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POPE PIUS THE TENTH

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Pope Pius the Tenth

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Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	19

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Pope Pius the Tenth

I

CHILD AND STUDENT

In the village of Riese in the Venetian plains was born on the 2nd of June, 1835, a child who was destined to leave his mark on the world's history.

Giuseppe¹ Melchior Sarto was the eldest of the eight surviving children of Giovanni Battista Sarto, the municipal messenger and postman of Riese, and his wife Margherita. They were poor people, and it was difficult sometimes to make both ends meet. The daily fare was hard and scanty, and the future pope was clothed, as an Italian biographer puts it, "as God willed." But both Giovanni Battista and his wife came of a hard-working, God-fearing stock, who could endure manfully and suffer patiently, and who taught their children to do the same.

Little Bepi was remarkable both for his intelligence and for his restless activity. The village schoolmaster, who at once singled him out as a pupil worth cultivating, was, we are told, not infrequently obliged to use means more persuasive than agreeable to calm his vivacity. Indeed, the seraphic element in Bepi seems to have been considerably leavened by that of the human boy. "That little rascal!" exclaimed an old inhabitant of Riese when he heard of Cardinal Sarto's elevation to the papacy, "Many a cherry of mine has found its way down his throat!"

It was not long before Bepi had mastered the rudiments of reading and writing, which were all that the village school could offer. He became an efficient server at Mass, and such was his influence over his companions that at the age of ten he was appointed leader of the somewhat unruly band of acolytes who served in the village church. The young master of ceremonies proved himself perfectly equal to the occasion. There was such a serene good temper and such a merry wit behind the somewhat drastic methods of Bepi that his authority was irresistible and unquestioned.

To most boys who serve daily at the altar the thought of the priestly life will sooner or later suggest itself; to some it comes as an overwhelming call. Giuseppe's vocation seems to have grown up with him, to have been, from his earliest years, the very centre of his life. About half a mile beyond Riese stands a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, containing a statue known as the Madonna delle Cendrole. Here young Bepi loved to come and pray, pouring out his joys and sorrows at the feet of the Mother of Christ, and perhaps she was the first confidant of his desire to consecrate his life to God. Certainly this sanctuary was especially dear to him in after-life, as one round which clung the happiest memories of his childhood.

At twelve years old the boy made his first communion. Did he think the time was long in coming, and was it the memory of the desire of his own childish heart that moved him in after years to shorten the time of waiting for the children of the Catholic world?

Anything that tended to the knowledge of God seemed to have an irresistible fascination for Bepi. Never was he known to miss the classes where the parish priest, Don Tito Fusarini, and his curate, Don Luigi Orazio, taught Christian doctrine to the children of the parish. So quick was his intelligence and so remarkable his aptitude that Don Luigi, who at the time was teaching Latin to his own younger brother, took Bepi also as pupil. The boy's progress soon convinced his tutor that he had the makings of a scholar, and the two priests determined to prepare him for the grammar school at Castelfranco.

¹ Joseph, Beppo, Beppino, Bepi and Beppe are all diminutives of the same name. "Sarto" is the English "Taylor."

Distant about four miles from Riese, Castelfranco, with its medieval and romantic atmosphere, its ancient fortress and picturesquely crowded market-place, is not the least attractive of the old Venetian cities. Here, in 1447, was born Giorgione, and here, in the beautiful old cathedral, is to be seen one of his most famous Madonnas. On either side of the Virgin Mother, seated on a throne with the Divine Child in her arms, stand St. Francis of Assisi, and St. Liberialis, the patron saint of Treviso, a young knight in armour. Many a time must the boy Giuseppe have slipped into the quiet cathedral to pray before the Madonna. Did he ask for the strength of the warrior and the humility of the friar, to be loving like the Christ and pure like His Mother? Those who knew him in after-life could bear witness that these gifts were his.

Day after day, in all weathers, the boy tramped the four miles into Castelfranco, his shoes slung over his shoulder, and a piece of bread or a lump of polenta in his pocket. In the fourth and last year of Giuseppe's school life he was joined by his brother Angelo, and as the financial affairs of their father had slightly improved, the two brothers were promoted to a rather ramshackle donkey-cart.

The day's work was far from over when the lads came home from school. There was plenty to be done in the house and outside it. Both the cow and the donkey must be attended to; there was work in the garden and work in the fields. It was Bepi's delight to help his mother in the care of the house, and to look after his baby brothers and sisters, that she might have a little sorely needed rest. His merry nature and thoughtful unselfishness made him a general favourite, while the younger members of the family looked up to him almost as much as to their parents.

From the beginning of his first year at Castelfranco Giuseppe Sarto had shown himself a hard-working and brilliant pupil, qualities which do not always go together. At the end of his fourth year, in the examinations held at the diocesan seminary of Treviso, he came out first in every subject. The two priests of Riese were justly proud of their scholar, and dreamed of great things in the future. Education, however, costs money; and the Sarto family were not only poor, but had eight children to provide for. That Bepi had a vocation to the priesthood was evident to everyone who had had to do with him. The next step was obviously the seminary; but who was to pay the expenses? The stipend of an Italian parish priest leaves no margin for such undertakings. Don Tito Fusarini therefore went to Canon Casagrande, prefect of studies at the seminary, who had examined the boys of Castelfranco; he would surely interest himself in the brilliant youngster who had passed with honour in every subject.

Now it happened that the patriarch of Venice, Cardinal Jacopo Monico, was himself the son of a peasant, and a child of that very village of Riese. Distinguished no less for his love of letters than for his zeal for religion, it belonged to him to name the few students who were entitled to a free scholarship at the seminary of Padua. That his heart would be touched at the thought of his young fellow townsman, like himself a child of the people, and unable to continue his priestly education for lack of means, was a likely surmise. Don Tito applied to Canon Casagrande, begging him to plead Giuseppe's cause with the patriarch, a request which met with a prompt and hearty assent.

At Riese all was suspense and hope. The postman was a man of firm faith, whose trust in God had never failed him; Margherita prayed unceasingly. As to Bepi his whole future lay in the balance; the dearest hopes of his heart depended on the patriarch's answer. At last the letter arrived. Canon Casagrande announced to Don Fusarini that Giuseppe Sarto had been proposed and accepted as a student at the seminary of Padua, and that the patriarch had himself written to the bishop of the diocese recommending young Sarto to his care.

Giuseppe's joy was not unmixed with sorrow at the thought of leaving for the first time the humble village home with all its dear associations. In the dusk of an early November morning the fifteen-year-old boy packed his few belongings into the country cart, in those days the only means of conveyance for the poor, and, bravely choking back the tears that could hardly be repressed, bade farewell to his family.

If the medieval charm of Castelfranco had influenced the young student so profoundly, there was enough and to spare in the city of Padua to satisfy his love of beauty. Famous throughout the

world is the basilica of Il Santo, built in the thirteenth century, and dedicated in honour of the great St. Antony. Sculptures by Donatello, bas-reliefs by Lombardi and pictures by Mantegna, Veronese and Giotto adorn its walls. The cathedral, partly destroyed in the twelfth century, was rebuilt by Michelangelo. The university, founded in the thirteenth century, and counting among its students such men as Vittorino da Feltre, the great educator, and Giovanni da Ravenna, the friend of Petrarch, was famous throughout the Middle Ages for its schools of medicine and of law.

The seminary, founded in 1577 and greatly enlarged a century later, boasts a handsome church and a noble library rich in precious manuscripts. It was probably the first library that Bepi had seen, certainly the first of which he had had the freedom, and one can imagine the delight of the young student as he wandered through its lofty halls, and realized that its treasures were henceforward part of the endowment of the new life that was now his.

The intelligence and cheery good-humour of Giuseppe, joined to the charm of manner that seems to have been his from childhood, soon made him a general favourite both with boys and masters. "His mind is quick," wrote one of the latter to Don Pietro Jacuzzi, who had succeeded Don Orazio as curate of Riese and was a firm friend of Bepi's, "his will strong and mature, his industry remarkable." The somewhat strict discipline of the seminary presented no difficulties to a boy who had all his life been accustomed to self-denial; a willing and intelligent submission to authority was indeed a characteristic of Giuseppe Sarto throughout his life. "In order to command," he was to say hereafter as pope, "it is necessary to have learned to obey."

At the end of his first year at Padua, Giuseppe was first in all his classes. The home-coming to Riese was an unclouded joy, both to the young seminarist and to his family. The holidays were spent in the company of the friends of his childhood in the country that he loved. To Don Jacuzzi and Don Fusarini he was as a beloved son, and much of his time was spent either at the presbytery or in long rambles with the good curate. Neither could studies be altogether neglected, although it was holiday time; and the autumn days passed quickly enough.

Back again at Padua, Giuseppe set to work vigorously, without a presentiment of the sorrow that was so soon to overcloud his happiness. In the month of May his father died after a few days' illness, leaving his wife and large family in very straitened circumstances. The thought of the struggle which his mother was waging against poverty lay like a weight upon Giuseppe's heart. He was the eldest of the family and would have come to her assistance, but not for worlds would the good Margherita have allowed her son to give up his priestly career. She was full of courage, and the other boys were growing up; they would soon be able to help to support the family. A second grief followed upon the first. Don Tito Fusarini, who had been like a second father to Bepi, and whose failing health had caused him for some time past to rely more and more upon the devotedness of his curate, was at last obliged to give up his work at Riese.

Don Pietro Jacuzzi, who succeeded him as rector, had been, from the day of his arrival in the village, Giuseppe's firm friend and chief adviser in all his boyish difficulties. The lad looked up to him as the model of everything that a priest should be, and corresponded with him continually from Padua. To him he owed the love and the knowledge of music that was to prove so valuable in after years, for had he not assisted at the transformation that had taken place in the village choir under the able tuition of Don Pietro? He had been witness, too, of the rector's unselfish and untiring devotion to his priestly duties which had won him the love and reverence of his parishioners; but within a year Giuseppe was to lose this second friend also. Don Pietro was transferred to Vascon, to the grief of the people of Riese.

When Giuseppe came home for the autumn holidays in 1853 the fullness of his loss became clear to him; Riese was hardly Riese without Don Tito and Don Pietro. The new parish priest, whose somewhat morose character formed a striking contrast to the genial kindness of his two predecessors, was not popular. He did not like sick calls in the night, and told his parishioners so

plainly from the pulpit. But sickness and death have a knack of not considering the convenience of the parish priest, or indeed of anybody else; and of this the inhabitants of Riese were fully aware.

By his very position as a church student Giuseppe was bound to be on friendly terms with the presbytery. On the other hand, mixing as he did with the people of the place, he could not avoid hearing some severe criticisms of their pastor. While forced to admit to himself that the methods of the new arrival were a little singular, the boy's loyal and upright nature forbade him to discuss matters with his friends. In this difficult and awkward position the lad of seventeen showed a tact and discernment which would have been admirable in a man of experience, "These holidays have been perfectly miserable," he wrote to Don Jacuzzi, who had learnt from other correspondents how things were going on; "I shut myself up in the house as much as I can and try when visiting the members of my family to keep off dangerous subjects."

"No greater grief than to remember days
Of joy when sorrow is at hand,"

he quotes, for he knew his Dante well. "Even the singing has gone down. I long for my little room at the seminary and the quiet life of study."

In 1856 Giuseppe distinguished himself more than ever, He had now only two years more to spend at the seminary. His brilliant successes as a student left him modest and humble as before, whilst his cheery kindness and sympathy made him a powerful influence for good amongst his young companions. Such was the trust reposed in him by his superiors that he had for long been prefect of discipline in the general study room. "My masters call me '*Giubilato*'," he wrote to Don Pietro. "I wish I could do more to show my gratitude for their kindness." Nevertheless he greatly appreciated the private room allotted to him during his last two years at Padua. "Here I read and work," he wrote to the same dear friend, "and prepare myself for the life of solitude and study that will be mine as a priest." His favourite studies were the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. The pastoral letters and papal encyclicals of later years bear witness to the fact that this predilection lasted throughout his life.

His knowledge and love of music had obtained for him the direction of the seminary choir. "I have worked so hard at the music for the feast of St. Aloysius," he wrote in the June of 1857, "that I am fairly dried up."

On the 27th of February of the same year he was ordained subdeacon in the cathedral of Treviso, and on the feast of the Sacred Heart went to Riese to preach. "Last Sunday I went to Riese to give a little discourse on the Sacred Heart," he writes to Don Pietro. He does not mention that the little discourse was so striking and so eloquent that the enthusiasm of the congregation knew no bounds.

At the end of August, 1858, Giuseppe Sarto's seminary life was over. As he was only twenty-three, and the canonical age for ordination is twenty-four, the Bishop of Treviso wrote to Rome to obtain a dispensation. The young cleric had finished his last year as he had finished his first, with honours in every subject. The record of his triumphal progress is still to be seen in the books of the seminary of Padua, the professors united in praising the qualities of his character no less than those of his intellect. In September the dispensation arrived, and with it the day so long desired, when Giuseppe Sarto was to be for ever consecrated to the service of God. The Bishop of Treviso was then at Castelfranco, and it was here that the ordination was to take place.

An autumn mist lay like a veil over the familiar landscape as the young man drove along the road which led from Riese to Castelfranco. The horse trotted swiftly, yet the way had never seemed so long. How often had he tramped it in the old days through dust and mud and snow, barefoot to save the shoes that were such a heavy item of expense in the Sarto family. And it was the thought of the day which at last had dawned, a day that seemed then so far away and so impossible, which had been the inspiration and the strength of that life of hardships, making everything easy to bear. The supreme happiness that now possessed him blotted out all the past. The first glimpse of the ivied walls of Castelfranco made his heart beat almost to suffocation. "To-day I shall be a priest," was the

one thought that possessed him; and when, a little later, he knelt at the altar of the cathedral where he had so often prayed as a child, to receive the sacred laying-on of hands, it seemed to him as if earth had nothing more to give.

On the following day the newly-made priest sang his first Mass in the parish church of Riese. Who shall describe the joy of his mother as that beloved voice, clear and resonant as it remained even to old age, yet tremulous with the joy and fear of the moment, pronounced the words of the great Mystery? The Mass ended, the congregation flocked to kiss the hands of the young priest whom they had known and loved from childhood – hands that had touched to-day for the first time the Body of the Lord. To say that it was a feast day in Riese but feebly expresses the general jubilation.

A few days later Don Giuseppe received a letter announcing his destination. The Bishop of Treviso had appointed him curate to Don Antonio Costantini, the parish priest of Tombolo.

II

CURATE AND PARISH PRIEST

The village of Tombolo, in the province of Padua and the diocese of Treviso, is surrounded by hilly and well-wooded country, watered by the tributary streams of the Brenta. The parish church, St. Andrew's, stands in the centre of the little township. Tombolo boasts of no commercial industries; it is a pastoral country, and the greater part of the population is occupied in dairy farming and the rearing of cattle. The people have clearly marked characteristics; strong and robust in build, hardened to sun, rain, and wind, rough-voiced and somewhat ungentle in manner, they have, nevertheless, good hearts and are in their own way religious.

But the Tombolani have one vice – or had when Don Giuseppe became; their curate. They swore systematically and profusely at everything, at each other, and at the world at large. "No offence is intended to Almighty God," they explained ingenuously to the horrified young priest. "He certainly understands. Just go to market, and try to sell your beasts and your grain with a 'please' and a 'thank you,' and you will see what you will get!"

There may have been some truth in this; and intention, no doubt, goes a long way; but the argument did not satisfy Don Giuseppe. For the moment he dropped the subject, but he had not done with it.

The rector of the parish, Don Antonio Costantini, was habitually ailing. Devoted to his people and wholly desirous to do them good, his ill-health was a constant impediment. He had many tastes in common with his curate, notably the love of music and of biblical and patristic studies. He soon learnt to look upon Don Giuseppe as a son, and highly appreciated his good qualities.

"They have sent me a young man as curate," he wrote to a friend, "with orders to form him to the duties of a parish priest. I assure you it is likely to be the other way about. He is so zealous, so full of common sense and other precious gifts that I could find much to learn from him. Some day he will wear the mitre – of that I am certain – and afterwards? Who knows?"

The good rector nevertheless did his best to fulfil his commission. "Don Bepi," he would say to his young curate, "I did not quite like this or that in your last sermon." When the church was empty he would make Don Bepi go into the pulpit and preach, criticizing and commenting the while both on matter and method; comments well worth having, for Don Antonio was a man of wide learning and an excellent theologian. Meanwhile Don Bepi, whose sermons were already becoming famous throughout the countryside for their zeal and eloquence, would listen humbly and promise to try to do better.

The income of the young curate was next to nothing, for Tombolo was a very poor parish; but he had not been used to luxury. He had planned his priestly life before his ordination, and was busy carrying out the scheme. To study deeply in order to fit himself more fully for preaching; to do as much good as was possible in the confessional and in the pulpit; to help his people both materially and morally, to visit the sick, to succour the poor and to instruct the ignorant – such was the programme, and with all the vigour of his soul he threw himself into the work.

The widowed niece of Don Antonio who kept house for her uncle used to see a light burning in the window of Don Giuseppe's poor lodging the last thing at night and the first thing in the morning.

"Do you never go to bed, Don Bepi?" she asked at breakfast one day, for the curate took his meals at the rectory.

Don Bepi laughed. "I study a good deal," he replied. He confessed later that he slept for four hours, and found it quite sufficient for his needs.

"He was as thin as a rake," said the good lady when pressed in after-life for reminiscences, "for he scarcely ate enough to keep body and soul together, and was never off his feet."

In the morning he would often ring the church bell for Mass, in order not to disturb the sacristan. Then he would go to fetch Don Antonio, having prepared for him all that was needed. Sometimes he would find his chief unwell and unable to rise.

"What is the matter?" he would ask in his cheery way – "another bad night?"

"I am afraid I cannot get up," would be the plaintive answer.

"Don't try to; stay quiet, and do not worry yourself I will see to everything," the cheery voice would continue.

"But you have already one sermon to preach to-day, my Bepi."

"What of that? I will preach two."

During the days of sickness Don Giuseppe, as well as doing double duty, would himself nurse the poor invalid. How he managed it was known to himself alone.

He had not forgotten – there was no chance of forgetting – the deplorable language of his parishioners. The curate mixed with them as much as he could, making friends especially with the young men and the boys. He interested himself in their work and in their play, treating them with such a spirit of friendly comradeship that they would crowd to talk to him whenever he appeared. One day some of them lamented that they could neither read nor write.

"Let us start a night school," proposed Don Bepi, "and I will teach you."

"It would be too difficult," objected another; "some of us know a little, some less, and others nothing at all."

"What of that?" replied the priest. "We will have two classes-those who know something, and those who know nothing. We will get the schoolmaster to take the upper class, and I will teach the alphabet."

"Why shouldn't he teach the alphabet?" protested a loyal admirer of Don Giuseppe.

Bepi laughed. "The alphabet is hard work," he answered, "I had rather keep it."

"But we can't take up your time like that for nothing," declared another. "What can we do for you in return?"

"Stop swearing," answered Bepi promptly, "and I shall then be more than repaid."

The school of singing made rapid progress in his hands. Don Antonio, who, like his curate, was an ardent lover of Gregorian music, warmly seconded all his efforts. The somewhat unmelodious, if extremely powerful, vocalization of the village choir became quiet and prayerful under his tuition. If one of the acolytes showed signs of a vocation to the priesthood, Don Giuseppe would teach him privately until he knew enough to go up for examination at the diocesan seminary.

On one point Don Antonio and his curate could never agree. Everything that could be saved out of Don Giuseppe's tiny income went straight to the poor. They knew it, and when he went to preach in a neighbouring village would lie in wait for him as he returned with his modest fee in his pocket. It sometimes happened that when he reached home not a penny would be left, and Don Antonio would remonstrate.

"It is not fair to your mother, Bepi," he would say; "you should think of her."

"God will provide for my mother," was the answer; "these poor souls were in greater need than she."

Invitations to preach in other parishes became more frequent. What he said was always simple, but it was full of teaching and went straight to the heart. The young priest had, moreover, a natural eloquence and a sonorous and beautiful voice. It was so evident that he spoke from the fullness of a soul on fire with the love of God that his enthusiasm was catching, and his sermons bore fruit. It happened on one occasion that a priest who had been invited to preach on a feast-day in the neighbouring village of Galliera was prevented at the last moment from coming. There was consternation at the presbytery. What was to be done?

"Leave it to me," said Don Carlo Carminati, curate of Galliera and a friend of Don Giuseppe; "I promise you it will be all right," and jumping into the presbytery pony-cart he took the road to Tombolo.

It was a Sunday afternoon and the hour of the children's catechism class. Don Giuseppe was at the church door, about to enter.

"Stop, stop," cried Don Carlo, "I want to speak to you." Don Giuseppe turned.

"You must come and preach at Galliera," said Don Carlo; "our preacher has fallen through."

"What are you thinking of?" exclaimed Don Giuseppe. "I cannot improvise in the pulpit!" and he turned once more to go into the church.

"You have got to come, your rector says so, and there is not a minute to lose," replied his friend; and, laying hold of the still expostulating Don Giuseppe, he packed him into the pony-cart, bowed to Don Antonio who stood smiling at the scene, and whipped up his steed. Arrived at Galliera, Don Carlo conducted his victim to an empty room, provided him with pencil and paper and left him. An hour later, having been set at liberty by his triumphant fellow-curate, Don Giuseppe vested and entered the church. The sermon that followed was so eloquent and so appropriate to the occasion that what had threatened to be a calamity became a cause for rejoicing. "Did not I tell you?" exclaimed Don Carlo.

Don Giuseppe's energy was boundless, and to him no labour was amiss. "Work," he used to say, "is man's chief duty on earth." When the presbytery cook fell ill, he both nursed him and took his place; for in his eyes any kind of work was a thing to draw men nearer to the Christ who was "poor and in labours from His youth."

Whether it was preaching, teaching, playing with the village children, visiting the sick, helping the dying, hearing confessions, catechizing the young or studying theology, it was all the same to him – work for the Master, and as such ennobling and honourable.

So the time passed, until Don Giuseppe had been eight years at Tombolo. Much as Don Antonio loved and appreciated his curate, or rather because of this very love and appreciation, it distressed him to think that his talents should have no wider sphere than a little country parish. He spoke of this one day to one of the canons of Treviso. The two curates of Galliera who were present joined enthusiastically in the praise of their friend. The canon became thoughtful.

"Do you think he could preach in the cathedral of Padua for the feast of St. Antony?" he asked after a moment of reflection.

"Most certainly, Monsignor," was the answer.

"Well," continued the canon, "if you will be responsible for his accepting, I will see to it that he is asked."

The feast-day sermon was naturally a topic of much interest in Padua. "Who is to preach?" was the question on everybody's lips on the morning of the great day.

"Don Giuseppe Sarto, a young priest who is curate of Tombolo," was the reply.

Now it was customary on the feast of St. Antony to ask a preacher of some distinction to occupy the cathedral pulpit.

"The curate of Tombolo!" was the apprehensive comment. "Oh dear! A country curate from an out-of-the-way village!" The cathedral was crowded for the high Mass. When the slight young figure of Don Giuseppe mounted the pulpit stairs there was a gasp of astonishment, which gave place to an expectant silence.

"His intelligence and culture were no less remarkable than his eloquence," wrote one of the congregation to a friend. "His imagery was beautiful, his style perfect." The sermon lasted over an hour, and no one thought it too long.

In the May of 1867 Don Giuseppe was appointed rector of Salzano. A wail of lamentation arose from the little parish where he had worked so faithfully for nearly ten years. "He was our father, our brother, our friend, and our comfort," cried the Tombolani. In the heart of Don Antonio grief

for his loss contended with joy at the thought that the merits of his beloved Don Bepi had been recognized at last.

Salzano is a small country town in the province of Venetia. It has a handsome church with a graceful campanile and a somewhat imposing presbytery. The country is fertile, and the people, who are wholly given to agriculture, are quiet, steady and hard-working. The new rector arrived on a Saturday evening in July. At Mass the next morning, in spite of the heat, the church was crowded, for the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages had assembled in force to hear the sermon of the newly appointed *parroco*.

The result was a delightful surprise. "What was the bishop thinking of," they asked one another when Mass was over, "to leave a man like that buried all these years at a place like Tombolo?"

As for Don Giuseppe, he set to work at once to visit his people. His frank simplicity, his understanding sympathy and zeal for their welfare gained their hearts at once. As at Tombolo, he gave special attention to the instruction of children; and, not content with this, inaugurated classes in Christian doctrine for the adults. "Most of the evil in the world," he would often say, "comes from a want of the knowledge of God and of His truth."

In spite of the large parish and the handsome rectory, Don Giuseppe's habits were as frugal as ever. There was more to give to the poor, that was all. His sister Rosina kept house for him.

"Bepi," she said one day, "there is nothing for dinner."

"Not even a couple of eggs?"

A couple of eggs there were, and on these they dined.

But there was always a welcome at the rectory and a share of anything that was going for any old friend who dropped in. Don Carlo came one evening for a visit, and found Don Giuseppe in the kitchen playing games with some little children. They were sent home with a promise that the game should be continued on another occasion, and Don Carlo was pressed to stay. The next morning he was accosted by Rosina.

"Don Carlo, you are an old friend, and a very kind one," she began hesitatingly; "there is a man coming to-morrow who sells shirting."

"Really?" answered Don Carlo, rather at a loss to connect the statements.

"Yesterday my brother got a little money," continued Rosina, "and he has hardly a shirt to his back. Now if you were to try to persuade him to buy some shirting, I think he perhaps would do it. Will you do your best?"

Don Carlo promised, and took the first opportunity of broaching the subject.

"Nonsense, nonsense," was the answer, "there is no necessity at all," and the plea was cut short.

But Don Carlo was not so easily beaten; he knew the sunny nature of his friend, and determined to have recourse to strategy. On the arrival of the pedlar, he examined his materials, selected what he considered suitable, and set to work, after the manner of his country, to bargain. Having agreed on what he considered a fair price, he ordered the required length to be cut off, and turned to Don Giuseppe who had been innocently watching the transaction. "So many yards at such and such a price," he declared. "Pay up, Don Giuseppe!"

The rector was disgusted; but there was nothing to be done but to obey. The bargain had been made and the shirting cut off. "Even *you* come here and plot to betray me," he complained.

As for Rosina, her delight knew no bounds. "God bless the day you came, Don Carlo," she said, meeting him outside the door. "If you had not been here to-day, to-morrow there would have been neither money nor linen!"

Salzano was a large parish, and the rector had to keep a conveyance. It was not much to look at, but it did hard service, being at the disposal of everybody who appealed to the well-known charity of its owner. The horse came home one day with both knees badly damaged.

"I am very sorry," pleaded the borrower, "an accident.."

Don Giuseppe swallowed hard. "Never mind, never mind," he said; "it is all right."

One day – there had been a bad harvest that year, and there was much poverty in the parish – the rector asked a friend who was in easy circumstances to sell the horse for him. "You have so many relations with money," he pleaded.

The horse having been disposed of, it was then suggested that the same friend might also sell the carriage.

"I don't think I shall succeed," he remarked doubtfully, "for you must allow that it is not in the best condition." His fears were too true; no purchaser was found, and the carriage remained in the presbytery stable at the disposal of anyone who possessed a horse without a vehicle.

In 1873 there was a serious outbreak of cholera. The people of Salzano knew little of hygiene and less of sanitation; it was hard to make them take the most necessary precautions. Don Giuseppe was everything at once: doctor, nurse and sanitary inspector, as well as parish priest. Not only were there the sick and the dying to be tended, but the living to be heartened and consoled. "If it had not been for our dear Don Giuseppe," said an old man in later days, "I should have died of fear and sorrow during those dreadful times." Some of the people took it into their heads that the medicines and remedies ordered by the doctor were intended to put them quickly out of their pain, and would not take them unless they were administered by the priest's own hand.

For fear of infection, the dead had to be buried by night, and no one was allowed to attend the funeral. Anxious lest in the fear and the haste of the moment due honour should not be paid to these victims of the epidemic, Don Giuseppe was always there to see that all was done as it should be. Not only did he say the prayers and carry out the rites prescribed by the Church, but would take his place as coffin bearer, and even helped to dig the graves. Sorrow at the heartrending scenes he had to witness, added to these incessant labours by night and by day, would have ruined a less robust constitution than his. It is small wonder that Don Carlo Carminati, coming to visit him soon afterwards, was horrified at his appearance.

"You are ill!" he exclaimed.

"You think so?" was the quiet answer.

"He *is* ill," interposed Rosina vehemently, "but what can you expect? He is everybody's servant, he never spares himself. He has not only given away the food from his own mouth, but his night's rest. Look at him, nothing but skin and bone!"

"Your sister is right, you are doing too much. Remember that the pitcher can go to the well once too often; and when it is quite worn out, it will break."

"You are becoming quite an orator," commented Don Giuseppe with a smile.

Don Carlo was a man of action. He wrote to Don Antonio Costantini telling him that their dear Giuseppe was killing himself, and begging him to give a hint to the diocesan authorities. The hint was duly conveyed and duly taken. The bishop wrote to the rector of Salzano, ordering him to take more care of himself; but this was an art which Don Giuseppe had never studied, and he did not know how to begin. He continued to devote himself body and soul to his flock, leaving himself to the care of God.

With Don Giuseppe the service of Christ in His poor went hand in hand with the service of Christ at the altar. During his ministry at Salzano the parish church was greatly improved and beautified. He got together a choir of young men and boys and taught them to sing the stately Gregorian music that he loved for its devout and prayerful spirit. Even those who knew the stark poverty of the rector's private life did not always understand how the means could be obtained to carry out the plans he had at heart.

"But how will you get the money?" they would sometimes ask.

"God will provide," was the quiet answer, given with the serene faith characteristic of the strong.

III

CANON AND BISHOP

In the early spring of the year 1875 the chancellor of the diocese of Treviso was removed to Fossalunga. A canon's stall was also vacant, while the seminary was in need of a spiritual director. It was the general opinion that if these three offices could be held by one holy, wise and purposeful man, it would be an excellent thing for all parties concerned.

"I have it!" said Bishop Zinelli, "Don Giuseppe Sarto is the very man we need."

No sooner said than done. The rector of Salzano was named chancellor and residential canon of the cathedral of Treviso, and appointed spiritual director of the seminary. The bishop had not forgotten the warnings of Don Giuseppe's friends. By this arrangement the newly appointed canon would reside at the seminary, where the care of his health would not be left entirely in his own hands. He would, moreover, preside at the professors' table, and therefore would be unable to indulge his tendency to starve so as to feed the poor.

The news was received with mixed feelings by the people of Salzano. Joy that their beloved father should receive such a mark of honour struggled hard with their grief at losing him. It comforted them a little, they said, to think that his precious gifts, instead of being spent on Salzano alone, would now find full scope in a diocese that counted two hundred and ten parishes.

It was not until the autumn of the same year that Don Giuseppe bade farewell to his sorrowing parishioners, and, taking possession of his stall, sang the first vespers of Advent Sunday in the cathedral of Treviso. Like all the other professors of the seminary, Canon Sarto had three small rooms set apart for his use. From the windows he could look across the neatly-kept garden to where the quiet waters of the Sile, flowing by the ivy-coloured walls, widened out into little lakes amongst the thickets of poplar and plane trees that lay beyond.

The rector of the seminary was Don Giuseppe's old friend Pietro Jacuzzi, and there were in the college 160 lay students and 54 aspirants to the priesthood. "I well remember Monsignor Sarto's first instruction," said one of the latter in after years. "'You are expecting to find in me,' he began, 'a man of profound learning and of wide experience in spiritual matters, a master in asceticism and doctrine. You will be disappointed, for I am none of these things. I am only a poor country parish-priest. But I am here by God's will – therefore you must bear with me.' I have forgotten the instruction," added the narrator, "but the preamble I shall never forget."

A regular course of instruction and meditation was begun at once, and immediately won the attention of the students. The lucid simplicity with which Monsignor Sarto spoke carried the minds of his hearers straight into the heart of the truth which they were considering. The students were never tired, never puzzled, his conferences being eminently practical and within the grasp of his audience. His aim was to inculcate real solid piety which would endure throughout the troubles and temptations of life. It is not everybody who has the art of appealing to the young: it was one in which Monsignor Sarto excelled. Even in his familiar talks, full of merriment and sympathy, there was always something helpful and uplifting. Personal cleanliness, not as a rule the most prominent characteristic of southern nations, was a thing on which he laid particular stress. Gentle and kind as he was to all weakness and suffering, he could be stern enough when it was necessary, and his reproofs were seldom forgotten. If any of the students fell sick, he would nurse them with a mother's tenderness; and to those of the seminarists who were the sons of poor parents he gave material as well as moral help.

It happened that one of these students was in great distress by reason of a family difficulty. His father, a poor working man, was in urgent need of a few pounds, and there was no means of obtaining the sum. He confided his trouble to one of his companions, who asked him why he did not go to

Monsignor Sarto and tell him all about it. The advice was taken, and he knocked at the familiar door. Monsignor Sarto was seated at his table reading. "What can I do for you?" he asked kindly.

The young man, who found it difficult to put his trouble into words, stammered out the whole story, Monsignor Sarto listening with compassion. "I am so sorry," he said when the tale was ended, "but I have only a few lire, nothing like the sum you require." The poor student broke down completely, for his last hope was gone.

"Come, come; cheer up!" cried the good canon, greatly distressed; "come to me to-morrow, and if I cannot give you all, I may be able to give you part of the money."

Next morning the seminarist returned.

"Well?" said Monsignor Sarto.

"Well?" answered the student nervously.

"Do you really think," continued the canon, "that I can manufacture banknotes?" Then, seeing the young man's distress, he added hastily: "Come come, my son, I was only joking, I have got the money," and, opening a little drawer, he took out the required sum.

"You will soon be a priest," he continued, "and when you can do so without inconvenience, you must give it back to me, for you see I have had to borrow it myself."

The winters were sometimes bitterly cold at Treviso, and the house was unwarmed. The needy students would often find warm clothing provided for them by the same charitable hand. A tradesman of Treviso certified that he received many orders from Monsignor Sarto for warm cloaks, with strict injunction to keep the matter secret. That the canon had seldom more than a few lire in his possession was not surprising.

It was a labour of love to him to prepare the little boys for their first communion. The vice-rector begged that this task might be left to those of the staff who had more time to spare.

"It is my duty," was the answer. "Am I not their spiritual father?"

In order to obtain the necessary time Monsignor Sarto deprived himself of the evening walk which was his only recreation after a day of hard work; and, assembling his lively little band of neophytes in the church, he would hold them spellbound.

His kindness and quick sympathy made him as popular with the staff. Laying aside the cares of his office together with the big bundle of papers that accompanied him everywhere, he set himself to make the time spent in the refectory as refreshing for the minds as it was for the bodies of his colleagues. The amusing stories told by him and the interesting discussions he set afoot were long remembered, as was his sly teasing of certain professors. These were not the moments, he held, for discussing serious questions; anyone who mentioned the word logic, for instance, was obliged to make amends by telling an interesting or useful story. When Monsignor Sarto's place was empty, everything fell flat.

He still kept up his old habit of working during part of the night. His neighbour in the seminary would often hear him moving in his room long after everyone else had retired to rest. "Go to bed, Monsignor," he would sometimes call out. "He works ill who works too long."

"Quite true, quite true, Don Francesco," would come the answer; "put that into practice. Go to bed and sleep well." It was past midnight before Monsignor Sarto's light went out, and he was up again by four o'clock.

In 1879 Bishop Zinelli died, and Monsignor Sarto was elected vicar capitular to administer the diocese while the see remained vacant. He announced his nomination in characteristic words.

"Called by the votes of my colleagues to administer the diocese of Treviso in place of him who for so many years has ruled it with such wisdom, prudence and zeal, I must frankly confess that I have accepted this heavy burden, not only because I feel assured that they will help me in my task, but because I know the spirit of the clergy. That you will earnestly co-operate with me in upholding the most precious prerogatives of the priesthood I have no doubt. I ask you, therefore, to remember the words of the Apostle: 'Walk carefully, that our ministry be not blamed'; let our actions be such

that our enemies shall find nothing in us worthy of reproach. You are full of zeal for souls: seek to win them rather by love than by fear. The supreme wish of our Lord for His own was that they should love one another, and this wish found its fulfilment in apostolic times, when the Christians were one heart and one soul in Christ. A priest's life is a continual warfare against evil, which cannot fail to raise up powerful enemies. In order that they may not prevail against us, let us be united in charity amongst ourselves; thus we shall be invincible and strong as a rock."

Monsignor Sarto administered the diocese for less than a year, but in this short time he accomplished much. Although still spiritual director of the seminary, he preached oftener in public, his sermons invariably rousing enthusiasm. In the February of 1880 he was relieved of this office on the nomination as bishop of Monsignor Callegari, who was to find in his chancellor a devoted and faithful friend. The new bishop, however, was destined to remain but a short time at Treviso. In 1882 he was promoted to Padua, Monsignor Apollonio succeeding him at Treviso.

In September, 1884, Monsignor Apollonio, who had been making the pastoral visit of his diocese, returned home rather unexpectedly, and Monsignor Sarto was not a little surprised at being summoned somewhat mysteriously to the bishop's private oratory. "Let us kneel before the Blessed Sacrament," said Monsignor Apollonio gravely, "and pray about a matter which concerns us both intimately." Still more astonished, Monsignor Sarto knelt, and the two prelates prayed for a moment in silence. Then the bishop rose, and, handing a letter to his companion, bade him read it. Thus did Monsignor Sarto learn his nomination to the bishopric of Mantua.

The strong man who all his life long had welcomed hardship and suffering with a cheery smile, wept like a child. He was, he declared, utterly incapable, quite unworthy of such a trust. The bishop, who knew better, but whose heart was touched at the sight of his friend's distress, comforted him as best he could. "It is God's will," he said; "trust in His help." Convinced, however, in his own mind that Pope Leo XIII was wholly mistaken in his judgment of him, Monsignor Sarto wrote to Rome to profess his incapacity and worthlessness. His arguments were not accepted.

Early in November, amidst enthusiastic demonstrations, the bishop-elect set out for Rome. At Padua he met with a fresh ovation, Monsignor Callegari himself came to the station to greet his old friend and to wish him well. On the evening of the 8th he was received by Pope Leo, and left his presence consoled and full of courage as to the future. Consecrated on the 16th, he remained in Rome for ten days longer, returning on the 29th to Treviso, where he was to remain for some months before entering on his episcopal charge.

It was during this time that he went one day, accompanied by a friend, to visit a Venetian city. In the railway carriage were two gentlemen, who, while conversing on local subjects, touched on the election of the new bishop of Mantua. They wondered what kind of a man Monsignor Sarto was; not very intelligent, they feared, nor very gifted. The bishop-elect, with a sign to his companion to keep quiet, joined in the conversation, endorsing most heartily everything that they said in his own disparagement. He then proceeded to contrast the poor picture he had painted of himself with the qualities that were necessary for an ideal bishop, and this with such ability and discernment that his two hearers were greatly impressed. Monsignor Sarto was the first to leave the carriage.

"Who is that delightful priest?" asked the gentlemen of his companion, who was preparing to follow.

The latter made a low bow. "Monsignor Sarto, Bishop-elect of Mantua," he answered with elaborate irony.

He spent Holy Week and Easter that year with his mother and sisters at Riese. It was a double festival for his family and the friends of his childhood who crowded round him. Back again at Treviso, where he had spent so many happy days, he had not the courage to face a public farewell. "Read them this letter at dinner," he said to the rector of the seminary; "tell them I keep them all in my heart, and that they must pray for me." Then, slipping unnoticed out of the house, he went to the carriage ordered to wait for him at a little distance, and so set out for Mantua.

At the station a large crowd had gathered to receive him, priests, people, representatives of the noble families of the place, and of the divers associations of town and country. Outside the bishop's house, in the great square of St. Peter, a multitude of townspeople were awaiting his arrival. "We want to see our bishop," they cried tumultuously, and their desire was immediately satisfied. Stepping out into the balcony which overlooked the square, their new pastor greeted them with warm affection and gave them his blessing.

Mantua, say the Italians, has always been a fighting city, and in 1885 it was still true to its reputation. Of Etruscan origin, and the birthplace of Virgil and Sordello, throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries its see had been usually held by members of the famous family of Gonzaga. The task which lay before the new bishop was no easy one. There were divisions between clergy and people; the seminary was almost empty of students; many parishes were without a priest; no synod had been held within the memory of man. The spirit in which Monsignor Sarto took up his new work showed itself in his first pastoral letter to his flock.

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