

## **The outbreak of cholera, in Lovere, in the year 1836<sup>1</sup>.**

“The first case of this dreadful disease”, says Scandella, “appeared in Lovere on 27 June: that was a little more than a month after the election of Gerosa as Superior. The thought that it might spread here as in other towns, and the fear that they might catch it any moment made people seek all ways and precautions to hold it at bay; but it was often in vain, because the disease proved to be baffling even to the most learned and experienced doctors. Very soon cases began to multiply at an alarming rate, and death followed in dreadful haste”.

Sr. M. Vincenza ““was one of the few people who in those circumstances did not lose heart. The two most courageous persons in the general panic were Gerosa and the Assistant Parish Priest ‘Curato’ Fr Fabiano Maveri”. Full of faith in God’s designs in permitting this chastisement, she recognized the Lord’s voice felt sure that God was calling her to sacrifice, if need be, her own life and the life of her sisters, to save the plague-stricken. Without a moment’s hesitation, she devoted all possible efforts for their sake. She accordingly sent the boarders home in order to attend more freely to the cholera patients and avoid all risk of deadly contagion among them. She kept with her only the few orphans who she had

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<sup>1</sup> From **THE LIFE OF SR M. VINCENZA GEROSA**, by **Luigi Mazza**, 1910. (English translation - **UNPUBLISHED**)

nowhere to be send to. She also suspended the classes of the day-school pupils.

Meanwhile, Government Authorities of the Region sent her a commission to inquire if she could admit in her own hospital poor people who fell ill of cholera. Gerosa was extremely glad to accept, as if it were a profitable gain, and she agreed to the proposal with so much love and enthusiasm that the Delegation Committee members were moved to tears, and went away deeply edified by such charity. Patients suffering from other ailments were taken to another place so as to leave the hospital entirely free for the cholera-stricken. In a few days, it was filled with them. It was then that Gerosa, with radiant cheerfulness turned to her sisters and said to them, **“Our Lord presents himself to us in various forms; at this moment he comes to us in the guise of the cholera-stricken; if anyone of you feels equal to it, she may go and look after them, but I do not put you under an obligation to do so”**. At this, “all rushed to follow her lead. Sr. Fedele Giudici attested: “I was a bit scared, but on hearing and seeing our Superior, I felt as if my feet and knees had grown wings on them, and I hurried off with no fear of any sort”.

The house was a piteous yet edifying sight. Death carried off, at a few hours' notice, blooming youths and sturdy men; patients cried out and moaned in pain. And in their midst, Sr. M. Vincenza and her sisters incessantly moved about, day and night. Free from all fear and never

minding repulsive sights, they cheerfully and joyfully watched over them, served them, nursed them and comforted them, evidently glad to risk their own lives to save their brethren. Gerosa herself was alert to all possible needs of the patients, but at the same time, she took every precaution to protect her sisters from the deadly contagion. With motherly concern, she sought to hold in check the zeal of the sisters who readily took upon themselves vigils, hard work and risky service. She preferably used the service of the strongest and most robust ones among them for the nursing of the patients, and spared no expenses in providing personnel to substitute for them and so ensure sufficient rest for them.

As if all this care and concern at the hospital were not enough, she was also “called, any time in the day or night, to look after the cholera-stricken in their own homes, where she devoted herself tirelessly to deeds of charity and sent the sisters to do the same; her only sorrow was that of being unable to reach and serve everyone. About 14 or 15 people died of cholera every day, and this went on for about two months”.

In fact, cholera in Lovere lasted from 27 June to 23 August. The cholera-stricken amounted to 249, of whom 83 died of it. Those who were admitted and treated at the hospital were 47” .

Over and above the strain of such charitable deeds, Sr. M. Vincenza did not fail to implore God to put an end to the plague. Prayers, penance and

alms were offered with that intention. She tried to comfort the afflicted who turned to her, inspiring them with new courage. Mindless of the risk she herself incurred, she was daring in peril, compassionate with the suffering, undaunted and persevering in the struggle. A fitting reward for such lavish self-sacrifice was Heaven's special blessing on the first shoots of this plant of charity, which were to serve as models for the numerous branches that in time would adorn it: the fact that every single sister and orphan-girl she had in the house was spared. Considering that they were in constant danger of contagion, their preservation was seen as a sort of miracle.

Quite rightly, Scandella writes: "The whole town was impressed by the heroism shown by priests, sisters and doctors in that calamity. Referring to the sisters, everyone kept wondering about the charity that enabled those saintly women to emulate one another in serving the cholera-stricken: none could understand it except persons who know how inspiring religious faith and a true gospel spirit can be. ..."