them to Patagones. Vacchina and a few others remained behind to keep vigil.

Sadly Vacchina watched as one building after another some, large, some small, toppled into the river, until a message came warning him that the waters were continuing to rise. This put even his high-point in danger, so the Governor gave orders for the remainder of the party, including Vacchina, to evacuate. Vacchina obeyed reluctantly, but not before he had defiantly run up a flag at half mast on top of the tower.

For three days, July 26, 27 and 28, Viedma remained completely submerged. Then the waters began to recede, but it was well into August before people could cross the river to plod through the deep layer of mud left in the wake of the flood. It was months before anything like normality was restored.

A fierce three-day storm followed hard on the fury of the flood blowing down the rest of the buildings. When the storm had spent itself, the only building to remain erect was the mission school with both its towers! The officer in charge of rescue operations noted in his log: "The Salesian house was a marvel. It was the sole building to resist the devastating action of the waters, the force of which was well-

nigh irresistible." Cagliero, in his report of the disaster to Rua, also commented: "The tower and its clock kept on sounding the sad hours in the midst of all that death and destruction."

Meanwhile, day and night the river bore down to the sea the carcasses of horses, cows, and sheep; tables, chairs, trees and branches. . . even coffins! It all added to the general picture of desolation.

Viedma never forgot the experience and, to help posterity remember it, the inhabitants placed a bronze plaque by the river, marking both the date of the disaster and the extraordinary level of the flood.

One thing noteworthy about this disaster was the absence of the leader of the mission, the man who should have been at the forefront to make decisions, to give orders, to meet emergencies as they rose. Where was Cagliero when the mission of Patagonia needed him most?

During these months, he was accustomed to visit the Salesians in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and the other Republics. He received his earliest reports of the disaster from the little group of refugees from Roca when he hurried down to meet them in Bahía Blanca. He had no indication yet, however, of the extent of the disaster until he contacted Vacchina. From that moment on he kept informed of events. It was on Vacchina's insistence that he did not return to Viedma. Vacchina argued correctly that he could do far more good by staying up north and seeking help. Cagliero then organized public and private appeals, sending on to Governor Tello the money and materials for distribution.

But this, even from so many, was insufficient. Therefore, he quickly organized the Sisters into groups and sent them begging from door to door in the streets of the cities. He dispatched Vacchina on an extended tour of Italy in search of alms, later sent Milanesio on the same

errand elsewhere, and directed an appeal to all Salesian houses.

The encouraging response to these appeals, plus his own indomitable courage, enabled him, although surrounded on all sides by disaster, to declare magnificently to the world at large: "We shall rise again!"

## 16. The Last King of the Pampas

The end of the century found Cagliero, at the age of 62, still vigorous and full of plans. These plans, despite his years, never allowed him the luxury of being able to stay in one place for any length of time. The magnitude of his task, that of guiding the Salesian Society in South America, and the enormous expanse of his vicariate, kept him constantly on the move.

Before the close of the century he undertook another trip to the town of Roca. Since the recent floods had eliminated river travel, he made the long journey by land, and patiently bore the extra hardship, although Tello did everything possible to make the journey less hazardous and less fatiguing. He had to sleep in what shelter he could find and eat whatever food was at hand. Sometimes, neither was available. At best, his diet consisted of meat cooked over an open fire, cheese, hard biscuit, and water. For sleeping quarters he had to be content with a shakedown in a kitchen, the corner of a classroom, and at times, even a hole dug into the lee side of a riverbank as protection against the bitter winds. And whenever he and his companions were caught out in the open pampa in the rain. . . those nights never seemed to end! Very often the bullockcarts which bore them and their luggage could make no progress

at all because the floods had turned the ground into a swamp. When that happened everybody had to put shoulders to the wheel and push, sometimes for entire days. It was always with immense relief that they pulled into a settlement, for it meant decent rest and good food. He finally reached Roca where, among other activities, he dedicated a new center of population which had formed in the vicinity of the missionary experimental farm. It bore the name of its founder: Stefenelli.

Instead of returning to Viedma, he continued north into La Pampa. One reason for his visit was to assuage the hurt feelings of Father Orsi. When word had reached Orsi that the federal government intended to move the capital of the province from General Acha, where, after encountering enormous difficulties, he had opened a parish and two schools, to Santa Rosa, he dashed off several fiery letters to the authorities in protest. It was all Cagliero could do to calm him, pointing out that since this was a matter for the government to decide, it was hardly the task of a missionary to prevent it. But calm Orsi he did, so much so that when the change was finally made, Orsi was one of the first to wire his congratulations! Cagliero reached Acha around the middle of April, already the cold season in those parts, and at once began preaching and hearing confessions for hours on end. The mission over, he headed for Toay, and from there went on to Santa Rosa. Since his next stop was Buenos Aires, about eight hundred miles off, the authorities, with whom he was on the best of terms, ordered a special coach to be sent down from the federal capital for him. After eighteen hours of traversing the immense wastelands of the pampas, he landed in Buenos Aires, refreshed from the comparative ease of his special coach.

His first care was to meet the new Internuncio, Monsignor Anthony Sabatucci. That Argentina had granted the new representative of the Holy See the status not merely of

Apostolic Delegate, but of Internuncio, a title which enjoyed diplomatic privileges, was an indication of the success of Cagliero's efforts. On his part, the Internuncio, as soon as he had reached Buenos Aires, had lost no time in meeting Cagliero. At the Internunciature, the two men embraced cordially. Both assisted at the laying of the cornerstone of San Carlos church on the grounds of Pius IX School, which by now had become a landmark in the capital. Present and patron of the ceremony was President Roca.

Cagliero's send-off from the capital was a fitting close to his triumphant mission through Río Negro and La Pampa and his reception at the capital. Two of his best friends, Sabatucci and Tello, saw him off on the long, wearisome trek to Viedma.

He returned to Viedma to prepare for the Silver Anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in South America — which coincided with the Holy Year. Although he did his best to persuade Rua to come to Buenos Aires for the occasion, and even tried to get the Holy Father to bring a little pressure to bear on him, it was futile. Rua chose, instead, to send his deputy Father Paul Albera, who arrived in Buenos Aires on September 11, 1900. Twelve days later, Cagliero greeted him on the steps of the parish church of Patagones.

Meanwhile, in Buenos Aires preparations were being pushed for a Congress of Cooperators, the Salesian Third Order. This would be the second such congress, the first having been held in Bologna, Italy, in 1895. It was opened in the capital on November 19, under the presidency of Dr. James O' Farrell. Nine bishops came for the occasion — a rare event for those days! Eight Cardinals and 82 prelates send goodwill messages; Monsignor Sabatucci read telegrams from the Holy Father, Cardinal Rampolla, and Father Rua. Three days of Congress were rounded off by a pilgrimage to the national shrine of Our Lady of Lujan.

Since all the Salesian superiors of South America were together, they decided to hold a South American Chapter under the direction of Albera. One of the points stressed at this Chapter was that the Society should keep alive its interest in and zeal for the missions, clearly an indication that its world extended well beyond the confines of Patagonia, and embraced a program which was much vaster than that of pioneer days. A letter from Rua was read, insisting that the members should be happy to aid Cagliero in his difficult task of guiding and supporting the vast missionary territory under his control.

The Chapter ended, Cagliero returned to Viedma where, at the beginning of the new year, and for the first time since he had been consecrated bishop, he issued a pastoral letter and signed it as Vicar Apostolic. It touched on such topics as the sanctification of the family; the Christian education of children; and the efforts of anticlericalism.

Despite all this progress, the year had not been entirely pleasant; its consolations having been more than offset by a disagreeable incident caused by the anticlericals of Patagones. Cagliero always had trouble with the anticlericals, not only of Patagones, but of South America as a whole. What hurt most was the fact that much of the trouble was caused by his own countrymen, the Italian immigrants who had brought with them the fiercely patriotic — and unfortunately antipapal — sentiments then raging in the homeland. The Masons played upon these feelings to harass the missionaries. When King Humbert of Italy was assassinated, the Italians in Patagones demanded that a funeral service be held and that the catafalque be draped with the Italian flag. So far so good, but on the flag they insisted on adding the inscription *King of Italy, One and Free*, something which at that particular moment in the history of Italy was an insult directed at the Holy See. Cagliero refused. In reprisal, the Italian council, followed by hundreds of patriots inflamed against the missionaries, marched behind their



band playing the *Hymn of Garibaldi* into the church during Mass! The newspapers, controlled by the Masons, took up their cause and attacked Cagliero viciously.

These anticlericals never let pass an opportunity to create trouble for him. Even in distant Acha, Orsi complained of their conduct. They were constantly on the watch for any slips on his part to use as pretexts against him. Typical of this was another incident which occurred on April 15 of that year. He had gone to bless a mausoleum erected by a committee in honour of a highly respected member of the community and a good Catholic. Present at the grave to accept the mausoleum, was the family of the deceased. They requested the committee to wait until the Bishop had blessed the mausoleum before beginning the ceremony of presentation. The committee, on the contrary, insisted on first handing over the mausoleum after which it could be blessed, if the family wanted it that way.

Cagliero went ahead with the obsequies. No sooner had the choir begun, however, than the members of the committee, in turn, raised their voices. The choir sang louder still . . . In the end the singers won and the ceremony ended, with exhortations from the Bishop and the Governor.

But the enemy was not quite routed. A poster made its appearance in the streets of Patagones inviting the people to a meeting at the theater of the Italian Society to honor Garibaldi, the "Hero of a hundred battles" and "The enemy of the clergy." Cagliero used his influence in an attempt to block this but the most he could obtain was to force the anticlericals to mitigate their tone from "Death to Cagliero!" to "Viva Garibaldi!"

Two months later they returned to the attack. This time, they stuck on the door of the church a poster vilifying the pastor for having denied a Christian burial to the most notorious Mason in town. According to them a man could be both a good Mason and a good Catholic! Their insults reached all the way up through Rua and

Don Bosco even to the Pope himself! As a policy, Cagliero usually ignored the activities of these groups, but this was too much. He dispatched a vigorous protest to the government complaining of the defacement of the church and of the scandal the anticlericals were causing in an otherwise peaceful community.

The Masons answered with another, larger gathering in the theater of the Italian Society—a blasphemous ceremony in which six young people were “baptized” according to the rites of the secret society.

The limit of their interference was reached, however, when a preacher whom the Bishop had invited to give the annual mission was speaking on the observance of the Sixth Commandment. Imagine Cagliero’s surprise when the local Justice of the Peace—a fervent “anti”—came to object that he had received complaints that the preacher was scandalizing the people with indecent talk!

All in all, the closing of the century held in it a lot more trials than triumphs. And the people who had caused him the most pain were, ironically enough, those nearest home, many of whom had benefitted from his self-sacrifice.

Toward the latter part of 1902 it was time to pay another visit to the distant Neuquén territory, the most westerly part of his vast mission. It reached from the pampas to the borders of Chile, a distance of more than eight hundred miles of difficult mountainous terrain. This became the most extensive, most prolonged, and most arduous of his many expeditions into the interior.

Neuquén is one of the most picturesque regions of South America, comparable in its lakes, rivers, valleys, and mountains with any of the world’s beauty spots. It is rich in rivers, chief among which is the one which gives the province its name. The population at the time of Cagliero’s visit was around 25,000, mostly Chilean. The remainder

were a mixture of English, German, Italian, and French, with very few Argentinians.

His tiny expeditionary force consisted of his secretary, Fathers Beraldi and Milanese, Brother Edward Genghini, and a boy to take care of the horses; a "break" or long open cart, and a small two-wheeled cart for the altar, bags, saddles, blankets and ponchos. Tello sent twenty horses and two armed guards ahead to Roca.

The caravan pulled out of Roca, December 2, in bright sunshine, and after a 60-mile march along the left bank of the Neuquén, reached Fortín Vidal, an abandoned outpost occupied by Indians. That night the Bishop wrapped himself in a blanket and slept on the hard earthen floor of the fortress.

That night, too, the horses broke out. While rounding them up again the following day, Genghini was kicked in the chest with such violence and his condition grew so serious that the Bishop administered Extreme Unction; the others recited the *De Profundis*. Fortunately, after spitting out a lot of blood and suffering a great deal from the bitter winds that blew across the desert, Genghini rallied. Cagliari sent him back to Roca for further attention.

The incident delayed him several days, but the time was not wasted. He used it to contact the families scattered around the area, to baptize their children, and to administer confirmation in scenes of rustic grandeur. To shelter the people from the burning midday sun, he gathered them together in a deep, sheltered arena, where a tree-stump, covered by a canopy of green willows, became his throne, from which he delivered a pastoral sermon to his congregation. The expedition then pulled up stakes and set off for Anelo, a settlement built around the first of a string of fortresses. Thus far, the Bishop noted grimly, he had found only one family married according to the laws of the Church!

After passing many isolated military outposts he met a party of friends who had ridden from Chos Malal to meet him and to provide a change of horses. They had supper on the roast meat these friends brought, although, unfortunately, the *zorrinos*, or desert wolves, had already stolen most of it. There was not enough for a full meal. To the meat was added a little stale bread and water from a nearby stream.

The next morning they transformed their cart into a chapel and celebrated Mass, then kept going until they reached the *Cordillera del Viento*, where Cagliero had had the near-fatal accident. Parts of their journey were along tracks carved out of overhanging rocks where they were in constant dread of falling or of a horse slipping and breaking its leg. Here they had to seek shelter again from the howling winds in order to bed down for the night.

At Chos Malal, the drums and bugles of the garrison blared out a welcome to the Bishop, as he passed under a shower of flowers into the church to intone the *Te Deum* and begin the mission. The people were for the most part Chileans, and he had learned that strong faith was a characteristic of the Chilean people. "Rarely in my life," he exclaimed, "have I beheld such faith!" The four missionaries heard confessions until late every night.

The mission ended, the expedition split in two, so as to visit as many Christians as possible. Milanesio pressed northward up the valley and the Bishop turned south into Tricao-Malal, the center of a fertile, cultivated zone. However, even before he came within the sight of Tricao, horsemen began to appear from all points of the compass. Hundreds of them had left their flocks and huts in the high Cordilleras to welcome him, entire families often riding on one horse! At the sight of such devotion Cagliero had some difficulty restraining his tears.

The Indians, too, were impressed. Never before had they seen a bishop and they watched him in awe as he said

Mass on an altar made from an old table. Empty bottles wrapped in colored paper served as candlesticks, and for decorations, there were the wild flowers of the pampas.

Here he conducted an eight-day mission in scenes of piety which reminded him, he declared, of the spirit of the early Christians. Some of the Chileans had come 70 miles across mountainous terrain to gain the Holy Year indulgence. The last to arrive at night had to find shelter from the biting winds of the Cordilleras by bundling up under a bush or hugging the side of a dry river-bed.

In the evenings, in search of a little tranquility, he climbed the hills and surveyed the scene below him. The pampa was dotted with the fires that the families had lighted; the snow-covered tips of the Cordilleras reflected the cold rays of the moon, and over all shone the lights of the Southern Cross. From the fields and valleys rose the sounds of evening prayer, led by the missionaries... and Cagliero reminded himself that he was looking at the fruit of the seeds which he and his men had planted here twelve years ago. It was a native scene, all right, but how different from the license and orgy that had once marked their gatherings!

The next morning, 300 horsemen accompanied him about twenty miles along the road to the valley of Curillee. Some even insisted on accompanying him back to Chos-Malal. It was lucky they did so, for, in descending the steep mountain slopes overlooking a deep gulch, the break picked up so much speed it got out of hand and overturned, burying the Bishop under a mountain of luggage! "I've never been very lucky in my missionary expeditions!" he remarked wryly. They soon had the break on its way again and at sunset he rode into Chos-Malal once more to await the return of Milanesio, while spending the time repairing the break and loading supplies.

When Milanesio arrived, the caravan consisted of 30 mules and horses, a stronger break for the Bishop and his

secretary, another cart for the equipment, three soldiers of the 7th Cavalry as guards, and several *gauchos* to handle the horses. This time, also, a small scouting party always went in the vanguard to find the easiest route. Cagliero called a halt at *Paso de Don Anselmo*. Here, weeping willows marked the spot where, years ago, one of his brave young missionaries, Francis Agosta Anselmo, almost within sight of the station, had drowned in the gorges of the River Neuquén.

A barge transported both break and cart across the Neuquén. The horses then forded the waters reluctantly, fearful of the dangerous currents that threatened to crush them against the rocks. Once on the other side, the caravan stopped long enough for a slice of roast meat and a drink of water, then resumed its slow way up to the pre-Cordilleras by a narrow Indian trail. The brand new military road which had been built to replace it had been washed away by the recent floods. The going was so difficult that the Bishop had to get down and walk, and at every step up the mountain path, both cart and break threatened to keel over and dash themselves to pieces on the rocks below.

Having passed the most dangerous point in this section, he mounted the break and was hardly settled when the horses stumbled, overturned the break, and threw him out again! Although it was nothing serious the pain of his wounds kept him awake all night.

At last they were among the white peaks of the Cordilleras. Here again he had to get down from the break and pick his steps across the face of rocks which overhung sheer precipices. When the danger points had been safely negotiated, he got into the break to rest, but while fording a river, the break overturned a third time, and flung him into the mud! It was hours before he reached the first house where he could clean and dry himself. The owner, a retired soldier, generously turned his home into

a chapel where Cagliero was visited by Indians who had come a long way to see what a bishop looked like.

During the mission in this area, he administered confirmation to some very old Indians, one of them a woman of over a hundred years who rode in with her children and grandchildren all on the same horse! Cagliero insisted that for the four days she stayed at the mission she should have mate with him in the morning and soup in the afternoon. Two old men of the group, however, refused baptism. This surprised him, for he was aware that the Indians had an almost superstitious belief in the power of the baptismal waters.

"Why do you not want to be baptized?" he asked them.

"We are too old," they replied, "for the Christian religion to do us any good."

Pulling up stakes, the expedition forded the river called *Agrio*, or bitter, because of the sulphate of ammonia it contains. Here some Chileans offered the Bishop milk, cheese and a block of mineral salt—a useful gift for travelers. While crossing the desert region of Cohunco, they began to suffer from thirst, but when they did sight a little stream, the mules dashed to it and all that was left to wet the lips of Cagliero and his men was froth and mud.

After a few days out the break, true to form, had another upset! This time it happened in a little valley where the caravan spent a bad day and a worse night, at the mercy of a fierce *pampero*. Utterly exposed as they were, it seemed at times as though they would be carried away by winds of more than 150 miles an hour. The wind scared their guide so much that he deserted! The horses, left to themselves, bolted, and the next morning a search party had to go after them under a scorching sun. In those high regions the temperatures are extreme—bitterly cold at night and burning hot during the day. On his return,



Milanesio fell off his horse, literally dying of thirst. They gave him the only liquid they had — a few drops of Mass wine and to Cagliero's intense relief, this was enough to revive him.

On the way south they rested at the Zapala homesteads which later were to expand into a flourishing town. Cagliero noticed one remarkable thing about this place — the flagstones on the pavement and in the houses had been taken from the local quarries, and although Zapala is more than a thousand miles from the sea, these were indented with the fossils of sea shells!

Finally, after two more wearying months, they pulled into San Martín de Los Andes, headquarters of the Third Cavalry Regiment, and four hundred miles south of Chos-Malal. Colonel Pérez provided them with every possible comfort, in happy contrast to what they had been suffering up to then.

This was also the settlement of the cacique Curruhuinca. In one single day, Cagliero administered four sacraments to the cacique, confession, baptism, confirmation and matrimony!

San Martín de los Andes nestled in a tiny patch of level fertile ground between two lakes and was surrounded on all sides by high mountains. Cagliero had heard of the scenery which was characteristic of most of the province of Neuquén. Close to the mountains, its river sources were bountiful. There was nearly always either rain or at least a heavy mist in the valleys. The neighboring settlement of Hua Hum had one of the most abundant rainfalls in the world. Pouman Lake, he was told, possessed a kind of Loch Ness monster: anyone who fell into the freezing waters never came out. The monster was supposed to have seen to that. There were others, however, who said that the freezing waters caused the body to sink to the bottom. Apple-trees abounded ever since they had been planted by the Jesuit missionaries a century before. He was particularly fascinated by the sight



of the miniature rainbows, arching the gorges. At night when the sky was clear he was consoled by the symbolic presence of the Southern Cross which, during the course of the night, completed the full circle of the Pole.

Junín de los Andes, their next stop, was a frontier town lying on a plateau northwest of San Martín, close to the mountain peaks that separate Argentina from Chile. Towering over all stood Lanín whose summit was surrounded by a picturesque sombrero of cloud. In these areas the dreaded caciques, Calfucurá and his son Namuncurá, used to harangue their warriors before sweeping down to the plains to attack the colonists. The warm summer season was too short and the sudden spring frost too cold to make farming profitable. Even the sheep to live over the long dry season had to nibble at the hardy *nene* plant which gave their meat a bitter taste. He was not surprised to find Junín full of merchants for it was a trading center and a half-way station between Chile and the Neuquén Valley.

Namuncurá, famous son of his still more famous father, Calfucurá, still lived here with the remnants of his tribe. It was the first time these people had seen a bishop, and Namuncurá called together his "parliament" of elders to honor his visitor. "Now I live as a good Christian," he told Cagliero. "I want my family and my people to do the same."

The Bishop patiently instructed him and one day, "the last king of the pampas" followed him into a toldo and made his confession. He received his First Communion at the age of 91! Afterward he took the Bishop's hand and kissed it. "I am getting old, Bishop." He shook his head sadly. "I'm going to die soon. One day all of my people are going to die. Yet we have no holy burial ground. Please prepare one for me and my people."

The Bishop agreed. They marked off a suitable piece of land in the center of the reservation, blessed it, and raised

on it a large wooden cross as a monument to his historic mission.

When all this had been done, on the evening before the Bishop left, the cacique invited him into his toldo. After they had both seated themselves and had drunk the mate which the cacique's daughter had prepared, the old man turned to Cagliero. "And now, Bishop," he said and his eyes softened. "Let us talk about my favorite son, Zepherin."

Zepherin Namuncurá, the boy whom the cacique and Cagliero were discussing was to be an intimate concern of the Bishop for many years, and his story forms one of the most beautiful chapters in the history of Argentina. He was the son of Manuel Namuncurá and the grandson of Calfucurá, both of them undoubtedly the most dangerous, most skillful, and most treacherous caciques ever to spread terror and death across the pampas.

Calfucurá established the brief dynasty of the *Cura*, or Stone — his name meant *Blue Stone* — by one tremendous act of treachery. In 1835 he sent emissaries down from the Chilean Cordilleras to ask permission from the leading cacique of the pampas to allow a caravan of his tribesmen to enter their territory to sell goods. Permission was granted and the Indians were looking forward to buying some of the travelers' wares. They were not prepared for what happened. Once the "merchants" entered their midst, they immediately turned into fierce warriors who began a slaughter which was to pass into the annals of Indian history. This single attack was so effective it succeeded in wiping out the most powerful rivals of Calfucurá! For the next thirty-eight years he dictated the fortunes of the vast hinterland of central Argentina.

Calfucurá was eventually defeated by General Rivas at the battle of San Carlos. He lost most of his best warriors; the enemy took back his stolen livestock; and, moreover, he had grown too old and too fat for the swift pampa warfare.

Broken in spirit, he withdrew to Chilhué on the Chilean side of the Cordilleras whence he had originally emerged to establish himself as "king of the pampas."

After his death Namuncurá took command and led the Indians on their famous *malones*. One of these took place in 1875, the very year Cagliero landed in South America. The Indians massacred three hundred whites, took over five hundred women as slaves or wives, burned down four hundred houses, and stole fifteen thousand head of cattle! It was one of the country's most disastrous raids! Nevertheless, his star was on the wane. What caused it to set more quickly was the erection by government troops of lines of fortresses connected by deep trenches. This, of course, did not prevent Indian infiltration but it did render impossible the great *malones*. Over and above this the cacique was well aware that the government's new Remington rifles would always defeat him in open warfare.

Astute diplomat, he saw that the only thing to do was to come to terms with the government while he was still in a position to negotiate. His conditions for surrender included a tract of land for his people and a sufficient ration of meat, mate, sugar, and tobacco. An agreement was made, but when the government failed to deliver the promised rations Namuncurá again took to the hills. In 1877 the new Minister of War, General Julius Argentino Roca, decided to break the power of the Indians. After two years of bitter campaigning, the only cacique of any importance still fighting was Namuncurá. But he, too, was already on the run.

In 1883 a group of Namuncurá's Indians presented themselves to Milanesio at Fort Roca and begged the missionary to help them make peace with the government. Before he had reached the point of giving in, Namuncurá had suffered intensely at the sight of his people being reduced to misery and had kept turning over in his mind the proposals of the Chilean Araucanos to give him men and arms if he would lead them in a war of revenge. It was Milanesio who

finally helped Namuncurá come to a decision on the side of peace.

In return for his surrender he received the rank of colonel and a grant of thirty thousand acres at Chimpay, 600 miles up the Río Negro. It was a tract of rather barren soil, but like the rest of the Río Negro valley, it could have made the tribe self-supporting. Namuncurá and his followers, however, were trained not to the use of plow and spade but to the handling of lance and boleadora. By slow degrees, they slipped into the depths of poverty.

It was here on August 26, 1886, that Zepherin Namuncurá was born of Rosario Burges, one of the cacique's three wives. She was later rejected when Namuncurá was baptized and chose his second wife Iñacia, as his Christian partner. (His first wife was now dead).

"He was born in disgrace!" Namuncurá bitterly commented. "He will never become my successor!" The old cacique had never considered his surrender to Roca as anything else but defeat. The boy grew up, nevertheless, into a sturdy, daring young Indian. His coal-black hair bound by a red band, his flashing eyes, his skill at games and at the chase — these signs slowly changed his father's opinion of him. He began to see in Zepherin, after all, the makings of a cacique.

In 1880 the Government ordered Namuncurá farther west to make room for more white settlers. Smoldering with rage, Namuncurá, in a spirit of vengeance, harbored a vague plan to make Zepherin his successor; to drive the invaders from the pampas. In 1897 with the help of influential friends, he sent him to Buenos Aires to be educated. Zepherin began in the navy workshops but his health failed so rapidly that through the influence of former President Saenz he was transferred to the Pius IX school in Buenos Aires.

From the very first days Zepherin captivated in a curious way his new audience. It happened that the milkman on his rounds had left his horse unattended in the play-

ground, which in those early days was of soft earth. As soon as Zepherin saw the horse, his instincts took over and the next thing the boys saw was the Indian galloping madly round and round the playground as free as the winds of the pampas that once had blown in his face.

While at the school he made his First Communion and this wrought a change that was slow but complete. One day in class, for instance, the teacher noticed that Zepherin kept glancing out the window. The teacher decided to take him away from the window. After class Zepherin went up to him. "Father, please let me go back to my old place."

"Why?"

"Because from there I can see the little lamp of the tabernacle."

His growing love of religion became apparent when in 1899 in a contest open to the boys of the school he won the title *Prince of the Catechism*.

Unfortunately, there began to appear in the boy signs of the disease which attacks all primitive peoples on their first contacts with civilization. One day Zepherin was horrified to see that he was spitting blood! Cagliari at once sent him back for a time to his native air to see if that would help. At Viedma he lived surrounded by places and things which recalled the earlier lives of his ancestors, and he was under the care of the one and only doctor in the whole region, Father Evasio Garrone. After a period of rest he took up his studies for the priesthood.

Now and then occasions arose to test him. During the long hikes with the boys Zepherin with his knowledge of nature became the center of interest. He taught the boys how to make bows and arrows and how to use them. His favorite trick to shoot an arrow into the air, step back and let the arrow fall on the spot where his feet had been. He held them spellbound with stories he had heard from his father and the other Indians.

One of the boys, enthralled with what Zepherin was saying, abruptly asked: "Zepherin, do you like to eat the flesh of the whites?" Zepherin's usually happy expression changed slowly. For a long time he stared at the face of the boy to see if he had meant any harm. Apparently he was reassured, for the anger slowly drained from his face; tears came to his eyes.

He began to mortify himself in various ways, such as placing bricks and pieces of wood in his bed to disturb his rest. When the superiors discovered this, they stopped him. Invited by an uncle to return to his people, he was told he would be happy there and would be entertained by the dancing and singing. Knowing very well that if he returned to his tribe he would be exposed to all kinds of temptation, he stubbornly refused.

It became evident however, that not even the native air of the Río Negro was doing him any good. Cagliero decided to take him along with him on one of his trips to the Oratory in Italy. It was not the first time that Cagliero had brought Indians to Europe, but perhaps this one was destined to become the most famous of them all.

During Zepherin's stay at the Oratory the people made much of him. Pointing him out in the streets they called their friends to come and see the "Little Moor." Since Zepherin's skin was very dark and he dressed in the fashion of the civilized Indians of this time — balloon trousers, or *bombachas*, tucked into high boots, shirt, necktie, a wide sombrero — the newspapers spoke of him as "the young prince of the Andes." He was even presented to the royalty of Italy during the Exposition where the Salesian missionaries had set up an Indian encampment.

Bishop Costamagna began to fear that all this attention might turn the young man's head. At times he would scold him for not paying enough attention to his books or for taking too much pleasure out of hearing himself being addressed as "the young prince." Once while Zepherin was washing

his face the Bishop took a pail of water and dashed it over him.

"Don't think you're something special!" he exclaimed. "Don't think that you are above the others. Everything they keep telling you about yourself is nonsense!" At times Costamagna was so harsh with him that Milanesio felt he was overdoing it and openly said so. Zepherin, however, humbly thanked Costamagna for telling him the truth about himself.

When Cagliero went to see Pope Pius X he took Zepherin along with him. The Holy Father treated the boy with every sign of affection, listened with pleasure when Zepherin read a little address he had prepared in Italian, and gave him a silver medal.

Cagliero sent him to Frascati, in the suburbs of Rome, in the hope that the climate might enable him to carry on his studies. Yet not all the good will in the world seemed to help; he declined rapidly. In a letter of March 21, 1905, he wrote: "I do not assist at class any more, for my health does not allow it. Good Monsignor Cagliero came from Turin to Rome to put my things in order. Poor Monsignor! He feels it so much. After all, he has made so many sacrifices for me!"

"I often go out to the olive garden . . . pass hours out here looking at the cupola of St. Peter's . . . I have very little appetite . . . Blessed be God. It is enough if I save my soul. For the rest let the holy will of God be done."

From Frascati he was brought to the hospital of the Brothers of St. John. Cagliero also persuaded the Holy Father's physician to attend him. But even while his own life was fast ebbing he could still think of a little boy who lay beside him in the hospital: "I shall soon go," he told the priest. "But when I do, please visit the boy in the next bed. If only you knew how he suffers! He hardly sleeps at night. He coughs and coughs . . ."

It was his last act of kindness. On May 11, 1905, he died at the age of eighteen years and nine months. As Cagliero put it: "At the age of Saint Aloysius Gonzaga and Saint Stanislaus Kostka, whom he had imitated in life . . . like a flower plucked from among the desert thistles, like a rare and precious lily gathered from the pampas of Patagonia."

His body was later taken back to Argentina and buried in Fortín Mercedes where it now rests and from where Zepherin looks toward the pampas and the hunting grounds of his savage ancestors. There is no monument to mark his birthplace at Chimpay on the banks of the Río Negro. What monument could mark the site of a toldo? But the people have not forgotten Zepherin. In Chimpay's little railroad station they have dedicated a majolica plaque to his memory.



## 17.           Adios Patagonia

"Bishop, what do you think of this divorce law?"

"Señor Presidente, I believe that marriage is a sacrament and that the nation which authorizes divorce cannot call itself a Catholic nation. Divorce is the best possible means of cutting oneself away from religion."

"And the moralists, what do they say?"

"Divorce spells the ruin of the family, the nation, and eventually of society itself."

This conversation took place in a room of the Casa Rosada where several members of Congress were gathered. Among them was Charles Olivera, author of the proposed law, whom Cagliero had never met. Knowing this, President Roca had led him into the conversation on the proposal to legalize divorce in Argentina.

Cagliero had been violently opposed to the law and had even chided the Archbishop of Buenos Aires because not one single prelate had dared to raise his voice in protest. Aware, however, that he had the backing of Governor Tello who wielded great influence with the Senate, he next went to seek the support of the President himself.

What happened after that conversation is not known, but when the motion came up for debate, Roca sent a messenger to Congress to find out how the voting was going. The messenger reported that it was a 50-50 tie. In a characteristic move, Roca then called in two of the members

who were for the law and hurriedly dispatched them out of town "on a very important mission." The law was defeated 50-48.

Cagliero had come to the capital after ending his mission in San Martin, Milanesio, however, had tried to persuade him to go south as far as San Carlos de Bariloche.

"It's a world apart," he enthused. "Snow-capped peaks, azure-blue lakes, waterfalls, woods, gorges... a fairyland! You'll see the mighty *Tronador*, where the snow tumbles down with a roll of thunder, the *Cerro del la Catedral*, a cathedral of mountain crests, rocks coloured white, red, and green, a forest of *arrajanos* with their red wood and white bark..."

"*Basta! Basta!*" Cagliero put his fingers to his ears in mock exasperation. "No matter how good you make it look we have no intention of buying the place! As a matter of fact, we won't even get to see it. Have you forgotten that if we go we have every chance of being caught by winter with the roads closed? How would you like that, Mr. Salesman?"

Milanesio made a wry face. "O. K." he called out to the others. "Back to Neuquén" With that the expedition pulled up stakes and began the last leg of the long trek that signified the end of the tour. It had been exhausting and often dangerous and had lasted over six months. On more than one occasion the Bishop and his friends had risked their lives. But now that was over and what mattered only was the fact that it had been enormously successful, with an overall result of 9825 baptisms, 8161 confirmations, 2014 marriages, and 54,756 Communions.

Cagliero was very glad that he had decided to return to his base so soon for on his arrival he was informed of the threatened passage of the divorce law. He lost no time in moving on to the capital. While he was in Buenos Aires he received what was perhaps one of the great consolations of his life. That was when they handed him a booklet written

by Dr. Gabriel Carrasco which made more than one reference to the work of his missionaries in Patagonia.

Dr. Carrasco had recently founded the National Office of Demographic Studies and had just completed an extensive tour of what the government called the "Territories of the South." His booklet bore the title: *Los Civilizadores de la Patagonia*, and contained paragraphs in the following vein: "Cagliero's missionaries are among the most efficient collaborators in the progress of Argentina... a notable part of this work of redemption falls to them... Bearing only the arms of the Cross and the Faith, and trusting in those virtues which religion inspires, these men have marched in the vanguard of civilization... for God and Country... Such is the civilizing mission of the Salesians in the Republic. Let us in our turn learn to love these men and consider their existence in our country a great blessing."

High praise, indeed! Yet there could be no doubting either the sincerity or the authority of the writer. One of the most respected men in the country and a recognized expert in his field, he had made his remarks only after first-hand observation. In the outside world the report could not help but create a profound impression.

With these words ringing in his ears, Cagliero departed for Europe. He had scarcely arrived at the Oratory when he heard Carrasco's words being echoed by Father Albera, the new Superior General.

"There are now 58 houses and 17,000 pupils, scores of Oratories, and 15 parishes in Argentina — much more than our forces there would ordinarily allow. Our confreres in their self-sacrifice go far beyond the limits of prudence.

"Whose fault was this? We hold the culprit right in our midst — Bishop Cagliero, our first missionary, heir of the devouring spirit of Don Bosco and of that activity which never cries 'Enough!' He has given such a tremendous impetus to our work in South America that even if he

tried he could not stay its course. . . .”

After a short visit with his friend Cardinal Svampa in Bologna, he set out for his usual round of visits to cities and centers, preaching, encouraging vocations to the missions, and collecting alms. During this period of activity, unfortunately, in Verona he fell ill and was forced much against his will to take to his bed. At this time another illustrious prelate was sick in bed—his friend, Leo XIII. But while Cagliero was up and preaching to a group of children on July 20, Leo XIII lay dead. This death was particularly affecting to Cagliero. How could he forget that it was Pope Leo who had created the vicariate of Patagonia and placed him at its head?

But he had the good fortune to be received on October 9 by the newly-elected Pius X, former Patriarch of Venice. Cagliero, naturally, was anxious to learn how the new Pontiff felt about both his mission and himself. At the first audience he took the opportunity to present the Holy Father the same gift he had so far made to three Popes—a rug of guanaco skins.

“Your Holiness,” he began after the formalities. “There are a few little favours and blessings I should like to beg for friends of our work.”

The Pope replied: “I shall grant you much more than you ask for.”

He was so generous indeed that Cagliero at one point protested. “Your Holiness is more of a father than a Pope!” he exclaimed, playing on the Italian words *Papa*, Pope, and *papá*, father.

Keeping the needs of Patagonia constantly in mind, Cagliero then requested and obtained from the Holy Father a token gift for the lottery he had organised for his new church in Viedma. Once he received a gift from the Holy Father, he explained, it would be easier to obtain other gifts from the Cardinals, and people of importance. He also spoke on the necessity for further increasing the number

of bishops in Argentina and for elevating Buenos Aires to the status of a Metropolitan See to satisfy the just pride of the Argentinians in the growth of their country.

Before leaving Turin he presided on December 8th over the departure ceremony of the missionaries from the Oratory. Twenty-seven years ago, he reminded his listeners, he had led the first mission band and since then had left no less than 36 more expeditions! Was any greater proof needed, he asked, that Don Bosco's great dream of the missions had come true?

On his return to South America, he was invited to preside at the Congress of Sacred Music organised by the Saint Cecilia Association in April at San Carlos. It was the first such congress to be held in the capital, and its aim was to give an impetus to the recent dispositions of the Holy See for the reform of church music. The choice of Cagliero was a happy one; in his speech he revealed some of the fascinating high-lights of his musical career.

This began, he told his audience, when, after listening rapt to the organist in Castlenuovo, he used a line of matches for a keyboard; next, he purchased a small set of bells on which he played a funeral dirge for the death in 1847 of Gregory XVI. When he went to the Oratory, Don Bosco, who had assigned an important role to music in his educational system, urged him to take up music seriously.

Cagliero informed his amused audience that his public musical career had a stormy beginning: — One day while he was entertaining some benefactors at the Oratory, for lack of material, he offered them a piece he had composed called *The Chimney Sweep*.

It was an immediate success. Everybody wanted to know the name of the composer. "It's hard to say," he answered vaguely. "I found it among my music."

After several more performances, however, people insisted on knowing. Cagliero finally said it was his.

"Cagliero!" was their indignant reaction. "How can you tell such lies?"

"Look here," Cagliero retorted, equally indignant. "I told lies until I was nine years old, then I stopped. I haven't told one since!"

Few believed him, nevertheless, and most put the piece down to one or the other famous composer. One publishing house even went so far as to congratulate Giuseppe Verdi! Verdi, on his part, did say that, as far as he could judge, the composer possessed a strong imagination and great creative power. At that, Cagliero lost his patience. He would prove that it was his by having it published under his name!

This caused so much alarm that the matter was referred to Don Bosco. At once he called Cagliero to his room.

"Is it true, John, that you intend to publish this piece under your own name?"

"Yes, it is."

"But is it really yours?"

The blood rushed to Cagliero's face; he raised a clenched fist and brought it down on the table with a crash. "Don Bosco, surely you don't think that I...?" He could not finish; he choked; hot tears welled up.

"All right, John. All right," soothed Don Bosco. "I'm sure it's yours. I only wanted to hear you say so. Go ahead and have it published."

To silence his critics completely, Cagliero sat down and defiantly wrote several more pieces in the same successful vein.

Since almost everything he wrote was *cantabile*, or tuneful, his compositions became nationally popular. Once, while he was travelling along the Italian riviera, a strolling guitarist boarded the train and began to sing a song called *The Sailor*. As the musician passed round the hat, Cagliero, within hearing of the passengers, protested that he had not sung it properly. This provoked a challenge to do better. To the amazement and delight of the people on the train,

Cagliero took the guitar and sang *The Sailor* as the author — himself — had intended that it should be sung. He topped this by bringing round the hat for a second collection for the strolling musician.

The apex of his musical career was reached perhaps in 1868. A year earlier he had brought to Rome a letter from Don Bosco to Pius IX. While there he attended the rehearsals of a Mass commemorating the Eighteenth Centenary of St. Peter's foundation. It was sung by three choirs of more than four hundred voices. Also in Rome, he met the *maestro* of the Vatican, Dominic Mustafà, and other names of the musical world who had gathered there for the occasion.

Inspired by all this, for the inauguration of the Church of Mary Help of Christians on June 9, 1868, he composed a Mass, *Succure Miseris*, to be sung by three choirs. The first represented the Church Suffering; the second, the Church Militant; and the third, the Church Triumphant. Two hundred boys and one hundred professional singers took part. During the practices he picked up off the streets and trained a boy who later became the tenor for whom Verdi wrote *Othello*. His name: Guiseppe Tamagno. To top everything he had the sounds of cannon play their part in the wars of the Church Militant! This Mass outshone all his other compositions, and earned for him a solid reputation in the world of music.

In contrast to his triumphs of earlier times, he also recalled, for the amusement of his audience, his musical experience with the Indians, and in particular, a session with the cacique Sayhueque. Despite his attempts to teach the Indians the simplest of hymns, he was unsuccessful. Every time he tried to get the children to sing, the old cacique insisted on accompanying them on an ancient violin, although he could not string two notes together. Cagliero finally lost his patience and told the cacique that if he really wanted to help the choir, the best thing he could



do would be to play the violin elsewhere!

Noting with a certain melancholy that his life on the missions had put an end to his musical career, he urged his audience to follow the new Church regulations, assuring them that ultimately it would benefit the faithful. "As *I* told the cacique to put aside *his* kind of music," he concluded. "The Holy Father has now told *me* to put aside *mine*."

Five days after the Congress closed, a carriage rolled to a stop in front of the most imposing building in the heart of the Almagro district of Buenos Aires. Msgr. Sabatucci, the Internuncio, stepped out of the carriage, and his cordoned hat and scarlet-piped garments contrasted with the somber garments of the little group of priests advancing to greet him. They had received word that he would be bearing an important communication.

He at once embraced Cagliero and handed him a telegram. As the Bishop read it, his face at first revealed no more than a little curiosity. Then, as always when he was most moved, he lapsed into his native Piedmontese. "This should happen to me?" he commented, and passed the telegram to the Provincial who read it aloud: "Holy Father deigns to elevate Monsignor Cagliero to Archiepiscopal See of Sabaste. Your Excellency please communicate news worthy prelate this act of particular benevolence of His Holiness." The little group burst into applause.

For the moment that was all there was to it. Monsignor Sabatucci took his departure and Cagliero retired to write letters to inform friends of his elevation.

"One thousand and two hundred Salesians," he wrote the Holy Father, "eight hundred Sisters, and one hundred and twenty houses with two hundred thousand pupils join me in thanking with the hearts of most affectionate children Your Holiness who loves so much and grants so many favors to the Sons of Don Bosco laboring in the distant Americas and particularly in Patagonia."



"Your sovereign act, Most Holy Father, while it has humiliated me, has filled with joy the Salesians of Europe and America. That it has done the same to others is shown by the felicitations received from the government, the clergy, and the people of Argentina."

What had happened to bring this about?

To begin with, while he had been in Turin for the last General Chapter, Rua and Vespignani, the superior in Argentina, had discussed the possibility of his remaining in Italy. Running his huge vicariate and at the same time overseeing the affairs of the Society in South America had become too great a task for his 66 years. In his stead they intended to place a Vicar Apostolic who would also be an Argentinian. Rua, however, doubted whether Cagliero, after having labored so much for the vicariate, would be willing to give it up. In fact, when he had broached the subject with Cagliero the result was as he had expected. Cagliero strove to put the idea out of Rua's head completely. If the government, he objected, had not recognized as Vicar Apostolic even *him*—who enjoyed such favour with everyone from the President down—they were certainly not likely to recognize anyone else. "I told you in person and I now repeat in writing," he informed Rua. "I shall submit to leaving Patagonia solely for that reason which ought to guide every religious, namely, the greater good of his congregation." They were not, therefore, to consider changing him, no matter how inclined they might be to spare him what they thought was an excessive burden. With that he, for one, had considered the matter closed.

Nevertheless, during his visit to Italy, he had shown signs of failing strength. The way he drove himself and the hard life of the missions had begun to take their toll; several times his doctors ordered him to take things easier. All this care and attention did somewhat restore him; but he went on working, and of course, accepting every invitation to

preach or to pontificate. His slow decline, however, became so noticeable, that the Superior General grew seriously concerned and began to lay the groundwork for his release.

Congratulations now poured in, not only from Argentina, but also from South America and Europe, for Cagliero by now was well known on both sides of the Atlantic. At the banquet held in his honor in San Carlos on May 1, 1904, the crowd was too great to be accommodated indoors, and the playground had to be used. Two weeks later, he was given an official reception at which the Internuncio, former President Uriburu, and members of the government and the hierarchy were present.

With his elevation, a change in the vicariate became inevitable. Since he would be in Italy in obedience to a call from the Holy Father, he appointed two provicars to take his place. The administration of that huge territory was too much to impose on any one man. He chose Father Stephen Pagliere for Neuquén and Rio Negro; Father Vacchina for Chubut. Although Father Vacchina apparently expected to be made Prefect Apostolic, Cagliero did not voice any opposition to the idea. This, however, was more to satisfy the eagerness of Vacchina than in the hope of having a second vicariate recognized. After all, he reasoned, the first continued to exist only because the President and the Archbishop tolerated the present situation simply to avoid any inconvenience to their friend Cagliero.

The manner in which the Holy See had honored him held an element of surprise for Cagliero. That it was also a pleasant one is clear from his letter to Rua describing enthusiastically the celebrations surrounding it, and his thanks to those who had contributed to it. There is also a certain naiveté in the frankness with which he averred that they had done well in the appointment. But his reasons were not personal. The Salesians had merited the honor, he maintained, in their thirty years of sweat and labour in the

inhospitable regions of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego.

His most important call was on President Roca. As soon as he entered the Presidential suite, Roca rose and embraced him.

"I'm sorry for not attending your ceremony," he apologized. "But every moment of my time is being taken up with my annual message to Congress."

The men sat down and exchanged reminiscences of the old days. Roca recalled that in '79 all he had seen during his desert campaign had been open spaces and wild Indians, while now, Patagonia was covered with signs of progress.

At that moment two senators dropped in and Roca introduced them. He told them that once, around 1880, he had had a curious dream. In this dream he found himself seated in Congress observing the senators and deputies as they entered. To his great surprise he saw some dressed in furs; they had evidently come from very cold and distant regions.

"Who are these people?" he asked.

"Those are the deputies from Santa Cruz and Tierra del Fuego."

"But aren't those places still deserted and inhabited by savages?"

"No, no!" he was told. "They are already civilized."

At this point Roca turned and pointed to Cagliero: "And here," he exclaimed dramatically. "You have the man who civilized them!"

In a souvenir album later presented to Cagliero, he wrote:

It gives me immense pleasure to recognize the great and lasting services of Monsignor Cagliero over a period of thirty years to the scientific and industrial education of the Nation's needy and abandoned youth.

During my travels across Patagonia, which Don Bosco chose as his vast field of endeavor for the faith and for civilization, I have found in the farthest reaches and

in the areas least furnished with human comforts, the schools and institutions of the Salesians.

The efforts and the perseverance of these saintly missionaries, directed and encouraged by the example of the Archbishop of Sebaste, deserve the gratitude of the people of Argentina, and indeed, of every Christian.

Great praise from one who in the beginning had utterly opposed the entry into Argentina of the Vicar Apostolic! But perhaps the greatest compliment that Roca ever paid his friend was when he confided to his intimates, "If I ever do go to confession, it will be to Cagliero!"

Cagliero next took leave of his well-wishers in and around the capital. After that, it was time to make his way back to his vicariate to carry out the unpleasant task of saying farewell to Patagonia. Although it was by no means certain that he would be leaving permanently, he understood that there was such a possibility and this made his task doubly difficult.

His arrival at Viedma was the signal for great jubilation. When the missionaries and the people learned that he might not return, however, their joyful manifestations took on overtones of sadness.

Cagliero would have none of it. "For goodness' sake," he exclaimed. "Stop all this weeping! Who said I wasn't coming back? I must come back if only to consecrate the cathedral of Viedma!" Yet despite himself, some of this sadness was creeping into his own soul. Those around him heard him, in unguarded moments, utter phrases such as "garden of olives," "bitter chalice," and the like.

Those who felt his parting most were, perhaps, the Sisters. For them Cagliero had always reserved a special place in his affections. On his visit to their house he was so upset by the melancholy way in which they were taking his departure that he decided to end it at once by injecting a little joy into their hearts. "If you stop shedding those tears,"

he told them. "I promise you right away these favors: I shall give the habit to the three postulants; accept the profession of the five novices; and grant perpetual vows to all those ready for them. To top it all, I shall receive as postulants the three alumnae waiting to enter the Society." Such a sudden and unexpected rush of favors quickly changed the atmosphere.

The time set for his departure from Viedma was the afternoon of July 15. Although it was a miserable winter's day with steady rain and thick fog blanketing the land, the streets were lined with people. His last moments included a visit to the hospital, a parting cup of cheer with Governor Tello; then off for the town of Patagones. The following morning, choosing a very early hour to avoid the emotional ordeal of a second farewell, he left Patagonia. He took with him his young Indian friend, Zepherin Namuncurá, and boarded the *galera* which had so often bruised his bones. This time, however, the bruises did not seem half so painful. A final stopover was planned at Fortín Mercedes. The wet season had converted the region into swampland and no less than fifty horses were placed at his disposal. At this point, Cagliero began to reveal a curious impatience to cut short the time he was spending in his old vicariate. It was costing him too much to tarry in the land where he had so long labored, where he had suffered defeat and tasted victory and which, perhaps, he might never see again.

When the favorite son of Don Bosco, after thirty years of untiring zeal, left the equally favorite mission of Don Bosco, he could look back upon a sizable list of achievements. These included;

- 14 parishes;
- 15 churches; scores of mission chapels and stations;
- 8 boarding schools;
- 1 trade school;
- 3 agricultural colonies;

- 6 day schools;
- 2 houses of formation;
- 8 nurseries;
- 2 hospitals;
- 1 large pharmacy;
- 3 workers syndicates;
- 5 meteorological stations;
- numberless religious organizations.

This was the foundation upon which, as time went on, the Church was to grow in southern Argentina.

Nor did his roster of achievements stop at the borders of his mission, or even of Argentina itself. He was responsible for laying the groundwork for the remarkable expansion of the two young Societies in the entire continent. From the seeds he planted grew the splendid tree whose branches reached out beyond Patagonia to Tierra del Fuego, Uruguay, Paraguay, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico, Venezuela; it embraced the Indians of Tierra del Fuego and Patagonia; the Jivaros, the Bororos, the Xavantes, the Orinocos, the Coroados . . .

In all these undertakings, the true spirit of Don Bosco had been firmly established. If Cagliero could be accused of having any consuming passion, it was that of making certain that everything was done in that spirit. While talking one day to Vespignani, the superior of the Salesians, Monsignor Francis Alberti, Bishop of La Plata, remarked, "It is easy to spot the men of Cagliero's school. They are always in action, always willing to give up even necessary rest when it is a question of working, preaching, confessing, teaching catechism, or going out of their way to help. They adapt themselves to any kind of food or lodging, discomfort or difficulty."

*Recto fixus calli ero.* "I shall be true to the way"; the way, that is, which he had assimilated, boy and man, from his model, Don Bosco.

## 18. Defender of the Weak

*"Me voy con el cuerpo, pero me quedaré con el corazón! . . . I leave with my body, but my heart still remains."*

Cagliero was referring, of course, to his departure from Patagonia. He might have added that besides his heart he was leaving behind two provicars through whom he would continue to run the vicariate. On the eve of his departure from Buenos Aires, he wrote a long letter to one of these, Father Pagliere, containing a detailed account of the vicariate's finances, adding one or two pointers for the latter's guidance. Deeply concerned about both his vicariate and his provicar, two weeks later he sent him another letter, this time from Brazil.

At the Oratory he attended a meeting of the General Chapter. "Thirty-three Provincials," he observed: "an equal number of delegates from different countries, three Salesian prelates, Fagnano and Costamagna and myself, constitute a striking proof that our Society is no longer a fledgling." After the Chapter, he wrote again to Viedma requesting copies of the little periodical, *Flores del Campo*, which he himself had founded, and offering suggestions for the improvement of its faulty grammar and syntax. He also tells the editor of another periodical to stop using language so abstruse that his readers (including Cagliero himself!) could not understand him.

Letter followed letter, all written whenever Cagliero happened to find time from his sermons, conferences and retreats. From Rome he wrote his 1905 pastoral letter for the vicariate, transmitting the Holy Year privileges he had received from the Pope.

In one letter he did more than merely counsel; he gave his provicar a piece of his mind. "Too many functions with too many *niñas, señoritas, and señoras* are being introduced into the boys' schools. Religious functions are being pushed into the background in favor of profane ones. The padres heading the different committees for these affairs should run them with a firmer hand." He also ordered Father Valentine Nalio from Patagonia to Turin to act as his secretary. Many of his letters were addressed to the Sisters in Patagonia. Apparently they did not find the warmth in the provicar which they had found in Cagliero, and frankly said so.

While waiting for what he hoped would be orders from the Holy Father to return to Patagonia, word reached him that there was a move afoot at the Vatican to propose him for the See of Vercelli. He stopped this at once by making known to Cardinal Rampolla that he did not want to be separated either from the Society or from Argentina. Meanwhile he went on directing the vicariate from a distance.

During a visit to Palestine to preach a number of retreats, he was taken ill and had to undergo an operation. After a week or so in bed he left for Italy again but, to his regret, had to refuse an invitation to attend the Silver Jubilee of the first Salesian house in Utrera, Spain, which he had founded.

In the beginning of 1906 he sent instructions for Milaneseo — who had been in Mexico since the Río Negro floods — to ask to be retired or else return to Patagonia; and he inquired about the number and state of the postulants. In April he sent another pastoral letter of eighteen pages, issued the new regulations governing the separation of male



and female religious orders, and ordered certain changes of personnel. Early that same April he relived a few moments of South American life when he met Roca during the latter's visit to Rome. He confided to Roca that since he had completely recovered his health, in a matter of days he intended to ask the Holy Father to allow him to return to his beloved Patagonia.

Finally came the long-desired audience with the Holy Father. Cagliero himself describes its outcome in a letter to Pagliere. "I insistently begged the Holy Father to allow me to return to Patagonia. But all he answered was, 'You have worked enough. Rest and take care of your health.' Four times I begged him and four times he answered me in the same way. When he inquired if the mission was doing well, I told him that I had left two provicars in charge who were good, active, and intelligent men. Alas, I should have told him that they were no good at all! Then he would have sent me back in a hurry!"

He took the keenest interest in the progress of the new church of Viedma. To him this was no ordinary church, but a future cathedral — the first in that part of South America. The day would come, he could easily foresee, when this vast mission would be split up into dioceses, and when the center of his mission at Río Negro became a diocese, he wanted it to have its own cathedral.

The story of this church goes back to the time when his friend Tello took over as Governor of Río Negro. He had helped Tello refind a Faith lost in the maze of political life in the capital. Politics and religion did not mix too well in those early days. Even before the flood at the end of the century which had destroyed the old church of Viedma, Tello had already felt that Viedma could do with a church more befitting its new dignity as his provincial capital. To strengthen his hand in appealing to the federal government for a new church, he invited a German engineer who had settled in the town to inspect the old church. The purpose

was to obtain its condemnation. The engineer promptly condemned it and, moreover warned that from one day to the other it could collapse.

Cagliero and Tello addressed a note to the Office of Municipalities, requesting the property on which the building would stand. That winter, while he was in Buenos Aires, Tello suggested to him to call on their friend Yofre, Minister of the Interior, to secure 4,000 pesos already promised for "public works" in Viedma, but which as yet had not been sent down. Soon after that, had come the flood that had wrought the utter ruin of the old church and made the construction of a new one imperative. The authorities, however, objected to granting the land for the church *in perpetuum*, forever. On the other hand, neither Cagliero nor Tello felt it would be safe to build what they had planned to be the most beautiful church in the new territories only to have it confiscated by some future anticlerical government. They kept insisting until, finally, the authorities capitulated.

The architect chosen to direct the project was the man who had designed the only building in Viedma to withstand the floods; Juan Aceto, a Salesian padre. The builder, Anthony Patriarca, was a thoroughly romantic character, a roving soul who had settled down with the missionaries after having travelled around the world. To do the work more economically, Tello used labour from the local jail and, in his spare moments, rolled up his own sleeves and took his turn on the job.

With the gifts that he had received first from the Pope and then from the Cardinals, Cagliero had organized a lottery for the church. In this he was but following Don Bosco who launched these lotteries from time to time for the benefit of the poor boys of his Oratory. Unfortunately, he had to leave Patagonia long before the church was finished, but he maintained his interest in it. Indeed, with characteristic directness, he complains in more than one letter to his provicar, that he is not kept informed of what is being

done. "*Respecto de la construccion de la iglesia de Viedma, no sé nada de nada. Dime algo.* Regarding the construction of the church of Viedma I know absolutely nothing. Tell me something." It remained for a long time one of his fondest hopes that the Holy Father would allow him to return to Patagonia to consecrate the church when it was completed.

This was not to be. Instead, it fell to Costamagna to consecrate, on July 2, 1912, the new and splendid church of Cagliero's dreams in Viedma. For by that time, the fortunes of Cagliero had changed in a way that neither he nor his closest associates could ever have imagined.

After his audience with Pius X, Cagliero left the heat of Rome and went for a short rest to Domodossola in the Alps. While there he received a message from the Holy Father summoning him to Rome. As he prepared to leave he kept asking himself — not without a certain apprehension — Was this the call for which he had so long waited? Was he being allowed to return to his beloved Patagonia?

Upon reaching the Vatican, he discovered, to his intense disappointment, that the Holy Father had something very different in mind: Not his return to South America, but the apostolic visitation of the dioceses of Bobbio, Piacenza, and Tortona. While he bowed his white head he confessed that it was a difficult and delicate mission and that he accepted it only because he was requested to do so by the Holy Father. "Besides," he adds: "who knows but when I finish these, he may not have waiting for me more of the same!"

The visitation of the dioceses was entirely successful. He solved the problems there with the same frank and sympathetic approach with which he had solved the problems he had encountered in Argentina. So optimistic and so charitable were his reports to Rome on people and their problems, that one Cardinal exclaimed: "You seem to find all these people saints!" Even while facing the most delicate situations, he was nothing if not human. On one occasion

in the diocese of Bobbio — the continued existence of which was an open question — he was confronted by two pastors. One insisted that the other's parish should be annexed to his. "Why, there was not a half-hour's walk between the two!" The other, in defense of his parish, insisted that it was much more, far much more.

"Let's see for ourselves," suggested the Apostolic Visitor. Followed by the two pastors, he set out to measure the distance for himself on foot. The first pastor hurried as fast as his legs could carry him, the other dragged his feet like a rheumatic. Between them strode Cagliero, head high, chest out, and taking deep, deep breaths, as happy as a sandboy on one of those walks he always loved! By the end of the march he was in no mood to make things unpleasant for anyone. Diplomatically, he decided that the threatened parish should be allowed to continue for the time being. Later it turned out to be a flourishing one. In same way, about the threatened diocese of Bobbio, he declared. "If this diocese did not exist, it would have to be created." The diocese, too, in time, flourished.

At the end of the visitation he handed in his report to the Holy Father.

"And your expenses?"

"No need to bother about that, Your Holiness. The Church is poor."

"The Church may be poor," replied Pius X firmly, "but it isn't a miser. Hand me your list of expenses."

Just as Cagliero had mournfully predicted, the Pope had three more dioceses lined up for him: Albenga, Ventimiglia and Savona. He finished these the following June then hurried off to Castelnovo to write out his report. When he handed it to the Holy Father he also pointed out that he was "one hundred and twenty percent fit again", and requested permission to return to Patagonia from which he had now been absent four years. Again, however, he was refused.

This continued refusal, besides causing him great pain, also created much misunderstanding of his position on the part of his friends. Since he always thought that he would return, he had consequently left unsettled the question of his title of Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia.

The vicariate, together with the prefecture of Tierra del Fuego, had been erected by the Holy See on the suggestion of Don Bosco, but neither had formally consulted the wishes of the government of Argentina. Perhaps they had known beforehand what the government's attitude would be! This later was clearly and strongly expressed by Roca: The vicariate was clandestinely granted to the Salesians in opposition to the rights of the *Patronado*. Not only that, but it was placed under a foreign bishop. This was against the law. The position of the Archbishop of Buenos Aires was no less clear: since the territory belonged to a diocese it was an anomaly to erect within it a vicariate — — that is, a mission in the strict sense of the word — which would be outside his jurisdiction. To both it was also highly distasteful to think that any part of their country could be called a "mission."

Indeed, for a long time, the very existence of the vicariate depended solely on the esteem in which everybody concerned held Cagliero. Bringing the question out into the open, they knew, would hurt him. Roca and the Archbishop too often had proclaimed their appreciation of what he had done for both the Church and for the country to leave their feelings toward him in doubt. But he had now been absent for four years and they, at least, were certain that he would not return. This created what was rapidly deteriorating into an impossible situation, not only for himself, but also for his missionaries. Vespignani, the superior in Buenos Aires, had to bear the brunt of the attacks in the anticlerical press. These attacks finally pushed him beyond the limits of endurance. In

a strongly worded letter to the superiors in Turin he complains: "It appears that Monsignor Cagliero simply does not wish to understand (and there seems to be no one who can make him understand) the touchiness of the authorities. They are instigating people to write letters and articles condemning the attitude of the Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia."

Father Peter Ricaldone, Visitor to South America, wrote to Rua that "the Archbishop of Buenos Aires insists on finishing with this business of the provicars. He says that there should be a religious superior and nothing more. Likewise, he points out that each time the newspapers carry notices of Cagliero receiving this or that new assignment, it sets the clergy murmuring. As far as the vicariate is concerned, he says, he will respect it since the Holy See so desires, but he suggests that we ourselves should do something to settle the matter." When Archbishop Espinosa himself came to Rome, he confesses that he was astonished to learn that Cagliero still continued to call himself "Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia."

All this caused the anticlerical press to drag Cagliero's name in the dirt. His critics among the clergy and the missionaries grew more open and bitter in their attacks on what they called his pride and intransigence. Even his friends failed to understand why he should want to hold on to a title to which he apparently no longer had any right.

Why, then, did he not relinquish his hold on the title of Vicar Apostolic?

In the first place, he was anxious for the Holy See to send him back to his beloved Patagonia. Had he not already made five requests to return! Each time, however, the Pontiff had answered him vaguely, but always in the negative, telling him to take care of his health, or voicing some such word of concern. When eventually he realized that it was not the intention of the Holy Father

to send him back to Patagonia, he hoped that the government could somehow be persuaded to recognize the vicariate and let an Argentinian be appointed. Once the new Vicar Apostolic was appointed, all Cagliero wanted was to be allowed to return to Patagonia to consecrate him.

He could face his critics more or less serenely because he based his position on assurances he had received from the Holy Father that when the time was ripe he would be allowed to renounce the vicariate and at that time the renunciation would be announced simultaneously by the Holy See, the bishops concerned, and the Salesian superiors. This would make it clear that he was acting not of his own accord, but in obedience to the wishes of the Pope. In a letter of October 23, 1908, he says: "Up to this moment the Holy See has not ordered me to renounce the vicariate, and is quite satisfied with the two provicars who are taking my place. If Archbishop Espinosa thinks fit, Father Rua and Father Marengo are quite prepared to suggest a solution to him which will be acceptable to the Salesians and at the same time advantageous to the mission."

The Minister of Argentina at the Vatican, Dr. Alberto Blancas, on June 30, 1909, sent a note to Cardinal Merry Del Val, Secretary of State, reminding him that the Holy See, *motu proprio*, of its own accord, and without previous consultation with the government of Argentina, had erected the vicariate. It was hoped — so ran the note — that to avoid further conflict, Cagliero would relinquish his title since, in effect, he had already done so by accepting another appointment.

The matter was bandied back and forth between the Internuncio, Archbishop Espinosa, the Holy See, and Fr. Vespignani, the Salesian superior. Finally, Vespignani proposed a solution: let the mission of Patagonia be divided among five priests with the title of *vicars foranes*, or delegates of the bishops to whom the territory would belong.



The five would naturally be chosen from among the men who had built the mission and who were at the moment running it. This would be only until such time as the dioceses concerned would have sufficient personnel. This solution seemed to satisfy all parties. It remained to be seen whether Cagliero would yield or whether he was, as others had said, too much attached to his title to let it go.

The answer he sent to his provicar, Father Pagliere, settled once and for all the canard regarding his attachment to the title. "Since a similar solution has already been applied to other parts of Argentina," he wrote. "to the mutual satisfaction of both religious and diocesan clergy, I do not see why it should not be applied to Patagonia. I myself have no difficulty in renouncing the title. I wait for instructions from the Holy See. I do not think it prudent to do anything until my jurisdiction is transferred to the heads of the mission or the *vicars foranes*." To the secretary of the Superior Chapter he wrote that he now waited only for word from the Holy See to shuffle off what he calls his *poncho*, referring to his title of Vicar Apostolic, or as he used to say jokingly, his title of *capataz* (local slang for "boss.") Monsignor Espinosa, always a good friend of Cagliero and the missionaries, not merely accepted the solution and the men Vespignani proposed, but even obtained a salary from the government for them.

Thus ended a situation that had caused much friction between Cagliero, the Archbishop of Buenos Aires, and the government. Thus ended, too, the vicariate of Patagonia. Always something of an anomaly, it had been created by the Holy See at Don Bosco's and Cagliero's insistence out of what was, after all, an uncared-for portion of the vast and unwieldy Archdiocese of Buenos Aires. Don Bosco had wanted it because he saw that only by becoming a vicariate would it be entitled to appeal to the generosity of the Catholic world, or obtain assistance from



the Propagation of the Faith. Cagliero had built it and while he was there, it stood; but when he left, it fell.

All the same he continued to interest himself in his old mission and was disturbed when no one wrote to keep him informed of events there. Since the mission of Patagonia was now attached to the Society's Province of Buenos Aires, he was afraid it might suffer from this arrangement. He was convinced that the chief glory of the Society lay not so much in the growing number of the provinces as in the mission of Patagonia.

His reasons for defending Patagonia as the principal work of the Salesians in South America he wrote in a letter of March 2, 1921: "We should remember that the Patagonian missions, not only in my judgement, but also according to the expressed wish of our Venerable Don Bosco—a wish which he repeated many times to me—were the principal end for which we went to South America; that the houses of Buenos Aires, San Nicolás, and La Plata were opened for the specific purpose of maintaining the missions. Forgetting or ignoring this idea of Don Bosco was the cause of the decadence of these missions. The glory of our Society before the world lies not so much in our social works in Argentina, but in Patagonia."

When Father Pedemonte, the new Provincial, gave a fresh impetus to the missions which would lead to their development, Cagliero was delighted. His correspondence which, when treating of the affairs of Patagonia, had taken on a complaining, almost querulous note, now displayed a more pleasant and hopeful tone.

Besides the question of his title, there was another which, perhaps, caused him even more pain. This concerned the Sisters for whom he had always cherished the warmest feelings. Knowing this, Don Bosco had appointed him their first Spiritual Director, and Cagliero had con-

tinued to help them in every way, first in Italy and Europe, and then in South America.

The trouble stemmed from a decision of the Holy See affecting the relationship between male and female religious orders. Article 202 of the document *Normae secundum quas*, issued in 1901 by the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, stated that a female congregation with simple vows could no longer be dependent on a male congregation of the same nature. This declaration, therefore, struck at the very foundation of that Rule of the Salesian Sisters which said: "The Institute is under the high and immediate dependence of the Superior General of the Society of St. Francis de Sales."

Up to this, the Salesian Superior General had also acted as the superior of the Sisters. This did not infringe on the autonomy of the Sisters who ruled their internal affairs through their own Superior General and Chapter.

The Sisters, for their part, fought within the limits of obedience to preserve their connection with the Salesians, pleading with Congregations, Cardinals, and the Holy Father himself. They knew that the ones who would suffer most from this separation would be themselves. Apart from the loss of the material and moral support they had always received from the Salesians, they feared that once they were separated from the successor of Don Bosco, they would incur the danger of losing the original spirit of their founder. The Salesians also were greatly disturbed, since both congregations had always formed the one family of Don Bosco, and believed they were destined to continue that way.

The moral separation, besides, had necessarily to be accompanied by a material one. This meant that the goods the two congregations so far held in common would have to be divided. It was begun all over the world where Salesians and Sisters worked side by side: it was begun in Patagonia.

Cagliero did not like the way it was being done there. In fact, when he received reports of what was happening he grew highly indignant. "If it has to be done," he wrote to the Salesians, "let it be done with judgement and prudence, but, above all, with justice and equity. Do not forget that in Patagonia without the Sisters we could have accomplished little. I have made this very clear in Turin and even in Rome. If we must form two families, the Sisters have a right to a fair share of goods, since we are sons and daughters of the same Don Bosco. At all events this division of material goods ought not to compromise the union of spiritual and moral goods. Let us not stray from that fraternity, unity, charity, and generosity towards those who have been, are, and always will be, our own Sisters, for they are daughters of our common Father." He also expressed his conviction that the Sisters, since they work so hard for the mission, should also have the expenses of their formation reimbursed; he had always reimbursed them.

In defense of the Sisters he wrote to Pagliere what was one of the strongest letters he ever penned. "May God avert that the placing of Patagonia under the Salesians of Buenos Aires turn out to be its ruin! Although the separation and the division of property was agreed upon by the provincials of both the Salesians and the Sisters, the final result has been nothing less than the *expulsion* of the Sisters! And all this without even consulting me! . . . I am sending a letter of *protest* to Father José (Vespignani) and to the Chapter in Turin, in case this may have been done with their knowledge and consent. This is destroying twenty years and more of my work! It amounts to an invasion of the Sisters' school, to the destruction of the orphanage. In my protest to Turin I called it vandalism. It may be inculpable; it certainly is brainless! — to reduce the central house of the Sisters to a simple branch of another house. Two errors have been com-

mitted: first, placing incapable personnel in charge; second, not understanding in Buenos Aires that the house in Viedma cannot maintain itself unless someone goes around collecting the means of subsistence the way I did and the way you did, too, from our benefactors and from the government."

When he heard that the Salesians at Patagonia wanted the Sisters to reimburse them for the house which he himself had paid for he protested to the Superior General. "In Viedma I bought the house for the Sisters in return for what they had left us. And now someone wants to claim \$ 40,000 from them for it. If the Salesians have debts, let them pay them. I left them no debts."

That he fiercely resented the Salesians' treatment of the Sisters there is no doubt. "We shall see how they fix up the mess brought about by this frigid *thine* and *mine* which destroys charity and fraternity among the sons and daughters of the same Father. In my sixty years in the congregation this is the greatest displeasure I have ever experienced — to see the work of twenty years in Patagonia destroyed!"

He kept urging the superiors in Turin to put pressure on the Salesians of Patagonia and Buenos Aires. His efforts finally bore fruit. It would have been difficult to disregard his forceful defense of the rights of his beloved Sisters. On their part, the Sisters kept him informed of events. "The Sisters wrote me that they are happy with him (the new Provincial, Father Louis Pedemonte) because he treats them with affection and has promised to help them. The torment of the division has ended with the cutting of the Gordian knot by Father Albera. With a stroke of the pen he cancelled the *to owe* and *to have*. Please God, the old paternal regime may return!" Through his efforts mainly, the rights of the Sisters were respected and harmony finally restored between the two branches of Don Bosco's family.

When he returned to Rome he was able to help the Sisters in yet another way. They had been appealing to the Holy See to have in each of their provinces a Salesian to act as counselor in certain intricate affairs such as dealing with governments, banking, and the like. They also suggested that a Salesian might represent them at the Vatican. Cagliero used his influence in this direction with the result that the Holy See eventually did allow them to choose such a counselor, and a decree of June 19, 1917, established the Salesian Superior General as the representative of the Sisters at the Vatican for five years. The Superior General was charged with visiting every two years the houses of the Sisters to see that they followed the spirit of their founder.

At the end of the first two years, Benedict XV called Mother Daghero, superior of the Sisters, to find out for himself if they were happy with the arrangement. "I should say so!" was her frank reply. "Among the children of the same Father, having the same spirit and a single aim in doing good, could it be otherwise?"

Because of this favourable report, the privilege was extended twice for six years, then once for ten years. The ten years were not up before the Holy See finally granted the Salesian Superior General all the faculties necessary for the spiritual direction of the Sisters. Once again, they were under the guidance of the successor of their common Father. Once again the efforts and persistence of Cagliero had won the day!

## 19. New Horizons

"Your Holiness, I'm seventy now. What could I do? Besides, I'm just a poor missionary. The only diplomacy I know is the diplomacy of Don Bosco, the diplomacy of the gospel."

"So you're seventy? Well, I'm seventy-three and I bear the whole Church on my shoulders. And as for diplomacy, you've shown you know as much about it as anybody. Go, *caro Monsignore*, and do there as much good as you have done in Patagonia and in other parts of America."

Cagliero bowed and took his leave.

Always straight of build, he seemed even a little straighter than usual on that May morning of 1908, as he strode out to the antechamber of the Pope's audience rooms where Father Félix Guerra was waiting for him. Guerra, a former pastor of Bahía Blanca, was in Rome at the time and had accompanied him to the Vatican.

Guerra stood up. "Any news this time, Monsignor?" He knew how anxiously Cagliero awaited an announcement from the Holy See on his status.

"There certainly is!"

"What is it, Monsignor?"

"Pack our bags. We're on our way to South America."

"Patagonia?"

"No. Central America. As Apostolic Delegate." He squared his shoulders. "I may be seventy," he declared, "but actually I feel like forty!"

"Well, let's see." Guerra pretended to size him up. "Average height, robust, and rather stout," — Cagliero glared at him in mock indignation. — "but quick in manner and comportment, serene of countenance, and..." Guerra ended with a flourish. — "with the fire of a young man in his eyes!"

Guerra's appraisal may have been rather complimentary but that and his new assignment did help to infuse new life into Cagliero. He was back in harness. Stepping out of the Vatican, he boarded a street-car for the Salesian procure in Via Minerva. Despite his rank he was too poor to own an automobile. Scarcely had he sat down among the workers than in a matter of seconds his head begun to sag forward and, tired from the all-night trip he had made to Rome, he fell asleep. He could relax completely in spare moments like these. As the people brushed past him entering and leaving the street-car, they stared at but were careful not to wake the sleeping prelate.

Although the appointment as Apostolic Delegate to Central America took him by surprise, it was, nonetheless, the result of long and serious study on the part of the Vatican. This was not caused by any doubt of the suitability of Cagliero but resulted from the complicated nature of the problems involved, all of which became obvious to him from the moment he looked into the background of the countries concerned.

The history of the Central American republics has been that of regions perpetually uncertain of their existence as political entities. When the yoke of Spanish rule was thrown off by the Captaincy of Guatemala, as Central America was then known, no bloody uprising was witnessed such as there had been in neighboring Mexico and

everywhere in South America. Fighting began only *after* 1821, when independence was declared. A confederation of states was set up as the natural and most logical transition from the old order to the new.

This confederation of July 1, 1823, the most beneficial arrangement to these republics, was split open by rebellion in 1833. A new republic was later proclaimed as the *Provincias Unidas del Centro de America*. This also broke up and a renewed effort was made in 1880, and again in 1895. Attempts were made down the years to establish at least a favorable climate for union beginning with international agreements on customs, currency, and mail services. Between-times there had been countless revolutions, constitutional reforms, and wars. Mexico for a long time exercised hegemony until 1846. Then the United States became interested in the construction of a canal across the isthmus — an idea, incidently, suggested as far back as 1616 by the King of Spain to his Governor of Castila de Oro to protect some interests newly acquired by the conquest of California. The most favored route of this canal started at the mouth of the San Juan River, Nicaragua, crossed Lake Nicaragua, then followed through a cut in the narrow strip of mountain near San Juan del Sur. De Lessup's Panama Canal changed all that, although the route is still mentioned as an alternate. Even without this incentive, however, United States intervention continued necessary for the prevention of innumerable brush wars, disastrous to the participants. It was continually being invited to arbitrate in one dispute after another.

Partly because of the failure of tyrannical rulers to use the Church as a political instrument, partly because pressures from anticlericals had forced the hands of the rulers, all the Central American republics had early broken off relations with the Holy See.

With the construction of the Panama Canal, these nations now acquired a new importance. Moreover, while



Masonry and anticlericalism had made enormous strides among them, the Church's influence had steadily waned. In Guatemala, for instance, Masonry had become a constitutional arm of the state in the very year in which the Catholic Church had been outlawed! All five nations banned religious orders, and education rested in the hands of a laity hostile to religion.

While the Holy Father and the Cardinals agreed that the time had come to re-establish relations with these countries, they were still debating on whom to send. At this point Cardinal Rampolla suggested Cagliero. As Secretary of State to Leo XIII, Rampolla had noted that Cagliero, while unswerving in his loyalty to the Holy See, at the same time had always managed to make friends of the anti-clerical rulers; had persuaded Argentina to re-establish relations after a lapse of twelve years, to scrap the divorce laws, and, finally, had demonstrated a more than ordinary capacity for solving problems, conflicts of interest, clashes of personalities — all this while leaving behind only a minimum of hurt feelings.

Rampolla was not alone in proposing Cagliero for this difficult task. Cardinal Gasparri, one of the ablest of Secretaries of State, had spent years as Delegate to the republics of Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, and was familiar, therefore, with the affairs of the sub-continent. Partly for this reason and partly because he believed in encouraging Don Bosco's work in South America, he gave his support to Cagliero. This, added to the backing of the Holy Father, who had also observed Cagliero at close quarters during the latter's visitation of the Italian dioceses, resulted in the unanimous and enthusiastic choice.

The new Apostolic Delegate lost little time in setting sail for his post. Already in August, a few months later, he was writing to Mother Catherine Daghero, superior of the Sisters:

"Our trip so far has been marvellous. At first we were afraid of the tropical heat. Instead, providence cooled us with delightful breezes. I am writing from Havana, Cuba, where we stopped over for two days. We leave tomorrow and in three days arrive at Puerto Limon in Costa Rica; we shall have spent thirty days of pleasant travel.

"When I was in Europe, I kept thinking of America; now that I am in America, I keep thinking of Europe. I remember you all in my Masses, prayers, and practices of piety. The best thing you can do for us is pray. God alone can move the hearts of those in power. Pray, therefore, that my new mission be successful. I, in turn, shall pray that you all become saints."

As he had indicated, he docked at Puerto Limón on the east coast of Costa Rica on August 7, 1908, one month after his departure from Genoa. On board the *S. S. Antonio López* with him were Father Guerra and Father Valentine Nalio whom he had called from Patagonia. He received the warmest of welcomes. Both government and Church had sent representatives from San José, the capital. A seven-hour train ride across the country brought him to the Pacific coast into San José with its population of 25,000. Along the way people met the train to show their affection for the second Papal Delegate to visit the country. The first had stayed only a short while nearly thirty years ago!

He sang the *Te Deum* in a cathedral packed with a crowd, the newspapers said, it had not seen since the day it was built. Welcomed by the Vicar General, he rose in his throne and, as one eyewitness puts it: "With a robust and agreeable voice, and a young man's energy, he saluted Costa Rica in perfect Spanish, praising the faith of this Nation which had received with such warmth the representative of the Holy Father." Later he and his secretaries were taken by Monsignor Juan Gaspar Stark, Lazarist Bishop of Costa Rica, to his palace — their temporary

quarters until the first Delegation could be built.

The following day he presented his credentials to President Dr. Cleto González Víquez in the presence of the Ministers and the diplomatic corps. Cagliero's new career as diplomat had begun.

Why had he chosen Costa Rica as the place in which to begin?

When the Holy See decided to send a representative to Central America, Costa Rica was the country with which the Vatican, although no Apostolic Delegate had been there since 1882, enjoyed the most cordial relations. Feelers had also been sent out to see if Costa Rica would receive a Delegate. The answer? Not only would Costa Rica receive a representative of the Pope, it would also grant him the status of Envoy Extraordinary! As an Apostolic Delegate he would have been authorized to handle only ecclesiastical affairs; as Envoy Extraordinary he could act as an ambassador entitled to full diplomatic privileges. From Costa Rica, also he could observe at close quarters the sentiments and conditions prevailing in the surrounding republics.

This nation's history was no different from that of the other Central American republics. Its name, "rich coast," was given to it by Columbus because of its lush vegetation and abundant mineral resources. The population on Cagliero's arrival was 311,176, with more Indians than whites. Regarding the stability of its finances, it is enough to say that in that particular year, 1908, its revenue was \$ 7,916,475 and its expenditures, \$ 9,191,450. In its short period of independence it had already had at least twelve different constitutions! One hundred and three priests, including twelve religious, took care of the nation's 68 parishes and its seminary with 10 students. The Salesians operated an orphanage with 233 boys in Cartago.

Costa Rica's beauty, Cagliero discovered, lay more toward the west; the east coast was an unhealthy tropical region

suited to the cultivation of bananas; the north rather arid. The west reminded him of the temperate zones and was plentifully supplied with moisture because of the conflicting winds from both the Pacific and the Atlantic. On the peaks behind San José, the capital of Costa Rica, he often watched two huge cloud-masses, one from the Atlantic and the other from the Pacific, meet head-on and produce a misty rain. During the day the sky was clear and sunny; but towards afternoon clouds formed, filling the sky with fantastic shapes. Costa Ricans called their country "the garden of Central America," although, like the rest of Central America it was a center of earthquake activity.

The capital had much of the appearance of a Mediterranean town with sun-bleached streets, pastel-colored houses, and a sense of order. Nor did the good-looking men and women belie that appearance. The Costa Ricans boasted of being the most cultured nation in Central America, of having in every town a church, a school, and a soccer field! — and of having kept themselves apart both from the native Indians and from the colored race inhabiting the east coast. Once they forbade the colored slaves under pain of death to come up from their lowly east coast to the *meseta* where the whites lived. Men told the Delegate tales of how Chinese slaves had had their eyes gouged out for disobeying. These stringent measures helped preserve in Costa Ricans the characteristics of an almost pure European race, and made them, perhaps, the handsomest people in Central America. On the other hand, some confessed to the fear that this inbreeding was producing a people without vitality.

Cagliero describes both the climate and his work in one of his many letters to Mother Daghero. In one written in the September after his arrival, he says: "The days here are the same throughout the year: at six in the morning the sun rises and at six in the evening it sets. For six months of the year it rains and for the other six months it blows dry. The seasons tend to disappear; it is always spring with flowers and

fruit, just as it is always summer. Here no one suffers heat, or cold, or hunger, or thirst. The natives are good, the whites restless, and the women without vanity! The people on the whole are Christian and liberal when they are not misruled by autocrats.

"Communication with Europe is easy — by mail it takes three weeks. Unfortunately, it takes longer to get mail from the nearby Republics!

"With the bishops, clergy, and people everything is going fine. Because I speak as the representative of the Holy Father, whom they all love, what I say is well received. With the other governments, things are also well. The Apostolic Delegate is always received with the deference due to his position, the papal flag given preference over the flags of the other powers.

"We are already in very good relations with the President of Nicaragua. He is waiting for me to present credentials so that I can be received officially with the honors due to an Envoy Extraordinary. I expect a similar reply from the Presidents of Honduras and San Salvador. The most difficult nut to crack will be Guatemala; but if you pray hard enough the Help of Christians will open the door.

"My Delegation is one of the most active, and very soon I shall set out on a visitation to these people who need so much religious instruction, so many priests. That is why I recommend with such insistence that you pray.

"The Salesians and the Sisters are very well looked upon here by the governments. I still have not been able to communicate with them in San Salvador except by letter and telegrams.

"We are all well in health and are still living in the Bishop's house. A *Protestant* banker is preparing a sumptuous palace for us — another Salesian diplomatic success!"

It was not long before Cagliero realized that, apart from the rather minor difficulties which he would have to overcome, such as those created by fierce and sometimes foolish

national pride, human weakness, ignorance, prejudice, laxity, and the like, two major problems confronted him: How to strengthen the Church within itself. And how to re-establish relations between the Church and Republics which, because of the influence of Masonry and anticlericalism, opposed religious freedom? No easy task and one which would be made still more difficult by the dictators of these countries who were proud, overly-sensitive about their authority, and governed by whims; who punished or praised simply to show that their wish was law. Not only that, but too often their term of office was so short that the Delegate would no sooner have hammered out a policy with one dictator than he would be deposed, and a different policy would have to be worked out with his successor.

In spite of all this, the Delegate courageously set forth on the conquest of what he imagined should be the easiest of the remaining four Republics, namely, Nicaragua.

This country, he found, had several claims to outstanding natural beauty. Chief among these was its lake. The lava from nearby craters had once poured into it and had settled into hundreds of islets upon which, in time, grew luxurious vegetation, gradually transforming the lake into one of the world's beauty spots. It was the only freshwater lake in the world which harboured sharks and saw-fish. Lined with shady *amate* (eternal) trees, among its many natural life curiosities it counted the chiltota, a shrieking bird which built an odd nest that hung from the branches of a tree. Volcanoes were plentiful—and active.

Another more interesting characteristic of Nicaragua were the clouds of *tijeretas*, scissor-tailed swallows which swooped into the towns at dusk to feed on the myriad insects in the air.

Politically the country had always been unstable; revolts kept its rulers in a state of vigilance. Economically poor and undeveloped, it possessed only a few miles of

good roads close to the capital. The absence of sanitation outside the capital, and the cesspools made necessary by the lack of a sewerage system, rendered water highly unsafe. (A sample sent to the United States for analysis brought back the telegram: "Is anyone still alive?") Outside the capital, water was sold from carts. It was a land of the barefooted and the undernourished, where ragged children and beggars filled the streets. The people also had a saying: "If a man doesn't steal he has to work."

At the time of Cagliero's arrival in Nicaragua the population stood at almost 800,000. It was on the verge of war with Honduras, but the Powers stepped in and forced a settlement. A year later Honduras sent troops against Nicaragua, anyway, and was defeated; the United States again intervened and the two nations signed a peace so effective that the following year Nicaragua sent troops to help Honduras quell a rebellion! A year after that Nicaragua began preparations for war, this time against San Salvador, but internal troubles and a quarrel with the United States over the execution of two Americans, Leroy Cannon and Leonard Gorce, stopped that, and led to the fall of the tyrant, José Santos Zelaya.

It was Zelaya who, in 1894, introduced a series of laws against the Church and against the spirit of the Concordat of 1861 with the Holy See. When it's only prelate, Bishop Francisco Ulloa y Larrios protested, Zelaya summarily banished him. At Ulloa's death in 1908 Bishop Simeon Pereira y Castellon was appointed to rule over a church consisting of 42 parishes, 45 priests, one seminary, and two schools.

Despite his feelings against the Church, Zelaya was nevertheless disposed to welcome the Delegate because, he declared, he had been impressed by Cagliero's success with the government and people of Costa Rica. But there was another and more selfish motive: he knew that his reign was nearing its end and he hoped that the arrival of the



Delegate and a show of friendly relations with the Church might distract the people and thus delay the revolution.

Cagliero landed at Corinto on December 5, and found the town decorated in his honor. After an early Mass followed, of course, by a rousing sermon, he continued on to historic León where papal flags flew from every street, and where at night the town was illuminated.

Planning to arrive at Managua, the capital, on Christmas Day, he boarded a special train decorated with the national and papal flags. The train stopped at several stations along the way to allow the people to catch a glimpse of the Pope's representative. About an hour's ride outside Managua, however, it stopped for an entirely different reason. The Delegate and the passengers received a sickening jolt when the engine ran off the rails and the train ground to a sudden halt. An investigation showed that a deliberate attempt had been made, by tying a plank to the rails, to cause a disaster! Luckily, only the two front wheels of the engine had been derailed and they were eventually put back on the tracks.

This unfortunate incident was quickly forgotten in the enthusiasm of the reception in the capital. The station was packed with a cheering crowd which made such a determined effort to get closer to kiss Cagliero's ring and receive his blessing that the police were unable to cope with them. Cagliero sensed that beneath the enthusiasm of the welcome lay a note of protest against Zelaya, but he held his peace. It would have been disastrous to have become involved in the politics of those countries.

Zelaya received him officially on January 2, 1909, at his residence in the Campo de Marte, and spared no effort to make the reception a splendid one. The Delegate was received by a guard of honor and presented to the ministers and the diplomatic corps. Those surrounding Zelaya, however, wondered at such a sudden change in the man who barely three years before had imprisoned



the country's only bishop and several priests for protesting against the out-lawing of soutanes. Yet, here he was, inviting the Delegate and his secretary — both wearing them — to sit down beside him!

In his talks with Zelaya, Cagliero, having discovered which way the wind was blowing, evaded pressure by the President to prolong his stay. Before leaving, he tried to get Zelaya to allow religious into the country. But the latter was prepared to admit — as a favor to the Delegate — only the Salesians and even then, restricted them to the so-called Mosquito territory which Great Britain had recently ceded, and in the border areas near Costa Rica. Cagliero did persuade him, however, to permit religious to recuperate after long spells in the tropics at a rest home in Granada, a town with an excellent climate. To the Delegate this was merely a first step in the right direction.

His next destination was Honduras, to the north. Mainly mountainous, its most fertile section lay to the east and included enormous banana plantations. The central, or hill district, enjoyed a healthy climate, but fever and disease infested the coastline.

The Delegate found the people of both town and countryside humble, polite, and courteous, but extremely backward. The capital, Tegucigalpa, was nothing more than rows of run-down dwellings clustered around a nucleus of solid buildings. The cultural level was low; books a rare commodity. The country's history did not permit progress: for almost every year of independence there had been a revolution! Stern, when not outright cruel dictatorship had been the usual form of government.

Like the remainder of Central America it had been a favorite hunting-ground for pirates, most of them English. These broke up the prosperous missions established by the Franciscans, scattering both whites and Indians. Another damaging blow was dealt to the Church in the

revolution of 1821 when the government confiscated all its property. This was repeated between the years of 1878 and 1880 by a president imposed on the country by Guatemala.

When the Delegate arrived the law of separation of Church and State was in force. This meant that the State had no official relations with the Church and no voice in its internal affairs—except on those occasions when the State thought fit to interfere. While the central government was no longer hostile to religion, the same could not be said for the provincial and local authorities. About sixty priests labored under bishop Joseph Mariá Martínez Cabanas for a population of 800,000. No religious orders were allowed, with the exception of one Salesian who worked in Camayagua and another missionary who worked on the coast. Cagliero decided he would make it one of his first concerns to obtain the entry of religious in order to lighten the enormous burden of the secular priests.

Arriving in Amapala on March 16, 1909, he began the long fatiguing journey across the hill country which separates the coast from the capital. Once again he experienced the hardships which had been his lot while crossing the pampas of Patagonia. Three days later he was greeted on the outskirts of the capital by members of the government. Before going on to Tegucigalpa, however, he visited Camayagua, the ecclesiastical capital, about fifty miles to the north-west. His welcome there was extraordinary. He notes in one of his letters that it was the most impressive reception he had so far received.

At the presentation of credentials President General Davila Miguel accorded him the fullest honors. Davila was a sincere man who was determined, so far as it lay in his power, to right the wrongs which had been perpetrated against the Church over the previous half century. He was

extremely cordial during the ceremony and, indeed, all during the four-month stay of the Delegate.

Even more important than his task of negotiating a resumption of relations between these countries and the Vatican, was the Delegate's task of improving conditions within the Church. Often his worst problems were caused not by outsiders, but by churchmen. In a letter of May 12, 1909, he says of Honduras: "I have written to Father Rua describing the unhappy state of this diocese. There has not been one religious vocation, male or female, for the past eighty years! The clergy cherish no idea of Christian perfection and work through routine. The seminary hasn't even gotten off the ground, since the professors know neither Latin, nor philosophy, nor theology." — And in a letter of April 22: "To take care of 800,000 souls there are sixty-two priests; three are octogenarians, three are suspended, and several others will have to be! . . . 224 districts without priests! . . . If the Pope does not send some help this country will sink into an abyss!"

Before leaving Honduras he tried to arrange for a visit to El Salvador and Guatemala. Even the excellent personal relations he had established, however, were not enough to induce those governments to receive him as the representative of the Holy See. El Salvador would accord him a warm personal welcome; Guatemala, not even that. Cagliero decided that this was not sufficient and that he would have to work harder to persuade them to welcome an Apostolic Delegate. He therefore returned, for the time being, to Costa Rica. One of his final acts was to write a pastoral letter for the clergy and the people, and he assured the Bishop that he would try to obtain for him an auxiliary.

Seven months after his departure from Costa Rica, he returned to San José. He was tired and much thinner from travelling in countries where the means of communi-

cation were largely undeveloped — an exacting task for a man of seventy-one.

Oddly enough, it was not his official business which occupied the greater part of his time, but his "unofficial" business of preaching, hearing confessions, and giving missions. "I make it a point," he says, "never to refuse an invitation to go anywhere if it will do some good." He confesses that his time is divided in such a way that for ten minutes of the hour he is the Apostolic Delegate and for fifty the missionary. Nalio, his secretary, notes that he became popularly known as *The Confessor*. "No matter where he went, he would exhort people to go to confession, and would sit in the confessional for whole mornings, sometimes the entire day! Everybody wanted to go to him and to satisfy them he would often skip meals. When that happened I'd bring him a bowl of soup to eat right in the confessional!"

On his return he had at least one great consolation. His friend, the Protestant banker, Mr. James Bennet from the United States, had kept his word and built the new Delegation. To offset this, however, a thorny problem awaited him. Relations between government and Church which he had left on a new and satisfying level, to his utter dismay had deteriorated to such an extent that the President was on the point of passing laws disastrous to religion. Fines, imprisonment, even exile, were punishments contemplated against the clergy.

What had brought this abrupt change in the short space of a few months?

In many instances these about-faces could be put down to rulers with an exaggerated sense of their own importance who were convinced that their way of doing things was the only way; that all opposition was criminal. They were not always the statesmen they set themselves up to be. Some of them, moreover, had an inborn conviction that

the Church was the enemy of progress. Consequently, they were ever on guard lest the clergy make any move to interfere with the political life of the nation. On the other hand, the clergy, long deprived of the most elementary rights, were anxious to remedy this state of affairs. Certain members of the clergy at times had let their political feelings carry them beyond the bounds set by their vocation. It was a constant source of anxiety to Cagliero that in these countries political feelings too often reached the heights of passion, some of which overflowed into the pulpit. Informed of the situation by Father Guerra, who always remained behind while he was travelling, he at once called on the President.

He came away with a plan to set things back on an even keel. First, he ordered the clergy to abide by the norms laid down by Popes Leo XIII and Pius X. These prohibited all forms of political propaganda in church; forbade any pastor to leave the limits of his parish for the purpose of making propaganda; and barred foreign priests from participating in the political affairs of the country. Then, to show the authorities that while he could curb certain activities of the clergy, at the same time he could defend their rights, he appealed directly to the Constitution and insisted that they be allowed to move about freely in the exercise of their ministry.

His clear stand, his natural fearlessness, and his persuasive personality, contributed to his success in preventing a rupture between the President and the Church. It also gained for him the confidence of the rulers.

In later talks with the Presidents of Nicaragua and Honduras he put this confidence to good use. He obtained permission, for example, to call in members of several religious orders — something up to then strictly forbidden. He entrusted to the German Lazarists the area known as Mosquitia on the eastern coast of Nicaragua, and the seminary of Tegucigalpa. He also invited the Salesians to send

personnel to both countries, particularly for the schools being built in the capital of Honduras.

December 7 of that year (1909) marked the 25th anniversary of his consecration as bishop. Friends showered their affection on him, not only as a representative of the Holy Father, but also as a man whom they loved. The celebrations began with a solemn function at the cathedral, and a state banquet; in the evening the national band serenaded him in front of his residence. To crown all this, he received gifts which showed he was still remembered by those far away. Pius X sent him a warm personal message, and his former missionary comrades from Patagonia presented him with an elaborately carved gold chalice.

Two short months later he was on the road again, this time bound for El Salvador. He had decided, after all, to make the best of a cordial, albeit unofficial, welcome. At the very least it would establish closer ties between the Vatican and the government and might conceivably open up the way to much more. If he succeeded in El Salvador he would then undertake the attempt to crack "the hardest nut of them all — Guatemala."

El Salvador, he found, followed the main characteristics of the other Central American countries: on the east coast lay the low, tropical, and more fertile sections; then came the cooler and healthier *meseta* or tableland, and after that, the delightful coastline of the west with its equable climate.

El Salvador's population of 1,200,000 lived in pleasant surroundings. The countryside was charming and its towns, like those of neighboring Costa Rica, were picturesque and neat. The inhabitants of Santa Ana lived in a manner that recalled old-time Spain. El Salvador was commercially more advanced than the rest of its sister republics, and its agriculture, based on coffee, was more productive, despite a scarcity of arable land. Unfortunately, along this

west coast loomed a chain of frightening volcanoes, part of a continuous line which runs from Panama to Mexico. And these were by no means inactive. From time to time they rumbled or erupted to remind the people of their terrifying power. While in El Salvador, he received news that Cartago in Costa Rica had been wiped out by a disastrous earthquake in which two Salesians, one servant, and four boys at the Salesian school had been killed. He had scarcely left San Salvador, the capital, when a fire broke out consuming a great part of the city. Later, in 1917, the volcano Irazu ("the lighthouse of Central America") which dominates San José, Costa Rica, burst its sides and vomited out a fury which utterly destroyed the city. There was enormous loss of life and the rumblings caused the entire countryside to "dance."

Before the Delegate reached San Salvador, he stopped at many seaport towns along the way, acknowledging enthusiastic welcomes. At first these had set him wondering. While people could be so affectionate in their welcome, and show every sign of loyalty to the Holy See, how could so much opposition exist on the part of the government which was supposed to represent the people? The religion of the State, according to the Constitution, was Catholic, so was the overwhelming sentiment of the people; yet the government remained hostile to the Church! The answer was that these governments had not been elected, but had maneuvered or forced themselves into power; that done, they invariably divorced themselves from the people. Visits to La Libertad, Acajutla, and Sonsonate made him marvel that the people could prove so loyal to the Church under such trying circumstances, and despite the fact that there was only one priest to every twenty thousand souls!

In San Salvador the road from the station to the cathedral was crowded with thirty thousand well-wishers — clear proof of the people's attitude towards the Church. He was cordially welcomed by the Church authorities and



several individual members of the government; the Vice-President and the Provisor acting as his escorts. One important element was lacking, however: the government had not welcomed him officially. How could it, when its relations with the Church were so irregular? When anticlericals, for instance, had forced through a law making a divorce legal by mere mutual consent? When, as a result of this, immorality was so rampant that no less than eighty percent of the nation's births were illegitimate?

Nevertheless, when he left the country, he was convinced that his tour had been anything but in vain. It was not so much what he had accomplished that encouraged him, as the promise he had opened up for future negotiations and the hope that these would pave the way for an understanding and, eventually, a concordat with the Holy See. Thus heartened, he felt all the more ready to encounter his most formidable challenge — Guatemala.



## 20. Waterloo!

When the *S. S. New Port* drew into the harbour of San José in southern Guatemala on June 9, 1910, a group of dignitaries boarded her, took their places on deck, and waited. The door of the guest of honor's suite opened and out stepped a figure in a dark suit and tie. A ripple of astonishment ran through them. It could not be! Yes, it was indeed the Apostolic Delegate! As the dignitaries advanced to greet him they kept wondering what had made him doff the dignified robes of his office and don this outlandish suit and tie.

Cagliero's first attempt to get into the country through normal channels had been unsuccessful. President Cabrera had slammed the door in his face, pointing out that Guatemala's laws closed the frontiers to *all* priests. The stringent anticlerical laws reached downward to the control of the time and manner of ringing church bells and upward to the death sentence for any Jesuit who entered the country!

Enlisting the aid of the President of El Salvador and several other influential friends, he had made a second attempt. This time he was more successful; he could enter, but not as a cleric. "On the evening of June 8, 1910," he wrote, "accompanied by Bishop Pérez and several priests and

laymen, I boarded the *S. S. New Port* for Guatemala and on the following day drew into San José. Then, to avoid a direct contravention of the law I went to my cabin and changed into suit and tie.

"The Mayor came to offer me the respects of the President. Not only that, he offered me, in the President's name, a special train! Archbishop Ricardo Casanovas was so glad to see me he warmly embraced me; and a deputation of clergy and leading citizens followed me to the train. Along the way I was welcomed by organizations from the various towns."

Guatemala differed from the other Central American republics in the matter of volcanoes in that it possessed the four largest — Fuego, Tajamilco, Acetenango, and Santa Maria. This last with its perfect 10,000 foot cone Cagliero rarely saw without its modest covering of clouds. Some called Guatemala "the garden of volcanoes," they were so plentiful and always in bloom. Others called it the land of eternal spring for the *meseta's* green hills and valleys were beautiful all year round. The great majority of the inhabitants were Indians who wore a native dress vaguely resembling the Japanese kimono; their faces had been ruddied by the winds so strong and so persistent, that they were blamed for making the Guatemaltecos *nerviosos*, or irritable. Guatemala City had always been the largest city in Central America, and one of the oldest. There were mounds in it which, before being plundered by the local inhabitants, contained relics of a civilization estimated to have been at least three thousand years old.

Guatemala had known many capitals, the most famous of which was Antigua, twenty miles west of Guatemala City. Antigua was destroyed by an earthquake in 1773 but still carefully preserves evidence of having once been the heart of all Central America, in the splendid ruins of its buildings, churches, and monasteries. One of these latter

belonged to the Mercedarians which took from 1558 to 1768 to complete, but which in a single night was wiped out by an earthquake! A plaque over the door of the old *Palacio de Capitanía* states that *Gualthemala*, as Antigua was then known, was "for 231 years the metropolis of Central America." Other interesting towns were Quetzaltenango, hemmed in between volcanic hills, with quaint broken-line, hilly streets, and old public monuments in the Grecian style; Chichicastenango, which gloried in an astonishing mixture of pagan and Christian ceremonies; and in the northern country lay buried the ruins of ancient Mayan cities.

Although the opulent *Palacio de Gobierno*—a gem in green stone, marbles, murals, richly decorated halls, and salons—seemed to assert Guatemala's superiority, it was then economically no better off than its neighbours. Here, however, perhaps as in no other country, had the individual Indian reached such heights of prosperity. Not long after the expulsion of the Spaniards from what they called the Province of Guatemala, one of these Indian peasants named Raphael Carrera gained control of the emerging federation of states. He ruled with an iron hand until his death in 1865. His successor, General Reyna Barrios, issued a proclamation aimed at reuniting the Central American Republics. When Honduras and El Salvador opposed it, Barrios attacked them, but three days later, on board the United States cruiser *Marblehead* he signed an armistice. Manuel Estrada Cabrera succeeded Barrios and at the time of Cagliero's arrival was coming to the end of his first six years as Dictator.

Religiously speaking, the Delegate found more problems here than in any other of the Republics. Guatemala had been made a diocese as far back as 1534 by Paul III and had for its suffragan dioceses the other four Republics. The Church had existed more or less in peace until after the revolution. Then Barrios with his Fundamental Law

of 1872 attacked it, and among other things, expelled the religious orders. With characteristic inconsistency he excepted the Sisters of Charity because they had treated him well while he was in hospital! One of the consequences of the Law was to make education free and secular.

The Indians still clung to the ancient beliefs of the Maya. The paganistic rites held at Chichicastenango bore witness to that. So, too, did the presence of a multitude of idols, including one at Clinte Peque of the skeleton of *El Re Pasqual*, the Pascal King, when he was a boy! This was passed secretly from house to house to prevent its removal by the authorities. Cagliero was warned that it would be dangerous to take any precipitous action against them. About 102 secular priests and twelve religious ministered to a population of 1,450,000, 90% of whom were declared Catholics. The seminary had sixteen students for the priesthood.

As soon as he was settled, Cagliero asked the Archbishop for his opinion of Cabrera. "Since one of your tasks," replied Casanovas, "is to appoint Father Joseph Piñol as my Auxiliary, I suggest that we consecrate him privately and then you will inform Cabrera. I know the man, and he will not let you move a finger to strengthen the Church. I have no feeling of animosity towards him; on the other hand, I have no illusions."

"What's the story of his rise to fame?"

"Cabrera's rise to fame was in keeping with the times. On the night of February 8, 1898, Barrios excused himself from going to the theater with friends. While at home, he received a call and, accompanied by an officer, left to visit the lady who had sent the call. Along the way, a Swiss named Oscar Soliger shot him in the mouth, killing him; two policemen shot and killed Soliger; the following day, someone shot the two policemen. The chief of police happened to be a close friend of Cabrera.

"The ministers and government officials, called together to discuss the emergency, paid no special attention to Cabrera, who had been Barrios' First Minister. An aide, however, noticed that although Barrios' death had been kept a tightly guarded secret, when Cabrera entered, he had asked to see *the corpse*. During the discussion Cabrera took the bull by the horns and boldly declared that he was now in command. There was no resistance, although the aide, aware that Cabrera had been implicated, was about to shoot him. But the moment passed.

"On taking over, he made no attempt to change the policy of his predecessor which was to reduce the Church to complete impotence, and insisted upon keeping strict control over the movements of its leaders. For instance, I have to inform him each time when I intend to visit my diocese; he also checks my correspondence with Rome to make sure that it contains nothing detrimental to him. His predecessor Barrios, although educated by the Jesuits and, according to those who knew him, a believer in *foro interno*, in his own conscience, was a 33rd degree Mason. The Dictator, on the other hand, is not a Mason, and is greatly influenced, instead, by his mother, Doña Joaquinita Estrada, an excellent woman who attends Mass daily. She's really his foster mother for he had been left on her doorstep by his natural mother, a loose woman. Whatever Doña Joaquinita says Cabrera always tries to do — something which explains, in part, any leniency he shows towards the Church.

"*El León*, as he is known, considers as mortal enemies all those who in any way threaten his dictatorship. Against these he has a simple policy: '*Cierro, destierro, entierro*: I imprison, I scatter, I bury.' His enemies long ago fled Guatemala but those who give him no trouble have no cause to worry. Indeed, he treats them generously. No favour is too great for anyone he thinks can help him maintain his grip. He has paid United States officials as

much as five times their salaries to keep him informed. Whenever a new official is scheduled to arrive, Cabrera knows about it long beforehand and has already been briefed as to his likes and dislikes."

As Cagliero listened to this account his face clouded. Finally, he looked up at the Archbishop.

"Don't you ever go to see him?" he enquired.

"He wouldn't receive me. And if he did what would I say to him? That I want to visit the archdiocese? I prefer to send a letter or telegram. If I don't, he'll dispatch one of his messengers to remind me to do so. If you really want Piñol consecrated, I repeat, do it privately; otherwise, it won't be done at all. I'm warning Your Excellency so that you may not suffer from any painful upsets."

A few days later the Delegate was received by Cabrera. To his great surprise he found *El León* affable, cordial, and very frank. This made him wonder about what the Archbishop had said.

When he thought that a favorable moment had come he broached the question of the appointment of an auxiliary bishop. "What would you say, *Señor Presidente*," he suggested, "if we were to appoint Father Piñol?"

"Piñol? Why not? What better choice? I have nothing but the best reports of him. He's rather young and at times a little... impetuous. But then... And what else does Your Excellency have in mind?"

Cagliero explained to him in detail his plans for the Church in Guatemala and mentioned his intention of appointing a bishop for Quetzaltenango, Cabrera's birthplace.

"I'm well aware," said Cabrera, "that some will grumble that I'm allowing too much liberty to the Church. But the people of my home town will be delighted at the honor... By the way, whom do you intend to nominate?"

"I thought of Father Jorge García y Cabellos, the Rector of the seminary."

"Very good! Very good! And who would the other bishops be may I ask?" Then, as an afterthought. "For Coban? You will need a good man there."

The one whom the Delegate had in mind for Coban was a certain Father Riveiro, the pastor of the Church of St. Dominic where Cabrera's mother went to Mass, and the man in whom she confided. That Riveiro would not make the ideal candidate, Cagliero knew, but he decided to appoint him just the same, since this would render the acceptance of the other candidates more palatable to Cabrera. At the end of the discussions Cabrera smiled at Cagliero. "You see," he said, "*El León* is not as black as they paint him."

Cagliero could only agree. More than happy with the outcome of the meeting, when he related all this to the Archbishop he could hardly restrain himself. On his part, too, Cabrera afterwards expressed his pleasure at having to deal with a man of his caliber. "You can be sure of what Cagliero says," was his comment. "But the rest of the clergy!..." The Delegate's policy had always been: "How can I ever say one thing and mean another?" As an added courtesy the Dictator sent his Minister of Foreign Affairs to return the call.

The only one who did not seem impressed was the Archbishop. He merely repeated what he had said before. "I do hope that everything turns out as you say and as Cabrera has promised it will. If so, there should be no more problems for the Church. I am, indeed, very happy that your kindness, frankness, and good faith have been so successful."

Having seen to this part of his mission, the Delegate next made preparations for a tour of the entire country, not only as a diplomat, but even more as a missionary.



He soon became aware, however, that the police were keeping close watch on his movements. This was not an easy task, for he travelled up hill and down dale, visiting towns, villages, hamlets, and homes; preaching, confessing and consoling. He had to spend days on horseback to reach some of the distant *pueblos*; there were times when he spent from morning till night in the confessional; and as usual, he never refused an invitation to speak. People in Antigua and Quetzaltenango would long remember "*El Delegado* who packed churches, preaching and confessing like during a mission." The religious celebrations organized everywhere in his honor gave him evidence enough of the condition of the Church.

*El León*, however, never allowed him out of sight. On occasion he could even let Cagliero see his teeth. One pastor, for instance, arranged a reception for him only to find himself sent two hundred miles away on the pretext that he had spoken against the Dictator!

Cagliero eventually finished his mission and was staying at Quetzaltenango at the Palacio Figueroa, later the Palacio de Justicia. With him were Canon Angelo Montenegro and Father Joseph Piñol, the Auxiliary Bishop-elect. On the vigil of their departure for the capital, October 14th, the local political chief presented himself.

"I'm sorry, Your Excellency," he said, "but I have orders to escort you and your friends to the frontier."

"But this is impossible!" protested the Delegate indignantly. "Who gave you these orders?"

"President Cabrera."

"I don't believe it!"

"Here's the telegram," said the other. "See for yourself."

Cagliero read the telegram. Its message was as clear as it was crude. "Seize Cagliero and Piñol. . ."

There was nothing else to do. Cagliero and his two companions packed their belongings and were escorted to



Puerto Barrios. There they took ship for Nicaragua and that was the inglorious end of Cagliero's diplomatic mission in Guatemala. The Delegate, ordinarily so successful in any mission, no matter how delicate, and so close to the end of his diplomatic career, met his waterloo at the hands of its Dictator, Manuel Estrada Cabrera.

Before he left the country, however, *El León* wished to teach him still another lesson in Central American politics. "The people welcomed you," he wrote Cagliero, "because they knew they were doing *me* a favour. Had they thought that *I* would not be pleased they would not have accepted you. After all, why deny the fact? *Soy yo el Dictator*. I am the Dictator!"

On the way to Nicaragua Cagliero tried to reason out Cabrera's about-face; it was a mystery to him. It was no mystery to his companions, however, especially to Piñol. Like the Archbishop, Piñol knew his man.

"Cabrera," he explained, "had many reasons for acting the way he did. In the first place the enthusiasm you aroused in the people with your missions and sermons was not at all to his liking. Then, although he may or may not have been pleased to see the Church a little better off, his party was enraged at him for allowing it to make any headway. He's strong enough to beat down opposition, but he wouldn't want to push them too far. Finally, there was the chance that he thought the growing strength of the Church threatened his position as Dictator. And *Soy yo el Dictator* — he will never let anybody or anything do that."

"Monsignor," concluded Montenegro, "you must not be too upset by this. Frankly, the mere fact that you were allowed to enter Guatemala at all, can be considered a great victory."

Back in Nicaragua, in the home of a prominent Catholic, the Delegate pursued his task of reorganizing the Church of Guatemala.

Cabrera later recalled Piñol, but Montenegro was not so fortunate and remained in exile with the Delegate in Costa Rica. In revenge for Cagliero's attempt to organize the dioceses, in 1917 Cabrera was on the point of expelling the Salesians.

Even on the question of the choice of the new bishops it seemed that Cabrera would have the last word. On the death of Archbishop Casanovas, he plotted to have his protege, Riveiro, elected to the See of Guatemala, and sent Batres Yuari, an able diplomat, to Rome to work toward that end. Batres sought the aid of the Spanish government, and the Spanish Ambassador to London, Merry del Val, wrote to his brother, the Cardinal Secretary of State, requesting an audience for him with Pope Pius X.

Informed of what was going on, Cagliero mailed a letter to the bishops of Central America advising them to send a petition to protest the appointment. Cardinal Merry del Val, however, paid no attention and pressed for the election of Cabrera's friend.

The nomination finally came through: it was Riveiro. When the news was cabled to Cagliero he turned to Piñol. "With this cable," he said with a bitterness alien to him, "I have terminated my diplomatic career. But it doesn't matter. There are still one or two things to be done for the sake of Guatemala."

As if to crown Cagliero's disappointment, Merry del Val took it upon himself to consecrate Riveiro Archbishop of Guatemala.

The last lines to this sad story, nevertheless, had not yet been written. They were penned by Benedict XV, who succeeded Pius X. Soon after the Pope's election, Merry del Val's career as Secretary of State terminated and after that he held no other important office.

Even Cabrera's days, after twenty-two years of dictatorship, were numbered. Piñol helped number them by rousing the people against the tyrant. "What?" he cried. "Two and

a half million people tremble at this man while he himself trembles at the two and a half million, and, what's more, cannot understand why they tremble?" The upshot of all this was a revolt against Cabrera. Taken prisoner, he died an unhappy death, disturbed by voices from the past.

With his fall, Riveiro's star was on the wane. To begin with, Piñol, now bishop of Granada, Nicaragua, was recalled to Guatemala by the Holy See, *in partibus fedelium*, that is, to care for the faithful at large. Riveiro promptly took away his faculties. This meant that he could not preach, hear confessions, baptize, or confirm and had to say Mass privately at the home of his brother, Raphael. His position became unbearable; but not for long. The Holy Father dispatched a special messenger with a decree exempting him from Riveiro's jurisdiction and restoring his faculties.

It was now Riveiro's turn to feel the pressure and he was eventually forced to flee. Later he attempted to re-enter the country, but Cagliero's successor threatened him with suspension. He then withdrew and ended his days in a convent in the United States.

If Cagliero had not accomplished all he had wanted, particularly in Guatemala, he had been able to study the Church's problems at first hand, having travelled those countries from top to bottom the way he had done in Patagonia. In these travels he had gathered a great deal of information; it was now time to correlate this and shape it into a series of reports for the Holy See. On these reports and on his recommendations would depend the future course of the Church in Central America.

Before such reports could be made, however, there had to be an interminable flow of correspondence. Before any particular territory could be divided into a diocese, a hundred items had to be taken into consideration: the limits of the diocese; the reaction of authorities and the leading

Catholics; the question of where the See should have its center. Each town of importance considered that it had the right to be chosen; and its merchants were not insensitive to the advantages of such an honour. Which of the dioceses should be the principal, or as they called it, the Metropolitan? Within the new framework the ancient Metropolitan See of Guatemala City, for instance, would have to yield the privileged status it had held from Spanish times. And the Diocese of León in Nicaragua, erected in 1534, would become suffragan to the newly-created Archdiocese of Nicaragua. This last move caused a near-revolution and it was led by the Bishop of León! Finally, there was the ticklish problem of the choice of candidates...

In Honduras, for example, during a tour he took before making his final arrangements, he tried to remedy a longstanding evil. At the head of the country's single diocese stood a bishop who had been a former army colonel. It was not clear how he had ever been consecrated. Apropos of this bishop, Cagliero's secretary remarks: "Monsignor, so good he never thought ill of anybody, one day exclaimed: 'He's a real bad one!'" Despite all efforts to remove him, however, this man continued to rule the diocese for many years. Finally there was the tendency to rotate rulers with great frequency through the swift process of revolution. Cagliero confessed that he grew a little tired of having to change his policies so often. In one particular country he had to deal with five different Presidents and five different Foreign Ministers in the short space of ten months! He had, of course, the help of the men of good will in the Church, governments, and laity. But against these, perhaps with greater zeal, fiercely anticlerical elements were working.

Nevertheless, the final touches were put to plans, permissions were obtained, agreements signed, quarrels settled, hurt feelings soothed, disappointments swallowed... and out of all this came the following report.

- Costa Rica:* Foundation laid for the creation of Diocese of Alajuela and of Vicariate Apostolic of Puerto Limón.
- El Salvador:* Introduction of a Diplomatic Representative of the Holy See in 1913. San Salvador made Metropolitan See with Auxiliary and two suffragan Dioceses, Santa Ana for the west, San Miguel for the east.
- Honduras:* Tegucigalpa made Archdiocese with Auxiliary Bishop; Santa Rosa made Diocese; Apostolic Vicariate erected for Indians in San Pedro Sula.
- Nicaragua:* Approval of a new Catholic Constitution by National Assembly. Managua made Archdiocese with Auxiliary Bishop; Granada created Diocese; Vicariate Apostolic of Bluefields erected for Indians. Leon becomes suffragan to Managua.
- Guatemala:* Way prepared for creation of Dioceses of Quezaltenango and Coban. Permission obtained for entry of Jesuits, Capuchins, Christian Brothers, and Salesians.
- Panama:* Way prepared for erection of Diocese of Colón.

It was a far cry from what he had found: one archbishop for Guatemala and one bishop for each of the other four Republics. In their stead he was leaving four archbishops, nine bishops, two auxiliary bishops, one coadjutor-bishop with the right of succession, and two vicars apostolic.

One thing still remained — to give cohesion to this body of prelates which now constituted the new hierarchy of Central America. "These men hardly know each other," he complained. "The only way to remedy that would be to organize some sort of congress to give them an opportunity to become acquainted and to discuss their difficulties, to make

them feel that they belong to a single body." Such a feeling of unity, he thought, was needed to strengthen them in a common resolve and to protect them against despots and anticlericals.

To make certain that the Church advanced along the lines he had traced out for it, he also wanted a voice in the choice of his successor. This meant persuading Rome to elect one whom he thought to be suitable. His choice fell on Monsignor Marengo, former procurator of the Salesians and now bishop of the diocese of Massa Carrara, Italy. He also wanted to reward his two secretaries for their loyalty and self-sacrifice. Marengo was nominated Apostolic Delegate to Costa Rica: Guerra, titular bishop of Amato and Apostolic Administrator of Santiago, Cuba; and Nalio, Apostolic Administrator of Honduras.

His secretary, Nalio, after considering the magnitude of Cagliero's accomplishment, once broke out in the following exclamation: "The work of Monsignor in Central America would be enough to immortalize a Pope!" Perhaps a more authoritative summing-up actually did come from the lips of a Pope. One day, Pius X remarked to Father Albera, "Did you know that Archbishop Cagliero is working wonders in Central America? How happy I am that I was responsible for appointing him!"

The secret of his departure had been so well kept that when the news was released, the people in the streets of San José were shocked; in government circles there was a feeling of consternation; the whole city rose up in protest. It was not long before a special messenger of the President — the Foreign Minister himself — hurried to the Delegation. Familiar with the vagaries of Central American politics, the President had assumed that Cagliero was being ousted by his enemies.

The Minister insisted on being ushered at once into the Delegate's presence. "Your Excellency," he began, "the

President wishes to inform you that if there's anything he can do to prevent your removal, please let him know. While he is President, he says, no one will dare raise a finger against you."

Cagliero, surprised by the sudden appearance of such a messenger, took a few steps up and down the carpeted floor, pulled at his nose, and then smiled. "My dear Minister," he said, "something of grave consequence has indeed happened to me. But whether it is good or bad depends, I suppose, on one's point of view. You see, there's a Red Hat involved."

"A Red Hat?" The Minister was puzzled. Then his eyes opened wide. "You mean. . . ?"

"Exactly!"

The next moment Cagliero felt himself enclosed in an excited Minister's arms!

This explanation for the Delegate's recall sent San José into a second uproar. Organizations, civil and religious, hastened to make preparations for the send-off; messages of congratulations poured in from Costa Rica, Central and South America, Europe and, of course, Patagonia. To crown these celebrations the President of Costa Rica ordered a state banquet.

Actually, Cagliero had known of the event long before he had revealed it to the public. Cardinal Gasparri, Secretary of State of Benedict XV, had already sent him word to prepare for the Red Hat. The Cardinal explained to Marengo in Rome that since the Delegate was now 78 years old they were thinking of recalling him, but that he would receive the Red Hat for his services. Once the Delegate had learned this, he was anxious to return at once to Rome. The reason? In Turin they were preparing to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Don Bosco and anything connected with Don Bosco was always of supreme importance to him. When that date had passed, however, and no further word had come from the Vatican regarding his elevation, he

had set his mind at ease and continued to work at the Delegation. He was still working when a telegram arrived on October 17, 1915: "Leave by the quickest route."

Unfortunately, the Allies were then at war with Germany. Transportation was at a premium and he had to delay his departure a month. This meant that he would miss the consistory set for November 22. The Holy Father then made a gesture which indicated the esteem in which he held Cagliero. He postponed the consistory until December 6.

There was yet another difficulty. Italy had already been six months at war with Germany; and Germany by this time had launched a submarine campaign which had stricken terror into the heart of Allied shipping.

After considering the risks involved, Cagliero took a characteristically bold step. Contacting German Naval Headquarters, he made a request directly to Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz. "Would the German Naval Command" he enquired, "guarantee immunity from attack for the Apostolic Delegate on his way to a consistory in Rome on board the *S.S. Bologna*?" Back came the answer: "The German Naval Command would not only guarantee that no German submarine would attack the *S.S. Bologna*, but that its squadrons, if requested, would even provide an escort!"



## 21. Homeward Bound

Whether Admiral Von Tirpitz provided the escort or not is not known. What is known, however, is that the Delegate arrived in Genoa on December 5, safe and sound, and was met by Father Albera. This was a noteworthy coincidence. Forty years before, Albera had seen Cagliero off from Genoa when the latter, in 1875, led the first of Don Bosco's missionaries to South America. The next day they continued on to Rome to receive the messengers from the Secret Consistory held that morning. During this consistory, the Pope had announced the names of six new Cardinals. Cagliero was third on the list.

Surrounded by Salesians and boys, he waited at the school of the Sacred Heart in Via Marsala for the papal messengers. When they arrived and a Monsignor presented the *biglietto* or ticket announcing his nomination as Cardinal, Cagliero handed it to Albera who read it to the assembly. It was greeted by a roar of approval.

"Tell the Holy Father," said Cagliero, "that I am happy to receive this elevation, not for my own sake but for the sake of Don Bosco's family, who are struggling and suffering to spread the reign of Christ across the face of the earth. Tell him I am always and everywhere a son of Don Bosco,

and like him, I want to work to my last breath. I may be old but I still consider myself young when it comes to work."

After that he went to the balcony and looked down on the hundreds of enthusiastic young faces. "*Viva il Cardinale!*" they cried. "Long live the Cardinal!"

To their stunned surprise, however, Cagliero turned away. Then he faced them again and raised his hand for silence. An expectant hush fell on them. "Don't say 'Long live *the* Cardinal!' " he scolded. "Say, instead, 'Long live *OUR* Cardinal!'"

The crowd exploded: "Long live *OUR* Cardinal!" This time he waved at them, and smiled.

On December 8, always the most important date in Cagliero's life, Benedict XV met the Cardinals-elect. He addressed the Delegate with particular affection. "So as not to offend your modesty, worthy son of the Venerable Don Bosco," he said, "We shall make only passing mention of the labors you have sustained in bringing the light of the gospel to those who sat in the shadow of death." He went on to enumerate a few of the outstanding events of the new Cardinal's life.

On the following day, Cagliero received the Red Hat, the ring, and the titular church of San Bernardo alle Terme. This had formerly been the titular church of Cardinal Joseph Gasparri, the renowned Secretary of State, and of Cardinal Joseph Sarto, later St. Pius X.

A description of the new Cardinal appeared in the press: "His powerful figure dressed in the robes of a Cardinal stood out magnificently. Not tall, although well made, he carried himself with an air of grace... one foot forward in the stance of a conqueror. His full features were carved with strong lines, showing great interior vigor; the nose was slightly curved, the eyes clear and smiling. There was something of the eagle, something superior, about him. But on closer contact this dissolved itself into warmth and good-

ness, turning the pioneer, the famous missionary, the illustrious diplomat, into the most paternal of men. He is fond of using Piedmontese dialect and this, while lending an endearing touch of simplicity to everything he does and says, somehow throws his wonderful qualities into greater relief."

Cardinal Maffi's estimation would perhaps have pleased him most: "Don Bosco had to have a monument during his centenary; one of marble, naturally, whose delivery the troubles of the moment [the World War] have caused to be delayed. But here you have a monument which is alive! Here you have also a lesson: that our times do not need statues of cold marble. They need something else; they need more Caglieros, alive and apostolic!"

As the new Cardinal prepared to settle down, a question arose: Where in Rome should he set up residence? In accordance with the dignity of his position, Albera wanted him to have a private house. Cagliero, however, objected. "If you want to keep me alive," he told the Rector Major bluntly, "let me stay with the boys. Take them away from me and you'll shorten my life. In all my years as a Salesian I have never lived a day in sadness because, like Don Bosco, I have always loved the young."

"But what will the other Cardinals say?"

"Let them say what they like!"

"And the Holy Father — what will *he* say?"

"The Holy Father, I know, will say absolutely nothing. Enough! My place is with the boys."

So it was decided that he should take up residence at the Salesian school of the Sacred Heart. While private quarters were being set up for him on the first floor, he would live at the Salesian procure in Via Minerva.

At the procure, he lived as simply as any missionary. His one servant, John Castella, took care of everything from protocol to potatoes, from secretarial duties to serving at table. When it was necessary, John would also dress up in the

finery required from the valet of a Prince of the Church.

Back in 1903, when Cagliero had gone to preach to the Sisters at their motherhouse, he stayed with the Salesians nearby. An aspirant was assigned to attend him: John Castella. He used to have John accompany him on his walks and made him so enthusiastic about Don Bosco that John cast aside all his doubts, became a Salesian, and left with him for South America that same year. He also accompanied him to Italy in 1914, and when Cagliero was made Cardinal, the superiors once again assigned John to him. In few instances has a man ever been such a hero to his valet.

Life at the procure, however, did not agree with the Cardinal. He fell ill and attributed his illness to one particular cause. "I can't live in a place where I don't hear the noise of the youngsters around me. If I don't hear the shouts of the boys in the playground, I feel I'm not a Salesian!"

When his quarters were ready and he came to live at the Sacred Heart School, his presence created a difficulty of which he was quite unaware and of which he was never informed. The school was mainly for poor boys and depended — especially during those war years — on the alms of benefactors. When these benefactors, however, saw a Cardinal in residence, they wrongly drew the conclusion that the school was now rich and needed no more help. The truth was that the Cardinal never had a cent. Not that he was a spendthrift. He never spent money on himself unless it was strictly necessary, used scrap paper for his notes, and once wore the same soutane for ten years! Everything he had he gave to those who needed it, so much so that he soon became known as a "soft touch."

Once John told him that a priest who had fallen into unfortunate circumstances had called, looking for help.

"Give him all the money we have," the Cardinal said when he had heard the story. "Every cent you can find."

Searching all over, John came up with 300 *lire* — a lot of money then — and the Cardinal ordered him to give it to the man at once. Because of this attitude, the Holy Father called him “the consoler of the poor” and often gave him alms to distribute.

Had Cagliero wished he could have saved plenty for his later years. During his tenure as Apostolic Delegate he received a more than adequate monthly allowance from the Holy See. This was held for him at the Salesian procure in Rome. But no sooner was it received than Cagliero sent instructions as to how it should be spent. Most of it went to his charities, chief among which were the works of the Salesians and the Sisters.

When the procurator learned that Cagliero was to be made a Cardinal, well aware of the expenses involved, he suggested that he build up a small income for himself. He could easily do this by suspending the distribution of these alms. But the Cardinal would have none of it. In spite of this, the procurator did it just the same, although when he considered the total amount saved, he added ruefully, “Perhaps I was a little late.”

It was natural that Cagliero’s visit to the Oratory in Turin would be awaited with great anticipation and he arranged to go there for the feast of Mary Help of Christians.

As he climbed the steps of the Basilica bells pealed out in joy. Later he and Father Albera walked up and down under the very rooms and veranda where Don Bosco had lived and died. It was no longer His Eminence and the Superior General who walked and talked, but the two boys whom Don Bosco had chosen and trained to lead his young Society — one to mount guard at the center, the other to advance its frontiers. It was a far cry from the time when Don Bosco used to hand them a roll of bread and they had drawn water from the pump for breakfast; from the days when Cagliero used to watch the jug-

glers and then run to catch up with his group before it reached the Oratory!

Another visit was to the motherhouse of the Sisters at Monferrato. To the Sisters this presented a golden opportunity for showing their gratitude to one who from their earliest beginnings had followed them at home and abroad with his encouragement and help, and they made the most of it. They were also careful to greet him as "*Our Cardinal!*"

His visit to Castelnuovo, his home town, naturally, was the one which most affected him. Upon his arrival, he was greeted with music and cries of "*Viva il principe di Castelnuovo!* Long live the prince of Castelnuovo." Cagliero accepted it all good-humoredly, smiling and waving blessings.

The peal of bells from the square tower of the old parish church of Saint Andrew's on the hill brought back memories of how every Sunday he had climbed those cobbled streets. If alone, he took the shorter, steeper paths behind the houses, through the vegetable gardens and vineyards; if with his mother or Granny, he took the longer, easier route of the sloping, cobbled streets. His mother, decked out in the finery of the poor—long blue dress and shawl, black socks, wooden shoes and a kerchief around her head—would try to keep him by her side while he was forever urging her on a little faster. How he had hated to miss any part of the ceremonies!—And how the music of the organ used to send him into ecstasy! Once in church, he would leave his mother, carry his stool up the aisle—there were few benches—and place it close to the altar. That way he could see and hear everything, even the sharp remarks the crusty old master of ceremonies would address to the clergy, and, when provoked enough, even to the bishop himself!

He had reached the top of the hill now, and in the center of the town square, halted to regain his breath.

There was a time when he had had no trouble with these cobbled streets, but now. . . The old town clock still told the hour at one end of the plaza; the church of Saint Andrew, the town's patron saint, lay at the other. Two levels below him he picked out Via Aliberti and the Cagliero home and farther down, at the bottom of the hill, stood the house where he was born. Beyond that spread a splendid panorama of hill upon hill, like the crestless waves of a rolling sea. Some of these hills were crowned with dwellings built on those heights in earlier times for safety; a great many were spiked with belfries and church towers. What had attracted the first settlers to this particular hill must have been the delightful sweep of land which, sloping to the west to form a valley, kept it aloof from its neighbours. Thirty miles to the northeast lay Turin, "the royal city," home of the first kings of a united Italy, where the people lived a busier, more sophisticated life than the inhabitants of Castelnuovo.

Most Reverend Costanzo Michele Rea had ruled the diocese when Cagliero was a boy; renowned for his learning in Canon Law and even more for his insistence upon its strict observance. Cagliero had always been fascinated by the Bishop on the rare occasions when the latter visited the church. At other times his attention had been held by the painting over the sanctuary, depicting Christ in white robes, supported by a cluster of solid-looking clouds and surrounded by a group of dark-skinned savages, Aztec-looking Indians, and men in strange, oriental garb.

As he left the church, he remembered how the pastor used to scold the men for standing at the rear, even though there was plenty of room up front; for slipping out for a smoke during the sermon; and for getting down on only one knee at the consecration. "Like Garibaldi's redshirts drawing a bead on my back!"

He paid a visit to his old home, the two-story house with its rough-plastered walls, its shuttered windows. It



had one door onto the street and he had to pass through the archway at the side which led to a courtyard about fifteen feet below road level. As with the other families, the Cagliero land lay scattered outside the town, a field here and a field there, in which they grew grapes, wheat, and maize. At home they kept a small kitchen garden and a tiny vineyard.

He peeked into the rooms used for basket-making and storage, and sometimes in the winter, for sheltering a sick calf; he puffed his way up the outside stairs to the first story, level with the road, where his relatives lived, and on up to the second story where he had lived with his grandmother, his mother, and his younger brother Alexander. From his old room he gazed beyond the housetops to the brook running past the bottom of the hill and the road winding out of the town into the distant world. Once again he smelled and tasted the appetizing meals of polenta, fresh bread, baloney, wine and — when it was a feastday — cheese, figs, melon, and his favorite peppers. He loved peppers! After those meals his mother made him rest, for he always had to rise early to get things ready on the farm.

In this little courtyard he had organized some of his wild escapades. One which he took particular pleasure in recalling happened soon after a visit of the Bishop, when, dressed in his pontifical robes, he had ridden in a coach drawn by six prancing horses and accompanied by outriders.

Cagliero could not, of course, compete with all that pageantry. But he did what he could. From scraps of colored paper, cardboard, and odd pieces of women's dresses, he and his companions put together a vague semblance of pontifical robes, miter and all. For the coach he borrowed a farmer's cart to be drawn by six sturdy boys; six others served as attendants. Seated in the cart and preceded by a boy ringing a bell, he set off through the streets. The bell brought young and old running out of doors



clapping their hands and shouting encouragement to give a rousing welcome to "His Excellency." It was not often that they had such fun come to their doorsteps!

He returned from this tour full of satisfying memories to settle down to his new life in Rome. The Holy Father appointed him to the Sacred Congregations of Rites, of Religious, of the Propagation of the Faith, and of Extraordinary Affairs. Faithful in attending meetings, he added a practical touch to the rather theoretical learning of the other members—as well as a note of good humor. The sessions lasted three or four hours and he put in countless more hours studying the various related documents. But his health stood up and he would come back to the Sacred Heart School full of life, and not above a little quiet boasting that, despite his years, he could outwork many younger men. The only thing he complained of was a continued buzzing in his head; his "cicadas" as he called it. At times, he also complained of slight internal disturbances which doctors drily attributed to overdoses of his favorite peppers.

Perhaps to show that he still had plenty of strength left after these long sessions, on returning from the Vatican, he once took a boy by the hand and made his companions form a long chain. Then he led them in and out of the portico, and when the bell rang for dinner, brought them into the dining room where they broke up and cheered *their* Cardinal. His favorite trick, however, was to plant his feet firmly on the stairs, hold on to the railings with both hands, and challenge the boys to pull him up—a challenge always accepted with great glee. On feastdays, when the school orchestra played in the dining room, he would conduct some of his own pieces; he loved to play *Il Marinaio*, The Sailor. At recreation he could hold the attention of the boys for hours with stories of his adventures in South and Central America. One listener re-

marked how he had never known the Cardinal to repeat himself.

"During his free moments," wrote John, his valet. "When he was not in demand across the country, we went for walks through the streets of Rome. He was a good walker and after a tour that would tire me out, would return home as fresh as when he started. 'I could go another round like that,' he would tell me. When Father Albera visited him, the three of us would walk through Rome to the open country. Then he would say, 'Come, John, nobody can hear us now. You, too, Paul. Let's sing the songs we sang in the old days for Don Bosco!' Together we would sing either one of his songs or perhaps a piece from one of the Masses he had composed in Patagonia."

Noticing him walk through the streets of Rome, his friends remarked that when Cardinals took the air they rode in a closed black carriage drawn by two black horses. Cagliero's reaction was an indignant snort: "I began taking my trips through Rome in the early days on my own two feet! I hope to keep it that way."

He might have added that because of his habit of giving away everything he could never afford a carriage. Eventually, however, he was politely but firmly requested by the Dean of Cardinals to follow the rules observed by the other Cardinals and drive, not walk, through the streets of Rome. His friends in South America who had given him the title of "The Angel Guardian of Patagonia" bought him a small automobile. He had it only a few months. Since he had no garage, it was stolen and later found demolished behind the walls of St. Peter's. They bought him another one, and he used it to get to the various meetings of the congregations. He still took his walks, although he drove to the open country before stepping out of the car.

This democratic manner had always been characteristic of him. Once, while travelling from Buenos Aires to Viedma with the Governor of Río Negro, a judge, and a deputy, the boat docked for a few hours at Bahía Blanca and the group went ashore for a short walk. Out in the open country, the judge threw back his shoulders, inhaled the invigorating air, and glanced at his friends.

"Anybody game for a run across the fields?" he asked impulsively.

"Sure." said the other two. "Let's go!"

"How about you, Bishop?" the judge asked. "Does the dignity of the cloth?..."

"I'll race all right," said Cagliero, "but on one condition."

"What's that?"

"If I win," he said, "you others will give me 400 pesos for my mission."

"It's a deal!"

Cagliero tucked up his cassock and the race began. Given his early training in the playgrounds of the Oratory, he won easily and pocketed the 400 pesos. "Many a time I walked for three or four days," was his comment "without earning a penny. By winning that short race I made 400 pesos in a few minutes!"

On one occasion, nevertheless, the dignities showered upon him did cause him to forget momentarily that he was still a humble son of Don Bosco:—

Since my health did not allow me to do anything else — wrote Father Picollo about this particular occasion — I used to prepare for First Communion or for confirmation young soldiers going to the Front. I saw to the First Communion myself, but confirmation was a different matter. Sometimes, to help me out, I asked Cardinal Cagliero, whom I had known for fifty years. At other times, I would ask any bishop who happened to be visiting the house.

"Your Eminence," I said one day, "I really need your help tomorrow to confirm a young soldier. He has to leave at once for the Front."

This time the Cardinal looked at me. I could see he was annoyed. "You're always at my heels!" he said. "Don't you know the Holy Father doesn't want a Prince of the Church to carry out functions that can be easily performed by others? Get a bishop."

"Your Eminence," I protested, "you know very well there's no other bishop in the house."

"Look for one."

"Very well, Your Eminence," I said, losing my temper. "I thought I was talking to the favorite son of Don Bosco, but I see I was mistaken. This is a matter of a young man's soul and Don Bosco wouldn't have hesitated one instant to do what was necessary to save it. However, I beg your pardon, and I assure you I won't trouble you again. Good day." I turned to leave the room.

"Where do you think you're going?" said the Cardinal shortly.

"To do as you told me. To look for somebody else."

"Sit down."

I sat down. The Cardinal began to pace to and fro. Finally he turned and pointed his finger at me.

"You're right, you know," he said. "Maybe I did sound off a moment ago. I ought to thank you for setting me straight."

"So?"

"When you want and as often as you want."

The next morning I brought the young man to the Cardinal's room. He was already vested and waiting. After confirmation, he turned to me.

"Now," he said, "am I the favorite son of Don Bosco?"

"You certainly are, Your Eminence," I said warmly, for I was very fond of him. "You have all the virtues and the spirit of Don Bosco."

And, like Don Bosco, even as a Cardinal, he was a man of the people. When visiting the Oratory, after Mass he would find the sacristy full of the women who sold vegetables in the nearby market. They knew he loved to talk to them in Piedmontese. Only when they had gone would he see the more important people of the city.

Despite his 82 years, he enjoyed travelling, accepting invitations of all kinds; conferences, lectures, triduums, and retreats. In this he had only one idea — to do good wherever possible. He was often criticized by some who believed that he was lowering his dignity as Cardinal. Although most of his travels were inspired by missionary zeal, he frequently stopped over at Castelnuovo, delighting the people with his wit as they worked at their basket and broom making. From Castelnuovo he would go out to the little country places nearby and insist on eating a generous portion of salad with his favorite peppers, even though indigestion might result. Another favorite of his was black coffee and barbera, a wine of the area possessing plenty of "body." His round face and stout figure were also a familiar sight at Monferrato, the motherhouse of the Sisters.

Yet, one thing was still lacking. Don Bosco had prophesied that something else would happen to him. This, however, seemed to have passed into the realm of the impossible, given his years and fact that he was a member of several Sacred Congregations.

But one day he walked into the Vatican and Benedict XV greeted him: "*Ave tusculane Praesul!* Hail to the Tuscan bishop!"

For the moment Cagliero looked puzzled. Then he understood and bowed his head, "I accept." Don Bosco's final prophesy in his regard had come true! "Don Bosco," he explained, "once told me that I would be appointed bishop of a diocese."

"In those days," he recalled later, "were fulfilled the fourth and fifth prophesies of Don Bosco in my regard. In January of 1885 I was about to leave for the second time for Patagonia, but this time, as Vicar Apostolic. As I knelt before Don Bosco for his blessing he said to me: 'You will do a lot of work and the Madonna will help you save many souls. Then they will recall you and give you a diocese.' Thirty years passed and I was recalled by Benedict XV; five more passed and the Tuscan diocese falls on top of me. Remember that the right belonged to eight other Cardinals before me. It was, as the Holy Father put it, in the divine decrees, and in fulfillment of the prophecy of Don Bosco."

What had happened to bring about the fulfillment of this particular prophecy of Don Bosco?

In the suburbs of Rome there are six dioceses reserved to Cardinal-Bishops. When Cardinal Boschi died he left Frascati, one of these dioceses, vacant. Cagliero had applied for it and in a Secret Consistory on December 16, 1920, the Pope had approved.

Not without reason had the eight other Cardinals given up their right to the vacant diocese. Frascati was very badly off in many ways, and Cagliero's predecessor had found it so overburdened not only with a heavy debt but also with so many other inconveniences he had rushed to the Pope crying: "They have given me a heap of bare bones!" Within nine months he was dead.

Cagliero took possession on January 17, 1921, but chose to live with the Salesians at Villa Sora. This was where he had once placed Zepherin Namuncurá in an effort to restore the boy's health. Here he had one room to sleep in and another for his chapel. His faithful valet followed him. As at the Sacred Heart in Rome, he took his recreation with the boys and they still preserve examination papers of the boys which bear the signature of the Cardinal-Bishop of Frascati. His first public gesture upon entering his See

was to redeem all pawned articles of clothing, furniture, and utensils, and return them to the poor.

The task of running this diocese was meant, perhaps, for much younger shoulders. There were only eight parishes, but his predecessor had complained that they had given him more trouble than eighty ordinary ones! "I have completed my visits to the whole diocese," Cagliero commented later, "including the thirty-two religious houses. The priests work very little. They do not preach, nor do they even know how to teach catechism!"

Besides this, he found no less than 51 lawsuits pending against him; an incredible number of Masses were still unsaid although the stipends had been spent; and each year he had to meet heavy payments on the interest of a crushing debt.

The cause of these troubles lay in the fact that after World War I the Communists in that region were teaching the strange doctrine that everything belonged to everybody. People began to apply this new theory very literally, going into the woods, fields, and parks to cut trees, tear down fences, uproot plants and flowers, and generally make themselves masters of everything. No one could stop them, for when brought to court the magistrates — Communists, too — acquitted them. Church property was brazenly stolen and rents for Church land refused. In view of this pastors started to pass on parish goods to relatives. When Cagliero tried to collect rents due the diocese he found the way blocked by local municipalities either Communist or anticlerical. Often the defendants presented counter-claims and were awarded damages! To crown it all, the anticlerical authorities insisted that the diocese should pay taxes on property for which it was denied the right to collect rent!

Cagliero decided to put an end to this incongruous situation by selling a great part of this property. This solution had already been entertained by his predecessors but none of them had had the courage to carry it out.



The anticlericals and, of course, all those who stood to lose, tried to block the move, insisting — among other things — that Cagliero needed permits for the sale of Church property. They even sent up a cry of simony! To handle this tricky business, he engaged the services of a legal procurator. Too late he discovered that this man also was a thief! In spite of everything, however, the move paid off and the day came when he could declare the diocese not only free of debt, but possessing to boot a steady annual income.

On January 14, 1922, on the 60th Anniversary of the Cardinal's First Mass, the Holy Father, in a special brief, praised his fidelity to the spirit of Don Bosco and his untiring missionary zeal. To mark the occasion a station in Patagonia, a square in Castelnuovo, and a missionary training center in northern Italy were named after him. But to him the most important of these celebrations was his Diamond Jubilee Mass on St. Andrew's Day, September, 1922, in his home town.

In the spring of 1923 he complained that his strength was leaving him, and after officiating at the Eucharistic Congress in his diocese, he returned to Turin for a breath of native air. John noted that he was not looking well.

In the summer of 1924 he fell ill again. His heart was not functioning regularly and his condition was further complicated by a persistent, high temperature. Brought to Rome for treatment, he recovered enough to travel to Ljubljana, Yugoslavia, for the consecration of the Shrine of Mary Help of Christians. From there he continued on to Austria and Poland. He toured Poland with the Administrator of Upper Silesia, Monsignor Hlond, who was to become the second Salesian Cardinal, and gave a conference to the directors of Germany, Poland, Yugoslavia and Austria who had come to meet him.



Every year on his birthday, January 11, he was received in audience by the Holy Father to obtain his blessing and, as usual, to beg special graces and favors for his benefactors. In 1928 — he was now 88 — even with the assistance of his faithful valet, he climbed the Vatican stairway with great difficulty. After the audience, John put him to bed and it took fifteen days of rest and much medical attention to get him out of it.

That summer he went to Turin and remained there until the end of the year for the celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Don Bosco's missions. If anyone should be there, everybody argued — and he agreed wholeheartedly! — it was Cagliero. Besides being the pioneer of the entire mission movement of the Society, he was also the sole survivor of the little band which fifty years ago had blazed a trail. At that time he had led a group of ten; the missionaries he now bade farewell to numbered not ten, but two hundred and twenty four! Nor were they bound for only one country. With his sons taking care of twenty-five mission territories, Don Bosco's dream of covering the globe with his Salesians was fast becoming a reality.

In the traditional ceremony of departure, he presented the crucifix to each missionary, adding a warm word of encouragement. After that there was — there had to be, where he was concerned — a rousing exhortation to be faithful to the spirit of Don Bosco, ending with the password to success: "Pray! Watch! Work!" To him this was the perfect way to celebrate the golden jubilee of the Salesian missions, and he was supremely happy. As he left the Oratory accompanied by Archbishop Félix Guerra and his valet, however, he fell silent. "I'll never see my Oratory again," he murmured.

On January 11, 1926, despite a rising temperature, he went for his annual audience with the great missionary Pope, Pius XI, the sixth Pope he had known. Later, he sat down to a birthday dinner in his honor at Villa Sora, but without

touching the food, rose again. "I don't feel too well," he remarked. Meanwhile, he still attended to his diocese and, as was his custom, read from cover to cover the *Salesian Bulletin*, a periodical Don Bosco had founded to publicize the activities of his Society. He felt sufficiently strong to award diplomas to the religious orders participating in the Vatican Missionary Exposition.

When he fell ill again a serious operation was called for. Monsignor Guerra warned him that it might be fatal. "So what?" he countered. "Do you think I'm afraid of death? — that I'm afraid to go when the Lord calls me?" While waiting for the operation he changed nothing of his regular way of life, but continued to say his Mass and breviary, to attend to the business of the diocese, and to receive visitors. Before leaving for the hospital, he shaved. "If the Lord does take me," he said, smiling, "at least they won't have to call in the barber."

The operation on February 14 lasted an hour and a half and was successful. During the difficult days that followed, he prayed for sleep and would comment, according to whether his prayer was heard or not, "My friends up top did well." or "My friends were a little deaf last night." His favorite prayer was "I adore thee, O my God, and I love thee with all my heart. I thank thee for having created me, called me into thy Church and . . . made me a Salesian." Once while saying this prayer he stopped and turned to John. "I'm 88 years old now," he said, "but if I were to be born 88 times, I'd follow Don Bosco 88 times."

As he grew weaker, reports were sent daily to the Holy Father; the Salesian superiors kept vigil. "He's going fast," was the doctor's diagnosis; but he continued to hold on tenaciously to life until February 25 when Bishop Guerra brought him Holy Communion. That afternoon his valet entered to find him standing at the foot of the bed. "What are you looking for, Your Eminence?" he asked.

Cagliero waved his arms feebly. "I'm looking for something. I don't know what. . . perhaps I was dreaming." He glanced around him absently. He began to tell John his dream about some Cardinals who were supposed to pontificate. One was already robed, the others not. But John cut him short. "Not now, Your Eminence, later." As he was put back into bed, he murmured, "I'm very sleepy, very sleepy." Then he quoted a popular Italian proverb: *Chi dorme non pecca*. No one sins in his sleep.

On Sunday, February 28, 1926, at one o'clock in the morning, he entered into his agony. At three he opened his eyes, gazed serenely at those around his bed; then he stared ahead and smiled. He was dead.

## Envoi

On May 8, 1964, the feast of Our Lady of Luján, Patroness of Argentina, the *M. V. Giulio Cesare*, slid easily into her berth in Buenos Aires. On board were the remains of the first Vicar Apostolic of Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. They were being brought from Rome to their permanent resting place in Cagliero's *segunda patria*, his second country. This action was the result of a long and persistent campaign on the part of the people, the authorities, and the bishops.

From the moment the remains arrived in Argentina they received state honors, for the President had declared the Cardinal a national hero. It was the President, too, Dr. Arthur Illía, himself a product of the schools founded by the Cardinal, who paid him a state tribute in the historic Plaza de Mayo, then led the cortege to the steps of the Cathedral where they were received by the Cardinal Primate Caggiano. From a common platform the leaders of both Church and State heard the Foreign Minister speak on the kind of relations which should exist between the two in a Catholic country. At that precise moment relations between the two were rather strained over the question of education. The orator underlined the part played by the deceased Cardinal in re-establishing relations broken in 1884, between his country and the Holy See. Observers remarked that the Cardinal, though deceased,

was still playing his part in keeping those relations intact.

The remains were then brought to *Mater Misericordiae*, later to Bahía Blanca, so that the people of both could pay him homage. After that they were brought to Fortín Mercedes where rest the remains of his former protégé Zepherin Namuncurá, whose cause for canonization had since made long strides. On the morning of May 14, they reached the cathedral of Viedma. With Bishop Joseph Bergatti, his successor to the See, officiating, the remains were laid to rest in the church under the mantle of Mary Help of Christians.

Cagliero's finest eulogy was spoken not after, but before his death. It was spoken by the one who of all men knew him best — Father Paul Albera, his friend since Oratory days. Fr. Albera, who went to his reward four months before Cagliero, said of his companion: "It seems that Don Bosco wanted to make this son of his a great and splendid example of his spirit. Cagliero was one of the first to give himself wholly to Don Bosco and to allow himself to be completely formed by him." In this lay the secret of his success... *Recto fixus calli ero*. "I shall be true to the way."

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