

VOLUME III - 1847-1850

THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS

of Saint John Bosco



Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne

FATHER GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE (1839-1916) was the first and great chronicler of the life of St. John Bosco and of the first decades of the Salesian Congregation.

From their first, providential meeting in 1864, Father Lemoyne esteemed Don Bosco as a person of outstanding character and holiness. He not only strove to understand and acquire his spirit, but also took upon himself the task of committing to writing anything of significance that Don Bosco did or said. Information concerning earlier events he painstakingly gathered from eyewitnesses and other sources.

In 1883 he came to the Mother House as editor of the **Salesian Bulletin** and Secretary of the Superior Chapter. The five years that followed he spent in cordial intimacy with Don Bosco and heard from the Saint himself the story of the arduous road he had to climb in his youth to arrive at the priesthood, and of the wonderful manner in which Providence guided the Salesian work.

After Don Bosco's death in 1888, he was formally charged with the compilation of available materials for the life of the Saint. Forty-five large volumes of galley proofs bear witness to his dedicated research and provide the material for the nineteen volumes of the **Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco**, the first nine of which he authored. Noteworthy among his other works are the **Life of Don Bosco** in two volumes and the **Life of Mamma Margaret**, Don Bosco's mother. He died in Turin on September 14, 1916 at the age of 77.

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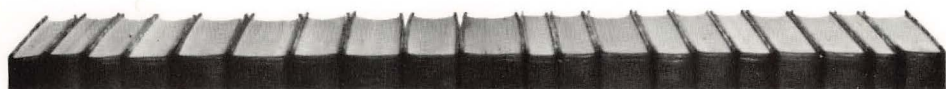
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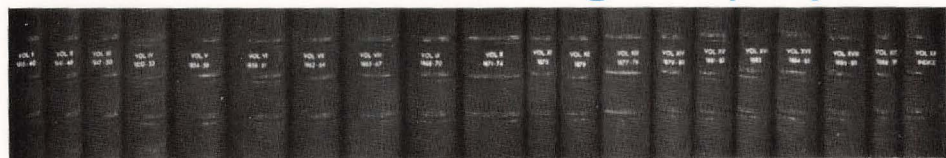
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THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

The
Biographical Memoirs
of
Saint John Bosco

by
GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE, S.D.B.

AN AMERICAN EDITION
TRANSLATED
FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN

DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

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Dedicated

WITH PROFOUND GRATITUDE
TO
THE LATE, LAMENTED, AND HIGHLY ESTEEMED

VERY REVEREND FELIX J. PENNA, S.D.B.

(1904-1962)

TO WHOSE
WISDOM, FORESIGHT, AND NOBLE SALESIAN HEART
THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION
OF
THE BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO
IS
A LASTING MONUMENT

TO
The Very Reverend
ALVIN FEDRIGOTTI
Prefect General
Of The Salesian Society
And
Former Member And Superior
In The United States
Of
America

Editor's Preface to the First Nine Volumes

SAINTE JOHN BOSCO, the central figure of this vastly extensive biography, was a towering person in the affairs of both Church and State during the critical 19th century in Italy. He was the founder of two very active religious congregations during a time when other orders were being suppressed; he was a trusted and key liaison between the Papacy and the emerging Italian nation of the Risorgimento; above all, in troubled times, he was the saintly Christian educator who successfully wedded modern pedagogy to Christ's law and Christ's love for the poor young, and thereby deserved the proud title of *Apostle of youth*.

He is known familiarly throughout the world simply as Don Bosco.¹ His now famous system of education, which he called the *Preventive System*, was based on reason, religion and kindness, and indicated by its descriptive name that, also in education, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. He always sought to place pupils in the moral impossibility of committing sin, the moral disorder from which all evils flow.

To ensure the continuation of his educational mission in behalf of youth he founded two worldwide religious congregations, the Society of St. Francis de Sales (Salesian Society) and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (Salesian Sisters) which today number more than 40,000 members conducting 2,800 educational institutions throughout the world.

To help in the difficult art of educating the young, Don Bosco planned to expound his method of education in a book but, absorbed as he was in the task of firmly establishing his two religious

¹ *Don* is an abbreviation of the Latin *dominus*, master. It is used in Italy as a title for priests; it stands for *Father*.

congregations and in unceasing other labors, he had to content himself with a simple outline of his ideas in a golden little treatise entitled *The Preventive System in the Education of Youth*.

Fortunately, the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* are ample compensation for a book which, if written, might have given us only theories. These memoirs, a monumental work in nineteen volumes, until recently reserved exclusively to Salesians and published only in the original Italian, are now available, unabridged, in this American edition not only to his spiritual children, devotees and admirers, but also to all who are interested in education.

In these volumes Don Bosco is shown in action: not *theorizing* but *educating*. What he said and did in countless circumstances was faithfully recorded by several of his spiritual sons, chief among them Father Giovanni Battista Lemoyne. From the day he first met Don Bosco in 1864 to his own death in 1916, Father Lemoyne spent his life recording words and deeds of Don Bosco, gathering documents,² interviewing witnesses, and arranging raw material for the present nineteen volumes of the life of Don Bosco, eight of which he himself authored besides readying another volume for the press before his death.

In the compilation of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco*, Father Lemoyne's primary sources were the *Memorie dell'Oratorio dal 1835 al 1855* (Memoirs of the Oratory from 1835 to 1855) written by Don Bosco himself, the diaries and chronicles of various fellow Salesians who daily recorded what Don Bosco said or did, numerous letters of the Saint, the *Cinque lustri di Storia dell'Oratorio di S. Francesco di Sales* (The History of the First Twenty-five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales) written by Father John Bonetti, S.D.B., and personally checked by Don Bosco, the proceedings of the diocesan process of beatification and other unimpeachable contemporary documents and testimonies. Above all, Father Lemoyne, intelligent, conscientious and well-informed, not only used reliable sources, but was himself an eye witness. He recorded what he personally saw and heard from Don Bosco. This

² All the documents in the archives at the Salesian Motherhouse in Turin, Italy are now being microfilmed and stored in the Don Bosco College Library in Newton, New Jersey.

enabled him to write a true history even though not according to modern critical methods.³ He concerned himself principally with presenting chronologically his vast selected material and therefore his narrative is somewhat fragmentary and may lack scientific method. It is nevertheless true history, even Volume I which deals mainly with Don Bosco's youth and the training he received from Mamma Margaret, his mother.⁴ When gifted writers and scholars of the future will produce a critical biography of Don Bosco, the *Biographical Memoirs* will still not be surpassed because Father Lemoyne lived at Don Bosco's side, wrote what he saw and heard, and eminently succeeded in giving us a living portrait of Don Bosco.

In editing the translation of the *Biographical Memoirs* accuracy and readability were the goals we set. This was not easy and occasionally, as regards the latter, we may have fallen short of the mark. Nineteenth-century Italian does not readily lend itself to an agile version that strives to be an accurate translation and not a paraphrase.

We have departed from the original in only one minor point: the lengthy titles or series of subtitles in each chapter. Father Lemoyne's method of chronological sequence in his narration necessarily made the contents of each chapter fragmentary. As it was not possible, under these circumstances, to give them a meaningful title and the volumes were not indexed, Father Lemoyne prefaced each chapter with many subtitles. In some volumes such subtitles fill a whole page. Since we have indexed each volume and subtitles become unnecessary, we selected in each chapter the most outstanding episode and gave it a title.⁵

May the reading of these *Memoirs* portraying the life of a man

³ True history in the sense that what he narrates is substantially true, though his method of presentation, his chronology, and his treatment of sources stand improvement. The episodes and incidents he reports did not necessarily take place in the manner described.

⁴ Cf. Francis Desramaut, S.D.B., *Les Memoire I de Giovanni Battista Lemoyne, Etude d'un ouvrage fondamental sur la jeunesse de saint Jean Bosco*, Lyon, 1962, p. 411ff.

⁵ One more thing: although this is not a critical edition, quite often we have researched and added first names, dates, scriptural sources, and numerous footnotes.

whom Pope Pius XI called "a giant of sanctity" inspire his spiritual children, to whom this work is primarily directed, and all men and women of good will to walk their own path of life in a spirit of service to God and man.

FR. DIEGO BORGATELLO, S.D.B.
Editor-in-chief

New Rochelle, N.Y.

June 5, 1965

124th Anniversary of Don Bosco's Ordination

Acknowledgments

For the publication of *The Biographical Memoirs of Saint John Bosco* we owe a debt of gratitude to the Very Reverend Augustus Bosio, S.D.B., Provincial of the Salesians in the eastern United States, who sponsored this project.

In the preparation of this volume we are indebted to Salvator Attanasio, John Chapin, and Rev. Paul Aronica, S.D.B., for editorial assistance; to Rev. Henry Sarnowski, S.D.B., for indexing; to the Editorial Board for advice and suggestions; and to the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine for permission to use the Confraternity translation of the Scriptures.

THE EDITOR

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Author's Preface

WE now present you, dear confreres, the third volume of *The Biographical Memoirs* of our admirable founder. A picture of the revered Father Joseph Cafasso¹ graces the frontispiece of this volume² in token of the undying gratitude the Salesians owe this great servant of God who was Don Bosco's teacher, counselor and benefactor at the beginning of his apostolic priestly career. Don Bosco always had the deepest respect and love for Cafasso and throughout his lifetime did not cease to recall him and describe him to his spiritual sons. The names and memory of Don Bosco and Father Cafasso are linked forever. As a saintly son glories in the sanctity of his [spiritual] father, so does a father glory in the wisdom of his son.

This volume will continue the narration of the wonderful events which astounded and gave pleasure to the many thousands who witnessed them. We shall mention many of them by name, but be it understood that when no direct testimony is cited, we are narrating the event as having heard it from those who were present.

We wish to remind you of our revered Rector Major's directives concerning the restricted use of these *Biographical Memoirs*, as mentioned in the previous volumes.

We humbly ask for your prayers. May the Lord bless us, and may the Holy Mother of God, the Help of Christians, assist us in earning that immortal crown promised to the faithful servants of Her Divine Son. We firmly hope that our beloved Don Bosco has already attained it.

FR. GIOVANNI BATTISTA LEMOYNE
of the
Pious Society of St. Francis de Sales

Turin, March 25, 1903

Feast of the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin

¹ Now St. Joseph Cafasso. [Editor]

² Not in this edition. [Editor]

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THE
BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIRS
OF
SAINT JOHN BOSCO

CHAPTER 1

Yearnings for Independence

AS the year 1847 began, it was widely anticipated [in Italy] that political changes were in the making. Books, pamphlets and broadsheets packed with patriotism kept proclaiming that it was high time to throw off the foreign yoke that weighed on the most important regions of Italy, and unite the various states in a confederation which would achieve and defend Italian independence. Such a goal, of itself, was neither anti-religious nor immoral. It expressed everyone's latent hopes, and soon it gained the sympathy of people in all walks of life and took on the appearance of being nationwide. At the same time, Silvio Pellico,¹ with his factual and dispassionate book, *Le mie prigioni*, had enkindled and inflamed in the hearts of young Italians an undying hatred of Austria.

Those who called themselves liberals took advantage of the tense feelings of the times to urge people on in the name of the great ideals of religion and patriotism, and to condition them in various ways to the developments that were in the making. The first step toward realizing their plans was to be a change in the form of government.

Many of these liberals were honest people, sincerely devoted to

¹ Silvio Pellico (1789-1854), born in Piedmont, spent most of his young manhood in Milan where, in 1820, he joined the *carbonari*. Arrested by the Austrians who then ruled Lombardy, he was sentenced to twenty years of hard labor in the Spielberg at Brünn. In 1830 he was pardoned and spent the rest of his life in Turin. Up to his imprisonment, Pellico had been a lukewarm Christian, but in the distress of prison life, he resolved to love God and his fellowmen. In 1832 he wrote the story of his experiences, entitling it *Le mie prigioni*. It was an account of his sufferings in prison and it became the most famous book in the literature of the Risorgimento. The Christian gentleness of this book at first disappointed some Italian patriots, but it proved to be more damaging to Austria than the loss of a battle. [Editor]

their king. They were acting in good faith, but the ideals which inspired them were not entirely fair or orthodox. They professed to be, and indeed were, sincere Christians: liberalism had not yet revealed itself as a system contrary to Catholic Faith and Divine Law. To promote the common welfare, they advocated a government dedicated to wise and more liberal principles of freedom, and a greater autonomy for the municipal governments, but they disapproved of the rabble-rousings of the secret societies.

Other members of the party, however, were not so honest. Their intellectual background, their pernicious readings, their ambitious inclinations, their rejection of all constraint made them yearn to restore that constitutional form of government which had aborted in 1821.² They were moved not so much by love of freedom as by their desire to seize power and control the government. To realize their goals they did not shrink from secret conspiracy and mob agitation. Unable to fulfill their ambitions by themselves, they had formed an alliance with the secret societies whose members, few but astute, had promised their support on the assurance that the government would be run according to modern, progressive principles, would break away from the Holy See, and would abrogate ecclesiastical immunities and other rights of the Church. They said nothing, however, of their ultimate aim, the establishment of a republic. Skillful writers, veiling their seditious principles in religious garb in order to seduce the unwary, soon set themselves with suave and deceitful ways to winning Catholics over to the revolutionary cause. While occasionally attacking Church institutions in a way that could only arouse hatred for the clergy, they generally had hypocritical words of praise for religion itself, hailing it as the origin and safeguard of true patriotism.

Nevertheless, this political entente could have no chance of success in Piedmont without the consent of King Charles Albert. The people loved him, the army was loyal to him, and he himself was very sensitive and firm in matters affecting the prerogatives of the Crown and the privileges of the Church. The liberals, however, had finally succeeded in gaining the king's trust, as we have already

² See Vol. I, pp. 5f. [Editor]

noted.³ They took part in his secret councils and approved his plans for the establishment of a united kingdom of Italy, but that was by no means their sole aim. They wanted to use him as a weapon and a rallying point against all the other rulers in Italy, the Pope especially. Charles Albert, on the other hand, opposed as he was to the Austrian domination of Italy, dreamed only of uniting Parma, Piacenza, Modena, Reggio, Lombardy and Veneto with his own dominions in order to create a defensive barrier for the Pope, whose loyal defender he intended to remain until the very end.

Besides, the liberals had won a point in successfully undermining the influence at Court of conservatives, all of them loyal Catholics and completely devoted to the Savoy dynasty. The liberals were now contending with them for supremacy in the political field. With his hateful publications, Gioberti painted the conservatives as an Austro-Jesuit group and as enemies of their fatherland. Moreover, the liberals, united with the Piedmontese conspirators, hoped to triumph in the not too distant future because they were supported by foreign and domestic republican parties which had joined into a kind of offensive and defensive coalition.

Effectively protected by Lord [Henry John Temple] Palmerston, the British foreign secretary and head of the Freemasons, they had already unobtrusively enmeshed Europe in a network of revolutionary plots and were laying the groundwork for insurrections that were to break out without warning. All their thoughts and efforts were concentrated on the overthrow of monarchies and the destruction of the Catholic Church, the foremost representative and guardian of established authority.

France, Austria, the Protestant states of Germany, Tuscany and the kingdom of Naples all looked like easy prey to these conspirators. In France, the revolution had caused untold moral harm. Austria had been weakened by the doctrines of Joseph II, who had sought to exploit the Church as an instrument of power instead of listening to it as a teacher and obeying it as a mother. The Protestant states of Germany had made a fetish of intellectual freedom, thus undermining all principles of respect for human or divine authority. In Tuscany and Naples, a whole generation of rebellious

³ See Vol. II, pp. 2f. [Editor]

critics of church laws had been weaned on the teachings of Leopold⁴ and Tanucci.⁵

As a result of all these factors, secret societies flourished everywhere in Europe, and a mine was ready to explode under every throne. The leaders of the various conspiracies had seen to it that, as far as possible, all insurrections should break out simultaneously so that no ruler could receive help from the others. In this way they hoped to gain control of every territory and nation. While planning these revolts, the revolutionaries kept their eyes, inflamed with hatred, focused on Rome, where they sought to destroy the Pope's temporal and spiritual power. At this time a great many of the bolder conspirators were flocking to Rome from everywhere, both openly and in disguise. Public order now waited on their pleasure. The angelic Pius IX, almost unaware of what was going on, was literally besieged in his own capital by these people, who were responsible for the boisterous public festivities being staged in his honor.

Despite all these underground moves, law and order continued to prevail in Europe except for Switzerland, where the radicals, after tearing up the ancient statutes and covenants, had for some time now changed the federal constitution with unheard of violence. The sole obstacle to the consolidation of their tyranny were the seven Catholic cantons. Therefore, recruiting all the disreputable people who had sought asylum in Switzerland from the reach of justice in their own countries, they attempted to seize full control of the entire confederation by force.

Rioting in Swiss territory began that year [1847], and bands of armed marauders roamed the mountains and valleys of the Catholic cantons, committing all kinds of crimes and outrages. The seven Catholic cantons, realizing that they would soon be attacked by the regular army, formed a league and called on the Great Powers to intervene in defense of their legitimate cause. They also appealed for arms to Charles Albert, who generously supplied them. Among the reigning sovereigns he was the only one to assist them

⁴ Leopold II (1797-1870), last grand duke of Tuscany, granted a Constitution in 1848. [Editor]

⁵ Bernardo Tanucci (1698-1782), was a politician, jurist and reformer in the kingdom of Naples. [Editor]

in their hour of need. Nevertheless, in November, 1847, the Catholics were defeated. Though they had defended themselves valiantly against 118,000 men of the invading radical army, treason and violated cease-fires delivered them into the hands of their enemies. The whole brutal conquest had been ordained, pursued and realized to the cry of "Long live freedom," while bishops were imprisoned, priests murdered, convents pillaged, churches burned to the ground, and infamous laws passed stripping the Catholic Church of its rights and subjugating it to the State.

The shedding of blood formed part of the general plans for a global revolution. Since Switzerland bordered on Germany, France and Italy, and was an independent nation, it was well suited to be the headquarters of the secret societies. Here they could with impunity feed the flames that were to spread in the form of revolutions over the surrounding nations; here too, conspirators and agitators could find a secure refuge and asylum if their infamous projects should fail. So it happened. "For the children of this world, in relation to their own generation, are more prudent than the children of the light." (Luke 16, 8) Everything had been readied; the threads of the sinister plot were now all woven; all that was wanting now was the signal. They dreamed of triumph, foolishly unaware that the fate of the Church and of all the nations of the earth are in the hands of God, that nothing can happen without His consent and that, if He so wishes, He may alter the course of events. Longer or shorter tribulations for some will give way to punishments for others, but Divine Law will always triumph in the end. At every step, God will show the rebels that "there is no wisdom, no understanding, no counsel, against the Lord. The house is equipped for the day of battle, but victory is the Lord's." (Prov. 21, 30-31)

CHAPTER 2

A Boys' Prayerbook

WHILE the spiritual enemy of man, a murderer from the very beginning, was striving furiously to dechristianize mankind, Don Bosco was doing his utmost to form the character of a vast number of boys who would live their Faith. Many of them he hoped to guide to a more perfect spiritual life. The Christian education which he gave them was based on prayer, to which he himself always had recourse with great fervor, thus setting a constant and effective example for countless souls.

The pressing burdens of his responsibilities did not allow him much time for daily prayer, but when he prayed, he did so to perfection. His deep faith shined out through his devout and fervent manner. Even when he was not very well, he never failed to say Mass. He recited his breviary regularly. Several times a day he would pray for himself, for the souls entrusted to his care and, particularly, for his penitents. Often, people entering his room would find him praying the rosary. In his vocal prayers, he used to pronounce the words with such unction as to reveal a heart brimming with love and a soul endowed with wisdom. Occasionally, when he felt too fatigued to continue working, he would pause and have someone read aloud to him. Yet, in spite of all this, he would often enough regret that he did not have more time for prayer. He made up for this by many short interior invocations. Such is the testimony of the earliest pupils at the Oratory, as for example Father Michael Rua¹ and Father John Turchi.

Imbued with this spirit of prayer, Don Bosco planned a small new prayerbook suitable for young boys. There were many devo-

¹ Don Bosco's vicar and successor. He first met Don Bosco in 1845, and he frequented the Oratory in its early years. See Vol. II, p. 248. [Editor]

tional books at the time, but they were for the most part outdated or not particularly adapted to the needs of young people. With this in mind, he swiftly met this need and compiled *Il Giovane Provveduto* [The Companion of Youth].²

When he handed the manuscript to the Marietti Press, the cost was estimated at four and a half *lire* per copy, bound and gold-stamped. The Paravia Press, eager to contribute to a religious publishing venture, offered to do the printing exclusively, at the modest price of twenty-five *centesimi* per copy. Don Bosco accepted Paravia's offer and, since he had no money to meet the printing costs, he had recourse to one of those practical expedients which were to prove so successful in the future. As he had perhaps already done with his *History of the Church*, his *Bible History* and his booklet on the metric system, he sent out a circular announcing his forthcoming book. When he was sure of a sale of ten thousand copies through an arrangement with the Speirani Press, he gave orders to go ahead. The book was printed in sextodecimo and came to 352 pages. When the subscribers' orders were filled, an additional five thousand copies had to be run to meet new orders. Don Bosco then sent word to Paravia to save the type. He received the following reply: "I already knew that this book would have a tremendous sale." He was right. That very same year another five thousand copies had to be printed. Marietti was commissioned to prepare some handsome deluxe bindings for Don Bosco's benefactors or for those who could afford the price.

As demand for the book kept increasing and other festive oratories and boarding schools provided new outlets, *The Companion of Youth* went through more than a hundred reprints, of approximately fifty thousand copies each, in Don Bosco's lifetime. This we know from Father Michael Rua. Translations were also made into Spanish, French and other languages. As a result, to date [1903], this prayerbook has passed by far the six million mark. We can say that *The Companion of Youth* has been well received in academic and trade schools and among the faithful, and that it has helped effectively to foster piety and to safeguard the Faith.

² *The Companion of Youth*, updated, is available from Salesiana Publishers, New Rochelle, N.Y., or from Salesian Publications, Blaisdon Hall, Longhope, England. [Editor]

When it first came out in 1847, Don Bosco warmly addressed his young boys as follows:

There are two snares that the devil uses to discourage boys from trying to be good. The first is to put into their heads the idea that obeying God's laws means having a miserable time with no fun at all. As this is absolutely false, I should like to teach you how to lead a Christian life which will make you happy and contented. I will show you what true enjoyment and fun are, so that you may make your own the words of the holy Prophet David and say: "Let us serve the Lord with gladness." [Cf. Ps. 99, 2] This then is the purpose of this little book: to teach you how to serve God and be always happy.

The second snare is to make them hope for a long life, with the thought that they can always mend their ways in their old age, or when death threatens. Be careful, my children, because many have been fooled in this manner. Who can guarantee that we will ever reach old age? Can we make a deal with death to wait till we are old? Life and death are in God's hands, and He disposes of them as He sees fit.

If God, however, should grant you a long life, listen to the warning that He gives you: the road on which a young man sets out will be the same that he will follow to old age and death. [Cf. Prov. 22, 6] In other words, if we lead a virtuous life when we are young, we shall do likewise in our later years. Our death will then be a happy one, the beginning of eternal happiness. On the other hand, if we follow evil ways in our youth, they will enslave us for the rest of our life, and death will be the frightening beginning of a most unhappy eternity. To forestall this misfortune, I have drawn up a way of life, brief and easy enough, but sufficient to help you be a joy to your parents and a glory to your country, good citizens upon earth and, one day, blessed inhabitants of heaven.

I have divided this prayer book into three parts. The first part tells you what to do and what to avoid in order to live your Faith. The second contains various devotions customary in churches and schools. The last one is made up of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, Sunday Vespers throughout the year, and a selection of sacred hymns.

My children, you are very dear to me. To know that you are young is sufficient reason for me to care very much for your welfare. I am sure you will come across books written by people far more learned and virtuous than I, but you will hardly ever find one who has a greater love for you in Jesus Christ, or a greater desire for your true happiness. I care for you, because you have in your hearts the treasure of virtue.

Possessing that, you possess everything. Without it, you become the most unhappy and the most unfortunate beings on earth.

May the Lord be always with you, and may He grant that by practicing these few suggestions you may add to God's glory and succeed in saving your soul, the supreme purpose for which you were created.

May heaven grant you a long and joyful life. Let your greatest treasure ever be the holy fear of God. May it draw down upon you His blessings in time and eternity.

Your friend in Jesus Christ,

Don Bosco

Truly, a preface inspired by fervent charity! Some concepts may seem overemphasized and later he omitted them. However, at the very beginning of his apostolate it was necessary for him to give expression to the full force of the paternal love he felt for souls that were still unresponsive and wild. No bond, except a love so genuine that it could never be disproved, could have drawn them to and kept them on the path of virtue.

This love of his was manifest on every page of this new prayerbook, in which he called them "sons." He wrote exactly as he talked. The boys were convinced that he loved them as his own sons, gladly took his suggestions, and considered themselves brothers. In fact, during the first fifteen years of the Oratory, they used to call each other "sons," and referred to their companions in speech and writing, as "son so-and-so," or "son such-and-such." At the Oratory, they were truly sons, sons of Don Bosco on the way to becoming sons of God.

The Companion of Youth helped them to become so, because its norms for practicing virtue and avoiding occasions of sin did not fall on deaf ears. By reminding them of these rules every day in various ways and at various times, Don Bosco saw to it that they lived up to them. This is not the place to detail the spiritual treasures contained in a book which is in the hands of all, but we shall not pass over some of the reasons which prompted Don Bosco to write it, or some of the historical circumstances connected with it.

First of all, among the morning and night prayers he included the Apostles' Creed, the acts of Faith, Hope and Charity and the

commandments of God and of the Church, so that their daily repetition would indelibly imprint on the boys' minds the truths they had to believe and the precepts they had to follow.

Then the book showed how to attend fruitfully Holy Mass, during which he had them pray three times for the whole Church and the Supreme Pontiff, invoking peace, concord and blessings on all persons invested with spiritual or temporal authority. Thus they acknowledged their great privilege of being members of the Catholic Church. These and other prayers, very short and meaningful, were said aloud alternately by a leader and the congregation at the Sunday Mass. The Christian Brothers too replaced their old and verbose prayerbook with *The Companion of Youth*, to the great delight of their pupils.

The book also contained the sung portions of the regular Sunday Mass and the Requiem Mass so that the choirboys could familiarize themselves with the simple tunes and the others, hearing the melodies, might more easily learn them. Moreover, it taught them how to serve low Mass. Don Bosco was always very keen in selecting and training many boys for this sublime task.

Then, after a clear, detailed description of the way to make a good confession (a constantly recurring theme in his sermons and talks), he suggested ways of arousing true sorrow for one's sins. A serious defect in some devotional books of the time was that the subject of confession was treated too theologically. The boys complained that they did not know how to feel sorry for their sins, and that the prayers were too abstruse and too long. They were delighted, therefore, when Don Bosco gave them *The Companion of Youth*.

Prayers of preparation and thanksgiving for Holy Communion followed those relating to the sacrament of Penance. On general Communion days, the usual morning prayers were interrupted after the Elevation, and the Communion prayers were recited aloud, phrase by phrase, by one of the boys and repeated by all. For non-communicants Don Bosco wrote: "If you cannot receive, make at least a spiritual Communion. This means that you should arouse in yourself an ardent desire to receive Jesus in your heart." The desire which he thus fostered led more than a hundred boys to receive Holy Communion every Sunday.

Nor did he leave out a most appropriate prayer for visits to the Blessed Sacrament, followed by a chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The book also had the Vespers for that feast. Devotion to the Sacred Heart was opposed in those days by many people steeped in Jansenistic errors and prejudices, but for Don Bosco it was always a source of real joy. Right from those early days, he began to sow the seeds of this devotion in the boys' hearts, explaining how the chaplet to the Sacred Heart of Jesus could be used as a novena for all feasts of Our Lord. Who could possibly estimate the number of times these fervent prayers of faith and reparation for the sins committed against the Divine Heart in the Holy Eucharist by heretics, infidels, and indifferent Christians have been and will be recited by thousands upon thousands of young boys in endless succession before the holy tabernacle? Let us not forget that Don Bosco was also the apostle of visits to the Blessed Sacrament.

Our Lord's love for mankind must be brought out in the mysteries of His birth, His passion, and His death. Therefore, *The Companion of Youth* contained also the Christmas novena made up of Messianic prophecies, canticles, hymns and solemn antiphons that were to be sung with all possible solemnity and devotion. As for Our Lord's passion, Don Bosco compiled a Way of the Cross suitable for boys. The references to the fourteen stations are very brief but incomparably effective in arousing a desire for spiritual betterment. This devotion was immediately adopted at the Oratory and continues to be practiced to this very day. It was held every Friday of March [sic] during Lent for the first twenty years. At first, when there were only a few boys, Don Bosco led it informally, but when they increased in number, it became more solemn. Don Bosco, in surplice and stole, preceded by a cross bearer and two acolytes with torches, would go from station to station and kneel as he read with deep feeling the short descriptions, meditations and resolutions contained in the booklet. He moved all with his deep piety. In the appendix he also included a short Latin memento of Our Lord's passion possibly for use at the bedside of sick or dying children.

After the devotions in honor of Our Lord, there naturally had to follow those to His Blessed Mother. Don Bosco addressed his boys as follows: "You may be absolutely sure that any favor you ask

of Mary will be granted unless it might prove harmful." He strove to spread among the faithful the practice of constantly invoking the name of Mary. Devotion to the heart of Mary was looked down upon by many who had been strongly influenced by foreign unorthodox ideas. With genuine faith, Don Bosco made himself a champion of this devotion, ending his visit to the Blessed Sacrament and the chaplet of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with St. Bernard's prayer to the Heart of Mary. Thus this devotion became a daily practice among more fervent Christians. He insisted that in the morning, at night, and during the day, the following prayer should be repeated: "Dear Mother Mary ever Virgin, help me to save my soul." Anticipating the dogmatic definition, he also taught this short invocation for daily recitation: "Blessed be the Holy and Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary."

The Companion of Youth also contained The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. He wanted to introduce into the Oratory the practices of piety that many of the country boys had performed in their village sodalities. As soon as he had a group of boarders who could read Latin, he began with the chant of the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin in the evening, between the catechism lesson and the sermon, and, later, of Matins and Lauds before the Sunday Mass while he was hearing confessions. When, later on, he had another priest in the house, Matins and Lauds were sung during a second Mass. The entire office was chanted only on the days of the yearly spiritual retreat.

But dearest to his heart was the holy rosary. For this reason he had included brief meditations for all fifteen mysteries. He had the boys recite a third part of the rosary every Sunday and holy day, and he exhorted them fervently to say it daily in their own homes, if at all possible. As long as he was the only priest at the Oratory he would recite five decades with his mother every day; when boys began to board there, he had them recite it during Mass on weekdays. From the time the Oratory was established in Valdocco until the present day, its walls have echoed every morning to the words of this prayer so dear to the heart of Mary and so effective in times of trial for the Church. Only once a year, was the rosary recited in its entirety in the chapel, on the eve of All Souls' Day, for the souls

in purgatory. Don Bosco never failed to take part in it, kneeling in the sanctuary and often leading it himself.

To these devotions in honor of the Mother of God, Don Bosco added two other pious exercises he had composed some years before, namely the chaplets of the Seven Sorrows and of the Seven Joys of Mary in heaven. Shortly afterward, a number of the more devout boys began to return to the chapel after the Sunday evening services to offer this second homage before Mary's image, and this practice went on until 1867. Don Bosco often joined them to encourage them by his example.

As may easily be seen, all the practices of piety that Don Bosco suggested were aimed at having his boys lead an immaculate life, "as [the] angels of God in heaven." [Matt. 22, 30]

The Companion of Youth also contained two short pious practices which had already been printed separately, namely *Devotion to the Guardian Angel* and *The Six Sundays and a Novena in Honor of St. Aloysius Gonzaga*. Thus he linked together devotion to the angels as protectors of youth and to St. Aloysius as the model of youth!

The devotions in honor of St. Aloysius were held in the chapel from the earliest days [of the Oratory] and Don Bosco used to urge the boys to make the novena at home. The feast day itself was celebrated with a great procession. Don Bosco kept pointing to the example of this saint who was so faithfully imitated by [Louis] Comollo;³ on every occasion he would speak of him, urging the boys to invoke his aid [with exhortations such as these]:

Obedying your parents is like obeying Our Lord, the Blessed Virgin, and St. Aloysius.

Think of the way you usually say your prayers, and try to become more fervent, especially by briefly invoking God and your advocate, St. Aloysius, during the day.

If you cannot get rid of temptation, make the Sign of the Cross, kiss a blessed medal, invoke the Blessed Virgin or St. Aloysius, saying: "Oh St. Aloysius, help me not to offend God!"

When approaching the sacrament of Penance, say: "Holy Virgin, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, pray for me that I may make a good confession!"

³ See Vol. I, Chs. 38, 51 and 52. See also Vol. II, pp. 153ff. [Editor]

He also used to suggest:

Ask St. Aloysius to help you make a good Communion and derive greater benefit from it.

At the end of Mass, say a Hail, Holy Queen to the Blessed Virgin and an Our Father in honor of St. Aloysius, that they may help you keep your good resolutions, and especially help you avoid bad talk. During the course of the day repeat the words: "Holy Virgin, Mother of Jesus and St. Aloysius Gonzaga, help me become a saint."

Lastly, he ended morning and night prayers with a prayer to St. Aloysius to obtain his protection in life and in death. In this way Don Bosco made St. Aloysius seem almost alive. He placed him at their side so that they could mentally converse with him as with a friend or pal, live a spiritual life with him and, surrounded by the fragrance of his virtue, come to abhor anything that might stain the purity of their souls. Thus he prepared them also to heed the call of the Lord, as St. Aloysius had done. Those who felt a calling to the religious life, for which chastity is an indispensable ornament, could then embrace it without hesitation. To this effect, for the eighth day of this novena he had composed this exhortation: "Pray to the Lord that He may show you how He wants you to serve Him, so that you may properly spend the time He has allotted to you. Your eternal salvation depends on this."

In his meditation on hell, he also gives this advice: "If God should call upon you to leave the world, obey Him without delay. Whatever you do to avoid an eternity of suffering is well worth the trouble. As St. Bernard says: 'One can never be overcautious when eternity is at stake!' How many have forsaken the world in the full flower of youth, leaving country and family to shut themselves up in caves and deserts, living only on bread and water, or sometimes only on herbs. All this to avoid the fire of hell. What about you?"

Then he offered another spiritual prop, to those who were in the state of grace lest they lose it, and to those who had lost it that they might regain it as soon as possible: the Exercise for a Happy Death.

"Remember," he wrote, "that at the hour of death we shall reap what we have sown in life. If we have done good works, we will be happy. Death will be a blessing because it will usher us into paradise. Otherwise, woe to us! Remorse of conscience and the open

jaws of hell will await us: 'What a man sows, that he will also reap.' " [Gal. 6, 8] And he added: "A man's entire life should be a continual preparation for death."

In 1847 Don Bosco began to set aside the first Sunday of each month for this salutary exercise, inviting all the boys to make a confession as if it were each one's very last, and to receive Holy Communion. To mark this Sunday from the others, he would treat them to a special breakfast. His main purpose, as usual, was to give them one more opportunity to form the habit of approaching the sacraments frequently. Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings, with unflagging patience and charity, he heard the confessions of crowds of boys for hours and hours.

After Mass he removed his vestments and then, kneeling at the foot of the altar he would recite the prayers of the Exercise for a Happy Death, starting with the moving supplication to God for the grace of not dying an unprovided death, and the prayer to St. Joseph for assistance at one's last moments. It had always been customary with him to urge his boys to call on the foster father of Jesus besides the Blessed Mother and St. Aloysius. Then with great feeling he would read aloud the brief description of the various stages of approaching death, to each of which the boys responded: "Merciful Jesus, have mercy on me!" He concluded with a prayer for the souls in purgatory, who were very dear to his heart.

In *The Companion of Youth*, he included the Vespers for the dead, to be chanted on All Saints' Day after the solemn Vespers of the feast, and also the psalms and exequies for the dead. There was mention also of indulgences granted by the popes for these devotions. His aim was to benefit spiritually the boys themselves and, through their suffrages, alleviate the sufferings of the departed.

He also inserted Compline for those days in Lent when the rubrics called for the chanting of Vespers before noon. Later on, the chanting of this office by the boys of our schools in France became one of the attractions of our churches in that noble nation. In addition to Compline, there were the Seven Penitential Psalms with the Litany of the Saints, which years later would be recited after Mass on the feast of St. Mark and during the three Rogation Days when the Oratory would start boarding boys. Finally there were the psalms, hymns, and versicles of Vespers for Sundays and

the feasts of Our Lord, Our Lady, St. Joseph, the Angels, the Apostles, and other principal saints. To avoid bulkiness he omitted the antiphons since these were to be chanted only by the choir-boys. He therefore secured an antiphonal and patiently taught plain chant to some boys. Joseph Turco ⁴ happened to come upon him one evening as he was rehearsing with three boys. Don Bosco was offering a caramel to the one who best sang the antiphon: *Dixit pater familias*.

Don Bosco could not have found a better ending for his book than his selection of sacred hymns. Among those in honor of Our Lady was one to the Heart of Mary by Silvio Pellico, and another to Our Lady of Consolation, which the boys sang on many occasions, particularly on their biannual procession to that famous nearby shrine. He often had them sing sacred hymns in the playground. He always asked them to sing a few stanzas on entering and leaving the chapel to muffle the sound of shuffling feet. He had them do this too before evening prayers, to cut short the inevitable whispering of a large crowd of boys. Don Bosco also wanted some singing during Holy Communion to occupy the non-communicants who, due to their age, would have been restless. It was a delight to hear hundreds of youthful voices that seemed to sing the scriptural verses: "Your statutes are the theme of my song in the place of my exile." [Ps. 118, 54]

From what we have related here of Don Bosco's spirit of piety one may form an idea of his skill in instilling it into his pupils. So far we have limited ourselves to the first edition of *The Companion of Youth*. On speaking of later editions, we shall mention the additions demanded by the circumstances. What is amazing is that uneducated boys took to this book as to a moral guide. Whereas they had once attended church irregularly, they now actively participated, not only in an orderly manner but with great enthusiasm, in religious services and prayers that were sometimes far from brief. Love had brought about this miracle. Don Bosco also used to assign some of *The Companion of Youth's* prayers or devotions as sacramental penance. Through this method, wisely used throughout his life, he made fruitful the penances imposed in

⁴ A boyhood friend of Don Bosco. See Vol. I, pp. 181f, 229, 315f; Vol. II, pp. 17f, 20f, 29. [Editor]

confession in atonement to Divine Justice. *The Companion of Youth* became the vade mecum of the more devout boys. Some of them, in their last moments, when no priest was available, had it read aloud to them by the bystanders; others asked that it be placed on their bodies after death and be buried with them. They loved this book so much because they sensed that Don Bosco had written it just for them, and each of its maxims struck a responsive chord in their hearts. One might say that he had carefully chosen every phrase, every word to make sure that they conveyed his holy designs. Above all, he had striven to avoid even the slightest expression that might not be rigidly modest.

However, not trusting his own judgment in regard to translating some prayers, in which he had thought it permissible to alter some words, and wishing to forestall any possible adverse comments from the ecclesiastical censors on some other score, he submitted the galley proofs to Canon [Joseph] Zappata. Don Bosco always accepted readily the remarks of the good canon, who occasionally would tease him about some minute observations and corrections by asking him, "Are you through now with dissecting your book?" Just as jokingly, Don Bosco would reply: "Not yet. I still need your permission to use a capital *O* in the word *Oriens* in Zachary's canticle where it says: *Visitavit nos Oriens ex alto*. In this sentence the word *oriens* is not a participle, but the proper name of Our Divine Saviour. This is clear from the Greek text and the Christmas novena antiphon in which the Church invokes the Messiah: *O Oriens*."

Smilingly, Canon Zappata would reply: "Oh, I don't think we'll have to call a meeting to settle this. Go ahead!"

We have mentioned this incident to show how meticulous Don Bosco was about everything. He used the same care in writing letters or reading his mail: he pondered every sentence. He was equally thorough in explaining a project or in giving orders, in asking an explanation or listening to a report, in reading a book, or entrusting an office or a task to someone. When any Salesians discussed matters with him they had to watch their statements and ponder their words, otherwise Don Bosco, politely but unfailingly, would make observations even on their pronunciation. Impatient people occasionally were inclined to regard him as importunate, and yet this was one of the reasons why he was able to carry out

projects on such a vast scale as to astound the world. He had studied them at length down to the tiniest detail, pondering the obstacles to be faced, the means of execution, the advantages to be gained and the guarantee of success. He never left anything to chance but considered everything feasible with God's help.

CHAPTER 3

A Dream: Roses and Thorns

IN trying to meet the spiritual needs of his pupils with *The Companion of Youth*, Don Bosco did not neglect his own progress toward spiritual perfection. The more the human heart detaches itself from the things of earth, the closer it draws to heavenly things and the sooner one becomes a true disciple of Jesus Christ. From all we have said so far, it is clear that Don Bosco had already completely sacrificed to God, through internal mortification, not only his will but also the inclinations of his heart and the more tender emotions of human nature. Through external mortification, too, he had constantly crucified his senses. As a result, he kept growing in that love of evangelical poverty which had been his from his earliest youth. Thus, though he was very particular about wearing clean things, he wanted his clothes and footwear to be quite ordinary and unassuming. For many years he wore clogs in the house, and he continued to wear an overcoat which had faded to a nondescript color. He made a cassock last as long as possible and when he finally had to discard it, there was hardly any material left to turn it into a small one for altar boys. Since he gave no thought to purchasing new clothing, his benefactors took it upon themselves to do it for him from time to time.

His room was very simple. Its furnishings amounted to a simple bed, a plain desk on a bare floor, on the walls a paper print of some sacred image and a crucifix, one or two straw-bottomed chairs, and a small stove rarely used even in winter, and then only very sparingly to save on wood. This thriftiness on his part was inspired also by his desire to save all he could from his own personal needs for the Oratory. He used to say that the wealth of a priest was the legacy of the poor.

His food was on a par with his clothing and his room. One could never tell what dishes he liked best. He ate very little, not because of poor appetite, but because he had made it a rule never to satisfy himself fully.

His meals were so frugal that when some of his fellow priests tried sharing them with him for a few days, they simply could not take it and had to give up. His soup was no more savory than a poor peasant's, and he only had one main dish, which his mother, at his own orders, prepared on Sundays and served him every day of the week for dinner and supper until Thursday evening. On Fridays she cooked a meatless dish which lasted till the end of the week. This course was generally a pie of some sort, and needed only to be heated before serving. Sometimes, in summer, it became slightly rancid, but Don Bosco paid no attention to this. He took it as if his mother had poured a little vinegar over it to give it a tang. This went on until he had young clerics and priests living with him, who needed more appetizing and substantial nourishment because of their studies and work.

In his love for holy poverty and in a cherished recollection of his youth,¹ he probably at this time joined the Franciscan Third Order in St. Francis of Assisi Church. Although his name does not appear in the official records of the order he was nevertheless listed in the directory during these years. For this reason, Father Candido Mondo, M.O., director of the third order in Turin, in a document dated July 1, 1886, issued at St. Thomas Monastery, declared that Father John Bosco, founder of the Salesians, had donned the habit of the tertiaries about the year 1848; that after his novitiate had professed its holy rule according to the papal constitutions; and that he therefore declared Don Bosco to be a true confrere of all the members of the three Franciscan orders.

In the meantime the schools at the Oratory were doing very well. Don Bosco had added recitations, singing, and music to the curriculum to enrich the boys' religious and moral education. As a diversion he also arranged some demonstrations of their progress, either in the presence of distinguished guests visiting the Oratory

¹ In his senior year of high school in Chieri he had decided to become a Franciscan, and he actually applied for admission. See Vol. I, pp. 214f, 226ff, and 272. [Editor]

or in intramural competition. However, he wanted the subject matter of these demonstrations to deal with the precepts and maxims of our Faith, the privileges and glories of the Blessed Virgin, or some episodes from Holy Scripture, whether in prose or poetry. He himself assigned to the more intelligent boys the selections to be memorized, coached them, and urged them on with a promised reward.

Soon also this initiative of his was crowned with success. In fact, early in 1847, after only a few months of Sunday school, he decided to hold a demonstration in catechism and biblical history and geography. Several prominent people of Turin were invited, among them Father [Ferrante] Aporti,² the deputy Boncompagni, Father [Peter] Baricco, Professor Joseph Rayneri, Brother Michael, superior of the Christian Brothers and several others. These guests questioned the boys on the above subjects, were pleased with their answers, praised the experiment, and left prizes and souvenirs for the best students. Professor Rayneri, the most distinguished member of the department of pedagogy at the Royal University, was very enthusiastic. When lecturing to his own students, in his education courses, he often told them: "If you want to see pedagogy in action, go to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales and watch Don Bosco."

Encouraged by this first test, the boys later put on another display on academic subjects they had studied at night school. This second experiment was very solemn. Since everyone in Turin was talking about Don Bosco's school as a great novelty, and since many professors and eminent people frequently dropped in, word reached City Hall. A committee was formed of [Joseph] Cotta and Mr. Capello, nicknamed Moncalvo, under the chairmanship of Commendator Joseph Dupré, to find out whether the rumored results were really as good as people said they were, or whether they were much exaggerated. The committee members themselves tested the boys' reading knowledge, their enunciation, their knowledge of arithmetic and the metric system, public speaking, and their knowledge of other subjects. They were quite at a loss to explain how boys who had been completely unschooled until the age

² At this time he was one of the foremost educators in Italy. See Vol. II, pp. 148f, 165ff, 171f, 311f. [Editor]

of sixteen or eighteen, could have made such progress in so few months. The committee also noticed that a large number of young adults were gathered at the school to get an education, instead of roaming the streets, and by the time the members of the committee left, they were full of admiration and enthusiasm. The municipal authorities were so satisfied by the committee's favorable report that they awarded a yearly subsidy of three hundred *lire* to Don Bosco's schools, which he immediately spent for his boys. He continued to receive this subsidy until 1878, when it was suddenly cut off without his ever knowing the reason.

Chevalier [Mark] Gonella, long remembered in Turin for his works of charity and zeal, was then the director of a school named La MendicITÀ Istruita. This learned gentleman also dropped in on the evening classes, after hearing so many wonderful things about them. He questioned the pupils himself, inquired about the methods of instruction, and was very much impressed. As a result, he told his own institute's board of trustees about what he had seen, and he got Don Bosco a special grant of one thousand *lire* for his schools in recognition of his work and as an encouragement to his pupils. The following year, 1848, he introduced the same system into his own institute. The municipal schools did likewise.

King Charles Albert and Archbishop Fransoni were also generous with their encouragement and subsidies. Don Bosco wrote in the *Memoirs of the Oratory*: "The support of civil and ecclesiastical authorities and the assistance of so many people eager to help with donations or their personal work are a clear sign of God's blessing and of public approval."

But the good that Don Bosco was doing did not suit the "prince of darkness" who, with God's permission, had begun to manifest his displeasure. What we are now about to narrate was revealed to us by Don Bosco himself. The first year he left the Rifugio ³ to go and live in the Pinardi house, every night, after going to bed, a loud persistent noise in the attic right above his room prevented him from falling asleep. The sound was of one lifting heavy stones and then, flinging them down and sending them crashing over the

³ An institution for wayward girls where Don Bosco was a chaplain. See Vol. II, pp. 184ff. [Editor]

wooden floor. At first he tried to set a few traps to catch the rats, martens, cats or whatever they might be, but in vain. He scattered nuts, bits of bread and cheese here and there in the attic, but when he went to look the next morning, to his surprise they were still there untouched. He then had everything cleaned out of the attic (logs, loose boards and assorted junk), so that whatever the cause of the racket, there would be nothing to make noise with. This did not work either. He spoke to Father Cafasso ⁴ about it and he, suspecting the origin of this spiteful trick, advised him to sprinkle the place with holy water. Yet, the terrible racket went on every night. Don Bosco then decided to move all his humble belongings to the last room on the same floor, facing east; but this, too, was to no avail because the racket followed him. In the meantime he grew thinner and weaker from lack of sleep and rest. Now and then, his mother would come into his room of an evening and, looking up at the ceiling, would exclaim: "Oh, you nasty creatures! Leave Don Bosco in peace! Stop it!"

At last Don Bosco got a mason to cut a trap door in the ceiling next to the wall, large enough for him to get into the attic. He then brought up a ladder and set it so that at the first sound he would be able to climb right up with a lamp and perhaps discover something. At the usual time came the dreadful sound. In a flash he was at the top of the ladder, and up went the wooden flap. Holding the lamp in his right hand and thrusting his head through the opening, he peered all about him, but there was nothing to see. He was frightened on realizing the cause of this disturbance, but then, taking a small picture of the Madonna, he hung it on the wall in the attic, asking Her to free him from this tribulation. It was a happy inspiration, for not a sound was ever heard again. The picture remained there until the old house was demolished to make room for a new building. Under the mantle of Mary, so to say, Don Bosco continued to use this new room for the next six years. It also served as his study and reception room. On the door lintel, on the outside, he placed this inscription: "Praised be Jesus Christ," so that every visitor would notice it and devoutly repeat it. This was his way of

⁴ Don Bosco's spiritual director and now a saint. See Vol. II, p. 40 and *passim*. [Editor]

making amends for the blasphemies, unfortunately all too common, among the lower classes. They filled him with such horror that he grew pale and trembled whenever he heard them.

What the Gospel tells us of Our Divine Saviour now seemed to repeat itself in Don Bosco. After tempting Our Lord in the wake of His forty-day fast, Satan, in defeat, withdrew and angels approached. The boys always regarded Don Bosco's room as a mysterious sanctuary of virtue, as a shrine where the Madonna was pleased to make known Her wishes, or as an antechamber to heaven. They always entered it with a deep sense of awe, a feeling shared also by Mamma Margaret who had moved into the room nearest her son's. She was sure that Don Bosco spent part of the night in prayer, and suspected that from time to time extraordinary things took place which she could not fully grasp. She once told James Bellia, then a boy, that once, an hour or two before dawn, she had heard Don Bosco talking. At times he seemed to be replying to some questions, at other times he seemed to ask them. She had tried to listen, but had been unable to catch the words. In the morning, although she was certain no one could have entered Don Bosco's room without her knowing it, she asked him with whom he had been talking. Don Bosco replied:

"I was talking to Louis Comollo."

"But Comollo has been dead for years!"

"I know, but still I was talking to him."

Don Bosco said nothing more, but it was obvious that he had something important on his mind, for his face was flushed, his eyes were aglow, and for several days he appeared to be somewhat distraught with emotion.

Some time later, Don Bosco was in need of a chalice. He did not know how he could get one, since he had no money. Then, one night he was told in a dream that he would find the necessary sum in his trunk. The next day, while he was attending to some business in town, he remembered the dream. What a fine thing it would be if it turned out to be true! He was so impressed that without further ado he went home. He rummaged through his trunk and found eight *scudi*,⁵ exactly the amount needed. No outsider could have

⁵ A silver coin approximately equivalent to a dollar. It was used in Italy until the nineteenth century. [Editor]

hidden it there because the trunk was always locked, nor could his mother, Margaret, have given him a surprise gift since she had no money either. She too was very surprised when she heard of the find.

But something even more impressive happened. Don Bosco first related it himself seventeen years later in 1864 when one night, after prayers, as was his custom at times, he gathered the members of his [infant] Congregation in his anteroom for a conference. Among those present were Father Victor Alasonatti, Father Michael Rua, Father John Cagliero,⁶ Father Celestine Durando and [the two clerics]⁷ Joseph Lazzero and Julius Barberis. After speaking of detachment from the world and from one's own family to follow Our Lord's example, he continued:

I have already told you of several things I saw as in a dream. From them we can infer how much Our Lady loves and helps us. But now that we are all together alone, I am going to tell you not just another dream, but something that Our Lady herself graciously showed me. I am doing this that each of us may be convinced that it is Our Lady Herself who wants our Congregation. This should spur us to work ever harder for God's greater glory. She wants us to place all our trust in Her. I am taking you into my confidence. Please do not mention what I tell you to anyone else in this house or to outsiders, lest you give evil tongues occasion to wag.

One day in 1847, after I had spent much time reflecting on how I might help others, especially the young, the Queen of Heaven appeared to me. She led me into a beautiful garden. There stood there a rustic but wide and charming portico built as a vestibule. Its pillars were dressed with climbing vines whose tendrils, thick with leaves and flowers, stretched upward together and knitted a graceful awning. The portico opened on a lovely walk that soon became, as far as the eye could see, a breathtakingly beautiful pergola, whose sides were lined with enchanting roses in full bloom. The ground too was covered with roses. The Blessed Virgin said to me: "Take off your shoes!" When I had done so, She added: "Walk under that rose pergola, for this is the path you must take." I gladly removed my shoes because it would have been a pity to step on such gorgeous roses. I took but a few steps and immediately felt very

⁶ John Cagliero entered the Oratory in 1851, was ordained a priest in 1862, and later became the first Salesian bishop, archbishop and cardinal. [Editor]

⁷ Members of the Salesian Society training for the priesthood. [Editor]

sharp thorns piercing my feet and making them bleed. I had to stop and turn back.

"I had better wear my shoes," I told my guide.

"Yes, indeed," She replied, "sturdy ones." So I put my shoes on again and returned to the rose pergola, followed by a number of helpers who had just showed up and asked to go along with me. They followed me under the indescribably beautiful pergola, but as I went along I noted that it was becoming narrow and low. Many of its branches were draped like festoons; others instead just dropped straight down. Some branches, here and there, jutted sideways from the rose stalks, while others formed a thicket which partly blocked the path; still others crept along the ground. All the branches, however, were thick with roses. There were roses about me, roses above me, and roses under my feet.

As my feet made me wince with pain, I could not help brushing against the roses at my sides, and even sharper thorns pricked me. But I kept walking. My lacerated legs, though, kept getting entangled in the lower branches. Whenever I pushed aside a bough barring my way, or skirted the sides of the pergola to avoid it, the thorns dug into me and made me bleed all over. The roses overhead also were thick with thorns which pricked my head. Notwithstanding, I went forward, encouraged by the Blessed Virgin. Now and then, however, some sharper thorns pierced me more than others and caused greater pain.

Meanwhile those who were watching me walk under that bower—and they were a crowd—passed comments, such as, "How lucky Don Bosco is! His path is forever strewn with roses! He hasn't a worry in the world. No troubles at all!" But they couldn't see the thorns that were piercing my poor legs. I called on many priests, clerics, and laymen to follow me, and they did so joyfully, enthralled by the beauty of the flowers. When, however, they discovered that they had to walk over sharp thorns and that there was no way to avoid them, they loudly began complaining, "We have been fooled!"

I answered: "If you are out for a nice time, you had better go back. If not, follow me."

Many turned back. After going on for a while, I turned to look at my followers. You cannot imagine how I felt when I saw that some had disappeared and others had already turned back and were walking away. I went after them and called them back, but it was useless; they would not even listen to me. Then I broke into tears and wept unrestrainedly as I asked myself: "Must I walk this painful path all alone?"

But I was soon comforted. I saw a group of priests, clerics and laymen coming toward me. "Here we are," they said. "We are all yours and

ready to follow you." So I led them forward. Only a few lost heart and quit; most of them followed me through.

After walking the whole length of the pergola I found myself in another enchanting garden, and my few followers gathered around me. They were exhausted, ragged and bleeding, but a cool breeze healed them all. Another gust of wind came and, like magic, I found myself surrounded by a vast crowd of boys, young clerics, coadjutor brothers⁸ and even priests, who began helping me care for all those boys. Many of these helpers I knew, but many more were strangers.

Meanwhile I had come to a higher spot in the garden, where a very imposing, majestic building stood. I entered and found myself in a spacious hall so grandiose that I doubt one could find its like in any royal palace. Fresh thornless roses, set all through the hall, filled it with a most delicate fragrance. The Blessed Virgin, who had been my guide all along, now asked me: "Do you grasp the meaning of what you now see and of what you saw before?"

"No," I said. "Please explain it to me."

She replied: "The path strewn with roses and thorns is an image of your mission among boys. You must wear shoes, a symbol of mortification. The thorns on the ground stand for sensible affections, human likes and dislikes which distract the educator from his true goal, weaken and halt him in his mission, and hinder his progress and heavenly harvest. The roses symbolize the burning charity which must be your distinguishing trait and that of your fellow workers. The other thorns stand for the obstacles, sufferings and disappointments you will experience. But you must not lose heart. Charity and mortification will enable you to overcome all difficulties and lead you to roses without thorns."

As soon as the Mother of God finished speaking, I awoke and found myself in my room.

Don Bosco understood the purport of the dream and concluded by saying that from then on he knew exactly the path he had to follow. Already known to him were the obstacles and snares with which his adversaries would attempt to block his progress. Many would be the thorns on his path, but he was sure, absolutely sure, of God's will in the matter and of the ultimate success of his great undertaking.

The dream also warned him not to be discouraged by the defection of some who seemed called to help him in his work. Those who

⁸ Lay members of the Salesian Society. [Editor]

first deserted him were priests and laymen who in the early days of the festive oratory had volunteered to help him. Those who came later were his own Salesians, and the wind symbolized the forthcoming divine assistance and comfort. On a later occasion Don Bosco revealed that this dream or vision was repeated in 1848 and in 1856, each time under slightly different circumstances, which we have integrated in our narration to avoid repetitions.

Although in 1847 Don Bosco kept this secret to himself, his devotion to the Blessed Virgin became ever more ardent, as we heard from Joseph Buzzetti.⁹ Ever more effective were his efforts to urge his boys to keep all the feasts of the Madonna and the month of May for their own spiritual advantage. It was obvious that he had fully entrusted himself to Divine Providence, just as a child throws itself into the arms of its mother. The unhesitating determination he displayed in making decisions when beset by grave problems or difficulties, showed clearly enough that he was carrying out a program already laid out for him and that he was taking his guidance from above. It looked as if the directive once given to Moses: "See that you make them according to the pattern shown you," had now been repeated to him. (Ex. 25, 40) We might finally add that from time to time various remarks would escape his lips, leading his close associates to believe that there was more than met the eye. On such occasions he seemed to be lovingly gazing on the image of the Blessed Virgin resplendent on high and inviting all mankind to have recourse to Her.

⁹ A Salesian coadjutor brother of the early years. [Editor]

CHAPTER 4

Fishing for Boys

A CONFIDENT feeling that the Blessed Virgin would always help him made Don Bosco even more indefatigably determined to carry on his work.

One of the more effective ways of attracting more boys to the Oratory was to look for them in the city streets, squares, and boulevards. He stopped every little vagabond or unemployed youngster he met, and before long he was asking him, in a friendly way, if he knew how to make the Sign of the Cross. If not, he would take him aside, or sit with him on a bench along the boulevard and very patiently teach him. After the youngster had learned that, and recited a Hail, Mary with him, Don Bosco would give him a little gift and invite him to the Oratory. Young Michael Rua was present at several of these touching episodes that took place in public, while Don Bosco paid no attention to passersby.

Whenever he passed a workshop at lunch time or during the siesta hour he no sooner spotted a group of young apprentices than he would go up to them, greet them warmly, ask them about their birthplace, their pastor, their parents, and how long they had been apprentices in that particular trade. Once he had broken the ice, he would inquire whether they still remembered what they had learned at Sunday school, whether they had made their Easter duty, and whether they still said their morning and night prayers. With the same frankness with which they replied to his questions, he would tell them where he lived at Valdocco and express his desire to be their friend for the good of their souls. They would accept his invitation to visit him, and on the following Sunday Don Bosco would find them around himself, listening intently to his words.

If he chanced upon some older boy who for some months had

stopped coming to the Oratory, he never failed to ask him how long it was since his last confession, whether he attended Mass on Sundays and holy days and behaved himself. He would always end by saying: "Come and see me. You'll always be welcome; if you can, bring your friends along, too."

Whenever he saw a group of young boys playing in a lot, he would stop and strike up a conversation with them. When they were all around him, he would ask whether they were having fun and were behaving themselves, how they spent their time, where they lived, what kind of work their parents did, what kind of games they liked best. Then he would tell them about all the games and pastimes they would find in his festive oratory, about the band, the hikes and all the other wonders. He would add that if they came to see him they would hear some very interesting stories and learn some catechism. If proper, he would give them a few pennies before leaving. The young boys would cry out: "Sure, we will come!"

Often, in one of the less frequented public squares, he might find a group of teenagers playing cards or gambling. They would be squatting around a handkerchief on which they had piled their coins. Don Bosco would walk up to them.

"Who's the priest?" one of them would ask, in the slightly derogative tone one often hears from the uneducated classes.

"I would like to play," Don Bosco would reply. "Who's winning? What's the ante? Here are my stakes." And so saying, he would fling a large coin down on the handkerchief.

The new player was welcomed cordially. After he had played for a few minutes, Don Bosco would begin questioning them on the basic truths of the Faith. Seeing they knew nothing, he would teach them in very simple words, and end up by inviting them to the Oratory and to confession. The game would then be resumed, and leaving his money behind, Don Bosco would go off about his business. It always happened that several of these boys, attracted by his casual manner, would indeed visit him at the Oratory and make their confession.

Another time, while crossing the square in front of a church in one of the suburbs, he came across a large group of boys chasing one another. He was carrying a bag of doughnuts which had just

been given him. He stopped, called the urchins over to him, and said:

"I've got a bag of cookies. If you catch me, you can have them!" And he dashed off with the whole crowd racing after him. He ran into the church, followed by them. Once they were in, he quieted them down and made them sit in the pews near the door, saying: "I'll have cookies for all of you in a moment, but first let's have a little catechism." Turning to the tallest one, he said: "You look as if you were the brainiest of all. Tell me, what would happen to one who died with a mortal sin on his conscience? How can one get rid of sins committed after Baptism?" With their eyes on the bag of cookies and hoping to earn more with their answers, the boys would strive to do their very best. Don Bosco held their attention for awhile with other questions and with amusing comments on their wrong answers. Then he would let them out, give them the cookies, tell them some pleasant story with a moral to it, and invite them to come to the Oratory. After he left, they could not get over having met a new kind of priest, one who amused them, gave them presents and told them a lot of nice things. They rarely failed to show up at the Oratory for catechism class!

The ease with which Don Bosco attracted boys to the Oratory after only a casual meeting was really extraordinary. Father [William] Garigliano, a fellow seminarian at Chieri, reminiscing fondly about this old friendship told the following episode to Father Charles Viglietti in 1889:

One day, while accompanying Don Bosco in Turin, we passed in front of Holy Trinity Church in Via Dora Grossa, and there we encountered a slovenly dressed and cocky looking young man.

Don Bosco stopped him in a friendly manner and asked, "What's your name?"

"My name? Why do you want to know? Who are you?" the boy answered.

"Well," Don Bosco said, "I'm a priest who likes young people. Each Sunday I gather boys in a nice place near the Dora, not far from the Rifugio. I have presents for them, and let them have fun. They like me. My name is Don Bosco. But now that I've told you who I am, will you tell me about yourself?"

"I'm just a homeless fellow looking for a job. My mother and father are dead."

"In that case I'd like to help you. . . . What's your name?"

"My name is so-and-so."

"Fine! I hope to see you this Sunday with the other boys. Come and enjoy yourself, and I'll try to find a job for you. You'll have a good time."

The boy stared at Don Bosco for a few seconds, then said brusklly: "No, you don't mean that!"

Don Bosco then handed him a *ten-soldi* piece, saying: "Yes, I do. Just come and see for yourself!"

Moved by this, the boy stared at the money and said: "I'll come, Don Bosco. If I don't, you can call me a liar."

He did come to the Oratory and, as a matter of fact, he attended it regularly thereafter. I believe he is now one of your own priests, because once, when I called on Don Bosco at the Oratory, I met him there wearing a cassock.

Many a time Don Bosco resorted also to the ruse of asking a boy he chanced to meet in the streets to come and share his modest lunch. He kept this up until the Oratory's growth made it impractical. Naturally his friendly approach bound youngsters to him with an affection hard to describe and with results of untold spiritual benefit. Let one incident suffice.

Don Bosco was returning home one day about noon, when he saw a boy named B . . . who lived only a short distance away, standing by the gate of the Oratory playground and vegetable garden. His hands and face were grimy and his clothes greasy. Till then Don Bosco had not been able to get to him because the boy always refused to attend the Oratory's church services, but they had exchanged a few words now and then. Although Don Bosco knew that the boy had a bad name and that serious misdoings were attributed to him, he walked up to him and said:

"Good morning, lad!"

"Good morning!" answered B . . . , hanging his head and letting his hair fall over his face.

"I'm glad to see you. I want you to do me a big favor today . . . Please don't say no!"

"I'll be glad to, if I can."

"Of course you can. Come and have lunch with me."

"Me, eat with you?"

"Right! I'm alone today."

"But you must be mistaken. You think I'm somebody else. You don't know me."

"I certainly do know you. Aren't you so-and-so's son?"

"You can't be wanting me to lunch. If you only knew my reputation!"

"Yes, I want you."

"But why all this fuss for me?"

"Never mind. No more arguing. Come on."

"But I can't come while I feel ashamed of myself. I'd rather go to confession first!"

"If you really want to, you can go to confession this Saturday or on Sunday morning, but today you're having lunch with me."

"I'll come some other time. Besides, I should let my mother know. She's expecting me home."

"I'll take care of that. I'll ask Mr. Pinardi to send word to her."

"But look at my clothes! I'd like to wash up and change. I'm ashamed to come like this!"

"Forget about that. I want you to come now, just as you are. I'm only too glad to have an hour or so with you."

"But . . . but . . ."

"No buts! Come along, soup's already on the table."

"If you really don't mind, then, I'll come."

When they went into the house and Mamma Margaret saw the guest, she asked Don Bosco in a whisper: "Why did you bring this grubby fellow here? Where did you pick him up?"

"Don't talk like that," Don Bosco replied. "I want you to know he's a friend, a good friend of mine. Treat him well."

From that day B . . . began to mend his ways and become quite a good young man.

But, though numerous indeed were the souls he caught in the Lord's net this way, they could not compare with the rich haul, to use his own words, which he got in Piazza Emanuele Filiberto. This area, adjacent to Porta Palazzo, swarmed with hawkers, peddlers, bootblacks, chimney sweeps, stable boys, lads passing out fliers, and messenger boys, all poor youngsters scraping together a meager livelihood from these odd jobs. One can easily imagine

what kind of men such boys grew up to be under these circumstances, with no one to supervise, teach or guide them, thrown on their own resources and exposed to all kinds of bad example. Most of them belonged to one or the other of several gangs in Borgo Vanchiglia. Boys joined them for self-defense under the leadership of older and more daring fellows. They were an insolent and revengeful lot, ready to fight on the slightest provocation. Since they had no steady jobs, they were growing up lazy and addicted to gambling, purse snatching, and petty thievery. Nearly all of them landed in prison sooner or later, but as soon as they had served their sentences, they would return to Porta Palazzo to continue their evil ways, but with more caution and greater experience.

Every morning Don Bosco would go to the square. He had already met a number of these boys when the Oratory had for a short while moved from the Rifugio to the "Mills Church."¹ He would break the ice by asking one of the older boys some directions, or he would stop to have his shoes shined. Then, whenever he passed by, he would always say "hello." Moreover he had already met a few of them in jail, since this was still one of his varied fields of apostolate.

He would stop with this or that group, tell them humorous stories, ask about their health or how good their business had been in previous days. He would tell them also how pleased he was to see them, mentioning sometimes that he came that way on purpose to see them and say "hello."

Little by little he got to know them all by name, and could talk to them frankly, like a father, on how important it was for them to save their souls. Whenever he met any of them alone, with a tact all his own, defying description, he would ask them about their spiritual condition and whether they went to confession. The boys would answer truthfully, but they rarely could say that they had been to confession, since, in most cases, they did not even know what the sacrament of Penance was. "Come and see me," Don Bosco would tell them, "and I'll teach you how to make a good confession. You will be very pleased."

To win their affection, he would sometimes buy them a basket or two of fruit. "Come here," he would then cry out to those near-

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 236ff. [Editor]

est him, "and call the others too. Here are apples for everybody." It is not difficult to imagine how happy this unexpected generosity would make them.

Whenever he went along the block between the beginning of Porta Palazzo and St. Dominic's Church, the match vendors would surround him, deafening him with their shouts of: "Wax matches! The best ever! Buy some from me! I haven't sold anything yet! Buy them from me, so I can get myself some lunch." It took Don Bosco about half an hour to get through the block while talking to one boy or another or trying to quiet the shouting. Then he would say to the whole crowd of them: "I want all of you to earn something this time, but on one condition, that you all come to the Oratory this Sunday!" They would promise to do so and then he would buy a few boxes of matches from each. As he left he would tell his new friends: "I'm thinking of joining you. I'll hang a little box around my neck and I too will sell matches at Porta Palazzo." They would all laugh, pleased by the two *soldi* he had paid them, and Don Bosco would go back home with a good supply of match boxes, which kind people would buy from him later.

Occasionally, these poor boys would ask for medals of the Blessed Virgin, and in giving them out Don Bosco would say, "Wear this around your neck. Remember that Our Lady loves you very much. Pray to Her faithfully so that She will help you."

Words cannot express how much these boys loved Don Bosco, nor describe the charming scenes that ensued. He could never pass through Piazza Milano without having to stop constantly. As soon as he would appear, the first boys to notice him would come running up. Then little by little, others and others until, as word spread, everybody was there to say "hello" and wish him a good day. Don Bosco would say:

"Shall I tell you something funny?"

"Yes, yes, tell us," they shouted. Meanwhile, the crowd would attract the attention of some of the women selling fruit and vegetables and they too would gather around Don Bosco. Soldiers, porters and other people would join in too.

"What's going on?" the latecomers would ask.

"I've no idea. I just stopped because I saw so many people here," someone would reply.

"Look! There's a priest there!" a third would volunteer, standing on tiptoes.

"It's Don Bosco!" someone who knew him would say.

"And who's Don Bosco?" a peasant who had just come to the market would ask.

"Who knows?" someone else would reply.

There would always be somebody, however, who could satisfy the strangers' curiosity, telling them all he knew about Don Bosco. Meanwhile as the crowd grew, so did the whispering and confused murmuring.

"Silence!" the boys yelled.

"Silence!" repeated the others, but their shouting only increased the noise. Eventually, everybody was quiet.

Don Bosco would then walk up onto a stoop or stand on a chair borrowed from one of the shops, or he would at least try to find something to lean on lest he fall as they pressed around him closer and closer in their eagerness to hear. Then he would begin to preach. Occasionally there were several hundred people listening. Even the shopkeepers stood in their doorways to listen. Policemen and carabinieri also came running up afraid that the priest might start a riot, but they too stayed to listen. It would have been difficult to find sermons more adapted to the capacity of the people or more fruitful than Don Bosco's. He would tell them some amusing story, some historical episode with a moral teaching, some past or contemporary event, and from it make a point. No one made a noise. Even those at the edge of the throng who could hardly hear what he was saying, uttered not a word, so as not to disturb the others. When he was through, they all said to each other: "Don Bosco is right. Our soul is the most important thing we have." And they would break up, pondering what he had said. Sometimes he would distribute medals, and then the crowd seemed to be endless.

On these occasions, particularly, it was difficult for him to get away because everybody wanted to follow him wherever he went. So he had to think up some ruse to evade them. He would take off his hat, for example, and pretending to drop it, bend down and pass through their midst, bent almost double. Or he would hide his hat under his cloak, bend down his head and ask some boy to lend

him his cap. With it pulled down over his eyes, he would move along, skirting the wall and hiding behind the barrier created by his urchins. By the time the people noticed his disappearance, he was already safely away. At times he vanished under the arcades or slipped inside some store unseen and left by the back door.

On such occasions the crowd would stand stock-still for a moment. Then, realizing that he had vanished, they would ask each other: "Where is he? Where did he go?" Some good woman would exclaim: "The angels must have carried him off."

The crowd would then break up into small groups, and those who had not been near enough to hear would ask others what he had said. All praised his words, because in those days religion was very strong among the people.

It was amusing to hear their comments as they dispersed and discussed the points he had made and his unusual presentation. Some said he was a saint, others a madman. Many who knew him well could judge matters correctly, but there were some who said that he was insane. Don Bosco took it all with good grace and was glad that some people who never or hardly ever went to church would listen to a sermon such as would not easily be forgotten. He used to say: "If a priest wants to do good, then he must combine charity with candid frankness."

On the outskirts of the city, from time to time, the same scene would be repeated again, but now the crowd, boys especially, would accompany him all the way home after listening to one of his interesting stories. The boys never tired of being with him and listening to him. Occasionally he would intone a sacred hymn or song which the crowd knew well, and a chorus of voices would join in. It looked like a re-enactment of the scene of Our Divine Saviour surrounded by throngs and walking through the towns and hamlets of Galilee. The going was slow as Don Bosco would answer questions or speak to them. Finally, as they reached the door of his tiny dwelling, he would turn to the crowd that had followed him, urge them all to remain faithful to the Church and to their Faith, and he would invite the boys to catechism class on the following Sunday. Then all would leave with loud shouts of "Long live Don Bosco!"

All of these incidents are based on information supplied by one or more of his former pupils who were actually present. Similar scenes occurred frequently until 1856.

There were those, though, who, wise in the ways of the world but not in the ways by which God leads his faithful servants, criticized Don Bosco with little regard for his good intentions.

Even a friend of the Oratory and an old acquaintance of Don Bosco, a Mr. [Michael] Scanagatti, cared little in the beginning for some of Don Bosco's ways, or certain customs at the Oratory, or the crowding of so many boys. He mentioned the matter to Father Cafasso, who was also his confessor, and asked him to tell Don Bosco to stop doing several things that were not quite to his liking. But Father Cafasso only replied: "Leave him alone. Don Bosco has extraordinary gifts. No matter what you think of his ways, he is inspired from above. Let us help him all we can."

The archbishop, too, realizing that the Church would soon lose the support of the civil authorities, felt that everything should be done to make good this loss by winning the support of the people. He wanted his priests to create closer ties with the faithful and earn their goodwill by helping them in all their needs, by giving them spiritual advice, by influencing them with their authority and the sanctity of their lives.

To this end, therefore, he favored Don Bosco's using every legitimate means, no matter how uncommon, as long as it was prompted by a prudent charity. All the more so was this true, since whatever Don Bosco did was a demonstration of the gift he had asked of God and obtained on the day of his priestly ordination, namely, efficacy of speech. It could truly be said of him: "Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the open squares she raises her voice; down the crowded ways she calls out, at the city gates she utters her words." (Prov. 1, 20-21)

CHAPTER 5

Fishing for Boys (Continued)

DON BOSCO was especially adept at putting boys back on the right path and devising ways and means of saving vast numbers of souls. Just how he did so would make a very amusing and interesting story. Totally unconcerned with what others thought or said, he was ready for any sacrifice, even to the point of demeaning and humiliating himself. Short-sighted or malicious criticism did not perturb him in the least, as long as he could promote God's greater glory.

"If one is to do good," he used to say, "he must have a little courage, be ready for sacrifice, deal affably with all and never slight anybody. By following this method I have always had significant success, in fact, marvelous success. Anybody else, even today, could achieve just as much by emulating the simplicity and gentleness of St. Francis de Sales." As he occasionally reminisced about the early years of the Oratory we heard him exclaim emotionally: "Oh, those days! How wonderful they were!"

While making his way through the city's streets and squares and its outskirts, Don Bosco noticed such places as inns, taverns and hotels, where a priest would be unlikely to set foot. He would make it a point to enter, either to accompany some stranger who had asked him where he might get a good meal, or some out-of-town friend who was looking for a respectable shelter for the night or some student in search of an inexpensive place to board. Occasionally, when the small supply of wine which his brother Joseph had sent him was all gone, he himself would go and buy a half barrel that would serve to win over prospective friends, or to treat the workmen whom he called for repairs to his house. Sometimes he would go in just for a hot drink, or a glass of water. These, how-

ever, were only pretexts. The mere appearance of a priest in such a place provoked a good deal of amazement. The proprietor would ask what he could do for him and surprised by the priest's affable manner he would strike up a conversation. Soon the customers would leave their tables to join them. At first, Don Bosco would amuse them with humorous stories, jokes, witty remarks, anecdotes and the like; then he would bring the conversation round to the subject of eternal salvation. He would touch on it frankly but sparingly, displaying a genuine interest in their spiritual welfare. With a friendly smile he would ask: "How long is it since you've gone to confession? Did you make your Easter duty this year?" Their answers were as forthright as his frank solicitude. Sometimes he had to debate a point, meet objections or dispel prejudices, but he did all with such grace that no one was ever offended; no tinge of bitterness ever crept into these peaceful exchanges. He assured us that he was never insulted in such places, nor was he ever the butt of any crude joke, though the lowest kind of characters could be found there. By the time he left, they had all become his friends and had invariably made him give his word to come again. Many visited him [at the Oratory] and went to confession as they had promised. While talking with them, he would always look around for boys and would ask the innkeeper or owner about his children, their health and deportment. He showed a great deal of interest in their growing up to be a comfort to their parents, and asked for the pleasure of meeting them. Finally he would beg the parents to let their children come to the Oratory services. These unusual goings-on attracted the mothers too; curiosity got the better of them and they came down from their living quarters. Impressed as much as their husbands by the priest's kind words and his obvious interest in the temporal and spiritual well-being of their children, they would gladly agree to his requests, especially that of sending the children to confession. The latter, of course, once they met Don Bosco were unable to keep away from him.

From among the many such incidents that occurred, we will select only one. With his usual purpose in mind, Don Bosco had visited an inn in Valdocco several times and had become a close friend of the innkeeper's son. Although the boy meant to, he had very little time to go to church on Sundays because of the heavy

turnover of customers on whom he had to wait. While he was talking to Don Bosco one day, his father came to sit with them and joined in the conversation. Don Bosco took the opportunity to ask him to allow his family to go to confession at the Oratory. It was many years since the man had been to the sacraments himself, but he readily agreed. "That's not enough for me though," Don Bosco exclaimed. "I want Papa to come too." For a moment the man sat thoughtfully; then he said, "Very well, I'll come, but on one condition."

"Let's hear it."

"That you agree to have dinner with me."

"Gladly."

The man was delighted and outdid himself in honoring his guest. On the appointed day Don Bosco arrived and had a truly sumptuous meal, although he was the only guest. The innkeeper kept repeating that it was the happiest day of his whole life. Thanking him before leaving Don Bosco remarked: "You'll keep your word, won't you?"

"Certainly!"

A few days later he sent the whole family to confession, but did not accompany them. Meeting him on several occasions, Don Bosco would ask, "When are you coming?" The man always found some pretext or excuse, but after several months he finally kept his word and always remained on close terms with Don Bosco.

Don Bosco, in turn, to reward these innkeepers and hostellers for their goodwill in accepting his advice, and for their courtesy, took pains to send them business. Whenever he wrote to out-of-town pastors or prominent townsfolk he would recommend their establishments for moderate prices and good service. Consequently, these people always had quite a few overnight guests and also others staying for longer periods, all sent by Don Bosco.

He also exercised his priestly ministry in the cafés of Turin. He would order a cup of coffee, but his eyes sought the young waiters. He would quietly strike up a conversation with one or the other as they set the tray before him. Soon they were pouring out their hearts to him, though no one at the nearby tables could guess what they were talking about. Don Bosco's words were few, so as not to attract undue attention, but they were effective. The following Sun-

day these boys would be at the Oratory at dawn. When, later on, he had boys boarding with him, they left the inn altogether and came to live with him.

Sometimes Don Bosco would call the owner over and ask, "Would you do me a favor?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

"Would you let this boy come to see me sometimes?"

"Where?"

"At the Oratory in Valdocco. There he can learn his catechism and grow up to be good!"

"That's just what he needs! He's a little rascal, and a lazy know-it-all! Everything's wrong with him!"

"Oh, come, that's hardly possible!"

He would then turn to the boy, who was biting his lips and fidgeting, and ask: "Isn't that so?" Then he would address the innkeeper again: "At any rate, we're agreed, aren't we? If you'll do me this favor, I'll be much obliged."

"Oh, if that's all you want, I have no objection." So the boy would come to the Oratory.

Occasionally, especially around Easter, Don Bosco would invite the owner and his children to come to confession. He would ask: "Well, how about your Easter duty?"

"I am a good Catholic, of course, and I know what I'm supposed to do," the café owner would reply, "but you see, we are so busy . . . we don't always have time . . . you know what I mean."

"How about your children? Have they already made their Easter duty?"

"They had better or they'll hear from me."

"Then you'll send them along?"

"Certainly. When do you want them to come?"

"Any morning. On second thought, just to make sure I'm there, tell them to come Saturday evening."

"I'll see to it."

Sometimes Don Bosco would have to renew his invitation, but in the end they always consented and came to confession with their children.

There was another class of boys for whom Don Bosco was also solicitous: apprentice barbers. Whenever he needed a shave, Don

Bosco would walk into a barbershop at an hour when there would likely be many customers. The barber would welcome him with the characteristic courtesy of the Turinese, and invite him to take a seat. Glancing around him, Don Bosco would catch sight of the apprentice stropping the razors. "I'm in a hurry," he would say, "and can't wait. If you don't mind, while you take care of these gentlemen, that young lad over there who is just stropping razors will suit me fine."

"For heaven's sake!" the barber would object, "don't let that lad skin you alive! He only began to handle a razor a few weeks ago. You'll have a rough time. He's careless too and doesn't seem to mind whether he learns or not."

"He looks bright enough to me," Don Bosco would say. "My beard isn't very tough, anyway. I'd like you to let him try his hand. You'll see that he will do all right."

"As you wish," the barber would reply, "but I've warned you. Forewarned is forearmed."

"Thank you," Don Bosco would say. Then, turning to the boy who was rather shamefaced at the barber's remarks, "Come here," he would say. "Show me what you can do. I'm sure your boss will have a different opinion of you." Encouraged, the boy would begin hesitantly, but then, becoming more sure of himself and taking hold of the razor, he would start shaving the poor priest. Don Bosco certainly did not have an enjoyable time. The dull razor often tore the hairs out. Don Bosco, who suffered even when shaved by an expert barber, endured a veritable torture, but he remained calm and did not wince. The boy, on the other hand, felt quite proud of himself and warmed up to the priest who had shown so much confidence in him. There were gibes from the barber at the expense of the apprentice and in sympathy with the customer, but Don Bosco maintained that the boy was doing his job very well. When the painful shave was over, there were nicks on Don Bosco's face, but his words of praise for the boy, who until now had only heard reprimands, were as so many ties binding the boy to the good priest. Don Bosco would then leave the shop and promise to come back on condition that only that boy shave him again.

Now and then he would go to another shop and repeat his performance. When he returned for another shave, he would intro-

duce some spiritual topic and finally ask the boy: "How long is it since you went to confession?" The boy would answer truthfully, for he now considered the priest his friend, and very often he would open his whole heart to him. A few words were enough for Don Bosco to grasp his situation. He would then invite him to come to the Oratory the following Sunday to learn catechism and go to confession. Sometimes the boy would say that he would like to go but that his employer would not let him. So Don Bosco would come to an understanding with the barber, who would willingly give his consent lest he lose a customer. Occasionally, when there were no other clients in the shop, Don Bosco would ask questions of the boy in the barber's presence to win both of them over to God. He would inquire of the boy whether he had made his Easter duty, whether he attended Mass on Sundays, and so on. The barber usually joined in the conversation with a great display of virtue, protesting that he wanted the boy to perform his religious duties and that he had told him time and time again, etc. With his captivating manner, Don Bosco always touched the boy's heart and got him to promise to come to the Oratory. On leaving, Don Bosco, with a word or glance at the barber would sometimes succeed in getting him also to the Oratory for his confession.

Acting in like manner in every shop or place where he could find boys, Don Bosco was able every day to bring back new souls to God.

CHAPTER 6

Preaching the Word of God

DON BOSCO'S most cherished desire, the sole goal of his life, was to destroy sin and to make God known, served, adored, and loved more and more by everybody and in every place. A priest of God, he grasped fully the import of his Divine Master's words: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me; to bring good news to the poor he has sent me, to proclaim to the captives release." (Luke 4, 18-19) Along with the Scriptures he avidly read the works of the most eloquent preachers. His model, however, was Our Lord, who in His incarnate wisdom spoke with a simplicity admirably suited to the level of the common people.

Since 1844 Don Bosco had written more than a hundred new sermons. He had drawn up meditations and instructions for an eighteen-day parish mission, several sets of spiritual retreats for religious, seminarians, nuns and boys, novenas and triduumms for the Forty Hours' devotion, plus as many sermons in honor of the Saints and for the principal holy days.

At the beginning of his priestly ministry he never mounted the pulpit, especially in the more important towns or cities, without having first written out his sermon. He never tired of saying: "The most effective sermon is the one that is best prepared." Both Bishop [Emilian] Manacorda of Fossano and Father Alvin Carmagnola testified to this.

Eager though he was to preach the word of God, as his tasks increased and his time diminished, he had to content himself with just tracing outlines of new sermons on small pieces of paper. We are fortunate to have quite a number of them.

Later, he did not have time even for that. Sometimes he would preach after only a moment's thought on his sermon topic; at other

times, after saying a Hail, Mary, he would mount the pulpit and improvise very effectively. He spoke slowly, almost without gestures, but his clear voice reached the heart of his hearers and moved them with his simple presentation. In some churches the congregation was made up mostly of people who, far from being practicing Catholics, were just plainly curious about the orator or wanted to hear for themselves some priest with a reputation for ideas opposed to their own. Even in these cases we ourselves heard their favorable comments both in church and out: "He spoke well! He truly did!"

Even in his improvised sermons there was order. He would begin with a Scripture text and then accurately define his topic or clearly state the aim of the festivity or the truth of Faith being celebrated. He would then develop his theme by very briefly bringing in some theological proofs, illustrating them by a historical event, or metaphor or a parable. This formed the main part of his sermon. He would conclude with some practical applications. We must add that he was always quite quick to change his sermon topic, even on entering the pulpit, if circumstances or the type of congregation seemed to warrant it. However, to achieve results with this method, any preacher would need, besides knowledge, a moral ascendancy over his hearers. Whenever Don Bosco preached, (and he would not pass up an occasion) he was always eagerly awaited and listened to as though he were a saint, by any kind of audience.

He preached so very frequently not only in Piedmont but in all parts of central Italy, that it would be difficult to list all the places. In Piedmont especially there is hardly a town or a village that did not hear him. When he felt that he could rely on his co-workers at the Oratory, he used to leave town, but was ever ready to return to the Oratory if his presence was needed. Wherever he went, incidents would take place, one more delightful than the other, that would tax the belief of later generations were it not for the testimony of reliable witnesses, as we shall mention in the course of our narrative. The memory of these incidents is still fresh at Alba, Biella, Ivrea, Novara, Vercelli, Asti, Alessandria, Cuneo, Mondovì, Nizza Monferrato, Rivoli, Racconigi, Carmagnola, Bra, Foglizzo, Pettinengo and Fenestrelle.

Like Our Lord, Don Bosco would pray fervently before preaching. Rural congregations were his favorites. On beginning his jour-

ney he would always make the Sign of the Cross, invoke the help of God, and pray to the Blessed Virgin. Whereas at the Oratory he went to confession once a week, on his travels he approached the sacrament of Penance even more frequently. He was not scrupulous, but he would not tolerate the smallest imperfection in himself, ever striving to please God even in the most insignificant things. This accounts for the abundant fruits he always reaped.

We also have to recognize a rare quality of his, an habitual and generous spirit of self-sacrifice. Railroads, still in their infancy at that time, were few and far between, and travel was mostly by stage coach. The jolting action of the vehicle upset his stomach violently, yet nearly every week he had to subject himself to this torment. As was his wont when traveling, he would like to have gone on scribbling or correcting his manuscripts, but his sickness often made this impossible. He would then sit up with the coachman, but every lurch of the coach provoked him to nausea. The coachman would feel sorry for him. "That poor priest," he often would exclaim, "if I could only do something for him!" At the next stop he would thoughtfully run to get him a drink, but the results were all the more disastrous. Many times he had to walk long distances over rough road, but this he could not do very often.

When Don Bosco reached his destination, he would be cordially received by the pastor. To him and to all who lived in the rectory he would be a model priest. Nothing escaped their attention and more than one of them told us later: "He was so careful of his words and actions that anybody who would have tried to surpass him would have been more than human."

He never complained of his sleeping quarters, no matter how uncomfortable, or about the meals. He acted as if he did not feel the cold, when the rectory and the church were poorly heated. In listening to people for hours, hearing their confessions or conducting religious services he showed a genuine spirit of mortification. His humility and patience in putting up with rebuffs, inattention, and poor manners never failed. He was quite unconcerned about himself, never asked for more than was given, humbly agreed to preach wherever and whenever he was requested, and graciously yielded even to younger priests or those of lesser rank. Completely calm and undeterred, confident in God, he would go forward, re-

gardless of the obstacles the devil tried to place in the way of his ministry.

He inspired great confidence in his hearers. He was zealous but never bitter or violent in his expressions, nor did he pamper his audience. He did not water down truth. When preaching spiritual retreats or missions, he wasted no time on trifles. His usual topics were the importance of saving one's soul, the end of man; the shortness of life and uncertainty of death; the hateful nature of sin and its tragic consequences; final impenitence; the forgiving of wrongs suffered; the obligation of restitution; false shame in confession; intemperance; blasphemy; turning poverty and sufferings to good account; keeping Sundays and holy days; the necessity and manner of praying, frequenting the sacraments, and attending the sacrifice of the Mass; the imitation of Our Lord; devotion to the Blessed Virgin; and the happiness that will crown our perseverance. These are the topics of many sermons written in his own hand. Some of his early friends and fellow seminarians gave them to us in 1900 to be preserved.

Since he always preached early in the morning and after sundown so as to accommodate farmers and other workers, Don Bosco, after hearing confessions would walk about the village.

He would pay his respects to the civic authorities, visit and console the sick, act as a peacemaker in families where he knew there was trouble, and in his affable way reconcile those who were at odds over money matters. He always showed great respect for the aged, and he was friendly toward farmhands and the poor. He never neglected an opportunity to invite people to his sermon. He would even go into stores and workshops to ask the owners and apprentices to church. They never turned him down. Enormous crowds would come to hear him; even youngsters, who naturally tire of serious talk, were eager to listen to him. Whenever asked, he would always teach them catechism gladly. They would become fast friends with him and gather around him whenever possible, hardly able to part from him; more than one boy was in tears when Don Bosco finally had to leave.

No less touching and deep was the gratitude shown by the adults. They realized that he had restored God's peace and grace to their hearts, a well-founded hope of paradise, joy to their families, love

for the village poor and others in need. During these priestly missions he also took occasion to spread throughout Piedmont the devout custom of saying the Glory Be three times after the *Angelus*.

We have mentioned that Don Bosco did not like to get involved in polemics from the pulpit. Nevertheless, he knew how to uphold the truths of Faith whenever circumstances demanded it or his ecclesiastical superior asked him to. Several newcomers had settled at Quassolo near Ivrea and their rather irreligious ways had earned them the local people's nickname of "Protestants." They ignored church laws and were a thorn in the side of the pastor, Father James Giacoletti, because of the harm they might do the local population in spreading errors against the Faith. Members of various sects had already settled in several villages, and so Bishop Louis Moreno wrote to Don Bosco and asked him to come to Quassolo for a mission. Don Bosco agreed. On hearing of his coming, those people made themselves scarce. In his evening sermons, Don Bosco began to explain the catechism, dwelling especially on those topics about which doubt and error had been spread. Humble and prudent in his approach, he refrained from invectives or personal attacks, limiting himself to a convincing presentation of the truth, so that no one would be able to deceive the people. His opponents, surprised at his affable manner, came back to the village but did not dare to say or do anything against the priest who had so thoroughly proven them wrong, to the great joy of the whole village. He spoke with such obvious sincerity and conviction that his deep faith found its way into the hearts of his hearers.

His tirelessness is shown by this episode. Once, while giving a spiritual retreat in Our Savior's Church at Ivrea and preaching four sermons a day, he was asked to give two talks to the seminarians. He obliged. Then, since the priest who was conducting a spiritual retreat in the local boarding school became ill, Don Bosco was called upon to substitute for him. He did so and there too preached twice a day, thus averaging eight sermons every day. The rest of the day and a good part of the night he spent hearing confessions, since everybody wanted to go to him.

When he got back home, quite exhausted, his mother gently reproved him for attempting to do too much, but he had a ready reply: "I'll have plenty of time to rest in heaven."

He kept up his preaching until 1860, when the increased number of boys at the Oratory made his presence there necessary and obliged him gradually to cut down all outside activities. By 1865 he left the Oratory only now and then for some special tridium, and for occasional sermons and lectures.

The reader will undoubtedly want to know some details about Don Bosco's efficacy of speech during this period. We shall oblige.

Some time between 1850 and 1855, Don Bosco went to Strambino for the feast of the Assumption. As soon as word got about that he would preach, an unusually large crowd came to hear him. When it was time for his sermon, the church was not only packed, but overflowing into the streets. There was no alternative but hastily to improvise a stand in the village square. The sun beat mercilessly upon the uncovered heads of his hearers, yet all were listening to him so intently that they scarcely budged and did not even wipe away the perspiration that trickled down their faces during the one-hour sermon.

Many who had not arrived in time to hear him, asked him to preach the following day on St. Rocco, whose rustic shrine stood in the midst of fields and meadows some distance from the village. The pastor, Father Gaudenzio Comola, formally invited him, and Don Bosco agreed. It was a weekday, but several thousand people showed up. The pulpit had been set up outside the chapel entrance. Don Bosco had barely started his sermon when the sky, which for weeks had been clear and intensely bright, began to darken. Soon thunder and lightning rent the air as at doomsday, releasing a torrential downpour. The peasants waited for Don Bosco to take shelter, but since he did not move, neither did they. The thunderstorm was short-lived and when it was over, Don Bosco went on with his sermon as though nothing had happened. Nor were the people perturbed in the least; rather, they were overjoyed and grateful to God for the abundant and unexpected rain in answer to their many prayers and penitential processions. It seemed miraculous.

Another time, Don Bosco was invited to give a sermon in honor of St. Anne, at Villafalletto in the diocese of Fossano. As word got around that Don Bosco was coming, such a vast crowd gathered that the people outside the church were ten times as many as those

packed inside. The village authorities, eager to satisfy the people, suggested having the sermon in the square.

"No, not in the square," some objected. "It's too hot and everyone will be scorched. Let's go into the meadow."

No sooner said than done. They set up an impromptu pulpit in a patch shaded by tall trees, and there the confraternities in their various uniforms gathered, along with thousands of the faithful. Don Bosco began his sermon, but his voice was lost amid the rustling of leaves and the whispering of the crowd. Not even half the listeners could hear what he was saying, no matter how loud he preached. At last someone shouted: "We can't hear a thing. Let's go back to the square." Those on the outer fringes picked up his suggestion. "Yes, to the square!" they shouted, ignoring the protests of those closer to the pulpit. The scene that followed is hard to describe: shouts and counter-shouts, people moving about, some staying put and waiting for the priest to make a move, others attempting to persuade him to step down and almost pressing him to do so. After Don Bosco took down the makeshift pulpit, the members of a confraternity known as the *Battuti* lifted it and paraded with it to the square. The multitude crowded around, and notwithstanding the many shouts of "Make way, make way!" the preacher could hardly advance a step. At last, by the grace of God, Don Bosco reached the pulpit. But another problem arose. As the pulpit was being moved, its steps had fallen off and Don Bosco could not possibly get into it without help. The bystanders gave him a hand and hoisted him up. The murmuring, however, had now become so loud that not even those very close could hear what he was saying. So he shouted: "Be quiet all of you, if you want me to preach." That settled them down. In a matter of seconds, not a sound was to be heard. It was July 26 [in the early fifties]. Everyone was bare-headed; the sun was so scorching that it was a wonder they could stand it. Yet, while the sermon was by no means a short one, nobody showed any fatigue or impatience. When the services were over, there was no end of praise for the wonderful things Don Bosco had said in his sermon. The pastor, Father John Mandillo, a theologian and canonist, always fondly reminisced over this visit of Don Bosco.

Another proof of the spell that Don Bosco cast over crowds was his sermon in honor of SS. Candidus and Severus at Lagnasco, in the diocese of Saluzzo, near Savigliano. He arrived late and had had no lunch. Vespers were over and, with the congregation waiting for the sermon, the pastor had already donned his surplice to substitute for Don Bosco, when in he came. Though faint from hunger, he immediately entered the pulpit and spoke for an hour on St. Candidus. Then realizing his time was up, he told his listeners that he would omit the second part about St. Severus not to weary them. With one voice the whole congregation cried out for him to go on. Don Bosco paused for a moment, undecided. From the sanctuary, the pastor, Father Joseph Eaudi, solemnly announced, "The voice of the people is the voice of God." So Don Bosco went on for another good hour to the amazement and enjoyment of all.

It was an enjoyment that always produced spiritual fruit. No matter who was in his audience, bishops, scholarly priests or aristocrats, and regardless of the topic, a dominant thought always ran through his sermon: the need to save one's soul. In fact, more than once, on very solemn occasions, Don Bosco chose to disregard the general expectation, and, after a brief reference to the saint whose feast day was being celebrated, he went on preaching about one or another of the Last Things or about one of the Commandments.

He once was invited to preach in a renowned convent on the feast day of their patron saint, a martyr. Knowing that he was well versed in church history, the nuns hoped that he would portray their saint from some new angle or dwell upon events in her life still unknown to them, ending up with ascetic and mystic remarks that would reveal his great learning.

But nothing of the sort happened. Although the church was jammed with prominent people, Don Bosco began by saying that for many years, indeed for more than a century, orators had this day always extolled the life and sung the praises of this martyr. He therefore wondered what purpose it would serve to keep repeating what had been said so many times before. Then, rhetorically posing a question to the holy martyr as to whether or not it would be fitting, at least for variety's sake, to change the sermon topic at least this once, he announced without further ado that his topic would be: "Striving for perfection and saving one's soul by making

good confessions.” We shall not attempt to describe the congregation’s surprise!

In choosing such a topic had Don Bosco been prompted by humility or had he perhaps been inspired from above? We do not know. This, however, we do know: his sermons always aimed at winning souls to God!

CHAPTER 7

Restoring God's Grace

COME and follow me, I will make you fishers of men," said Our Lord to His Apostles. (Matt. 4, 19) Don Bosco, fully appreciating the dignity and excellence of this call, would habitually express his ardent wish to secure, so far as he was able, eternal happiness not only for himself but for all others. He had made his own a saying of St. John Baptist de Rossi, known in Rome as the hunter of souls: "To my knowledge, the shortest route to heaven is through the confessional. A priest can draw untold spiritual benefits simply by hearing confessions." Therefore, Don Bosco's aim in preaching was to get people to go to confession. He also prayed and urged others to pray for poor sinners, and he had all his boys say a Hail, Holy Queen every day for their conversion.

To him the confessional was a place of [spiritual] rest and delight, not a burden. He never discontinued this sacred ministry, usually devoting two or three hours a day to it. On special occasions he would spend entire days in the confessional and, a few times, even whole nights. He did not desist when he was ill. This tireless ministry was carried out first of all in the various churches of Turin. On his missions in various villages and towns of Piedmont he usually attracted large crowds by his learning, affability, prudent insight and the supernatural gifts that everyone was certain he possessed. On these trips he would listen to endless crowds of penitents from early morning until late at night. This he did for years, from 1844 until 1865. To all those who knew him he was the symbol of confession. People anxious to reconcile themselves with God, especially those on the verge of despair and therefore in greater need of his priestly charity, would seek him out, even if he were not preaching in their area. Many of them came to Val-

docco. "How often," Father Francis Dalmazzo would tell us, "I was told or saw with my own eyes how harried individuals would come to the Oratory in the dead of night to confess their sins to Don Bosco, of whose holiness they had heard. Often enough, they had little hope of ever being forgiven, but when they left the room of the saintly man, their faces radiated the joy of their hearts. Don Bosco would invite them to come back often, assuring them that God, in His infinite mercy, had washed away their sins.

These visits brought Don Bosco boundless joy, all the more so because he was always interested in the eternal salvation of anyone whom he met, even total strangers. Talking of spiritual things came naturally to him and he was quite skillful in steering conversation to such subjects on any occasion, thus encouraging the good to persevere and bringing sinners to conversion. The latter he not only awaited and warmly welcomed, but often sought out. With a word of advice or an offhand suggestion, which was remarkably effective, he urged them to put their conscience in order. In such matters he was amazingly frank: "Have you performed your Easter duty?" he would ask. "How are things with your soul? How long is it since you went to confession?" Questions of this sort, whether straight from the shoulder or in a roundabout way, as circumstances suggested, were constantly on his lips. We ourselves heard him speak thus not only to uneducated people, but also to businessmen, writers, aristocrats, and even to princes, dukes, senators of the realm, deputies in parliament, army generals, cabinet ministers and other powerful men notoriously opposed to the Church in their speeches, writings or activities. To our great astonishment, nobody ever seemed offended by his apostolic freedom of expression, which, however, was always blended with genuine warmth and a sincere show of esteem, respect and genuine affection, enlivened occasionally by a timely dash of humor. Years later, Don Bosco used to tell his Salesians: "A priest is always a priest, and such he must always appear in speaking. To be a priest means to be duty bound constantly to further God's interests, the salvation of souls. A priest should never let anyone come to him without hearing a word of concern for his eternal salvation."

In this Don Bosco was most adept and successful. In talking to people he unobtrusively managed to assess their spiritual condition

regardless of their social standing, rank or education. They all had one thing in common: little time or inclination to frequent the sacraments. Amiably he would lead them quite imperceptibly to disclose their inmost misery and thus make it easier for him to guide them back to the right path. On meeting porters or other unskilled workmen who had the bad habit of blaspheming or using foul and vile language, he knew how to talk to them, and little by little, ever so gently, he would lead them to admit their fault. Very often also they went to him to confession. We shall cite some examples.

About the year 1847, as a gentleman from Cambiano informs us, Don Bosco, on returning from services at the Crocetta Church, was taking a shortcut across the rubbish heaps, ditches and barren ground outside Porta Nuova, a deserted stretch of land which was later the site of new apartment buildings. Four grim-faced youths, twenty-two to twenty-six years old, approached him, and with mock courtesy stopped him saying: "Please listen to us, Father. This fellow says I'm wrong, and I say I'm right. Would you be so kind as to decide which of us is right?" Don Bosco glanced about and saw there was no one in sight, although it was two hours after sunrise. Fearing an assault, he recommended himself to God. The youths went on with their rambling tale, never mentioning what he was expected to decide, and over and over again insisted, "Tell us who is right and who is wrong."

Don Bosco realized that they wanted to have fun at his expense and thought to himself: "I'd better play it smart." So he said: "Listen, boys, this isn't something I can decide just like that. How about letting me think it over while we have a cup of coffee at the Café San Carlo?"

"Will you treat us?" one of them asked.

"Certainly! That's why I'm inviting you."

"Good! Let's go!" So they walked toward the café like old friends. When they passed by St. Charles Church, Don Bosco stopped. "Listen, fellows," he said, "I promised you a cup of coffee, and I'll keep my word. But since I am a priest, I want to treat you like a priest should. So let's just drop in here for one Hail, Mary."

"What? Are you looking for a way out?"

"No, I'm not. I'll keep my word, but first I want us to say just one Hail, Mary."

"Then you'll pull out your rosary . . ."

"I said just one Hail, Mary."

"Don't forget it. Let's go in."

So they entered, knelt, and said the prayer, after which Don Bosco said: "Now we'll have our coffee." And they did. Afterwards, when they were outside again, he said to them: "Since I've had the pleasure of getting to know you, why don't you boys come with me to my house. We can have something else there."

They accepted, and he took them to Valdocco. Now on familiar terms with them, he began to say: "Tell me something, as between friends. How long is it since you boys have been to confession? The way you are living what would become of you if you were to die suddenly?"

They looked at each other, then at Don Bosco, who went on in the same vein. One of them finally muttered: "If we could find a priest like you, we wouldn't mind going to confession."

"Well, here I am."

"But we're not ready just now."

"I'll help you." So saying, he took one of them by the arm and led him over to a kneeler. "Here, lad," he said, "you have chattered enough with your friends." And to the other three: "Start preparing, because you'll be next!"

To make a long story short, three of them made their confessions, truly sorry for their sins. The fourth refused, saying that he did not feel like it. As they left, all four promised to visit him again. A Hail, Mary said by Don Bosco always produced amazing results.

On another occasion, as he was walking at night along the arcades of Via Po toward Piazza Castello, a stranger approached him and bluntly asked for money. With his usual friendliness Don Bosco engaged him in conversation and led him to make a clean breast of all his past life. He then pointed out to him what he could expect should he continue in his evil ways. Finally, he sat on the parapet of the moat around Palazzo Madama, a lonely, dark spot in those days because of poor lighting, and heard this stranger's confession as the latter knelt at his side. Canon Borsarelli, uncle of Canon Anthony Nasi, happened to be crossing the huge square and witnessed this unusual scene. On account of the darkness, he

did not at first recognize Don Bosco, and so he asked some people who were also watching from a distance. "That's Don Bosco," they told him. The canon waited for him to finish and when the man had left, came up to Don Bosco and accompanied him to the Oratory. For the rest of his life he was a good friend and benefactor to Don Bosco.

Once it also happened that, while Don Bosco was strolling across the parade grounds, he was met by several ruffians, all adults, who, taking advantage of their being alone, began to insult him openly. Don Bosco, unperturbed, struck up a conversation in a light vein. Taken aback and ashamed of themselves, all but two walked away. One of them who had started the whole trouble, angry at Don Bosco, kept up the senseless abuse. He soon tired, however, amazed at Don Bosco's unalterable calm and he too walked away. The last fellow continued to curse at priests and religious, heaping insult upon insult.

"Come, now," Don Bosco said to him, "when you insult priests, you are also insulting me, a friend of yours. That's because you don't know me. If you did, you wouldn't say such things."

Startled, the man stared at Don Bosco from head to foot, as though trying to recall whether he had ever met him before. Don Bosco went on: "I'm one of your best friends. The proof is that though you're insulting me, I don't take offense and am ready and willing to help you if there is anything I can do for you. Furthermore, I wish you the best of luck not only on this earth but in the next life too."

Such an unexpected retort made the poor fellow stop. Finally, Don Bosco told him frankly: "Believe me, my dear man, nobody can be truly happy in this world unless he is at peace with God. If you're so wrought up and angry, it's because you don't give much thought to the salvation of your soul. If you should die at this very moment, you'd be badly off."

The man first became pensive and then was moved. Little by little, Don Bosco managed to persuade him to go to confession. It was a long time since his last. Fearing, however, that his repentance might be but momentary and that as soon as he was out of sight he might change his mind, Don Bosco urged him to make his confession at once.

"I'm ready," the man said, "but where?"

"Right here."

"Can we?"

"Of course we can!"

They had been walking while conversing and, although they were still on the parade ground, they had reached a somewhat secluded spot where a few trees shielded them from view. Don Bosco heard the poor man's confession, and the penitent was so overjoyed that he could not part from the priest who had given him such peace of mind.

There were other incidents of this kind, that would be superfluous here, like the case of a good man who told us that he had made his confession to Don Bosco near the towers by Piazza Emanuele Filiberto.

During those early years of the Oratory, as we have already mentioned,¹ there was a sizable shed along the Via della Giardiniera. It belonged to the Filippi brothers, but had been rented out to a contractor named Visca, who used it as a carbarn for the municipally-owned coaches. Here, besides the coachmen, any number of derelicts, drunkards, and assorted riffraff used to find shelter for the night. Often in mild weather they held impromptu and boisterous dances in the open air. They were certainly not very desirable types to have as neighbors.

One day, Mamma Margaret, standing on the balcony, had finished cleaning a new cassock of Don Bosco's and, after hanging it over the wooden rail, had gone indoors for a moment. The balcony was not very high off the ground. When Margaret came out again, the cassock was gone. She went to look for Don Bosco, lamenting the mean trick played on her. "I am certain it must be one of those people who loiter about in that shed," she said.

"Well, what if it is?"

"We should try to get it back."

"Why risk being laughed at just for that?"

"Would you let them take away your new cassock, the only one you've got?"

"What can we do?"

"You're always the same! Nothing matters to you!"

¹ See Vol. II, p. 418. [Editor]

"Why not forget it? Don't worry over such trifles. Whoever stole it must have needed it more than I. As far as I'm concerned, if the man who took it came to confession to me, I'd make sure he sincerely resolved never to steal again, then I'd give him the cassock, and a big absolution to go with it!"

As things turned out, Don Bosco actually made some friends beneath that shed. For several years, during the Paschal season he used to approach that rabble and affably invite them to confession. "Come, my friends," he would tell them, "come whenever you like, at any hour that's convenient for you, morning, evening or night, and I'll always be glad to listen to you. Don't feel uneasy with me. We're friends, and as friends we can discuss anything in complete confidence. Look, I'll even put aside some bottles of good wine for you, and after you've straightened out your conscience, we'll drink to the occasion."

Many of these unfortunate people came to him, truly sorry for their sins, and they always received a warm welcome. When confessions were over, Mamma Margaret would exhaust her whole supply of wine, for it was not easy to quench their thirst. Don Bosco, however, was happy because, with a few stirring words, he had been able to kindle a little love for God even in those most unlikely hearts. This was a special gift that the Lord had bestowed on him.

Wherever he went, situations arose giving him an opportunity to hear confessions in coaches, private houses, hotels, the open fields and the streets. People could not resist his gentle exhortations. Such incidents are numerous enough to fill a large volume. Here we shall limit ourselves only to Don Bosco's dealings with coachmen.

He always had a great regard for this class of people, since he so often traveled by public conveyance. On reaching his destination, he would invariably give the driver a generous tip, whispering, "This is for you." To people who showed surprise at his generosity, he would reply: "I don't want to miss the chance of helping these poor people and saying a kind word to them because they need it."

Some coachmen occasionally took advantage of him when collecting fares, but he always paid whatever they asked, lest they use language offensive to God. With his subjects he insisted that they

should act likewise. Father Joachim Berto was a witness to his generosity for more than twenty years.

Don Bosco's charity was what endeared him to all these poorly educated men. On his trips to Novara, Vercelli, Casale, Asti and a hundred other towns and villages, he always tried to sit beside the coachman, waiting for a propitious moment to win the man's soul to God. It would not be long before the man would break out into some blasphemy and Don Bosco would say jokingly: "What was that you said? I'm sure you said it without thinking. You're really not bad at heart. I can tell you're a good man just by looking at you."

"You're right, you know; it's a habit I've got. I hate talking like this; but when I'm not thinking, that's what happens. I feel very sorry when I make these slips, especially when priests are around."

"Try to correct it then."

"Yes, I'll try, I really will!" the man would keep repeating. But after a while, if there were trouble on the road or the horses acted up, or just through force of habit, out would slip another profanity. Don Bosco would just look at him. The man, embarrassed, would listen to Don Bosco telling him about God's goodness and His punishments and the importance of mending one's ways and saving one's soul. Don Bosco would always end his short talk by exhorting him to go to confession. His words were so effective that the coachman unfailingly gave in. Many of them made their confession while sitting on their box and driving the horses; others, while the horses were being changed, or in the stables, taverns or thereabouts.

One day Don Bosco was traveling to Carignano. While talking to the coachman, he remarked: "I suppose you've already made your Easter duty!"

"Not yet," the man said. "It's been quite a few years since I went to confession. I wish I could go again to the same priest I had last time, if I could only find him!"

The priest he had made his confession to when he was in prison in Turin was none other than Don Bosco himself, but neither he nor Don Bosco had recognized each other.

Don Bosco went on probing: "What was the name of this priest you liked so much?"

"Don Bosco. I don't suppose you know him."

"I certainly do! *I'm* Don Bosco!"

The coachman stared at him, then gradually recalling his features and recognizing him, he exclaimed, overjoyed: "This is wonderful, but how can I make my confession here?"

"That's no problem. Give me the reins and kneel down," Don Bosco said.

The man complied at once, and while the horses slowly went their way, the coachman made his confession. This incident we came to know from Father [Michelangelo] Chiatellino, and it, like most of the others, took place before 1850.

We shall narrate one more that Don Bosco himself told us of.

I was returning to Turin from Ivrea by stagecoach because the railroad had not yet been built. I could hear the coachman blaspheming now and then whenever he flicked his horses with the whip. I asked him whether he would let me sit up beside him on the box. He agreed readily. Once up there, I asked, "Would you do me a favor?"

Misinterpreting my request, he replied: "You want to get to Turin in a hurry, don't you? Very well!" And he began to lash the horses punctuating the strokes of the whip with blasphemies.

"No, that's not it," I said. "I don't care whether we get to Turin a quarter of an hour earlier or later. All I do want is that you should stop swearing. Can you promise me that?"

"Oh! If that's all you want, you have my word and I'm a man to keep it!"

"Good! How can I show you my appreciation?"

"No need for that! I shouldn't swear anyway."

I insisted, so he said he would settle for a tip of four *soldi*. I promised him twenty. Then he lashed the horses again, and out came a curse. I warned him, and he said: "How stupid of me! I slipped again."

"Don't worry," I told him. "I'll still give you twenty *soldi*. But every time you slip I'll deduct four *soldi*."

"It's a deal," he replied. "I won't lose a single one."

After a while the horses slackened their pace, and as he whipped them, he cursed once. "Sixteen *soldi*, my friend," I said.

The poor man was embarrassed, and muttered: "Force of habit." And he kept grumbling to himself.

After another stretch of road, another crack of the whip and two more curses.

"Eight *soldi*, my friend. You're down to eight."

"I can hardly believe it," he cried angrily. "Why must bad habits be so troublesome and hard to break? I'm thoroughly angry with myself. I have no self-control. This accursed habit has already made me lose twelve *soldi*."

"My friend, you shouldn't be upset over such a trifle. You should be more concerned for the harm you are doing to your own soul."

"Yes," he replied, "you're right. I'm hurting myself a lot. This Saturday I'll go to confession. Are you from town?"

"Yes. I live at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales."

"Good. I'll come and make my confession to you. What's your name?"

"Don Bosco."

"I'll see you then." Before we reached Turin he let out another curse. He was now down to only four *soldi*, but I pressed him to accept twenty for the effort he had made. We then parted.

I expected to see him that Saturday, but three more went by before he showed up. I saw him take a place among the boys but did not recognize him at once.

When his turn came, he said to me: "Do you remember me? I'm that coachman. Remember? I want you to know that, since then, I abused God's holy name once in a careless moment, but once only. I had decided to punish myself by going on bread and water should I fall again. Well, that's just what happened, and I don't care to go through it again!"

Years later, several of these people told Father Michael Rua of their remarkable luck in meeting Don Bosco. They were still grateful to the priest who had brought them back to God.

CHAPTER 8

Regulations for the Festive Oratory

DON BOSCO kept endlessly searching for new ways to make the Oratory grow. Though he gathered boys of widely differing temperament, background, education, intelligence, and social standing, he did not intend to organize a motley mob with no order or discipline. He never stopped striving for unity of will and direction. He realized the necessity of having definite directives for the priests who generously gave their time and talent to this portion of their sacred ministry. He very carefully trained the boys he chose to assist him. He explained in great detail the way they were to act in church, in school, and at play, although he did not put these rules down in writing. He had tried to do so several times, but had given it up in the face of various grave difficulties deriving from conflicting opinions of his co-workers, and from the fact that the Oratory had had to pitch its tent in various places [before settling down in Valdocco].

For several years now, plans had matured in his mind. He had secured information on many festive oratories founded by zealous priests in different parts of Italy in fairly recent years, to see what others had learned from experience. Among his papers we found a copy of the *Rules of the St. Aloysius Oratory, founded in Milan in 1842, in the Parish of St. Christina*, and also a copy of the *Rules for the Holy Family Oratory*.

Different goals and methods had inspired all these regulations. Don Bosco had to study them carefully before attempting to evaluate them correctly and to adapt them to his own needs. The regulations of some of the oratories had been drawn up at a time when city people regularly taught their children the first rudiments of the Faith, shielded them from moral harm, and personally took them

to church and to the sacraments. The task of an oratory director had then been a relatively easy one. It involved getting children together at certain hours on Sundays and holy days, keeping them busy at games, teaching them some catechism, counseling them, correcting any bad habits they might have picked up, and nurturing the good seed that had already been sown in their hearts. Not so in Don Bosco's day. Many boys no longer received religious instruction at home or went to church at all. Before planting the seeds of virtue there was need first to cleanse their hearts by uprooting the evil caused by bad example and precocious corruption. In many cases, for lasting effects, it was also necessary to remove youngsters from a bad environment. Any farsighted person could easily foresee that this deplorable situation would gradually worsen and become truly alarming. Consequently, the modern oratory for poorer classes had to become the field of a new apostolate, where all means of sanctification instituted by Our Lord could be applied in conformity with the spirit of the Church. This new type of oratory would have to provide for the young the same church services of a parish church, as laid down by the Council of Trent. It would have to become a center of fatherly attention, in an effort to make up as much as possible for parental neglect. It would have to capture the hearts of boys, so as to exercise a steady and strong moral influence over their conduct.

There were institutions which came close to Don Bosco's requirements, where boys could hear Mass, learn their catechism, go to confession, receive Communion once a month and enjoy supervised recreation. But these oratories closed before noon, leaving the lads to shift for themselves during the rest of the day. Therefore Don Bosco, knowing only too well the strong temptations to which boys, especially young apprentices, were subject in the evening hours, was determined to keep his oratory open all day.

Other types of festive oratories, while offering all possible spiritual assistance and remaining open afternoons, would admit only boys of good moral character. Parents had to register their children and withdraw them if they misbehaved. Don Bosco, instead, wanted his oratory to admit not only the uneducated in order to teach them, but also the unruly in order to convert them, as long as they did not give scandal. He expected the good boys to serve as models for

the rest and inspire them. Setting down conditions for admission he regarded as utterly impractical since moral violence almost had to be used to entice some boys to God's banquet. Nor would he hear of expelling those who sometimes kept away from the Oratory for months on end. Rather, he regarded their return, even though brief, as something to be happy about. To him it was obviously futile to expect guarantees of the boys' good conduct from parents who not only did not care for their children but actually had lost even their respect and, in some cases, were dead set against religious training.

Don Bosco also studied the setup of oratories for problem boys boarding in hospices or living with their families. He disliked their disciplinary system, their police-style supervision, however necessary, and their compulsory attendance. Such a system had no future because public opinion was turning against it. Furthermore, Don Bosco wanted his boys to do what was right of their own free will.

In his study of these various systems, Don Bosco took notes and made revisions, adaptations, and new combinations, basing himself mainly on the regulations of the oratories of St. Philip Neri in Rome and those of St. Charles Borromeo in Milan, the latter dating from about 1820.

However, he discarded some rules which seemed outdated and which, instead of attracting boys, might have the opposite effect. He excluded only the very young and those suffering from contagious disease. In cases of insubordination the policy was to be lenient; punishment was to be replaced with friendly, frequent, and effective admonitions. Expulsion from the Oratory was mandatory only for those who gave grave scandal. No official records were to be kept of misdemeanors or negligence in religious practices. There was to be the greatest possible freedom in frequenting the sacraments. There was no obligation to secure a confession certificate. No boy could be reprimanded for staying away from confession for any length of time. Nor would Don Bosco hear of any fixed arrangement for confession: the boys were to be heard as they came, so that anyone wanting to withdraw could do so unnoticed. The same rule applied to Holy Communion. When on solemn feast days the boys were treated to a breakfast, everybody was welcome whether he had gone to Communion or not. Attendance records were kept but only for award purposes. Such freedom, governed by

Don Bosco's prudent zeal and frequent exhortations, was destined to bear marvelous fruit.

After studying the regulations of various oratories, Don Bosco recorded his comments which have guided us in compiling these pages. Then, early in 1847, after his evening schools were organized, he yielded to the advice of prominent people, among them his own archbishop and Father Cafasso, and finally set himself to drawing up his own set of regulations. He completed this task in a few weeks. His regulations spelled out what was already being followed at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales; they pointed out what was to be done in church, at play, and in the classroom, giving opportune norms for each specific activity. These regulations, published about 1852, were revised in subsequent editions. They are divided into three parts: the first deals with the purpose of the festive oratories and the various duties of those in charge and the norms for carrying them out; the second concerns the boys' practices of piety, and their behavior in church and outside; the third, which was not published till later, refers to the day and evening schools and contains valuable information about them.

Once these regulations were published and became known, bishops and pastors applied for permission to set up in their own dioceses and parishes oratories modeled as closely as possible on Don Bosco's Oratory in Turin. They were well aware of how good he was at imparting a truly Christian education to the young, and these regulations further proved it.

Don Bosco describes the purpose of the festive oratory as follows:

The purpose of the festive oratory is to entertain youngsters on Sundays and holy days with pleasant and wholesome recreation after they have fulfilled their religious duties.

We say:

1. *To entertain youngsters on Sundays and holy days* because we are particularly interested in young apprentices who, more than others, are exposed on these days to severe moral and physical dangers. We do not, however, exclude school children who on these days and on holidays wish to frequent the oratory.

2. *With pleasant and wholesome recreation*, that is, that which truly recreates rather than fatigues. Games or activities that may harm the health or morals of the boys are not permitted.

3. *After they have fulfilled their religious duties.* Religious instruction is the oratory's primary objective; the rest is only an accessory, an inducement for the boys to attend.

This oratory is placed under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales, because those who intend to dedicate themselves to this kind of work should adopt this saint as a model of charity and affability. These sources will produce the fruits that we expect from the oratories.

The admission requirements are listed in Chapter 2 of Part II:

1. The purpose of this oratory is to keep boys busy and away from bad companions, especially on Sundays and holy days. Therefore, any boy may be admitted regardless of social condition.

2. Poor, abandoned and uneducated boys are particularly welcome because they need more help to achieve their eternal salvation.

3. Boys must be at least eight years old; younger ones are excluded because, being too young to understand, they would only cause disturbance.

4. Boys with physical disabilities may also be admitted as long as they have no contagious or repulsive disease.

5. Those not attending school are required to be employed in some craft or trade, because idleness promotes vice and tends to nullify any religious instruction. Any boy who is looking for work should apply to the Protectors who will give him every possible assistance.

6. Boys entering this oratory must realize that it is a religious organization whose purpose is to train boys to become good Christians and upright citizens. Therefore, blasphemy, obscene conversation or language offensive to our Faith are strictly forbidden. Any boy guilty of such offenses will be admonished in a fatherly way the first time; if he does not mend his ways, he will be reported to the director for expulsion from the oratory.

7. Troublesome boys may also be admitted provided they do not cause scandal and are earnest in improving their conduct.

8. This oratory charges no admission fee or fees of any kind. Those who wish to join some profit making organization, should apply to the Benefit Society, which has its own constitutions and bylaws.

9. All boys are free to frequent this oratory, but all must obey the orders of those in charge, and observe the prescribed norms of behaviour at recreation, in church, and outside the oratory.

CHAPTER 9

Regulations for the Festive Oratory (Continued)

FOLLOWING the advice of prominent and competent persons, we have considered it worthwhile to present in this chapter the regulations Don Bosco drew up for his festive oratory, and to give the readers his genuine ideas as they sprang out of his organizing mind. His first set of regulations, reproduced in the previous chapter, state the purpose of the festive oratory and its admission requirements. They also engender in our mind the thought that he had a long-range plan, constantly cherished but unfolded only gradually as prudence dictated, to prepare the foundations of the Salesian Society. He himself made this known several times, and the regulations bear this out. The titles of the oratory staff are the same as those of the superiors in the congregation he intended to found. The head superior is called "rector," and later "director" when, by delegating his authority over the festive oratory to another superior responsible to him, that office becomes secondary.

In two of the articles, Don Bosco refers to the perpetuity and expansion of his work. In Part I, Chapter I, Article 9, where he speaks of the rector, we find: "He may appoint his successor, who must be a priest, and this appointment must have the approval of the bishop." With respect to the trustworthy assistant which the rector should have, Don Bosco remarks in Chapter II, Article 6: "The prefect will assist the rector in every way possible, and will endeavor to be one with him in spirit, purpose, and zeal for the glory of God." These articles were later eliminated when the Salesian Society began to take shape, but Article 5 remained: "The prefect will also act as spiritual director in those places where there is a shortage of priests."

Thus he took into consideration the fact that his oratories would later be established also in other cities. He also laid down, as we shall see, that various officers were to be elected as in chapter meeting by majority vote of the oratory staff; he also provided for special prayers, not only for his co-workers at their death, but for their parents as well. Finally in Part II, Chapter VII, Article 9, he calls the boys' attention to the importance of a divine call. "In matters of grave importance, such as the choice of your vocation, always consult your confessor. The Lord says that he who listens to his confessor, listens to God Himself. 'He who hears you, hears me.'" [Luke 10, 16]

But if there is only a slight hint of some future religious congregation in these regulations, fully manifest is the spirit that was to animate it. He usually referred to the boys as "sons," just as St. John the evangelist did with his disciples. To superiors he stressed that they should be ready to make great sacrifices, without sparing or neglecting anything that might contribute to God's greater glory or the welfare of souls. On every page he repeated that treating the boys kindly would be the best way to do them good.

Let us now, after these general remarks, examine in detail how he organized his oratory. He wrote:

"The various duties to be carried out by those who wish to work fruitfully in the festive oratory may be shared among the following officials who are to be considered as superiors in their various fields: the Director, the Prefect, the Catechist or Spiritual Director, Assistants, Sacristans, Monitors, Chapel Subassistants, Catechists, Archivists, Peacemakers, Choirboys, Playground Subassistants, Protectors."

To some it may seem that there were far too many superiors, but it must be remembered that Don Bosco did this for various reasons: in order to interest many in the welfare of boys and thus assure a wider and more careful supervision; to assign them jobs more suited to their temperament or aptitude; to give to some a well-deserved token of special trust; to bind ever more to the festive oratory the more enterprising boys by giving them some authority over their companions.

After outlining the special duties attached to each office, about which we shall speak shortly, Don Bosco entrusted these offices to

those boys who seemed the most likely to do the job well because of their good behavior and common sense, thus making them, so to speak, his officers or adjutants. He let them know that he did not intend to impose laws or rules, but was making them personally responsible for the performance of the tasks entrusted to them. Since he limited himself to supervising their work and seeing to it that they fulfilled their duties, everyone tried to understand what these duties were and did his very best to carry them out. Thus, things proceeded smoothly and efficiently and Don Bosco's work load was lightened. Once a week he called them to a meeting. Like an expert general, he gave them a pep talk to encourage them to faithfully discharge their duties, and offered tips and suggestions on what to do or avoid for better results. Whenever they came to him, he always received them with great kindness and friendliness in conformity with what he had laid down for the director: "He must always receive staff members kindly and give them helpful suggestions for maintaining order and promoting the greater glory of God and the spiritual welfare of souls. He must endeavor to win their love and esteem by being kind and by being an example to them." To show his appreciation, Don Bosco occasionally gave them some little thing, such as a holy picture, a booklet, or something like that, and always ended the interview by reminding them of the beautiful crown awaiting them in heaven. His words of encouragement and his tokens of confidence served as a great stimulus, and only rarely did he have to relieve someone of his duties on account of negligence or bad conduct.

Though he found no great difficulty in recruiting exemplary boys for most of the tasks, he was faced with considerable problems in finding people for the offices of Prefect and Catechist or Spiritual Director. Zealous priests accepted these appointments but soon tired of them or could not do justice to them because other duties prevented them from being at their oratory post when most needed. Consequently, theirs was a too frequent turnover. Don Bosco, however, was not upset over this, and took over their work himself, waiting calmly for Divine Providence to send him new co-workers of his own. That is why he had drafted a complete set of regulations, not limited to the actual needs of the festive oratory as it was in 1847, but with an eye to its future development. He therefore

made provision for things that would be done as soon as they would be feasible, such as, for example, the chanting or reciting of Matins of the Little Office of Our Lady on Sundays, and the establishment of the St. Aloysius Sodality and of a library. This last project became a reality that same year [1847]. He also made passing mention of a mutual aid society, which came into existence in 1850.

Such farsightedness is truly admirable, but our main purpose here is to show how Don Bosco strove throughout his whole life to make the festive oratory a huge success. To this end we shall present the latest edition of the *Regulations for the Festive Oratory*, published in 1887, and compare them with the manuscript version of 1847. The differences are not many. Nevertheless, in order that they be clearly shown, we shall italicize whatever appeared in the first edition and was deleted in the last one. We shall enclose in parentheses whatever he added, which became standard practice about 1852 and later. We shall deal with the chapters and articles referring to the moral and religious training of the boys later on as the occasion will demand.

A careful study of what is the paramount object of our apostolate is by no means superfluous. Our Constitutions state: "The object of the Salesian Society is that its members, while striving to attain Christian perfection, shall be engaged in every work of charity, both spiritual and corporal, on behalf of the young, especially the poorer ones." [Constitutions of the Society of St. Francis de Sales, Article 1]

Mindful of what we read in the Book of Proverbs, "Hear, O children, a father's instruction; be attentive, that you may gain understanding," (4, 1) we shall begin with the duties that Don Bosco assigned to each of his co-workers.¹

¹ In this edition we have placed these regulations in Appendix 1 of this volume. [Editor]

CHAPTER 10

Sundays and Holy Days at the Festive Oratory

WE hope that our readers do not mind our resuming a subject we have already considered under a different light, namely how the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales kept its Sundays and holy days. It is, in fact, a pleasure to revive the image of Don Bosco in the field of his labors, to bring out examples of his charity so far unmentioned, and to recreate those days enlivened by the spirit of the new regulations. But first things first. Let us begin with the way in which the Sundays were usually celebrated and as Don Bosco finally sanctioned in Part II, Chapter 6 of his *Regulations for the Festive Oratory* on the basis of long experience:

1. Confession and Communion are our two principal practices of piety. Therefore, on Sundays and holy days, boys shall be given an opportunity to approach these two great sacraments.

2. Church services on Sundays and holy days shall consist of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, Holy Mass, bible or church history, catechism, Vespers, a moral sermon, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

In addition, five decades of the rosary was recited either in the morning or in the evening. Many devout people, religious included, considered so many practices of piety excessive, and feared that the boys might develop a dislike for them. But Don Bosco always replied: "I have called this place an 'oratory' to make it strikingly clear that prayer is [ultimately] the only means on which we can rely. We recite the rosary because from the very beginning I have put myself and my boys under the direct protection of the Blessed Virgin." Besides, he had the knack of carrying out these services in such a way that the boys never showed signs of tiredness or bore-

dom. Moreover, he had instilled in them the firm belief that Our Lord and Our Lady would reward their devotion with countless graces even of a material nature.

The little chapel at Valdocco opened early in the morning and Don Bosco stood at the door to welcome the boys who came running from all directions. They remembered his teachings:

We are Christians and therefore must show respect for everything especially those connected with the church which is called "the temple of God, a holy place and a house of prayer." Whatever we ask of God in church He will give us. "In it, everyone who asks, receives." [Cf. Matt. 7, 8]

My dear children, how much you please Our Lord, and what a good example you set for others by your devout behavior. Whenever St. Aloysius went to church, people flocked to watch him and were edified by his modest behavior. When you enter a church, do not run or make any noise but, after bowing to the crucifix or genuflecting to the Blessed Sacrament, go to your place, kneel and say the Glory Be three times in honor of the Blessed Trinity. If it is not yet time for church services, you may recite the Seven Joys of Mary, or perform some other act of devotion. Be very careful not to laugh or talk without need, because even a word or smile can give scandal or distract others.¹

The boys would go directly to where Don Bosco heard confessions and kneel down. Sometimes he would briefly prepare them for a good confession by exhorting them to have a filial trust in their confessor even if they only had some doubts bothering them. Then he would start hearing them. Many adults, not connected with the Oratory, also came for confession and Mass, and received Communion along with the boys.

Don Bosco regularly said Mass after hearing confessions, but if he could not because of other commitments, some other priest, usually Father John Vola, Jr., substituted for him.

The boys assisted with great devotion. Don Bosco could not bear the thought of boys attending Mass carelessly through mere habit. Those who were present in those early years tell us that often he

¹ A rather lengthy footnote has been transferred to Appendix 2 of this volume. [Editor]

would earnestly speak to them of the nature and the infinite value of the Sacrifice of the Cross. He repeated to them what he had written in *The Companion of Youth*:

It is truly a sorry sight to see so many boys knowingly pay no attention to the Mass, act irreverently and disrespectfully, remain standing and looking about with no embarrassment. By doing so, they renew, as of old, the sufferings of Calvary, give bad example to their companions and dishonor our religion. Therefore, my dear sons, assist at Mass as true and devout Christians with such modesty and recollection that nothing can distract you. Let your mind and heart be intent solely on honoring God. Picture to yourselves Our Lord undergoing His cruel passion and dying for our salvation. Be eager to go to Mass on weekdays also, even if it costs a sacrifice. Our Lord will reward you with His blessings and make you succeed in your undertakings. Pray for yourselves, your parents, relatives and benefactors, and for the souls in purgatory.

The boys took his words to heart. Even on ordinary Sundays, at Communion time, it was a very moving sight to see two hundred or more boys, ordinarily restless and unbridled, approach the altar with their hands joined and an expression of heartfelt devotion on their faces. Their eyes glowed with faith, and Don Bosco experienced a heavenly pleasure in giving them Holy Communion.

After Mass he gave a sermon, to which the boys listened with wrapt attention and pleasure. That year [1847], his talks were based on the Bible. When he exhausted the subject, he went on to church history and the lives of the popes.

So good was he at telling a story and so clear were his explanations that, when he questioned them, as was his wont, at the end of his sermon, the boys could not only repeat what he had said, but could also reply to other stimulating and important questions he used to put to them. We were told this by Bishop John Baptist Bertagna, who used to come to Valdocco to teach catechism as a seminarian.

We have already mentioned how, after the morning sermon, Don Bosco always wanted the boys to sing "Praised Forever Be the Names of Jesus and Mary" in reparation for the many blasphemies uttered throughout the world. Sometimes he himself would intone

this prayer from the pulpit and not wait for the cantor to do so. The boys would then file out of church while singing a hymn to St. Aloysius.

Most of them would go home for breakfast. For those who stayed behind, as we have already explained, there were various classes geared to their individual needs, like repeat courses in grammar or the metric system, taught either by Don Bosco himself or by others, as Father [John] Giacomelli informs us. Then there followed a recreation period supervised by Don Bosco. At noon all were dismissed for lunch.

Don Bosco was gratified by the way the boys responded to his great solicitude for them. At the beginning of the year, however, his delight was clouded by displeasure over the occasional harsh manners of his co-workers toward the boys. He himself told us: "One Sunday, I saw one of the bigger boys in charge mistreat one of his small companions. I was shocked, and it was all I could do not to intervene at once, but the next day, on meeting the older boy, I did not fail to give him a gentle reprimand."

Notwithstanding repeated warnings, however, he could not always prevent such things. Some of the older boys responsible for maintaining order were rather rough and demanding; on the other hand, their patience was often sorely tried. Particularly in church, they all too often dealt hefty blows to those few who dozed or caused trouble during the sermon or prayers, with the result that there were bad feelings both in and out of the Oratory. But Don Bosco disliked being harsh with or dismissing monitors who were otherwise good at maintaining order and were well-intentioned, so, when he was preaching, he pretended not to notice and tried to control himself. But he finally decided to end this abuse and he devised a remedy with young Joseph Brosio, who had been helping him since 1841 when Don Bosco was stationed at the *Convitto*. Brosio remained very close to him for forty-six years and was glad to relieve Don Bosco of this unpleasantness. It was his task to stand in the sanctuary and lead the prayers; as soon as these were finished, he began pacing up and down the church, thus forestalling any violent punishment on the part of his fellow assistants. Now and then he would nudge those who dozed, and, when he noticed that some tried to make themselves comfortable and thus invite

sleep, he would startle them into full wakefulness by unexpectedly disrupting their plans with some snuff stuck under their noses. Boys who chattered and wriggled were greeted with a stern, unsmiling look that made them obey, for Brosio was twenty years old and tall. If they did not take the hint, a threatening gesture brought results. Now and then he would also promise a small reward to those who behaved themselves, and by the time Don Bosco got into the pulpit, his flock of youngsters was perfectly quiet.

To these efforts Don Bosco added his own persuasive words both in preaching and in chatting with the boys in the playground. He would bring out examples of how necessary it was for boys when together, especially at the Oratory, to behave like brothers toward each other if they wanted to deserve God's blessings. Ultimately he succeeded. Unpleasant incidents and complaints came to an end.

As regards Don Bosco himself inflicting punishments, one of the boys who at this time frequented the Oratory, a certain Chiosso, tells us that Don Bosco very rarely punished. This happened, for example, when some boy acted rebelliously and insolently, swore or indulged in obscene conversation, and then only in those cases when, after remedying the scandal, expulsion would have been fatal to the boy's soul. On these occasions rarely did the boys notice that a punishment had been inflicted, and when they did notice they all sided with Don Bosco. Their comments about the boy in question were: "He deserved it." Even the culprits themselves agreed, for Don Bosco never let himself be swayed by his own wounded pride. His kindness was habitual with him.

This was the basis of his system, for he was firmly convinced that to educate boys one must find the way to their hearts and gain free access to it to uproot evil and plant the flowers of virtue. With his nice ways he took pains to make them open-hearted, candid and frank. To gain their confidence he did his very best to win their love and convince them that they were loved in return. Boys who were uncommunicative and kept their secrets from him, bad habits in most cases, and those who stood aloof or glum, or who dissembled were a thorn in his side. Also with these he did all he could to win their affection and penetrate their hearts.

Father Ascanio Savio who was staying with Don Bosco at this time, as we shall see later, told us that Don Bosco was always kind,

soft-spoken and paternal in his efforts to attract boys to the practice of virtue. He never saw him treat any of them with lack of courtesy or threaten any with punishment, not even the most thoughtless or unruly. This was the reason why the Oratory was swarming with boys and young men who, for the most part, received the sacraments every Sunday.

All who happened to talk with him, even if only once, were immediately won over by his noble, gentle manner, his cheerfulness and the timely graciousness of his words. This explains the irresistible attraction the boys felt for him. Their hearts were always open to him and trustful, and their faces radiated a special charm that seemed a reflection of their souls. They were so glad to be with him and found it so hard to part from him that they could never bring themselves to it of their own accord. Don Bosco himself just about had to make them go.

Joseph Buzzetti and others have told us many and many a time that Don Bosco's manner was so attractive, pleasing, loving, and I should even say, angelic, that he hardly seemed to be of this world at all. The spell of his holiness seemed to radiate from his eyes and smile. Boys around him were heard to exclaim over and over again: "He looks just like Our Lord!" a phrase that became habitual with them.

Yet it would be wrong to think that his gentleness was the result of weakness or indifference, for he also could show anger when God's honor was at stake. In such cases, anger may be an instrument of virtue, if controlled. Our Lord Himself was angry more than once with the Pharisees as we read in the Gospel: "Looking round upon them with anger, . . ." (Mark 3, 5) Anger well controlled is not inconsistent with meekness. During the course of these memoirs the zeal of our beloved Don Bosco will shine also in this respect.

CHAPTER 11

Sundays and Holy Days at the Festive Oratory (Continued)

SUNDAY afternoons at the Oratory were no less strenuous for Don Bosco than the mornings. After a hasty lunch at about one o'clock or half-past one, he again opened the Oratory gates. The boys came flocking back, eager to be with him once more, a feeling he reciprocated with a warm welcome. He made sure that they had plenty of things to play with. There was a rocking horse, a swing, a high jump bar and other kinds of gymnastic equipment. To forestall squabbles and fights, he carefully marked the spots where each group was to play without interference.

Meanwhile Father [John] Borel and Father [Hyacinth] Carpano would stroll about in the neighborhood on the lookout for boys coming from other boroughs to play in the deserted fields nearby. These boys did not know or did not care to know about the Oratory. As soon as they spied them, the two priests would invite them, in a friendly way, to come along with them, using gifts to entice those who were reluctant. They were rarely turned down.

When Father Borel and Father Carpano were not available, Don Bosco sent out one or more of his young catechists or clerics.

Meanwhile, at the Oratory, Don Bosco had given the boys their playthings and the games had started. He himself was always with them, as Father [Felix] Reviglio tells us, going from one group to another. Without their being aware of it, he sounded them out, to discover their moral character and needs. He would whisper confidentially to one boy or another some spiritual advice or an invitation to approach the sacraments, or he would linger with those who seemed to be lonely and try to cheer them up with some joke. He himself was always cheerful and smiling, though nothing ever

escaped his vigilant eye, for he was fully aware of the many dangers lurking among so many boys who differed in upbringing and temperament. He never relaxed his vigilance even when he had priests and clerics helping him, because he wanted to lay down a firm basis for that paramount tenet of his of never leaving boys by themselves.

Besides the priests already mentioned, others also helped Don Bosco in supervising the boys: Father [Felix] Rossi, Father John Vola, Jr., Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, Father Bologna¹ and several priests of the Convitto Ecclesiastico. These zealous ecclesiastics gladly gave their time to teach catechism or to preach. But not all of them could come to the Oratory every Sunday, and not even rarely could they mingle with the boys after the church services. Nevertheless, when they were able to come, it was always a heart-warming experience to see all play cease the moment these good priests made their appearance. The boys ran up and gathered around them and Don Bosco in small groups, asking for a story or singing a hymn to Our Lady. This always happened either at the start or at the close of each recreation.

Towards half-past two the religious services began again. It was wonderful to see the way perfect order was maintained by so many boys, even in the midst of their many exciting games. One stroke of the bell was enough to make them fall into line and march willingly toward the chapel.

It does not follow, however, that there were no exceptions. Sometimes a few newcomers, lured by their playmates or unruly by nature, tried to flee at the first sound of the bell. They would shrug their shoulders if someone tried to call them back, or scoff at anybody who urged them to stay. A firm hand was needed to get them back for a lesson in religion, about which they knew absolutely nothing, as well as to keep them from possible physical or moral harm if left to their own devices. In past summers, the urge for a swim in the Dora River or in one of the deep irrigation canals had cost the lives of several careless youngsters. Some mothers had brought their children to the Oratory, telling Don Bosco how unruly they were and begging him for his help. He therefore felt responsible to God for their souls. Sometimes he himself would

¹ Not to be confused with Father Joseph Bologna, a Salesian in later years. [Editor]

run after them and catch them right away; at other times he had to chase them for several minutes. Some would give in and laughingly let him bring them to the catechism class, but others would resist, and it took the patience of a saint not to become angry in the face of such obstinacy. One day Don Bosco was running after two of these boys and was flushed and out of breath. Suddenly, Father Giacomelli appeared from among the trees, exclaiming, "This is the second time I've seen you upset!" Don Bosco, who had finally overtaken the two fugitives and was holding them firmly by the hand, replied in a way that showed how calm he really was: "What do you expect? These blessed boys were trying to get away from church!"

At the Oratory Don Bosco had introduced some changes in the order of services. The recitation of the third part of the rosary now preceded the catechism classes. The boys were divided according to their age and knowledge and entrusted to their catechists. In order that the boys might get the most out of the catechism lessons, Don Bosco had assigned the older boys to the more learned priests and to some devout and competent laymen of the Turin aristocracy. Count Charles Cays and Marquis Dominic Fassati helped him greatly in this respect, as well as in the teaching of academic subjects. Usually Don Bosco reserved for himself the adults' catechism class conducted behind the main altar. When he could not be present, some distinguished priest, more often than not Father Francis Marengo, substituted for him.

In expounding the truths of our Faith and in rebutting the errors that were beginning to make headway, Don Bosco gave proof of possessing in an eminent degree the heavenly gift of understanding. He explained Christian doctrine in clear, simple terms adapted to the intelligence of all; it was a pleasure to listen to him. In this respect, as also in his ability to instill piety in the heart of young boys, he displayed a unique and rare talent, as Father Leonard Murialdo informs us.

The catechism classes lasted only half an hour. Five minutes before the end, the altar bell would ring. All the boys would then shout in unison, "Story! Story!" and the catechists without further ado, to the boys' great delight, would narrate some episode from the lives of the saints, church history, or the miracles of the Blessed

Virgin. The boys' shouting might have sounded irreverent in church, but Don Bosco knew that after sitting quietly for so long, they needed some outlet, and, until 1868, he gladly permitted it, for he was certain that the sound was also welcome to Our Lord. Besides the catechism lesson, in the evening, if other priests were not available, Don Bosco gave a sermon on some moral subject, and Benediction followed. Before filing out, the boys would sing a hymn.

Since Don Bosco felt a special love for the name of Jesus, often invoking it and writing it with great delight, he selected the hymn in honor of the Most Holy Name, which begins: *Su, figli, cantate* [Come, my children, sing]. Every verse ended with a refrain which he himself had composed, and in which the name of Jesus was repeated several times. He urged all to join in the singing with great joy and devotion.

At that time Don Bosco did not take part in all the exercises. When each group, including the one behind the main altar, had its own teacher and another priest was available for the sermon, he used to take a long walk around the neighborhood looking for stray lambs, that is, boys whom it was hard to win over.

Instead of attending church services, these youths would gather in the meadows or on the porticoes of farmhouses to gamble. Don Bosco would casually go up to them and unconcernedly watch the game. In the middle of the circle, on a chair or more often on the ground, lay a handkerchief on which they had piled the money they were betting. Card games were a craze. The youths played *tresette*, *asina* and *capra*,² all of which, the last one in particular, were illegal. As much as fifteen, twenty or more *lire* were piled on the handkerchief for each game. Often a quarrel would break out and end in a knifing.

Don Bosco would edge in and sometimes join in the game himself. However, when he saw that the handkerchief was well stocked with money and the players were heatedly flinging down their cards, quick as a flash, he would grab the four corners of the handkerchief, money and all, and dash off.

Startled, the boys would leap to their feet and run after him, shouting, "Our money, give us back our money!" But they were no match for Don Bosco, who had few rivals to outrun him. Now

² Typical Italian card games. [Editor]

and then, he would turn around and shout: "Don't worry, I'll give it back to you. Come with me! Hurry! Faster! I'll give you presents. You'll like them. Come on, run!"

As Don Bosco ran ahead and the others chased him, they would all reach the Oratory gate.

The chapel, at this time, would be full of boys and Father Carpano or Father Borel would be in the pulpit, but at Don Bosco's sudden appearance with this crowd of boys it became necessary to put on an act of sorts. The idea was to calm these youths, angered by the trick played on them, entice them in, and succeed in making them stay for the sermon. According to circumstances, Don Bosco would act the part of a storekeeper or of a boy reluctantly obeying his mother's orders to go to church. At other times, he pretended to be someone invited by the director to visit the Oratory, or just an Oratory boy bringing other friends along with him. The boys already in church would turn around and laugh, anticipating the scene that would follow, and straining to get a better look.

Sometimes Don Bosco would go down the aisle of the church, pretending to be a hawker, crying: "Candy! Candy! Candy, anybody?"

From the pulpit the priest would turn on him: "Listen you, get out of here! What do you think this is, a marketplace?"

"Right! I'm looking for business and here I see plenty of customers!"

"Is this the way you show respect for the house of God?"

The two speakers talking in the Piedmontese dialect, rich and expressive, enthralled their audience. The sermon then either continued, or the priest switched his talk to the respect due to the church, the keeping of Sundays and holy days, the evils of gambling and swearing, or the duty of confessing one's sins.

The youths who had followed Don Bosco into the church, startled at this unexpected turn of events, stopped to listen, laughed, and ended up by taking a seat, if available, staying until the dialogue was over. Father Borel and Don Bosco were so skilled at playing their respective parts of teacher and pupil, and so witty that they were able to keep up the play for even as long as an hour and a half, when, to the boys regret, they put an end to it.

There followed then the chanting of the Litany of the Blessed

Virgin. Don Bosco would still be at the back of the church with his freshly caught youths. One of them would ask in a whisper, "When are you going to give us back that money?" And Don Bosco would reply, "In just a couple of minutes, right after Benediction." Then, leaving the church with them, he would lead them to the playground where he would return their money, usually adding some special gift and getting a promise that they would come back to the Oratory every Sunday, and give up gambling. He would show them the interesting games the boys played at the Oratory; impressed by his nice ways, they would wind up becoming his friends and the following Sunday they would start frequenting the Oratory.

After church services and recreation there followed classes for the young apprentices, either before or after sundown according to the season. Don Bosco himself took over some of these classes. Then recreation was resumed until it was dark.³

An eye witness, Mr. [Charles] Castagno, [an Oratory boy in those early years], had the following to say about Don Bosco.

He was always the first to start a game, the very life of the recreation. Watchful and alert, he seemed to be in every corner of the playground, in the midst of every group, taking part in everything. If a dispute arose in one game, Don Bosco would ease the troublemaker out by telling him: "That group over there is one player short. Go, join them. I'll take your place here." He played ninepins, *bocce*⁴ and other games to the boys' great delight. If he noticed anyone unmannerly in words or actions while engaged in games of skill, he would hurry over and say: "Watch me. Let me do it!" And so it went. Don Bosco thus covered the whole playground, and he was always considered a good player to have, although it entailed a great deal of exertion and sacrifice on his part.

Another Oratory boy [of those early years], now advanced in age, tells us:

It was heartwarming just to see him in our midst. Some of us had no coats or they were in bad shape; others had trousers that were more rags than anything else; others, too, had no hat or their shoes were so worn

³ A rather lengthy footnote quoting a chapter of the Regulations for the Festive Oratory has been transferred to Appendix 3 of this volume. [Editor]

⁴ Italian lawn bowls played outdoors on a long narrow court. [Editor]

that the toes stuck out. We were a disheveled and, occasionally, quite grubby, ill-mannered, importunate and capricious lot, but he was happy to be with the poorest of us. With the smaller boys he was as gentle as a mother. If two of them started calling each other names and broke into a fight, Don Bosco would quickly run up to them and tell them to behave. But the two boys, blind with anger, would pay him no attention. He would then raise his hand as if to strike them, but would suddenly check himself and just separate them. Soon peace would be restored as if by magic.

He often divided the boys into two teams for a game, leading one himself. Both sides played so hard that players and spectators got very excited. One team wanted the honor of beating Don Bosco and his team, while the other was sure of undisputed victory.

Often he would mark a finish line and challenge all the boys to a race with, of course, a prize for the victor. After they were all lined up, Don Bosco would hitch his cassock to his knees. "Ready?" he would cry. "Get set! Go!" And the race was on, as a swarm of boys raised a cloud of dust and trailed Don Bosco. He always won. The last of these contests took place in 1868, when Don Bosco, in spite of his swollen legs, still ran so swiftly that he left eight hundred boys behind him, including some top racers. We were there ourselves and could hardly believe our own eyes.

Sometimes, when things slowed down, Don Bosco would fill his pockets with caramels and then fling some to various knots of boys. It was a mad scramble, as all tried to get some, while those who could not turned to Don Bosco shouting: "Give me one! Give me one!" Before they got too close, Don Bosco would dash off with the boys in hot pursuit. Now and then he would stop and hurl handfuls of caramels to them, and they would begin chasing him again, until his supply was all exhausted.

All those exertions fatigued him terribly, but what tired him most was his continuous talking from morning to night in the confessional, in the pulpit, in the classrooms and in recreation. The boys, a sizeable number of whom attended regular classes, asked him countless questions on all sorts of things: arts, crafts, inventions, languages, history, geography, the creation of the world, its destruction and aftermath, the deluge and the amount of water involved, always ending up with a long string of "whys". Don Bosco

had to give straight answers to all, since they would not have it otherwise, and he had to be very careful lest his answers be wrong or contradictory. The boys regarded him as a kind of oracle, and repeated what he said to their parents and teachers, who never found fault with Don Bosco's answers. Thus the boys came to have great respect for his learning; in their eyes his store of knowledge was something quite unique and unrivaled. This obliged him to be forever on the alert, for, were he to hesitate or blunder or only once say he did not know, he would lose, at least in the eyes of some, that halo which for their own good he was anxious to retain. And then, too, he knew that those of them who went to school also plied their teachers with the same questions. This fame as a walking encyclopedia and the esteem in which he was held were a strong tie binding the brighter boys to him, of whom there were many. Through them he was able to influence the several other hundreds who were unschooled, and thus it became easier for him to assert his fatherly authority over all. He had made it a rule to keep up with his boys' studies and whatever knowledge they might sooner or later necessarily acquire. This was an exacting and endless task which only one with a prodigious memory like his own could have attempted. We believe that some of his algebra notes, for example, including those on quadratic equations, date from this period.

Yet it would be fantastic to assume that Don Bosco was a walking encyclopedia. When he found himself really at a loss for an answer, he was clever enough to get out of a tight spot without losing composure. "Oh, do I always have to say everything?" he would remark. "Come now, don't you know that? At least this once, you give me the answer! If you really don't know it, then look it up because it is not too hard. I'll have a prize for the best answer next Sunday." All through the week the boys would research the problem, pestering their teachers, priests, and experts, and they would produce the answers triumphantly the following Sunday. Don Bosco too was ready, but he would enlarge on the problem by examining it in its different aspects and corollaries. If apropos, he would add historical background, thus presenting in an attractive manner what others had said in a few words. In the same way and with the same results he would ask them questions

on various topics. Keeping their minds busy he considered a very effective means to shield them from evil.

In church also, on closing his sermon, he would often propose some topic for study with a prize for the best answer. He had quite a reputation as a preacher among the boys. He was really so effective in describing the greatness of God in creating and preserving all things, and the manifestations of His mercy and justice, that the boys, even after they had left the chapel, still could not get over it, so impressed were they. Before they filed out, taking advantage of their enthusiasm, Don Bosco would refer to the subject of the sermon just concluded and say, "Next Sunday I want you to tell me why the Blessed Sacrament is called 'Eucharist' and what the original meaning of the word 'paradise' is." At other times he would propose that they explain the meaning of the word "death" or "purgatory" or the various meanings of the word "hell." Sometimes he would make them do some research on the Scriptures. "Find out for me the original language of the word 'park,' meaning royal woods and gardens, as used by Solomon in his books."

Throughout the week the boys would seek help from the many priests of Turin, and come back with theological answers, which were often not the right answer because the boys had failed to word their questions properly. He would then tell them: "You didn't get it right. Try again." So they would go back to the same priests for more information.

Sometimes no one would win the prize. Once he asked for the etymology of the Latin "peccatum." Nobody succeeded in finding the correct answer, although they consulted several experts. So Don Bosco sent for the *Matthiae-Martini Lexicon Philologicum* and read aloud that "peccatum" came from "pecu" or an abbreviation of "pecus" [sheep], because the wicked wander about like sheep, governed not by reason but only by their brute instincts. The problems he asked the boys to solve always had a moral.

Sometimes he would get a variety of answers substantially different. He would then say: "Roetti,⁵ go to my room and get me such and such a book." Flipping the pages as everybody stood very attentive, he would then read the only correct answer and give the

⁵ A young cleric. [Editor]

prize to the lucky winner. Father Ghiringhello, a theologian, once called on him to ask him in good spirit kindly to give the theologians in Turin a break, for they were exhausted by all the questioning from his boys. Don Bosco was glad, however, because he was thus putting many of his boys in contact with some of the more pious and learned priests of the city, while they in turn, by their gracious manners, were fostering in the boys a better liking for God's ministers.

Scenes such as these were a frequent occurrence, and took up quite some time, especially in summer. When night came, Don Bosco would give the boys a word of advice before dismissing them. He would caution them against getting involved in fights or calling their companions irritating nicknames; he would exhort them to do their duty out of love and not for fear of punishment, or encourage them to show great respect to all in authority, taking off their hats when they met them, reverently kissing ⁶ the hands of priests who came to the Oratory to help them, and replying to their questions simply and sincerely. He urged everybody to observe the Oratory regulations faithfully, and to vie with each other in being devout, modest and punctual at all church services.

More frequently, however, after assuring himself that all his little charges had a job, happy to know that none would be idle the next day, he would warn them against dangers lurking even for those who were determined to shun sin.

In the house, school, shop, store or factory where you work there may be some people carrying on indecent conversation. Let me tell you how to get out of this tight spot without offending Our Lord. If those people are subject to you, reprimand them severely and without fear. If not, walk away if you can; if you cannot, then do not take part in it neither with words nor with smiles, and say in your heart: "My Jesus, mercy . . ." Ignore what others may think. Some may scoff at you and make fun of you, but that doesn't matter. The time will come when in hell the laughter and scoffing of the wicked will turn into tears, whereas the abuse suffered by the good will be transformed into heavenly happiness. Remember that even those who mock you will feel compelled to admire you and will no longer dare to annoy you with their evil talk if they see you are loyal to God. St. Aloysius was so respected by his companions, whether

⁶ A customary mark of respect in many lands. [Editor]

younger or older, that no one ever dared to utter a reprehensible word in his presence. However, if, notwithstanding all your care, you should still be in danger of offending God, then flee, leave that place, that house, that job, that shop; endure any evil rather than endanger your soul. You may be sure that God and the Blessed Virgin will never forsake you. On my part, my beloved sons, I will do my utmost to help you find work and bread.

To encourage them to pay attention to the sermons and learn, he often announced that he would reward them by performing sleight of hand tricks or by giving them medals, holy pictures, pamphlets or other prizes. He offered also other inducements such as snacks, vocal or instrumental music, or clothing donated by various benefactors. Since they all knew that Don Bosco always kept his word, they were beside themselves with joy.

After such a strenuous day, with only a scanty meal to give him strength, Don Bosco was so tired he could hardly move. The young apprentices who were the last to leave, (the young boys went home a little earlier) would ask him, "Walk us to the gate."

"I can't," Don Bosco would reply.

"It's only a few steps . . ." They were so insistent that he complied. After walking a short distance, he would try to excuse himself, but the boys would not hear of it. "Just a bit farther, only as far as those trees." Patiently Don Bosco would move on. When he reached the spot he would stop, and three hundred or more boys, big and small, would crowd around him, begging for a story. Don Bosco would plead, saying: "No more! Let me go home. I'm very tired!"

"No, no," they answered. "We'll sing a hymn and you can rest a little. Then you tell us a nice story."

"Really, I can't."

"Just one! That's all."

"But don't you see I can hardly even talk?"

"Just a short one!"

Meanwhile, the crowd would grow around him, for passersby, including many soldiers who were then coming out of the saloons, would also stop. Curious, they stood waiting to hear what the priest would say. After the boys had sung two or three stanzas of the hymn *Lodate Maria* [Let Praises to Mary . . .] Don Bosco would

climb on a stone bench or a pile of gravel and say: "Well, I'll tell you just one more story, and then you'll have to go home." He would end the story, saying: "That's all! Good night!"

The boys and the curious who had gathered would reply, "Good night!" and then they would let off one last deafening *Viva Don Bosco*, after which they would scatter toward their homes or wherever they lodged. First, though, they all wanted to get near him to say goodbye once more.

At this point several of the bigger boys would raise him on their shoulders and carry him home while loudly singing their well-known song: *Andiamo, compagni, Don Bosco ci aspetta* [Let's go, boys, Don Bosco awaits us].⁷ When he got to his room he was usually so exhausted that to Mamma Margaret's call for supper, he generally replied: "Let me rest a while," and would fall asleep so soundly that no amount of shaking could wake him up. Sometimes, even while eating, after one spoonful of soup he would fall asleep with his head on the table. After a while, Joseph Brosio and the other boys who had remained to keep him company would carry him almost bodily to his room and he would collapse on the bed dressed as he was, unable even to turn on his side or move an arm or leg. He had been working steadily from four in the morning until ten and even later at night. It was even worse when a holy day occurred in midweek before he had yet recovered from his Sunday workout. When he returned at night, his mother, alerted by the martial songs of the boys accompanying him back from the Rondò, would meet him at the door and ask, "Are you still alive?" But her son did not seem to hear. He would climb up the stairs to his room, and sitting down on the first chair, trunk or bench he found, instantly fall fast asleep, occasionally not waking up until dawn. Certain mornings he awakened still half dressed, his back resting against the bed, his feet propped against the wall.

Self-sacrifice, heroic in our estimation, marked every moment of Don Bosco's daily labors, to which, occasionally, were added painful disappointments. Anyone who has been working with young people has experienced this. Don Bosco, however, was ever mindful of Our Lord's words, "By your patience you will win your

⁷ A song written by Father Hyacinth Carpano. See Ch. 48. For further information on Father Carpano see also Vol. II, pp. 271f, 334, 336, 389, 411. [Editor]

souls." (Luke 21, 19) Full of confidence in the help of God and the efficacy of a truly religious upbringing, he would often tell his boys, "I hope that one day we shall all be together in heaven!"

Amazing results rewarded his efforts and fulfilled his expectations. Joseph Buzzetti told us: "I saw a rapid transformation take place in hundreds of boys who, before attending the Oratory, were totally ignorant and unconcerned about their religion. They grew so fond of the Oratory that they could not keep away, and began frequenting the sacraments not only on Sundays, but also on holy days." Canon [John Baptist] Anfossi testified to what he had witnessed for many years: "I saw unruly young adults fervently attending church after spending only a few Sundays at the Oratory. Some, whose tenor of life had previously been far from exemplary, were now among the best; several would have welcomed the opportunity to humble themselves by publicly confessing their misdeeds, if Don Bosco had allowed them to do so."

This moral reform was constant. Don Bosco hoped that, in time, he would succeed in changing for the better at least a part of society. Not many years later, boys whom he had brought up in the practice of their Faith were to be found all over the world raising Christian families. "That this was his main purpose," Father Francis Dalmazzo wrote, "could be easily gathered from the tone of his voice and the way his eyes would look up whenever he had an occasion to say with the Psalmist: 'Praise the Lord, all you nations.'" (Ps. 116, 1)

CHAPTER 12

Solemn Feast Days at the Festive Oratory

THE Oratory was never closed during the year. Church services were held every Sunday and holy day, some more solemnly than others thanks to Don Bosco's efforts and labors. Outstanding were the feasts of St. Francis de Sales, from whom the Oratory took its name; of St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the boys' principal patron saint; of the Guardian Angel, patron of the Oratory; and the Annunciation, the Assumption, the Nativity, the Holy Rosary and the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin. On these occasions Don Bosco tried to excite greater devotion in the boys, especially by urging them to gain the plenary indulgence obtainable on each of them. He was anxious to have them grasp its importance and the requirements for obtaining it. "Remember," he wrote in his *Regulations for the Festive Oratory*, "that in order to gain a plenary indulgence you must fulfill the following conditions:

1. Confession and Communion.
2. A visit to our church.
3. Prayers for the intention of the Holy Father."

In his manuscript copy he wrote: "All the Oratory boys, especially those entrusted with some duty, are urged to seek these spiritual benefits and to approach the sacraments on these solemn occasions, to set the example for others."

He never let an opportunity slip by without warmly encouraging all to take part in a general Communion. For one reason or another, these general Communions usually took place at least once a month, but he never tired of promoting them. Nor was he aiming just at numbers; in every way possible he made sure that not a single one of these Communions be sacrilegious. As regards con-

fession, he kept repeating what he had already written in the above mentioned manuscript: "To gain indulgences one must first be in the state of grace, for no one can obtain the remission of temporal punishment if he is deserving of eternal." Concerning Holy Communion, he had frequently on his lips certain maxims which Oratory boys of those early years repeated to us. "Before you decide to receive the adorable Body of Jesus Christ, examine your conscience to see if you have the proper dispositions. Remember that if you do not intend to mend your ways after having sinned, that is to say you still intend not to give up sinning, even though you have gone to confession you are not worthy to approach the Holy Table and if you do, instead of growing in sanctifying grace, you will make yourself all the more unworthy and deserving of greater punishment. Instead, if you have confessed your sins and made a firm resolve to mend your ways, your receiving the Bread of Angels will please Our Lord immensely. When He was here on earth, although He welcomed everybody, He always showed a particular preference for devout and innocent children, saying: 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not hinder them.' [Mark 10, 14] And He blessed them. Listen, then, to His loving invitation and go to Him to receive not only His blessing, but Himself." Countless confessions were a tangible and consoling result of these exhortations.

These special celebrations imposed other duties on Don Bosco because he personally saw to all the necessary details. He decorated the chapel, trained the choir, taught the altar boys, borrowed the needed vestments from the Rifugio and set up in the sacristy whatever else was necessary. He also handled the printing of the program, sent out invitations or personally called on the benefactors of the Oratory, chose a host for the festivities, secured the priests for the solemn High Mass and for the sermon, and collected money for the necessary expenses, one item being a breakfast for all the boys, regardless of whether they had been to Communion or not. Those who are familiar with the running of an oratory can add to this list whatever I have omitted.

The boys' good behavior and inner joy matched Don Bosco's solicitude for them. For them the chapel was a bit of heaven. It was a delight to watch their genuine piety. Don Bosco's cup of happiness overflowed in knowing that they were all in the state of

grace, and in seeing them approach the Holy Table in a seemingly endless line.

In the evening, after Benediction, Don Bosco always found new ways to entertain them, especially with games that were played only on these more solemn occasions. Don Bosco would prepare a special place for the numerous benefactors and guests he had invited, with seats of honor for the more distinguished among them. He presided over everything, while his co-workers were spread among the boys in the adjacent playground to keep order among them. A few times a small brass band made up of friends of Don Bosco would enliven things. The entertainment would start with sack races, with prizes for the winners. There followed piñata games with clay pots full of cookies. Other prizes enticed the boys to climb "the tree of plenty," a grease pole with various goodies dangling at the top. Or they would try their skill at inching up a well-greased wooden incline. These feats were neither dangerous nor easy, but it was fun to see boys straining to go up slide suddenly back under their own weight, provoking wild laughter among the spectators. There were also illuminations of the windows and playground, balloons, and fireworks.

Often Don Bosco himself would put on a juggler's gown and stand before a little table prepared for the purpose to perform various sleight of hand tricks with his old skill, pulling large and small balls and other objects out of his magic box to the amazement of his audience. He made objects fly into people's pockets, or guessed the cards they held in their hands. His fingers were so strong that when he was with his boys he would break peach stones with his bare hands. If anyone had money he would borrow a *scudo*, saying, "I'm sorry, but I'll have to return it in pieces!"

"Go ahead," was the answer. Naturally those standing round watched eagerly as he grasped the coin in his four fingers and broke it in half. He kept entertaining his boys with his tricks until 1860.

The last time he did tricks of this kind, after convulsing them with laughter, he frightened them by making them look headless. There was a point to this trick. He often spoke to the boys about "being headless" or "allowing one's self to be beheaded." His purpose was to convey a hidden and important meaning: first, a boy

should strive to be humble and conquer his pride by submitting his will to that of his superiors and by accepting their rulings and advice in preference to his own immature decisions and whims; secondly, but this was less clearly and not as often mentioned, he was hinting at the obedience required in the religious congregation he intended to found through them when he invited them to stay at the Oratory to help him save other boys. At that time he could not yet speak openly of a religious congregation¹ and had to limit himself to broaching the matter casually to those boys he knew to be particularly good, generous, and especially devoted to him. Other games gave him a chance to urge lightheartedly some youngster or other to be good.

James Bellia,² Joseph Buzzetti and hundreds of their companions never forgot these entertainments, and told us of many others that always packed those evenings with so much fun.

On some of the more important feast days, such as that of St. Francis de Sales, Don Bosco would set up a "fortune wheel" with some tickets numbered and others blank. On a big table he spread the prizes, some quite valuable, which he had obtained from his benefactors. Each prize had a number. Before a great crowd of guests, a boy would turn the wheel. Don Bosco himself would fish out the tickets, which far outnumbered the prizes, and would hand them to those who had bought chances. Some of the guests would draw as many as ten or twelve blank tickets in a row and would take it with a smile, while the audience, especially the boys, would have a good laugh. The "fortune wheel" helped Don Bosco cover the expenses of these special events.

Luck, too, provided a means of keeping the boys pleasantly occupied. Approximately every three months, on the feasts of St. Francis de Sales, St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the Assumption, and All Saints he held a lottery.³ The prizes were mainly books of devotion, novels, framed pictures, crucifixes, medals, games and occasionally a few pairs of shoes or some yards of cloth for the more

¹ It was a time when in Piedmont religious orders were being vilified and suppressed. [Editor]

² An Oratory boy and later a diocesan priest. [Editor]

³ *Regulations for the Festive Oratory*, Part III, Ch. 5.

deserving. Attendance and good behavior determined the order in which the boys would draw tickets which entitled them to pick their own prize.

Besides these occasions, Don Bosco held other lotteries, less formal but no less attractive, practically every month. It was no mean work to number by hand some six hundred tickets and stubs, then fold the tickets and put them into a box. Besides, he also had to enter all the numbers in a ledger and specify the prize allotted. Standing either at his room's balcony or on a chair outside the church, Don Bosco would announce the rules of the lottery as he shook the box. Then very slowly, for he wanted to prolong the excitement as much as possible, he would draw out the numbers and read them aloud. The boys would push and shove against each other in the courtyard, their eyes riveted on Don Bosco or on the stubs they held in their hands. Sometimes, when he announced that there would not be prizes for all, the suspense would make them all the more attentive as everyone hoped to be one of the lucky winners. More often than not, though, Don Bosco arranged for everyone to win some little thing. Their interest would then be even keener, each wondering what he would get. Spread out on a table were several ties, a hat, a cap, a jacket, a cake, some fruit, candy and other desirable things. Bursts of laughter and much handclapping would greet the announcement of certain booby prizes, such as a baked potato, a carrot, an onion, a turnip, or a chestnut! The boy with the winning number never failed to come up for his magnificent prize. Sometimes the prizes were collective, that is, a number of boys would win a prize which they had to share, such as a large cake, assorted foods and drinks. Depending on the prize, there would be four, five or ten boys sharing it, but the first to win the prize could not claim it until chance would determine his other co-winners. The way such groups were thrown together always called for much comment and laughter, for temperaments differed considerably, and occasionally some of the co-winners were not the best of friends. However, everything went well and better feelings usually prevailed.

It must not be imagined, though, that Don Bosco was overgenerous on these occasions. Except in very few cases or unless his benefactors provided valuable gifts for the raffle, he knew how to

be thrifty and spend his money on more urgent needs. The prizes never cost more than ten *lire* and he was always able to find some generous-hearted person to pay for them. With the expenditure of only three and a half *lire*, Father Michael Rua tells us, he often managed to provide very handsome but inexpensive prizes and always to satisfy all the boys in a surprising manner. Don Bosco used to say: "Boys value things according to the way they have been taught. It isn't the value of the gift that matters, but the spirit with which it is given and its timing. This is what they like."

Don Bosco's affable ways made everything seem beautiful and desirable.

CHAPTER 13

Music Teacher

IN the previous chapter we spoke of Don Bosco's anxiety to do everything possible to give his boys an extra good time on special feast days and we also made a brief allusion to sacred music. We shall now speak about this at greater length to bring into ever sharper focus Don Bosco's untiring zeal. He passionately loved sacred liturgy; for this reason he continued classes in singing. Towards the end of 1847, and all through the following year he also increased the number of choirboys. But what difficulties he had to overcome! On his own, he had learned to play the piano, but since he could not afford such an expensive instrument, he used to practice at the home of a fellow priest. To keep his pupils on key and to accompany [outdoors] their hymns in honor of Our Lady, he bought a twelve-*lire* accordion in July, 1847. Then on November 5, 1847, for a mere thirty-five *lire* he bought a small harmonium for the Pinardi Chapel.¹ One can easily imagine how tuneful its notes must have been! It was operated by a hand crank, and its repertoire consisted of the *Ave maris stella*, the Litany of Our Lady, the *Magnificat*, and a few other sacred hymns. For countless years it had probably been moved on feast days from one country chapel to another. While it could do for ordinary feast days, it was useless when circumstances called for a change in the musical program. A piano, therefore, was becoming more and more necessary for Don Bosco's singing classes. Father John Vola, Jr. met this need by donating a harpsichord, or rather an ancient spinet, he had at home. "This has cost me thirty *lire*, don't forget!" he said with mock solemnity when the boys came for it.

Shortly after, Don Bosco picked about fifty bright boys who had

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 334f. [Editor]

fine voices and were musically inclined. Some of them he had already drilled in sight-singing; a few others belonged to the first Oratory choir we have already mentioned.² From long practice these boys were used to the method which Don Bosco had devised for them and to the kind of music he taught them. The great majority of the boys, however, had never sung before and knew nothing at all about music.

At all costs, Don Bosco wanted to solemnize the more important feast days by having his boys sing; the prospect of long months of practice to have them learn the pieces by ear did not discourage him. He had a hard time finding easy and suitable music, so he composed his own Mass, a *Tantum ergo*, and some settings for the psalms of Vespers, adding these to the pieces previously mentioned which he had already composed.³ His melodies were often adaptations from sacred hymns the boys already knew, to which he had added some original opening and closing measures. He would work in the more majestic and inspirational Gregorian melodies of antiphons or graduals, with only occasional slight melodic or harmonic variations. He would also compose a few simple solo melodies.

All this may sound so trivial as to be scarcely worth mentioning. Yet in all frankness we can say that this marked the first beginnings of that reform of church music which he so ardently desired to bring about. As a matter of fact, most contemporary choir directors, having only superficial knowledge of sacred music and little interest in learning, preferred to follow the trend of the time by botching the *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo* and other sung parts of the Mass with choral and solo parts from operas. They did the same with Vespers, and it was not uncommon to hear the *Tantum ergo* sung to the tune of a popular song. Sacred words set to worldly music was a form of sacrilege Don Bosco could never stand.

Sitting at his spinet with his new choirboys grouped before him, he would play the pieces over and over again, sing them himself, and then have the choir repeat them constantly until they were finally mastered. Progress was slow, however, because a number of boys had jobs and could not attend regularly.

On the eve of a feast day, Don Bosco would distribute the var-

² See Vol. II, pp. 300, 436f. [Editor]

³ See Vol. II, pp. 101ff. [Editor]

ious parts they were to sing, and then ready himself for some disappointment that would put his patience to new tests. The following day some choirboy, envious or resentful because he had not been given the part he liked, or for some other reason, would not show up on time, leaving Don Bosco in the predicament of either singing the absentee's part himself or replacing him with some other choirboy. Such conduct was all the more uncalled for since Don Bosco always saw to it that the choir and altar boys got a small reward or were treated to a special breakfast on these occasions.

The following Sunday the peevish choirboy would show up again as if nothing had happened. Don Bosco made it a point not to reprimand him and to overlook his fault lest the boy leave the Oratory for good. His paramount policy was always to subordinate everything to the salvation of souls. He used to repeat: "Patience smooths away lots of difficulties." As a preventive remedy, however, he started to teach the same solo parts to several boys at the same time. That took care of the trouble, for it no longer paid to act peevishly. Later on, though, at an opportune moment, Don Bosco would not fail to correct those in need of it and to curb their pride. He would exhort them to sing for the higher motive of pleasing God.

Singing formed yet another tie binding the boys closer to the Oratory and attracting others to join. Outsiders, including priests who visited the Oratory, marveled at this boys' choir that responded so well to its director, and it was not long before they asked and even begged for them to sing in their own churches.

No one but Don Bosco could have managed that choir. "I was the only one who could conduct them," Don Bosco would often say, laughing. Nobody else, in fact, could have read his score; it was simply illegible! Some pieces were clearly written out with all their notes; others had only a few bars. A symbol, a letter, or a number might mean a repetition, or a refrain. There would sometimes be a few plain chant notes. Indications as to key, accidentals and tempo existed only in Don Bosco's mind.

He was once invited to have his choir sing a Mass at the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation. He arrived on time with a few choirboys and the score of the Mass he had composed. The church organist was the renowned Maestro Bodoira. With a cryptic smile Don Bosco

asked him whether he intended to accompany the Mass, since it was quite new. "I think I'll manage," Bodoira replied in a huff, since he was extremely gifted at playing even the most difficult scores at first sight. Don Bosco gave him the score, but the maestro never even glanced at it. When it was time for Mass, he opened the score, looked at it, shook his head, and attempted to play it. The singers were all off key. "Who can make head or tail of this?" he exclaimed. "What key is it in?" Finally, sputtering he gave up and, grabbing his hat, he stormed out. Don Bosco, who had expected this to happen, took his place at the organ and skillfully accompanied the Mass to the very end; his choirboys never missed a note. The congregation was enchanted by the silvery tone of their voices and by the devout behavior of the boys whose faces radiated faith and innocence. When the choristers passed through the sacristy they were much praised. There were also praises for the organist who was presumed to be none other than Maestro Bodoira himself. This was a fine tribute to Don Bosco for having played the accompaniment so well, and it was all the more significant because of the circumstances. Our source of information is a former pupil of the Oratory in those early years, now a doctor of letters.

Don Bosco's innate taste for music filled his mind and heart with heavenly melodies, but he used to joke about the musical worth of his compositions. Nevertheless, his deep love of sacred worship inspiring them and his humble selflessness would deservedly entitle them with this scriptural verse: "In the presence of the angels I will sing your praise." [Ps. 137, 2]

Unassumingly and with scanty means, as usual, he had started a school of singing. Under his wise guidance it would not only enrich and enhance divine worship, but it would also perfect the moral and intellectual education of his pupils. The love and study of music was to become a permanent and distinctive feature of all his schools, because he considered it a necessary element of school life.

To show his regard for music, he started the custom of inviting to dinner on the feast of St. Cecilia five or six choirboys outstanding for their behavior and performance, a practice he kept up for many years.

His choir enthusiastically filled the needs of the moment, but

after a few months Don Bosco started a preparatory class and put a young man, James Bellia at its head. Don Bosco was not satisfied with just having the boys sing; he wanted to give them proper training. There were no teaching aids at his disposal. A chair placed on a small table against the wall had to serve as a music stand for placards on which he had printed by hand sight-singing exercises. When their other duties permitted it, Father [Louis] Nasi and Father [Michelangelo] Chiatellino gave more advanced lessons to those boys who, in Don Bosco's opinion, showed greater promise.

Meanwhile, news of this singing school had gotten around town. Since this was the first and only school with so many pupils, and since this was the first time that one teacher attempted to teach singing to a group of boys simultaneously, a great many visitors came to see what it was like. Don Bosco wrote:

Distinguished teachers like Louis Rossi, Joseph Blanci, Joseph Cerutti and others, came almost every evening for several weeks to listen to my lessons. This only apparently belied the old saying that no disciple is above his teacher because my knowledge of music was almost nothing compared to theirs. Nevertheless, there I was, teaching in their presence. They, of course, had not come to learn music from me, but were interested in the method which is now in use in all our schools. At that time any boy who wanted to learn singing had to find himself a teacher for private lessons. Only after sufficient training was a boy admitted to a choir. Then, under the direction of a good choirmaster, he would practice singing for either the theatre or the church.

The outstanding music teachers mentioned above were especially impressed by the silence, discipline and attention of the pupils, as well as Don Bosco's effective techniques in teaching so many of them at the same time. It was not classical music, but yet it had its difficulties. They could not get over the fact that Don Bosco could drill them in sight-singing and train them to sing high notes with no noticeable strain. They freely admitted having learned a few things from Don Bosco, whose method they later imitated.

Meanwhile, he was proving himself capable of coping with the task he had undertaken, and there was reason to believe that, either alone or with the help of others, he would exceed all expectations. In fact, that first singing class and that humble spinet were to pro-

duce outstanding musicians, not a few renowned organists, and hundreds of similar schools that were to make quite a name for themselves. In recognition of Don Bosco's achievements in vocal and instrumental music, the municipal authorities of Turin awarded him a prize of one thousand *lire*. On such occasions as these, he would not fail to instill in his boys respect for and obedience to the civil authorities, and his words were effective.

But he was not yet satisfied, for he dreamed of great choirs, not for concerts, but as a means for the faithful to express themselves in prayers and hymns. He was all for genuine Gregorian chant, but he wanted it well-prepared and so sung that the faithful could again find in the church services the charm of which the ancient Fathers, especially St. Augustine, had written. In later years he often used to say that what he liked most was to hear a boys' choir of about a thousand voices, divided into two groups, sing a Gregorian Mass in Mary Help of Christians Church. For him this was the height of the sublime.

Therefore, as early as 1848, on Saturday evenings, since no evening classes were in session, Don Bosco used to have a group of boys practice the correct reading of the Vesper psalms. Once they had mastered that, he taught them to sing the antiphons of the following Sunday, while a new group of boys was drilled in reading. What is surprising is that all these lads were just uneducated young apprentices. When, years later, many boys began boarding at the Oratory, he had them learn Gregorian chant in the very first few months of the school year. Those who came during the summer months were taught to read music and practice sight-singing while the other boys, who were already past this stage, were drilled in singing psalms, antiphons and Masses. He did this also because he desired that the boys, once back in their villages and towns, should help their pastors with the singing at church services, all the more so since he realized that little by little, human respect and ignorance would soon take their toll of church choirs. It was also his policy not to admit boys to singing class until they had learned Gregorian chant. For the contents of this chapter we are indebted to Father Michael Rua, Bishop John Cagliero and many, many others.

CHAPTER 14

A Favorite Confessor

FOR Don Bosco, religious festivals, playtime, games, vocal and instrumental music, raffles, and school were but means to accomplish one purpose: getting his boys to make good, frequent confessions. He gave no thought to his own inconvenience and sacrifice.

“My dear boys,” he would exhort them continually (and this same exhortation he inserted in the first edition of *The Companion of Youth*), “if you don’t learn to make good confessions while you are young, you run the risk of never learning at all. This would badly hurt you spiritually, and you would risk your eternal salvation. Above all, I would like to convince you that, whatever the sin burdening your soul, it will be forgiven in confession as long as you receive this sacrament with proper dispositions.”

To win their full confidence, he taught and explained what these dispositions should be, stressing nicely and convincingly that their confessions had to be sincere. At the same time, he knew how to present to their young minds the ugliness of mortal sin, and to their hearts reasons for loving God. “God is a good father, and is deeply grieved when He has to condemn any one to hell. We were doomed, and Jesus died to save us. Do we, then, still want to offend Him?” Then, after exhorting them further to keep their good resolutions and carry out their confessor’s suggestions to avoid relapsing into sin, he urged them to take these three all-inclusive resolutions and to ask the Blessed Virgin for help in keeping them:

1. To behave devoutly in church.
2. To obey parents and all other superiors promptly.
3. To fulfill zealously the duties of their state of life, and to

resolve to work for the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Furthermore, having formed the habit of greeting the Guardian Angels of people he met, Don Bosco also prayed to his boys' Guardian Angels for help in making them good. He further urged his boys to recite the Glory Be three times in honor of their heavenly custodians.

As a result of Don Bosco's kind, attractive ways, the boys felt gently drawn to his confessional, prompted not only by the love, esteem and confidence they had in him, but also by the realization that hearing confessions was his very life and consolation. Not at the Oratory alone, but wherever Don Bosco went, in towns and villages, youngsters felt mysteriously attracted to him for the very same reasons. He, in turn, regarded it as his crowning achievement to be always surrounded by clusters of boys, eagerly awaiting their turn to tell him the secrets of their souls. After having labored so long and arduously for them, he found his greatest delight and fulfillment in being able to restore them to the grace of God.

Sometimes, especially during the early years of the Oratory, as many as a hundred young boys, totally undisciplined, would cluster about him, all anxious to make their confession at once [without benefit of the privacy of a confessional]. It was perhaps the second or third confession they ever made, and their boisterous impatience would have dissuaded any other priest from hearing them under such conditions. With no catechists to monitor them, they quarreled to go first, pushing forward and being shoved back. It was a strenuous task to put order in that confusion, but eventually the youngsters would quiet down and kneel in silence. Don Bosco then, turning to the boy nearest him, would raise his hand to bless him, and the others close-by would all cross themselves as though about to begin their own confessions. Don Bosco, unperturbed, had to hear them standing up, keeping the other young penitents at arm's length as they tried to push forward while he put his ear to the lips of the youngster making his confession in a low voice.

An amazing change would come over the youngsters as they approached Don Bosco. They would suddenly quiet down, seemingly beyond any distraction, intent solely on unburdening their souls. Their faces would show how they understood Don Bosco's

brief advice, as silently they withdrew to a quiet corner to recite their penance. Here one could almost see the grace of God spreading its merciful wings over Don Bosco and his charges!

In a short time, too, the behavior of the boys waiting for their confessions took a turn for the better, even though there was still room for improvement, as will be clear from what follows.

Don Bosco was unfailingly courteous and cordial in greeting all boys, even if they were rude, ignorant, careless and unprepared for confession, and he always found a way to lead them all to God. Once he characterized certain youngsters as follows.

They come to the confessional, but don't utter a word, and when they are questioned, they say nothing. If confessions are heard in church, such lads should be called to the front of the confessional, instead of remaining at the grating, for then they will answer more readily. Further, if the priest places his hand over their heads, it helps keep them from gaping around, as they usually do. Generally they open up, but, at the start, the priest must have much patience in kindly and tactfully asking and repeating questions to get them to talk. I have come across boys from whom I first thought I could never extract a single word, but, thanks to a rather unusual trick of my own, I managed to make them talk. When they would not answer my routine questions, I would switch to unusual ones, such as:

"Did you have your breakfast this morning?"

"Yes!"

"Were you really hungry?"

"Yes!"

"Have you got any brothers?" And so on. Once the ice was broken, they kept answering other questions about the state of their conscience and made a clean breast of it.

This is not the time to dwell at length upon the various expedients he used to help his young charges make a good confession. We shall come to that later. Now we shall only speak of the large number of penitents who chose him as their confessor.

Very often, on Saturdays, Don Bosco stayed as long as ten or twelve hours at a time in the confessional, while his once restless and mischievous charges patiently awaited their turn. When confessions went on past eleven or midnight, Don Bosco would often doze while hearing some boy's confession. On noticing it, the lad

would stop and, not daring to wake him, would wait for a while, and then sit down on the kneeler until Don Bosco should awaken. Usually, an hour or two later, Don Bosco would hear the snoring of the boy, who had also fallen asleep. By now it would be three or four in the morning and the sacristy of the Oratory would present a strange sight. Boys were sprawled all over the floor, sound asleep in a variety of comical postures: some kneeling and resting their head against the wall; others squatting, head down on their arms crossed over the knees; others with their legs stretched on the floor and their backs leaning against the wall; a few propped on the next boy's shoulder; others spread-eagled on the floor.

Don Bosco had to smile as he surveyed the scene. These lads had not gone home and yet their parents had not even troubled to come looking for them. They were all on their own. Before coming to the Oratory they had roamed the city at night, free to get into trouble that would inevitably land them jail and perhaps jeopardize their eternal salvation. Yet here they were, peaceful in heart and far from all danger of wrongdoing, patiently waiting for a chance to cleanse their souls of sin.

Upon hearing Don Bosco stir, some of the boys would wake up, look around, and meet Don Bosco's smile.

"What are we all doing here at this hour?" Don Bosco would ask.

"There's no point in going home now," someone would reply.

"Well, then, let's get on with confession!"

"Yes, let's!"

So Don Bosco resumed his role. Those who were awake began making their confession, while the others peacefully slumbered on until they were awakened one by one in time to prepare themselves properly.

Meanwhile dawn was approaching, and repeated knocking on the door announced the arrival of boys coming for Mass. The newcomers now invaded the sacristy, and confessions would continue with no letup until nine or ten.

"Many a time," Joseph Buzzetti told us, "I saw Don Bosco spend whole nights hearing confessions. At dawn he would still be where he had been sitting at sunset of the day before!"

One evening, the eve of a solemn feast, as the clock struck ten many boys were still waiting for confession.

"I think it's time to get some sleep, boys," Don Bosco suggested. "It's very late!"

"Please go on," they begged.

Don Bosco obliged, but after a while, one after another, they all dozed off. Don Bosco followed suit, resting his head wearily on the arm of a boy named Gariboldi whose confession he was hearing. The boy's hands were folded, his forearm resting on the kneeler. Don Bosco did not awaken until around five in the morning. Seeing all the boys stretched out on the floor asleep, he turned to poor Gariboldi, who had been awake all night, and said, "It's really time we all went to bed."

As he spoke the boys awoke and Don Bosco resumed confessions. That afternoon, at about two o'clock, Don Bosco noticed that Gariboldi's right arm was in a sling. "What happened to your arm, young fellow?" he asked.

"Oh! nothing," he answered, unwilling to say more.

Don Bosco was not to be put off by the answer; it was not like Gariboldi, who was so talkative and outspoken. He pursued the subject.

"Well, if you really want to know, I'll tell you!" the boy replied. His arm was black and blue because all night long it had been pinned to the armrest of the kneeler by Don Bosco's head. He had not awakened him out of respect, although the pressure on his arm had been quite painful. A fine example of the affectionate esteem the boys felt for Don Bosco!

On some Sundays Don Bosco might have a preaching engagement outside Turin. When the boys came to the Oratory and did not find him, they would ask Mamma Margaret, "Where's Don Bosco?"

"He's out. He went to Carignano."

"How do you get to Carignano?"

"First you go to Moncalieri, and there you come across a wide road that will lead you straight to it. What do you want with him?"

"We want to go to confession!"

"There is a priest taking his place."

"But we want Don Bosco." Thereupon the boys would set out

for Carignano as though it were just around the corner. They would get there around eleven, covered with dust, weary and hungry. Nevertheless, they would go at once in search of Don Bosco. On finding him they would call out, "Oh, at last, Don Bosco! We want to make our confessions and then receive."

"Are you still fasting?"

"Of course!"

Don Bosco would return to the church, hear their confessions and give them Holy Communion. Meanwhile he was rather worried about feeding them. He could not send them back fasting. The local priests of the parish, however, sensing his distress and moved by the boys' piety would always come to his aid generously. After the repast, [when the time came for the afternoon services], the boys would go into the choirloft and sing Vespers, the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and the *Tantum ergo* (which they had learned in their evening classes) to the delight and amazement of the villagers. After church services, they would start back on the long trek home. Such incidents were repeated many times at Sassi, Superga and other nearby localities. If the boys happened to get there before Sunday Mass, they would also sing it. Their joy knew no bounds if in the evening Don Bosco would walk back to the city with them.

In those days all the boys wanted nobody but Don Bosco as their confessor. Although he usually invited other priests to help him, among them Father Louis Dadesso, an Oblate of Mary, very few, if any, availed themselves of their services. Thus it happened that these additional confessors stayed in church briefly and eventually stopped coming. Rather than go to confession to somebody else, the boys preferred that the Mass be delayed, and did not mind waiting patiently and prolonging their fast until they could receive Holy Communion. Actually, this Mass was never celebrated at any rigidly fixed time since Don Bosco could never start until he was through hearing confessions.

We have had occasion to hear many of these boys (now grown men) talk of their singular and devoted affection for Don Bosco. "He was our spiritual director for five, eight, ten years," several would say, "and if we are what we are today both as citizens and as Catholics, we owe it all to him."

Of the conversions that were the result of Don Bosco's love of

his fellow men we can only know an insignificant fraction. We shall cite just one incident which we ourselves witnessed. The sacristy was full of boys kneeling on the floor while a tall and powerfully built young worker, about twenty years old, was making his confession with great concentration. It was the first time he had ever approached Don Bosco. In a very audible tone he began to tell his sins which were neither few nor slight. Don Bosco cautioned him to lower his voice and vainly tried to muffle it with a handkerchief. The boys nearest the penitent even nudged him and whispered to him to talk softer. He paid no heed and continued in the same vein, occasionally kicking those who kept tugging at his sleeve. The boys had to plug their ears. Finally, after receiving absolution, the young worker kissed Don Bosco's hand so loudly that a ripple of laughter went through the crowd. He then arose, radiating peace, joy and humility. As he made his way through the boys, some whispered: "Why did you talk so loud? Everyone could hear your sins." The young man stopped, spread out his arms, and exclaimed with great candor: "So what? I *did* commit those sins, but Our Lord has forgiven me. I'm going to turn over a new leaf! And that's all there is to it!" So saying, he knelt apart from the rest and spent a half hour in thanksgiving without stirring.

Toward the end of his life Don Bosco used to reminisce over these incidents. As we listened intently he told us:

You can't imagine how much I regret being no longer able to spend some time with the day pupils, especially the apprentice bricklayers. With God's help, I used to have a chance of doing them a great deal of good. To this very day I am thrilled whenever I can talk briefly with them. In those early years they thought so much of me that they would have done anything to please me. For instance, I would ask someone, "When will you come for confession?"

"Whenever you say. I'll even come every Sunday."

"No. Every two or three weeks will do."

"Very well. I'll do that."

Then I would continue, "Why do you come to confession?"

"To be in the state of grace again."

"Good! That's what matters most. But is that your only reason?"

"Also to acquire merit."

"Any other reason?"

“Because Our Lord wants it that way!”

“Anything else?” Then, since the youngster did not know what else to say, I myself would add: “And also because it pleases Don Bosco who is your friend and has your interest at heart. Isn’t that so?” These words would move him deeply and he would take my hand and kiss it, sometimes even shedding tears of joy. I used to say that in order to give them an ever greater confidence.

Don Bosco was not just a man. He was above all a priest. He sought the boys’ love in order to offer it to God. With this end in view, in his *Regulations for the Festive Oratory* he offered practical suggestions for worthily approaching the two great means of grace, the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist.¹

¹ In this edition we have placed these regulations in Appendix 4 of this volume.
[Editor]

CHAPTER 15

A Boy's Idol

IN every boy Don Bosco saw and loved the image of the boy Jesus and he spared no effort to make the grace of their Divine Model shine in them. In turn, with the unerring intuition of youth, the boys were utterly certain of the purity of his motives and of his readiness to sacrifice himself for them; willingly they accepted his guidance. Thus, he was able to direct them not only on Sundays, but also during the week when they could not attend the Oratory. This trust and confidence were also a result of his solicitude for them in the evening schools. All his pupils had a copy of *The Companion of Youth* and in reading it they would remember what he had told them in his sermons.

The first virtue a boy should practice is obedience to his father and mother. Pray for them every day so that God will grant them every temporal and spiritual blessing. After your morning prayers, go to your parents and find out what they wish from you, and do nothing without their consent. If necessary, help them with the household chores; show them especially any money or goods you may have received as a gift or as payment, and use them as they suggest. Always be honest with them; never cover up your faults with excuses, or deny them, which is even worse. Always tell the truth. Besides being sinful, lies make us resemble the devil, the greatest liar ever. Moreover, when the truth is discovered, you will become known as a liar and you will acquire a bad reputation with your superiors and fellows. During the day the boy who wants to live his Faith should attend to his duties and sanctify them by saying: "O Lord, I offer You this work. Give it Your holy blessing." Say grace before and after meals. Do not feel embarrassed to act as a Christian even outside of church.

During the day, read about some saint, such as St. Aloysius Gonzaga, or look over one of the short readings at the beginning of this book. Once

in a while recall the advice your confessor gave you at your last confession. Morning, noon and evening, say the *Angelus*. Escort the Holy Viaticum when it is brought to the sick, and if you cannot do this, recite an Our Father and a Hail, Mary. Say them again when the bell tolls for the dying, if you cannot go to church and say a prayer. When it tolls for the dead, recite the *Requiem æternam* three times for the souls that have just passed into eternity. Every evening, if you have not done so before, recite the third part of the rosary together with your brothers and sisters, devoutly and without haste, without sprawling or squatting on your heels. After your night prayers, spend a few moments examining your conscience, and if you find you have committed some mortal sin, make a sincere act of contrition, resolving to make your confession as soon as possible.

For boys living with their families *The Companion of Youth* contained other very valuable suggestions for avoiding sin, while to those who were away from home Don Bosco offered similar advice, although more briefly, in his *Regulations for the Festive Oratory*.¹

Such norms proved to be valuable spiritual aids to the boys, because many of them followed them in their entirety, and the others did so at least in their substance. As regards practices of piety, the boys rarely failed to carry out at least some of them daily.

During the week, though, Don Bosco continued to visit his boys at their jobs, lest he lose the fruit of his Sunday gatherings, a custom he had started ² when taking courses at the Convitto Ecclesiastico. He considered it important to meet their employers in their own workshops or stores, especially when he was able to give or receive good news about the young apprentices. These people could notice how much their apprentices had improved since they had started frequenting the Oratory, and often they appealed to Don Bosco for more boys, since they knew by experience that they would be honest, obedient and diligent. Nevertheless, Don Bosco always kept an eye on their conduct. The employers invariably expressed their deep satisfaction; not only were the boys well-behaved, but they also made rapid strides in learning the skills of their trade.

¹ A rather lengthy footnote has been transferred to Appendix 5 of this volume. [Editor]

² See Vol. II, p. 74. [Editor]

Since Don Bosco never failed to give praise where praise was due, the boys felt spurred to do even better. It was a genuine delight for both employers and apprentices to see Don Bosco show up in their workshop, and when he took his leave they would beg him to come again. This he invariably did, often bringing along some new apprentice. In Turin, he often ran into young boys who would ask for money. Frequently he did not have a cent to give them, and so he would encourage them in a kindly way to trust in Divine Providence, and urge them not to be idle but to look for a job. He would also invite them to the Oratory on the following Sunday. If, through no fault of their own, they still could find no work, then, as a loving father, he would recommend them to some employer. Father Giacomelli and Canon John Baptist Anfossi several times accompanied him on these visits to the workshops, visits which Don Bosco kept up for many years.

Not only young apprentices but also boys working in stores throughout the city showed their love and gratitude for Don Bosco. Let a few incidents suffice.

In Turin at that time it was a familiar sight to see boys suddenly dart out of doorways and stores to press round him and kiss his hand. Onlookers were touched by such a show of affection and admired Don Bosco's endless patience under the circumstances. Father [Stephen] Giorda, pastor at Poirino, once saw him surrounded by swarms of boys who, in their eagerness to greet him, almost knocked him over. Annoyed at what he considered excessive familiarity, the priest drew near and scolded the youngsters to make them scatter, but Don Bosco gently remonstrated, "Leave them alone, they mean well!"

One evening Don Bosco was walking along Via Dora Grossa, now Via Garibaldi, and he passed a clothing store with a glass door. A young boy from the Oratory worked there as delivery boy. Seeing Don Bosco, the boy was overjoyed and dashed out to greet him. He forgot about the door and smashed the glass to smithereens. Don Bosco turned and, stepping gingerly amid the debris, opened the door for him. The boy, deeply embarrassed, came close to him, followed by the proprietor who was understandably quite upset. A crowd gathered. "What happened?" Don Bosco asked the boy. The youngster frankly replied, "I saw you passing by and I

wanted to say hello to you so badly that I forgot about the door and ran into it." The proprietor, though, had not yet regained his composure and kept blaming the thoughtless boy. "Why be so hard on him?" Don Bosco asked. "Can't you see it was an accident?"

"Yes, but see what happened! Who's going to pay for it?"

"It won't cost you a penny," Don Bosco replied. "Just leave this poor boy alone. It's somehow my fault, and I'll pay for it."

"Well, in that case, I won't say another word. Who are you, may I ask?"

"I'm Don Bosco. I live at Valdocco."

By now the proprietor's wife had come out, a kind looking lady. "Oh, you are Don Bosco," she said, and, turning to her husband, added, "Why don't you forget about it? Don't you know that Don Bosco hasn't got money to throw away?"

"But who is going to replace this glass?" insisted the merchant. The woman said nothing, but the following day she came to the Oratory to see Don Bosco. "I hope that our dear Charles won't try going through glass doors again. Here is money to pay my husband, but please don't tell him where it came from. You shouldn't have to worry about this. A boy's generous impulse and your kind work for many poor boys should not suffer because of an accident. Ask God's blessing for me."

Another time, Don Bosco was passing by St. Lawrence Church with Father [Anthony] Cinzano, his pastor at Castelnovo. Several young bootblacks and chimney sweeps, twelve or thirteen years old, were leaning against the wall, soaking up the spring sunshine. Spotting him, one of the bootblacks cried out, "Don Bosco! Let me shine your shoes."

"Thanks, friend, but I'm in a hurry."

"I'll shine them in a jiffy!"

"Another time. Just now I can't."

"But I'll be quick. I really want to!"

At this point a chimney sweep broke in, "Stop bothering him!"

"I'll talk to anyone I please!"

"Can't you see he's in a hurry?"

"So what? I happen to *know* Don Bosco, see?"

"I know him too."

"But I'm a *friend* of his."

"So am I."

"But I like him more than you do."

"That's what you think!"

"I do."

"Says you!"

"You'd better shut up!"

"Make me!"

"You want me to push your face in?"

"You? Just try!"

"You're crazy!"

"So are you!"

Like a flash they went for each other, rolling on the ground and grabbing each other by the hair. In the melee the shoeshine kit was overturned and its contents spilled all over the sidewalk. Don Bosco stepped between them. "Break it up, break it up, my boys! This is no way to settle things!"

It was quite a job to separate the two scrappers. They stood glaring at each other.

"I still say I like him more than you do!"

"I've been to confession to him."

"So have I."

"He gave me a medal."

"He gave me a book!"

"Don Bosco, isn't it true that you like me better?"

"You're crazy! He likes *me* a lot more!"

"Don Bosco, you tell us! Whom do you like better?"

"Well," exclaimed Don Bosco, "this is quite a problem! Look at my hand." He held out his right hand. "Do you see my thumb and index finger? Do you think I would want to lose either one of them? Which do you think I like better?"

"You like them both, of course!"

"Right! I feel the same way toward you. You are like these two fingers, and it is so with all my boys. That's why I don't want you to fight over it. Come along with me, and let's forget about this scrap. It doesn't help anybody. Let's go." So Don Bosco walked on with the two boys close to him, followed by the other chimney sweeps and bootblacks, and by a small crowd that had been attracted by the scuffle. He walked with this motley crew as far as the

basilica of SS. Maurice and Lazarus chatting amiably with them all the way. There they parted, and the boys sat down on the steps of the church to enjoy the sun.

Eventually, that chimney sweep, a native of the Aosta valley, became a boarder at the Oratory and distinguished himself for his good conduct and talent. His mother came to visit him one day and was taken aback to learn that he was studying for the priesthood. "A chimney sweep going to be a priest?" she exclaimed. "Impossible!" It was too irreverent for her. Don Bosco told her to wait and see, and she agreed. Unfortunately, the boy became seriously ill and had to return home, where he died a saintly death.

"How many fine lads there were among those chimney sweeps," Don Bosco used to say. "Their faces may have been black with soot, but how pure their souls were!"

He was particularly solicitous for them. Whenever he met chimney sweeps he would give them money and invite them to the Oratory. In those years they were the special objects of his pastoral care. These young Savoyards used to come down from their mountain homes, all innocence, with no inkling of the evil they would come across in the city, and knowing no dialect but their own. They needed instruction in their Faith. Especially had they to be protected from evil companions. Don Bosco's efforts were successful. He won their trust, often provided their livelihoods, watched over them and by his advice kept them from evil. In turn, they responded to his care and were a source of great consolation to him. Don Bosco's efforts to recruit boys for his festive oratory, especially for the Lenten catechism instructions continued until the year 1865.

While caring for poor boys, he in no way neglected adults and their families, especially on weekdays. Usually he lunched around noon; immediately afterward he set about writing petitions on behalf of needy people. This act of charity might seem insignificant, but it actually ought to be considered one of his outstanding achievements. When Turin was the capital, these unfortunate people frequently appealed to the king and to his ministers for help in their straitened circumstances. Their needs were grave and urgent, but unfortunately many of them could not write, nor could they find anyone to write for them gratis. Some could not even afford to buy stationery. Consequently, a great many of them came to the Ora-

tory, where Don Bosco would patiently listen to the recital of their woes and send them away satisfied. During the first five or six years [since the establishment of the Oratory at Valdocco] he personally attended to this task, very tedious in itself, but rewarding and gratifying to him. Later, when a room could be spared as a reception office, he arranged for one of his young clerics or another suitable person to sit there at certain hours and write petitions for those in need. He made sure of this especially when he had to be absent from Turin. He even supplied the stationery, which in the long run was not an insignificant cost. From 1847 to 1870 and even later, a day never passed without someone coming for help. Many of these petitions were sent to the most illustrious and wealthy families of Turin. Thousands of people were helped in this way and of course the Oratory became a well-known part of the neighborhood.

When married men came to him for help, Don Bosco always asked them if they had children. If they did, he gave them some advice for their upbringing and made them promise to send their boys to the Oratory for catechism. He also extended his priestly care to boys recommended to him by out-of-town friends. These lads came to Turin to advance themselves in some art or trade.

Charles Tomatis, now an art teacher at the Royal Technical School of Fossano, in 1847 was studying painting and plastic modeling under Professor Boglioni. One day Don Bosco dropped in at the studio and engaged the young student in conversation asking him his name, where he came from and what he was doing. Tomatis answered politely and asked in turn, "Who are you?" Don Bosco replied, "I'm the mentor of all the young rascals at Valdocco. Come to see me this Sunday and we'll have a fine time together!" He had gone to the studio to see Tomatis because Father Bosco [no relation], a teacher in the Fossano seminary, had recommended him. After that first meeting, the young man could not wait for Sunday to come. He hastened to Valdocco where he found the Oratory packed with boys, for the most part young apprentices. From then on, he spent every Sunday and sometimes even weekdays there.

The first time he went during the week, it happened to be a Thursday,³ and Tomatis was surprised at the large number of boys he found there. They attended the various private schools in town

³ A regular school holiday in Italy. [Editor]

and on that midweek holiday they flocked to the Oratory to be with Don Bosco and take advantage of the various games and play equipment that he placed at their disposal till late evening. Don Bosco used to spend the whole day with them. To lead them to God he used the same method he employed with the boys of the poorer classes. The results were the same and they too felt drawn to Don Bosco. Many of them he knew from the time when he was teaching catechism in the municipal schools,⁴ but he met others for the first time when their friends brought them to the Oratory.

On Thursdays Don Bosco did not have to exert himself physically as much as on Sundays, for these boys were better behaved, more intelligent and better educated. The mental strain was greater, however, for they continually badgered him with questions about literature or science, and he gave them extra assignments for the following week.

On dismissing them, he always exhorted them to shun idleness and to apply themselves diligently to their studies.

I don't mean that you should study from morning to night without a break. I care for you and am quite happy to let you have as much fun as possible, as long as it is not sinful. But I must urge you to choose pastimes which combine fun with usefulness; for example, the study of history or of geography, of the mechanical and liberal arts, of vocal and instrumental music, of drawing and similar hobbies, and also those household chores which not only serve as a diversion but add to your experience and please your parents and superiors. Whenever you have nothing particular to do, set up some little altar, work on your scrap book, go over your books and papers.

You can also have fun with games and other pastimes which truly will refresh you in body and mind. However, always ask your parents' permission first, and, while so engaged, occasionally lift your mind to God and offer up your enjoyment for His glory and honor.

Another frequent recommendation of his was: "Receive the sacraments often; be devoted to the Blessed Virgin; consider bad books worse than a plague; avoid bad companions even more than poisonous snakes."

On Thursdays Don Bosco also used to call a meeting of his catechists and others on the Oratory staff. After the reading of

⁴ See Vol. II, p. 273. [Editor]

some chapters of the regulations, he would exhort each one to practice the articles pertaining to his particular office. If anything required correction, it was mentioned and suitable measures were proposed to straighten it out. Don Bosco would also recommend that the staff give good example to all the boys by zealously performing their religious duties, particularly by going to confession and Communion at the Oratory, as this would edify and encourage others to do likewise. He would also remind them that since they were better educated, it was very desirable that they should entertain the other boys with wholesome stories during recreation periods. Above all, he urged them to show the utmost deference to the priests who helped him in the Oratory, and never to leave the premises without their permission. He also used to tell them often, "Whenever you happen to see or hear something improper, privately let the superior know of it so that he may prevent any offense against God."

[Though Sundays were Don Bosco's hardest days], weekdays afforded him little rest; they only gave his work variety. He was always ready to write letters or pamphlets, hear confessions or preach. Several times a day, if he had to attend meetings of any sort where others were present, he would give a short talk on the truths of our Faith or some of the moral precepts.

Whenever he returned from an out-of-town assignment, he was always given a joyous welcome by his Oratory boys. Usually they inquired about the time of his return and would wait for him at the Po or Mosca Bridge. As soon as the stage coach rolled into sight they would shout, "Hurrah for Don Bosco!" and swarm around the carriage while it was still in motion. The coachman would fly into a rage, yell at them, threaten them with his whip and call them all sorts of names, but to no avail, because the boys continued to run alongside the carriage, hailing Don Bosco until they came to the city gates. People stopped to look at the crowd of boys, happy but panting, while Don Bosco smilingly waved at them and greeted them by name. When the coach came to a halt there was such a crush of boys at the door that the passengers could hardly get out. The coachman would jump down from his seat and try to clear the way by cuffing the boys right and left. As he got out, Don Bosco would say to him: "Let the poor boys alone! They're friends of mine."

"Is that so? Obviously you don't know much about them. They're nothing but a pack of rascals and good-for-nothings. Get going, all of you!"

It was all in vain! They clustered around Don Bosco to kiss his hand and accompany him home while the coachman, shrugging his shoulders, drove off in a huff.

We'll close this chapter with another incident. On the evening of All Souls' Day in 1853 the boys boarding at the Oratory were returning from a visit to the cemetery. Don Bosco had fallen a little behind. Suddenly at the sight of him, bootblacks, match sellers and chimney sweeps in Piazza Emanuele Filiberto sent up a shout of joy and swarmed around him, filling the air with jubilant cries. Smiling, Don Bosco stopped. The Oratory boys, among them John Francesia,⁵ halted to watch the moving scene. People crowded around. The sentries of the nearby barracks did not know what to make of it, while other soldiers rushed to the gate to look. The carabinieri also came running up to see what was wrong—an accident or a robbery, or even the beginning of a riot? Don Bosco meanwhile walked on as if in triumph, in the midst of his young admirers. It was a wonderful demonstration of the sway of religion over the hearts of these lads.

⁵ Father John Baptist Francesia was an outstanding Salesian of the early years. He died a nonagenarian in 1930. [Editor]

CHAPTER 16

Lenten Catechism Classes

SO far we have given a résumé of Don Bosco's work over a span of some fifteen years, but now we shall proceed in a more orderly manner. By presenting in chronological order public events closely connected with Don Bosco's life, we shall have a better insight into the lofty aims of all his activities.

Ash Wednesday of 1847 fell on February 17 and Don Bosco was busy preparing all he needed for the daily Lenten catechism classes. The norms he laid down that year have been followed by his spiritual children every Lenten season, even though they were not inserted into the *Regulations for the Festive Oratory* until much later.

On Sexagesima Sunday Don Bosco began reminding his young charges that on the following Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, the last days of the carnival season, the Oratory would offer special games and amusements which they would find highly enjoyable. His aim was to keep them away from the wild revelry of the city with its potential moral harm, and from companions who saw no wrong in any kind of merrymaking. Overjoyed at the news, the boys swarmed all over the Oratory on those three days in lively, wholesome merriment. A gift and a hearty lunch given them by Don Bosco made most of them forget that Turin was wildly celebrating the end of carnival. He also provided for their spiritual welfare by holding church services in atonement for the sins being then committed and in suffrage for the souls in Purgatory. The boys made the Exercise for a Happy Death and on that Tuesday afternoon Don Bosco and Father Borel gave them a catechetical instruction in the form of a dialogue, which they greatly enjoyed. Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament brought services to a close. A few years later Don Bosco

added the singing of Vespers. The boys then played games until dark. On this last day of carnival the *piñata* game carried the day. Several pottery jars, some filled with fruit, candy and similar goodies, and others with turnips, potatoes or just plain water would be hung one at a time from a rope. Then a boy, blindfolded and swinging a long stick, would try to hit it while the others swarmed around him. Deafening shouts of "straight ahead," "back," "to the right," "to the left," "yes" and "no" thoroughly confused the poor fellow. He would stop or move forward, and then, trying to make sense out of the noise, he would take careful aim and whack at what he thought was the jar. More often than not, the blow struck very wide of the mark; sometimes it came close but rarely did it hit the target. If he missed, the others would laugh at his expense; if he hit the *piñata*, they would crawl on hands and knees to gather the fallen treasure or occasionally get just a shower. Although there was a prize for the boy who made a hit, the lucky one would immediately fling aside his stick, tear the kerchief from his eyes and jump into the fray to grab something else for himself. Another jar was then strung up and then others. In subsequent years, a straw man was also rigged up to represent "father carnival," and the boys would parade it around on an improvised stretcher and then set fire to it in a grand finale.

Ash Wednesday hastened the preparations for the Lenten catechism classes. Since Don Bosco wanted no more than a dozen pupils per class he needed many catechists and, if he was short, he just had to find them. He made sure that each teacher had a roll book with a daily record of the progress and deportment of their pupils. Classrooms and desks were another problem to be faced and not a slight one.

On the first Sunday of Lent the boys were divided by age; if any of them was not up to par in his knowledge of catechism he was referred to Don Bosco for transfer to some special class. The catechists planned their program in such a way as to cover the principal truths of Faith, particularly the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, before Lent ended. Since many youngsters, especially the apprentices, would not attend the Lenten catechism classes in their own parish churches at the appointed time, Don Bosco took on the added heavy burden of instructing them at the Oratory every

afternoon from 12:30 to 1:30. This way the young apprentices had time for lunch and for catechism, and could still be back at their jobs or in school on time, thus forestalling complaints from employers and teachers.

Catechism classes began on the Monday of the first week of Lent. For over thirty years Don Bosco himself presided. To call the boys to class he used a rather curious method. Taking his cue from St. Francis de Sales, he had a boy go through the main streets of the neighborhood vigorously ringing a good sized bell. Its clanging was a reminder to both parents and boys: to the former to send their sons and to the latter to attend. Within minutes, swarms of youngsters would appear from all over, tag behind the young bell ringer, and help him call other lads to join them. In half an hour, the Oratory was filled with boys. Divided into classes they eagerly listened to their catechists with edifying attention.

From the very start Don Bosco checked whether any of the boys had to be prepared for Confirmation, and for them he arranged two or three special classes. He wished them to be confirmed not later than mid-Lent, in order to have sufficient time to prepare them for their Easter duty. If no bishop was available, Don Bosco kept a list of their names and postponed the ceremony to a later date. Moreover, he arranged evening classes to accommodate many boys who were unable to attend during the day. This was the beginning of those Lenten catechism classes which Catholic laymen still conduct today for young apprentices after working hours.

Catechism was taught on Saturday evenings too, and those who wanted could also go to confession. In fact, Don Bosco was very solicitous that those attending catechism classes should go to confession at least once a month, rather than wait for Easter. This lightened the confessor's burden by shortening the boys' confessions and it also cut the waiting time for the large number of penitents.

Still, Don Bosco was not complacent about the fact that so many boys came of their own free will. Especially during Lent, he went out looking for more. During those early years he was often seen climbing scaffolds or walking on planks to meet contractors and foremen and to get their permission to invite the young apprentice bricklayers to his catechism classes. Passersby would stop to stare

at the unusual spectacle and exchange comments. "Isn't that priest taking a chance up there?" they commented.

"Who can he be?" others asked. "That's Don Bosco, looking for boys for his catechism classes," some who knew him would answer.

He also called on the owners or the shop stewards of factories, cotton mills and sawmills, urging them in their own interests to let their young apprentices attend catechism classes at the Oratory. He was so persuasive that they gladly consented. At the noon whistle, the boys dashed home, ate quickly so as not to be late for catechism, and rushed to their beloved Don Bosco in Valdocco who, they knew, cared so much for them. They were always back at their work on time. Their employers, seeing their eagerness and noticing a marked and rapid improvement in their diligence and obedience, gave them an extra half hour for lunch, so that they could eat with less haste and attend their catechism class without worry.

Whenever Don Bosco met some boy loitering at the entrance of a building or anywhere else, he would stop and strike up a conversation.

"What's your name?"

"Jimmy."

"How's everything?"

"Oh, fine!"

"How old are you?"

"Nine."

"Are you a good boy?"

This question was sure to produce a grimace, and Don Bosco would continue, "Are both your parents living?"

"Yes."

"Who else lives with you?"

"My grandpa."

"Have you any brothers or sisters?"

"Yes," and he would tell how many.

"Who is better behaved, you or they?"

"Me!"

"Are your father and mother well?"

"Yes." Or he might answer, "My father's sick."

"Is your grandpa very old?"

"Yes."

"Will you do an errand for me?"

"Sure!"

"You won't forget?"

"No!"

"When you get home, tell grandpa that Don Bosco says hello to him. Then give your father this medal and tell him that Don Bosco sends his regards."

The boy would run home, delighted with this sign of trust, and his grandfather and parents would be overjoyed at this unexpected act of consideration. If there were enough medals for the whole family, as was often the case, the boy gladly distributed them among his kinfolk. When Don Bosco had occasion to pass that house again, the family would come out to thank him for his greetings and his kindness. He would stop to chat with them and suggest they send the boys to catechism. Then he would turn to the head of the household and say, "Would you do me a favor on Saturday?"

"Gladly. What is it?"

"Please send your whole family to confession. Easter is approaching."

"Gladly. I'll come too, because I need it badly. It's two years since I've been to confession."

"Come, by all means. We'll settle things as between good friends."

"But be ready for some pretty awful things never heard before, in heaven or earth."

"That's just what I am looking for!" Don Bosco would reply. Joking along thus, he did good for souls.

Such pleasant episodes took place almost every day wherever Don Bosco went, in or out of Turin.

Not far from the Oratory, at its eastern and western ends, stood some low-rent apartment buildings with a fairly large courtyard where women used to gather at certain hours to work and chatter together. Don Bosco would appear on the scene and greet them jokingly, "Hello there! Have you any boys for sale?"

"Oh, Don Bosco! Our children are not for sale."

"It's not I who want them, but Our Lord, and He will reward you. Send them to me for catechism." Laughing, the mothers would promise to do so.

It must not be imagined, however, that trying to get boys to catechism classes was always an easy task. Not all yielded so readily at his first invitation, and those who did were not always so polite about it. Often he came across lads coarse in speech and manner. Sometimes they would take advantage of him and instantly ask for alms; under the circumstances he could not refuse. Saloons and other dubious hangouts were located on the ground floor of these buildings and it was easy to run into unpleasant types. Despite his delicate sensibility Don Bosco endured all patiently, concealing his disgust, refraining from reprimands when he realized they would be useless, and treating everybody with courtesy.

We will pass over unpleasant episodes and rather relate a very amusing one.

A certain man lived near the Oratory. He used to get drunk almost every week, and if he chanced to meet Don Bosco he would go up to him, saying, "Oh! Don Bosco, you're such a good priest! I like you so much. Let me give you a kiss!"

"Certainly not!" Don Bosco would reply, warding off his drunken embrace.

"What's wrong with a little smack for such a good priest as you? If you weren't so good, I'd understand, but . . . Well, I know what I'll do! If you let me give you a kiss, I promise to go to confession this Sunday . . ."

"Come whenever you like. I'll be glad to hear your confession, and I'll give you only a very light penance, but now please let me go about my business."

"But don't think I'm drunk!" protested the drunkard, hardly able to stand on his feet. "I'm a bit unsteady, to be sure, because I had one too many, but otherwise I'm fine! Besides, I haven't been drinking cheap wine! No, it was good wine, really good, and, as you know, good wine gladdens men's hearts." So saying, he flung his arms around Don Bosco. Don Bosco calmly managed to free himself, but avoided even the trace of a smile which might suggest contempt, or any word that might be taken amiss. He carefully shunned anything that might anger people or later prompt a person, even perhaps when at death's door, to spurn the services of a priest. As a matter of fact, Don Bosco was often called upon to assist the dying in his neighborhood. This particular character, how-

ever, never came for confession. The next day, when he had sobered up, he met Don Bosco but had entirely forgotten his promise.

Now it was almost the middle of Lent, and every available space in the Oratory was occupied by catechism classes. On that mid-Lent Thursday, Don Bosco decided to call off the catechism class to avoid certain practical jokes which might have ended in quarrels and fights. It was an old and time-honored custom to play tricks on that day.¹ People found great fun in sending to some friend or requesting from him a saw [symbolizing the sawing off of the first half of Lent], or having some simpleton or even some smart fellow who was off guard convey the message. Of course, whoever fell for it got his share of laughs. It was also customary to pin the cutout of a saw on somebody's back. Soon boys would crowd around boisterously. Not everyone took this practical joke with good grace, and resentment sometimes exploded into unpleasantness. Since Don Bosco could not abolish this custom, quite innocent in itself, he deemed it wiser to declare a holiday.

¹ A sort of April Fools' Day. [Editor]

CHAPTER 17

Lenten Catechism Classes (Continued)

AT the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales the boys learned to respect and obey all those invested with authority as God's representatives. In his first edition of *The Companion of Youth* Don Bosco had very clearly worded this advice to his boys.

Obeys your superiors, both ecclesiastical and civil, and your teachers. Accept all their instructions, counsels, and corrections humbly and respectfully, and be convinced that everything they do is for your own good. . . . I urge you to be very respectful to priests. When talking to them or meeting them in the street do them honor by taking off your hat and kissing their hand. Above all, be on your guard never to act disrespectfully with them by word or deed. Whoever fails to respect sacred ministers should fear a terrible punishment from God.

To past pupils, he gave this advice: "Do your best to fulfill your religious duties in your own parish church, since your pastor has been put there by God to take care of your souls."

In later editions he made himself clearer on this matter. After exhorting young adults to receive the sacraments in the churches of their sodalities and oratories, he added: "Make an exception, however, for your Easter Communion, which you should receive in your own parish church. In fact, you should try to receive the sacraments there whenever possible, thus giving good example to others."

He gave the same advice concerning Holy Communion on week days. The local pastors knew how Don Bosco trained his boys, and they were grateful to him for the increased respect and deference the boys showed them. All the priests were on friendly terms with him, but, nevertheless, some still regarded the Oratory as a rival

to their parishes. In this same year [1847] they again complained, this time to the archbishop.¹ Now it was no longer merely a matter of teaching catechism on Sundays in cramped quarters, but of conducting solemn Lenten catechetical instructions in competition with those given in all the city parish churches. More boys were attending catechism lessons in Valdocco than in the rest of the city. "Whose right is it to teach?" the pastors asked. "Who is to judge whether a boy knows enough to be admitted to Communion on a temporary or permanent basis?"² Isn't it an incontestable right of the pastor to administer First Holy Communion to his parishioners? How can he find out who has, and who has not, fulfilled his Easter duty?" There were some pastors who quietly spread the word that, to settle the matter once and for all, it would not be a bad idea to assign Don Bosco as a curate to some remote mountain village.

In reply, Don Bosco pointed out that the majority of his boys were transients and, as for the rest, their parents did not bother to send them to the parish church anyway. But the pastors refused to be convinced. Don Bosco then invited Fr. [Charles] Dellaporta, pastor of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, to come to the Oratory and personally verify his statements. He did come one day, mingled with the boys, and conducted an inquiry.

"What parish are you from?" he asked one boy.

"St. Blase!"

"Where is that?"

"In Biella!"

"And you?" he questioned another.

"I'm from St. Philomena."

"St. Philomena?"

"Yes, on Lake Como."

"And you," he asked a third.

"I'm from St. Zita."

"St. Zita?"

"Yes, Father, near Genoa."

"I'm from St. Eusebius at Vercelli," volunteered a fourth one.

¹ For descriptions of previous complaints *see* Vol. II, pp. 277ff. [Editor]

² This was a diocesan custom to ensure that first communicants continued to attend catechism instruction. [Editor]

Others added that they came from Novara, Novi, Nice and other towns and villages.

"But where do you live here in Turin?"

Some could give an address but did not know what parish they belonged to; others had moved several times in a few months to follow their foreman from job to job; others slept wherever they could. Some boys were not living with their parents, others were orphans, and others still had never even known them. Their answers at last convinced Father Dellaporta that Don Bosco was doing much good; he truly cared for boys who had no one else to look after them.

Father [Augustine] Gattino, pastor of Borga Dora, in whose jurisdiction the Pinardi property lay, also came to see Don Bosco one day. After a tour of the whole Oratory and classes, he remarked: "It's all very well, but I don't see how you can continue your work if the pastors were to object to it. I, for one, however, promise to speak up for you as well as I can at our next meeting."

"Thank you," Don Bosco replied, "but please understand that it won't be easy to settle this problem the way they want. I do not object to telling all these boys to find out what parish they belong to and go there for their Lenten catechism lessons. But will they be willing to go? And even if I were to shut them out, will this guarantee that they will go there, or won't they rather roam around the streets and meadows? Then who will round them up? And if they get into trouble, who will bother to get them out of it?"

"You're right," Father Gattino said, "but still . . . We'll see."

Father Seraphim of Gassino, pastor of Our Lady of the Angels, also visited the Oratory when he learned that several of the boys belonged to his parish. He pointed this out to Don Bosco, who replied, "You and the other pastors can have all your boys back. Then, you'll have to find a way to look after them. All I need is one word from the archbishop, and I'll drop everything and return to Castelnovo, where I'll be free from all this harassment."

"I have a plan which might settle everything satisfactorily," Father Gattino replied. "Couldn't you take the boys who belong to my parish and all those who have no permanent domicile to my church during Lent, and have them make their Easter duty there? I'll re-

serve a confessional for you, and you'll be free to do all the good you please."

"That sounds fine," observed Don Bosco, "but in that case, shouldn't I rather take them to my own parish of SS. Simon and Jude? If I come to your church, would you allow boys from other parishes to come there too? They will certainly not want to leave me. Wouldn't this create more problems than it would solve? How would the other pastors like it? And if all my seven hundred and more boys come, where will you put them? Further, if you exclude those who don't belong to your parish, do you expect me to abandon them? One last thing, a theoretical question, but worth considering: Am I expected to become your assistant?"

"You have a point there," replied Father Seraphim. "The matter isn't as easy as it seemed to me at first. Let's not discuss it further. We'll see what the pastors' conference decides."

The last to call on Don Bosco was Father [Vincent] Ponzati, pastor of St. Augustine. He was the most determined of all to assert his pastoral rights as regards the Lenten catechism classes and Easter duty. He talked at great length; Don Bosco, in turn, set forth his views but also declared himself ready to yield if this were the will of his ecclesiastical superiors. His calm manner and the irrefutable logic of his arguments somewhat disconcerted his opponent whose parting words were, "Whatever the pastors' conference may decide, I intend to insist on my right to examine the boys for admission to Holy Communion."

Don Bosco reminded him that the boys numbered at least a hundred every year, but Father Ponzati restated his position with finality and left.

Meanwhile, on Passion Sunday Don Bosco told each catechist to give his pupils an examination and, if he found them prepared, to declare them ready for First Holy Communion. They were also to rate them according to their knowledge and give the results to Don Bosco for a record. Don Bosco and other priests presided at the examinations.

Don Bosco, however, sent the boys of St. Augustine's to their own pastor. When Father Ponzati saw the crowd, he asked rather brusquely, "What do you want?"

"We've come for our catechism examination for First Communion."

"Come back some other time. I am too busy now." So the boys returned to the Oratory, saying, "He didn't want to examine us."

"Didn't you tell him that I sent you?" asked Don Bosco.

"No, we didn't."

"Well, then, go back and kindly ask him for me to examine you."

The boys returned. Instead of the pastor they now met the sacristan, to whom they repeated their request in Don Bosco's name. The sacristan looked them up and down. They were all big boys, several already sprouting beards. "Well, well, what a surprise!" he exclaimed ironically. "So you still have to make your First Communion? Poor little ones! You were in no hurry, I guess! Well, it could be worse!" And he went on in this vein.

The boys, who had already made a giant effort to comply with Don Bosco's wish for them to face the pastor, went back to Don Bosco, upset and mortified. They were through with any examination. Don Bosco then called on the archbishop and explained matters to him. Archbishop Frasoni, wishing to think it over, promised to give him his decision by mail. Meanwhile, towards the end of Passion Week, Don Bosco announced that a triduum of sermons would be held at the Oratory during Holy Week at an hour and on the days most convenient for the boys. For years after, during Holy Week, Don Bosco, Father Borel and other dedicated priests continued to fill with fervor the crowd of boys who were preparing to receive the Eucharistic Bread.

Since the boys flocking to confession were far more than expected, Don Bosco set up a schedule starting on Monday of Holy Week with the smaller boys who had not yet been admitted to First Holy Communion. He asked the confessors to be especially patient and gentle with them as this would encourage them to make a sincere confession. He also exhorted them to instill into their hearts a horror of sin as well as true contrition, for, unfortunately, they too were capable of offending God. Lastly, he asked them, as far as possible, not to dismiss them without absolution.

He had assigned a special day for those who were to receive First

Holy Communion. Regardless of age and certain ingrained customs, he admitted youngsters to First Communion as soon as they had been sufficiently prepared and were able to distinguish between ordinary bread and the Eucharistic Bread. He was anxious that Our Lord should possess their hearts as soon as possible, but in some cases he followed the diocesan custom of allowing them to receive Communion only once or, at most three or four times in that first year. To receive more often they had to ask permission, which usually was granted. The aim of this restriction was to ensure that the boys who wanted to communicate regularly would attend the Lenten catechism classes a few years longer, for without this proviso some would have neglected to do so. Don Bosco, however, generally admitted them to unrestricted Holy Communion if they were well instructed. This was his policy not only during the Paschal season but throughout the year, without waiting for any special feastday.

Archbishop Frasoni, meanwhile, anxious to clear the way for Don Bosco, sent him the following letter on Wednesday in Holy Week.³

Rev. John Melchior Bosco
Turin

March 30, 1847

Dear Reverend Father:

After duly considering what you brought to my attention the other day, I have decided to authorize you, with this letter, to instruct and admit to First Holy Communion the boys attending your oratory. That their respective pastors may know who they are, please inform them that with my special authorization you have instructed and admitted to First Holy Communion the boys whose names you will list as having performed their Easter duty in the oratory chapel.

This authorization also includes admission of these same boys to the sacrament of Confirmation and issuance of the customary certificate.

Devotedly yours,
Louis, *Archbishop*

³ An oversight! March 30, 1847 was a Tuesday. [Editor]

This formal decree removed any further pretext for remonstrances on the part of pastors whose complaints would otherwise have been justified. The archbishop used to tell them, "The oratories which the boys attend shall be considered their parishes." In explaining the reasons for his authorization of Don Bosco, he used to add, "Since many of these boys are transients, and the rest are inconstant by nature, they would never go to church and would grow up ignorant and troublesome, if it were not for the attraction that the oratories exercise on them." The pastors promptly acquiesced to his decision, and thereafter Don Bosco took pleasure in calling his Oratory "the parish of abandoned boys."

The archbishop's letter not only gladdened Don Bosco, but also spurred his catechists on to greater efforts. They did not spare themselves in order that these poor boys might receive the sacraments with the proper dispositions, come to the triduum of sermons (which began on Maundy Thursday at the same hour which had formerly been reserved for catechism class), and put into practice the brief but cogent counsels Don Bosco gave from time to time.

Although these young catechists did not board with Don Bosco, they found his zeal contagious. Some were at his side from morning to night, watched his every step, were edified by his example and imitated him even in minor acts of devotion.

Here let me digress a little. Don Bosco's spirit of piety was ever manifest also in the respect, love and esteem he showed for all those acts of worship which the Church fosters and recommends without making them an obligation, as for example, the use of sacramentals, attendance at church services, recitation of the rosary in common, membership in pious associations, the *Angelus* prayer, grace before and after meals and the devotion of the Way of the Cross. As regards this last in particular, Don Bosco felt a burning love for the passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He lovingly meditated upon Our Lord's sufferings and whenever he talked about them words often failed him because of his deep emotion, thus moving his listeners to tears. He urged all his co-workers to practice this devotion, and spoke of it with great feeling in the confessional. In this connection, he had the year before submitted the following petition through Father Borel to the archbishop:

Your Excellency:

In order to promote yet greater piety among the large number of boys attending the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, recently opened in Valdocco on the outskirts of the city, the priests engaged in their instruction desire to introduce the devotion of the Way of the Cross. Therefore they respectfully appeal to the pastoral care of Your Excellency and request that you graciously grant them this favor and delegate anyone you choose for the erection of the Stations of the Cross. . . .

On November 11, 1846, permission was granted for a Franciscan priest, appointed by his superior, to erect the stations without prejudice to archiepiscopal and parochial rights. The concession was signed by Canon Celestine Fissore, pro-vicar general, and by Father [Augustine] Gattino, pastor [of Borgo Dora]. The signature of the proprietor of the building, Francis Pinardi, bore witness to his consent. On April 1, [1847], Father Anthony, guardian of St. Thomas monastery in Turin, appointed Father Buonagrazia, who had diocesan faculties, to erect the stations. Don Bosco had purchased the whole set of fourteen stations for twelve *lire*. His poverty did not let him spend more.

On the same day, Maundy Thursday, April 1, Father Buonagrazia, in the presence of a great number of boys, solemnly blessed the pictures with their wooden crosses according to the prescribed ritual. The pictures were then borne in procession around the chapel and hung in the designated places. As each picture was hung, appropriate prayers were recited. This was the first time the boys practiced this devotion as set forth briefly in *The Companion of Youth*. They also sang hymns, and the Franciscan Father delivered a brief exhortation. On Good Friday Don Bosco had them repeat this devotion, enriched by the popes with countless indulgences. What better way than this to make known the infinite love of Jesus for man, or to impress on man his duty to reciprocate?

Imbued with these thoughts, the Oratory boys, all apprentices, performed their Easter duty on Easter Sunday. Don Bosco had invited additional confessors to give the boys every possible facility and freedom for confession; nevertheless, several hundreds wished to confide the secrets of their conscience to him alone.

Easter Sunday, which Don Bosco tried to make as joyful as

possible for his boys, did not mark the end of his Paschal activities. On Low Sunday he awarded prizes to the boys who had distinguished themselves during Lent by their regular attendance at catechism classes and their good conduct. Many guests were invited to add solemnity to the prize-giving ceremony. Don Bosco had words of praise and encouragement for the winners, promising them richer and more rewarding prizes from the Lord.

On the second Sunday after Easter, April 18, [1847], a lottery was held for those who had attended the Oratory during the year. This manner of opening and closing the Paschal season was continued thereafter up to the present time.

When these celebrations were over, Don Bosco immediately reorganized his Sunday catechism classes. At about this time of the year many out-of-town lads poured into Turin to learn a trade, or to work as day laborers, and many of them would find their way to the Oratory. It was therefore necessary to reassign places in the chapel, grouping together those who had already made their First Communion. This arrangement, however, could last only for a few months. At the beginning of November, Don Bosco again had to reorganize classes. Construction work came to a standstill in winter and the majority of the young bricklayers returned to their villages. Other boys came down from the mountains, alone or with relatives, to earn a living which was hard to come by in their snow-bound native hamlets. Some of them were content to beg, others worked as knife grinders or sold small wood carvings, but most of them were chimney sweeps. Invited by Don Bosco and urged on by their friends, they filled the places in the Oratory which had been vacated. There were also more than a few boys of their own age from the city itself; now that summer with its many enticements was over, they were looking for diversion in some pleasant and wholesome environment.

Later on, younger grade school boys came too, and there were so many of them that, at the beginning of fall, Don Bosco had to form a special group.

Thus several times a year, Don Bosco had a large turnover of boys. One can easily imagine the hardship to him and the spiritual advantage to them.

CHAPTER 18

A New Approach

UP to now Don Bosco's main efforts in Valdocco had focused almost exclusively on ways and means to promote religious instruction through catechism lessons: to give his boys an education through day, evening and Sunday classes, and to care for their spiritual needs by suitable practices of piety. He knew, however, that something more was needed; daily experience made him realize that if some boys were to be effectively helped, these things were not enough. A lodging for homeless boys was needed.

Many of the boys he met, whether from Turin or from out of town, obviously *wanted* to work and be good, but when he asked them to take the first steps in this direction and to persevere in it, they invariably answered that it was a hard thing to do without adequate food, clothes or lodging. Their lot was a dreary one. They had to live from hand to mouth and in such unwholesome surroundings that in one single day or night they might easily throw overboard all the good resolutions of an entire week. Most of them, in fact, with or without permission, slept in stables, sheds or under staircases; others curled under the stars on the bare ground, on public benches along the avenues, on the porticoes of arcaded buildings or in open lobbies. Some boys could not attend the Oratory on Sundays, because their dire need compelled them to work even then. Don Bosco always tried to help as best he could, providing bread and soup for the hungriest, while Mamma Margaret mended and patched their tattered clothing. But what more could they do? As he pitied their wretched state, he often exclaimed: "I'm so sorry for these poor boys; I'd give them my heart, piece by piece if I could!"

Meanwhile he and Father Borel racked their brains to find a way

to open a small home for them. They had even sounded out Mr. Pinardi whether he would sell his house and for how much. "Eighty thousand *lire*!" was the discouraging answer. Don Bosco made no reply, but his mind, with that spiritual fortitude that was so uniquely his, began to toy with a very far-reaching project. Before he died he saw it realized just as he had envisioned it. Some mysterious power was constantly spurring him onward; consequently, even though he did not have the means, he decided to go ahead with his plan. "Let's get started," he said, "the means will come." He had no misgivings about the hard times ahead, but he also knew that "one who pays heed to the wind will not sow, and one who watches the clouds will never reap." (Eccles. 11, 4)

Without further ado, he set up a makeshift dormitory for the neediest boys in a hayloft close to the Oratory and furnished it with straw, sheets, blankets, and even sacks in which they cuddled up as best they could. It was all he could do at this time since no other rooms were available. Nevertheless, his fatherly solicitude was badly rewarded at the very start, as the following story illustrates.

One day in April of 1847, Don Bosco, having been delayed on a sick call, was returning home late in the evening through the fields which then were known as the Citadel meadows, but are now the site of stately buildings. As he drew near the neighborhood of Via Dora Grossa (now Via Garibaldi) where Corso Valdocco starts, he saw a group of some twenty young men. They had never heard of Don Bosco or of the Oratory and so, on seeing a priest approach, they began to jeer at him. "All priests are misers," said one. "They're conceited and intolerant," said another. "Let's test this one out," shouted a third.

Hearing such unflattering remarks Don Bosco slowed down, trying to figure out a way to dodge them, but when he realized it was too late for that, he went straight ahead and boldly introduced himself. Pretending he had not heard their remarks, he greeted them. "Good evening, my friends! How are you?"

"Not too good, Father," replied the ringleader.

"We're thirsty and we're broke. Would you buy us a bottle of wine?" another added.

"Yes, how about it, Father?" shouted the others at the top of

their voices. "A large bottle or we won't let you take another step." So saying, they surrounded him.

"Gladly!" replied Don Bosco. "In fact, since you're so many, I'll get *two* bottles, but I want to join you in a drink."

"Of course!" they cried. "You're a swell priest, a regular fellow. If only all priests were like you! Let's go to the Tavern of the Alps right around the block."

To avoid greater trouble and hoping to do them some good, Don Bosco went along.

It must have been quite a sight! A priest with a retinue of young toughs in a tavern! Everyone stared as they entered, but in a short while the patrons found out the identity of Don Bosco and why he was there. Nobody was shocked.

Don Bosco beckoned to the innkeeper and ordered first one bottle and then another. When he saw the young thugs loosening up into a more friendly and receptive mood, he said, "Now I'd like *you* to do me a favor."

"Anything, Don Bosco," they replied, for he had already identified himself. "Just say it, and we'll not only do you one favor, but two and even three! From now on we want to be your friends."

"If that is so, then, please stop blaspheming the name of God and of Our Lord as several of you have already done this evening."

"You're right," one of the culprits said, "you're very right, Don Bosco! But, you know, sometimes the words just slip out. But we'll watch from now on, and if we slip again we'll bite our tongues." All the others promised to do likewise.

"Good. Then my thanks to you. Now I can go home satisfied. I'll be looking forward to seeing you this Sunday at the Oratory. It's time to go home now and you had better be off like good young men."

"I have no home," one of them cut in. "Neither do I," echoed several others.

"But where do you sleep at night?"

"Sometimes in a coach inn stable with the horses, or in a public dormitory at four *soldi* a night. Some nights we stay over with an acquaintance or a friend."

Don Bosco realized the great moral danger to which these poor wretches, most of them from out of town, were exposed. So he

added: "Then let's do this. Those of you who have parents or relatives will go home and the rest will come with me." So they parted, and Don Bosco, followed by about a dozen of them (six more had joined the group in the meantime) went on toward Valdocco.

Their arrival was a great relief to Mamma Margaret, who had been rather worried about Don Bosco because of the late hour. Don Bosco then, after inviting his guests to recite an Our Father and a Hail, Mary (which they could hardly remember), led them up a ladder to the hayloft, handed out sheets and blankets, and told them to be quiet and behave. Bidding them good night, he withdrew, happy to have started, as he believed, the hospice he had in mind.

But Divine Providence (as Don Bosco found out the following morning), seemingly did not intend to use this type of young man as the foundation of such a great enterprise. At daybreak, as he went to see his guests, greet them and send them off to their jobs, he was surprised not to hear a sound. He thought they were still fast asleep and so he climbed to the hayloft to wake them up. The rascals, however, had awakened two hours earlier and had stolen away, taking the sheets and blankets with them to sell.

Thus Don Bosco's first attempt at founding a hospice failed. But his resolve to carry out the task assigned to him by God did not diminish one iota.

One evening in May, shortly after supper, while a heavy rain was falling, a boy of about fifteen came to the door. He was drenched from head to foot and asked for some food and lodging for the night. Someone who knew about the Oratory, or, more likely, Divine Providence had sent him there because on that very evening the Hospice of St. Francis de Sales was to come into being.

Mamma Margaret with motherly love welcomed him to her kitchen, made him sit by the fire and, after he had been warmed and dried, served him a plate of piping hot soup and bread. Afterward, Don Bosco asked him where he came from, whether he had any relatives and if he had a job. "My parents are dead," replied the boy, "and I came from Valsesia only a short while ago looking for work. I'm an apprentice bricklayer. I had three *lire* with me, but I spent it all before I could earn any money. Now I've nothing left and I don't know anybody."

"Have you already received First Holy Communion?"

"No, not yet."

"Have you been confirmed?"

"No."

"Have you ever been to confession?"

"Sometimes, when my mother was still living."

"What are your plans now?"

"I don't know. . . . Can I stay here tonight? Any corner would do." He then broke into tears.

Mamma Margaret, moved by the boy's plight, began to cry, and Don Bosco too was deeply stirred. After a few moments he said, "If I could trust you, I'd fix you up for the night. Some time ago other boys took off with most of my blankets, and I'm afraid it may happen again."

"Oh, Father, don't worry about that. I'm not a thief!"

Turning to his mother, Don Bosco said, "If you don't mind, I'll put him up here for the night, and tomorrow God will provide."

"Where will he sleep?"

"Here, in the kitchen."

"What if he runs off with the pots and pans?"

"I'll see that he doesn't."

"Do as you like, it's all right with me."

Don Bosco and his mother then went out to the courtyard, together with the boy, to fetch some bricks to serve as bed posts. Across them they laid some planks and the mattress from Don Bosco's bed with two sheets and a blanket.

This was the first bed and the first dormitory of the Salesian boarding school at the Oratory in Turin. Today [1903] about a thousand boys live there in more than forty large rooms. Who can fail to see the hand of God in all this?

After making his bed, Mamma Margaret gave the young apprentice a little talk on the necessity of work, honesty and the practice of one's Faith. Unwittingly, she was starting a custom which is still observed at the Oratory, and has been introduced into all other Salesian houses, namely that of addressing a few encouraging words to the boys before the night's rest, [the Salesian Good Night], a practice that yielded excellent results.

Finally, she told the boy to say his prayers.

"I don't remember them any more," he answered blushing.

"Then say them along with us," she suggested. They all knelt down, and he repeated the prayers word by word. Afterwards, they bade him good night and retired. Before going to bed, however, Mamma Margaret took no chances with her pots and pans and locked the kitchen door. That boy, however, was not a thief and he was in earnest about wanting to earn his living honestly. He was eminently fitted to be the cornerstone of a providential institution.

Next day Don Bosco found a job for him and the lucky youngster was able to stay on at the Oratory until the winter, when for lack of work he had to return to his village. Nothing more was ever heard from him. We have reason to believe that he died shortly thereafter. In spite of persistent research, we have not been able to find out his name since at that time Don Bosco did not keep a record of the boys, mostly transients, who boarded with him. Perhaps the Lord ordained it so in order that His intervention be all the more visible in a work which from humble and obscure beginnings mushroomed into such a vast undertaking.

Shortly afterward, a second boy was given shelter, under the following circumstances. In early June of that same year [1847], toward sunset, Don Bosco was on his way back to the Oratory from St. Francis of Assisi Church. When he came to Corso San Massimo, now Corso Regina Margherita, he noticed a young boy, about twelve, leaning against an elm tree, weeping dejectedly. Don Bosco went up to him.

"What's the matter, son? Why are you crying?"

"I'm all alone," answered the lad between sobs. "My father died before I ever knew him, and now my mother also is dead. She died yesterday and today they have taken her away to bury her. She took good care of me, she really loved me. . . ." After blurting out these words the boy wept even more uncontrollably, arousing Don Bosco's deep commiseration.

"Where did you sleep last night?"

"I still slept in our lodging, but today the landlord took away what little furniture we had because the rent hadn't been paid. He locked the room as soon as they took my mother away. What am I to do now? I'm all alone. I'm hungry and I need a place to sleep, and I don't know what will happen to me."

"Would you like to come with me?" asked Don Bosco. "I'll do all I can to help you."

"You mean it? Sure I'll come, but who are you?"

"You'll soon find out. For the moment it's enough for you to know that I want to be your friend."

Don Bosco invited the boy to follow him and shortly afterward he presented him to Mamma Margaret, saying, "God has sent us another boy. Please look after him and prepare him a bed."

The boy came from a good, well-to-do family which had fallen on hard times, and Don Bosco found him a job in a store. Thanks to his quick intelligence and trustworthiness, he had an honorable and lucrative position by the age of twenty. He raised a family, was an upright citizen and a practicing Catholic, and he always remained deeply attached to the Oratory and to Don Bosco who had sheltered, trained and educated him.

Several other boys came to the Oratory after these two, but because of limited space Don Bosco that first year did not take in more than seven boys. Their good conduct gave him great comfort and joy and encouraged him to continue his undertaking. Among these boys was Joseph Buzzetti who could be considered as having already lived in the house, so close was he to Don Bosco. One Sunday evening, as he was dismissing the boys, Don Bosco held Buzzetti by the hand and, when they were alone, asked him, "Would you like to live at the Oratory?"

"Sure! But what would I have to do?"

"What the other boys who live here are doing . . . and then other things, too, which I'll tell you about later on. . . . I'm sure you'll be happy. I'll talk to your brother Charles about it, and we'll do what we think Our Lord wants us to do." Charles, who had been attending the Oratory for the past seven years, agreed with Don Bosco's proposal and so his brother Joseph began to board at Valdocco, though he still worked as an apprentice bricklayer in Turin. Another reason for the small number of these first boarders is that Don Bosco with enlightened zeal always practiced the motto: "Make haste slowly." He had no use for hasty action, and used to say that it only led to greater blunders. Once he undertook a task, though, Don Bosco saw it through firmly and dauntlessly.

He had made a dormitory out of two adjoining rooms and man-

aged to squeeze four beds into each. In each room he hung a crucifix, a picture of the Blessed Virgin and a placard inscribed "God sees you." He laid down no rules. The norms contained in *The Companion of Youth* and his evening recommendations must have sufficed then. The following was his first exhortation.

Devotion to the Blessed Virgin, my sons, will be your great safeguard. If you are devoted to Her, She will not only shower you with blessings on earth, but through Her intercession She will also secure heaven for you. Be, therefore, absolutely convinced that whatever favor you ask of our Blessed Mother, She will grant it to you if it is not harmful. There are three graces in particular which you should insistently ask for: never to commit a mortal sin; always to keep the holy, priceless virtue of purity; to avoid bad companions. To obtain these three graces, we shall recite daily three Hail, Marys and one Glory Be and repeat three times the invocation "Dear Mother Mary ever Virgin, help me to save my soul."

Early each morning, while Don Bosco celebrated Mass, the boys recited aloud their prayers and five decades of the rosary. From that time on at Valdocco, not a day went by without praise being given to God with the rosary and the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass despite the current of opinion that was growing in those days against these daily practices of piety. When Don Bosco was out of town, other priests were asked to take his place, usually Father John Vola, Jr. or his brother Joseph. On Sundays all the boarders took part in the religious services with the festive oratory boys.

On weekdays, these boarders went to their jobs in the city, taking along a piece of bread [for breakfast]. Like a good father, Don Bosco served them plenty of soup and bread at noon and in the evening; sometimes he was able to add something more. He also supplied them with clothing according to their needs and his own means.

While attending to their material wants, Don Bosco took even greater care of their intellectual and moral welfare. That he doubtless had the talent and vocation to educate youth according to Christ's teachings is proven by the truly extraordinary results he obtained first with the festive oratory boys and then with the boarders, whose number was to grow from seven to several thousand. His method was based on God's Law. Don Bosco had learned his ped-

agogy from Our Lord, the Divine Teacher, who raised fallen man to make him similar to Himself: perfect, holy, happy and immortal. Don Bosco's first concern was to instruct his pupils in the most essential articles of Faith; then, as they progressed, he taught them the little catechism of the diocese. Later on, with the more advanced boys, he took up the larger catechism, and lastly, he gave them a course in apologetics to enable them to refute contemporary errors. With Don Bosco, the study of religion always ranked first.

CHAPTER 19

Guiding Boys to Sanctity

ZEAL and prudence marked all of Don Bosco's spiritual undertakings and the running of the Oratory. It was his policy first to ponder all aspects of new projects in prayer before God; only then, after lengthy reflection, would he gradually test the efficacy of the means he intended to use for the spiritual welfare of his boys. As a result of this careful planning, he never found it necessary to discard any of the practices he had started; their excellent results justified their keeping. So far he had given his boys *The Companion of Youth*, which so well fostered their piety and formed their character; he had put the Oratory on an organized basis with regulations that promoted and maintained unity of administration; and he had opened a boarding school section. Now Don Bosco realized he had to spur his boys on to virtue by some lasting, uniform means that would unite the more virtuous of them, arouse their enthusiasm and give them by their very number greater confidence against fear of their companions' criticism. To meet this need Don Bosco decided to establish the St. Aloysius Sodality, and thus to have the boys commit themselves to practice constantly the more characteristic virtues of this saint. He aimed at starting them on such an exemplary life as to become "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" to their companions. He therefore drew up a set of brief but forceful sodality regulations suitable for his purposes, and submitted them to the archbishop. The latter, who never failed to encourage Don Bosco's projects, examined them, consulted with others, and then returned them to Don Bosco with the following remarks in his own hand.

April 11, 1847

Dear Reverend Father:

I have examined your tentative regulations of the St. Aloysius Sodality for those boys who want to place themselves under the patronage of this saint and imitate his virtues. This undertaking is doubtless substantially excellent in itself, but I think it should be made explicit at some point or other that the sodality regulations and commitments do not bind under even venial sin. Also, it seems to me that a promise to receive the sacraments every week is a bit too stringent; every other week and special feast days should be sufficient. I also think that the obligation of revealing to the superior the reason for not approaching the sacraments might give rise to serious difficulties. Finally, the last sentence of this second article where members are again exhorted to receive frequently is superfluous, since it is already stated in the beginning that they should try to go to confession and Communion every week.

I remain with the greatest esteem, etc.

Louis, *Archbishop*

In the draft submitted to the archbishop Don Bosco had established weekly confession and Communion so that the more fervent boys, as sodality members, might have greater opportunity to receive their Divine Saviour. The article's last sentence which the archbishop had considered superfluous, aimed at encouraging indirectly the more fervent among them to receive also on weekdays. Asking the members to explain their not going to confession and Communion was only another way of cutting down absences from the festive oratory with consequent poor example to their companions. Nevertheless, Don Bosco unhesitatingly carried out the archbishop's suggestions by amending the draft accordingly.

Archbishop Frasoni approved the establishment of the St. Aloysius Sodality with a rescript dated April 12, 1847. He granted an additional forty days indulgence to the members every time they recited the invocation, "My Jesus, mercy," which Pius IX had already endowed with a hundred days indulgence. He also expressed the wish to be enrolled as the sodality's first member.

Its regulations still stand unaltered to the present day [1903].

1. St. Aloysius was a model of exemplary conduct; therefore, all who want to become members of his sodality must behave in such a manner

as not only to avoid giving any kind of scandal, but also to strive constantly to set a good example, especially by the faithful observance of their religious duties. St. Aloysius from early childhood was so exact in performing his duties, so fond of prayer and so devout that, when he went to church, people flocked to see his modest demeanor and his recollection.

2. Endeavor to go to confession and Communion every two weeks or even more frequently, especially on solemn feast days. These sacraments are the weapons by which we triumph over the devil. As a young boy, St. Aloysius received them every week, and as he grew older, more often. Any member unable to fulfill this obligation may substitute some other act of devotion, with his director's advice. All are encouraged to frequent the sacraments and to attend church services in the Oratory chapel so as to set a good example for their companions.

3. Flee from bad companions as from a plague, and be very careful to avoid improper conversation. St. Aloysius not only shunned such talk, but showed such modesty that no one even dared to utter an unseemly word in his presence.

4. Practice the greatest charity toward your companions, readily forgiving any offense. St. Aloysius repaid insults with friendship.

5. Have the greatest respect for the house of God. Urge others to practice virtue and join this sodality. To show his love for his fellow beings St. Aloysius volunteered to nurse the victims of a plague, and thereby sacrificed his own life.

6. Be very diligent in your work and in the fulfillment of your other duties; promptly obey your parents and superiors.

7. When a sodality member falls sick, all the others should pray for him and also give him material assistance according to their means.

To these basic regulations Don Bosco added other norms in Part II, Chapter XI of the *Regulations for the Festive Oratory*, in order to give the sodality a well-defined structure.¹

The Oratory boys heartily greeted the announcement of the establishment of this sodality, whose members they named the *St. Aloysius Brothers*, and all were very eager to join. Don Bosco, [not aiming at numbers alone]² in order to offer to all a greater incentive to improve their conduct laid down two conditions for admis-

¹ In this edition we have placed these regulations in Appendix 6. [Editor]

² A reference from the Vulgate *Multiplicasti gentem et non magnificasti laetiam* [Isa. 9, 3] has been expunged because no longer apropos in the new Confraternity version. [Editor]

sion. The first was that the applicant prove himself for a whole month by observing the sodality regulations and setting a good example in church and elsewhere; the second was that he avoid bad talk and frequent the sacraments. Soon a great improvement was noticed in the boys' conduct and piety.

The first enrollment took place on Sunday, May 21, [1847], the first of the Six Sundays³ preceding the feast of St. Aloysius. For the Oratory this was an unforgettable day. The boys crowded into the tiny church, anxious to see this novel event. The candidates knelt before St. Aloysius' statue, at whose side Don Bosco stood in surplice and stole. After the singing of the *Veni Creator*, Don Bosco addressed the ritual questions to the candidates. Then the *Salve Regina* was recited and the choir intoned: *Elegi abiectus esse in domo Dei mei, magis quam habitare in tabernaculis peccatorum* [I had rather lie at the threshold of the house of my God than dwell in the tents of the wicked—Ps. 83, 11]. Meanwhile the candidate's name was entered on the registration form which each one then read in a clear voice.

I ————— pledge to do all I can to imitate St. Aloysius Gonzaga. Therefore, I resolve to flee from bad companions, to avoid bad talk, and to encourage others to virtue by my word and example both in church and elsewhere. I also pledge to observe all the other sodality rules. I hope to be faithful to this with the Lord's help and the protection of St. Aloysius. Daily I shall recite the following prayer:

"O glorious St. Aloysius Gonzaga, I humbly beseech thee to receive me under thy protection and to obtain for me from God the help to practice thy virtues in life, so that I may die a holy death, and be one day partaker of thy glory in heaven. Amen."

Pater, Ave, Gloria, etc. My Jesus, mercy.

Date: _____

The Director

Don Bosco then delivered a brief exhortation to the new members, telling them how pleased God was to have them serve Him in their youth. The ceremony ended with the singing of the liturgical

³ A devotional practice established by Don Bosco. See Vol. II, pp. 281ff. [Editor]

prayer for the feast of St. Aloysius. The names of the new members were then entered in the official sodality register.

The establishment of this sodality was one more task that Don Bosco gladly took on. At least once a month and, at certain times even once a week, Don Bosco or someone taking his place held a meeting, during which he gave the members a short talk on one of the regulations, on some incident in the life of St. Aloysius, or on one of his virtues. A secretary took down the minutes, briefly recording all the proceedings. The practice is still in effect today.

About this time Francis Picca, a boy attending a Jesuit school located on the site of the Museum of Ancient History, brought fifteen of his companions to Valdocco. He introduced them to Don Bosco and all were enrolled in the St. Aloysius Sodality. From then on, their superiors excused them from attending their Sunday Congregation⁴ in order to help the catechists at the Oratory.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco's mind was crystallizing another project for the sanctification of a small group of his boys—a spiritual retreat. At that time only four or five boys boarded at the Oratory, and it was they whom he had particularly in mind, although he also planned to include some of the older boys who attended the festive oratory. A few of these he had already prepared and invited to make a spiritual retreat of about a week. The retreat had its problems: inadequate facilities to accommodate the retreatants; constant supervision on his part; the expected lack of understanding by the boys, due to their youthful restlessness of the importance of silence and recollection; distractions caused by neighborhood noise and the coming and going of people in the Pinardi house; disruption of routine in the boys' homes and workshops; and also the added expenditure of Don Bosco's limited resources.

Undaunted by the lack of adequate kitchen utensils, Don Bosco determined to serve the boys a noon-time meal to eliminate their having to go home to eat with the distractions that this entailed. He did not wait until everything was available. He was convinced that if one delays doing what is good in order to do it better he may actually end up by doing nothing at all. Therefore, he decided to hold the spiritual retreat that very year, 1847. Divine Providence

⁴ A prescribed attendance in a body at Sunday church services under the supervision of school authorities. [Editor]

sent him a priest to preach it in the person of Father Frederick Albert, a court chaplain and a gifted mission preacher. Revered as a saint he died in 1876 while a curate in Lanzo. Don Bosco once described to us how he first met him and how, ever since, Father Albert had become a co-worker of his and kept in touch with him even when his many duties later prevented him from coming to the Oratory.

"One Sunday in 1847," reminisced Don Bosco, "a young priest walked into the Oratory. After greeting me, he said: 'I hear you need a priest to help you with catechism and with the moral guidance of these boys. If you can use me, I'm willing.'

" 'What's your name?'

" 'Father Albert.'

" 'Have you done any preaching?'

" 'A little,' he replied modestly, 'but I can always learn more. Besides, I could help by teaching catechism, or doing secretarial work.'

" 'Have you ever given a spiritual retreat?'

" 'Not yet, but if you will give me a little time, I'll prepare myself and give it a try.'

" 'Fine. Now, this is the situation. I already have several boys living here at the Oratory, and others coming on a daytime basis. I think a spiritual retreat would greatly benefit them. Get ready, and then we'll see.'

" 'I was able to gather about twenty boys,'" Don Bosco continued, "and that was the first spiritual retreat ever held at the Oratory."

The boys were an assorted lot, ranging from excellent to poor. No one else was allowed to join. Some of the retreatants, among them Joseph Buzzetti, told us of having been very much impressed by the sermons. God blessed this retreat and Don Bosco was very happy with the fruits. Several boys, with whom he had labored for a long time in vain, now turned over a new leaf. He therefore determined to hold a retreat every year, regardless of the sacrifices it entailed. Genuine conversions and singular fruits of sanctity resulted in increasing numbers. For several years he continued to provide lunch during that week, also to the day pupils even when they were as many as fifty. This gave him a chance to discover their inclinations, to spur the lukewarm to greater effort, to encourage

the more fervent, and to probe their vocations, directing toward the priesthood those whom he considered to have the calling. He did all this so artfully and prudently however, that, while fully respecting the boys' freedom of conscience, he aroused in their hearts a greater love for God and spiritual things and a firm detachment from worldly affairs. He was deeply pleased to see not a few of these young apprentices, after their spiritual retreat, strive perseveringly to lead a better life, and indeed to tread a path of sanctity. This is no exaggeration, for we can cite many names, as we have come to know from Joseph Buzzetti [who was one of them]. They nourished their spiritual life with a brief morning meditation from *The Companion of Youth*, they rose early for Mass and Communion every day or at least two or three times a week, and in the late afternoon they made a brief visit to the Blessed Sacrament. On Sundays, during recreation, a few always lingered in the chapel after services to pray. Others walked to the hedge behind Mamma Margaret's vegetable garden to kneel and say the rosary undisturbed. Some paced the walk leading to the garden and read some spiritual book or a saint's biography, or they spoke of spiritual matters. There were some who even fasted several times a week and practiced other mortifications and penances. Above all, it was heartwarming to see how unafraid some were to practice their Faith openly, to speak up in its defense, and to prevent wrongdoing among their companions. Some who had been arrogant and proud became meek and humble, through persevering effort strengthened by prayer. Several resolved to become exemplary and thus to make up for previous bad example they had given when they were ignorant of their Faith. If they were praised for their excellent conduct at home, at work or elsewhere, they would candidly remark, "If you only knew how bad I used to be! Don Bosco saved me!"

Thanks to Don Bosco's initiative, this blessing has spread throughout the world. Spiritual retreats are now [1903] held yearly in more than six hundred [Salesian] schools for boys of the working class, and God alone knows how many thousands of souls are thereby led to eternal salvation.

CHAPTER 20

A Memorable Event

IT was now June, 1847; St. Aloysius' feast day was drawing near, and the boys prepared themselves by eagerly attending the Six-Sunday Devotions in honor of the saint and receiving the sacraments, in order to gain the plenary indulgence granted by Pope Clement XII. To make this easier for the boys, Don Bosco told them he would be available for confessions at any hour of the day or evening. On Saturdays especially he heard confessions late into the night, sometimes even after eleven, and again the next morning from four until the hour for Mass, which often was as late as nine or ten o'clock. The patience and piety of the boys were matched by Don Bosco's indefatigable zeal, which prompted him to stay for hours in the confessional for the boys' spiritual welfare, allowing himself only a very short rest at night. Several times, as we have already mentioned, he actually heard confessions right through the night so that the first boys to show up in the morning found him still surrounded by those who had come the night before. Such an endless stream of penitents made Don Bosco sometimes stay in the confessional for sixteen, seventeen or eighteen hours at a stretch. His dedication to this arduous task could not help but make a deep impression on the boys. Many who came late in the evening, usually the most slothful, were moved at seeing Don Bosco sacrifice himself so generously for them, and it opened their eyes. It made them think about the state of their souls and decide to turn over a new leaf more readily than if they had listened to the most stirring sermon in the world.

Nor was this all. Since many of the Oratory boys, especially those from out of town, had not yet been confirmed, Don Bosco thought it would be a good idea to have the archbishop administer this

sacrament to them at the Oratory on the very feast day of St. Aloysius. He therefore called upon the prelate. Archbishop Frasoni graciously accepted the invitation, promising not only to confirm the boys but also to celebrate Mass and administer Holy Communion. The news brought indescribable joy, but it also piled more work on Don Bosco's shoulders. The weekly catechism lessons were held each Sunday evening and were thronged. Thanks to zealous priests and laymen, the confirmands were properly prepared, and everything was shipshape on the appointed day. Meanwhile, Don Bosco, the prefect, and the spiritual director of the Oratory had made all necessary arrangements with the prior of the St. Aloysius Sodality.

It was the first time Archbishop Frasoni had visited the Oratory at Valdocco and held services in its chapel. Despite their poverty, the boys spared no effort to have the occasion celebrated as splendidly as possible. The choirboys rehearsed and the sacristans tastefully adorned the chapel, cleverly using sheets, bedspreads and colorful drapes hung like festoons to look like tapestries. At the chapel entrance, they built a tiny pavilion and a beautiful triumphal arch of boughs and flowers from which hung this inscription: "Your Excellency, on this your first visit, the boys and superiors of the Oratory bid you joyous welcome and offer you this garland, a symbol of their filial affection."

The bell ringers too did their share. Since the tinkling of their little bell could not be heard far enough, they found a much bigger one, and on the eve of the feast they paraded through the neighborhood ringing it "both when convenient and inconvenient" [2 Tim. 4, 2] making known to each and all that the feast of St. Aloysius was being celebrated at the Oratory on the morrow, with the archbishop attending. Priests and laymen helped to write out confirmation certificates, prepare boys for confession and Communion, and coach those who were to declaim either in prose or poetry, or act in Father Hyacinth Carpano's skit, entitled *One of Napoleon's Corporals*. Don Bosco had a hand in everything, and personally attended to the most important things, giving suitable orders and seeing that they were carried out. The Oratory literally buzzed with activity, and everyone's thoughts and energies centered on one goal only—the solemn celebration of St. Aloysius' feast day.

The great day dawned at last. To have all the boys present, including workers, the feast day was set for [Tuesday] June 29, the feast day of SS. Peter and Paul, a legal holiday and a holy day. It was still very early, and a large number of boys was swarming around Don Bosco and the other priests for confession. By seven, the crowd was so great as to break all previous records. It seemed as though every boy in Turin had come to the Oratory. Many, therefore, of those who were not being confirmed could not get into the church, and had to attend Mass at Our Lady of Consolation.

The archbishop's carriage came into view shortly after seven o'clock. Several priests accompanied the prelate, along with two canons of the cathedral. The apostolic nuncio at Turin was also there, along with several other dignitaries. The priests, who were already at the Oratory, went to meet the archbishop in procession wearing surplices. When the archbishop reached the pavilion, Don Bosco stepped forward and gave a welcoming address in which he expressed his joy and that of the priests and laymen helping him and of all the boys, at the presence of their beloved pastor. He expressed above all his ardent desire to welcome the archbishop in a manner worthy of his exalted position and incomparable goodness, begging him to overlook the modest decorations and rather to cherish the warm affection of their hearts. Among other things, he said: "We would like to adorn our bare walls with precious tapestries; to strew your path with the fairest flowers; to offer you rich gifts befitting your dignity, but all this would be but a symbol of our overflowing esteem, gratitude and love for you. Since our poverty keeps us from offering you such symbols, we beg you, dear archbishop, graciously to accept what they stand for: our love, and the prayers we shall offer up this day. May Our Lord shower His blessings upon you and grant you a long life, so that we may continue to enjoy your thoughtful benevolence, and so that you may see in greater abundance the fruits of your eminent charity."

The archbishop then celebrated Mass and gave Communion to several hundred boys. He took spiritual delight in seeing so many boys, who were previously negligent in their religious duties, attend Mass and receive Communion with touching devotion. Later he declared that he had never before taken part in a more stirring

and pleasing function. "I could not help feeling overwhelmed with joy," he exclaimed, "at seeing all around me hundreds of fine, devout youngsters who perhaps would have gone astray, as so many others, were it not for this providential undertaking! I could not help feeling tears of happiness well up in my eyes at the sight of so many little lambs nestled in the bosom of the Church and in the arms of Our Lord when, were it not for the pastures and the sheepfold of the Oratory, they might be grazing upon poisonous herbs, falling victims to the fangs of wolves, or becoming wolves themselves."

An amusing incident occurred at Communion time when one of the boys misunderstood Don Bosco's instructions. As the archbishop, before giving him the Sacred Host, presented his ring for the ritual kiss, the confused boy, instead of kissing it, nearly took it in his mouth.

After Mass and the singing of the *Veni, Creator*, the archbishop confirmed about three hundred boys and closed the ceremony with an appropriate allocution.

On this occasion another comical incident took place to which we have already referred in another volume,¹ but which merits another mention here. As usual, an episcopal chair had been set up at the altar. Actually it was a stool draped with satin cloth and set on a wooden platform covered with a carpet. As he mounted the improvised throne, the mitred archbishop forgot that the chapel was not as lofty as his cathedral, and so the point of his mitre bumped against the ceiling. Smiling, he removed the mitre and murmured, "I must show respect for these young gentlemen and preach to them bareheaded!" He never forgot this incident. He often liked to recall it, and when urging Don Bosco to build a larger church for his boys he would add with a smile, "Make sure it's high enough so that I won't have to remove my mitre when I come to preach there."

In his allocution the archbishop reminded the boys of the meaning of Confirmation and exhorted them to be steadfast in resisting temptations as befits good soldiers of Jesus Christ. "Fight especially against the fear of what others might say," he told them.

¹ See Vol. II, p. 335. [Editor]

"Never stop anything right or begin anything wrong just because you fear what others will say or the mockery and the insults of the wicked. What would you think of a soldier who is ashamed of his uniform or is afraid to take a stand for his king?" After offering advice befitting the occasion, he concluded: "When I confirmed you a short while ago I invoked peace upon each of you, saying *Pax tecum*. Now I again invoke this peace upon all of you, and say *Pax vobis*. Yes, peace always abide in you, my dear children—peace with God, with yourselves, with your neighbor. Be at peace with everybody except the devil, sin, and the ways of the world. Wage ceaseless war against this trio of enemies. Always find strength in the thought that, by fighting till death, victory shall be yours, and this victory will bring you lasting peace."

Afterward, the boys were treated to breakfast, compliments of the archbishop, who wanted to be their shepherd also for their temporal needs.

The church services were inspiring, but no less pleasing were the outward manifestations of this feast day, in which the archbishop also took part after his breakfast. By coincidence this was also his name day, and the boys took this opportunity to recite various compositions in prose and poetry in his honor. The item that drew the loudest applause was a lively, witty dialogue among several boys who carried it off with professional ease. Then came a skit, *One of Napoleon's Corporals*, acted on a makeshift stage in front of the church on the street side. The star of the play was a comical caricature of a noncommissioned officer who expressed his happiness over this solemn occasion in myriad humorous expressions. The prelate thoroughly enjoyed the skit, claiming that he had never laughed so much in all his life.

The archbishop again addressed the boys. (Among those present that we came to know personally was Father Francis Oddenino.)² He began by expressing his joy at seeing with his own eyes the wonderful work being done at the Oratory. He likened it to the joy felt by missionaries when, in their poor and humble chapels, they see themselves surrounded by new Christian families, rich in the love of God and man and full of fervor. He had ample praise for all the priests and laymen working at the Oratory. Emphasizing the lofty

² A fellow seminarian of Don Bosco. See Vol. I, p. 383. [Editor]

character of this branch of the sacred ministry in words that were a reflection of his own zeal for the Church, for souls, and especially for the young, he exhorted all to persevere in this charitable undertaking, assuring them of his particular benevolence. Then, speaking directly to the boys, he urged them to attend the Oratory regularly and with good will, stressing the advantages they would receive spiritually and materially, now and in the life to come. In fatherly tones he exclaimed:

How many wretched people are today groaning in the depths of some gloomy prison! They are nothing but a burden to themselves, a shame to their families, a dishonor to their Church and country! And why? Because in their youth they had no friend, no visible guardian angel who, at least on Sundays and holy days, would take them off the streets and squares, shield them from life's pitfalls and bad companions, teach them their civil and religious duties, and show them the dignity of work and the shamefulness of idleness. I hope, my dear children, that this will not be your fate. Continue to come here for as long as you can; treasure the instructions you are receiving here; make them your norms of life. I assure you that, even in your old age, you will keep blessing the day when you found the way to this haven of knowledge and virtue. I cannot conclude my talk without thanking you for your warm welcome. I appreciate the affectionate sentiments expressed to me in your name in prose and poetry; I thank the young actors for their delightful skit, the choirboys for their melodious singing, and those of you who helped build the pavilion and arch. I thank, above all, those who have so zealously worked for your education. In short, I thank all of you for everything you've done. Since you called me "shepherd" and "father" in your recitations, I want to assure you I will be truly such to you, looking upon you always as my little lambs and my most beloved children.

It was nearly noon when the archbishop left, and another heart-warming scene took place. Archbishop Frasoni was so gracious and affable that everyone liked him at first sight and immediately felt at ease with him. So, when they saw that he was about to leave, the boys crowded about him blocking his way. Some tried to kiss his hand or touch his robes, others shouted "thank you" and "long live the archbishop." It evoked images of the solemn acclamations with which the first Christians had welcomed bishops in the early centuries of the Church: *Deo gratias, Episcopo vita, te Patrem,*

te Episcopum. The archbishop, indeed, looked like Our Saviour among the hailing multitudes. If the archbishop had let them, the boys would have hoisted him on their shoulders and carried him home in triumph, as the ancients had done with their kings, and as the boys [sometimes] did with Don Bosco. Their enthusiasm moved the prelate to remark, "I am more than ever convinced that young people are good at heart and that one can do wonders with them by appealing to their affection." Eventually he managed to get into his carriage and leave amid thunderous ovations and Don Bosco's repeated thanks and acts of respect, while he blessed them all once more from the bottom of his heart.

After the archbishop left, a report was drawn up on the ceremony, and the appropriate information entered on all the certificates. They were then sorted according to parishes, and sent to the chancery for forwarding to the respective pastors. The boys went home for lunch, but returned by two o'clock to play until four. Then they sang Vespers and listened to a sermon portraying St. Aloysius as a boy's model, especially in the practice of modesty and in his prompt service of God from his early youth. Next came a procession headed by a boy carrying a beautiful new banner. An outstanding feature was a pleasant young boy in cassock and surplice walking in front of St. Aloysius' statue and holding a lily in his hand; his devout demeanor and bearing made him look like a little saint. All eyes were upon him, just as formerly people had flocked to church to gaze at St. Aloysius in prayer, who looked to them like an angel in mortal flesh. As the procession reentered the church, the choir sang the *Tantum ergo* and there followed Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

Fireworks and balloons closed the festivities at night. At about nine, Don Bosco called the boys around him and had them sing the first two stanzas of the hymn, *Luigi, onor dei vergini*. Then he told them that it was time to go home and that they should leave in an orderly, quiet manner. They did so after shouting once more, "long live St. Aloysius, long live Don Bosco!"

Some time later, Don Bosco announced that several important persons had been enrolled in the St. Aloysius Sodality as honorary members. The boys were thrilled at the news that Pope Pius IX, James Cardinal Antonelli, Archbishop Louis Fransoni, Archbishop

[Anthony] Antonucci (then papal nuncio to the House of Savoy in Turin and later cardinal archbishop of Ancona), and other prominent persons were also members.

This solemn celebration, which made a great impression on the boys, was repeated yearly thereafter, but Don Bosco almost invariably set aside different days for honoring St. Aloysius and for administering Confirmation. If St. Aloysius' feast day was kept with ever greater splendor due to the swelled sodality membership, the thousand or more Communions, and the procession, it should not be assumed that the administration of Confirmation ranked lower in importance in Don Bosco's zeal or in the lasting spiritual advantages that came to the boys. Tireless in preparing them to receive this sacrament, Don Bosco took pains to explain what Confirmation was, its effects and the disposition with which they were to receive it. He heard their confessions the day before or in the early morning on the day of their confirmation and, after greeting the bishop at the church entrance, he would take part in the ceremony to assist the confirmands and help them keep recollected. As they lined up in the aisle he would go up and down and whisper a word or two to those who needed it, so eager was he that the Holy Spirit should find a worthy temple in these young hearts.

Thereafter he would often remind them that since they had now become soldiers of Jesus Christ, they should courageously bear witness to their Faith before the world, and be ready for any sacrifice rather than offend God. With greater earnestness he exhorted them to make the Sign of the Cross often and devoutly as a profession of their Faith, a weapon against the devil, as a uniform, a password setting them apart from the heathens. He would patiently point out the faulty way in which several of them made it because of ignorance or carelessness. To correct them, he gently chided those who made it poorly as though, instead of performing a holy act, they were trying to chase flies away. His lively faith made him a model to them, because in public and in private, he would make the Sign of the Cross so devoutly and so gravely, that even in this he was a source of edification.

Moreover, to remind the boys of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, he celebrated with great devotion and singular fervor the novena and the feast of Pentecost, exhorting the boys to do likewise. For several

years he himself preached the novena sermons, and later invited other priests to do so every evening of the novena, which always closed with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.

The zeal and deep faith he showed toward the Holy Spirit give us an inkling of how fervently he himself must have prepared for that day on which he had received from Archbishop [John Anthony] Gianotti the sacrament of Confirmation.³

³ See Vol. I, p. 207. [Editor]

CHAPTER 21

Political and Religious Turmoil

JOSEPH BUZZETTI [a contemporary witness] told us about a strange occurrence of this year [1847] which, he claimed, was common knowledge at the Oratory.

While Don Bosco was saying Mass [in town] at the convent of the Good Shepherd, one of the nuns let out a scream at the Elevation, jolting the whole community. Don Bosco was taken aback and barely managed to go on. When the nun later came to the Oratory to apologize for the commotion, he asked her, "What happened?"

"I saw Our Lord in the Host looking like a child dripping with blood," she replied.

"What does that mean?"

"I have no idea!"

"Know, then," replied Don Bosco, "that a bitter persecution is being staged against the Church!"

Indeed this dismal prediction was fulfilled only a few weeks later. *Il Gesuita Moderno* [The Modern Jesuit], a seven volume work by Vincenzo Gioberti,¹ printed in Switzerland, had been smuggled into Piedmont and was being widely circulated. In a paroxysm of hatred and a flood of vulgarity, Gioberti had drawn on every slanderous and scurrilous statement against the Society of Jesus by all kinds of heretics and unbelievers of the past two centuries. Parading as a zealous paladin of sound doctrine, he balanced violent invectives against the Jesuits with lavish praise for the Papacy in order to draw down everybody's condemnation on the former. Gioberti, in short,

¹ Father Vincenzo Gioberti (1801-1852), a philosopher and politician, played an important part in shaping Italian national feeling during the Risorgimento. See Vol. II, pp. 114ff, 250. [Editor]

was following Mazzini's ² secret directives of October, 1846: "Raise an uproar against the Jesuits. They personify the clergy. . . . Clerical power is embodied in the Jesuits. The hatred inspired by this name must be fully exploited by socialists. Keep that in mind!" ³ Gioberti's defamatory attacks were also directed at prominent churchmen and members of the laity. He attacked the Institute of St. Raphael and the Sisters of St. Dorothy, and painted in darkest colors religious orders and congregations, especially the Christian Brothers. He did not spare the Sacred Heart Sisters a pack of vile lies, outdoing the bitterest hack writer of cheap, lurid fiction. Gioberti also turned his guns on the Convitto Ecclesiastico of St. Francis of Assisi, ⁴ accusing Father [Louis] Guala of being [at heart] a Jesuit and so shaping his institution. He charged further that an all too lax morality was being taught at the Convitto and that it was nothing but a factory of lies, a hotbed of error, a workshop of prayers, a hangout for politicians and such like.

Gioberti's books created a violent stir in Italy and abroad. The secret societies hailed them as stupendous works, long needed, and destined for enduring fame. His name was bruited about the streets and in caf  s, praised and exalted to the skies by an ignorant populace aroused by agitators. Busts and portraits of the philosopher were displayed everywhere, and no effort was spared to spread the ideas contained in the *Gesuita Moderno*. Its primary purpose was to create a public opinion hostile to religious orders, and thus prepare the climate for a demand that education of the young be taken out of their hands. Mob hatred was also to be incited against them, thus putting pressure on the authorities to close their schools and prevent the religious from wielding any influence over the people. The secret societies were confident that victory would be theirs.

However, their least expected adversary, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales was rising in Valdocco. Divine Providence seemed to be playing a joke on them.

In Rome too the leading conspirators were faithfully following Mazzini's instructions on trapping the pope and the other sover-

² Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), was the apostle of the Italian Risorgimento. See Vol. I, p. 8f. [Editor]

³ Balan, *Storia Ecclesiastica*, Torino, 1879, Vol. I, p. 67.

⁴ See Vol. II, 31ff and *passim*. [Editor]

eigns. "The pope," Mazzini had said, "both on principle and from necessity, will lead in making reforms. . . . Take advantage of his slightest concession and assemble the masses, even if it is only for them to express their gratitude with festivities, songs and meetings. . . . Make the people realize their power and keep demanding more and more. As soon as you have won passage of one liberal law, shout your approval and demand another."

In fact, Pius IX, well-intentioned and eager to promote the people's welfare did grant some of the freedoms which they seemed to desire most, and immediately impressive mass demonstrations were held to thank him and loudly demand more reforms. On June 14, [1847] Pius IX appointed an ecclesiastical Council of Ministers. The revolutionaries, biding their time for a propitious moment to impose lay ministers on the pope, took to the streets with *vivas* to Pius IX, interspersed with cries of "viva Gioberti, viva l'Italia," in a background of revolutionary hymns. On July 5, [1847] Pius IX, who had only a few troops at his disposal, permitted the establishment of a civil militia for the maintenance of public order. By this stratagem the revolutionaries gained access to arms. Shortly thereafter, following the appointment of the Municipal Council, the pope established also the Council of State in which every city in the Papal States was represented. Unfortunately, several of the most dangerous conspirators had been elected to this council. On March 15, [1848] the pope granted freedom of the press but with certain limitations. They were completely disregarded. In Rome alone there appeared by August of the same year some fifty publications most of which were despicably intent upon fomenting rebellion. Meanwhile, there was no letup in the chorus of praise for Pius IX.

News from Rome reechoed in Turin with frenzied demonstrations and *vivas* for Pius IX. Archbishop Franson was among the first to sense the insincerity of the revolutionaries in this exaggerated enthusiasm for the pope. At the request of Pius IX, on June 7, 1847, he issued a pastoral letter urging the faithful to relieve the famine in Ireland, and he took this occasion to declare that this would be a fitting way in which to pay tribute to the pope, and a reason for acclaiming him; that some kept applauding Pius IX not for what he was, but for what they would like him to be; that, moreover, it should be understood that the applause the pope would

welcome most was neither the frenzied clapping of hands nor disorderly, tumultuous acclamations, but filial obedience to his admonitions and prompt execution not only of his commands but also of his wishes.

Don Bosco completely shared his archbishop's views. Naturally, loud hosannas to the pope were also heard at the Oratory, all the more so because Don Bosco always spoke of him with the greatest esteem. He often stressed the need to follow the pontiff as the link uniting the faithful with God, and foretold disaster and punishments for those who presumed to oppose or to criticize the Holy See in the least. He knew how to instill in his boys such love for the pope that they were ever ready to obey him faithfully and defend him with their lives. Hence they frequently shouted, "Long live Pius IX!" They were somewhat taken aback when Don Bosco corrected them. "Don't say, 'Long live Pius IX,' but 'Long live the pope!'"

"But why?" they asked. "Isn't Pius IX the pope?"

"Right!" Don Bosco answered. "To you it sounds the same, but certain people are trying to distinguish between the sovereign of Rome and the pope, the political ruler and the Vicar of Christ. They praise the man, but I see no evidence on their part of reverence for the dignity with which he is invested. So if we want to be on the safe side, let's shout, 'Long live the pope!'"

Then all the boys would repeat, "Long live the pope!"

"Now," Don Bosco continued, "if you want to sing your praise to him, sing the hymn which Maestro Verdi has just composed:

Let us hail the holy banner,
Which the Vicar of Christ has unfurled.

Thereupon all the boys would burst into a rousing chorus, singing this hymn which, according to Don Bosco, was a homage to the banner of the Holy Cross.

More than once, on Sundays, at a time when [political and religious] feelings ran high, several laymen visited the Oratory. They were considered to be good practicing Catholics, but liberals. They were enthused at seeing hundreds of lively youngsters. After expressing their admiration and encouragement, they invited the boys

to shout, "Long live Pius IX!" and were rather disconcerted when five hundred and more voices roared a thunderous "Long live the pope!" The boys had not forgotten Don Bosco's lesson. Indeed, to impress it on their minds even more strongly, he placed placards throughout the Oratory, exhorting the boys to obey the pope, to accept with respect his orders and to revere his authority. The placards carried these inscriptions:

1. "Thou art Peter and upon this rock, I will build my Church." [Matt. 16, 18]
2. "Where Peter is, there is Our Lord."
3. "I am with you all days even to the end of the world." [Matt. 28, 20]
4. "Where Peter is, there too is the Church."
5. "Feed my lambs." [John 21, 15]

In 1873 Don Bosco told [Alexander] Cardinal Bernabò:

I recall that in 1847, in some leaflets put out by rabid revolutionaries I read these instructions: "Now is the time to start shouting 'Long live Pius IX' but never 'Long live the pope.' Smear the Jesuits but hands off the pope. Praise good priests, encourage them and try to appeal to their vanity by showering praises on them. But as for bad priests, consider it a great achievement to win them to our cause."

This program was carried out to the letter. Even then, all but the blind could see how every move on the part of the liberals was aimed at harassing and unseating the pope, by cutting him off from temporal means and human support. Even now the liberals still say, "When the pope will have no more hope of getting back what was forcibly taken from him, he will have to bow to our demands."

To this end, therefore, in 1847, while Gioberti assailed the regular clergy, the conspirators astutely began to apply their wiles to beguile the diocesan priests. Mazzini had written: "It is a good policy to be on friendly terms with the [secular] clergy, and win them over to our side. . . . The [secular] clergy are not hostile to liberal ideas. . . . Our movement would make giant strides, if you could create Savanarolas in every capital. . . . Do not attack the [secular] clergy because of wealth or attachment to tradition; prom-

ise freedom to priests and you will see them joining our ranks. . . . The essential thing is not to let them know the real goal of our revolution. . . . Show them only the first steps to be taken . . .”

Consequently the order of the day in Turin’s masonic lodges was, “Be good to the priests!” Those who were not in on these secret aims could not grasp the reason for the unusual deference and cordiality displayed toward the [secular] clergy even by non-churchgoers. Soon every patriotic celebration was climaxed by a visit to some shrine, by the attendance of officials at Mass or at a *Te Deum* with Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. Priests were invited to conventions, seminars and parades, and were treated with every possible courtesy. At the University of Turin, where the Jansenists were firmly established as in a citadel, the students of other faculties fraternized with seminarians and priests taking courses in theology. Occasionally the latter had no way to avoid being greeted with enthusiastic ovations by their companions and professors. Outside the university, frenzied shouts of, “Long live our priests! Long live our seminarians!” told even from afar that some prominent ecclesiastic or a group of seminarians was passing by. Hence it should not be surprising that many of them joined the liberal movement in those days. Some had been aroused by Gioberti’s writings; others, in greater number, were simply naive and credulous, utterly unable to see through that false praise. They never once suspected that the political reforms, which everyone seemed to want, might not be entirely harmless, for had not Pius IX himself generously granted some of them to his own states? While so many priests swallowed the bait of public flattery, there were others who were not taken in by this popular display of enthusiasm. First among them was Don Bosco, who was convinced that the many *hosannas* would soon be followed by as many cries of “crucify!” In fact, when, this very same year [1847] Don Bosco’s friends asked his opinion on the present and future situation of the Church, he replied, “The revolution will proceed step by step and will carry out its program to the smallest detail.”

This soon became evident in the treatment accorded bishops, in strident contrast with the feigned affection for the lower clergy. In 1847, an infamous slander was concocted against Bishop Philip Artico of Asti, a vigilant guardian of ecclesiastical discipline. At

first the civil authorities backed the slanderers, and the Piedmontese Senate, ignoring the stipulation of the concordat of 1841, that the pope alone could judge bishops, ostentatiously sent its representatives to Asti to institute criminal proceedings against them. The case, however, was quickly dropped when the bishop's innocence was clearly established. To assuage the worthy prelate's sorrow and to show his personal regard for him, the king invited the bishop to [his royal mansion in] Racconigi. Nevertheless, the hostile manifestations and canards of the Asti conspiratorial clique continued unabated. Toward the end of the year, the bishop, feeling unsafe in the city, withdrew to his episcopal villa on a lonely hill, but there too he was followed and made the target of vituperation. In his bitter affliction he was deeply comforted by the staunch defense of his cause by the bishops of Piedmont and by the constant friendship of Don Bosco.

CHAPTER 22

Looking for Help

W HILE good, loyal Catholics were very apprehensive over the suspicious activities of the Church's enemies, the yearly spiritual retreat was being held at St. Ignatius' Shrine above Lanzo,¹ where for several years Don Bosco had been going on foot with Father [John] Giacomelli,² covering some nineteen miles in half a day. Father Victor Alasonatti of Avigliana tells us that Father [Louis] Guala³ and Father [Joseph] Cafasso had invited a Jesuit priest and a canon from Vercelli to preach. Don Bosco jotted the following notes on a plain sheet of paper.

Resolutions Taken at My Spiritual Retreat in 1847

Every day: a visit to the Blessed Sacrament.

Every week: an act of self-denial and confession.

Every month: the prayers for a happy death.

"O Lord, give me the means to do what You command, and then command whatever You will."

"The priest is the thurible of Divinity." (Theodotus)

"The priest is a soldier of Christ." (St. John Chrysostom)

"Prayer is to a priest what water is to a fish, air to a bird, water to a deer."

"He who prays is like one who goes to the king."

Strengthened and rested in spirit, Don Bosco left the peace and solitude of this mountain setting to return to the city. Soon after, the political situation was complicated by an unexpected train of events. The explosive controversy over salt between Piedmont and Aus-

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 96f, 112f. [Editor]

² A fellow seminarian. [Editor]

³ See Vol. II, pp. 96f. [Editor]

tria,⁴ already bordering on open warfare, was further heightened when news came that Austrian troops, violating papal rights, had occupied the city of Ferrara under the pretext of building an allegedly necessary line of defense for the Lombard-Venetian region. This act kindled new indignation in Italy and further emboldened the revolutionaries. Patriotic manifestations now included shouts of, "Austrians go home! Down with Austria!"

Charles Albert, determined never to separate his cause from that of the pope, immediately assured the pontiff that he was ready to put his army and navy at his service. In August, [Cesar Trabucco]⁵ count of Castagnetto, read a letter from the king to the Agrarian Congress at Casale in which he declared: "If Divine Providence sends us to war for Italy's independence, I shall mount my horse and place myself with my sons at the head of my army. . . . It will be a wonderful day when we shall be able to shout, 'To war, for the independence of Italy!'" All the newspapers carried this statement which aroused grave fear in those who foresaw the consequences of such a war.

Don Bosco, meanwhile, realized that he would not long be able to bear the entire burden of the Oratory alone, but he could not find others willing to live in community with him and dedicate themselves entirely and permanently to the salvation of youth. For several years he had toyed with the idea of entering a religious congregation, where he might be allowed to carry out his plans or which might provide him with the means to do so. He longed to surround himself with fellow priests whom he could imbue with his own zeal. For his part, he was more than ready to obey anyone the superiors of the institute might place above him. Indeed, he would prefer to carry out his mission, step by step, under such guidance. Later on, however, Don Bosco confided to us as follows.

The Blessed Virgin had revealed to me in a vision the field of my labors. I had, therefore, a complete course of action thoroughly planned in advance. I could not and absolutely would not alter it. The success of the undertaking depended entirely on me. I clearly saw the path I was

⁴ Piedmont's repudiation of an agreement on the salt trade brought swift retaliation from Austria in the form of a prohibitive duty on Piedmontese wines. See Vol. II, pp. 366f. [Editor]

⁵ A cabinet minister and senator of the realm. [Editor]

to follow and the means I was to use to attain my purpose. Consequently, I could not risk jeopardizing such a plan by submitting it to the judgment and will of others. Nevertheless, in that same year of 1847, I again searched carefully for a religious congregation in which I could be certain of carrying out my mandate, but before long I realized none existed. However commendable their spirit and their goal, none filled my need. This was what deterred me from becoming a religious. So my search ended and I remained alone. Instead of joining others already tested in community life and experienced in the various tasks of the priestly ministry, I had to look for young companions and then select, instruct and form them as I had been shown in my dreams.

Don Bosco, however, had not been forbidden to seek support for his mission from some congregation or to study their constitutions to see if they were suited to the current times.

He felt a particular liking for and a great interest in the Institute of Charity ⁶ [whose members were popularly known as Rosminians]. Both the founder and the members of this congregation enjoyed a reputation for virtue and knowledge. Don Bosco knew that in Rovereto they conducted evening classes for young apprentices to keep them away from saloons and other evil influences, that in Trent and elsewhere they had opened festive oratories for boys, that their mission of preaching in rural areas had done much good, and that in England their missionaries had brought many souls back to the true fold. Moreover, he was convinced that their religious structure was ideally suited to the new age, and that it offered a guarantee of stability and defense against the gathering storm which would inevitably break over the religious orders and their resources. In this congregation the right of individual ownership had replaced the system of collective ownership at least in essence, thus forestalling legal cavils against property subject to common law. There was another consideration. Don Bosco had also given thought to the advisability of availing himself now and then of Father Rosmini's strong influence over the new men in power in Turin and of having him as a friend and protector. It was Don Bosco's policy to secure every human means of support, while confidently and resignedly trusting Divine Providence to guide the course of events in keeping with its own ends. He was helped in his plans by several priests

⁶ Founded in 1828 by Father Antonio Rosmini-Serbatì (1797-1855). [Editor]

of the Institute of Charity who were stationed in St. Michael's Abbey ⁷ and who vied in zeal and labors with their predecessors, the Benedictines. Don Bosco had become friendly with them and had sent to their novitiate at Stresa some Oratory boys who wanted to join a religious order. This, and the hospitality which he extended to these good religious (who did not have a house in Turin) strengthened his contacts with them. Whenever Father Rosmini came to the city, Marquis Gustavo Benso of Cavour was always his host,⁸ but for several years the Rosminians who came to Turin on business, or who needed a respite during a long journey, found hospitality at the Oratory. Don Bosco always gave them a warm welcome and such accommodations as his limited circumstances permitted. The Rosminians, accustomed to austerity, were always perfectly satisfied. Whenever he could, he gave each of them a private room, and if his small house was already filled he would share his room with the new guest by reserving for himself only a small space behind a closet which served as a kind of partition. There he took his rest on a mattress laid on the bare floor. If the visitor rated special consideration, Don Bosco would move out entirely and find himself a place to sleep in the kitchen or in the sacristy. This he continued to do until 1854.

Grateful for these and other courtesies, Father [Charles] Gilardi and Father [Joseph] Fledelicio ⁹ had often urged Don Bosco to visit them in Stresa, but he had always been too busy to accept. Now, in the fall of 1847, he decided to go. He wanted to have a talk with Father Rosmini and ask his opinion on several plans he had in mind, which we shall discuss later. At the same time he wanted to see how some of the boys whom he had sent to the novitiate there were getting on.

Before leaving Turin, he handed over the direction of the Oratory to Father [Hyacinth] Carpano and the two boys Barretta and Costa, who were the factotums and principal singers in the choir. After reminding them to watch over their companions, he entered the carriage of Mr. Frederick Bocca, a contractor, who personally

⁷ Built in 998 on Mt. Pirchiriano, about three thousand feet above Avigliana, near Turin. It is one of the most important monuments of European Romanesque architecture. See Vol. I, p. 368. [Editor]

⁸ See Vol. II, p. 349. [Editor]

⁹ The correct name is Fradelizio. [Editor]

wished to drive Don Bosco. Mr. Bocca himself gave us the following brief account of this journey.

One Sunday, after a few days' travel, Don Bosco, who had silently been absorbed in his own thoughts for a good part of the way, suddenly exclaimed: "Well! Knowing that I am away, Barretta and Costa have not gone to the Oratory. Nor is Father Carpano where he should be; right now he is doing such and such a thing." Mr. Bocca made a note of this, to check it on his return.

The two travellers passed through Chivasso, Santhià, Biella, Varallo and Orta. At Miassino the coach inn was crowded. Don Bosco's jovial affability soon won him everybody's friendship. He entertained them with the life of St. Julius to their great delight, though they were unaccustomed to tales of this kind. Further on, Don Bosco and his companion visited the minor seminaries at Gozzano and San Giulio in the diocese of Novara. At night they were the guests of the Razzini family. At last, by way of Arona and San Carlone they arrived at Stresa. Don Bosco learned regretfully that Father Rosmini was away; Father Fradelizio, however, welcomed him cordially for he had great hopes that Don Bosco would join the Rosminians. He took him sightseeing to the Borromeo Islands, to Intra, to Pallanza and on the other side of Lake Maggiore to the shrine of St. Catherine of the Boulder, so named because a massive rock seems to hang in midair above the shrine.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco, through personal observation and tactful questioning, learned much about the spirit of the Rosminians. He came to the conclusion that in some respects it did not suit his purpose, but he kept this to himself. After enjoying the warm reception of the novices and their superiors, he returned to Turin by way of Arona, Novara, Vercelli and Chivasso. The homeward journey was marked by many delightful and spiritually fruitful incidents with innkeepers along the way. As usual he heard the confessions of coachmen and stableboys. The trip lasted almost twelve days. When they were back in Turin, Mr. Bocca went straight to Father Carpano and said to him, "I heard that you were not at your post last Sunday."

"Who told you?"

"Don Bosco himself."

Father Carpano, who was quick-tempered, snatched his biretta

from his head and flung it angrily to the floor. "See? They couldn't wait to run and tattle to Don Bosco!" he exclaimed. "Who told him?" When he heard that Don Bosco himself had guessed or seen from afar what had happened, he fell silent. Mr. Bocca also verified Don Bosco's observation with regard to the two young choirboys.

Don Bosco stayed only briefly in Turin. On October 2, he and Father Borel arranged an outing for all the boys to Superga,¹⁰ providing plenty of grapes for a snack. Then he himself set out on foot for the usual trip to Becchi. He was accompanied by a few boys and by his mother, who walked alongside him carrying her basket. As long as they were within the city limits, she discussed with her son the problem of where to lodge the boys and supervise them, but once they were beyond the customs gates and were moving along the lonely country roads, she began to recite the rosary aloud, the entire group responding.

The Moglias, his former employers and benefactors,¹¹ had been told of his coming by letter, and they had made preparations to welcome him properly. During the first years of the Oratory Don Bosco took along only four or five boys; in later years, ten or fifteen; once he took twenty-five, but that was the last time. He stopped visiting the Moglias because each time he came he had more boys with him, and he did not want to abuse their generosity. His arrival always called for a feast. An enormous dish of polenta¹² and plenty of sausages were usually prepared for the boys, and they had lots of fun cooking the sausages themselves. Don Bosco and his co-workers, priests or clerics [when he had them in later years], would sit with the Moglia family. Later, Don Bosco would continue on to Morialdo, where he would spend some weeks in his father's farmhouse¹³ and help [his pastor] Father [Anthony] Cinzano, on the feast of the Holy Rosary.

This year, when he returned to Turin, he brought along the first student from Castelnuovo d'Asti, his cousin Alexander, son of John

¹⁰ A hill about three miles east of Turin and 2,205 feet above sea level. It is crowned by Juvara's masterpiece, the basilica of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. In fine weather one can look down on Turin or at the wide semicircle of the snow-crested Alps that rise like a wall at a radius of about thirty miles. [Editor]

¹¹ See Vol. I, pp. 144ff, 153f, 293, 328f. [Editor]

¹² Cornmeal boiled in water. [Editor]

¹³ See Vol. I, p. 20. [Editor]

Baptist Pescarmona, a rich landowner. Pescarmona had agreed to pay Don Bosco a regular fee for board and tuition and to provide his son with necessary clothes, books and medical care. The boy was to lodge at the Oratory and attend a third year Latin course in a private school conducted in Turin by Professor Joseph Bonzaino. Aware of Don Bosco's straitened circumstances, the boy's father had insisted on advancing the total fees for a three-year period.

We have mentioned this incident to call attention to a policy for admitting boarding pupils to the Oratory that Don Bosco had already set in those early years. "We are here," he said, "to gather and board poor boys free of charge. Hence it would not be right that alms intended for the poor be used for those who have some means of their own, scanty or ample. This policy should be our gauge in setting the appropriate monthly boarding fee."

Young Alexander was not the only boy that Don Bosco took in as a boarder. He was always looking for helpers to further his good work. Consequently, he gladly offered lodging to priests and others who wished to settle in Turin for their studies or similar pursuits. They too paid a prearranged fee. For example, Father [Charles] Palazzolo,¹⁴ his friend and pupil from Chieri, started boarding at the Oratory on October 23, 1847, and on October 29 of that same year Father Peter Ponte¹⁵ came to Valdocco. He was probably the second person to hold the office of prefect in the festive Oratory. They stayed with Don Bosco throughout 1848 and carried on their priestly ministry in various churches of the city.

The two main dishes¹⁶ which were the staple diet of the week, were hardly appropriate for these paying guests, and so the Oratory now offered meals which were customary in religious houses—nourishing, but not lavish. He ignored requests to make them more savory, since he was determined to lead a life of sacrifice and self-denial; consequently, his boarders did not stay long with him. Don Bosco liked to quote St. Paul: "Having food and sufficient clothing, with these let us be content." (1 Tim. 6, 8)

¹⁴ See Vol. I, pp. 219f; Vol. II, pp. 28f. [Editor]

¹⁵ See Vol. II, p. 336. [Editor]

¹⁶ One dish prepared on Sunday lasted until Thursday; the other, meatless, was for Friday and Saturday. See p. 20. [Editor]

It bears mentioning again that his poverty and self-denial prompted his benefactors to come to his aid more readily, since they saw that he kept nothing for himself. It was obvious to them that no worldly motive induced him to work so hard and endure such privations. Further, his example inspired generous souls to be equally zealous and to help him however they could. For example, several nobles and middle class people joined his young catechists and teachers, both in church and out, and they too began to take an interest in boys who needed jobs. They gave them clothing, taught them how to meet prospective employers in workshops and stores, found work for them and visited them on the job during the week to see how they were getting along. In 1878, in a conference to Salesian Cooperators Don Bosco praised them.

It was certainly Divine Providence Who sent them, and thanks to them, the good work kept spreading. These first helpers of mine, priests and laymen, unmindful of hardships and labors, sacrificed themselves for the salvation of others, content to see so many unruly youngsters now leading honest and upright lives. I have seen many of them give up the comfort of their own homes to come here every Sunday, even daily during Lent, at hours that were convenient to the boys but most inconvenient to themselves, in order to teach the youngsters their catechism. I have seen them come to Valdocco every evening in winter, through streets and paths that were rough and dangerous, through snow and ice, in order to take over classes which had no teacher, giving most generously of their time.

Among these must be mentioned Count [Charles Albert] Cays of Giletta, Marquis [Dominic] Fassati, Count [Frederick] Callori of Vignale and Count Scarampi of Pruney. The latter, in 1900, at the age of eighty, still wept for joy when reminiscing to Father Celestine Durando¹⁷ about Don Bosco and those early years.

Not only laymen, but lay women too came to the Oratory to help. Don Bosco, in the above mentioned conference, had this to say of them.

Increasingly our poor boys were in need of material assistance. Some had pants and jackets so tattered as to be immodest. Some lads could

¹⁷ A distinguished Salesian, a scholar, and member of the Superior Council of the Salesian Society in its early years. [Editor]

not even afford to change the one torn shirt they wore. Their clothes were so filthy that nobody would hire them. This is where the loyal and kindly assistance of these ladies made such an outstanding contribution. I would like to honor and praise these Turinese ladies, who, despite their noble background, did not disdain to pick up those soiled clothes and mend them with their own hands. They took those dirty, tattered shirts which perhaps had never once been laundered, and washed them and mended them. The boys were of course impressed by this example of Christian charity and continued to frequent the Oratory and practice their Faith. Several of these distinguished ladies also used to send linen, new clothes, money and groceries. Some are present here now, but many others have already been called by the Lord to receive the reward of their labors and charitable deeds.

These zealous ladies gathered about Mamma Margaret. First and foremost among them was Mrs. Margaret Gastaldi, mother of Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, and her good sister. Then, there were Marchioness [Mary] Fassati, an illustrious lady-in-waiting, and others of high social rank. They did not consider it beneath their dignity to associate with the humble peasant woman from Becchi and mend ragged garments in her tiny room.

When Don Bosco began to board orphans, these same ladies took care of them with truly motherly affection. They would bring them shirts and handkerchiefs every Saturday, and every month clean sheets, diligently mended if necessary. Mrs. Gastaldi assumed responsibility for having the linen laundered. On Sunday she would inspect the beds. Like a general reviewing the troops, she checked the pupils one by one, to see whether they had changed their shirts and whether they had washed properly. Then, after setting the soiled linen aside she sent it to the washerwomen. She would also inspect the boys' clothes to see if they needed mending. Often she would call upon various girls boarding schools and convents for help, and they would compete with one another in this work of charity. Mrs. Gastaldi spent a good part of her day in the linen room of the Oratory with Mamma Margaret, helping her keep it in order and providing personally or through the charity of others sufficient supplies of linen and personal clothing for the boys. She also gave whatever financial aid she could. The boys looked upon the Gastaldi sisters as their special benefactresses. Mrs. Gas-

taldi continued this charitable work for several years, even after the death of Don Bosco's mother.

Up to now we have described the care showered on the Oratory boarders when they were in good health. We have to add that there were also generous benefactors who took care of them when they were sick, alleviated their sufferings, and did all they could to restore them to health. Don Bosco entrusted the day pupils to the ministrations of charitable doctors, and readily procured medical assistance for the more poverty stricken among them, even when they were living with their families. He recommended the boys who were hospitalized to nursing sisters and doctors for special consideration. With fatherly solicitude he never failed to visit the sick youngsters in their homes or in hospitals. Even as early as 1847, he wanted to provide a house doctor for the Oratory boarders. The first to hold this office was Doctor Vella of Cavaglià. Don Bosco had the greatest regard for him and for his brother, who with fellow seminarians came to the Oratory to teach the catechism at Archbishop Franson's request. Doctor Vella zealously performed his charitable mission until 1856, when he joined the faculty of medicine at the University of Bologna.

Other eminent doctors, animated by the same charitable spirit, succeeded him. We shall gratefully mention them later in our narrative. Apart from these, whom we might call general practitioners, there were also hundreds of specialists who, over a period of forty years and more, visited and treated those boys who were seriously ill, at any hour of the day or night when Don Bosco or his representatives called. They were highly esteemed physicians and gifted surgeons, busy from morning until night with their own private practices. Nevertheless, they were grateful for a chance to be helpful, and insisted on being called whenever there was need. These poor boys received the same care as the children of the wealthy families. Such are the achievements of noble souls inspired by Christian love. Honor and grateful thanks to the doctors of Turin! We shall always pray for them and always remain grateful to them as Holy Scripture tells us: "Hold the physician in honor, for he is essential to you and God it was Who established his profession." (Sir. 38, 1)

CHAPTER 23

God's Instrument

IN 1847-48 Don Bosco was God's instrument in the remarkable conversion of a young Jew. One day, as Don Bosco was making the rounds in St. John's Hospital in Turin, the mother superior, Sister Seraphim, a native of Buttigliera,¹ told him of a Jewish patient in his early twenties who seemed interested in becoming a Christian. Don Bosco gave the nun some wise suggestions on how to begin religious instruction without getting into any controversy. In her friendly talks with the young man, Sister Seraphim, among other things, told him about Don Bosco and especially of his fatherly care for boys, pointing out what he had done and was doing for their welfare in Turin. The young man listened with growing interest and soon became quite anxious to meet Don Bosco. A few days later, Sister Seraphim, who had invited Don Bosco beforehand, went to the patient's room and said, "I have some good news. I think Don Bosco has just come in and is making the rounds in our ward. If you want to meet him, I'll introduce him to you. I'm sure his visit will do you good."

"Yes, of course! I'd be very glad to see him," replied the young Jew who was not a bed patient. As Don Bosco came into his room, one of the best in the hospital, the young man arose from his chair and politely removed his cap whose visor almost hid his face. Something about his gentle, refined appearance hinted at a secret sorrow. After a few questions Don Bosco sensed that he was dealing with a sensitive youth of sterling qualities. This first visit was a short one, but it paved the way for many others, longer and spiritually

¹ A village adjoining the small hamlet of Morialdo close to Don Bosco's birthplace. See Vol. I, pp. 20, 132, 207. [Editor]

fruitful. As the young man came to know Don Bosco better, he began to feel a deep liking for him and told him his life story.

His name was Abraham, and he had been born in Amsterdam of wealthy parents. Very intelligent, a top student, and the idol of his family, he had easy access to amusements, travel and comforts. Nevertheless, he had always led a decent, upright life. Abraham had an older sister, Rachel, of whom he was very fond. She secretly desired to become a Christian. From books on religion which she read secretly or through contact with some Catholics, Rachel had learned about our Faith and was gradually influencing her brother Abraham with Christian principles without his awareness. A few years older than her brother, Rachel at seventeen told her father that she wanted to become a Catholic and a Sister of Charity, and asked his permission to go to France for that purpose. Her request infuriated him. Unable to shake her from her resolve, he forbade her to leave until she became of age. When that time came he could not stop her, but he disinherited her and refused to give her any means of support. Her aunt, however, also Jewish, felt sorry for the girl and provided her dowry for admission to St. Vincent de Paul's Sisters of Charity in Paris. When Abraham learned that his sister wanted to become a Catholic and a nun, he took a sudden, bitter, violent dislike to her, in the belief that she no longer cared for him. Nevertheless, the Christian principles she had instilled into him were strong enough to keep alive in him some gnawing doubts about his own faith.

Abraham's mother was quick to grasp his misgivings. In order to strengthen his faith, she would often tell him stories from the Talmud to impress upon him the terrible punishments visited upon Jews who changed their religion. But Abraham gave them little credence and kept repeating: "Why should I fear a witch ² who you say lived in the days of Adam? If she still exists, as you claim, she must be pretty old by now, and so I don't think she can do me any harm."

Abraham's father, who was quite superstitious, seeing his favorite son stray further and further from his ancestral faith and at times even belittle some of its precepts, called in a learned rabbi to

² Most likely the dreaded Lilith of Jewish lore. [Editor]

show him his error. Abraham's subtle intelligence, however, gave the rabbi a hard time, especially when they discussed the eternal kingdom promised by God to David. He asked the rabbi where this kingdom was at the present time, repeatedly quoting Moses as saying: "The scepter shall not depart from Juda, nor the staff from between his feet, until he [the Messiah] comes to whom it belongs." [Gen. 49, 10]

"Now if the Messiah has not yet come," insisted Abraham, "where is our kingdom of Juda? And if the kingdom of Juda is no more, isn't that a sign that the Messiah has already come?"

Try as he might, the rabbi was unable to answer him convincingly on this point. The father loved Abraham as a favorite child. Seeing his constant restlessness and deep interest in religion, he sent him to Protestant ministers in the hope that they would clear his doubts and satisfy his intellectual curiosity without endangering his faith. It was useless, for they rather tried to draw him to their own persuasion. Abraham was not impressed. He considered a religion without sacrifice or ritual, without unity and unquestioned doctrine, as no religion at all. In their determination to win him over they undermined his morals, and, unfortunately, Abraham was too weak to resist. As a result of his dissolute life he contracted a pulmonary disease. As soon as the first symptoms appeared, Abraham developed a violent hatred against the Christian faith, realizing that the cause of his disease lay in the evil advice he had received. He complained bitterly to his father for having referred him to those ministers, but his father answered, "You wanted to know about Christianity and I sent you to its teachers." In Amsterdam, [at that time] Christian meant Protestant: such were the courts, the churches, and society in general. Catholics were so few and unknown that he had never even heard of them or their religion. When his sister Rachel had turned Christian, Abraham had assumed that she had joined the Protestants.

As his illness persisted, his parents decided to send him to Vienna for treatment by the most renowned physicians. There he spent some time in several hospitals, receiving the best and most expensive care. Since there was no improvement, the doctors decided to try a change of climate and sent him first to Innsbruck and then to Turin. The illness was now clearly diagnosed as tuberculosis. At

first, some wealthy Jewish relatives of his welcomed him, but, then, fearing for the health of their own children, they sent him to Chieri where his condition progressively worsened. He had to go back to his relatives in Turin, and after a few days they set him up in a private room at St. John's Hospital.

It was here that he had the good fortune to meet Don Bosco. In his first visits Don Bosco made no mention of religion; he broached the subject only after he was sure of the boy's friendship. Abraham then realized his error in identifying Christianity with Protestantism, and he could not help admiring the beauty of Catholic doctrine. Soon, however, his family learned of Don Bosco's long visits and took steps to prevent their son's conversion. They hired private nurses to watch him day and night, and from then on it became very difficult for Don Bosco to visit Abraham and discuss religion with him. At first the young man was rather distressed, but soon he found out that one of the nurses spoke only French and German, whereas he spoke English perfectly as did Sister Seraphim. So they agreed to continue his religious instruction in English, with neither of the nurses being the wiser for it. Don Bosco coached Sister Seraphim and provided her with suitable books, such as Paolo de Medici's *Discussioni dirette agli Ebrei* [Talks to the Jews] and *Gli Ebrei* [The Jews] by Father Vincenzo Rosso of Mondovì, two works intended to prove to Jews that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, had already come. The two nurses could not understand a word of what was being said but, suspecting what was afoot, told their employer, to whom Abraham's father had given explicit orders to prevent the boy's conversion to Catholicism. As a result they tried to move him again to Chieri. But not even the offer of a generous recompense could overcome the reluctance of the Jewish families there to accept the patient in their homes. Meanwhile the illness was approaching its terminal stage, and Abraham's relatives kept a close watch. After being informed of his turn for the worse, the father ordered his son returned to Amsterdam, no matter what the consequences. The doctors, however, refused to comply; the patient was so weak and so little life remained in him that he would surely have died on the trip. At last his kin in Turin, realizing that nothing could save him, overcome by their superstitious fear of the dying, made themselves scarce and left him alone. Seizing the propitious moment,

Father [Felix] Rossi, the chaplain, baptized Abraham, gave him First Communion and administered the Anointing of the Sick at two in the morning. His relatives were told nothing.

A few days later Don Bosco was on his way to pay Abraham a visit when a patient in one of the wards asked him, "Are you by any chance going to see Abraham?"

"Yes."

"He died last night."

The young man had been in the hospital six months. [Thirty-five] years later, in 1833, Don Bosco happened to be in Paris. He called on the Sisters of Charity and asked whether in their convent there was a nun from Amsterdam, a convert from the Jewish faith.

"Yes, Sister Rachel is still here," said the sister who opened the door.

"Would you kindly tell her I have some news of her brother?"

"Her brother? He died years ago."

"Yes, I know, but, so to say, he died in my arms."

"Did he die as a Catholic then? His sister did hear some rumors to that effect, but nothing definite."

"I can vouch for it. When may I see Sister Rachel?"

"Could you come to say Mass for us tomorrow? In the meantime I'll tell Sister Superior. How thrilled Sister Rachel will be!"

Don Bosco kept his appointment. Rachel was overjoyed at meeting the priest who had been the Lord's instrument in leading her dear brother to his eternal salvation. She now learned that the seed she had sown so many years before had borne the fruit of everlasting life. Don Bosco said Mass and preached. It was indeed a day of great joy for Sister Rachel and the whole community.

CHAPTER 24

Plans for a Second Oratory

THE harder Don Bosco and his incomparable assistant Father [John] Borel strove with their co-workers to promote the intellectual and religious education of the Oratory boys, the more the attendance rose. On Sundays there were so many boys that only a fraction could be accommodated in the chapel; two hundred or more had to use classrooms or a section of the playground, which also, in spite of its size, was becoming inadequate. It looked like a drill ground crammed with soldiers unable to march or maneuver without bumping or unwittingly sabering one another. Something had to be done.

One Sunday in August, after the afternoon church services, Don Bosco took Father Borel aside and said: "For the past few Sundays, especially today, you've probably noticed that the number of boys coming to the Oratory is positively amazing—at least eight hundred! They can't all squeeze into church any more, and those who do are packed like sardines. The playground situation is no better, they keep tripping over each other like circus tumblers. It will only get worse as we go on. Cutting down the number by sending some away would be like deserting them and exposing them to moral dangers. What do you suggest?"

"I've noticed it, of course," replied Father Borel. "Obviously this place, which once seemed big enough, is now far too small. But are we to pull up our stakes again and, as cranes and swallows do every year, migrate once more?"

"Maybe there is another solution," Don Bosco continued. "I have learned that a good third of these boys come from Piazza Castello, Piazza San Carlo, Borgo Nuovo and San Salvario, which means they have to walk a mile or two to get here. How about

opening another oratory in that area? That would solve our problem without having to move again. What do you think of it?"

Father Borel pondered Don Bosco's suggestion awhile and then exclaimed joyously: "Excellent! We'll hit two birds with one stone. With fewer boys in Valdocco we'll be able to give them more attention, and with a new oratory in town we'll draw many others who cannot come here because of distance. So let's go ahead!" They were truly of one mind.

The very next day Don Bosco went to Archbishop Frasoni, told him of the need for a second oratory, outlined his plans, and asked his advice on the matter. The archbishop immediately gave his approval and, knowing the needs of the city, suggested that the new oratory be opened in the southern part of town.

Encouraged by the prelate's words, Don Bosco then called on the pastor of Our Lady of the Angels, who gladly promised to help Don Bosco as much as he could. Don Bosco next made a tour of inspection of several possible sites in the Porta Nuova neighborhood. After weighing the pros and cons of several localities, he decided on one along the Viale del Re, now Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, near the Po River. This is now [1903] a residential area with splendid buildings, wide avenues and beautiful gardens, but in those days it was a vast wasteland, dotted with small homes scattered about without any planning, and inhabited mostly by washerwomen. Its fields ringed with trees made it look like open country and it was ideally suited for large crowds. On Sundays especially, swarms of boys used to gather there to play; many of them lingered even during catechism class and church services. Thus they grew up ignorant of their religion but well versed in evil. It was an ideal location for what Don Bosco had in mind. Like an experienced captain, he chose it as the strategic spot to pitch camp.

On this terrain stood a small house to which were attached a ramshackle shed and a courtyard. When Don Bosco found out that it belonged to a certain Mrs. Vaglianti, he called upon the lady, explained what he was looking for, and asked her to rent him the whole place. The good woman was willing to give him a lease, but they could not agree on the yearly rent. After much wrangling, negotiations seemed to be about to break down when an unexpected

development brought them to a close. The sky darkened and suddenly there came a terrifying clap of thunder. The landlady turned to Don Bosco in utter fear and cried, "God save me from lightning, and I'll rent you the place at your price!"

"I thank you," Don Bosco answered, "and I pray that God bless you now and always." In a few minutes the skies cleared, and all was quiet again. They settled on a rent of 450 *lire*. The tenants living there were served notice and masons were immediately dispatched to the spot to start converting some rooms into a chapel.

Meanwhile, one Sunday, Don Bosco told the boys that a second oratory would soon be opened. The charming way in which he gave this welcome news is still remembered.

My dear sons, when a beehive becomes overcrowded, some bees fly elsewhere to start a new one. As you can see, there are so many of us here that we can't even turn around. Every time you play, someone gets pushed or knocked down or ends up with a bloody nose. In the chapel we're packed like sardines. It wouldn't do to try to make it bigger by pushing the walls out, because the roof would crash down on us. So what shall we do? Let us imitate the bees. Let's swarm and start a second oratory.

Shouts of joy greeted this announcement. When the boys quieted down, Don Bosco continued.

I bet you're all anxious to know where the new oratory will be, who of you will go there, how soon it will open, of course, and what its name will be. If you'll manage to be quiet, I'll tell you. This new oratory will be in the neighborhood of Porta Nuova, near the iron bridge, on the Viale del Re, which is also known as the Viale dei Platani from the plane trees which line it on both sides. Those of you who live around there will attend this new oratory, not only because it is nearer to your homes, but also because I want you to draw other boys by your good example. When will it open? Workmen are now busy preparing the chapel, and I hope that we shall be able to bless it on December 8, the feast of the Immaculate Conception. As we did in Valdocco, we shall open our second oratory on a day sacred to the great Mother of God, thus placing it under Her protection. What shall we call it? We shall call it the St. Aloysius Oratory for two reasons: first, to provide a model

of purity and virtue for boys, as the Church herself has done; secondly, as a gesture of appreciation and gratitude to our beloved Archbishop Frasoni, who bears the name of this saint ¹ and who loves us, helps us, and protects us. Do you like it? Are you happy?

He was answered with a thunderous roar of approval, followed by prolonged "hurrahs" to St. Aloysius, to the Porta Nuova oratory and to Don Bosco! It would be hard to imagine a happier, more praiseworthy and unanimous plebiscite.

The boys carried the news to their families, schoolmates, and fellow apprentices. Soon the whole neighborhood knew of it, and small groups of boys began to inspect the site of the new oratory. Seeing it so well suited to their games, they were overjoyed, and could hardly wait for it to open. Every day seemed like a thousand to them. Thus, weeks before its gates opened, the new oratory was already well known.

However, Mrs. Vaglienti's decision to rent her property to Don Bosco had not pleased the washerwomen who lived and worked there. When they found out that Don Bosco had rented the place for an oratory, they became furious. Inciting each other to action, they decided to protest to Don Bosco in person and force him to cancel his contract.

One day, while Don Bosco and Mrs. Vaglienti were inspecting the rooms for the necessary alterations, they found themselves surrounded by a group of these angry women. Faces flushed, eyes flashing with rage and fury, arms akimbo, like so many harpies they unleashed on Don Bosco a string of insults and curses such as he had never heard before.

"You are a heartless priest!" they shrieked. "Is this the way you practice charity?"—"What harm have we done to you that you should drive us away from our homes?"—"Aren't there other places in Turin where you can mingle with scamps and thieves?"—"I hope you break your neck!"—"A plague on you!"—"To the devil with you and your oratory!"—"If you don't leave of your own free will, we'll drive you away. Our hands are strong enough, you know.

¹ In this edition we translated the archbishop's first name with "Louis" rather than with the less common form "Aloysius." Nevertheless, we used the form "Aloysius" in all contexts referring to the Gonzaga saint. [Editor]

We'll even scrub your face!" And they began to advance menacingly towards him.

Don Bosco tried to calm them. "Listen, please listen to me, good women," he said to them.

"We're not going to listen," they yelled. "Just get out of here or you'll be leaving here more dead than alive!" Several of the more rabid ones had already raised their fists to strike Don Bosco when Mrs. Vaglienti stepped forward.

"You're so wrong, my tenants," she shouted. "You think this priest has come to destroy your jobs. Just the opposite. If he opens an oratory in this neighborhood and later a boarding school for boys, you'll have plenty of work. He'll send you the wash, and you'll have lots of mending to do. Why get mad at him, when really you should be grateful? As for lodging, I'll set you up another place nearby. You'll be just as close to the river for your washing, you'll have plenty of room to spread your laundry to dry in the sun, you'll have more work and you'll earn more money!"

The landlady's speech had the effect of a handful of sand thrown at warring bees; better, it was like sprinkling holy water on a swarm of goblins. The washerwomen fell silent, listened to what Don Bosco had to say, finally apologized and immediately left Don Bosco and his new oratory in peace.

Other battles, however, much more dangerous and bitter, were in the offing, and not only against Don Bosco and his second oratory.

CHAPTER 25

Admirable Prudence

A LETTER from Charles Albert [in August, 1847] to [Cesar Trabucco], count of Castagnetto ¹ hinted at the course the king intended to follow. On October 9, Count [Clement Solaro della] Margherita, the only minister who did not stoop to flatter the king, was dismissed from the government. Thus the field was left wide open to the liberals who now gained full control. Charles Albert soon realized his mistake, but it was too late.

The first effects of this take-over by the liberals were immediately apparent. Marquis Robert d'Azeglio,² brother of Count Maxim,³ drafted a petition and solicited signatures from all who loved freedom, to demand that the king grant Jews and Waldensians full civil rights by abrogating all hostile laws. Many people, even some clergymen, failing to note the heretical notions implied in this petition, let themselves be carried away by this semblance of justice and freedom. Such laws, after all, had been passed to protect Catholics from the proselytizing of Waldensians, from the exploitation of Jews, and from the intolerance and hostility that marked the attitude of both these groups toward Catholics.⁴

The marquis had also tried to win over the bishops, but they presented the king a petition of their own in protest. Don Bosco's signature was also solicited [by the liberals]. The sponsors of this petition pointed out to him that six canons of the cathedral, ten

¹ See p. 171. [Editor]

² Roberto d'Azeglio (1790-1862), was an outstanding statesman and patriot of the Risorgimento. See Vol. II, pp. 366f. [Editor]

³ Massimo d'Azeglio (1798-1866), like his brother Roberto, was active in the Risorgimento. See Vol. II, pp. 113, 249f. [Editor]

⁴ The reader should not forget that the events described in this volume took place over a hundred years ago. [Editor]

pastors of Turin and about a hundred other canons, pastors and priests had already signed. Don Bosco read the petition and calmly replied, "When I see the archbishop's signature, I'll sign too!" The petition carrying slightly over six hundred signatures, not all from Turin, was presented to the king on December 23.

After thus gaining the support of Waldensians and Jews, the liberals set to work most energetically to force Charles Albert into carrying out desired political and civil reforms. When the king hesitated, the foreign press, prompted by Massimo d'Azeglio, began to speak of the waning influence of the king of Piedmont and of a steady rise of public opinion in Italy against him. Angered and alarmed by these criticisms and satirical barbs, Charles Albert yielded to pressure, and between October 29 and November 27, [1847] he issued the first reforms through a series of decrees. The main ones were: establishment of a supreme court of appeals, admission of oral debate in criminal procedure, abolition of special law courts and of special jurisdiction for several civil bodies, transfer of police authority from military to civil personnel, reorganization of the Council of State, election of councilors by their own municipalities, and a limited freedom of the press. This last decree, although prohibiting works offensive to religion and its ministers and to public morals, did not exempt from pre-publication censorship works carrying an ecclesiastical imprimatur. Consequently, it subjected pastorals of bishops, catechism books, all religious and church publications, and the very Bible to civil censorship.

All that the bishops wanted was compliance with the laws enacted by the Fifth Lateran Council and the Council of Trent. They sought no personal advantage; they were concerned only with the welfare of the people, the protection of the Faith, the security of the throne and the king's good name. Their appeal was in vain, and Bishop Andrew Charvaz of Pinerolo resigned his see in protest to show his displeasure.

For several months after October 29, [1847] Turin became the scene of a dizzy succession of mass demonstrations hailing these reforms. The celebrations began with a so-called "spontaneous" illumination of the city; throngs of people, in their Sunday best, with red, white and green cockades on their lapels, paraded through the city streets and squares, unfurling a forest of flags and wildly cheer-

ing Italy, Charles Albert, Pius IX and Gioberti. Almost every night, patriotic serenades were conducted. The leaders of the secret societies kept fanning the flames among the working class; demonstrations and banquets became the order of the day; business concerns sent messages to the king pledging full support to the struggle for independence. Indeed, every public appearance of Charles Albert drew deafening applause. On November 2, [1847] when he left for Genoa, where other enthusiastic receptions had been prepared for him, the crowds escorted the sovereign as far as the Po River with flags and flowers. There was another illumination of the city on November 4, the king's name day, and a solemn *Te Deum* in the "church of the miracle."⁵ Robert d'Azeglio was the leading spirit behind these and other wily maneuvers.

Many priests, even the older and more sensible, had been swayed by this ferment for change, these petitions and civil celebrations, and were wildly praising the reforms, Charles Albert and Pius IX. To bring them back to their senses Archbishop Fransoni ordered on November 11, that in all sacristies a notice be posted forbidding the clergy to take part in political demonstrations. He stated, among other things, that priests should always be the first to show loyalty to the king, not through worldly demonstrations, but through faithful observance of their duties toward him. On November 13, in a circular to pastors, the archbishop authorized them to sing the *Te Deum* if requested, but also enjoined them to point out to the people: that the proper way to give thanks to God and have Him heed their prayers was to free their souls from the slavery of sin; that no good could be accomplished by those who sponsor church services but have nothing but contempt for church laws; and that there had always been people who tried to hide their evil deeds under the cloak of religion.

At this blunt talk the liberals raised a hue and cry against the prelate, and many diocesan and religious priests echoed them, thus showing their ignorance of the real situation. Archbishop Fransoni

⁵ Corpus Domini Church. The miracle of the Blessed Sacrament took place on June 6, 1453. A soldier was carrying off in a sack over the back of a mule a stolen ostensorium containing the Blessed Sacrament. When he reached the spot where the church of Corpus Domini was later built, the mule refused to budge notwithstanding whippings and blows. The ostensorium fell to the ground while the Host remained suspended in midair for all to see. [Editor]

was charged with supporting Austria and the Jesuits, with being an enemy of Italy and an opponent of the pope himself, whom the whole world acclaimed and blessed. Through the press and by word of mouth the rumor spread that Pius IX was to be the leader and moving spirit of the *Lega Italica*,⁶ and that he had entered into an alliance with Charles Albert, a devout Catholic, in order to drive the Austrians out of Italy. In other quarters it was also said that the pope had sent the king a sword he himself had blessed and that it bore this inscription: *In hoc gladio vinces* [with this sword you shall win].

Among the archbishop's critics were several priests who, chafing under ecclesiastical discipline, hoped that the moment had come for shaking off the yoke of episcopal authority; there were also religious who formed cliques and showed their desire for internal reforms, mitigation of somewhat austere rules, curtailment of the superior's authority, and a more democratic administration of their communities. Later these religious were either dismissed or requested to leave. Those of the clergy who were pious, hard-working, and earnestly dedicated to their sacred ministry sided with the archbishop.

Amid such a nonsensical mess Don Bosco's remarkable prudence shone brilliantly. Steadfast in refusing to take part, alone or with his boys, in any of these public demonstrations, he clearly saw that the banner of freedom was being waved to incite the people against the rights of the legitimate sovereigns, especially the pope. Hence, he did not favor political innovations, but he equally refrained from opposing them verbally or otherwise. All he wanted, he said, was to do good—nothing but that—no matter what the cost. But this was not easy to do. Prominent and influential people, aware of his control over hundreds of boys and young men, urged him to swell the crowds taking part in the celebrations and the parades, but despite their urgings, pressure and criticism, Don Bosco always refused.

One day, Brofferio ⁷ met him [in town] and said to him, "There's a place reserved for you and your boys tomorrow in Piazza Castello."

⁶ A federation of states under the leadership of the pope as envisioned by Gioberti. See Vol. II, pp. 114ff. [Editor]

⁷ Angelo Brofferio (1802-1866), a figure in Piedmontese politics, was an adversary of Camillo Benso Cavour. [Editor]

"Others will be there to take it if I don't show up," replied Don Bosco. "I have very urgent business I cannot put off."

"Do you really think it wrong to give public witness of your patriotism?" the lawyer continued somewhat sarcastically.

"I didn't say that," rejoined Don Bosco. "I'd like to point out that I am just a simple priest, that before the State I am no one in particular and that my duties are preaching, hearing confessions, and teaching catechism. I cannot order my boys about, once they are out of my chapel, and therefore I cannot take any responsibility for them in such an important matter."

Meanwhile, Don Bosco was busy organizing demonstrations and parades of a very different kind. He bought a statue of Our Lady of Consolation and a pedestal for twenty-seven *lire* on September 2, [1847] and decided that this year and next it should be borne processionally through the Oratory neighborhood on the main feasts of the Blessed Virgin. He also organized a procession in honor of St. Aloysius within the Oratory precincts on the first Sunday of each month and set aside the last Sunday for the Exercise for a Happy Death. Pius IX had endowed the practice with a plenary indulgence applicable to the souls in purgatory, and had granted an indulgence of three hundred days to all who took part in the procession. So, while in town a thousand flags waved to the strains of patriotic songs and music, at the Oratory swarms of boys walked behind humble banners and filed out of the chapel with the little statue of St. Aloysius Gonzaga. To the strains of hymns glorifying innocence and purity, amid lilies and other flowers, they bore it in procession around Mamma Margaret's vegetable garden and back to the chapel to receive their Divine Saviour's blessing. A great deal of good was accomplished by this monthly procession and by other religious practices which were absolutely essential in those days. They were held regularly for a little more than a year, that is, as long as popular demonstrations were taking place in Turin. Even Don Bosco was amazed at the boys' response.

The revolutionaries, as we shall see, kept employing every wile and stratagem to capture the imagination, incite patriotic frenzy, inflame passions and portray the Church as an enemy of the freedom and the welfare of nations. Consequently, for several years there was among the people a deplorable religious decline, and disre-

spect and even hostility toward bishops and priests. It is hard to envision the excesses to which some of the more hot-headed let themselves be carried. Don Bosco one day remarked to Father John Turchi: ⁸ "How glad I am to be a priest! If I were not, what would have become of me in times like these!" His own reactions, as usual, guided him in talking to his boys in order to dispel prejudice, teach truth, and keep alive the spirit of piety in their hearts.

His own preoccupations, however, did not prevent him from sharing Archbishop Fransoni's tribulations and worries. As the archbishop's palace was always open to him in the last few months of 1847 and the early months of 1848, he would go there of an evening at about half-past five and stay until eight. Young Francis Picca,⁹ would often meet him at Porta Nuova on his way from school and would be invited to tag along. "Gladly," the boy would answer, "but where are you going?" The answer was always the same: "To see the archbishop." One after another, the young priest and the venerable prelate would discuss the very grave events that were happening so rapidly and, often, Don Bosco would be given a difficult and delicate mission, since there were some who spied on the archbishop's every word and action. The situation kept worsening with each passing day. The commissions which were supposed to censor the press allowed the printing of subversive books and the importation of the most godless publications from France and Switzerland; they made no effort to forbid novels, comedies, tragedies and poems filled with hatred for the Church, all of which had for some time found their way into homes, universities and even religious houses and seminaries. At the same time the leaders of the secret societies were beginning to make use of the extraordinary power of the press, and they began with the newspapers *Opinione*, *Risorgimento*, and *Concordia*.

Grave as these afflictions were for the archbishop, there was yet a graver sorrow that might be termed domestic. A spirit of restless-

⁸ A pupil of Don Bosco and later a teacher at the Oratory, where he said his first Mass on May 26, 1861. On October 25, 1895, he gave a very important written testimony to the Prefect of the Congregation of Rites concerning the relations between Archbishop Lawrence Gastaldi of Turin and Don Bosco. See *Memorie Biografiche di S. Giovanni Bosco*, Vol. XIX, pp. 403-12. [Editor]

⁹ A high-school boy who first helped Don Bosco when the latter was staying at the Convitto Ecclesiastico. See Vol. II, p. 298. [Editor]

ness, of impatience with discipline began to be noticeable among his seminarians. On one occasion, upon meeting the apostolic nuncio in the street, they failed to show him due respect. The reading of certain books, the excitement of endless public demonstrations, and the sly encouragement of agitators had stirred up and inflamed the seminarians too. Superficial in their evaluation of events, they were taken in by the outward show of respect to religion with which the revolutionaries had cleverly launched their campaign. In their inexperience the young seminarians tagged the labels of "reactionaries, Jesuits, pessimists, idiots" upon those priests who tried to restore them to their senses by foretelling dark days both for Italy and for the Church.

On December 4, [1847] a great demonstration was staged to welcome Charles Albert back from Genoa, and most of the seminarians decided to take part in it. The archbishop strictly forbade them to do so, declaring that he would deem any seminarian who disobeyed unworthy of sacred orders. He ordered, too, that the seminary gates be kept open. Late in the evening some eighty seminarians walked out and mingled with the enthusiastic crowds. Shortly thereafter, on the feast of Christmas, Archbishop Frasoni had another painful surprise: at the pontifical Mass his seminarians in the sanctuary were wearing red, white and green cockades pinned on their chests. Surely his sorrow must have been somewhat mitigated by the prayers and Communions of the boys at the Midnight Mass in Valdocco and by the [recent] opening of the Oratory of St. Aloysius in Porta Nuova.

CHAPTER 26

Opening of the Saint Aloysius Oratory

FATHER JOHN BONETTI describes the solemn opening of the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova in his *Cinque Lustri di Storia dell'Oratorio Salesiano* [History of the First Twenty-Five Years of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales] as follows.

As the time for the opening drew near, Archbishop Frasoni was asked to authorize the blessing of its chapel, and to grant all other necessary faculties for the boys' [spiritual] welfare. The archbishop promptly and generously agreed, and delegated the pastor of Our Lady of the Angels to bless the chapel; he, in turn, subdelegated Father Borel.

On the Sunday preceding [the feast of the Immaculate Conception] Don Bosco announced that the opening of the new oratory would take place early on the morning of that feast day. He invited the boys who lived in the southern part of the city to come to the oratory grounds, which they already knew so well; there would first be confessions, then the blessing of the chapel, and finally Communion.

"Come in great numbers, in a spirit of devotion, my dear boys," he exhorted them. "That way we shall worthily honor the Immaculate Queen of Heaven, who is also our beloved Mother. We shall implore Her to look lovingly upon our new oratory, to take it under Her mantle, to protect and defend it, and to make it grow for the good of so many boys like yourselves. Those of you who live in Valdocco should attend the Valdocco Oratory. Thus on this memorable day we shall be like two families; though physically at the opposite ends of town, we will still be one in spirit, singing the praises of the most holy, lovable, ever sinless and immaculate Mother of God."

As they filed out of the church, a crowd of boys swarmed around Don Bosco and Father Borel, promising to bring other boys, relatives, neighbors and schoolmates to the new oratory. The two priests saw in

their enthusiasm a joyous omen of success for their undertaking, God willing.

On the eve of the feast [of the Immaculate Conception] the chapel to be dedicated to St. Aloysius was ready. Several benefactors and benefactresses, the so-called Salesian Cooperators, had provided the necessary appurtenances: a picture of the saint, candlesticks and candles, altar cloths, alb, chasuble, cope, benches, kneelers, a small storage cabinet, and a vesting table. Some good ladies had done the embroidery on most of the sacred vestments. The few items which were still needed were brought over from Valdocco or borrowed from the neighboring parish church.

A heavy, whirling snow was falling on the morning of December 8, 1847. It was the third anniversary of the blessing of the first chapel of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, when it had been located at Marchioness Barolo's St. Philomena Hospital.¹ Under the patronage of that most gentle of saints, it had grown beyond expectations. As if to guarantee that this second oratory would likewise bring untold benefits to youths and enjoy the same success, Providence had disposed that it begin under the same auspices, namely on the feast of the Immaculate Virgin, watchful guardian and powerful support of the most praiseworthy undertakings. Even the falling white snowflakes augured well for the future, as though the Lord wanted to show that the boys of this new oratory would be as numerous as the snow flakes whose whiteness was a symbol of that innocence He wished to see preserved in, or restored to, their souls. Lastly, having St. Aloysius as patron and model was a further guarantee of good fruits to come. These expectations were no illusions; in due time they were fulfilled.

The inclement weather did not prevent the boys from coming in great numbers to the new oratory. At seven in the morning several were already waiting to go to confession, and by eight the chapel was full. Father Borel officiated at the ceremony, since Don Bosco had to be at Valdocco. He blessed the chapel, celebrated Mass, and then delivered a short, heartfelt homily which went substantially as follows.

"I cannot tell you how happy I am this morning, my dear boys!" For a moment he was choked by emotion, but then he continued. "The cold weather did not stop you. Your devotion to the Blessed Virgin and your love for your new oratory warmed your hearts and brought you here in great numbers. All of you have heard Mass devoutly and many have received Holy Communion. I am truly happy. I have great hopes that

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 194f. [Editor]

you will continue to come willingly and regularly. I hope that by your good example and suggestions you will be able to bring along many of your friends. I hope that this oratory will prove a worthy brother to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, and that both will lead many souls to God! May the Immaculate Virgin, on whose feast day we are beginning this new work, help, protect and defend us! Then, taking his cue from the feast of the Immaculate Conception, he exhorted the boys to avoid sin and to practice the virtue of purity above all else by modeling their conduct on the edifying life of St. Aloysius.

At the conclusion of his homily, the boys recited some prayers, sang an invocation to the Blessed Virgin, and then filed out of the church in an orderly manner. At the door, each joyfully received a sandwich as a little gift from his heavenly Mother to appease his appetite, since it was already past breakfast time. It would be superfluous here to speak of the routine of the new oratory. Suffice it to say that it followed the same schedule and method of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

So far Father Bonetti's account. As we have seen, he sets December 8 as the opening date of the St. Aloysius Oratory. We find the same date in Vol. XXI of an 1851 encyclopedia compiled by Goffredo Casalis, under the heading *Istituti di beneficenza*. This poses a grave difficulty inasmuch as Archbishop Frasoni's decree, delegating the pastor of Our Lady of the Angels to bless the new oratory chapel and permitting the celebration of Mass there, is dated December 18, 1847, and the date is spelled out. We cannot assume that there was a previous oral authorization, because Don Bosco in presenting a brief history of the Society of St. Francis de Sales to the Holy See in 1864 to obtain a preliminary approval, clearly states that "by a decree dated December 18, 1847, the ordinary authorized the opening of a new oratory dedicated to St. Aloysius." We cannot assume that Holy Mass was celebrated there without authorization. What are the true facts then? We may surmise that Father Bonetti confused two distinct facts. The *de facto* opening of the St. Aloysius Oratory may well have taken place on the evening of the feast of the Immaculate Conception, while in the morning the boys who would ordinarily attend it went for services to Valdocco as before. On the two following Sundays they may well have gathered in the chapel during the afternoon, though it had not yet been blessed, for catechism lessons and the sermon, so that

they would not have to go twice on the same day to Valdocco in such bitter cold and with darkness falling so soon. We exclude Christmas since that fell on the Sunday after December 18,² and Father Borel would have been far too busy with his many duties at the Rifugio. In our opinion the solemn opening must have taken place on the feast of St. Stephen [December 26] or on that of St. John the Evangelist [December 27] which at that time were faithfully observed as days of obligation. If we take other circumstances into account, such as the fatigue which such festivities, following closely one upon the other, would have caused, we think that very probably the chapel was blessed, and the first Mass celebrated precisely on the feast of St. John the Evangelist. In such a case, although the diocesan ordo had to be followed as regards the Mass, the Blessed Virgin shared honors with Her adopted son.³

Let us continue with our narrative. Don Bosco at this time could not run this second oratory himself. Hence, in agreement with Father Borel, he entrusted it successively to several zealous priests in Turin, to whom he sent as helpers some of the older and more dependable boys [from Valdocco] morning and evening, on Sundays and holy days. He often went there himself, as did Father Borel.

The first director of the new oratory was Father Hyacinth Carpano who, assisted by Father [Joseph] Trivero, took great interest in providing whatever was still needed for the decorum of the sacred services. He also strove to win the love and confidence of the boys. He succeeded so well that this second oratory became a faithful copy of the first at Valdocco.

According to Father Michael Rua, over five hundred boys attended the St. Aloysius Oratory. He himself had often visited it as a boy and later as a cleric to teach catechism.

Here, too, classes were held after church services. The boys learned basic reading, arithmetic, and modern and Gregorian music. Many boys also came for instruction to the evening elementary classes held during the week. In a playground adjoining the oratory

² An oversight! December 18 was a Saturday, and so was Christmas. [Editor]

³ According to Father Eugenio Ceria who wrote Volumes XI through XIX of the *Biographical Memoirs of St. John Bosco* and who annotated the 1946 edition of the *Memorie dell'Oratorio di San Francesco di Sales* by St. John Bosco, the formal opening of the St. Aloysius Oratory took place on Sunday, December 19, the day after Archbishop Fransoni had granted his authorization. [Editor]

they were taught military drills and gymnastics, and engaged in wholesome games and sports.

Since [false] notions of liberty had also spread to this section of the city, Father Carpano had a few unpleasant encounters in the neighborhood.

On Sundays and holy days he had to bring wine and hosts for Holy Mass and the boys' Communion, as well as bread for his own breakfast. Since it was a very bitter winter, he used to carry also a bundle of wood under his cloak to warm the small room which served as the sacristy. One morning, as he was hurrying along the quiet streets of Borgo Nuovo, several hoodlums, seeing him bundled up as though hiding something, began to shout after him. Then becoming more curious, they ran, overtook him and roughly tore open his cloak, almost throwing it to the ground. When they discovered the bundle of wood and learned what it was for, they were ashamed and hastily withdrew in great embarrassment.

Another evening, as he was wearily returning home from the new oratory, he was pelted with stones in the old parade grounds. He thought his last hour had come, when he heard a voice saying, "Leave him alone, it's Father Carpano!" Immediately the stones stopped, and he emerged from this ugly encounter miraculously unscathed.

The devil was beginning to show his rage against the newly opened second refuge to shield boys from moral dangers.

CHAPTER 27

Political Demonstrations

GREAT events were set in motion at the beginning of 1848. The secret societies were fully geared for action. Civil reforms were demanded of the ruling sovereigns from one end of Italy to the other. Piedmontese newspapers carried harrowing accounts of the cruelties, vexations and oppressions inflicted on the Lombardy and Veneto provinces by the Austrians. There was a great outcry of protest in Turin amid calls for war and shouts of “down with Austria!” when Austria reinforced its garrisons in its Italian dominions, raising the total of soldiers to eighty thousand. These shouts, however, were accompanied by even shriller ones of “death to the Jesuits!” as the revolutionaries kept spreading the rumor that the Jesuits favored Austria and that because of their pressure Charles Albert refused to grant an amnesty to political prisoners, failed to establish a civil militia and did not lower the price of salt. Gioberti’s writings had also incited hatred against the Religious of the Sacred Heart portraying these nuns as a branch of the Society of Jesus.

Charles Albert still believed he could reconcile the demands of the revolutionaries with the prerogatives of an absolute monarchy. He had once declared, “I shall never grant the Constitution!” But on January 7, the leaders of the Piedmontese press met to demand precisely that from him. Though couched in deferential terms, their demand both puzzled and frightened the king. Then, on January 12, a bloody revolution engineered by followers of Mazzini broke out in Sicily, and the Neapolitan provinces threatened insurrection; Ferdinand II had to grant them the Constitution, and the grand duke of Tuscany followed suit shortly thereafter. At this news, the slogan, “We won’t settle for less than Tuscany and Naples,” swept like wild fire through Turin. [Angelo] Brofferio and [Marquis Ro-

berto] d'Azeglio led crowds through the streets in the glare of flaming torches to demonstrate nearly all night under the windows of the Neapolitan embassy, loudly acclaiming the Constitution. Pressure was put on Archbishop Frasoni for a solemn *Te Deum* in St. Francis of Paula Church, but he refused, irking those ringleaders who demanded freedom for everybody except the clergy. A mob of hoodlums had sometime before held a hostile demonstration under the windows of his palace in broad daylight. On another occasion they had surrounded his carriage as he returned from a visit to the ailing Father [Louis] Guala at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, and they had insulted and booed him.

Sinister, incessant mass meetings began to demand that a liberal government be set up. Charles Albert's ministers warned him that he must either grant the Constitution or face an inevitable clash between government and people. True enough, the vast majority of the populace was either indifferent or opposed to all these innovations, but the few managed to impose their will on the many. On February 5, a vast crowd assembled in Piazza Castello, and a delegation from City Hall petitioned the king to establish the legislative chambers and a civil militia. On February 7, Charles Albert, deeply shaken by the crucial concessions he was being forced to make, held a council meeting with his ministers. After formulating the principal articles of the Constitution, he insisted that in regard to freedom of the press, books dealing with religion be subject to the episcopal *imprimatur*, and that Church property be absolutely inviolable. Since time was essential and further delay might prove disastrous, the promise to grant a Constitution was promulgated on February 8, and its main features were outlined in fourteen articles. They dealt with the king's powers, the two legislative chambers, the system of taxation, limited freedom of the press, guarantee of individual freedom, permanent tenure of judicial office, and institution of a civil militia. Thus Charles Albert stripped himself of part of his royal authority and invested it in the people, represented in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, changing his absolute rule into a constitutional monarchy.

This solemn announcement was followed by new enthusiastic demonstrations, but the municipal authorities did not go ahead with the general illumination of the city, as planned, since the king let

it be known that he did not wish it. On February 9, many seminarians, flaunting cockades, again streamed out of the seminary for a walk through town. The liberal press praised them in glowing terms, and incited them to further rebellion. Meanwhile, Don Bosco continued to spend several hours every day in colloquy with the archbishop.

On February 12, the archbishop held a thanksgiving service in Corpus Domini Church, attended by the city officials, and on the same day he issued a very brief letter authorizing a solemn *Te Deum* in all the churches. Everyone expected Archbishop Frasoni to mention the Constitution, as other bishops had done, in announcing an indult for Lent starting on March 8. He did not; instead, in his pastoral of February 24, he instructed his pastors to steer clear of politics in their sermons. The liberals harshly criticized this letter and viewed it as evident proof of his opposition to the recently granted freedoms. They therefore began to hatch a plan to drive the archbishop out of his diocese.

Meanwhile, the king had accepted in part the petition for the emancipation of Waldensians and Jews. On February 17, he issued a decree granting Waldensians full civil and political rights as well as the right to attend universities and secure academic degrees; he did not, however, alter existing laws concerning the exercise of their cult or their own schools. Added impetus was given for more celebrations.

The municipal authorities decided to commemorate the promise of the Constitution with a solemn high Mass and *Te Deum* in the church of La Gran Madre di Dio [The Great Mother of God] ¹ on [Sunday], February 27. Archbishop Frasoni, invited to preside, was asked to authorize an outdoor Mass under the church's portico. He refused and declined to attend, but permitted Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The celebration took on the aspect of a most imposing procession. People flocked from all parts of Piedmont, from Liguria, Nice, Savoy, Sardinia and Lombardy, thronging the long, wide route from the royal palace to the further bank of the Po. The king joined in the celebration along with the royal family, city officials, representatives of the various communes and provinces with their banners, members of the guilds, and, at their head, a

¹ It was built to commemorate the return of the Court in 1814. [Editor]

group of Waldensians. The crowds lustily sang Mameli's martial anthem *Fratelli d'Italia*,² [Brothers of Italy]. Despite a new, explicit directive of Archbishop Fransoni prohibiting participation in political demonstrations, many seminarians gathered on a terrace overlooking Via Po along the parade route. The mammoth procession was barely under way when the first dispatches arrived from Paris reporting the fall of Louis Philippe, civil war in Paris, and the establishment of the republic. This ominous news so dismayed Charles Albert that he could not hide his fears and he paled visibly. Had such an event occurred a month before, he would most certainly never have granted the Constitution. The cathedral rector, assisted by four canons and other members of the clergy, gave Benediction from the head of the majestic stairway in front of the church, but the boisterous behavior of the multitude was a real profanation of the day of the Lord. The truly devout regarded it as an evil omen.

Marquis Roberto d'Azeglio that evening was hailed by several hundred Waldensians and pastors who assembled before his house to express their joy and thanks, just as the Jews had done on that same day in their ghetto in Turin. The marquis well deserved their applause and gratitude, for he had worked hard to make them part of the expected glory and happiness of a new Italy. The secret societies had planned this parade since the beginning of the year so as to force the king to grant the Constitution; they had entrusted its organization to the marquis who, with his usual tact and efficiency, by letter invited the different communes to attend. Since the king had already yielded, the huge demonstration served to celebrate the promise of the Constitution. Thus, what had originally been planned to be treacherous pressure became a triumph. Perhaps Charles Albert was unaware of that, but the absence of the archbishop and Don Bosco from this celebration revealed their admirable prudence.

To be sure, Marquis Roberto d'Azeglio had also called on Don Bosco to press him to participate with his boys and all the other

² Goffredo Mameli (1827-1849), a poet and an advocate of Mazzini's ideas, wrote patriotic poems. Outstanding among them was *Fratelli d'Italia* . . . in 1847. Set to music, it was sung throughout the wars of the Risorgimento and eventually became the Italian national anthem. [Editor]

schools of Turin in the mammoth parade in Piazza Vittorio Emanuele. The marquis was on friendly terms with Don Bosco, whom he often met in some of the patrician homes of the city, and he was sure that his invitation would be accepted. Don Bosco instead replied, "Marquis, this hospice and oratory are not an officially recognized institution. It is nothing more than a family living on the charity of the people. Were we to take part in such celebrations we would only make ourselves ridiculous."

"Not at all," the marquis rejoined. "Let everybody know that this budding undertaking of yours is not hostile to the new institutions. This will greatly help you and channel more donations to you. The municipal authorities and I will be generous to you."

"I am grateful for your goodwill," Don Bosco replied, "but I firmly intend to keep on assisting these poor boys morally by teaching them and finding them jobs, but I will not fill their heads with ideas they cannot understand. By sheltering abandoned children and striving to restore them to their families and to society as good sons and well educated citizens, I prove clearly enough that my work, far from being hostile to modern institutions, agrees with them and helps them."

"I understand all that," insisted d'Azeglio, "but you're making the wrong decision. If you keep up this course of action, you will be deserted, and your work will collapse. My dear Don Bosco, one must be interested in the world, become acquainted with it, and update both old and new institutions."

"Thank you for your advice, dear marquis. I shall certainly put it to good use, but you will kindly forgive me if I do not attend the coming celebration with my boys. Ask me to help out in some project where a priest can exercise his ministry, and you will find me ready to sacrifice myself and all I have. But I don't want to bewilder my boys by having them attend demonstrations whose true import is quite beyond them. Besides, marquis, in my present circumstances, I have made up my mind to keep aloof from anything that smacks of politics. Never for, nor against."

As they conversed, Don Bosco led the marquis through the house, discussed his future plans with him, and told him of the daily routine. The marquis admired all he saw and was unstinting in his praise, but he nevertheless voiced the opinion that too much time

was being wasted on lengthy prayers. He particularly did not like at all the recitation of fifty Hail, Marys, one after another. He suggested that such a tedious practice be dropped.

"Well," replied Don Bosco amiably, "that practice means a lot to me. I would say that my whole undertaking is based on it. I wouldn't mind giving up many other important things, but not this. If it should become necessary, I would sacrifice even your very valuable friendship rather than abandon the recitation of the rosary."

Since he could not budge Don Bosco from his principles, the marquis took his leave and from that day on had no further dealings with Don Bosco.

Don Bosco's repeated refusals to take part in the demonstrations and his unwavering loyalty to the pope and the archbishop did not escape the attention of those who were on the alert against sudden reactionary moves. These worthy persons, for whom plotting was a way of life, always suspected others of the same intent. Don Bosco's lengthy visits daily to the archbishop, and the hundreds of boys that seemed ready to obey him at the drop of a hat had increased suspicion. So, from time to time, he was summoned to City Hall, where there was great excitement among the officials over the changes in the form of government. Several of these gentlemen asked him to express his opinions and make some gesture which would win him the favor of the liberals. Don Bosco gave only evasive replies. To decline would be interpreted as an act of hostility toward Italy; to consent implied acceptance of principles which, he was convinced, would have dire consequences. Therefore, Don Bosco condemned no one, but neither did he approve. Indeed, one official once haughtily told him, "Don't you know that your very existence lies in our hands?" Don Bosco pretended not to hear the threat. He had arrived at City Hall looking like a simple fellow, unshaven, in hand-me-down clothes, discolored shoes, and with a deliberately ungainly gait. He looked like the curé of some very remote mountain village. The officials, who at that time knew him only by name, finally decided that he was not anyone worth bothering about and, perhaps, even slightly deficient mentally. By behaving as a nonentity Don Bosco dispelled their fears. He seemed to be imitating David's stratagem at the court of Achis, king of Geth. [Cf. 1 Kgs. 21, 13-15]

CHAPTER 28

Mob Violence

DAY in and day out, the Jesuits were made the target of a vicious stream of abuse. A citizens' committee sought an audience with the king to request their expulsion from the realm; he did not receive the committee nor would he grant their petition, and so the agitators took to the streets to express the will of the Freemasons. A mob of Piedmontese revolutionaries and outlaws from other Italian states literally ran riot on the night of May 2, [1848]. Screaming murder, smashing windows and doors, they invaded the Jesuit house adjacent to the church of the Holy Martyrs and their school of Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, driving them out into the street amid imprecations and insults from the mob. The police appeared when all was over. The following day the rabble stormed the convent of the Religious of the Sacred Heart in Via dell'Ospedale, but this time the police kept them from breaking in. The convent, however, was besieged for a week. In reply to the mother superior's appeal for protection, the minister of the interior sent word that "the king could do nothing for them." Consequently, the sisters had to return to France.

The Jesuits, forced to scatter to the four winds on that tragic night, sought refuge in private homes. Father [Louis] Guala sheltered many of them in the nearby Convitto Ecclesiastico and gave them sizable loans to meet their most urgent needs. Don Bosco too did all he could to help, especially by providing them with civilian clothes to get out of the city in disguise. It was none too soon because mob fury was soon followed by police action, and all Jesuits were ordered out of the realm. They left unmolested, but in other parts of Italy they were treated shamefully. In Turin, however, the disorders continued. Gioberti's invectives in his book *Il Gesuita*

Moderno [The Modern Jesuit] and the shelter offered to the Jesuits aroused the mobs against the Convitto Ecclesiastico. One evening a large crowd rallied in Via Mercanti under its windows, shouting, among other invectives, "Down with the Convitto! Death to Father Guala!"

Father Guala was sick, so Father Cafasso faced the mob in an effort to calm the handful of rabid ringleaders and the crowd that had been enticed out of sheer curiosity. Many already knew him, for they had seen him accompany convicts to the scaffold. His calm, meek bearing and gentle utterances soon reduced the rabble to silence. At that very moment, one of the student priests, a hot-headed admirer of Gioberti's writings, improvised on his own a small-scale window illumination with the few candles he could find in the rooms of his fellow priests. This was enough to turn the hostile shouts of the mobs to *vivas*, and soon the demonstrators dispersed. Father Guala was sorely grieved by the incident and tactfully dismissed the liberal-minded student.

The trouble seemed to be over, but one night four plainclothesmen and two policemen showed up at the Convitto with a warrant to conduct a thorough house search, as though it were a hotbed of subversive activities. They rummaged through the place while Father Guala watched them from his easy chair, but they found nothing incriminating. All they took was a bundle of documents, which they soon returned.

Demonstrations were also staged against Marchioness Barolo,¹ for allegedly having hidden fifteen Jesuits in her residence. Her life was threatened, as though the girls sheltered in her institutions had been kidnapped from their parents and forcibly kept there. Such was the mob's gratitude for all her works of charity in Turin. Drunkards and loose women gathered in front of the Rifugio and hurled all sorts of insults, swearing to liberate the girls living there and burn the place down. Their uproar could be heard at the Oratory.

Nor had the revolutionaries forgotten Archbishop Fransoni.

¹ Marchioness Juliette Colbert Barolo (1785-1864), born in Vendée, France, had married Marquis Tancredi Falletti of Barolo, Italy. She used her wealth to build and maintain several charitable institutions in Turin. See Vol. II, pp. 182ff and *passim*. [Editor]

They planned another noisy demonstration against him, but were balked by Marquis Roberto d'Azeglio, who stationed himself on the portico of the palace with a squad of the national guard and kept the demonstrators at bay.

Danger signs of new unrest among the seminarians, the imminence of war with Austria, and the disruption of studies at the University of Turin prompted Archbishop Frasoni to close the seminary. All seminarians who had taken part in political demonstrations were barred from sacred orders. Having been told of the archbishop's decision, many gathered in the courtyard and sang the popular Genoese patriotic anthem, *I figli d'Italia si chiaman Balilla* [Italian boys are like Balilla].² So violent was the warmongering that many of them, giving up their priestly vocation, enlisted in the army; others turned to teaching, became well-known professors of literature, led good Christian lives and, in due time, as good friends of Don Bosco, greatly helped the Oratory high schools; a few were incardinated into other dioceses and eventually became priests.

It was inevitable that these ugly events should adversely affect the Oratory boys. After all, everywhere in town, within their own families and at their own jobs, they could not help hearing different opinions, some favorable, about these demonstrations. Don Bosco soon realized it; privately and publicly, he tried to protect his boys against distorted judgments. Aware also of the baneful influence of some newspapers, he entreated his charges never to read them. Although *Il Gesuita Moderno* [The Modern Jesuit] had not yet been condemned by the Church, Don Bosco forbade it for his catechists, teachers and young students. To give them a dislike for it, he showed them how Gioberti had even had the effrontery to vilify the Convitto Ecclesiastico, where their own companions had been the very first to receive all kinds of favors.³

His exhortation, strengthened by his quotations from Gioberti's repulsive statements against the cradle of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, was law to his boys. None of them, either then or later when that book was placed on the Index, ever dared read it; they all regarded its author as a sworn enemy of the Church.

² Nickname of Giovanni Battista Perasso (1729-1781), the boy who, on December 5, 1746, triggered the victorious insurrection of the Genoese against the Austrians. [Editor]

³ It was at the Convitto that Don Bosco first began gathering boys for catechism. See Vol. II, pp. 56ff. [Editor]

If the Jesuits, the Religious of the Sacred Heart, and many other worthy persons of Turin were sorely afflicted by the irresponsible attacks of an unbridled press, Don Bosco fared no better. He too became the target of insults and threats. Indeed an incident took place which, from the very beginning of the ill conceived ideas of liberty, endangered his life and thus threatened the very existence of our Oratory.

At that time, just a few yards from the north side of the chapel of St. Francis de Sales, there stood a little wall separating it from the neighboring vegetable gardens and meadows which to this day [1903] stretch as far as the right bank of the Dora River. Factories, private homes and apartments now dot the area, but at that time it was not so. Early one Sunday evening, in the spring of that year [1848] while the Oratory boys were attending their respective catechism classes, Don Bosco was in the chapel behind the main altar instructing the older boys; his topic was the boundless love Our Lord has shown us in His incarnation, passion and death. He was standing near a little window, which was closed and was only a few yards from the wall. The light through an open door threw his whole figure into bold relief. Some hatemonger, armed with an old fashioned musket, was hidden behind the wall. Hoisted on the shoulders of an accomplice, he leaned over the top of the wall and, when his target was clearly in view, fired straight for Don Bosco's heart. Fortunately, he missed. A loud scream followed the shattering blast, and then an awesome silence, as the boys stared in mute surprise at Don Bosco, shock and terror marking their ashen faces. The bullet had pierced the window pane without breaking it, and had passed harmlessly under Don Bosco's armpit, slightly tearing the side and sleeve of his cassock and embedding itself into the wall, causing a few inches of plaster to fall to the floor. All Don Bosco felt of the bullet was a slight pressure as of someone tugging at his robe. Not in the least disconcerted, he showed such calm and presence of mind as to allay the fear gripping the boys. He reassured them with a smile, "What? Are you afraid of a joke in poor taste? It's only a joke. Some scoundrels don't know any better. Look, they've ripped my cassock and damaged the wall! Oh, well . . . let's get back to our catechism." Seeing him so jovial and realizing he was unhurt by the criminal attempt, the boys became their usual selves.

After class, Don Bosco calmly presided at Vespers, preached, gave Benediction and then joined his boys in the playground. Here a moving scene took place. They crowded around him affectionately, weeping and sobbing with joy, wetting his hands with their tears and thanking God heartily for having saved him so wondrously. Don Bosco meanwhile kept remarking, "If the Blessed Virgin had not made him miss his aim, he would certainly have got me. But he was a bad shot." Then, looking at the rip in his cassock, he exclaimed, "Oh, my poor cassock! The only one I've got!"

Meanwhile, one of the boys dug the bullet out of the wall and handed it to Don Bosco. It was a rather large pellet, made to fit the rifles of those days. Don Bosco held it in his hand and showed it around observing humorously, "Look at that! Some inexperienced youngster wanted to play *bocce*, but he was a bad shot!"

There was no trace of the gunman who seemingly had disappeared behind the smoke of his own weapon. By discreet investigation, however, Don Bosco was able to discover the would-be assassin. He already had a criminal record and was then in the pay of a political group; he seemed quite certain to go unpunished. Had he perhaps been hired for the job? Don Bosco, who knew the man even before this incident, chanced upon him one day. Convinced that the culprit would not dare to make a further attempt on his life once he realized that his identity was known, Don Bosco asked him abruptly why he had tried to shoot him. The would-be assassin was surprised but not apologetic. Shrugging his shoulders, he replied brazenly, "I really don't know. I guess I just wanted to see how deep the bullet would sink into the wall."

"You're a wretch," Don Bosco said pityingly, "but I forgive you from the bottom of my heart. I wish we could be friends."

Later we shall recount other attempts on Don Bosco's life, especially when he began publishing the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings]⁴ to refute Protestant errors. It will become evident that if this friend and father of youth was not murdered, it was only because God watched over him and often defended and protected him even miraculously.

⁴ A monthly of about one hundred pages whose first issue dates back to March, 1853. It is still published. Since 1955 it bears a new title: *Meridiano 12*. [Editor]

CHAPTER 29

Don Bosco's Church History: A New Edition

THE revolutionaries all over the continent kept their pacts of mutual assistance. Hard on the heels of rioting and destruction in France and Sicily came insurrection and violent upheavals in all the German states, with arson, pillage, and bloody clashes between the army and the populace. Cries of freedom were heard everywhere; Jews, socialists, republicans and rationalists incited the masses to action; thousands of students and workmen flung themselves into the fray. The weak and godless governments failed to alert the people to the danger, and the masses, deceived by the revolutionaries' false promises of greater freedom and prosperity, eagerly sided with them. Riots in Vienna forced Emperor Ferdinand I to grant a Constitution and the king of Prussia had no choice but to follow suit.

In Rome the revolution cast aside its mask of hypocrisy and advanced to overt threat and violence. Pius IX, powerless now to resist, also yielded and on March 14, [1848] granted a Constitution, safeguarding however the rights of the Church, her laws and the integrity of her temporal power.

Earlier, on March 4, Charles Albert, too, had signed the new basic Constitution for his realm, and it was solemnly promulgated from a balcony of the royal palace overlooking Piazza Castello. The illuminations, ovations, anthems and merriment lasted several days in Turin and the provinces. The eighty-four articles of the Constitution were prefaced by the following declaration.

As loyal king and loving father, We have today fulfilled the promise made to our beloved subjects last February 8. We trust that God will bless our purposes, and that our nation, free, strong and content, will

prove itself ever more worthy of its ancient glory, thus earning a glorious future for itself.

Three articles of the Constitution had been written at the behest of the king himself. We think they deserve mention here since they safeguarded the rights of the Church.

Article 1. The official religion of the State is the Roman Catholic. All other religions existing at present are permitted in conformity with the laws.

Article 28. The press shall be free, but within limits set by law. No Bible, catechism, liturgical or devotional book may be printed without the bishop's previous permission.

Article 29. All property, without exception is inviolable.

Count Cesar Balbo was charged to form the first constitutional government, thus establishing the principle that the sovereign reigns but does not govern. The electoral law was promulgated on March 17. On April 7, sixty-six senators of the realm were appointed. It was a strange coalition of bishops, sincere Catholics and revolutionaries. The election of deputies to the Chamber was far worse because many were chosen to become legislators who were well-known for their aversion to the Catholic Church and their close ties with revolutionaries abroad.

Don Bosco, who carefully followed the daily course of events, attended parliamentary debates several times during the Chamber's first months of session, and quickly realized the trend public affairs would take with respect to the Church. The whole atmosphere was saturated with the spirit of voltairianism; most of the deputies subscribed to the tenet that "the State has limitless and exclusive power to determine what rights and freedoms the Church can enjoy."

One of the first acts of the new government was the emancipation of the Jews, in whose behalf Article 24 of the Constitution declared that all citizens, regardless of status, are equal before the law. On March 29, a royal decree gave them full civil rights and the right to obtain academic degrees. On April 6, a new press law decreed that anyone ridiculing or offending "religions permitted" by the State was liable to fine and imprisonment.

Don Bosco understood the motives and ultimate purpose of some of the legislators. Nevertheless, he resolved to go about his business

undaunted as he had done and would always do, avoiding offense to anyone.

Christian prudence must always strive toward one end only—God. Since the end is good, the Christian chooses the most suitable means, controls his words and actions, and acts with mature deliberation in order to overcome obstacles and avoid foreseeable perils. Moreover, he relies not only on human reason but also on Our Lord's doctrinal and moral teachings. It was in this spirit that Don Bosco, amid the storm of unbridled political and religious passions, labored over the second edition of his *Storia Ecclesiastica* [Church History].¹ He wanted to tell his boys the whole truth about certain contemporary events and point out to them the present enemies of the Church. On the other hand he realized that he had to avoid antagonizing them or provoking their wrath against his two oratories. Therefore, following a well thought-out plan, as we have already said,² he avoided specific accusations but presented his views and narrated events in chronological order, without invective or hostility, without giving the reader to understand that he aimed at fighting the enemies of the Church. This second edition, as the first, followed the question-and-answer method. It contained no major revisions, aside from some notable changes suggested by contemporary events. Since subsequent editions do not carry them, we shall briefly discuss them here lest they be entirely lost.

The title page displayed the papal coat of arms and below it a line drawing of St. Peter kneeling before Our Lord who is handing him the keys, with the legend: "I will entrust to you the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 16, 19) Don Bosco's name and surname followed almost as a personal profession of faith.

Throughout the book Don Bosco took every occasion to bring out the divine prerogatives of the pope and the Church. One by one he introduced her opponents: Protestants, Jews, and various secret societies. He first discussed the Protestants. Briefly, he described the origin of the Waldensians, their ignorance of Scripture, their errors, their flight from Lyons to the recesses of Piedmont near Pinerolo, their condemnation by 302 bishops of the Third Lateran Council under Alexander III, their rebellion against the reigning

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 257ff. [Editor]

² *Ibid.*, p. 257. [Editor]

monarchs and their severe punishment, and finally their merger with the Calvinists.

From the Waldensians he passed on to discuss the sordid, wicked and bloody figures of Luther, Calvin and Henry VIII, contrasting them with the heavenly figures of their Catholic contemporaries: St. Cajetan of Thiene, St. Jerome Emiliani, St. John of God, St. Thomas of Villanova, St. Ignatius Loyola, St. Francis Xavier, St. Peter of Alcantara, St. Philip Neri, St. Pius V, St. Teresa [of Avila], St. Charles Borromeo, St. Francis de Sales, St. Vincent de Paul, St. Aloysius Gonzaga and many others. Sanctity goes hand in hand with truth.

Another method he employed in pointing out the errors of the Protestants was to relate them to the heresies that had plagued the early Church. For example, after stating that the Second Council of Nicaea [in 787] in conformity with the first one [in 325] had condemned the Iconoclasts, he remarked, "The Protestants also follow the Iconoclasts' error." Taking note of Gottschalk's blasphemous assertion that God predestines some for eternal glory and others for eternal punishment since it is not His will that all be saved, Don Bosco commented, "These errors were later taken up by Luther and Calvin."

Lastly, without alluding to the Protestant claim that the present Catholic Church is no longer that founded by Our Lord, but to counter it, Don Bosco brings out evidence that the Catholic Church is still one and the same Church.

The celebration of Sunday, of the Nativity of Our Lord, of the Epiphany, of Easter, of the Ascension and of Pentecost; the Lenten and Ember days fast (a custom going back to the time of the Apostles), the use of holy water against diabolical harassment and other spiritual and corporal afflictions, the washing of feet on Maundy Thursday, the Sign of the Cross, and the two lighted candles flanking the crucifix at the celebration of Holy Mass were instituted in the first century. The custom of three Christmas Masses was begun in the second century. In the third century Pope Zephyrinus obliged all Christians to receive Holy Communion during Easter time. In the fifth century Pope St. Zosimus ordered a Paschal candle to be blessed in every parish church during Holy Week and instituted the Rogation days. In 431, the Council of Ephesus, with

the approval of Celestinus I, declared that the Virgin Mary was truly the Mother of God. In 1136, the Church of Lyons began to celebrate solemnly the feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin, a proof that this belief existed in the Church centuries before. In 491, Pope Gelasius held a council of bishops in Rome to determine which books of the Bible were authentic and which apocryphal. He also ordered the compilation of the *Sacramentary*,³ a liturgical book containing the order of practically all the Masses now in the *Roman Missal*, as well as rites for various blessings. Further, he instituted the procession on the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin in which the faithful carry candles, and set the ordination of priests on Ember days. To St. Gregory the Great, elected pope in 590, in whose hands the consecrated Host visibly became flesh, we owe the *Antiphonal* and the *Roman Breviary* still used in the Church today. He also instituted the Litany of the Saints, the procession on the feast of St. Mark and the imposition of ashes on the first day of Lent.

From these books and prayers it is obvious that in those days the faithful believed in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, in the efficacy of prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints, in the existence of purgatory, auricular confession and the other sacraments. Lastly, in brief, at the Second Council of Constantinople in 553, Pope Vigilius gave ample proof of the Church's authority to condemn heretical or pernicious writings, to make pronouncements on their contents and to demand that the faithful submit to the Church's judgment.⁴

With these and similar proofs offered by Don Bosco, how could Protestants deny in good faith that the present beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church are those of the first centuries of its existence?

Don Bosco then passed on to the Jews. He described how Our Lord's prophecy regarding the destruction of Jerusalem had been fulfilled under Titus and later under Julian the Apostate. Basing himself on the Scriptures, he also asserted that at the end of the world, the whole people of Israel would become Christian. He made brief mention of the terrible persecutions against Christians in Spain

³ Not to be confused with the post-Vatican II sacramentary in the vernacular. [Editor]

⁴ This council condemned Nestorian errors contained in the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia and others. [Editor]

at the time of the Moors, to force Christians to embrace the Hebrew faith or to become followers of Mohammed. As a proof of Jewish hatred for Christians he described the three days' atrocious martyrdom they inflicted on the saintly youth Vincent Verner of Treves in France in 1827.⁵ He also recalled the equally cruel death of Father Thomas of Sardinia in Damascus during the last years of the pontificate of Gregory XVI. "These episodes," he was not afraid to write, "should teach Christians to be very careful in their dealings and familiarity with such people."

Finally, in trying to determine the underlying causes of the aberrations that had come upon so many Christians and of the recent events which had brought so much trouble to the Church, Don Bosco proceeded to speak of the rationalists and so-called modern philosophers who, imitating Voltaire and Rousseau, spurned all religion, law and rights, and who under the excuse of seeking only the light of pure reason, were actually at the mercy of their own whims or caprices.

It is difficult to state their beliefs, since they really have none at all. Anyone who reads their writings carefully will conclude that their modern philosophy has no other object than to deny truth, deride virtue, teach error, encourage crime, and indulge in mental hair-splitting in order to efface from the heart of man the sweet hope of a future life; in short, to debase man to the level of an animal. The Freemasons carried out their machinations in secrecy, and the philosophers helped them by writing and by putting the Freemasons' doctrines into practice. To succeed in their intent, both groups rose against the religious orders and discredited them with the most scurrilous slander. It was in the midst of this chaos, at the insistence of the courts of France, Naples, Portugal and other nations, that Pope Clement XIV, after long hesitation, suppressed the Society of Jesus in 1774. Later, Pius VII, realizing the singular services that this order could render the Church, reinstated it. In our day the Society of Jesus has almost been disbanded, its members persecuted and expelled from Switzerland and from all of Italy. Out of respect for historical truth, it must be added that in many places these religious were driven out in a most shameful fashion, insulted and affronted in their

⁵ In our opinion, it would be a disservice to history if episodes like this one were deleted from this edition. The mature reader ought to understand that in past centuries there were excesses on all sides. Moreover, we do not guarantee the historicity of this episode. [Editor]

misfortune in violation of all law and natural equity. This much [we have gathered from] Vincenzo Gioberti.⁶

Don Bosco displayed staunch courage in defending a religious order which was even then [1848] persecuted, but he was also admirably prudent in quoting Gioberti, the very bitterest foe of the Jesuits. A few pages further, writing about Pius IX, Don Bosco did not hesitate to say, "The great Gioberti considered the day he first saw Pius IX as the happiest of his life." This was not flattery because people can be called "great" for different reasons. Indeed Don Bosco was following the pope's example. On September 30, 1847, Pius IX had instructed Monsignor Corboli Bussi, his special envoy to Charles Albert, to be cautious and very sparing in speaking of Gioberti, who was the revolution's idol and who was being praised to the skies by all the rebels and innovators.⁷

Lastly, while omitting political considerations, Don Bosco introduces historical facts to prove certain rights of the Church which the worshippers of the deified State were about to abrogate.

In the first century, records began to be kept of the names of those receiving Baptism, and of the deceased; now those records are called registers of births and deaths. The third century marked the beginning of the custom of blessing cemeteries and making them Church property. Already in the sixth century priests and clerics could be judged only by an ecclesiastical court. The Fifth Lateran Council [1512-17] set down regulations to control the use of the recently invented press, forbidding any book to be printed without previous ecclesiastical approval, and this under penalty of immediate excommunication.

Thus, with prudent remarks scattered throughout his book, Don Bosco enabled his boys to evaluate properly events that were then taking place to the detriment of the Church. Later, in his talks, he would stress individual episodes that better served his purpose, or muster several of them when necessary to give a complete picture. This was also the reason why he practically ignored the Middle Ages. In reviewing the prosperous condition of the Church in Europe and in the foreign missions in the face of obstacles and persecutions, and in noticing that Protestantism seemed to be losing

⁶ *Concordia* [a newspaper], March 18, 1848.

⁷ *Civiltà Cattolica*, 1879, Thirtieth Year, Vol. X, p. 94.

ground in England, Don Bosco commented (with great circumspection as dictated by the turbulent times) that God seemed to be preparing an upheaval that would benefit all mankind.

It is quite true that the turmoil of present times brought about by the changing structure of government causes the Church serious troubles. All the more serious is it when people who are entirely incompetent in ecclesiastical matters insist on being heard, thereby profaning what they do not know. Fortunately, we Italians have the great Pius IX and the devout, valiant Charles Albert as our leaders. We can look forward only to a prosperous future, marked by events that will give honor to the throne and glory to religion.

This was his ardent desire, but there were grounds for fears. After a magnificent tribute to Pius IX some pages before, Don Bosco felt he had to add, "Let us pray that God open a path for the pontiff and prevent the harm which ill-minded people are trying to inflict on the Church. May He give Pius IX strength to govern it and achieve new triumphs." The book concluded with a vibrant peroration.

From Church history we must first realize that all who rebelled against the Church were later punished terribly by God, most of them even during their lifetime. [Secondly], we must recognize that all sects belong to the synagogue of the Antichrist since they are not within the church established by Jesus Christ. In all ages the Catholic Church has been attacked by the sword and the written word, but she has always emerged triumphant. The Church has seen kingdoms, republics and empires crumble to ruin. She alone is firm and unshaken. Nineteen centuries have passed since her foundation and she is still in full vigor. Others shall come after us and shall still see her vigorous. Guided by God, the Church shall overcome all earthly vicissitudes; she shall conquer all her enemies; she shall advance with steady pace through the centuries, through all human upheavals until the end of time. Then she will gather all her children in one kingdom in the realm of the blessed.

In giving copies of this book to his boys and explaining its contents to them publicly or privately, Don Bosco warned them never to ally themselves with the enemies of the Church, lest they contribute to their own ruin. "Fighting the Church," he said, "is like striking your fist against the sharp point of a nail."

The second edition of the book was well received and widely used in schools, as Don Bosco had hoped. Of course, it had cost him much patient, grueling work. To make sure its style was simple and intelligible to all, Don Bosco carefully read it aloud to his mother. On one occasion Mamma Margaret understood that Emperor Constantine had persecuted the Christians. To make things perfectly clear Don Bosco rewrote that paragraph and was satisfied only when his mother understood it perfectly.

Also worthy of mention is Don Bosco's reserve in writing. This prompted a wise comment from him. One day, when, calling on the duchess of Montmonrency at Borgo Cornalense [not far from Turin], he met Charles Tomatis [a past pupil of his]. Noticing that Don Bosco was carrying the galleys of his *Storia Ecclesiastica*, the young man asked how he proposed to deal with thorny issues, as for example when he would have to say something derogatory about important people. Don Bosco replied, "If I can say something good about them, I'll do so; if not, I'll say nothing."

"And what about truth?"

"I'm not writing for scholars. My book is for the unlettered and for youngsters. If I should undermine the faith of some simple soul by describing disedifying or controversial events, wouldn't that be leading someone into error? If I bring out the faults of some member of a religious congregation and the reader is uneducated, wouldn't that give him a wrong idea of all religious in that congregation? Wouldn't that be a distorted view? Only one who has an overall view of two thousand years of church history can realize that the faults and flaws of even eminent men in no way cast a shadow upon the holiness of the Church. Rather, they are a proof of her divine origin, for if the Church has never failed in her mission it is because God has sustained her and always will. Youngsters themselves will fully grasp this as they continue their studies. Anyway, remember that a bad impression received in one's childhood by listening to unwise or careless talk, can often have deplorable consequences for one's faith and morals."

We shall add that Don Bosco did not rely exclusively on his own judgment in writing. We have already referred to his friendship with Silvio Pellico,⁸ whose humility he sincerely admired, especially

⁸ See p. 1. See also Vol. II, pp. 105, 426f. [Editor]

since Pellico was well known in Europe. Don Bosco often visited him in Turin and in Moncalieri and, just as often, the latter returned his visits at the Oratory and greatly enjoyed what he saw there. After exchanging some letters, Don Bosco at last asked Pellico for his opinion on the church history he was about to publish. Pellico read the manuscript with great care, made a few corrections and praised the work.

One thing Don Bosco never forgot was the advice Pellico once gave him. One day the latter asked Don Bosco if he frequently consulted his dictionary when writing. Don Bosco replied that he thought he had sufficient knowledge of Italian, and that, being very busy, he had little time for looking up words.

"Dear Don Bosco," Silvio Pellico replied, "don't be too sure of yourself. Look them up! I cannot write a single page without consulting my dictionary. If I didn't do that, I would make frequent mistakes. For the full, exact meaning of a word, as also for its spelling, there is nothing better than a dictionary, and it is a *must*. At times, we think we know the meaning of a word, but we are wrong. We can often fall into gallicisms, Latinisms, or even dialect. Follow my advice! Always keep a dictionary handy. You'll see I am right in making so bold as to give you this advice."

From then on Don Bosco not only took Pellico's advice, but never forgot to take a dictionary along on his trips. This same advice he passed on to his clerics and priests. "Do you use a dictionary? Do you keep it handy?" he would ask. More than once a priest or cleric would smile at such a question as more suited to a grade school boy than to an educated man. Nevertheless Don Bosco would insist and, if the answer were negative, he would urge the priest or cleric to begin to do so, adding, "Silvio Pellico gave me this advice, and I put it to the test. You simply cannot write correctly without frequently consulting a good dictionary."

Don Bosco's friendship with Silvio Pellico, valuable also for its literary advantages, lasted to the latter's death in 1854.

CHAPTER 30

Indefatigable Zeal

U PRISINGS in Vienna and rioting in Budapest had strengthened Austria's enemies, and were now spurring the liberals of Lombardy and Veneto to further action. Political unrest began to grip Padua and Pavia. On March 18, [1848] demonstrations at Modena forced the evacuation of Austrian troops, and Duke Francis V had to flee. On March 20, youths in Parma seized arms and forced the Austrians to evacuate, while Duke Charles II hastily granted a Constitution and then withdrew to Marseilles. On March 22, after five days of dogged fighting, the people of Milan drove the Austrian garrison from the castle and the city, forcing them to retreat to the Quadrilateral¹ with heavy losses. Como, Bergamo, Brescia and Venice rose in rebellion on the same day and shook off their yoke. The provisional government of Milan appealed to Piedmont for help, and on March 23, Charles Albert declared war on Austria, after a courageous and vibrant proclamation to the people of Lombardy and Veneto. On March 24, Archbishop Frasoni presided at a solemn *Te Deum* in the cathedral in thanksgiving for the expulsion of the Austrians from Milan. The king and his cabinet were present and national guards stood in dress uniform in Piazza Castello. But as the archbishop emerged from the cathedral, a mob of hecklers, among them persons considered respectable, hurled vile insults at him, shook their fists threateningly, and chased his carriage for a little way. No effort was made to interfere, although many carabinieri were present. In the evening, hostile shouts

¹ The Austrian line of defense in Lombardy and Veneto hinged on Mantova, Peschiera, Verona and Legnago, which, so to speak, form the four angles of a quadrilateral. [Editor]

and boos were resumed before his episcopal palace to force him to leave Turin and Piedmont.

On March 25, Charles Albert set out for war with an army of sixty thousand men; they passed the Ticino River and an advance brigade entered Milan on March 26. Meanwhile, the bishops ordered public prayers and exhorted the populace to assist the soldiers' families; the government itself asked the bishops for support and for prayers. On March 29, the king entered Pavia, already evacuated by the Austrians, and went on to Milan. Parma and Modena kept closing their ranks around him.

On March 29, at about six in the evening, the saintly, undaunted archbishop of Turin left for Switzerland. He was yielding to the insistent urgings of the minister of the interior who, through high ranking ecclesiastics, advised the archbishop to leave until his opponents had calmed down. Loyal friends, among them Don Bosco, also called on him and suggested the same course of action. They pointed out that he had no alternative, since most likely the same people who had officially urged him to leave were also behind the hostile demonstrations. Before boarding his carriage the archbishop asked Don Bosco to take care of those seminarians, especially the indigent ones, who had remained loyal to him and who were then scattered in every direction. Don Bosco promised that he would not betray this trust. We shall see later how he more than kept his word.

On April 6, crowds of students and other people, in a noisy demonstration against the local archbishop in Vienna, threatened to ransack the monasteries, shouting that Pius IX was an enemy of the empire. Thereupon the government ordered the suppression of the Redemptorists, of the Sisters of the Most Holy Redeemer and of the Jesuits. Without warning, innocent monks and nuns were pitilessly flung into the streets, without shelter or food, and forced to beg. On successive days the disorders grew ever more threatening in Vienna, Budapest and Prague and almost led to a fatal clash between the rioters and the regular troops. Meanwhile, on April 7, the victorious Piedmontese army drove the Austrians from Goito and crossed the Mincio River.

On April 21, General Giacomo Durando of Piedmont, disregarding his orders to limit himself to guarding the border, crossed the Po River with seventeen thousand papal troops. The king of

Naples had sent another sixteen thousand to Lombardy in support of King Charles Albert under the command of the old *carbonaro* Guglielmo Pepe; the grand duke of Tuscany also sent another six thousand men. In Modena and Parma the provisional governments had also called in Piedmontese troops to keep the insurgents under control.

To the dismay of all true Catholics, on April 25, Charles Albert, from his headquarters in Volta, reestablished the royal exequatur over appointments of the Holy See, reviving old decrees which had already been censured by Clement XI and Benedict XIV.

On April 30, the Piedmontese troops seized Pastrengo after a fierce battle, and laid siege to Peschiera, one of the four fortress cities separating Lombardy and Veneto. Charles Albert established his headquarters at Sommacampagna, and the Austrians retreated to the left bank of the Adige.

Anxiously awaited news of these events reached Turin, sending the people into near delirium over the victories. The excitement and enthusiasm also spread to mere school boys and so inflamed them with patriotic fervor as to endanger them, if not properly restrained. Whether people talked or wrote or sang, at home or in public places, the topic was war; they even dreamed of war. Mere children thought of themselves as grown ten feet tall and able to run a sword through two Austrians with one thrust. They could be seen at the end of the day, pouring out of schools, factories and workshops, armed with sticks, grouping together, choosing a leader, forming platoons and companies, drilling, maneuvering, fencing and occasionally engaging in mock battle, group against group. Unintentionally or through misplaced battle fervor, they would exchange blows worthy of a better cause. Particularly on Sundays and holy days, the wide boulevards and the fields skirting the city became drill grounds. The youngsters' emotions were further stirred by the roll of drums and blaring of trumpets of the National Guard on parade, the arrival of war prisoners, and the demonstrations that greeted each new victory.

The Lenten catechism instruction had begun on [Monday] March 13, but for the above reasons classes had thinned out or were all but deserted in almost all the parishes. It was practically impossible for the Oratory boys not to be affected by all this excitement.

Indeed many did not show up at church services on Sundays and holy days and missed the weekday catechism class. Of those who did show up, some came half-heartedly, many looked bored and hardly paid attention. Attendance at confession and Communion declined very sharply.

To counteract this religious and moral decay, Don Bosco had to use his inventive charity and zeal to find some efficacious antidote. It did not take him long. His first remedy was the use of prayer.

In this very year [1848] he introduced the devotion of the Way of the Cross. It began on March 10 and was repeated on the following Fridays for the rest of the Lenten season.² He wanted all the boys who boarded at the Oratory to take part in it as devoutly as possible. They were joined by many other day boys and neighborhood people who found it convenient on weekdays to come to the Oratory for Mass and confessions. Don Bosco led the service of the Way of the Cross, showing so full a consciousness of Our Saviour's sufferings that his demeanor was more effective than a stirring sermon.

Meanwhile, adapting himself to the spirit of the times insofar as it did not conflict with faith and morals, Don Bosco allowed the boys to engage in sham military drills in the Oratory playground. He even found a way to provide them with a good supply of mock rifles. As a condition for playing with them, he laid down the rule that the boys were not to come to blows as the Piedmontese and Austrians were doing, and that at the sound of the bell all were to put aside their arms and file into church. He also got them started on some new, less dangerous gymnastics and provided them with *bocce*, *piastrelle*³ and similar games. Further, he had them play the *piñata*⁴ game, he held sack races, and he presented short comedies and skits. In short, he stopped at nothing to provide diversion and amusement for all tastes, so that each boy could have a good time at the Oratory under his wise, fatherly supervision.

Another very effective diversion was the singing class. To this he added piano and organ instruction and instrumental music, to

² See pp. 11, 135f. Eventually this devotion was observed on *all* Fridays in Lent. [Editor]

³ Flat pebbles, slightly larger than pucks, used in a throwing game. [Editor]

⁴ See p. 123. [Editor]

the great delight of many boys. As he tried to organize a brass band and to teach a few boys to play the piano before letting them draw wails from the organ, he gradually improved his choir. After perfecting some very fine voices with numerous rehearsals and drills, Don Bosco took his boys' choir to sing in various public churches in town at May devotions and other services in which all the boys took part. Besides being of spiritual benefit to the faithful this attracted the boys and bound them ever closer to the Oratory. Up to now people had heard only robust male voices; the youthful solos, duets and choruses evoked images of angelic choirs, which deeply moved the congregation, sometimes to the point of tears. As a result, Don Bosco's young choristers became well-known and were much sought after for solemn feasts and celebrations. They not only sang frequently in Turin in such churches as Corpus Domini and Our Lady of Consolation, but later, to their great delight, also in Moncalieri, Rivoli, Chieri, Carignano and other neighboring towns. The distinguished Canon Louis Nasi of Turin and Father Michelangelo Chiatellino of Carignano accompanied the small philharmonic group; their musical experience helped the boys put on impressive performances which won high praise. Pride in their accomplishments, excursions to parishes where they were to sing, refreshments and even dinners tendered them soon made the boys forget the political turmoil around them.

Among other things, that year the boys also enjoyed a devout service at the neighboring shrine of Our Lady of Consolation, to which they walked processionally from the Oratory. Their sacred songs along the streets and their musical program in church attracted a big crowd to the shrine. There was Mass, and many went to Communion. After Mass Don Bosco gave a short sermon on the loveableness of the Blessed Virgin, and stirred his listeners' hearts to love Her. Among other things, he said:

Mary is the most loved and most loving of all creatures. God the Father loves Her; so do Jesus, Her Divine Son, the Holy Spirit, all the Angels and Saints, and every devout heart. This shrine is a shining proof of the love this city has always shown the Blessed Virgin. On the other hand, She loves us all with a mother's heart. Though She loves all of us, She has a very special love for the young, like Her Divine Son, Jesus, who considered the children so precious that He would have been de-

lighted to have them always around Him as a crown. Jesus told his Apostles, "Let the little children come to Me." [Mark 10, 14] Mary, likewise, keeps repeating, "Whoever is a little one, let him come to me." [Prov. 9, 14—Douay Version] It is, however, Her tender love that proves the Blessed Virgin to be the great comforter of the afflicted, *Consolatrix afflictorum*. Let us reciprocate, let us love Her too, my dearest sons; and for love of Her let us avoid sin. To make this visit memorable let us leave here our poor hearts; let us beg Her to accept them and keep them pure and sinless. Under Her mantle, let us strive so to act as to have a joyful life and deserve a consoling death.

From that time on, this orderly procession was made once or twice a year until 1854, and the boys never failed to visit the crypt chapel for a final prayer.

Holy Week gave the boys another opportunity for increased fervor. On Maundy Thursday they went from church to church to visit the Blessed Sacrament at the "altar of repose," singing hymns and psalms, while other boys, young and old, rich and poor, attracted by their voices and their example, overcame all human respect and eagerly swelled their ranks. In each church, they would kneel a few moments in adoration at the "altar of repose," and then with great feeling sing the *Passio* or some motet which Don Bosco had taught them for the occasion. They sang so movingly that their listeners were deeply stirred, and followed them to the other churches, to shed tears repeatedly at the feet of Jesus. This edifying spectacle was a great lesson to adults too, who out of false shame or unnerved by jeers and insults, no longer dared take part in those acts of devotion.

Toward evening, the Washing of Feet was performed in the Oratory chapel, in the presence of a large number of boys, many of whom were witnessing it for the first time. Twelve boys, chosen to represent the Twelve Apostles, were seated in a semicircle in the sanctuary. After singing the Gospel, Don Bosco put on a small linen apron. Then, kneeling before each one of them, he washed and dried their feet, as Jesus had done to His disciples at the Last Supper; he then humbly kissed them. During this ceremony the choir sang the liturgical antiphons: *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*. "Where charity and love are, there is God, . . ." and *Cessent iurgia maligna, cessent lites. Et in medio nostri sit Christus Deus*.

"Let malicious quarrels and contentions cease. Let Christ our God dwell among us."

There followed then a homily explaining the significance of the ceremony, a most effective lesson for instilling in the hearts of the young humility and charity, two basic Christian virtues.

After the ceremony the young "apostles" ate a frugal supper with Don Bosco, who personally waited on them, the more faithfully to duplicate Our Lord's Last Supper. Finally he gave them each a little gift and sent them home, their hearts full of joy. Thereafter this ceremony became a yearly, edifying event at the Oratory; Don Bosco, who loved this ceremony very much, reserved it to himself as long as his health permitted. He chose the "apostles" himself from among the more exemplary pupils, and he added a thirteenth to their number. He usually invited some priest to address a few words to the boys before the ceremony; in 1850 it was Father Giacomelli. During the ceremony, Don Bosco's spirit of faith, his humility and simplicity stirred the hearts of all present. The little gift he gave each of the young "apostles" after supper was usually a nice linen handkerchief and a crucifix.

The visits to the Blessed Sacrament at the "altar of repose" in a body continued until 1866 and Don Bosco always accompanied the boys, previously arranging with the pastors of the churches included in their pilgrimage. The boys' devout deportment greatly edified the people. When later circumstances no longer permitted these visits in procession, Don Bosco substituted for them other suitable devotions in the Oratory chapel, such as visits to the Blessed Sacrament, the recitation of the chaplet in honor of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, the Way of the Cross and the singing of the *Stabat Mater* set to polyphony.

By these means Don Bosco managed to keep a hold on his boys; well instructed in their catechism, many of them were able to make their Easter duty on April 23.

To keep up the attendance and further cut down the Sunday absenteeism, Don Bosco and Father Borel thought up another expedient. Besides distributing little gifts, such as holy pictures, medals, and sometimes fruit and candy to those who attended catechism class more regularly and to those who gave less trouble, they began to turn the Sunday afternoon instruction almost ex-

clusively into a dialogue. Father Borel would sit among the boys and play the role of penitent or pupil; now and then he would come up with humorous questions or answers that kept the boys attentive or provoked laughter, while from his pulpit Don Bosco explained the subject matter and drew appropriate morals. This method of instruction was always extremely popular with the boys. The announcement that the next Sunday instruction would be in the form of a dialogue was enough to pack the chapel with eager young listeners.

CHAPTER 31

Peacemaker

DON BOSCO once said that the history of the Oratory could be neatly divided into three eras: legendary, heroic, and historic. "The first era, comprising the first ten years, began when I was still all alone and had practically no fixed abode. It continued in Valdocco, when I started taking a few boys into the house as boarders, and it came to a close about 1855. What happened in those days may now sound like a fairy tale, (that's why I call it the legendary era) inasmuch as truth can be stranger than fiction. Yet, it is the honest truth. It was a decade of constant struggle."

If our story up to now bears this out, our further narration will prove it.

As we have said, by guarding his charges from the dangerous turmoil of the times, Don Bosco was able to keep his two oratories at Valdocco and Porta Nuova crowded with boys. But his solicitude for them did not stop there. The war frenzy had led to the formation of youth gangs among the lower classes in every section of the city: at Vanchiglia, Porta Nuova, Borgo Dora, and so on. Each gang was split into units of various sizes, as small as a squad or as large as a battalion. They held their own meetings, and chose their own leaders.

All were at war, constantly fighting and battling each other with stones for any and all reasons: to quench their thirst for violence, to avenge some insult or just to accept a challenge, and thus raise their rating through new exploits. Their savage fights were far worse than we can now imagine. Older youths fought and led crowds of younger boys. No human force could stop them. The carabinieri and the regular police were powerless against them and no longer attempted to separate the combatants. When the policemen were

only a few, a whistle was the signal to make them the target of the boys' missiles. If reinforcements were rushed to the scene, another whistle sent all the boys scurrying away into hiding, only to reappear and start their battles over again when the police withdrew.

Don Bosco tried to stop these savage fights from the very beginning and to do some good among these wild youngsters. He began to attract some of the tougher and more lawless boys to his two oratories by giving them special consideration. Whenever he met these tougher types, some of them former acquaintances and boys with records of delinquency, he would stop for a chat and try to renew their friendship. On visiting the prisons, where occasionally some gang leader was serving a few days sentence, he applied all his persuasive skills to calm him down, help him, and make him give up those savage gangs. Usually the leader had been nabbed at night either because he happened to be alone or was outside his neighborhood. Not surprisingly, among those groups Don Bosco counted some youths well disposed toward him. Nevertheless his self-imposed task was not easy, and in the process he had to put up with grievous affronts.

Once, while in a remote section of the city, he came across a rowdy group airing their views on a rumble they were planning against neighboring gangs. Abruptly he walked up to them and greeted them cordially, "Hello there! What's up?"

"None of your business! Keep moving!" one of them answered brusquely.

"Why the rudeness? I thought I was talking to friends!"

"Me, a priest's friend?" replied the boy scornfully.

"Hey, watch out! This is Don Bosco," a companion whispered.

"So what?" answered the blusterer with a vile insult.

"Watch your language," warned his companion loudly. "One more word and I'll knock your teeth down your throat!" So saying, he clenched his fist, ready to make good his threat. The young tough quickly quieted down, especially when he realized that many of his companions, who occasionally had visited the Valdocco Oratory, were siding with his challenger. Don Bosco asked what the trouble was and cooled off their resentment by showing them that the alleged insult from the other gang was but a trifle. He also reminded them that our Divine Saviour, persecuted and tortured, could have

avenged Himself by uttering just one word, but refrained from doing so. They accepted his advice and escorted him for a good stretch of the way. When they parted, he made them promise to forget fighting other groups.

On another occasion he was caught in the crossfire of two fierce gangs. Shouting wildly, they were advancing threateningly toward each other from the opposite ends of a long avenue down which he chanced to be walking. They were close enough to start hurling stones at each other, but Don Bosco kept walking at a regular pace. The two gangs stopped and some shouted, "Don Bosco, get out of the way! Get off the street!"

"Why should I? I have a right to walk here."

"You can't say we didn't warn you," they replied. "You'll be sorry!" With that a barrage of stones was fired from both sides. Some nearly grazed his head and shoulders. At last, several of the older boys, concerned for Don Bosco's safety, shouted to their companions, "That's enough! Let's stop it."

But the more angry ones wouldn't hear of it. Threats, blows, kicks and slaps fell upon them; tempers ran very high, and many drew their knives. Don Bosco now had to act as a pacifier before they stabbed each other on his account.

Frequently these battles, which were rarely bloodless, took place in the Oratory neighborhood. One day there was a murderous exchange between youths from the Pallone district and those of Porta Susa. Nearly all had clubs and knives; a few even had pistols, but, as usual, cobblestones made up the opening salvo. The carabinieri, who had rushed to the scene, tried to keep the two groups apart, first with kindly warnings and then with stern threats, but all in vain. Don Bosco, at his window, seeing serious danger for the boys and relying on his being known by many of them, rushed into the street, running a gauntlet of stones which already whizzed by him from all sides. Before long, the first row of both groups closed in on each other, and shots were fired. Don Bosco saw two boys lunging at each other with knives and ran to separate them, but just as he got to them, one of them plunged his knife into his opponent shouting, "This will finish you!" The victim fell at Don Bosco's feet, blood gushing from a gaping wound in his stomach. The assailant vanished, and two of the victim's companions carried him

to the hospital, while the injured boy kept murmuring angrily, "He'll pay for this. I'll kill him!" Don Bosco went along exhorting him to forgive. When finally the rage for vengeance abated, Don Bosco convinced him to make as good a confession as circumstances permitted. The poor youth died the next day, another victim of street fights that never ended without serious and even fatal injuries.

Don Bosco had taken this mission on himself in order to prevent sin and the loss of souls. Later on, when he had priests and young clerics helping him at the Oratory, he once reminisced about those early years as follows:

One day a large number of boys got the mad idea of fighting a pitched battle near the Oratory. They were throwing rocks large enough to kill someone. I ran out immediately, trying to restrain those wild lads with gestures and shouts, but to no avail. Then I said to myself, "These boys are in serious danger. This is a grave offense against God. I can't allow this murderous battle to go on without opposing it. No! I'll have to stop it at any cost! Extreme situations call for extreme measures." What did I do? Something I had never done before. Seeing that words were useless, I plunged into the thick of the barrage and hurled myself at one group of fighters, clouting right and left, knocking down a great many and sending the others to flight. Then I ran over to the other side and did the same. In this way I stopped a fight which could have had tragic consequences. I remained the only victor in the field, and for that day none of them dared to return. When I did withdraw, there were some shouts from a safe distance. Once inside the house I was thinking, "What a thing to do! I could have been hit by one of those rocks and knocked unconscious!" Yet, nothing of the sort ever happened to me, except once when I was struck in the face with a wooden clog, and bore a scar for several months. It's just as I always say, "When one is convinced that his cause is just, he will fear nothing." That's the way I feel. When I see God offended, I cannot ignore it or do nothing about it. To prevent it, I'll fight even a whole army.

God rewarded his zeal by guarding him from harm and giving him moral ascendancy over those lawless youngsters. When they invaded the Valdocco neighborhood on Sundays he would immediately mix with them, after first ordering his Oratory boys not to leave the premises. They watched him fearfully from behind the

hedges and trees, or peeped cautiously over the top of the wall. They saw him advance fearlessly into the midst of the fray, without ever being seriously hurt, although sometimes flying rocks struck his legs and shoulders. In most cases, at his appearance the youths would spread the warning, "Don Bosco is here. Don Bosco is here!" This was enough to induce most of them to disappear. The rest would gather around him as he tried with friendly admonitions, jokes and sometimes reprimands, to show them how wrong they were to act that way. As he talked, the boys would carefully sheath their knives and slip them into pockets lest he see them. Those who were clenching rocks loosened their grip, letting them slide down their legs noiselessly to the ground. Thus Don Bosco managed to calm them down for at least a few days.

The police, who watched from a distance, had to admit that only Don Bosco had the courage to throw himself into the middle of those brutal brawls, and that he alone knew how to pacify those wild youngsters.

On three different occasions Father [John] Giacomelli saw Don Bosco resolutely make his way between two battling gangs. One, at the Valdocco Circle, was bombarding a much larger group taking cover in the place where the Viù Restaurant stands today. What impressed him most was that Don Bosco peremptorily ordered both sides, "Drop those rocks!" Interrupting their bombardment, the boys looked at him hesitatingly, still clenching the stones. But when Don Bosco repeated his order, they dropped them and quickly dispersed.

Often, on Sundays, after putting an end to their brutal pastime, he would get them together for religious instruction. Since even his most persuasive ways could not induce them to set foot into the chapel, because, as they said jokingly, they could not stand the smell of wax, Don Bosco would sit down with them on the grass somewhere in a meadow.

Then, the whole gang, seated or stretched out around him, would listen silently and attentively as Don Bosco would pleasantly teach them catechism for an hour or so. He never failed to win some of them over to God.

The above mentioned violence lasted for a long time and Don

Bosco, in subsequent years, used to invite some of these young rebels to live with him at the Oratory after he had restored peace among them. Many were very poor and truly homeless. His main objective was to win over the gang leaders, because experience had taught him that once they came to live at the Oratory the gang soon broke up. It required lots of patience and skill to keep boys of this breed in the house without causing trouble, but the results were satisfying. Although they stayed only a short time and soon wanted to leave again, none ever got involved in those bloody skirmishes again.

Thus Don Bosco got at least partial results, although his effective efforts could not, at the start, uproot the evil altogether. The war fever was growing more virulent and the older and more violent gang members were paid by agitators to take part in the various demonstrations which almost daily kept the city in a state of turmoil. Shouts of joy, threats, angry outbursts, or hymns of triumph followed one another.

On April 30, Vincenzo Gioberti, taking advantage of the amnesty that had been granted to political exiles, left Paris and returned to Turin where he put up at the Hotel Feder. News of his arrival swept through the city on the same evening; the people gave him a splendid ovation in front of the hotel, and the city was brilliantly lit up as at the great festivals. But he had not returned only to receive the homage of the crowds. Since the republican sects were threatening to wrest the leadership and prestige of the national movement from the Savoy monarchy, the monarchist liberals and the cabinet hoped that in this emergency he would support their party. Gioberti accepted this task. In fact, before leaving Paris, he had come to an agreement with Mazzini that, for the time being, things were to follow their course and that Mazzini would not hinder the lawful developments of events. Gioberti had also been entrusted with the secret mission of campaigning in northern Italy for a merger of all Italian states with Piedmont under the House of Savoy and for the seizure of the Papal States, leaving only Rome to Pius IX for the remainder of his lifetime. Gioberti had an audience with Charles Albert on May 7, at Sommacampagna; on May 24, he arrived in Rome after a tour of Lombardy, Liguria and Tuscany where he was hailed with unbelievably frenzied acclamations and

pomp. At the Campidoglio¹ he was greeted as a conqueror, declared a citizen of Rome, and made an honorary professor at the Sapienza. Finally he called on Pius IX to deceive him as to the real intention of the liberals, win him over to the Italian confederation of states, and suggest that he, the pope, crown Charles Albert in Milan with the *corona ferrea* [the iron crown].² Pius IX, even though he knew the real Gioberti, replied that he would go along, if it would help the cause of peace and make Italy happy. Gioberti had met with all the political party leaders, and his work did not seem to have been in vain. For a time the republicans remained quiet, and many of the provinces decided to unite with Piedmont under King Charles Albert: Piacenza on May 10, Parma on May 25, Reggio on May 26, Modena on May 29, Milan on June 8, and Venice on July 4. Turin had every reason to rejoice; now it had officially been recognized as the capital of a very large and important portion of Italy.

Meanwhile, the war dragged on. The Austrian general, Nugent entered Friuli³ from across the Isonzo River at the head of twenty-two thousand men, and on April 23, after an easy victory near Palmanuova, he seized Udine and then Conegliano; finally, on May 5, also Belluno and Feltre. On May 6, Charles Albert attacked the Austrians at Santa Lucia, hoping for an insurrection in Verona; it did not materialize and so, after a long battle, the Piedmontese were forced to retreat. On May 9, Nugent's troops repelled a fierce attack, and the papal troops, tired of bearing the brunt of battle, began, at the instigation of republican emissaries, to mutiny and to disband. In Naples, through the intrigue of the republican ministers who were secretly working to establish a republic, the people, supported by the National Guard, rose in revolt on May 15, and set up barricades. The regular army, however, quelled the uprising, after a ferocious battle which raged from street to street and house to house. The revolt again flared in the provinces. Sicily was already

¹ The most important of the seven hills of Rome. In Roman times the victors used to climb to the top to the temple of Jupiter to lay there the crown of victory. [Editor]

² The "iron crown" was used, after 1311, for the coronation of the Holy Roman Emperors and of Napoleon at Milan in 1805. It is said to contain one of the nails used at the Crucifixion. [Editor]

³ A region of northern Italy between the Adriatic Sea and the Carnic Alps. [Editor]

aflame, one party demanding a republic, the other offering the royal crown to the duke of Genoa. Under these circumstances, King Ferdinand, who needed all his troops, recalled those who had been dispatched to Lombardy; his order was obeyed to the great detriment of the national cause. Disorders in Vienna took on such proportions that, on May 17, the emperor, fearing for his life, fled to Innsbruck. On May 20, 22, and 24, the Austrians attempted to enter Vicenza, but the Italians bravely drove them back and shortly afterward repulsed them twice again at Bardolino.

On May 29, the Austrians, supported by more than fifty cannon, attacked Curtatone, near Mantova, and dislodged four thousand volunteers, mostly Tuscans, in spite of a resistance so fierce and stubborn as had never been seen in the course of the war. On May 30, General Radetsky, with forty cannon, launched an attack on twenty thousand Piedmontese at Goito in an attempt to relieve Peschiera which was under siege. The attack was repelled and he retreated to Mantova. Peschiera surrendered and flung open its gates to Charles Albert. This happy event was joyously celebrated in Turin and throughout Piedmont with thanksgiving services in all the churches.

CHAPTER 32

A Father to Homeless Boys

LET us now leave battles and demonstrations and spend some restful moments in the peaceful atmosphere of the Oratory.

Although some fifteen hundred boys attended the St. Francis de Sales and the St. Aloysius oratories on Sundays and holy days, nevertheless as we have already said, there were still too many youngsters roaming the streets of Turin and not attending church because of their parents' and employers' neglect. Among these was a group whose leader was a lean, sixteen-year-old apprentice, forceful and fiery, fit to command a regiment. He had often heard one of his companions speak enthusiastically of Don Bosco as a particularly loyal friend of boys, but this had not impressed him much. One Sunday in 1847, as he and his gang were all together in their usual hangout, he noticed that one of his friends was missing and asked where he was.

"He went to Don Bosco's Oratory," one replied. "Don Bosco is a fine priest," he added.

"Oratory?" the boy echoed, "What's that? What goes on there?"

"They say it's a boys' center where you can run and play and sing. There is also a church."

"Did you say, run and play? That sounds good to me. Where is this place?"

"Valdocco."

"Let's go and see," ordered the youthful captain leading the way. When he got there he found the gate closed because the boys were already in church, but he was not dismayed by such a trifle. He climbed up the wall and, seeing no one, jumped to the ground with the ease of a cat. Then he began looking around. The premises were not glamorous at all; the solitary building was nothing to brag about!

Someone saw him, questioned him about his business, and then led him into the chapel. He was amazed at seeing so many boys of his age, attentively and respectfully listening to a short, venerable priest, who was talking to them in a simple, affable manner. It was Father Borel and, most appropriately, he was talking about lambs and wolves, pointing out how the former are the boys who are innocent, and the latter their evil, perverse companions. "If you don't want these hungry wolves to tear you apart," he was saying, "run away from them. Flee from bad companions: those who blaspheme, who talk dirty, who steal, and who do not go to church. On Sundays and holy days come to the Oratory. Here you are safe; here the wolves cannot enter, or if they do, there will be priests who will guard and protect you like watchful sheep dogs." His words made a deep impression on the leader, who had never before heard such a sermon. The boys then began singing the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and the young gang leader, who had a beautiful voice and liked music, eagerly took up the melody. The unspeakable joy sweeping over him for the very first time in his life was a call from God to a life of grace. The lad was very eager to meet Don Bosco, and as soon as they emerged from the chapel he asked one of the boys, "Who is Don Bosco? Is it that short priest who gave the sermon?"

"No," the other replied. "Come with me and I'll introduce you." He took him to Don Bosco who, as usual, was already surrounded by a swarm of boys. Don Bosco's affectionate welcome deeply moved the young fellow. After a few routine questions, Don Bosco invited him to join in the games. Then Don Bosco had him sing, praised his fine voice, and promised to teach him music as well as other subjects. Finally he whispered a word into his ear, one of those persuasive words of which he alone knew the secret, and the boy was bound to him completely with ties of sincerest affection. From that moment on the boy realized a great change coming over him. Meanwhile, some of his other friends had walked in. On hearing that they too liked singing, Don Bosco invited them to show him what they could do. They willingly obliged and with their young captain as conductor, gave an impromptu performance of various operatic selections while the curious Oratory boys swarmed around them. Their leader had chosen those selections that best expressed his current state of mind. Their singing delighted the audience, and Don

Bosco determined to take special care of the young captain. Thereafter he attended the Oratory regularly and brought several companions along.

He was, however, totally ignorant of his religion, which he had completely forgotten. He did not even remember the Our Father. This was the reason why, several years before, his pastor at St. Augustine's had not allowed him to make his First Holy Communion even after he had been scheduled to. Don Bosco felt sorry for him and on their next meeting asked him to go behind the main altar and wait for him to hear his confession. Don Bosco generally made it a point to tour the playground while the boys were playing, in order to pick out those who he knew or sensed more urgently needed his help. The new boy unhesitatingly accepted his invitation and on entering the chapel found several other boys already there for the same purpose. When his turn came, he poured his heart out to Don Bosco and was given another special word which filled him with indescribable peace. After the boy's confession, Don Bosco volunteered to teach him catechism, but since the boy needed special instruction, he entrusted him to Father Peter Ponte, who was then staying at the Oratory. Father Ponte taught him every day, but his task was easy because the boy was intelligent and attentive and soon recalled the instruction he had already received in his own parish church. Just two weeks later he received First Communion from Don Bosco himself.

After that the Oratory became his favorite spot; he went there every day and often several times a day, spending hours at music. Soon he was able to sing with the choir, both at the Oratory and elsewhere. In the evenings, when Don Bosco walked him and the other boys part of their way home, his beautiful voice rose above the others as they sang the praises of the Blessed Virgin through the streets.

This, however, is not the whole story. The youngster's parents really deserved to be called his tormentors. They mistreated him daily. Very often, after he had worn himself out at work all day, they let him go hungry. Needless to say, they were entirely unconcerned about his spiritual welfare, and on learning that he was attending the Oratory, they tried to keep him away by poking fun at him.

Don Bosco, knowing this, used to cheer him up. Once, when he found him in tears, he warmly reassured him, "Remember that no matter what happens, I'll always be a father to you. If things get really bad, come to my house." It was not long before it happened. The boy's father who was a typesetter, had his own shop. One evening in the spring of 1848, as the talk got around to Don Bosco and the Oratory, he told his son, "I want you to cut out this Oratory stuff. Starting with this Sunday, you keep away from that . . .," and out came a gross insult and a blasphemy. The boy had always respected his father, but this time he had enough. Tired from his day's work, weak from hunger, and outraged by the endless abuse and threats that were his daily lot, he shot back with a ready tongue, "If I learned to steal or fight or any such thing at the Oratory, you'd have reason to forbid me going there, but it's nothing like that. There they even teach me to read, write, and do arithmetic. I want to go and nobody is going to stop me."

"Oh no?" his father sneered, and he dealt the boy a blow that made him reel. Fearing even worse punishment, the boy ran out and headed for the Oratory. There he asked for Don Bosco but was told that Don Bosco was out. Afraid that his mother might come looking for him, he climbed the mulberry tree in front of the gate and hid in its thick foliage. It was eight o'clock in the evening.

Perched in the tree, he waited anxiously for Don Bosco. Meanwhile, boys began to stream in for their evening classes. At last Don Bosco came into view, but at the same time the boy saw his mother turn the far corner into the street. Suspecting that her boy had taken refuge at the Oratory, she was coming for him. When she saw Don Bosco ahead of her, she quickened her steps and called out to him. Don Bosco waited for her and together they walked into the playground. A long conversation, or rather a long argument ensued between them. Rudely the woman insisted that her son was hiding somewhere at the Oratory. On hearing her shouts, many boys came to see what had happened. The runaway lad, unobserved, was listening to the far from pleasant dialogue, and his only fear was that someone might look up and spot him. Don Bosco and the boys, not knowing where he was, swore that they had not seen him, but the mother refused to believe them. After she had left, the boy began to breathe freely again, but to play it safe he waited until classes

were over and all the boys had gone home before sliding down from the tree. Then he dashed across the empty playground and knocked at Don Bosco's door. Don Bosco was most surprised to see him but, after hearing what had happened, agreed to take him in for the night. Mamma Margaret served him bread and soup and set up a cot.

The following day the boy faced his mother, who had come back to look for him, and obtained her consent to remain at the Oratory. His name was Felix Reviglio. Later, he became pastor of his own native church of St. Augustine and a synodal examiner. The account is his own. Up to this time he had been learning bookbinding and continued to do so throughout 1848. Don Bosco's fatherly care, something he had never before experienced, changed him completely. Very intelligent and good-hearted, fervently and sincerely devout, he gave wonderful little talks to his friends. He had a natural aptitude for music and progressed rapidly in it. He took piano lessons from Don Bosco and also learned to play the organ well; eventually he became Don Bosco's right-hand man at all musical contests and performances.

Another boy who found a haven at the Oratory in 1848 also deserves special mention here. One day Don Bosco walked into a Turin barber shop for a shave. A small boy was working there as an apprentice. As was his custom, Don Bosco began to talk with him to invite him to the Oratory.

"What's your name, son?"

"Charlie Gastini."

"Are your parents still living?"

"Only my mother."

"How old are you?"

"Eleven."

"Have you made your First Communion yet?"

"No."

"Do you take catechism instructions?"

"Yes, whenever I can."

"Good! Now will you give me a shave?"

"For heaven's sake," the barber interrupted, "don't take that chance, Father! The boy's just a beginner and he could hardly shear a dog."

"That doesn't matter, sir," Don Bosco replied. "If the boy doesn't try, he'll never learn."

"Excuse me for insisting, Father, but if he has to try, let it be on somebody else, not on a priest!"

"Well now, does that mean that my beard is more precious than anybody else's? Don't worry, sir." Then he told the barber his name, adding, "My beard is made of *bosco*¹ so have no fear. As long as this boy doesn't chop off my nose, the rest won't matter."

The apprentice barber had no choice but to try his hand. It goes without saying that poor Don Bosco had a hard time deciding whether to cry or laugh as the inexperienced and trembling hands tried to shave him, but he bravely endured it. When the ordeal was over, he told the boy, "Not bad! Little by little you'll become a famous barber." He talked with him a little longer and invited him to the Oratory on the following Sunday. The boy promised. Then Don Bosco paid the barber and left, occasionally feeling his cheeks which were still smarting. He was glad, however, to have won over another boy.

Little Charlie kept his word and showed up the following Sunday. Don Bosco praised him for keeping a promise, and told him to play with the other boys and then join them in church. Afterward, he whispered into his ear one of those words that quickly won over young hearts to him. Then he led him into the sacristy, prepared him, and heard his confession. So overjoyed was the boy, that he abruptly began to weep unrestrainedly and even moved Don Bosco to tears. From that day on, the Oratory became Charles' favorite spot; on Sundays and holy days he hastened there as soon as he was free. So greatly was he influenced by what he learned, that whenever he heard anyone tell coarse stories in the barber shop, he would boldly shame the offender into silence by saying, "Aren't you embarrassed to talk like that in my presence?"

A few months later, Charlie lost his mother too. Since his older brother was away in the army, he was left alone with a small sister. Both of them were driven out into the street by the landlord because his mother had been unable to pay the rent during her final illness. One evening, Don Bosco was on his way home. As he neared the so-called Rondò, he heard a boy sobbing. Going up to

¹ *Bosco* in the Piedmontese dialect means wood.

him, he recognized his little barber. "What's the matter, Charlie?" he asked. The boy told him the pitiful story, punctuating it with heart-rending sobs. Don Bosco was deeply moved and, as though God had sent him an unexpected treasure, he took the unhappy little orphan by the hand and brought him to the Oratory. Lodging was also found for his little sister in the home of a poor but kindly woman. Later, the little girl was placed in an orphanage at Casale Monferrato, where she ended her young life in an atmosphere of peace and piety. The boy received his regular schooling and grew to be an upright, devout citizen, always deeply attached to Don Bosco.

Let us relate one more episode. One morning Don Bosco came across a boy. He was dressed in rags which were still moist with dew and was sitting by an open trench along the street, trembling with cold, his face already showing signs of suffering.

"What are you doing here all alone?"

"My father kicked me out yesterday."

"You must have done something bad to make him so angry."

"I didn't! I was fired because I couldn't do a job. When my father came home and I told him, he grabbed a stick to hit me and I ran away."

"What's your name?"

"Andrew."

"Are you hungry?"

"I stole a roll from the baker," the boy said in a whisper.

"That could have gotten you into trouble!"

As the boy began to whimper, Don Bosco comforted him and took him to the Oratory. He had made it a point to teach children obedience to parents and to placate parents by having their children ask pardon for any offense. Don Bosco therefore asked Father Giacomelli to call on the boy's father and plead for the boy. It was useless. The father was implacable and unreasonable. Under the circumstances, Don Bosco compassionately added one more boy to those already living with him.

Later in 1848, Don Bosco took in five more boys and lodged them in another room of the Pinardi house, which he rented at an exorbitant price since some tenants still had leases running. This addition brought the number of boys living at the Oratory to fif-

teen. It was at this time that he began to assign a patron saint to each of those lowly dormitories, or families, as he then called them, to foster the boys' piety better. The first patron saints were St. John, St. Joseph, Our Blessed Mother, and the Guardian Angels.

Mamma Margaret, seeing how the number of boys constantly increased and how a vacated bed was instantly filled by a newcomer, would often ask her son, "How can we feed them when we haven't anything for ourselves?"

Don Bosco would reply jokingly, "Don't worry, we'll serve them beans." Another time she remarked, "If you go on like this and keep bringing home new boys every day, there'll be nothing left for you when you're old."

Don Bosco answered, "Oh, there'll always be a place for me in the Cottolengo Hospital. But if my work is according to God's will, it will succeed."

Mamma Margaret was reassured by her son's words. She was continually witnessing miracles of Divine Providence.

CHAPTER 33

Life at the Oratory in 1848

AT this point in our narrative it would not be amiss to describe the life of the first boys sheltered by Don Bosco. For the first few days after their arrival he taught them their prayers, instructed them in the Faith, and prepared them to receive the sacraments as soon as possible. Once convinced of their earnestness and good moral character, he placed them with good and upright craftsmen to learn the craft they were best fit for. He went with them himself to their jobs on the first day, introduced them to the employers and checked on their proper supervision. He looked after their interests both as regards working conditions and technical instruction. Less concerned with wages than with their moral environment, he wanted to be sure that God would not be offended where they worked. This practice he followed even when the number of boys living at the Oratory increased considerably.

A typical day's schedule follows. The boys rose at an early hour, according to the season of the year, washed and made their beds. Then they attended Don Bosco's Mass in the chapel since he insisted on saying it there even in the dead of winter [though there was no heating]. During Mass they recited their prayers and five decades of the rosary; a short spiritual reading followed. The more fervent boys also received Holy Communion. So that all could receive more frequently, Don Bosco was always ready to hear their confessions either the night before or early in the morning; this practice is still followed in all Salesian schools, to the boys' great spiritual advantage and comfort.

After Mass the boys went to their respective jobs in the city: tailors, shoemakers, carpenters, bookbinders, bricklayers, and so on, since the Oratory itself had no workshops until 1856. At noon

they came back for dinner. Each boy took a bowl and went up to the steaming pot which stood either on the hearth, or on a stool near the entrance. Mamma Margaret or, at times, Joseph Buzzetti or Don Bosco himself, ladled out the soup which consisted mostly of rice and potatoes, or pasta and beans, or quite often chestnuts and corn flour; this thick gruel was a tasty favorite with the boys. *Polenta* was also served, with a pinch of grated cheese or a spoonful of gravy, and occasionally, especially on feast days a little piece of sausage or codfish. Sometimes, as the soup was being ladled out, Don Bosco from a window on the main floor would nod at some boy and offer him an apple. The boy would climb to the window-sill, grateful for the little treat. A genuine happiness reigned in that poorest of homes! When Don Bosco, after saying grace, wished the boys a hearty appetite, they would all break out laughing because such a wish was hardly necessary.

They ate in colorful surroundings. In good weather the boys scattered over the courtyard in groups of three or four, or alone; some sat alone on a plank, others on a stone or tree stump, some on a bench, and others on the bare ground. All busily ate the meal which Don Bosco's zealous charity had provided for them. In bad weather they ate in the kitchen or in one of the other rooms, sitting on the floor or on the stairs. Ice-cold spring water gushing forth nearby was an inexpensive way to quench their thirst.

The meal over, each boy washed his own bowl and put it away in its proper place. In winter, reluctant to dip their hands into icy water, they played games to determine who would have to wash the bowls for all.

Each boy was responsible for his own spoon. If he lost it, he had to buy another with his own money. Consequently they took good care of them, putting them in their pockets for safekeeping. This custom gave rise to much fun. One day a boy named Paul Conti, who attended school downtown, happened to drop his spoon in the classroom. His companions had quite a laugh and teased him, but he replied, "What! Do you expect me to come to school without my spoon?" With serious aplomb he returned it to his pocket.

At half-past one the boys went back to work. When they returned to the Oratory in the evening, they were served another bowl of soup. Occasionally, if some boys had to work overtime, Mamma

Margaret's hens would leap up to the table and peck at the filled bowls of the missing boys. The others would call Mamma Margaret, momentarily busy elsewhere. Laughingly, they would remark that those hens enjoyed the immunity of Parliament.

In those years each boy bought his own bread. It was Don Bosco's custom in the evening to assemble the boys in the so-called dining room and give each twenty-five *centesimi* for bread. Recalling that scene, Father Reviglio commented, "Fifty years have passed since then, and I still can see the love shining in his eyes and his gentle smile as he gave us the money and said, 'Divine Providence gave it to me, and I give it to you.' The remembrance of it still fills me with joy. I'll never forget it."

With that daily allowance each boy, on his way to work in the morning, bought as much bread as he needed. Those who were not too fussy bought whole wheat or the coarse army bread; the more fastidious preferred soft white bread. Every boy knew how to stretch his allowance so as to buy something else to go with the bread. Luckily groceries were cheap in those days. There were some who liked to buy a little oil and vinegar as dressing for the greens which Don Bosco let them pick in the Oratory vegetable garden. On Sundays Don Bosco always increased the allowance by five *centesimi* for some little extras. The more responsible boys, who were not likely to squander it all at once, received their entire weekly allowance on Saturdays. This custom continued until 1852. Thus the boys learned how to use their money wisely in preparation for the time when they would be wholly on their own in the world. They surely needed this knowledge and experience. For example, one of these boys once sold his mattress for the ridiculous price of eight *soldi*. Fortunately, Don Bosco heard of the transaction and quickly called it off, after giving the seller a good lesson in economics, and the buyer one in justice.

During supper, a bell would summon to evening classes the neighborhood boys who frequented the Oratory. Lessons began after the boarders' recreation. Prayer opened and closed all class and study periods. Don Bosco supervised the various groups while teaching a class of his own. Sometimes, unable to have supper on time, he would munch on some food while teaching the boys, especially the boarders; he would correct a poor reader, teach sums,

or show those who were just learning to write how to hold a pen. Classes were held every evening for one hour, except on Saturdays, when the boys were given the opportunity for confession. In Don Bosco's view there was no better way than weekly confession to keep youngsters from evil and spur them to virtue.

After school, the non-boarders returned to their homes while the others gathered around Don Bosco for night prayers. Then they wished Don Bosco good night and went off to their beds or, rather, sacks stuffed with dry leaves or straw, laid across two planks of wood, supported by a few bricks. But they were so sleepy and tired, and above all so full of joy, that their crude beds felt most comfortable. In those days the Oratory was truly a family.

On Saturdays, the boys went to bed somewhat later. Usually, in those days, Don Bosco would attend to some business in town and come home rather late, unless the following day was a special feast day. At about nine, after supper, he would begin to hear confessions, which lasted till eleven or eleven thirty, the boys patiently waiting their turn. This practice continued until 1856. Sunday morning was devoted entirely to hearing the day pupils' confessions.

In various ways he tried to make them persevere in doing good. One way was to give them an occasional short, informal talk after night prayers. He instructed them on the smooth running of the household or told them some edifying story or instilled in them sound principles of piety and morality. Ever alert to any bad example, he warned them to be on their guard whenever they were off the premises, especially against bad companions. Valdocco, scantily policed, was one of the most dangerous areas of the city. He also gave them useful hints on how to behave at work, urging them to learn the trade on which their future livelihood would depend. And he would always add, "Prayer is necessary, but along with it, work. He who does not work should neither eat." On the other hand he continually stressed the priority of their religious duties even over their jobs. He exhorted them to be devout in church, diligent and obedient at work, upright in their conduct at all times. If he noticed that they had been exposed to some bad example, he would nicely offset its effects. For this reason he kept himself informed of their day's events and tactfully corrected wrong notions they had heard.

He gave them timely advice to keep them from scandal and alerted them to the errors of the day. He suggested how they were to retort to those who talked nonsense about religion. To increase their knowledge of liturgy, he instructed them on the great solemnities of the Church. On the eve of such feasts he would comment briefly on them, thus gradually instilling in them the spirit of the Church. No feast of Our Lord or of the Blessed Virgin ever occurred without his preparing the boys to celebrate it fruitfully by receiving the sacraments. Their frequent reception was the goal of all his efforts; for this reason he allowed no games before Mass. Since he made it easy for the boys to go to confession, there were several communicants every day; on Sundays almost all received. Don Bosco had laid down the principle: "Frequent Communion and daily Mass are the two pillars of education."

He also saw to it that the boys clearly understood indulgences and how to gain them. When some feast day was approaching in which indulgences could be gained, he alerted them a few days before and told them whether or not they could be applied to the souls in purgatory.

The Exercise for a Happy Death was another powerful factor in his educational system. When boys began boarding at the Oratory, they made the Exercise for a Happy Death with the day pupils; later on he scheduled it on the last Sunday of the month for the former, and on the first Sunday for the latter. To make it truly effective, he exhorted them to put all their spiritual and temporal things in order as though they were to appear before God's tribunal on that day and to be mindful that they could be suddenly called into eternity. The evening before the Exercise for a Happy Death he urged them to reflect on how they had spent the previous month, and to make their confession and Communion on the following day as though they were really about to die. The worldly-minded might think that mentioning death to young boys would fill their minds with gloomy thoughts. Not at all. On the contrary, it filled their hearts with peace and joy. Spiritual unrest comes from not being in God's grace. Once sin is washed away, fear of death vanishes. Don Bosco used to tell his boys, "When the just man dies, God, whom he has loved and served, together with the Blessed

Virgin, hastens to assist him, consoles him in his agony, fills him with courage, confidence and resignation, and leads him triumphantly into heaven."

His words achieved their desired effect, all the more so because the boys were inspired by Don Bosco's example. Sometimes, for variety's sake, he would have them make the Exercise for a Happy Death on a weekday in some church on the outskirts of the city or even in the private chapels of some pious families and benefactors. Of course, the latter case was possible only in the early years of the Oratory when the boys were so few.

We may also add that now and then, when speaking to them after night prayers he would repeat the advice he often gave in his sermons, "My dear boys, you may suddenly leave this world through accident or sudden illness and it may be impossible for you to have a priest at your side. For these reasons, I exhort you to make frequent and even daily acts of perfect contrition and of perfect love of God also outside of confession. One such act, accompanied by the intention of confession, would be sufficient at any time and especially in your last moments, to wash away your sins and lead you to salvation." Citing figures, he would point out how many people are unable to receive the Last Sacraments. He explained the nature of true contrition and showed them how easy it is to attain it. He used to add that from the time of Adam to the coming of the Saviour, millions upon millions of sinners had been saved through perfect contrition.

He was equally solicitous for the boys' spiritual welfare when they were off the premises. It was his custom to visit by turn his boys' employers every week in their own stores or workshops in order to get firsthand information on the boys' environment, their conduct and progress. For a good report he would, for example, reward the boys with some spending money and thus encourage them to keep it up. He never failed to remind their employers to keep a vigilant eye on their young workers. He pointed out to them that if he took pains to see that their apprentices were obedient and diligent, they, in turn, had to teach them their trade well and protect them from physical and moral harm. Thus he succeeded in helping both employers and employees. If any boys were mistreated, Don Bosco firmly took up their defense and insisted on fair treatment

without exploitation of their youth. If he spotted any physical or spiritual danger to his boys in any workshop, Don Bosco quickly found them another employer. But first he would investigate the new employer's moral character, his technical ability and his attendance at church on Sundays and holy days. When Don Bosco himself was unable to do this, he delegated it to trusted aides; once he had young clerics at the Oratory, he entrusted this task also to them.

He also knew how to arouse emulation among the boarders. To encourage them and reward their good conduct, he later introduced the custom of awarding prizes to those boys whom their companions, in a secret ballot, considered the best in conduct. This laudable custom continued for many years. The prizes were usually awarded to both students and artisans,¹ on the eve of the feast of St. Francis de Sales. A week before, each boarder submitted to Don Bosco a list of boys who, in his opinion, were most exemplary in their conduct and piety. He tabulated the results and the boys with the most votes were publicly announced at an assembly and were given an award. There were usually between six and ten winners. It is noteworthy that the selection made by the boys was also so eminently just and judicious that the superiors could not have done better. After all, who can know us better than those we are close to, with whom we deal, and who, so to speak, without our being aware of it, know our every word and move?

Before we go further, we should mention Don Bosco's various activities during this period. While his young artisans were at their jobs in town, he continued to tutor several promising youths who, in turn, helped him with the Oratory activities and evening classes. With a pedagogy all his own and inexhaustible patience, he enabled them in a short time to attain good positions and manage their families efficiently. At other times, as Father Reviglio recalled, he taught theology to several seminarians, thus keeping his promise to [the exiled] Archbishop Fransoni.

In fall and winter some boys came home at sunset, others two or three hours later, depending on their work hours. Don Bosco

¹ This was the name given to the boys learning a trade, to distinguish them from those taking academic subjects; these latter were known as "students". [Editor]

tried to keep the first comers busy. Joseph Buzzetti described the following scene to us, reminiscent of certain Flemish paintings. The boys grouped in the kitchen, a lamp hanging from the ceiling, Mamma Margaret sitting in a corner mending a jacket, a boy astride a bench scribbling in an exercise book at a table, another next to him studying his lesson, and a third repeating catechism answers aloud. Apart from them, almost in the dark, leaning against the wall, a young apprentice coaxes squeaky strains from an old violin. From the next room come the sounds of a piano being pounded, while a few other lads practice singing, score in hand, faces turned to Don Bosco in the background. He has just removed a pot from the fire and beats time with a long spatula he uses to stir the piping hot polenta. But he had also other chores to do. Since he did not think it advisable to hire domestics, he and his mother did all the household work. Mamma Margaret managed the kitchen, saw to the wash, and mended the linen and the boys' clothes. Don Bosco handled the many other chores. In those early years he lived the life of the boys, and unless he was out, he did any kind of work. In the morning he saw to it that the boys washed properly. He combed the hair of the smaller ones, gave all of them haircuts, cleaned their suits, made some beds, and swept the rooms and the little chapel. Mamma Margaret lit the fire, while he drew the water from the well and sifted the corn flour and the rice. Sometimes he shelled beans and peeled potatoes. Often, too, he set the table and washed dishes and kitchen utensils, as well as the copper cooking pots which some kind neighbor occasionally loaned to him. When necessary he made and repaired benches and chopped wood.

To save on clothing expenses, he cut and stitched trousers, underwear, and jackets. With his mother's help, he could make a boy's suit in a couple of hours. At night, while the boys slept, he picked out the clothes in need of mending and took care of them.

If any fell sick, Don Bosco immediately sent for the doctor and provided whatever was needed. He nursed them himself, and, if prevented by other duties, he entrusted the task to one of the boys. Felix Reviglio was one of the first to perform this duty. Whenever he could, Don Bosco visited them very frequently, day and night.

A few years later, one of these boys, a certain Cigliutti from Genoa, told John Villa,² "Don Bosco was a real father. In his love for us, he did not mind performing any menial task. He did it with the same pleasure and readiness with which he taught or performed his priestly duties, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, indeed his duty." On his part, Don Bosco always recalled fondly those early days, which were among his most precious memories. He liked to tell how he had often made the soup, and how he had managed to satisfy all at half the ordinary cost. The boys loved to see him in a cook's role, an apron about him; it gave them an even heartier appetite. Don Bosco's soups and polenta seemed to have an exquisite flavor all their own, and the boys always clamored for seconds and more. His witty remarks to one or the other of the boys made up for the main course. "There, my boy," he would say, "eat heartily, because I cooked it myself." "Do honor to the cook by eating a lot." Or, "I'd like to give you a piece of meat, if only we had some, but just leave it to me. As soon as I come across a homeless steer, we'll really have a banquet." Such pleasantries, of which he had many, gave such zest to the meals that the boys did not miss not having a main course. On feast days, however, Don Bosco made sure they had a full meal, and he was very happy when he could add something unexpected to the usual daily fare.

It would require many pages to describe adequately his solicitude for his youngsters at the cost of grave sacrifice to himself.

Father Ignatius Vola highly admired him for this. Having seen what Don Bosco was doing not only for his boarders but also for his day pupils, he exclaimed, "Don Bosco really kills himself for his boys!" Father Giacomelli, who heard this comment and reported it to us, added, "I believe it, and I am convinced that this is no exaggeration. Many boys came to know a father's love only after meeting Don Bosco!"

Don Bosco was always glad to mingle with the boarders as it often gave him a chance to advise or encourage them with a friendly word. Thus he not only molded their characters and improved their conduct, but he also brought a spirit of gladness into their lives. Even though many were orphans, they experienced the

² A pupil of Don Bosco. He started frequenting the Oratory in 1855. [Editor]

joy of a loving family, thanks to the goodness of their adopted father.

Don Bosco treated all impartially, showing each the same amount of benevolence and affection. They were all dear to him, and to forestall any rivalry he would assure them of that. He proved it by the interest he took in their individual spiritual and material welfare, by listening to them patiently not only in confession but whenever they came to talk to him. Thus the boys were convinced of his impartial affection and never had reason for jealousy or envy. He wanted them to act the same way toward their fellow beings and almost daily repeated St. John's words to them, "He who does not love abides in death." [1 John 3, 14] He exhorted them not only to be charitable toward each other by being kind and amiable and mutually forgiving, but also to be generous toward the poor. He himself was forever setting the example. Consequently there reigned a wonderful harmony among the boys, and some occasionally deprived themselves of a *soldo* or a piece of bread to give it to some street beggar.

Regarding the boys' response to Don Bosco's suggestions, Father Reviglio had this to say.

The better to know his boys' inclinations and to have a better chance to instill a desire for spiritual perfection in them, Don Bosco made himself available at all times. Thus, for example, he would barely finish his frugal meal when the [day] boys would often burst into his small dining room and swarm around him. How fondly I recall the warm welcome our good father used to extend to us! We pressed around him and showered a hundred kisses on the hand that had bestowed so many blessings upon us. Despite the annoyance this must have caused him, he good-naturedly endured these manifestations of our gratitude. I, who perhaps needed his attention more than the rest, would very often crawl under the table and rest my head on his knee. Don Bosco took advantage of such moments to tell us an edifying story or whisper an individual word that kindled in us a love of virtue and a horror of sin. It is no exaggeration to say that after such contact, we left the room with an ever greater determination to be good.

This was also the reason why Don Bosco, on Sundays, always invited to dinner the two boys who had taken their turn to serve

his Mass during the week. Before leaving, they thanked him and always received some unforgettable spiritual advice.

Since we have talked about the dining room, we shall also add that in 1848, as he sat at table with his first boarders, he manifested a desire which he again expressed in the following years. James Bellia, who lived near the Oratory, used to bring to Don Bosco the *Annals of the Society for the Propagation of the Faith* and those of the Pontifical Association of the Holy Childhood right after his dinner. Sitting near his table, he would then read aloud those publications in which Don Bosco was deeply interested. After listening to the reports of missionaries, Don Bosco would often exclaim, "Oh, if only I had lots of priests and young clerics! I would send them to preach the Gospel in Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego! Do you know why those places, my dear Bellia? Guess!"

"Perhaps because that's where they are most needed," Bellia would venture.

"Right! Those people are the most forsaken!"

Thus already [in 1848] Don Bosco felt drawn by Divine Providence to those faraway lands. "He was the true image of what a holy priest should be," remarked Father Ascanio Savio.³ "If all priests were like him, the whole world would be converted." He burned with a desire to convert all the people of the world and save their souls. Indeed, in him were fulfilled the inspired words, "Zeal for your house consumes me." [Ps. 68, 10]

³ Don Bosco's first seminarian. [Editor]

CHAPTER 34

Life at the Oratory in 1848 (Continued)

OUR description of the intimate family life at the Oratory is still incomplete. The boys boarding there also had a mother in Mamma Margaret, Don Bosco's own mother. She possessed all the virtues of a truly Christian mother to a high degree: a wonderful disposition, great simplicity, patience and charity. She was truly admirable for having sacrificed her whole life to further her son's holy undertakings. The frugal meals she prepared for Don Bosco reflected their spirit of self-denial, but often enough they were dictated by poverty. She lived an unobtrusive and retired life, always working and praying. Her chores multiplied with the number of boys. They all called her "Mamma."

She had no domestic help during those first years, but attended to everything herself. She cooked, did the mending, and made shirts, underwear, and socks. She also supervised the laundry-women. It was her special pride to see her boys properly dressed during the week, spruce and sparkling on Sundays. She also found time to teach good manners and peaceful family living.

Whenever the boys needed anything they turned to her and, if possible, she always satisfied them. She could not have done more had they been her very own children; indeed she might have done less, because the strength on which she now drew for her new, arduous mission was truly a gift of God.

She tried to guess Don Bosco's will in every possible way. So faithfully did she carry out his least wish in running the thrifty household that one would think she could read his thoughts. To his amazement Don Bosco would find things done before he had uttered a word about them. Her presence in the Oratory seemed, and truly was, indispensable to all. If she ever had to be away for a few

days, she left such a feeling of emptiness behind that her return was always an occasion of great joy.

Her unwavering calm, her ever loving and generous nature made her loved by all. It was nice to see her in action as she helped to run the Oratory. She supervised everything, and her voice was always heard when there was need of a gentle scolding, admonition, or prevention of some damage. Her reprimands were always tempered with praise. Even Don Bosco was often impressed by her natural eloquence, her forceful speech, rich in allegories and parables. From his room, he often enjoyed listening to her vigorous comments on things and people. The boys paid her respectful attention, which, naturally, gave further impetus to her eloquent flow. No one would have presumed to talk back to her, yet she never took advantage of her position and never tried to use her influence around the Oratory. Indeed she made it a point never to force her son to uphold her authority at the expense of the boys' absolute trust in him. Likewise she was always above petty jealousy, interference with authority, and excessive sensitivity, things that can normally be expected among people of different character, inclination, education, and duties. As soon as the first boy aspiring to the priesthood donned his cassock and was given some authority, she immediately began to regard him as a superior and completely refrained from giving him advice, reprimands and orders. From then on she behaved like a humble subject, even though the young cleric respectfully kept calling her "Mamma" as formerly.

When she was Don Bosco's only helper, Mamma Margaret watched over the order and discipline of the whole household. Prompted by justice and charity, she showered special care on the more flighty and stubborn boys. Sometimes she ran up against an incorrigible fellow whom nobody could control. To him she would say, "When are you going to start behaving? Don't you see that you're just like an unmanageable horse with a hundred sores on its tail? Everybody else is trying to make himself good for something, but all you do is figure out ways of getting into trouble and being a nuisance to all. Just for once, wouldn't you like to know how nice it is to be liked by your companions and superiors, to be at peace with yourself and to realize that God is pleased with you?"

On another occasion, reproaching an apprentice who showed

little interest in learning his trade, she said, "Don Bosco sweats blood from morning to night trying to provide you with food, and yet you refuse to work? Aren't you ashamed to eat what you haven't earned? Shame on you! How could you be that mean? Won't you ever show appreciation to those who love you? If you don't learn your trade, how will you earn your living when you grow up? You've got to eat somehow, don't you? Do you want to end up in prison? What do you want to be, a failure in this life and a worse one in the next, a hell here and another beyond?"

To a hotheaded boy who lost no time in warming up to a fight, she used to say, "Do you know what? You're worse than an animal. In fact, I can't see any difference between you and a dumb animal. Horses and sheep don't fight as you do. Compared to you, I would say they are better. Beating up your companions! Can you imagine that? Isn't God the Father of all? Aren't your companions your brothers? Don't you know that those who seek revenge will one day be punished by God?"

When she saw a youngster wolfing down his food or overeating, she would remark, "Just think! Animals, who after all are only animals, eat just what they need and no more. But you choose to gorge yourself and get yourself sick. A man who overeats is not a man. Gluttony is the mother of a thousand vices. Do you want to die young or end your days in a hospital?"

Once, a homeless boy found shelter at the Oratory, but during the first few weeks absolutely refused to go to work. He would always try to avoid Mamma Margaret around the house, but one day she called him over and said, "You don't want to work, but you don't mind eating what others have earned by the sweat of their brows. When you grow up and leave this place, you'll have no way of making a living but by stealing and killing. There's your future!"

At these words the boy tried to withdraw, but Mamma Margaret stopped him and continued, "Don't be in such a rush to go. Be patient and listen another minute. Do you see the *Rondò* there?" So saying, she pointed to the circle where criminals were publicly executed in those days. "Perhaps that's where your future lies, the gallows! My poor lad, listen to me and do something about it before it's too late!"

The boy began to cry, and in a more gentle voice Mamma Margaret went on, "But there's a remedy for everything, you know. It's easy to be a good boy if you really want to be. Start this very day. Obey and respect your superiors; go to work. Pray from the bottom of your heart, pray devoutly."

Whatever the circumstances, Mamma Margaret somehow always found the right words, either in public or in private, according to the individual's needs. But to measure the full impact of her utterances, one must have seen and heard her. Not boys alone, but young men and adults and sometimes young clerics would weep as she spoke. More remarkable about her was that, thanks to her habitual calm, she could switch instantly from reproof to praise. For example, if an exemplary youngster happened to be passing by as she was concluding some bit of good advice to one boy, she would say to him, "Come over here. Keep up the good work. Don Bosco is pleased with you, and so is our Lord. Don't forget the reward which is promised to the good when they get to heaven. Try to earn it!"

We do not, of course, mean to suggest that Mamma Margaret's eloquence always achieved its desired effects. Sometimes boys listened respectfully to her when she scolded them, but made faces behind her back once she finished, only to be strangely embarrassed. Don Bosco's shutters would open and he would appear at the window. The little rascal, caught in the act, would shamefully bury his face in his hands while Mamma Margaret, convinced that she had set some boy on the right path, would go up to her son, saying, "Poor boys! They need a little straight talk once in a while. I just gave some to one fellow. He will change, you'll see! They're really good at heart, but they're so young and thoughtless! Let's be patient with them. Kindness always wins out!"

But she was not easily fooled. As Don Bosco himself declared, she not only knew the conduct and character of each boy living in the house, but she uncannily guessed his very intentions.

The young apprentices brought home their weekly wages on Saturday evenings and handed them over to Don Bosco, as agreed. Once a youngster tried to cheat. He scratched his face and then, whimpering, told Don Bosco in the presence of all his companions that he had been robbed and beaten as he tried to defend himself.

Don Bosco listened sympathetically, but Mamma Margaret came to his side and whispered, "Do you really believe that?"

"I know he's telling me fibs," Don Bosco answered in a low voice, "but if I expose him now, I'll lose his confidence." Don Bosco hoped that by sparing the boy a public humiliation he might be able to straighten him out and get him to admit his error and lies. Unfortunately, his hope was not fulfilled, and the boy ended badly.

Also on other counts Mamma Margaret greatly deserves our praise. She kept a loving and vigilant eye on boys who had been reprimanded or punished because of their conduct at work. Her policy was not to leave them to brood and nurse the grudge they felt for having been crossed. She tried to make them forget the humiliation they had brought on themselves. "Every wound needs salve," she used to say, "and we must try to make the boys understand that if severe measures have been taken, it is only for their own good."

Don Bosco's methods of educating and correcting youngsters were effective because they appealed to the conscience and not to fear of reprimands or punishments. In the beginning, Don Bosco was alone, but the conscience of the boys made up for the absence of a prefect or assistant or any helper. It prompted them to avoid wrong for the love of God and of their director, and to acknowledge their failings when at fault. St. Paul's words, "If any man will not work, neither let him eat" [2 Thess. 3, 10] were a law at the Oratory, and the young apprentices liked to repeat them in unclassical Latin, *Qui non laborat, non mangiorat*. Whenever a youngster's misconduct or laziness was brought to Don Bosco's attention, he would go to the culprit and ask, "Well, how are you doing? Are you behaving? Is it really true what I hear about you, that you won't turn over a new leaf? What would you do if you were my superior and I were in your place behaving as you now behave? Be your own judge. What do you think you deserve?"

He would then go to his room and leave the boy to mull things over. At dinner the culprit, instead of going in with the others, would go off to a corner of the playground and pensively stand there, his head hanging in shame and mortification. Mamma Margaret would soon be at his side. "What have you done?" she would ask kindly. "Is this the way you show your appreciation? All we

want is your own good, so why don't you try to behave and do what you are supposed to? If you act like this now while you are young and you see such good example and get good advice, what will you do when you're a man and on your own? You poor boy!" Meanwhile she would offer him a healthy sandwich she had prepared for him. Such motherly affection would bring tears to the eyes of the young culprit who, feeling he did not deserve it, would sometimes hesitate to take it until Mamma Margaret pressed him to.

At other times, after the rest of the boys had finished eating, she would look for some boy who, knowing that he deserved to be punished and fearing to be disgraced before his companions, had closeted himself in some room. "What's the trouble?" she would ask. "What did you do this time? Nothing good, I guess! But I haven't come to scold you. You're going to be a good boy, aren't you? Well, then, your punishment is over." So saying, she would lead him into the kitchen where she would continue her lecture, pointing out how he would only hurt himself, body and soul, with his bad conduct. Then she would add, "You certainly have given Don Bosco plenty of headaches! He wears himself out for you, and what do you do for him? Go and apologize and promise him you won't behave like this any more."

"Yes, I'll do as you say," the boy would answer.

"But that's not enough," Margaret would continue. "What about God? You know who He is, don't you?" Here she would become grave and majestic. "God! It is of Him first that you should ask pardon! He sees not only all your actions, but even your most hidden thoughts. Perhaps you were angry while Don Bosco was scolding you and you didn't feel like changing your ways. God saw all that. Ask His pardon for everything, but do so sincerely, with all your heart."

As she talked, she would prepare some food for him, sit him at table and set a bowl of soup in front of him. By now the boy knew he was wrong; grateful for her soothing words, he would resolve to mend his ways. "But don't tell anyone I fed you," she would warn him. "It would make me look like a fool. I would seem to be encouraging you to do wrong. They might even say that I am easily won over and you are taking advantage of me. Besides, I wouldn't like people to think I am siding with you against Don Bosco. If I

did, it would be all the worse for you. I don't want them to think I'm protecting those who don't deserve it. Instead I want them to know that you've realized your error and are truly sorry for what you did." Thus she won their hearts.

All who were fortunate enough to enjoy Mamma Margaret's company and to experience her maternal solicitude now fondly recall those happy boyhood years. They still remember her perennial smile, and the many homely sayings which enriched her conversation and engraved sound moral principles on their minds.

We shall now try to meet the requests of some of these former pupils who would like to see recorded in these memoirs some of the picturesque incidents which they themselves witnessed or took part in.

One day Margaret was in her room busily mending clothes piled on several chairs. She hardly raised her eyes from her work while a boy stood shamefacedly in front of her. He had once been obedient and devout but had of late become rather fickle and negligent. Mamma Margaret spoke to him.

"You know, you have changed a lot! Why have you taken a turn for the worse? Why don't you pray? How do you expect to be good without God's help? And if you don't change for the better, what will become of you? Take care lest the Lord forsake you!" Then she concluded her reprimand with one of her sayings, "It's easy enough to go downhill, but it takes strength to go up."

When dealing with some youngster who had been very foolish, "Don't jump into the water if you can't swim," she would tell him. Once, another boy who had got into a rather serious scrape, came to ask her for a favor. He held out his right hand, confident of getting what he had asked for, while shielding his face bashfully with his left. Mamma Margaret told him, "Yes, I'll give you what you want; but first tell me, have you been to confession?"

"I didn't have time yesterday morning."

"What about last Saturday?"

"There were too many boys ahead of me."

"And Sunday?"

"I wasn't ready."

"That's it! Never ready for what you don't like to do!"

On another occasion a boy brought her a jacket and asked her to sew a button on for him. She handed him a needle and thread, saying, "Are you entirely helpless? Here are needle and thread. You'd better learn all you can while you're young. Don't you know that 'What we learn first, we know best?'"

One day a younger boy came to her in tears, complaining he had been hurt by his companions. Mamma Margaret cheered him with a joke and a little bunch of grapes as he sat on a footstool by her feet. His tears stopped and he broke into a smile. In such situations she had a fine way of comforting troubled youngsters. "Is that all you've got to cry for?" she would say. "That's nothing! Don't you know that in this world we must put up with some trouble? Only in heaven will things be the way they should be. Haven't you ever heard that the first hundred years are the hardest? A hundred years from now, this won't bother you a bit!"

If occasionally a boy would thoughtlessly turn into toys things that could have been put to better use, she would stop him and remark, "Why this waste? 'Waste not, want not!'" She would often repeat this saying when speaking of the preciousness of time, of the importance of little things, or of increasing one's efficiency.

Sometimes a boy would pilfer something from the kitchen and secretly show it with an air of triumph to a companion watching his performance. Margaret, who was aware of it, would surprise him with, "That's a nice thing to do, isn't it? Conscience is like tickling: some feel it, and some don't." This she would also repeat whenever someone made excuses like, "What's wrong with that?" If some boy made no effort to correct some fault, or if others tried to make excuses for him, pleading his youth and asserting that when he was older he would be all right, Mamma Margaret would answer, "If he can't do the easy thing now, he won't do the harder thing later."

Mamma Margaret also turned to certain puns to teach the boys basic good manners. For example, if a boy entered a room and left the door wide open, she would hiss, "Pst, pst!" as though calling a dog. The culprit would take the hint and, blushing, would close the door slowly while Margaret smiled approvingly. Such incidents would give an artist material for a gallery of paintings whose candor and serenity would be a delight to all.

Solicitous for the well-being of the young boarders, Mamma Margaret took no less care of her beloved son, Don Bosco, especially as regards his health. Here too, she avoided the costly and the superfluous. Her solicitude was rooted in Christian wisdom; she looked after his physical health to enable him to work for the spiritual welfare of his fellow men. While on feast days she worked extra hard to prepare a meal worthy of guests, on other days she set a very frugal table and saw no reason for doing otherwise. She knew the importance of Christian mortification, but she also realized that it has to be tempered by prudence. Thus, if Don Bosco, tired and exhausted from preaching or from a trip, insisted on abiding by the law on a fast day, she would have none of it. She would remind him, "Aren't you the one who preaches that one is not bound to fast when it would impair his health?" Don Bosco could hardly deny it; the point was well taken.

All we have said shows us the generosity and goodness of Mamma Margaret. Nevertheless her mind more than her heart guided her every action. Everything about her reflected order. In a sense, she embodied the Oratory. In those early years Don Bosco was almost always absent from the house, visiting prisons or hospitals, or preaching missions, triduums and novenas in many places. Several times a week he also heard confessions in several religious institutions in the city. Some people could not understand how these prolonged absences did not hurt the proper running of the Oratory. They were amazed to see how it all went on with perfect regularity. The secret was Mamma Margaret's refined common sense; she was truly a treasure. She had an innate ability for clearing difficulties, forestalling disorders, and remedying ill-doings. She was never at a loss under any circumstances. She dispatched any business on hand, did the buying and selling, received visitors, and even dealt with people in authority. Everything was simple and uncomplicated in her eyes; nothing threw her off balance; she was alert to all that went on around her.

When Don Bosco came home, she was the first to greet him. If he looked worried, she would not tell him anything about the week's happenings, postponing her report to a later time. If he seemed to be in a good mood, she would give him a detailed factual report of everything that had occurred without comments and would then withdraw to her household chores.

She was a truly admirable woman because she always prayed. Prayer is the source of wisdom to the humble and those who lack human knowledge. Besides daily Mass, frequent Communion, visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and recitation of the rosary with edifying devotion and demeanor, she kept in continuous prayerful contact with God from morning to night. How often she had to interrupt an Our Father or a Hail, Holy Queen to advise one boy or give an order to another, or issue a warning to a third!

Thus if a boy entered her kitchen while she was engaged in some task, she would say, "Do me a favor: take that log off the fire; the flame is too high and will blacken the pot." Then she would continue her prayer, "... forgive us our trespasses ..."

If some boy came up the stairs while she was saying the Hail, Holy Queen, she would tell him, "Take the broom and sweep those steps." She then went on, "Turn then, most gracious advocate, Your eyes of mercy toward us ..."

Sometimes, leaning out of a window she would call out to one of the boys in the playground. "Do you see that sheet which the wind has blown off the line? Put it back again." Her prayer then was resumed, "O my good Angel, whom God has appointed to be my guardian, ..."

Sometimes while she was praying a boy would come up. "Mamma, can I tell you something?" Instantly she would interrupt her prayer, listen, grant the request, and then resume her prayer.

If people were around, she would whisper her prayers softly, but when she was alone, she would express her love for God aloud, for hours at a time. Don Bosco could hear her from his room, and sometimes, in order to divert her attention a little, he would call out, "Are you arguing with somebody, Mamma?"

Calmly she would answer, "Oh, not at all! I'm just praying for our boys and benefactors." How often, if she had a moment's respite, she would hurry to visit the Blessed Sacrament in the chapel.

Some people may look upon these habits of hers as somewhat out of place. Perhaps they would be in others, but not in Mamma Margaret. There was in her such spontaneity, such candor, such devotion and conviction that it was obvious that her thoughts were centered on the presence of God.

Don Bosco himself declared, "Her faith in the power of prayer was limitless."

CHAPTER 35

Twin Souls

THE political unrest of the times did not keep Don Bosco from his providential undertakings and from preaching the word of God. His speeches, sermons, lectures, sermonettes, and catechetical instructions, at the Oratory and elsewhere, numbered some three thousand a year. Yet he craved new fields of action. Unlike many who seem virtuous, and indeed are, but who do not resist the tug of an easy and pleasant life, Don Bosco's zeal was undaunted and untiring to the point of heroism. After the boys had gone to bed, Don Bosco would recite his breviary, and then spend a good part of the night writing by the dim light of a lamp. He had a special devotion to St. Vincent de Paul who, like himself, had been a cowherd in his youth, and later, as a student, a seminarian, and a priest, had dedicated himself to the education of boys. This year [1848] Don Bosco wrote a new book in which he sketched the life of this ardent apostle of charity. Its title was: *Il Cristiano guidato alla virtù e alla civiltà secondo lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli. Opera che può servire a consacrare il mese di luglio in onore del medesimo Santo.* [The Christian guided in the practice of virtue and social life according to the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul. A suggested way to honor this saint in the month of July.] Don Bosco introduced this work as follows.

To the Reader: The purpose of this little book is to propose St. Vincent de Paul as a model of Christian life to all the faithful.

It is entitled, *The Christian guided in the practice of virtue and social life according to the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul*, because this saint dealt with people of all classes, and in all these diverse situations there was no virtue that he did not practice admirably. We have added the words, *and social life*, because in his contacts with the higher and more

refined classes of society he knew how to apply the principles of Christian living contained in the Gospel.

The words, *according to the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul*, imply that everything set forth here is truly taken from his biography and from the book entitled: *Lo spirito di San Vincenzo de' Paoli* [The spirit of St. Vincent de Paul]. My only additions are some sayings from Holy Scripture on which St. Vincent's teachings are based. The introductory biographical sketch will form the outline of topics to be elaborated at greater length.

Saint Vincent was like a flaming torch chosen by God to spread the light of truth among educated and ignorant alike. He was like a man of low condition raised by God to sit with princes in order that the example of his heroic virtues might bring a spiritual renewal to France and to all Europe. God grant that St. Vincent's charity and zeal be rekindled in priests and that they be tireless in saving souls. May this same spirit be sparked also among all people of all countries, so that, inspired by his virtues and spurred by the example of holy priests, they may make giant strides along the road which leads to heaven, our only true happiness.

We shall not elaborate on Don Bosco's success with this book. We shall limit ourselves to a few relevant remarks on the book itself. First, Don Bosco already professed a firm belief in papal infallibility at that time and instilled it in others, a full twenty-two years before Vatican Council I declared this truth a dogma. In this he was in complete agreement with St. Vincent de Paul who, in order to put a stop to Jansenistic agitation and diabolical maneuvers, since the matter was very urgent, persuaded the French bishops to appeal directly to the pope rather than to a general council. As a result Pope Innocent X, as teacher of the faithful, condemned Jansenism's errors and subtle maneuvers.

Above all we should not forget that in 1848 Don Bosco upheld the pope's Christ-given prerogatives at a time when the revolutionaries violently attacked them.

In this book Don Bosco wrote:

Approve all that the pope approves; condemn all that the pope condemns. As a good Christian strive to love and respect the ordinances of the hierarchy. Do not join the ranks of those who, utterly ignorant of church matters, presume to criticize ecclesiastical authorities, their words and deeds. No one should presume to pass judgment on matters beyond

his understanding. Our Lord warns us not to find fault with His sacred ministers. He regards as done to Himself what we say or do against them. "Touch not my ministers." [1 Par. 16, 22] "He who rejects you, rejects Me." [Luke 10, 16]

Secondly, Don Bosco not only sketched the life of St. Vincent de Paul, but carefully studied the saint's practice of the cardinal and theological virtues, and from that he drew guidelines for his own spiritual life. Apart from the adaptations demanded by the needs of his time, Don Bosco so faithfully copied St. Vincent de Paul that a reader personally acquainted with Don Bosco would feel a strong inclination to substitute his name for that of St. Vincent. Identical were their views on spiritual matters; equal their zeal for the glory of God, their absolute trust in Divine Providence, their love for religious orders and congregations, their charity toward the poor and the imprisoned, their eagerness to nurse those afflicted with contagious diseases, their efforts to convert heretics.

To corroborate what we have said we should mention here that Don Bosco, although short-tempered by nature like St. Vincent, nevertheless succeeded in imitating his gentleness and self-restraint in order to win more easily the hearts of men. From St. Vincent, as though by reflection, he copied the amiability of St. Francis de Sales. We might say that Don Bosco's spirit could properly be defined as that of St. Francis de Sales as exemplified in St. Vincent de Paul. In fact, Don Bosco took note of St. Vincent's advice for acquiring this virtue.

"Endear yourself to the assembly." (Sir. 4, 7) Saint Vincent de Paul based his amiability on two principles: the word and example of Our Saviour, and the knowledge of human frailty. In regard to the first principle he used to say that gentleness and humility are twin virtues which easily merge into each other. He quoted Our Lord's saying, "Learn from Me, for I am meek and humble of heart," [Matt. 11, 29] and demonstrated it by his example. Our Lord chose as disciples men who were uncouth and subject to shortcomings in order to teach superiors how to treat their subjects. . . . Regarding the second principle, St. Vincent used to say that faults are as natural to a man as thorns to brambles; that even the just man falls seven times, that is, often; that the spirit, like the body, has its troubles; that since a man must often be patient with himself, it should not seem strange that he also try the patience of

others. St. Vincent also reminds his listeners that true justice knows only compassion, not anger; that cutting words are more often the result of impulsiveness than of true feelings; that the wisest of us are subject to passions, and that these passions sometimes cause words that we regret as soon as we have uttered them. Finally he used to add that, wherever we may be, suffering will always be our lot; but that since we can acquire merit, the wise thing to do is to store up plenty of amiability because without it our sufferings will be worthless and may even endanger our eternal salvation.

"Amiability," the saint added, "manifests itself in three ways. First, by keeping our feelings under control and repressing those angry stirrings which disturb our soul, well up within us, and disfigure our faces. An amiable man cannot help feeling the promptings of anger because the impulses of nature are felt before those of grace. But he will not allow his feelings to get the upper hand and if, despite himself, they show up in his face, he will quickly regain control and calm himself again. If he is obliged to reprove or punish, he will act out of duty, never out of passion. He will thus imitate the Son of God who reproved St. Peter and called him "Satan," who reproached the Jews for their hypocrisy, and who overturned the tables of the money changers in the Temple, but who said and did all these things with perfect calm. Under similar circumstances a man without amiability would have acted out of anger.

"Secondly, amiability manifests itself by a great affability, a serenity which reassures all comers. Some people have such pleasant and amiable manners that they attract everybody; from the very onset they seem to offer you their hearts and ask for yours in return. Others, on the contrary, show a forbidding countenance, and their humorless, grim expression startles and disconcerts. A priest or a missionary who does not have manners to captivate his hearers' hearts will never succeed; he will be like arid soil, yielding only wild thistles.

"Lastly, amiability shows itself by banishing all brooding that may linger in one's mind for wrongs or bad treatment received. One must form the habit of forgetting the offense, forgiving the offender, and convincing oneself of having acted hastily, carried away by feelings. Above all, one must get used to keeping his lips sealed lest he argue with those whose only aim is to further embitter him. We should also be amiable with those who show us little respect or even insult and strike us. We should accept their outrageous treatment and offer it up to God for His sake, restraining our own anger and choosing to be amiable even under these circumstances. A kindly word may convert the obstinate, whereas a harsh one may further embitter him."

Amiability, which is always a pleasing feature in anybody, had such an indefinable candor, humor and wisdom in St. Vincent de Paul that it was difficult to resist.

After reading these reflections and examining Don Bosco's own life, may we not conclude that Don Bosco himself emerges as a living portrait of St. Vincent de Paul? As we proceed further in our narration the similarity between the lives of these two men of God will become all the more striking, the more we examine their achievements.

Like St. Vincent, Don Bosco went to Rome to pay homage to the pope, to pray at the tomb of the Prince of the Apostles, to visit the famous shrines of the capital of the Catholic world. Like St. Vincent, he preached not only in cities, but in countless villages; was solicitous for the formation of a zealous clergy; made up for the lack of seminaries; fostered the growth of priestly and religious vocations; listened to innumerable people from all walks of life who came to him for advice; wrote so many letters that this task alone would have kept a man busy an entire lifetime. Finally, like St. Vincent, Don Bosco dealt with kings and great men of his day, arousing their admiration for his bearing in their presence and for his frankness in speaking the truth.

St. Vincent de Paul restored the pristine fervor to many religious houses; Don Bosco, on the other hand, with a courage inspired by faith, endeavored to save hundreds of monasteries from suppression, and actually managed to save some of them. St. Vincent founded the Congregation of the Mission of St. Vincent de Paul and the Daughters of Charity; Don Bosco founded the Society of St. Francis de Sales and the Institute of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians. St. Vincent spent huge sums to help the poor and relieve entire provinces from dire distress; poor Don Bosco raised millions with which to care for the countless orphans who found shelter in his hospices and oratories. St. Vincent founded confraternities and sodalities of noble ladies to help him in his works of charity; Don Bosco founded the Salesian Cooperators, men and women, for the same purpose. St. Vincent's wise counsel influenced the appointment of saintly bishops in France; likewise, through Don Bosco's good offices, bishops were restored to more than fifty Italian dio-

ceses which had long been without them. On his deathbed Louis XIII called on St. Vincent to assist him in his last moments; Grand Duke Leopold II of Tuscany had Don Bosco at his side in his agony. St. Vincent de Paul was the apostle of papal infallibility in France; Don Bosco expressly journeyed to Rome to overcome the prejudices of several prelates who contended that such a dogmatic definition was ill-advised and inopportune. In his desire to spread the Gospel, St. Vincent sent his sons to the Barbary States, to Scotland, Ireland, England, Madagascar and India; Don Bosco sent his Salesians to England, to the wilds of Patagonia, and to other parts of the American continent. Both, finally, suffered from the same physical ailments, malaria and a swelling of the limbs, for over forty years.

The similarity between them was so evident that in its Catholic conventions France recognized and hailed Don Bosco as the Vincent de Paul of the 19th century, and the conferences of St. Vincent de Paul called on him and assisted him in founding hospices in Nice, Buenos Aires, Montevideo and in other cities.

Don Bosco ended his book by concisely but accurately presenting in devotional tones the marvelous and countless works of holiness wrought by St. Vincent. He concluded with this dedication.

To the glorious Saint Vincent de Paul
In behalf of all his devotees.

The Author

Another aim of Don Bosco in writing this book was to render homage and service to the Cottolengo Hospital, just as he had previously tried to be of help to the Rifugio Institute with his booklet *Esercizio di divozione alla Misericordia di Dio* [Devotion to the Mercy of God].¹ In fact, he twice referred to the work of the Venerable Cottolengo² when describing St. Vincent's charity toward his fellowmen. He also stated that the hospital, which under the saint's inspiration was doing splendid work to benefit thousands of poor and sick people of every description sheltered there, had been born under the influence of St. Vincent's spirit. Then, in the practical

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 427f. [Editor]

² Saint Joseph Benedict Cottolengo since 1939. [Editor]

application appended to each consideration, Don Bosco exhorts the faithful to detach their hearts from material things and to make proper use of them by helping the needy, by obeying Our Lord in giving to the poor that which is over and above their own needs, and by curtailing some household expenses to give more to charity.

When the book was completed, Don Bosco was confronted with the problem of its printing; he had no money. He therefore called on Canon [Louis] Anglesio, successor of the Venerable Cottolengo. He showed him the manuscript, saying, "You can help me publish this book by taking a sizeable number of copies."

"Gladly; I'll take three hundred."

"Not enough! You should take at least three thousand."

"Impossible! I could never pay for that!"

"You won't have to. I'll take care of that!"

"In that case, I gladly agree!"

Thereupon, Don Bosco went straight to Countess Del Piazzo and suggested that she pay for three thousand copies for the Cottolengo Hospital. The good lady promptly obliged.

The book was printed in Turin by the Paravia Press and was distributed among the religious congregations working in the Cottolengo Hospital. It is still a popular spiritual reading book. The first edition was anonymous. Don Bosco's name did not appear until the second and third editions in 1876 and 1887 respectively. In the Vincentians' novitiate in Chieri, the book was read in July in honor of their founder.³

³ The liturgical feast day of St. Vincent de Paul falls on July 19. [Editor]

CHAPTER 36

Anticlerical Ferment

JUNE began with an ugly affront to the Church. Bishop [Dominic] Galvano of Nice had denied church burial to an emigrant who had died unrepentant. In reprisal, a wild mob of about six hundred people ripped the bishop's coat of arms off the façade of his residence and dragged it through the mud. A deputy, Angelo Brofferio,¹ seized upon this incident as an excuse to attack the episcopate in a vitriolic speech to the Chamber of Deputies.

Meanwhile the war of independence was not going so well. On June 11, Radetsky with an army of thirty thousand men attacked Vicenza, defended by only ten thousand troops. The city, raked by the fire of one hundred and ten cannon, was forced to capitulate after two days of desperate resistance. An insurrection breaking out in Bohemia seemed to be well-timed and if successful it would have made the whole Austrian Empire collapse, but things turned out otherwise. Prague, where rebellion flared on June 12, was brought to its knees after four days of fierce fighting. In Italy, the Austrian army occupied Treviso on June 13, and Palmanuova on June 25, despite furious resistance. Papal troops played an important part in all these battles, but they too were forced to abandon Padua, cross the Po, and return to Rome. Thus, the whole of Veneto fell again under foreign rule.

The Piedmontese government, however, was not wholly occupied with these events. On June 16, Minister Pareto wrote to Pius IX stating that the needs of the time called for abrogating the privilege of ecclesiastical forum in all still permissible cases, and of all privileges formerly granted to the clergy. On June 17, Minister Sclopis wrote to the bishops of the realm alleging that some priests were

¹ See pp. 193f. [Editor]

fomenting discontent and mistrust among the people by their obvious hostility to the current order of things. He threatened legal action against them. But the real cause of the government's annoyance lay elsewhere. Austrian victories had dampened the frenzied enthusiasm of the first days with a feeling of despondency. Families had been bereaved; even greater hardships were feared; everywhere there lingered jealousy, thwarted ambitions, and disturbances by the secret societies and revolutionary parties. Mazzini's visit to Milan inflamed his followers to riots. But the conspirators were not strong enough to seize power and they impatiently awaited help from revolutionary France. After a series of riots, the socialists in Paris took up arms on June 23, in a bold bid for power, but the National Guard and the regular troops sided with the government. For four days the entire city became a cruel, bloody battleground. Archbishop Affre fell mortally wounded at the barricades, a victim of his own pastoral solicitude. The socialists were defeated, and the plans of the Italian revolutionaries all fell through.

As though these troubles were not enough, another nuisance, the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, made its appearance in Turin, thanks to Bottero,² Borello, and Govean. Modest in size, it played a great role in inciting hatred against the Church; perhaps more than any other publication, it caused harm to religion and its ministers. Aside from the fact that it adroitly pampered mob passions, it was also popular in its simple and direct style and its wide coverage of business and finance. It thus enjoyed great circulation among white collar workers and among a large segment of the common people not only in Turin, but also in other towns, even the smallest villages of Piedmont. When its first issues appeared, an incident in a café illustrated the sound common sense of one uneducated man. Don Bosco liked to recall it as a conversation piece to amuse his friends. One day, while he was in the Café Fiorio talking with a young waiter whom he hoped to take into the Oratory, a highlander came in. He wore a fur cap; his trousers, which reached only to his knees, had two huge sack-like pockets. He was a rather colorful figure. The man sat down and ordered a bowl of coffee and milk. When it was brought to

² Giovanni Battista Bottero (1822-1897) was a liberal writer of Nice. In 1848 he founded the periodical *L'Opinione*. [Editor]

him, he picked up the sugar with his tobacco-stained fingers. Some young students and dandies who were present watched the performance with great amusement. After exchanging amused glances and chuckles, they went up to him and one asked, "Have you seen today's *Gazzetta del Popolo* yet?"

"No!" he said. "I can't even read. But if there is interesting news, give me a copy and I'll take it home to my son who's a real scholar. Not only can he make good salami, but he can also read and write."

"Is this brilliant son of yours a lawyer maybe?" another of the young blades asked, laughing. Guffaws and shouts greeted the question. At that the highlander placed his clenched fists on his hips. "What's the big laugh for?" he asked. "When my pastor preaches, he often comes out with '*orum, orum, orum*'."

The young blades now roared more boisterously. "And what does your pastor mean with that?" a dandy asked.

"Well, I don't know any Latin myself, so I asked him. The meaning is that it takes little to make a fool laugh."

The young men took the hint; the stranger was not the dolt they had taken him to be. They changed the topic and began singing the praises of the *Gazzetta*, quoting the latest stories, especially those concerning priests. Meanwhile they eyed Don Bosco at whom their sallies were directed. The highlander showed surprise at what they were telling him.

"Is that so?" he exclaimed. "Are you trying to fool me by any chance?"

"Not at all! You mean to say that you don't know these things?"

"Exactly, and they don't interest me a bit."

"The *Gazzetta* says that priests are finished lording it over us."

"Oh, I see. Now, it's our turn to do the lording."

"Right! And, furthermore, this paper has some choice tidbits about priests. It's hard to believe that priests can be like that!"

"Do you believe all that stuff?"

"Of course. The *Gazzetta* says so, and so does everybody else. Don't you?"

"Me?" The good man pondered a while before replying, and then, solidly, let them have it in good Piedmontese. "Look, fel-

lows," he said, "you ought to know that a donkey brays louder than a mule and that fools always side with those who shout the loudest."

As Don Bosco heard this he could not help chuckling. He left, followed by his new pupil, while the peasant continued his lesson to the brash young blades.

Unfortunately the diabolically destructive work of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, of *L'Opinione*, another anticlerical publication, as well as the blasphemous lies of an apostate scoundrel named Bianchi-Giovini and of many many others began to bear sinister fruit. Gradually people began to believe that being a Catholic or a heretic made no difference, and that one religion was as good as another in the eyes of God; as though black and white, sweet and bitter, light and darkness, truth and error, praise and abuse were one and the same thing. By confusing liberty with license, the enemies of the Church aroused the people's passions and declared lawful what was unlawful. They spread rumors about the Church, made up and publicized scurrilous stories about bishops, priests, and religious, and spared no effort to discredit them and stir up hostility against them. For these and other reasons too numerous to mention very many people were deceived and led astray, so that a priest was no longer safe even in the streets of Turin, a city renowned for its orderliness. It was during this time that Don Bosco ran into danger several times, but escaped unharmed with the help of the Blessed Virgin. He was also able to do some good for those who had affronted him. Incidents like the one we shall relate now occurred very frequently for several years.

One day, near Porta Nuova, Don Bosco saw a group of twenty young fellows at the far end of a road which led into open fields. They certainly did not look like church-going types. When they saw Don Bosco coming toward them, they began to mutter derisive comments and several actually yelled, "Let's get him!"

Don Bosco would rather have turned back, but it was too late, nor would it have been advisable to show fear. He continued to walk slowly toward them. As he drew quite close the group parted in two and he had to pass between, while the young ruffians eyed him with scorn. He had hardly passed when one shouted, "Why did we let him go?"

"Doesn't he have the right to go his own way?" a voice replied ironically. "Who knows who he is? He might even send us all to jail!"

"A priest have us thrown into jail?" the first went on. "What's a priest anyway? He's just a crow, a scraggy miserable crow." And mimicking the crow, he crowed, "qua, qua, qua."

"But why bother someone who hasn't bothered you," continued the second speaker.

"That's right," exclaimed a third, "we should make it up to this priest for our lack of respect. Let's all go with him to a tavern and treat him to a bottle of Barolo."³

"Why you?" yelled a fourth, "I want to have that honor. Besides, I'll treat you also to a snack."

"Snack nothing!" interjected another. "Shut up, all of you! Let me handle this. This calls for something more than a snack."

Then they all began to shout, "It's my treat! It's my treat!" as though they were really competing for the honor of entertaining a priest at supper. For a while it looked as though they would come to blows. Don Bosco continued walking on slowly, taking in all their mockery. Abruptly he stopped and retraced his steps.

The young toughs silently encircled him. "Listen," Don Bosco said, "you seem to have quite an argument about who shall pay. Let me solve the problem. Come with me and I'll buy drinks for all of you!"

Cheers and repeated *vivas* greeted the suggestion. Don Bosco replied, "Cheers to you! But first let me ask a favor of you."

"Certainly! Let's hear it!"

"Some Sunday, I'd like you to take a walk down to the end of Corso Valdocco. There you'll find the Oratory."

"Is that where I've been told boys gather on Sundays to play and have a good time?"

"That's right."

"At Don Bosco's place?"

"Exactly."

"Who's Don Bosco?" most of them began to ask.

"Who knows?" some answered. Others added, "I've never been there."

³ A choice Piedmontese wine. [Editor]

"Will you go, then?" Don Bosco asked.

"Sure, sure, but treat us now!" So saying, they all made for the tavern which stood some distance from the residential quarter in the middle of nowhere. At that hour there were no customers. Don Bosco ordered enough wine for all; they drank toasts and Don Bosco himself sipped some wine. After some expected boisterous merry-making, Don Bosco wanted to take his leave.

"No!" they all shouted, "we're coming with you. We want to see you safely home to your door!" So they set out with him. When they got to Valdocco, one of them pointed out a small house in that area and said, "That's the house of a very good priest. He likes boys like us and always helps them. He's really swell."

"Yes," put in another, "that's Don Bosco's house."

"Oh!" said a third, "I've been here, and I went to confession. I even went to catechism once and afterward had a grand time. But I didn't see Don Bosco because he was out preaching that day."

When the young toughs saw that Don Bosco was walking toward the very house they were talking about, they asked, "Do you live with Don Bosco?"

"This is my house! Now, can you guess who I am?" smiled Don Bosco.

"You aren't Don Bosco, are you?"

"You are Don Bosco!" cried all the others.

"That's right! I'm Don Bosco and I want to be your friend!"

There were profuse apologies from the young toughs, but Don Bosco made them understand that he had not been offended, adding, "Since I see that you're really nice fellows, I'd like you to promise me something." In unison they shouted that they would be only too glad to do whatever he wished. "Well then, I would like all of you to come here next Sunday for confession. I assure you, you won't regret it."

"H'm, confession," said one doubtfully. "I haven't been to confession for six years," said another. There were other comments, such as "I haven't been inside a church since my First Communion" and "I wouldn't know what to say," and "I've never been to confession at all."

"Never mind," said Don Bosco, "just come, all of you."

"All right, we'll come!" After wishing Don Bosco good night, they went home.

Don Bosco had invited them to return, but had little hope that they would do so. However, on the following Sunday, sixteen of them showed up, made their confessions, radically mended their ways, and remained close friends of his for a long time. Only four failed to keep their word.

Another time Don Bosco was crossing a square, adjacent to one of the busier streets in Turin when he ran into a mob of thirty or forty young toughs swearing loudly and shouting obscenities. When they noticed him, several of them passed the word, "Look at the priest!" After exchanging a few words among themselves, they walked toward him intending to surround him. "They're out to have fun at my expense," thought Don Bosco to himself, "and I'll have to outsmart them." As soon as they were close enough he greeted them and asked how they felt and where they were going, as if they were friends of long standing. They replied nonsensically and mockingly, with no effort to hide their contempt. Ignoring their rudeness, Don Bosco went on to tell them where he was coming from and where he was going. Unexpectedly, one of them shouted to his face, "Priests are rascals!" while the others guffawed approvingly.

"Take it easy," said Don Bosco resuming his interrupted talk. "Most likely none of you know even the meaning of the word 'rascal'. If you did, you wouldn't use it." Then pointing to one of them he asked, "Well, do you know what it means? Do you know the origin of this word?"

They looked questioningly at one another while Don Bosco went on, "You see, in order to understand its real meaning you must know other languages as well, because that word is of foreign origin."

At this point the toughs began to nudge each other, and clench their fists, muttering to each other, "You tell him, you tell him. . . ."

Realizing that there was no easy way out and that no police were in sight, Don Bosco tried a trick. "Listen, fellows," he said, "let's do something. I like to be with young men. Here's a tavern. Let's go in. Be my guests, but on two conditions. First, I'm a priest and it's not proper for me to order drinks, so you'll do the ordering.

Naturally, order the best wine there is . . . from Asti. Secondly, I want to pay."

The toughs stared at each other in disbelief. "This priest isn't at all like those I've known!" they said to each other, laughing. Then they shouted gaily, "All right, let's go!"

They went into a tavern, had their drinks, and talked even more than they drank. None of the boys knew Don Bosco. One of them however began to suspect his identity and said to those nearest him, "I have a hunch he is Don Bosco."

"You think so?"

"No, it can't be," others added.

The boy then turned to Don Bosco and asked him bluntly, "Are you Don Bosco?"

"Yes, I am," he replied. "Now that I have treated you to a drink, I'd like to ask you a favor."

"Ask, and we'll do it," they replied.

"I want you to come to the Oratory for confession this Saturday evening."

The boys stared at each other and broke into laughter. "We, go to confession? If you only knew how tough we are, and all we've done. . . ."

"Are we friends or not?"

"Sure, we're friends."

"Well then. . . ."

"All right," they shouted. "We'll be there."

"How about one of you vouching for it," Don Bosco added, eyeing one of the youths who was obviously the leader.

"I will," the leader said. "They'll all be there, even if I have to drag them by the scruff of the neck."

"For heaven's sake, nothing so drastic!" replied Don Bosco. "I'll see you all on Saturday then."

The whole gang did come over on Saturday and Sunday and made much better confessions than Don Bosco had hoped for. Many of them continued to visit the Oratory, and eight of them eventually entered as boarders. True, they could not long endure a way of life which curtailed the freedom to which they were accustomed, but some stayed on for nearly a year. Nevertheless, they all turned out well, made their living in honest work, and some of them

are now well-to-do business men. What is more important is that they persevered as good Christians and became exemplary parents.

Another Saturday evening, Don Bosco was returning to the Oratory accompanied by quite a few young toughs who were going to make their confession to him. As they were kneeling in the sacristy, one suddenly began to giggle; others joined in and soon they all ran out laughing, except the one who was actually making his confession. Don Bosco did not expect ever to see them again and was willing to admit the failure. Instead, the following Sunday they were all back. It was hard work to help them make their examination of conscience, teach them to feel sorry for their sins, and persuade them to say their penance. Yet the hard work was well worth it.

In many such instances Don Bosco also performed a great civic service by helping to break up several gangs which would inevitably have ventured into crime.

Don Bosco, however, would not always have come through similar encounters unscathed if he had not had some unexpected help. One day he found himself surrounded by a gang of young rascals on whom friendly talk was wholly lost. They yelled insults at him and tried to knock off his hat; this time he really feared the worst. Without losing his composure, he tried to free himself from their clutches, but in vain. At that moment a young man of the neighborhood, who had only recently met Don Bosco, chanced to be passing by. Putting his hand into his pocket as if to draw a knife, he shouted, "Don't you know that this priest is Don Bosco? Stop bothering him or I'll cut you wide open!" His threat sounded so convincing that the toughs did not try to dare him. They were amazed that Don Bosco should have one of their own breed as a bodyguard.

These and worse attacks on priests were a direct result of the anticlerical press, but the civil authorities never bothered to do anything about it.

CHAPTER 37

Sectarian Attacks

ENEMIES other than an anticlerical press were getting ready for a bitter, dangerous struggle against the Church. On June 19, 1848, an edict by Prince Eugenio di Carignano abolished all discriminatory laws against Waldensians and Jews. The edict stated that "difference of religion can bar no one from the enjoyment of full civil and political rights, or from administrative or military posts." Furthermore, the Waldensians and Jews were granted full freedom to worship and to proselytize. This was an abuse of the principle of religious freedom. As a result of the decrees of February 17 and March 9, [1848] the Jews had already emerged from their ghetto and had shortly become the foremost landowners in Piedmont. Waldensian pastors too had left the valleys around Pine-rollo, to which the Savoy sovereigns had prudently restricted them, and were spreading over the whole of Piedmont; later they would overrun the whole peninsula. In Turin they were only a handful, but knowing that the revolutionaries were on their side, they soon showed their true colors. They dreamed of turning Italy into a Protestant nation, thus depriving the pope of his subjects and forcing him to abandon Rome. Both on their own and in cooperation with the Protestants of Switzerland, Germany, and England, who had been sent to Italy to proselytize, they did all they could to spread their false teachings. The better to succeed in their intent they distributed books, founded schools, held lectures, and built chapels and churches. As though they lived in a pagan land, they did not spare themselves in trying to turn Catholics into as many Waldensians, Lutherans, and Calvinists.

Don Bosco and the boys of the St. Aloysius Oratory were among the first to feel the evil effects of these new developments. Shortly

after coming to Turin, the Waldensians set up shop near Viale dei Platani not far from this oratory. They rented a building and began to give bible lectures. Under the pretext of explaining the Scriptures they railed against the pope, bishops, priests, celibacy, confession, Holy Mass, purgatory, devotion to the Saints, and above all the Blessed Virgin. They spoke of Her as of an ordinary woman, sacrilegiously denying Her two most resplendent privileges: Her virginity and Her divine maternity.

These Waldensian ministers had expected to arouse warm enthusiasm among the people with their blasphemous novelties and to attract serious-minded persons to their lectures, but they were soon disillusioned. Very few people of Turin were inclined to attend Protestant lectures, and give up their own Faith. The few who did, no more than a score, were mostly good-for-nothings whose Catholicity amounted to having been baptized as Catholics. Among them was a man named Pugno, an unemployed cobbler. Tired of his trade, he became one of their most rabid preachers. He even called on Don Bosco several times in order to debate with him. Don Bosco would have been overly amused by the sheer nonsense uttered by this cobbler suddenly turned theologian and apostle, had he not felt a deep compassion for his soul.

Once the Waldensian ministers realized that they would not make many converts among the adults, they decided upon another approach, which unfortunately was successful and indeed still succeeds in seducing many souls and luring them to perdition. They offered money as bait and cast their nets among unwary, inexperienced youths. They picked their most aggressive adepts and sent them, like wolves, in search of lambs. Since the St. Aloysius Oratory then numbered about five hundred boys of various ages, it became their prime target; it was like an unfenced sheepfold. To entice youngsters, one Sunday, several proselytizers stationed themselves on the street leading to the oratory and near its playground. "What are you going there for?" they asked the boys. "Come with us, and you will have more fun. You will hear something you'll like. To top it off we will give each of you sixteen *soldi* and a nice book to read."

The thoughtlessness of youth and the lure of money did entice

many of them. "Let's go!" one suggested. "Yes, let's!" echoed another. "I sure can use sixteen *soldi*!" added a third. That Sunday, about fifty boys went with the Waldensians. After listening to a talk, each of the boys received the promised sixteen *soldi* and a book against confession written by the notorious apostate [Louis] De Sanctis.¹

After receiving their pay, along with an invitation to return, several boys, unaware of the snares that had been laid for them, innocently went back to the St. Aloysius Oratory later in the afternoon and freely talked about their adventure. Father Carpano instantly realized that the wolves were closing in on the lambs that Don Bosco had entrusted to him, and he zealously set to work to save his flock. First he collected all the copies of the books that had been given to the boys; then, recalling the parable of the good shepherd, he exposed the designs of the Waldensians so convincingly, and instilled such horror for their meetings that all the boys promised never again to go there for all the gold in the world.

This amounted to a declaration of war. The battles that would ensue were to give Don Bosco, Father Borel, Father Carpano, and all the boys many harrowing hours and days.

On the following Sunday the Waldensians again stationed themselves on the road leading to the St. Aloysius Oratory. This time the hunting was not as easy as before. The older boys, alerted by their superiors, kept watch. Whenever a Waldensian approached some boy, they went to his rescue.

"Don't let these fellows talk you into anything; they want to take you to the *barbetti*;² they are against our religion. Go to the oratory!"

As a last resort the thwarted proselytizers turned to mockery and insults. "You pack of idiots!" they shouted. "What can priests do for you? Isn't it better to come with us and get sixteen *soldi*?"

"You must be pretty bad preachers," the boys replied, "if you have to pay people to listen to you. Can't you do anything better with your money?"

¹ A local ex-pastor turned evangelical minister. [Editor]

² Waldensian ministers used to wear a beard, and were nicknamed accordingly. [Editor]

This retort hit home. The zealots would have liked to punch them but, being outnumbered, they prudently retreated with the threat, "We shall return!"

It was to be expected that on the following Sunday things would take a turn for the worse. The boys, therefore, were warned that from then on they should simply ignore the Waldensians, if they were approached by them, and go straight to the oratory. Their fears were justified. Shortly after noon the following Sunday, about thirty or forty young toughs, each of whom had pocketed his sixteen *soldi*, showed up in a meadow adjoining the St. Aloysius Oratory. The boys did as they had been told and kept to themselves. But the toughs did not like that. They began to bombard them with stones as though storming a castle. Rocks rained on doors, or windows, and on the roof, and some landed among the terrified boys, causing head injuries to several. All passed moments of sheer terror. The shameless provocation enraged the older boys. Forgetting their orders and disregarding danger, they picked up stones, furiously charged their opponents and chased them beyond Viale dei Platani.

But this was not the only battle. There were many others, almost every Sunday and holy day for the next few months, to the worry of Don Bosco and his co-workers. The Waldensians and their followers, unable to lure the boys into their snares, contented themselves with scaring them away from Don Bosco by throwing stones at them as they walked along the road in twos and threes. More often than not they would wait until all the boys were in church, and then would hurl a barrage of stones through doors and windows, terrifying the smaller boys and forcing Don Bosco to suspend church services.

Once, Father Borel and Father Carpano were in the sacristy vesting for Benediction when a gunman appeared at the window overlooking the street and fired two shots at them. Fortunately, the bullets missed and embedded themselves in the wall. The boys were terrified, but seeing the two priests unharmed they soon regained their calm. Our old companions Cigliutti, [John] Gravano, and [Joseph] Buzzetti were present at all these happenings.

It was becoming increasingly clear that the Waldensians were not joking and that they were determined to force the St. Aloysius

Oratory to close down. Don Bosco and his co-workers, however, with the help of God and of the Blessed Virgin, withstood their onslaughts with courage and perseverance and won out in the end.

The boys of the St. Aloysius Oratory continued to attend. They loudly professed their Faith by repeating the prayer in the *Companion of Youth*: "O my God, I firmly believe all the truths You have revealed to Your Church, because You are the Infallible Truth. Grant me, O Lord, the grace to live and die as a true Christian in the bosom of Holy Mother Church."

While the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova was being subjected to these ordeals, the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales in Valdocco, after a peaceful feast of St. John the Baptist, was now celebrating the feast of St. Aloysius Gonzaga with extraordinary solemnity. The times seemed to demand it.

Civic or patriotic demonstrations exercised a great attraction for boys. To meet this challenge it was not only expedient but necessary to counteract worldly celebrations with religious ones, the better to win the hearts and minds of the faithful, especially the young ones, to the Church.

The feast of St. Aloysius had been announced long in advance, and was preceded by the usual Six-Sunday Devotions in honor of the saint.³ The band and the choir held frequent rehearsals and invitations were sent to benefactors, relatives, and friends. Firecrackers on the vigil and on the morning itself served as a reminder to those near and far. All these preparations meant extra work for Don Bosco, Father Borel, and several other priests, but they felt rewarded for their labors by the many Communions on that day. In the afternoon so many youngsters poured into the Oratory that the chapel could accommodate only a part of them.

The procession climaxed the festivities. It was a moving sight to see an ordinary young apprentice carry the St. Aloysius Sodality banner while two boys of noble families held its tassels. The procession wound its way along Via Cottolengo. So many took part in it that those at the head of the procession were already halfway down the long street as those in the rear were just coming out of the Oratory gates. Despite the crush of people, everything went smoothly and calmly. The police had nothing to do but be present. Band selections and the singing of the boys alternately filled the air.

³ See Vol. II, pp. 281ff. [Editor]

On this occasion it was very edifying to see in the procession two very important men, both prominent in Italy and one famous throughout Europe. Walking alongside the statue, candle in one hand and the *Companion of Youth* in the other, they joined the sacred ministers in singing the liturgical hymn *Infensus hostis glorie* in honor of St. Aloysius. These two dignitaries were none other than the two brothers Marquis Gustavo and Count Camillo Cavour. The marquis had expressed the wish to be enrolled in the St. Aloysius Sodality, and kneeling among the boys before the altar he had read aloud the ritual membership declaration.

These two brothers had become staunch admirers of Don Bosco after seeing how he had successfully carried out his plans to gather boys into the Oratory from all parts of Turin despite obstacles and opposition. The two noblemen often paid him encouraging visits and seldom missed the more important feasts of the Oratory. They enjoyed seeing so many boys together at play and study in a wholesome, pleasant atmosphere, far from an environment that could lead them to jail. Count Camillo Cavour, watching these happy youngsters at play, was often heard to exclaim, "What a wonderful, providential undertaking this is! If every city could have one such institution, many young men would never see the inside of a prison, and the government would not have to waste so much money on criminals. Rather would we have good citizens earning an honest living, to their own advantage and that of society."

Some may be surprised to learn that the two Cavour brothers were frequent visitors to the Oratory and that they did express sentiments of this kind. It must be remembered that they had been brought up by devout parents, and that at this time they were still exemplary Catholics. Marquis Gustavo Cavour especially could often be seen in some church or other in Turin receiving Holy Communion with truly edifying piety. As late as 1850, Count Camillo Cavour, who was not too familiar a figure in Piedmont since he had spent many years in England, used to receive Communion in the church of the Annunciation from Father [Louis] Fantini who later became bishop of Fossano.

At the beginning of the Italian revolutionary movement Camillo Cavour seemed to be a conservative in church matters, even though he favored the rights of the king. No one would have ever suspected that later on he would turn against the pope and the Church.

Meanwhile, in 1848, steps were being taken to establish a Catholic press. The sudden rise and growth of liberal, revolutionary newspapers and magazines impressed upon the faithful the need for a periodical which would take up the defense of the Church and her rights. Thus while Bishop Louis Moreno of Ivrea, after consulting with Don Bosco, studied ways and means of launching such a publication in Piedmont, some priests and laymen in Genoa were likewise planning a newspaper to be called *L'Armonia*, but serious obstacles held up its publication. The latter, when they learned of Bishop Moreno's plans, suggested that he take over *L'Armonia* and offered him the funds they had already collected. Bishop Moreno agreed. With the pope's blessing, the first issue of *L'Armonia* came out in Turin on July 4, 1848, under the editorship of Father William Audisio, president of the Academy of Superga, Marquis Birago of Vische, and Marquis Gustavo Cavour. For several years Marquis Cavour was one of its most gifted writers. This newspaper had the merit of being the first, most courageous, and most brilliant defense of the Church, the pope, and the Catholic clergy of Piedmont. It waged a constant, implacable struggle against revolutionaries and liberals in defense of the pope's temporal power and the indissolubility of Christian marriage.

Don Bosco strongly supported this publication. This, as we know for certain, earned him the distrust and reproaches of some powerful liberals. When *L'Armonia* came out that summer, Don Bosco was already at St. Ignatius' Shrine for his annual spiritual retreat in Father Cafasso's company. There, in that solitude of peace, he prepared himself for new battles in the offing. At the shrine an incident occurred which was repeated several times later on. We heard of it from Father Borel. Don Bosco had written him that on the previous Sunday two boys, Costa and Baretta, had walked into the chapel through the main door and gone out by way of the sacristy. Instead of attending church services they had gone for a dip in the Dora River, and while they were swimming both had received some rather heavy-handed slaps on their backs from some invisible hand. As soon as Father Borel received the note, he questioned the two boys; their answers perfectly matched Don Bosco's disclosure.

CHAPTER 38

A Severe Ordeal

FOR Don Bosco 1848 and 1849 were years of trouble. Discord and near hostility beset the clergy: liberals clashed against conservatives; the people, egged on by revolutionaries, were hostile to the clergy and accused them of being behind the times and opposed to national independence. Prominent ecclesiastics, good men beyond reproach, unfailingly opposed Don Bosco and his novel undertakings, alleging that his fraternizing with the young toughs of the city was compromising the dignity of the priesthood. Unfortunately Don Bosco's staunchest supporter, Archbishop Frasoni, was in exile in Switzerland. As if these tribulations were not enough, the Oratory had to go through another ordeal, more dangerous than any it had formerly faced.

It is well known that a kingdom, a society, or a family in discord cannot endure for long. The devil, who from the very beginning had vainly attempted to destroy Don Bosco's work through the spitefulness of people blinded by prejudice, and through slander and threats, now resorted to discord. The seeds had been sown already some years before but had not yielded much fruit; now, however, they took root among several of Don Bosco's co-workers. These came to the Oratory to teach catechism and other subjects and to supervise the boys during the recreation period; several of them, full of liberal ideas and national aspirations, let themselves be swept along by the tide of events. They sided with certain priests who, quite anxious to get rid of the traditional clerical garb, aired their views in newspapers and started a letter campaign advocating civilian clothes. In Turin, in fact, some even discarded the Roman collar and dressed as laymen. The liberals favored this change of dress and encouraged street urchins to poke fun at priests wearing

the cassock. One day, one of these progressive priests, aware of the propaganda value of Don Bosco's approval, called on him and, telling him that many priests favored a change of garb, tried to win him over to this reform. Don Bosco laughed and asked his visitor, "Have you talked to Father Cafasso about it yet?"

"No, not yet."

"Well, try to persuade Canon Anglesio, Father Cafasso, and Father Borel to wear civilian clothes. When I see these three priests, whom I revere and respect, take up this new clerical fashion, maybe I'll follow suit."

The bishops were quick to condemn such hasty demands. Clearly, priests who found such an important point of ecclesiastical discipline irksome were not likely to be helpful at the Oratory. Some of them, along with a few laymen who felt the same way, began to demand that all the boys take part as a group in public demonstrations and festivities in those very places where certain enthusiastic cries of *viva* would soon be changed into angry shouts of "to the gallows."

Others began filling the boys' minds with bizarre religious and political notions, expounding them at the slightest excuse. Don Bosco did not fail to point out that the only politics to be taught to the Oratory boys should be avoiding sin, practicing the Faith, and being obedient to those in authority in order to become in due time good and respected citizens. Consequently he urged his co-workers carefully to avoid instilling in the boys' minds opinions and beliefs which, to say the least, were out of place and could serve only to distract them from their proper duties.

But such wise counsels were not taken graciously, and his co-workers continued to champion the new ideas. Don Bosco was then forced to express his disapproval of them, and to rectify them from the pulpit. Although he did so with the utmost discretion, the animosity of some of his co-workers against him increased, and they began to deride him and his comments. The ferment began to spread also among the boys and curiosity got the best of them. Many occasionally skipped the church services to run off to some public demonstration, mingle with the shouting crowds, and listen to stirring patriotic hymns and music. They were fascinated by the sight of young choirboys dressed in black velvet trousers and shirts,

wearing felt hats adorned by tiny Italian flags. Their hair fell in curls to the shoulders, a dagger was slung at the belt, and a small shield representing Italy hung from a slender gold-plated chain on the chest. When the boys went back to the Oratory on the following Sunday, their vivid accounts of what they had seen persuaded others to go see the spectacle for themselves. These distractions diminished the reception of the sacraments, and Don Bosco had to put up with many things to avoid greater evils. Nevertheless, his mere presence exercised a good restraint over the majority of the boys.

Meanwhile, exaggerated war bulletins, concocted by newsmen, described imaginary Italian victories and promised even more exciting news. Turin again became the scene of victory demonstrations. In reality, however, nothing had happened on the war fronts since negotiations had been proposed by England. It was not until July 13 that Charles Albert finally ordered the siege of Mantova. On July 18, Piedmontese troops attacked and defeated a large number of Austrians at Governolo. Popular demonstrations grew in frenzy, and the applause and shouts of victory took on an ominous antichristian tone. That same day, the Piedmontese parliament passed a law suppressing the Society of Jesus and the Religious of the Sacred Heart, confiscating all their houses and properties. All the deputies, including members of the clergy, voted in favor of the suppression.

About this time, two priests who were helping at the St. Aloysius Oratory called on Don Bosco and bluntly demanded permission to have the boys, with banner and cockades, take part in public demonstrations and parades. Don Bosco could no longer remain indifferent. Not only did he deny permission, but he explicitly forbade any such participation. Whereupon these two priests and several young clerics, all avid readers of the *Gazzetta del Popolo*, openly announced their opposition to him and declared that they would go ahead with their plans, regardless of his prohibition. It was understandable; a craze for national independence was sweeping the country, and everybody was itching for war. One must have lived in those years to understand them properly. The two priests carried out their threat. The following Sunday morning they had the boys of the St. Aloysius Oratory join in the patriotic celebration. Don

Bosco took action immediately. He asked Father Borel to come from the Rifugio and supervise the Valdocco Oratory. Then, in the afternoon, he himself went to the St. Aloysius Oratory. Here he sternly reminded the director of his explicit instructions that no member of the oratory staff was to involve himself in political activities of any sort, that there was to be unity of direction, and that his orders had to be faithfully carried out. Since such orders had been disregarded, he regretted having to tell him that his services were no longer needed because they were not in the best interest of the oratory. The director, who was about to give the boys their afternoon instruction, was taken aback by Don Bosco's reprimand and was at a loss for an answer. Don Bosco added, "I'll take over right now. I shall speak at the afternoon services." Then, in the pulpit, he preached on some doctrinal topic and made not the slightest reference to the events of the morning! After Benediction, the director asked him who would deliver the sermon the following Sunday, and Don Bosco answered, "I will."

Don Bosco's unexpected intervention and his needed reprimands badly annoyed his rebellious staff members, and they resolved to get even with him. The following Sunday, in Valdocco, at about two in the afternoon, one of the most loyal and sensible boys was in a corner of the playground reading *L'Armonia* when several of these rebels appeared with cockades on their chests, one of them carrying the Italian flag. The flag bearer, who was otherwise a zealous and learned priest, went up to the boy and shouted, "What's wrong with you? Don't waste your time on this nonsense!" Snatching the Catholic newspaper from the boy's hand, he tore it into shreds, flung it to the ground, and then spat and stamped on it furiously. After this outburst, he went up to Don Bosco, who was standing near the water fountain with several boys, and offered him a cockade. Then he pulled out of his pocket a copy of *L'Opinione* and said, "This is what you call a good newspaper. This is what all good citizens should read. It's high time to stop heeding stubborn reactionaries. It's time to act!" Don Bosco was astounded at the gesture and words, but not wanting to make a scene, he told the priest he didn't feel like discussing that matter then and there. "Nothing doing!" the priest replied. "The time for secrecy is past!"

From now on everything must be said and done in the clear light of day!"

Just then the bell rang for church. Don Bosco hoped that emotions would cool off, but, unfortunately, such was not the case. The priest, whose turn it was to preach the afternoon sermon, mounted the little pulpit and delivered a tirade of most deplorable character. For half an hour, such words as "emancipation," "independence," "freedom" were dinned into the ears of his youthful audience. Many of the boys were indignant, others laughed, and some latched on to the word *libertà*, whispering a Piedmontese rhyme, *torototèla, torototà*. The one who suffered most was Don Bosco, whose heart was full of bitter sorrow. "I never thought we would come to this," he kept saying. "The devil has really scored on me this time. My God, make my boys forget such foolish notions and keep them from spiritual harm!"

When services were over, he tried to talk to the misguided priest, to have him realize his mistake, but he did not have the opportunity. As soon as the boys were out of the chapel, the priest invited his followers to join him in a popular anthem which he intoned at the top of his voice, and then, with about a hundred of them, he marched out, waving the Italian tricolor in a frenzy. The rebels walked up to the Monte dei Cappuccini and there passed a resolution not to attend the Oratory any longer unless explicitly invited and formally received, with banners flying and their chests bedecked with medals and cockades. Despite his bitter grief over the incident Don Bosco did not lose heart or yield one iota to their demands. Convinced that his stand was right, he knew he had to make grave decisions against false principles and their dire consequences. He realized, too, that, under the circumstances, no reconciliation was possible between his policies and the political ideas of some of his co-workers. Therefore, during the following week, he wrote a note to all those who in their catechism classes were more interested in expounding political opinions than in teaching religion. Courteously he thanked them for all they had done for the Oratory in the past and informed them that their services were no longer needed and that, furthermore, they were not to set foot again on the premises.

This unexpected dismissal so enraged them that they one and all decided to do their utmost to alienate the boys from him. They visited them in their homes and at their jobs, waited for them in the streets leading to both oratories, and succeeded in persuading all the older boys to quit Don Bosco. For one reason or another, and some for justifiable reasons, nearly all the clerics and priests who previously used to help in both oratories had now all but abandoned Don Bosco. Many of them had been drafted and were now in boot camp. The few catechists that remained were incited to leave; the handful who remained faithful did so either for reasons of their own or because they, in turn, needed some assistance or favor from Don Bosco. Both the seminary and the Convitto Ecclesiastico were occupied by troops, and Don Bosco could not count on the usual help from those quarters. The Oratory in Valdocco was now almost deserted. For a few Sundays only thirty or forty boys showed up, compared to the five hundred or more that had previously come. Although the figure rapidly rose again, even above that number, most of the boys were younger ones.

As a result of this break and desertion, for a time Don Bosco had to run the Oratory almost single-handed. On Sunday mornings until noon, the only priest in church, classrooms, or playground was Don Bosco. One or two priests came around but for only a short while because they were already overburdened with their own pastoral duties.

From noon till night Don Bosco was alone, supervising and assembling the boys, shepherding them into church, and teaching them catechism. He presided at and sang Vespers without surplice because, even while singing, he had to keep order among the boys. Then he would mount the pulpit to preach, again without surplice, because he would often have to interrupt the sermon to restore order in some group or to move some noisy youngster somewhere else to keep him quiet or to escort some troublesome boy outside the chapel. Returning to the pulpit, he would continue his sermon and give Benediction. After the church services, he stayed with the boys till dark and walked them to the first houses, lest they encounter trouble in the isolated fields around Valdocco.

In his loneliness and exhaustion Don Bosco found comfort in Father Borel's loyal assistance. Notwithstanding his many duties at

the Rifugio, in the city's prisons, and in a score of other institutions, Father Borel was a priest, small of stature, but ten feet tall in every other respect. Often he deprived himself of sleep in order to help out with confessions or preach on special occasions and thus relieve Don Bosco of at least this chore.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had his heart set on gathering around himself a nucleus of boys truly virtuous, fit to be "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world" among their companions. To this end, mindful of the wonderful results of the spiritual retreat that had been held the year before, he decided on another one. He discussed it with several boys who seemed to be good material for it, showed them how to get a week's leave from their parents or their employers, and was able to gather a small group. He then made the necessary preparations and selected two fine preachers: Canon Joseph Gliemone of Rivoli for the meditations, and Father [John] Borel for the instructions. The spiritual retreat began on a Sunday evening in July and ended on the morning of the following Sunday after Communion with the final sermon on the souvenirs of the retreat.¹ The retreatants lived at the Oratory with Don Bosco but some went home in the evening because there were not enough beds for them. The preachers whom Don Bosco had chosen did superlatively well. They knew how to adapt the truths of the Faith, the teachings of the Church, and illustrations and edifying anecdotes to the capacity of their young audience and thus hold their attention. Aided by God's grace, several boys underwent a spiritual renewal and began to lead very exemplary lives. Some later joined religious orders; others who remained in the world led very up-right lives.

We would like to mention here an amusing episode which, we are told, took place during this retreat. One of the boys, anxious to make his general confession as accurately as possible, wrote down all his sins. Whether he had really committed them or just thought he had, he filled up a notebook, planning to memorize the list or read it to the confessor. Somehow, though, he lost this detailed record of his inglorious deeds. He rummaged through his pockets and searched every conceivable place he might have put his notebook, but without success. Gloomy and depressed, he broke

¹ Suggested resolutions for a more perfect spiritual life. [Editor]

into tears. Fortunately, the notebook had been found by Don Bosco himself. His companions, seeing the boy sobbing uncontrollably, kept asking him what was wrong, but they got no response. As a last resort, they led him to Don Bosco.

"What's wrong, Jimmy?" Don Bosco asked. "Don't you feel well? What happened? Has anyone hit you?" As he spoke, he patted the youngster's head in a fatherly way.

"I've lost my sins!" Jimmy blurted out, drying his tears. His companions burst out laughing, and Don Bosco, who immediately understood the boy's meaning, humorously remarked, "Lucky for you if you never find them again. Without sins you'll certainly go straight to heaven!"

But the boy, thinking that Don Bosco had not understood, explained, "I lost the notebook in which I had written them down."

Thereupon Don Bosco took it from his pocket. "Don't worry," he said; "your sins fell into the right hands. Here they are." The boy's face lit up. Laughing, he said, "If I had known you found them, I would have laughed, not cried. When making my confession to you this evening I would just say, 'Father, I accuse myself of all the sins you have in your pocket!'"

The practices of piety had been held in the apse, behind the main altar, since there were only thirteen boys making the retreat. Among them there were Felix Reviglio, Joseph Buzzetti, Charles Gastini, Hyacinth Arnaud, Sansoldo, Nicholas Galesio, John Costantino, James Cerruti, John Gravano, and Dominic Borgialli. Don Bosco supervised them and never missed a single sermon. The calm, serene atmosphere of the spiritual retreat was a striking contrast to the widespread agitation which prevailed in the city during that time. Canon Gliemone, the preacher of the meditations, writing [years later] to Father Bonetti about this retreat, told him that in going through town morning and evening on his way to and from the Oratory he had the impression that the world was coming to an end, so violent were the demonstrations.

There was a reason for all this excitement: a stinging defeat at the hands of Radetzky who had launched an offensive with more than sixty thousand men. On July 22, after a stubborn resistance, the Piedmontese troops were forced to evacuate Rivoli; on July 23, the Austrians attacked and occupied the heights at Sommacam-

pagna and Custoza, only to be driven out again on the following day by a heroic counterattack led by Charles Albert. It was in vain for on July 25, the king, outnumbered and outflanked by the loss of Volta which General Sonnaz had vainly tried to reconquer, lost all hope and was forced to retreat. On July 31 he again crossed the Adda.² His army was short of food, exhausted, despondent, undisciplined, and weakened by daily desertions.

On July 25, the government ordered the mobilization of all men fit for military service. A special appeal was made to the pastors asking them to persuade the people of the necessity and justice of the war. At stake were their national institutions, the monarchy, and the political independence of the Holy See, which a victorious Austria wanted to destroy by seizing the Legations.³ The government also appealed to the bishops, requesting public prayers for their country in its hour of danger. With due permission, several Capuchin fathers toured the towns and villages preaching a national crusade.

² A tributary of the Po River. [Editor]

³ Papal provinces governed by the pope's legate. [Editor]

CHAPTER 39

Frankness and Courtesy

DURING these tragic days Gioberti was on his way to Turin. On July 18, *L'Armonia* ran a short article which would now be judged rather odd, to say the least. It sheds further light on how difficult those times were, and what prudence was needed when one wrote of certain idols of the revolution. We quote:

Rumor has it that within a few days the great philosopher and eminent citizen, Vincenzo Gioberti, will be among us again.

May his arrival and eloquence curb the attacks of ill-advised people against the Church and her ministers.

Let them cease, once and for all, to justify their excesses and defend their false teachings by appealing to a name so loved by all. Let them hear from his own lips that he does not endorse their teachings, and that he has nothing in common with them, save the desire to see their happiness for having mended their ways.

Gioberti arrived in Turin on August 1. He was immediately asked to join the Fabrio-Casati Cabinet (which had been hastily formed on July 29) as a minister without portfolio. He chose John Baptist Gal, a lawyer, as his personal secretary. The latter, born at Torgnon in the valley of Aosta, had worked for several years in the Department of Foreign Affairs. He was a learned and devout Catholic and an intimate friend of Count Cesare Balbo, Count [Emiliano] Avogadro della Motta, Count Cesare Saluzzo, Marquis Gustavo Cavour, Silvio Pellico and Cesare Cantù. From the very start of his career he spent all his free time in the company of Father [Joseph] Cottolengo and Father [Joseph] Cafasso. In 1841 he frequently visited the Convitto Ecclesiastico and struck up a warm, lasting friendship with Don Bosco.

This very probably accounts for an audience Don Bosco had with Gioberti. Don Bosco was accompanied by Father Borel, Gioberti's boyhood friend and schoolmate. Very probably Don Bosco was acquainted with the secret machinations of this misguided priest against the Church, but he wanted to sound him deeply to ascertain to what extent Catholics should be wary of him or expect anything from him. In his writings, in fact, Gioberti had declared himself an enthusiastic admirer of the popes' achievements—an indication, perhaps, that he was not entirely lost to the Church. Besides, Gioberti already wielded enormous political influence, and it could be foreseen that the reins of government would soon pass into his hands. For these reasons Don Bosco thought it advisable to have Gioberti's goodwill and to forestall any unfavorable impression that Gioberti might form of him on the basis of malicious reports made by people hostile to his oratories.

Gioberti warmly welcomed his former schoolmate and Don Bosco. Soon the conversation switched to his recent journey to Rome, to Pius IX, and to the vital question of Italian independence. In this connection Gioberti made some rather uncomplimentary remarks about the pope and his love for Italy. He stated that, in his opinion, the pope's intentions were far from clear, and he lamented the fact that Pius IX's refusal to declare war on Austria had disheartened many Italians in their struggle for national independence.

These accusations were entirely unfounded, revealing the new minister's bad faith. The pope, as father of all peoples and nations, could not, unless forced by very grave reasons, go to war and make enemies of some in his flock. Besides, he had already given ample proof of his sincere, Christian love for his own country. He had proposed the setting up of a customs union for all the Italian states. This could have been the first step toward a political alliance for mutual assistance in putting down internal uprisings without foreign intervention. He had also proposed a defensive pact to Charles Albert, one approved also by the other states but rejected by Piedmont. Piedmont's goal was *unity*, not a *union* of states which, in the pope's plan, would be centered in Rome. Furthermore, when war had broken out, Pius IX had begged Emperor Ferdinand I to relinquish Lombardy and Veneto, and, at the pope's suggestion, Charles Albert had accepted Roman volunteers into the Piedmontese army,

lest the Austrians treat them as outlaws. Lastly, Pius IX had unhesitatingly rejected plans for a proposed Italian Republic with the pope at its head, since that would eliminate all Italian rulers, including Charles Albert.

Don Bosco, who knew of these and other generous acts of the pope, could not bear Gioberti posing as self-appointed teacher and censor of the pope. Whenever the honor and prerogatives of the pope were at stake, Don Bosco never kept his peace; he spoke frankly and fearlessly, scornful of consequences. So on this occasion he upheld the pope openly but with customary courtesy, not to offend his opponent.

After a lengthy talk they parted on good terms. Don Bosco, however, left with a heavy heart. At the Oratory several priests were anxiously waiting to hear about this meeting. Don Bosco obliged and after satisfying their curiosity concluded, "Gioberti will come to a sorry end because he has dared to censor the actions of the Holy See!" Felix Reviglio and the other boys boarding at the Oratory were present when Don Bosco made that remark. It is noteworthy that as a result of this audience the Oratory was not molested at all during 1848 and 1849, although anticlericals could have found plenty of pretexts for trouble in the political and military setbacks of those days.

Meanwhile, Charles Albert had withdrawn with his troops to Milan and again attempted to stem the Austrian advance. The city, however, was defenseless, wholly unprepared for a sudden attack, and so he surrendered on August 4 to General Radetzky to avoid useless bloodshed. This prudent and sound decision greatly displeased a turbulent political faction, which stirred up a segment of the Milanese population against him. Crowds gathered under the windows of the royal palace yelling, "Death to the traitor!"

Charles Albert bravely did not hesitate to face the mob and calm their anger; but, after being spared by enemy bullets, he nearly lost his life at the hands of his own people. The night of August 5 to 6 was a hellish one for Charles Albert. After miraculously escaping assassination, he fled incognito, on foot, to Vigevano to save himself from the insane mob. His army withdrew to Piedmont, the Austrians camped on the left bank of the Ticino, and an armistice was signed on August 9.

These grim events brought deep sorrow and consternation to Turin. At the Oratory, the boys did all they could; they prayed for the safety of their king, thus proving that they were both loyal citizens and devout Catholics.

Indeed there was plenty of need for prayer in Turin. The fever of revolution was mounting dangerously. An endless stream of volunteers and political exiles fleeing Lombardy and Veneto, poured into Turin to take advantage of the generous hospitality of the Piedmontese government. But instead of helping in the reconstruction they set about fomenting opposition to the Church, spreading lies, blaspheming, cursing, plotting, manipulating elections and taking part in the ugliest and most rabid demonstrations. Bishops became their prime targets. The archbishop of Vercelli had allowed the troops to occupy the seminary and fourteen churches; now, the city authorities demanded the use of four more churches and two monasteries, though the city theatre and other public buildings were untouched. On September 6, the archbishop appeared before the City Council and spoke with dignity of the rights of the Church, of the respect due to sacred buildings, and of the hardships limiting public worship. The public authorities took his word as an affront; a hired mob surrounded the episcopal palace, shouting insults and threats, and Minister Pinelli wrote him an insolent letter of reprimand.

Meanwhile, the boys who had deserted the Oratory gathered wherever their hotheaded leaders directed. On Sundays and holy days they attended Mass in some church or other and then went to Superga or elsewhere in the city outskirts, but they had no sermons or catechism lessons. Free refreshments, hikes and parades were the enticements that kept them away from Don Bosco. By these means and with fiery rhetoric their rebel leaders managed to keep a hold on the youngsters, thriving on entertainment and excitement. At the same time, the leaders did not hesitate to resort to lies and insults; their mildest criticism of Don Bosco was that he was a half-crazy reactionary. Such vengeful gossip made the rounds of the whole city. Almost daily, news vendors shouted abusive headlines against Don Bosco: *A Plot in Valdocco! The Priest of Valdocco and the Enemies of the Fatherland*, and so on. In such a charged atmosphere, these wild utterances could seriously

harm the Oratory and make it a target for the people's hatred. But Don Bosco remained calm. The dreams he had had at the Convitto ¹ and that of the pergola of roses ² had forecast precisely such events. "They all deserted me," Charles Gastini ³ heard him say, "but God has been and is with me. Whom should I fear? The work is His, not mine, and He will make it succeed." Subsequent events were to prove him right.

Nevertheless, he did not neglect all available human means dictated by prudence. Don Bosco had designated the feast of the Assumption as prize-day for the Oratory boys. He took this occasion to prepare a musico-literary entertainment that would evidence his patriotism. Many of the more active, intelligent boys who had already had practice in public speaking, had deserted him. God only knows what a hard time he had to prepare songs and music, prose and poetry selections, and to drill boys who were still clumsy and new to such things. Government officials, noblemen, and even some liberals, among whom to our knowledge was also Father Aporti, ⁴ attended the entertainment which turned out quite successfully. ⁵

A few weeks after the recital, Charles Albert gave a telling proof of his great love for the Church in a letter to Pius IX from Alessandria, dated September 10, 1848. ⁶ We shall give excerpts which fully disclose the inner feelings of the king, who was worthy of his ancestors.

[September 10, 1848]

Most Holy Father:

.....

We are passing through very evil times, O Holy Father. We have been sorely tried by God's wrath and punishments. Oh, how often have I wished to open my heart to Your Holiness and confide to you my afflictions and tribulations. But by so doing I would only increase your own sufferings. Now, however, the religious situation [of Piedmont] has be-

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 190f, 232ff, 267f. [Editor]

² See pp. 25ff. [Editor]

³ See pp. 243ff. [Editor]

⁴ See Vol. II, pp. 148f, 165ff, 171f, 311f. [Editor]

⁵ See Appendix 7. [Editor]

⁶ See *L'Aurora*, Rome, No. 229, October 7, 1880.

come so crucial that I can no longer avoid bringing it to the attention of Your Holiness.

Not even the misfortunes of war have been able to bring back some sound common sense. Your Holiness must have been informed of what has been done against the Church and against religious orders during my absence. My heart is sorely grieved! Holy Father, the evil is so great that human remedies are inadequate. We need special help from the Lord, for this evil is widespread, and, short of a miracle, the situation is utterly hopeless.

I am convinced I have done all in my power for the good of the Church and my subjects. However, now I no longer have the heart to continue as king. I only await the end of the war and the signing of a peace treaty to abdicate and retire to some distant country, there to end my days in obscurity and in exercises of piety.

I assure Your Holiness of my sincerest devotion and beg for Your holy blessing. With the most profound respect, I remain, O Most Holy Father,

Your humble and devoted servant and son,
Charles Albert.

A sovereign endowed with such religious sentiments and goodness of heart could not but be revered by his loyal subjects and by those who had experienced his generosity. Don Bosco's pupils were proud to be in that number.

On September 14, [1848] Charles Albert arrived in Turin from Alessandria at three-thirty in the morning. From Count Edward Mella we have come to know that at this time four Jesuit fathers were being sheltered in the house of a well-known engineer, who had formerly been their pupil. One evening a brigadier of the carabinieri, a Savoyard, knocked at his door.

"Are you so-and-so?" he asked.

"That's right."

"Can you prove your identity?"

"Come in and ask my family."

The brigadier then entered with his escort and, drawing out a purse, said to the engineer, "His Majesty thanks you for the hospitality you have extended to the Jesuit fathers and sends you these four thousand *lire* for their expenses."

CHAPTER 40

Young Helpers

FOR a time those priests who had caused Don Bosco so much sorrow and tribulation managed to keep the boys away from both oratories with various tricks. But the game was getting tiresome. One by one, almost all the boys returned, either because they missed Don Bosco or because, once the novelty and the excitement were gone, they realized that they were dealing with prattlers motivated by revenge instead of by any real and friendly interest in their welfare. Perhaps also their misguided mentors got tired of taking boys around and spending their own money for love of country. A score of boys continued to go along with them for a few more months, only to be abandoned in the end.

Although Don Bosco was pleased by the return of these prodigal sons, he made it clear that anyone desiring to be readmitted must first see him. It was a wise decision, and things turned out better than expected. The agitators dropped out of sight for some time, unity and concord reigned once more, and most of the misguided youths returned to both oratories begging forgiveness and promising obedience. Some of the older boys, however, did not return; unfortunately they all came to a bad end.

But why had those co-workers of Don Bosco incited the boys to revolt? Seemingly, their aim was to win over all or part of the boys of both oratories and eventually take over the management and run the oratories according to their own policies. We also have reason to believe that some wily demagogue had a hand in this wretched affair. Be that as it may, their action might have proved fatal to Don Bosco's work, since the ringleaders were influential and talented. If this did not eventually happen, we owe it to God and to

the Blessed Virgin; through Don Bosco, She protected and defended the oratories against the enemy's wiles.

Don Bosco harbored no ill feeling against these agitators. Some he never saw again, but those who returned to him received a warm, friendly welcome and were reinstated in their former posts at the St. Aloysius Oratory. Apart from their bizarre political views, which had sobered, they were priests of excellent and upright character.

God, who occasionally permits His servants to be humiliated, also exalts them in due time in order to embarrass their enemies. It so happened that the leading agitator, after having been forgiven, found himself forced to seek Don Bosco's help. He had moved temporarily to Vercelli, where the archbishop forbade him to celebrate Mass or preach unless he secured a certificate of good conduct signed by Don Bosco himself. The priest was extremely reluctant to appeal to the very man whom he had so much opposed and grieved. He tried to get around this, first by asking that the certificate of the Turin archdiocesan chancery be accepted in its stead; he did present it, but it was rejected. Then he inquired if he could ask Don Bosco by mail, but Archbishop Alexander d'Angennes ordered him to request the certificate personally from Don Bosco. Since the archbishop did not relent, the priest had to comply. Don Bosco received him very cordially and readily wrote out the required declaration, stating that the priest in question had worked zealously for the welfare of the Church and of souls.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco turned his efforts to remedying the grievous situation caused by the desertions. Of his better helpers who had remained loyal to him, he sent some to the St. Aloysius Oratory, which was more sorely in need, though, consequently, the staff at Valdocco now became inadequate. Don Bosco often told us:

Even before this time, especially in these trying circumstances, I had to find a way of getting myself helpers. I began by selecting some boys and posting one here, one there, among the other youngsters. We got along as best we could. As soon as I could obtain a seminarian, I gave him a position of responsibility and immediately entrusted many things to him. I recall that as soon as Ascanio Savio donned the cassock, I immediately put him in charge of the Vesper services, some supervision and catechism classes, and various other duties. Thus my load began to

lighten somewhat. Now, I could have a little time to prepare my sermons. Afterward, while someone led the boys in the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, I could vest for Benediction without worrying about their behavior. To be sure, even with this help I was dog-tired at the end of the day, but meanwhile, I would never have been able to carry on without these workers. I selected them with the greatest care, a few at a time, whenever I met any with the necessary qualifications. At the same time I never lost sight of another trait that I was looking for: a suitability or inclination to community life so that I might ask them to live with me at the Oratory. Of course, I never left these young co-workers to their own devices; I guided them, while at the same time I trustfully delegated as much authority as possible to them. I began to take some of them with me when I stayed with a friend of mine in the country, and took others to Castelnovo. Occasionally I would invite one of them to dinner, or have him come to my house in the evenings, to read, write, talk, or relax. I did all this to counteract the venomous opinions of the times, lest they listen to agitators as their predecessors had done. I must admit that at the start I had to work very hard to train them along my lines, but the best among them proved very valuable even at the most trying moments.

In the selection of his future helpers, Don Bosco, on the occasion of his yearly trips to Castelnovo, had called with success on some students who had been teaching catechism for several years and were then vacationing in their home towns; but now he needed someone to set a dynamic example for his new recruits. At the beginning of September, he was preaching at Corio and was a guest of the Cresto family, which had always helped him. Then he proceeded to Rocca di Corio, and invited Francis Picca,¹ a young student, to come to Turin with him. The young man accepted.

His best and most reliable assistant, however, was his first seminarian and fellow villager, Ascanio Savio, who was then seventeen years old. As a young boy, Savio had heard his pastor, Father Cinzano, speak of Don Bosco as a zealous, enterprising priest. Later, when Don Bosco was at the Rifugio, he was introduced to him by his father in order to be examined in Latin. From then on, Savio was strongly drawn to Don Bosco. After donning the cassock in the Cottolengo Institute, he was scheduled to enter the Chieri

¹ See p. 195. [Editor]

seminary, since the one in Turin had been shut down. However, he asked and obtained the chancery's permission to help Don Bosco at the Oratory. Thus he became Don Bosco's first seminarian. "From the moment I got there in 1848," he told us, "I became so attached to Don Bosco that I put all my trust in him and loved him as my own father. I stayed four years with him as a seminarian, and even after I left the Oratory I still felt powerfully drawn to him as to a magnet. I always remained quite close to him until his death. At his request I preached to sisters, heard boys' confessions, and taught moral theology to the Oratory priests and clerics." An expert in moral theology, thanks to his experience in the confessional, Father [Ascanio] Savio became successively director of the Rifugio, vice-rector of the Turin minor seminary, rector of the Regio Parco seminary also in Turin, and, for many years, professor of moral theology in the Convitto Ecclesiastico. This proves that the Oratory did not neglect sacred studies. Don Bosco knew how to stress their importance to these who lived under his roof.

The seminarian, Ascanio Savio, took a hand in whatever Don Bosco was doing to attract youngsters to the Oratory, and helped him in every possible way. Don Bosco often sent him out around the neighborhood to fetch those youngsters in whom he was so interested. He also sent him to teach catechism at the St. Aloysius Oratory and to keep an eye on its operation. This was no easy job for a young seminarian, but, lest difficulties overcome him, Don Bosco buoyed his spirits by repeating to him what he was wont to tell his co-workers in order to instill in them some of his own strength, "*Esto vir*. Let nothing dismay you!"

Don Bosco's burdens were further lightened when Joseph Brosio ² later joined [Ascanio] at the Oratory. After an honorable discharge from the Bersaglieri Corps, Brosio continued to attend the Oratory faithfully. Since he always showed up in his military uniform, he was promptly nicknamed the bersagliere, and, naturally, the boys asked him to teach them drills and other military maneuvers. With Don Bosco's permission he obliged, and soon he had quite a smart platoon among the brighter boys.

The government donated about two hundred rifles without barrels; practice sword sticks were also provided. The bersagliere

² See pp. 76f. [Editor]

brought his bugle, and soon the Oratory had its own well-trained "militia" almost as good as the National Guard. The boys were simply wild about the unit and either tried to join or enjoyed watching its maneuvers, drills, and skirmishes. On all solemn feast days, the Oratory's "militia" was on duty to keep order and, occasionally, paraded and gave highly applauded displays of gymnastics. These military drills and calisthenics, conducted army-style, soon brought back many of those boys who had left the Oratory to find novelty. At the same time it helped to keep others who, anxious for games and pastimes suitable to the times, might have left the Oratory. A few times, the Oratory "militia" made the news in *L'Armonia*.

One day the tiny army involuntarily caused grief to Mamma Margaret who, after Don Bosco, was the one dearest to all. A peerless housekeeper, she had laid out a small vegetable garden at the end of the playground. She carefully tended it and grew her own lettuce, garlic, onions, peas, beans, carrots, turnips, and all kinds of herbs, including mint and sage. She even had a small plot of grass for rabbits. On one important feast day the bersagliere assembled his brigade with a blast from his bugle and divided his men into two platoons to stage a mock battle for the amusement of the audience. He gave orders as to what platoon had to simulate defeat; then, to make sure that no damage would be done to Mamma Margaret's precious garden, he gave strict orders to the pursuers not to step beyond the hedge. He then sounded the foray. Loudly shouting, "Charge!" the two platoons opened the skirmish, each advancing from its own side of the courtyard, aiming wooden rifles at each other. It was a realistic battle scene, what with the deafening shouts, the well simulated loading and firing of the rifles, the slow, cautious advances and retreats, the right and left flanking movements designed to take the enemy by surprise. All that was lacking was the roar of cannons, the whine of bullets, and the thud of the dead and wounded hitting the ground. The boys enjoyed the spectacle immensely and wildly cheered the combatants. This further enkindled the fighting spirit, so much so indeed, that the pursuers forgot all about their orders and, trampling over the hedge, chased the defeated troops across Mamma Margaret's vegetable garden. Boys fell to the ground and struggled to their feet again, and in few minutes the little garden was a scene of utter devastation. The

bersagliere yelled and sounded retreat, but the laughter and wild applause drowned him out. When the two platoons reassembled there was hardly a trace left of the vegetable garden. Mamma Margaret, thinking that its devastation had been planned to enhance the reality of the play, turned to her son, and, justly resentful, exclaimed, "Look, look, John! See what the bersagliere has done! He's ruined my whole garden!" Smiling sympathetically, Don Bosco replied, "Mother, what can you do? They're young!" Then he also consoled the bersagliere, who was embarrassed and grieved to have unwittingly distressed Mamma Margaret. Taking a bag of candy from his pocket, Don Bosco asked him to give them to both victors and losers.

The vegetable garden was eventually restored, but, not much later, it disappeared altogether to make room for a larger play area. Joseph Brosio, the bersagliere, continued to be the life of the Oratory until some time after 1860. His bugle was entered as a prize in the lottery held for the benefit of the St. Aloysius and St. Francis de Sales oratories in 1856. The list had this entry: *A bugle donated by a bersagliere.*

In addition to these attractions, Don Bosco also introduced the custom of giving a free meal to a certain number of non-boarders. At the proper time, they joined the boarders at dinner as guests of Don Bosco, who was glad to have found another way of helping them and keeping them on the straight path. To make sure that all the Oratory boys, without exception, could in turn benefit by this custom, he arranged for a new group to be invited each Sunday until everybody had a chance. To be sure, this entailed considerable extra expense for Don Bosco and extra work for Mamma Margaret for almost a year, that is, throughout the period of political unrest. By these and other means Don Bosco won his boys back, and the restlessness which had led many of them to desert the Oratory and its religious practices for several months definitely abated.

About this time a remarkable event took place which strengthened the resolve of the boys to remain loyal to the Oratory. It was a solemn feast day, most likely the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin. About six hundred boys had gone to confession and wanted to receive Holy Communion. Don Bosco started the Mass, convinced

that the ciborium inside the tabernacle was full of consecrated Hosts. Actually, however, it was almost empty. Joseph Buzzetti, [the sacristan] had forgotten to put a full ciborium on the altar before the Consecration. He realized his oversight only after the Elevation. As Don Bosco began giving Holy Communion, he was distressed by the small number of Hosts for such a large crowd. Saddened at the thought that so many boys would be unable to receive Our Lord into their hearts, he raised his eyes to heaven and then went on distributing Holy Communion. Poor Buzzetti meanwhile, kneeling nearby, deeply regretted the mistake that caused such displeasure to Don Bosco. Imagine Don Bosco's wonder, and Buzzetti's as well, when the Hosts did not diminish in number. Without breaking them, Don Bosco was able to give Communion to all the boys. The few Hosts with which he had started, even if broken repeatedly, would have sufficed for only a small number of boys. After Mass, Buzzetti, who had not gotten over his surprise, told his companions what had happened and proved it by showing them the ciborium he had forgotten in the sacristy. Some of the boys, too, declared that they had noticed what happened. Buzzetti often spoke of this happening to his friends, among whom we ourselves were present, stating that he was ready to swear to its truth.

Indeed, Don Bosco himself confirmed this fact on October 18, 1863. As he was talking with a few of his clerics, he was asked about Buzzetti's story, whereupon a grave expression came over his face. After a long pause, he answered, "Yes, there were very few Hosts in the ciborium. Yet I was able to give Communion to all who came, and they were by no means few. By this miracle Our Lord wished to show us how pleased He is with frequent and devout Communions."

Upon being asked how he felt as this happened, he said, "I was deeply moved, but undisturbed. I was thinking to myself that the miracle of Consecration is even greater than that of multiplication. May the Lord be praised for everything." Thereupon he changed the subject.

CHAPTER 41

A Chapel at Becchi

AN event occurred during this tumultuous year which, though hardly important in itself, is fondly remembered by our Congregation for its spiritual fruits. Whenever Don Bosco spent a few days at Becchi,¹ in order to say Mass he had to walk nearly two miles to Capriglio or to Morialdo on roads that in bad weather became almost impassable. He therefore decided on a plan very close to his heart, namely, to turn a room on the main floor of his father's house into a chapel and cut a door onto the courtyard fronting it. While his brother Joseph hastened to do the work, Don Bosco sent the following petition to the chancery in Turin.

[No date]

Your Excellency:

Reverend John Bosco of Castelnuovo d'Asti spends part of the year at Morialdo in the township of Castelnuovo. The parish church is about two miles away and the roads are poor. Therefore, considering that a chapel would be of great spiritual advantage to the local people, he petitions Your Excellency to authorize the reverend pastor of Castelnuovo, or the petitioner himself, to bless a chapel erected here for the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice. It is hoped that this favor will be granted.

Rev. John Bosco, *Petitioner*.

Meanwhile, perhaps with the assistance of Father Cinzano [pastor of Castelnuovo]² and Father Cafasso, the small chapel was readied

¹ Don Bosco's birthplace was part of the hamlet of Morialdo, one of five within the township of Castelnuovo d'Asti. See Vol. I, p. 20. [Editor]

² See Vol. II, pp. 86, 114ff, 396, 402. [Editor]

and properly furnished according to liturgical requirements. On September 27, 1848, the vicar general, Canon Philip Ravina, acting in the absence of the archbishop, appointed Father Anthony Cinzano, pastor and vicar forane, to bless the chapel after ascertaining that all canonical prescriptions had been observed and without prejudice to any and all archiepiscopal and parochial rights; furthermore the pastor had the perpetual right to conduct church services in this chapel.

In early October, Don Bosco set out for Becchi with about sixteen Oratory boys, boarders and non-boarders, among them [Stephen] Castagno³ who was still living in 1902. On October 8, [1848] Father Cinzano blessed the chapel, which was dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary.

This was the first permanent sacred edifice which Don Bosco erected to Our Lord and the Blessed Virgin in thanksgiving for the favors they had generously bestowed on him there. On its front door, Jacob's words quite appropriately could have been engraved as an epitome of Don Bosco's childhood years. "Truly the Lord is in this place and I did not know it." [Gen. 28, 16] The first feast of Our Lady of the Rosary to be celebrated there was marked by very great solemnity and an unusually large attendance. The Oratory boys stayed for the whole novena and feast day, delighting the good villagers with their sacred hymns. From then on, Don Bosco went there every year on the same occasion, always bringing with him those choirboys whose conduct had been outstanding. He preached every evening of the novena and every morning heard confessions and gave Communion to the people living in the hamlet. All were extremely pleased, and the custom was continued even after Don Bosco's death. During Don Bosco's stay, many people received the sacraments; many boys came from Chieri, Buttigliera, Castelnuovo, adjoining villages, and even more distant communities to confide the secrets of their conscience to him.

On the day of the feast, a vat was usually turned upside down to do double duty: first, as a table to hold the boys' food, and later, covered with a drape, as a pulpit for Don Bosco or some other priest. It was upon this makeshift pulpit that, on a similar occasion, Father [John] Cagliero, while preaching to a large, attentive au-

³ See Vol. II, pp. 271, 410. [Editor]

dience, suddenly disappeared from view when the bottom of the tub gave way amid the laughter of the congregation. Since the chapel could hold only a few people, the musicians and choir stood outside with the congregation. At times the celebration would close with fireworks or a stage play.

Whenever Don Bosco paid a visit to the parish church of Castelnovo crowds approached him for advice or counsel, and all, holding him in great esteem, eagerly attended his Mass and sermons. Father Cinzano attested to this hundreds of times.

Among the many courtesies Father Cinzano extended to Don Bosco and his boys, we must recall his dinner invitations during the Holy Rosary novena to all the boys, even when they were more than a hundred. They used to go to his rectory with their band instruments, theatrical props, firecrackers and balloons. There, while the band played, the boys encircled an enormous *polenta* which they ate heartily in joyful spirits. Needless to say, there was plenty of food and drink to satisfy all. The good pastor was happy and grateful for a visit so dear to him and kept this custom up every year till his death in 1870.

A few days after the feast of the Holy Rosary, Don Bosco hastened back to Turin. To please his mother and his brother Joseph, he took along his eight-year-old nephew Francis to give him schooling suited to his social condition. Joseph made up in great part for the expenses with his many services to the Oratory, but nevertheless Don Bosco wanted his nephew to be treated just like any other boarder. He disliked having favorites because of the jealousy it might cause. But he had to give up this idea so as not to hurt the feelings of his mother, who warmly wanted her grandson to sit at his uncle's table. Father Giacomelli declared that on several occasions he noticed that Don Bosco was not at all happy over this favoritism. Although he had a deep affection for his relatives, he wanted all his actions to be inspired by a supernatural motive, not by natural impulse.

Meanwhile a new education law was promulgated on October 4, abrogating the previous law of 1822. Although certain religious practices, Sunday Mass, and a triduum of sermons preparatory to Easter were still in force in schools, ecclesiastical authorities were gradually being stripped of their right to appoint chaplains and to

supervise religious instruction in the universities and in the public and private schools. Education became in great measure secularized. Although seminaries remained entirely under episcopal jurisdiction, their courses were not recognized for the purpose of examinations and credits in public schools unless they were in keeping with the new directives.

Don Bosco immediately saw the need for building Catholic private schools regardless of cost. How else could bishops rely in good conscience on the orthodoxy of the religious instruction given by teachers not subject to their jurisdiction? For a long time he had been nourishing ambitious projects for the Christian education of youth, and his foresight had led him to offer his services as a religion teacher in various city schools. Now his fears were justified.

From time to time he managed to attend lectures on literature by the renowned Pier Alessandro Paravia at the University of Turin. While they helped him perfect his writing and improve his natural talent for conceiving and expressing ideas in a simple style, he studied the spirit prevailing at the University. He became sadly aware of the increasing bitterness of many students and professors toward the Church. One day he heard the professor of pedagogy and philosophy, Dominic Berti, say to his class, "Once, all education was in the hands of priests; it is now time for the laity to take over. The day is not far off when priests will have to come to us if they want to learn." This was really the ultimate goal of the revolutionaries, who were meanwhile hastening to shake off all ecclesiastical control. In fact, Christopher Neri, president of the university council, in a letter dated December 8, declared that the archbishop no longer had any right to interfere with university affairs, that no one representing the acting chancellor would be allowed to sit in on examinations, and that, furthermore, students were forbidden to have the bishop's approval of the theses they intended to present at their examinations. The university had also a faculty of theology. The door was therefore now open to the teaching of unbelief and heresy, and there was no oddity or error which was not expounded and defended, especially in what concerned papal authority and the rights of the pope and of the Church. The bishops protested in vain, with the result that several forbade their seminarians to take courses

at the university or matriculate, while others dissembled and allowed their students to continue their theological studies and to take their degrees.

Don Bosco shared the viewpoint of the latter and made this known to the bishop of Ivrea. Convinced that this law would remain in force for many years, he was of the opinion that talented and solidly virtuous seminarians and priests should be sent for degrees, especially if these were required to teach in elementary and secondary schools, colleges and universities. Don Bosco contended that this was the only way the Church would still be able to influence public education, at least indirectly, since many of the present excellent teachers would eventually be replaced by others imbued with false principles. To disregard this course of action, therefore, was tantamount to a gradual handing over of youth to the enemies of the Church.

With such wise foresight, Don Bosco kept increasing his efforts on behalf of the Oratory. He reasoned that the best way to attract boys to the Oratory also during the week—those especially who came irregularly and were less docile—was to give them more assistance with their education. Hence he expanded the evening classes until the boys numbered over three hundred. With doubled effort and a matchless spirit of abnegation, he would go from one class to another encouraging all to work harder. At the same time he sought and trained new young teachers. The recent disorders were now a thing of the past.

Those attending the evening classes were not all young boys. Nearly a hundred were illiterate adults, most of them sprouting beards and moustaches. They came to school at Don Bosco's special invitation. He taught them himself in a separate room, and they were as docile as babes. He had his own special method for teaching the alphabet. His witty remarks and interesting similes delighted the pupils and strongly impressed on their minds the letters that he wrote on the blackboard for them. He would draw, for example, *O*, then cut it in half vertically; the left half became a *C*, the right one a *D*. Thus, by drawing straight and curved lines, erasing and re-writing, but always following a logical presentation to avoid confusion, he taught the entire alphabet. He then went on to form syllables and words. Sometimes his young teachers, among them

James Bellia, would leave their own classes for a few moments to watch him at work and enjoy his pedagogical props.

Although his pupils were mentally sluggish, they learned amazingly fast and soon were able to read and write. Don Bosco's lessons always included some catechism. Now and then, during the lesson or at its close, he would tell an edifying story that would instill piety or love of virtue in the hearts of his listeners; classes always ended with the singing of a sacred hymn.

Once he had broken in his class, Don Bosco handed it over to James Bellia, who kept their full attention, even though he was only sixteen at the time. But Don Bosco visited the class from time to time and occasionally taught penmanship and arithmetic, the latter especially after the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce, on December 15, [1848] asked the bishops' cooperation in popularizing the metric system and teaching it in the seminaries. This class held an important place in Don Bosco's plan of prudent foresight.

Don Bosco's adult pupils, whose number kept increasing in the following years, gave him particular satisfaction since they fully cooperated with what was closest to his heart, the salvation of their souls. Attracted by church services, they soon joined the Oratory boarders in singing Vespers, taking their place in the choir or in the sanctuary. On his part, Don Bosco found jobs for those unemployed and also gave financial aid to those in need.

Perfect harmony now reigned at the Oratory, but toward the end of that year, some priests and laymen who had been among Don Bosco's first helpers began to fear that a repetition of the previous troubles might completely wreck the work of the festive oratories. Therefore, they drew up a plan for a federation of the oratories already in existence and of future ones. They were to be under the jurisdiction of an administrative board which would look after their material and spiritual needs and mediate any dispute that might arise. At this time there were three oratories in Turin for poor children, including the first at Valdocco. Although the St. Aloysius Oratory at Porta Nuova had been founded by Don Bosco, several priests helping there had expressed some fanciful notion for independence, and their plans called for making that oratory autonomous. There was a third oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, near the

Po, whose inhabitants were poor and belonged to the parish of the Annunciation. It was separated from the rest of the town by Viale San Maurizio; now renamed Corso Regina Margherita and lined with neat apartment buildings, it cuts right through the area. In those days clusters of houses known as *Il Moschino* kept the police busy day and night. It was here that, in 1840, Father John Cocchis, an assistant pastor with aims similar to Don Bosco's began to gather a certain number of boys. Years later, on February 23, 1847, he rented a courtyard and two sheds overlooking Via San Luca for eight hundred *lire* from Ludovico Daziani, a lawyer, governor of Sassari, deputy, and later senator, and from Alessandro Bronzini Zapelloni, a lawyer. Crowds of boys, mostly young adults, used to assemble here for gymnastics, military drills, and jumping. Calisthenics was such an outstanding feature of this oratory that it became a byword for the boys going there. They used to say, "Let's go to Father Cocchis' gymnastics." By such means this zealous priest kept them away from morally dangerous pastimes for their own good. This undertaking won him the sympathy of Marchioness Barolo, Marquis Roberto d'Azeglio, and Gabriele Cappello, nicknamed Moncalvo.

The priests and laymen mentioned above demanded that, regardless of cost, Don Bosco enter into partnership with Father Cocchis who, though irreproachable in conduct, entertained fiery political opinions like so many other good priests in those days. This was something Don Bosco never had or would have any use for. Yet, every day fresh fuel was added, to inflame these passions which had been made all the more explosive by Charles Albert's defeat and the restlessness of an expected comeback. The Sicilians had driven the Neapolitan troops from their island, with the exception of Messina. In Rome, demands were made on the pope to declare war on Austria, and in Bologna, when the Austrians attempted to occupy it, the citizens rallied together and forced them to retreat. In Tuscany the Grand Duke lost all power, and bloody riots were provoked by Gavazzi's inflammatory speeches against the clergy and the army. Venice was still free but besieged by her enemies firmly entrenched on the mainland. All Italy rang with incessant shouts of "foreigners go home! long live Pius IX!" while the ruling political parties kept working tirelessly for an Italian Republic. Austria,

a land of ruins and dead soldiers, seemed doomed to helpless impotence. Hungary had waged a ferocious war against Croatia in an attempt to subdue it. Vienna had risen in revolt but, notwithstanding the support of Hungarian troops, bloody battles and bombardments lasting from October 6 to October 31 forced it to surrender. Emperor Ferdinand abdicated on December 2, and was succeeded by his nephew, Franz Josef. Thereupon Hungary proclaimed itself a republic and entered into a savage struggle with Austrian troops, which was to last until the following September.

Under these circumstances, how could the hotheads in Turin change their opinions or cool down, when newspapers ceaselessly fed them fuel for aspirations they considered legitimate and even holy? Don Bosco did not favor excitement that distracted one from a truly apostolic mission, and he was loath to repeat an experiment which had already had bitter consequences for him.

Meanwhile a committee had been formed. Among its members were Father [Maria Antonio] Durando, a Vincentian,⁴ Father [Joseph] Ortalda, and Father [Amadeus] Peyron; another outstanding committee member was Canon Lawrence Gastaldi.⁵ The canon did all he could to persuade Don Bosco to accept the plan, submit to the committee and accept those rules or statutes which would be proposed to him. At the same time he assured Don Bosco that the committee would assist him, financially and otherwise, for the good of his undertaking. Briefly, the idea was to reduce Don Bosco to the office of mere director at Valdocco.

At a full preliminary meeting of the committee (its first and last), Don Bosco, after listening to Canon Gastaldi's arguments, made it immediately clear he was not in favor of such a plan. He added, "Let's discuss first the Vanchiglia Oratory. Father Cocchis is all for gymnastics and, to attract boys, drills them with sticks and rifles; he, however, has little use for church services. The sticks and rifles I intend to use are rather the word of God, confession, and frequent Communion; everything else I consider solely a means to draw boys to catechism class. All the other priests engaged in oratory work are in varying degrees enmeshed in politics, and often

⁴ See Vol. II, pp. 170, 361. [Editor]

⁵ In 1867 he became bishop of Saluzzo and in 1871 archbishop of Turin. [Editor]

their sermons are patriotic exhortations rather than religious instructions. Instead, I intend to steer absolutely clear of politics. Things being so, how can unity be achieved among men with opposite points of view and methods? I am not blaming anybody, but I do not want to be blamed either. Let us abide by the Scriptures, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!" [Ps. 150, 6] You have your plan, Canon. Carry it out. I wish you success. You will have many opportunities to open other oratories. I too have my plan. I think it is a good one; I know what means to use and I will get along with it. Let each go his way in freedom. The only thing that matters is to do good. Besides, I must be independent. To care for many boys I shall need priests and clerics, men who will depend entirely on me and not on others."

"Does that mean you intend to found a congregation?" Father Durando asked.

"Call it what you want. I must open oratories, build chapels and churches, conduct catechism classes and schools; and unless I have a loyal staff I cannot do anything."

"But how will you be able to do all that? You would need buildings and heaps of money!"

"*Would* need them? I already *do* need them, and what's more I'm going to have them."

Thereupon Father Durando stood up and said, "There's no point continuing the discussion further."

Thus ended a plan which, though well intentioned, was unsound. Don Bosco's constancy was termed stubbornness, and although even his most intimate friends ridiculed him, he remained steadfast in his project. Not many years later, while recounting this episode to some of his first clerics, he repeated what he had often said previously. His words were recorded and passed down to us. "I was never dismayed by anything because I knew, (and this it is that gave me strength), that the Lord was going to bring to completion His work by means of the very same boys attending the Oratory. What's more, even before it existed, I saw written in large letters on the façade of the building that was to rise on the site of the Pinardi house, exactly as you see it now, the words, *Hic nomen meum, Hinc inde exhibit gloria mea* [Here you will see my name; hence my glory will come forth].

"I always kept going, convinced that I would soon have help."

"And whose words were those?" asked his clerics.

"The Lord's," he answered. "I would have engraved them on this house but for the fact that I did not want to give anybody pretext for accusing us of pride."

CHAPTER 42

Tragic Events in Rome

THE inscription *HINC INDE* which Don Bosco had seen in his dreams¹ clearly referred to both sides of Via della Giardiniera. On the further side was located the field where the church of Mary Help of Christians was later built and where the Moretta house stood. Besides a stable and a cellar, this building had nine rooms on the first floor and nine more on the second; access was through two stairways and a long balcony. The house, which had its own well closeby, had a meadow both in front and in the back. All in all, the whole estate was slightly over half an acre. On the east, where the main entrance was located, it adjoined our well-known Filippi brothers meadow;² on the south it bordered on a Mr. Rocci's farm; on the west the Valdocco road; and on the north a meadow belonging jointly to the Turin seminary and Mr. Rocci. This was the meadow of Don Bosco's dreams. Father John Anthony Moretta, who had owned the building, had died in 1847, and the entire property had been put up for auction. As we have already said, Don Bosco, Father Borel and their assistants had intensified their efforts to shield the boys from the ever increasing moral dangers. More than ever, Don Bosco realized the necessity for sheltering a larger number of boys and for further consolidating the festive oratories. He was also anxious to expand the evening schools, especially for young men, and as we know he succeeded in that too. In view of all this he had tried, to no avail, to buy the whole Pinardi house. Mr. Pinardi had lowered his price, but it still stood at sixty thousand *lire*, a truly exorbitant figure.

Fortunately Father Moretta's property was now up for auction

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 190f, 268, 318. [Editor]

² See Vol. II, pp. 294ff, 327ff. [Editor]

and Don Bosco was determined to buy it at any price. At the auction, held on March 9, 1848, he made an initial bid of ten thousand *lire* and raised it by a hundred *lire* at a time, until at 11,800 *lire* he topped all other bids and the whole property became his. He took possession of it on April 1. He now planned to move the whole Oratory there and enlarge the boarders' and guests' quarters. As regards visitors, Don Bosco was always generous with his hospitality, selflessly welcoming strangers and hoping that they would find their stay both enjoyable and spiritually uplifting.

The deed of transfer, signed on March 9, was made public by the notary Galeazzi on December 4. Don Bosco paid a deposit of only 601 *lire* and 75 *centesimi* plus 396 *lire* and 25 *centesimi* toward the interest, a clear sign that he was short of money. Nevertheless, he increased the number of boys living in the house to thirty, choosing them from the most needy, physically and morally.

While Don Bosco was busy with his undertakings, tragic events were unfolding in papal Rome. On November 15, [1848] the revolutionaries, whose plans called for first getting rid of the pope and then destroying his authority and the Church, murdered his prime minister, Pellegrino Rossi, in broad daylight; then they incited the populace to make iniquitous demands and to rise in revolt. A mob of revolutionaries and their followers surrounded the Quirinal Palace, the papal residence, disarmed the guards, aimed cannons at the building, and threatened to demolish it. The rebels riddled the palace with rifle fire. Msgr. Palma, Pius IX's secretary, was struck on the forehead and fell dead at the pope's side. There was excited speculation over what the pope would do in this extreme situation. Would he take flight or would he give himself over as a prisoner and victim to the rebels?

Pius IX was still undecided over the course he should take, when a precious gift accompanied by a truly providential letter came to him from France. The gift was the small pyx inside which Pius VI had carried the Blessed Sacrament as his companion and comfort when the French had forcibly removed him from Rome in 1799 and taken him across the Alps to die in prison at Valence. Both the letter and the gift came from Bishop Pierre Chatrousse of that city. Among other things, the letter said: "Holy Father, heir to the name, the see, the virtue, the courage, and the tribulations of the

great Pius VI, perhaps you will cherish this small but important relic, which I hope will no longer serve the same purpose. But who can fathom the hidden designs of God in the trials that, in His Providence, He is preparing for Your Holiness?"³ The pope took both the letter and the gift as a heavenly warning. Banishing all doubt from his mind, he decided to save himself and the dignity of the Holy See by fleeing and putting into practice the admonition Our Lord left us in the Gospel, "When they persecute you in one town, flee to another." (Matt. 10, 23)

On the night of November 23, as darkened skies seemed to make an escape all the harder, Pius IX entered his private chapel and prayed fervently to Jesus Crucified to save His vicar. Then he rose, changed into a disguise, and, accompanied by a single servant holding a lantern, stole through a secret door and down long corridors. With God's help he succeeded in dodging the sharp watch of his enemies' hired ruffians. At a prearranged spot, he met Count Spaur, ambassador of the king of Bavaria, who drove the pope in his own carriage into the kingdom of Naples. Pius IX safely reached Gaeta on the evening of November 25.

Thus the two sovereigns who had ushered in the reign of freedom, as even their enemies acknowledged, were the first to suffer its bitter consequences.

If the misfortunes of their beloved pope deeply grieved the Oratory boys, they were even more sorely distressed on hearing of the heinous crimes committed against him. Later we shall relate how they gave him proof of their filial affection during his exile and how he rewarded them. The bishops of Piedmont ordered public supplication, and in a moving public statement defended the pope's authority, decrying the harm which Italy would suffer for having stripped the pope of his temporal kingdom. They also wrote to the pope and expressed their grief at his exile in words of admiration and comfort, assuring him that both clergy and people were with him, promising prayers and requesting his benediction, counsel and comfort in the long, enduring struggle.

The liberal and revolutionary parties had tried to stifle the bishops. *L'Opinione* issued the following threat. "Now at last the government will pass into the hands of those who are determined to

³ Spaur, *Account of Pius IX's Journey to Gaeta*.

destroy the evil at its root, to punish those shepherds who . . . rather than look after their fold have chosen to help an anti-national party with intrigues, briberies, and deceptions." Only an impudent revolutionary could have written such slanderous lines hinting at an imminent persecution.

Another sorrowful event increased Don Bosco's grief. On December 6, [1848] Father [Louis] Guala passed away at the age of 73. Resigned to God's will, he was happy that his Convitto Ecclesiastico was safely in the hands of Father Cafasso, who had recently been appointed rector of the adjacent St. Francis of Assisi Church. He was given a magnificent funeral, attended by more than four hundred priests in choir garb, Don Bosco among them. They all escorted his body to the cemetery for burial in a lot which he himself had purchased. He had willed his entire private fortune, amounting to several hundred thousand *lire*, to Father Cafasso. This legacy, together with other large sums of money from charitable and wealthy people, enabled Father Cafasso generously to assist the poor and to carry out works of charity and piety.

On December 16, 1848, Vincenzo Gioberti was appointed president of the cabinet and foreign minister. In a desperate attempt to find support for the new war which was being planned against Austria, Gioberti went to Paris to seek help from the French Republic. His mission was a failure. France's rejection of Gioberti's request was one reason which induced the Piedmontese Government to seek reconciliation with the pope. Its aim was to try to forestall Pius IX's expected appeal to foreign governments and prevent the republican forces from overthrowing the monarchy. Gioberti, therefore, sent envoys to Gaeta to invite the pope back to Rome under the protection of the Piedmontese troops, and to request that he retain the democratic cabinet which had been formed. If this were not possible, the pope was offered residence in any city of his choice in the Sardinian States. Upon the pope's refusal, Gioberti decided to occupy Ancona, but Charles Albert opposed such action. Thereupon Gioberti decided to send Piedmontese troops into Tuscany, the scene of republican agitation, to restore that region to the Grand Duke, but the other ministers opposed the plan. As a result, Gioberti permanently lost his ministerial post on February 22, 1849.

Possibly he did not wish to acquiesce completely to the orders of the revolutionaries.

Gioberti favored order and moderation, but his colleagues had other ideas. Indeed, during the Christmas festivities, which the Oratory boys celebrated with their usual devotion and solemnity, the government gave an unpleasant surprise "gift" to the clergy.

In a circular dated December 25, 1848, Minister Urbano Rattazzi pompously dared to rebuke the bishops of the realm, warning them that in their writings, circulars and pastorals they were not to use any expressions that could be interpreted as hostile to political personalities, and that if they wished to discuss political events they had to conform to the viewpoint, aims, intentions, and deliberation of the government.

On the same day, the Secretary of the Treasury, Vincenzo Ricci, sent a confidential letter to the district directors of state properties to tell them that the government badly needed accurate information on properties owned by religious corporations, the *Economato Generale*, bishops, chapters, and similar moral bodies. He also told them to get information on the number and size of church bells and the number and quality of sacred vessels made of precious metals, but to proceed discretely and cautiously. For the moment, however, the government did not push the issue any further, but it did not stop confiscating more church property and imposing other burdens on the clergy. With a semblance of respect for ecclesiastical immunity, it asked the apostolic nuncio's permission to make the clergy join in a loan which had been floated to help pay war damages amounting to 72,193,000 *lire*.

Thus ended the year 1848. The new year promised nothing better, yet Don Bosco found great comfort in seeing his work expand through the purchase of Father Moretta's house. Divine Providence, however, let him use it for just a little more than a year, since the Pinardi house, and no other, had been destined to be the cradle of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. Don Bosco had barely started repairs on the Moretta house when it was found that the walls were about to collapse because of poor material and shabby workmanship. There was nothing to do but suspend operations. Besides, repairs would require substantial sums, and Don Bosco still had

to pay the greater part of the purchase price, over eleven thousand *lire* plus interest. At the same time he had to provide for his boys' upkeep. Heavier taxes, a business recession, the urgent needs of bereaved families, and the widespread hard times had greatly diminished the alms which he usually received. Realizing that he just could not yet have adequate facilities for his many undertakings, he resigned himself to wait for a more opportune time. He therefore decided to resell the Moretta property in two separate sales. These deals went through at a considerable profit to Don Bosco in 1849, on March 8 and April 10 respectively. Thus he freed himself from a debt, and had a surplus that enabled him to carry on with his work for some time.

CHAPTER 43

Side Activity

ONE day in 1876 Don Bosco told Father Michael Rua, Father Celestine Durando and Father Julius Barberis,¹ "When I took up residence in Valdocco, I was concerned with only three things: boys and whatever concerned their spiritual and material welfare, the exercise of the sacred ministry, and the study of moral theology." His persevering study of moral theology was truly remarkable and should be an inspiration to his priests who wish to be thoroughly faithful to their vocation of saving souls, including their own. Let us not deceive ourselves. Holy Scripture says, "When there is no knowledge of the soul, there is no good: and he that is hasty with his feet shall stumble." (Prov. 19, 2—Douay Version)

Don Bosco had really mastered moral theology. Father Cafasso testified to this on various occasions. As a result, some priests who had attended the Convitto with Don Bosco and some who had been his fellow seminarians at the time of his ordination began to go to him for help. After attending lectures at the Convitto as day students, they would go to him for tutoring first at the Rifugio and later in Valdocco at the Pinardi house. What drew them was his singular ability to pinpoint the essentials of each treatise and apply them to practical cases. Most of these priests were looking for a cram course to prepare for examinations for diocesan faculties and to become chaplains, teachers, or curates in some village or other. Archbishop Fransoni had warmly encouraged Don Bosco to give these refresher courses. He did not only teach; he instilled into his listeners his own ardent love for the sacrament of Penance. He urged them to be ever eager to save souls, ever willing to hear confessions at all times.

¹ A pupil at the Oratory in 1863, he became a Salesian and filled important positions in the Salesian Society. He died in 1927. [Editor]

Occasionally we heard him say, "It would be desirable for a priest to eat so frugally as to be able to resume hearing confessions without inconvenience a half hour after his dinner." He practiced what he preached. He carried out Father Cafasso's sound advice to priests: "If you want people to go to confession, first, speak frequently about confession; secondly, make it easy for them to go to confession. You will be surprised at the results."

Among those who attended Don Bosco's lessons were Father [Louis] Nasi, Father [Joseph] Trivero, Father [John Baptist] Giordano, the brothers, Fathers [John and Joseph] Vola, Father [Daniel] Rademaker, Father De Amicis, Father [Charles] Palazzolo, Father [John] Giacomelli, and many others; occasionally Canon Eugene Galletti, later bishop of Alba, also attended. Msgr. Solari who studied moral theology under Don Bosco assured us that he had learned a great deal under his guidance. He added that many of the above mentioned priests, learned theologians themselves, flocked to Don Bosco's classes because he especially treated of matters concerning young people and of methods of hearing their confessions quickly and fruitfully. He presented many cases of conscience and taught them how to ask questions, establish the degree of culpability, suggest to the penitent ways of avoiding occasions of sin, ascertain the dispositions of the penitents, and finally give essential advice even to the most uneducated of them. It was remarkable how he could make confession simple and quick. At the same time, in various ways he taught prudence in asking questions. If, for example, a boy confessed to blasphemy, Don Bosco did not like the confessor to ask questions in such a way as to repeat the blasphemy himself. On the lips of a priest this would fill him with horror. Rather, he instructed priests simply to ask, "Did you curse God?"

He urgently stressed that they were never to make confession hateful or burdensome by a curt reprimand, because boys would then clam up and commit one sacrilege upon another. On the contrary, confessors were to try to win the boys' full confidence by their kindness. Yet he also insisted on much reserve in dealing with youngsters, suggesting that confession should never be heard as a rule in any secluded place, that the confessor should not be too close to the boy during confession, and that caresses or similar endearments be absolutely avoided. A suitable word prompted by a

sincere desire for the salvation of his soul should be the key to the boy's heart. Don Bosco possessed a treasure-house of such words, shared them with his eager students; he also taught them the expressions he used, short but penetrating, with which he aroused true sorrow in the hearts of his penitents.

During these lectures he sometimes gave norms for preaching and teaching catechism to the common people or to youngsters. Since we have already spoken of this, we shall mention only two other things in this connection. First, Don Bosco thought it was preferable to follow the diocesan custom of preaching in the Piedmontese dialect so that the congregation might more easily understand the word of God. Therefore, from 1841 to 1850 he and his co-workers exclusively followed this practice. After that date, as his schools increased and boys came from all parts of Italy and even other nations, he began to preach in Italian. At the Oratory, however, until about 1865, most of the Sunday evening instructions were given in Piedmontese, especially since the boys enjoyed the witty popular sayings which enlivened them. Don Bosco's only concern was that the boys understand and learn. In his regulations for festive oratories, along with wise suggestions for preaching, he stressed the importance of clarity in explaining the eternal truths of the Faith.²

The second thing we wish to mention is his advice to preachers never to bring out, either in sermons or in private conversations, objections against the Faith in order to refute them, unless they were already fully known to the congregation and it was necessary to defend the honor of God. He maintained that it was enough to state and prove that God had taught or commanded this or that. Never should a preacher disturb one's simple faith.

One day a priest was telling Don Bosco in the presence of some boys how a Protestant writer had brazenly concocted and published a tract against the sacrament of Penance. According to him, confession had been instituted by the Fourth Lateran Council for its own purposes. He had even made up the names of fictitious persons who were supposed to have suggested, opposed, or approved the proposal. Don Bosco said nothing, but after the boys had gone, he

² A rather lengthy footnote has been transferred to Appendix 8 of this volume. [Editor]

asked the priest, "Before speaking, did you first consider the effect of your words on the minds of those boys? Did you notice how attentively they were listening?"

"I spoke so as to make them understand how the enemies of our Faith use lies as a weapon!" the priest rejoined.

"But did you prove it? And would the boys have understood, even if you did?" replied Don Bosco. "What need was there to tell them all that rubbish in such detail? False teachings sink in easily, but it takes skill, knowledge and time to refute objections. Even the slightest doubt can harm young people; it may long linger in their minds, and in some cases even lead to their ruin."

This moral theology course became even more providential for another reason. A baleful spirit had penetrated even the Convitto Ecclesiastico. Its young priests and students had become very excited over the new political developments and the war against Austria. Certain books and newspapers had filled their minds with quite unorthodox ideas of the pope's temporal power and of religious orders. Father Cafasso had vainly tried to persuade them in a fatherly manner to keep aloof from such developments by showing them the evils shaping up against the Church and society itself. But several among them, stubborn in their opinions, engaged daily in heated arguments and songs to Italian independence. Father Cafasso would have liked to take drastic measures but, due to the exceptional times they were going through, prudence counselled against such action. Fortunately, Father Cafasso received a request from the government for the temporary billeting of soldiers in the Convitto. He obliged by having the student priests return to their various dioceses in Piedmont. It was then that Father Cafasso urged Don Bosco to continue his moral and pastoral theology courses also for those Convitto students who, living in Turin, desired to attend. When the Convitto was later reopened, the public lectures were not resumed. This measure was taken in order to keep out the day students and avoid the repetition of disorders. Don Bosco admitted some of these students to his lectures.

With no remuneration at all Don Bosco continued his moral and pastoral theology lectures for about seven years. Canon [Philip] Ravina, vicar general, deeply respected Don Bosco's learning. Whenever Don Bosco's student priests came to the chancery to be ex-

amined for diocesan faculties a note from Don Bosco with the words *sufficienter instructus*, would generally obtain faculties for them with no examination.

As somewhat of an appendix to the pastoral theology course, Don Bosco had established another weekly study circle in Valdocco for the prudent development of his oratories. Participants were priests known for their piety and learning, such as Father [John] Borel, Father Robert Morialdo, the two brothers, Fathers [John and Joseph] Vola, and several others. The main object of their meetings was to study ways of working ever more zealously for the spiritual welfare of boys and of helping each other in facing the problems posed by the enemy of souls. Father Felix Reviglio was present at many of them.

Don Bosco continued his own private study of moral theology even after he could not continue the pastoral theology courses. According to Bishop [John] Cagliero, Don Bosco often proposed moral and doctrinal cases to the more eminent theologians in Turin. At times, after a serious discussion, these learned men would end up accepting Don Bosco's conclusions. Don Bosco was also interested in Canon Law and sometimes debated with his friend, Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, who had studied at the University of Turin and entertained several opinions not entirely conforming to doctrines taught at Rome. Throughout his lifetime Don Bosco often held meetings with learned canonists, especially Father [John Baptist] Rostagno, a scholar and former professor at the Catholic University of Louvain. When there were conflicts between Church and State, bishops and religious orders, Don Bosco painstakingly secured information on the directives and decrees of the Holy See and the Councils; his prodigious memory stored up a vast wealth of knowledge that he never forgot. His incessant mental activity was indeed a wonder!

CHAPTER 44

Apostolate of the Press

BY 1849 most people seemingly hostile to Don Bosco's work had changed their minds, impressed by his achievements; all the more so since his truly exemplary life, rich in good deeds, was ample proof of his good faith. Up to this time no publication had mentioned anything extraordinary about him; yet it was already a widespread conviction that he was not only the recipient of extraordinary favors from the Blessed Virgin, but that he had actually performed miracles. Father Michael Rua and Father Ascanio Savio have testified to this.

The fame of the Turin Oratory had already spread beyond Italy, thanks to the noble Rademaker family,¹ who in August, 1848, had sailed home to Portugal from Genoa. The Rademakers, friends of Don Bosco, had felt the beneficial effects of his supernatural gifts, and eventually became the first link between the Salesians and Portugal. Father Daniel Rademaker wrote an interesting letter to Don Bosco from Lisbon on January 9, 1849, describing their arrival, the joyous welcome they received from relatives and friends, whom they had not seen for so many years, the lamentable condition of the Church in Portugal, the departure of a warship which the Portuguese government had put at the disposal of Pius IX, and the illness of his sister, for whom, in his mother's behalf also, he asked prayers. The letter concluded:

.....
I never shall forget you. Send me news about yourself; you cannot imagine how interested I am. How is your health? Is the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales doing well? Will you keep the feast of St. Francis de

¹ See Vol. II, pp. 245ff. [Editor]

Sales this year too as in the past? Does Father Carpano have many boys at the St. Aloysius Oratory? Can you give me news of Father Vola, Father Bosio, Father Carpano, Father Borel, Father Palazzolo and Father Borghi? Please give my mother's regards to Baroness Nasi and my own to Father Nasi and to the priests I have mentioned. In closing, I wish you the best of everything, especially for this new year. May it be one of rejoicing for the Church, and not one of sorrow and mourning, as 1848 has been.

Unfortunately his good wishes were not to come true; for Don Bosco himself the year began with a grave sorrow. His stepbrother, Anthony, who now and then came to the Oratory to visit Mamma Margaret and Don Bosco, died rather suddenly on January 18, after a brief illness. Don Bosco was informed of his death by his brother Joseph, just as he was about to leave for Becchi. Despite Anthony's past opposition, Don Bosco had never forgone a chance to show his sincere affection for him; now that his stepbrother was dead, he took over the care of his two sons. One of them, Francis, he took into the Oratory to teach him cabinetmaking; he grew up to be an upright man. Anthony's other son stayed at Becchi and received help from Don Bosco as he needed it. Thus do saints take their vengeance; there is no room in their hearts for rancor or grudges. Father Rua, who was very close to Don Bosco for thirty-eight years, always admired his goodness toward his stepbrother; he never heard Don Bosco speak disparagingly of him.

But Don Bosco's grief for Anthony's death was little compared to his deep distress over the diabolical campaign initiated by the Protestants and revolutionaries in the press to pervert the minds of the unwary. Nearly all novels, plays, and poems of those days were in some way or other hostile to religion or morals. Angelo Brofferio's ² licentious Piedmontese songs were very popular. A flood of books obscenely illustrated glorified vice and corruption. Shouts of "long live Pius IX!" were heard no more. Rather, lurid caricatures of the pope were now being hawked about the streets. A veritable beehive of historians set to work to distort truth, with the aim of making all religions equal and destroying Catholicism. All religious matters were monstrously distorted. Indeed, the Church

² See pp. 193f. [Editor]

was depicted as the eternal foe of civilization, while the pope was portrayed as the archenemy of Italy. The theatre, too, catered to the lower instincts. Overtly or allegorically plays and skits venomously and scurrilously lampooned the clergy and held them up to ridicule, while heretics and revolutionaries were shown to be heroes and loyal, brave defenders of the oppressed. Hence it is not surprising that priests and even bishops were often insulted in public; Don Bosco too was similarly humiliated, as we shall now see.

On occasion groups of young ruffians would provokingly hold dances in the meadow across from the Oratory. Don Bosco would then walk to the dancing couples and, rather than give them a pretext to revile and abuse him as they perhaps expected, he would so graciously ask them to dance elsewhere so as not to disturb the church services which had just begun, that they did not have the heart to refuse. Though they would feebly insist on their rights, since it was a public thoroughfare, and though they would try a few more steps to the music, invariably they would give up and move. Who gave Don Bosco this strange power over such people? Father Rua stated:

Sometimes when I escorted him to town, I saw little street lads and older boys insult him. He endured all patiently. If he had a chance, he would say a few kind words to them; if distance, their bad disposition, or other circumstances counseled otherwise, he calmly would go his way without showing the slightest annoyance.

To this Joseph Brosio added:

Whenever Don Bosco went along the avenue now called Corso Regina Margherita, a mob of urchins would insult him, yell obscenities, and sing filthy songs. One day, when I was with him, I heard the usual insults, which would have angered even the most patient Job. Trembling with indignation at their insolence, I wanted to hit out at the brats, right and left. But Don Bosco went on walking calmly, as though nothing had happened. In fact, he even stopped and called the boys to him; they hesitated a moment and then approached him. After gently and briefly admonishing them for their conduct, he bought some choice peaches from a street vendor and gave them to these "little friends of his," as he called them.

Evil-minded persons tried to insult him in every possible way. One evening, Don Bosco and Father Giacomelli were on their way back to the Oratory and came to the Viale dei Gelsi which led into Via della Giardiniera. Suddenly Don Bosco stopped; he had stepped on garbage strewn across the road. At the same time several people hiding behind bushes began making rude, mocking noises at him, showing clearly that they were behind this outrage. Don Bosco looked toward the bushes. "Pay no attention to them," said Father Giacomelli. "No," answered Don Bosco. "I'm on my own ground here!" He ordered them to shut their mouths. Father Giacomelli expected an explosion of obscene replies, but all he heard was the shuffling of many feet beating a hasty retreat.

On another occasion, a mob of boys who did not attend the Oratory began hurling stones at the main gate. Some flew above the wall and endangered the boys in the playground. Don Bosco, who was fearless when the safety of his pupils was at stake, decided to go out and stop the attack; Joseph Buzzetti tried to dissuade him with the pretext that those boys would soon tire and go away. Don Bosco forbade anyone to go with him; then he opened the door and walked alone into a rain of stones. Miraculously, as on other occasions, he was not hit by a single stone. As he reached his assailants, they either turned and fled, or, dropping their stones, they waited for him and let him talk them out of their senseless behavior. Later, he sat on the ground as a sentry to make sure that the enemy did not return in the very place where the church of Mary Help of Christians now stands. Soon many of his young assailants came back, one by one, and listened attentively as he began to speak to them in a friendly voice.

Obviously these juvenile gangs had been driven to such violence by what they heard from adults in their own homes and in the streets, and perhaps they were also egged on by Protestant agitators. But the main responsibility fell upon the anticlerical press, which unceasingly fanned these fires of hatred and constantly sought to undermine all divine and human authority with their daily spiteful attacks on the Church, Catholic worship, and religious orders. Even the comic sheets featured sacrilegious cartoons. Such vitriolic scribblers respected neither personal secrets nor the privacy of fam-

ily life, neither sound opinions nor spotless honor and integrity. In short, nothing sacred or inviolable was spared from being dragged through the mud and maliciously held up to the ridicule of the mob. Although Archbishop Frasoni was no longer on the scene, they continued to print lies about him in order to arouse public opinion against him, charging that he was assisting the king's enemies with church funds. Nor did they spare Don Bosco. Vicious articles in *La Gazzetta del Popolo* and *Il Fischietto* mockingly dubbed him *The Saint*, *The Miracle Worker of Valdocco*, thus perverting the concept formed by the better people of Turin about Don Bosco.

The bishops had registered a vigorous, eloquent protest with the government against the excesses of the press and its outrageous attacks on the Faith, the clergy, and morals, but the government paid no heed. When their protest was read in both the Senate and the Chamber it was received with yawns, grumblings, and sneers. All previous protests of the bishops, as well as appeals to the Constitution and laws of the land, had been accorded a similar reception.

What weapons then were left to combat such a host of evils? Obviously an irresponsible press had to be opposed by one that was sound, honest and responsible. Archbishop [William Emmanuel] Ketteler of Mainz rightly said some time later that, had St. Paul lived in that day and age, he would have become a journalist. The staff of *L'Armonia* began the counterattack, but very soon proved to be unequal to the task inasmuch as the enemy was vastly superior in number, more venturesome, and supported by people in key government positions. A few other Catholic newspapers also appeared at this time: *Il Conciliatore*, *L'Istruttore del Popolo*, *Il Giornale degli Operai* and *Lo Smascheratore*, but, for one reason or another, several were forced to cease publication.

The scanty circulation of Catholic newspapers, however, was principally due to the fact that the liberal press had been the first to meet the public need at a time when the people hungered for political news affecting so many vital interests and for the war bulletins from the front, since most families had loved ones in the army. As a result, those newspapers were avidly devoured and through well-organized, vigorous distribution, were carried into

every corner of the Sardinian kingdom. Astutely the anticlericals had foreseen what such newspapers could do for their cause. The common people were loath to think for themselves; an intellectual sloth made them think, judge, and speak as others did. Though claiming to speak their own mind, they actually let themselves be led by the nose by some journalist whose ideas they bought for a penny. This explains why godless ideologies, combined with overly excited passions and a pagan concept of patriotism, were able to make public opinion favor intriguers and plotters.

Ever alert to means of saving souls and safeguarding religious and moral values of youth, Don Bosco was eager to be of practical help to Catholic journalism. Since *L'Armonia* was geared to a rather educated class of readers, Don Bosco thought it a good idea to publish a newspaper for the more common people. He formed a committee with Father [Hyacinth] Carpano and Father Chiaves, among others, and revealed his plans for the publication of a politico-religious newspaper to be called *L'Amico della Gioventù* [The Friend of Youth] with features characteristic of a family newspaper. He had added the word "political" because at that time the word "religious" by itself would not have attracted the readers for whom the newspaper was intended. It was to appear twice a week, with Don Bosco as its managing editor. Giulio Speirani and Giacinto Ferrero were to be the printers and publishers; the editorial office was to be located in their plant, and the committee members were to receive a monthly salary. A circular letter, of which unfortunately no copy is available, was sent to all the priests in the dioceses of Turin, Ivrea, Asti, and Vercelli with subscription forms for the purchase of shares to help cover the initial financial outlay. Don Bosco's friends among the pastors and other priests pledged some money. Pledges were to be returned no later than February, 1849. Although the subscribers were few, some eight hundred *lire* was collected; this seemed sufficient to launch the publication. Among the principal subscribers were Canon John Francis Chioccia of Trino Vercellese, Father Louis Porliod, canon penitentiary of the Aosta cathedral, Canon Francis Maria Calosso of the Chieri cathedral, and Father John Baptist Bottino, prior and vicar forane in Bra. During its first three months the newspaper had about 137

subscribers, although there were a great many more readers, since Don Bosco distributed it freely among his boys. The cleric Ascanio Savio and others have told us they found it informative and enjoyable. Don Bosco avoided topics particularly irksome to the government in his articles, dealing broadly with politics, that is, contemporary events. His articles were of an edifying character, but he also directed his fire at current errors and did not hesitate to name and censure the more vicious publications. More often than not, his articles entitled, "Blunders of *La Gazzetta del Popolo*," strongly refuted its blasphemies against Our Lord, the Holy Eucharist, confession, the rosary, and the existence of hell, as well as its slanderous comments on priests, bishops, and popes in that paper's vicious gossip column, *Il Sacco Nero* ["*The Black Sack*"]. *L'Amico della Gioventù* did plenty of good in its own day. In addition to its informative articles which filled a need, it kept the Oratory boys from seeking the news of the day in a corrupt press which might have stuffed their heads with unchristian notions. Although Don Bosco had assistants, he did most of the work; he planned the whole issue, checked every item, and even corrected the galley proofs.

After the first three months the newspaper's subscription dropped to 116. In an attempt to keep the paper alive in every possible way, Don Bosco addressed a second circular letter to wealthy people in the city and provinces.

[No date]

Dear Sir:

The [uncontrolled] freedom of the press and the irresponsible handling of religious matters by some segments of the press (which seem intent only on dishonoring and vilifying religion) have convincingly pointed up the need of publishing religious periodicals to counteract the influence of these enemies of truth.

We are happy to say that *L'Amico della Gioventù* is now three months old. But it is urgent to make this antidote to irreligion available not only to young people but to others as well. We therefore plan changes that will make it welcome in every Catholic family. This enterprise requires much money. Since our subscribers are too few, we invite you to participate in this undertaking by purchasing shares at twenty, fifty, and one hundred francs, to suit your goodwill and means. Shares may be bought in installments till the end of this month: one fourth down and the bal-

ance in quarterly payments. Once increased circulation covers costs, your advanced sum will be returned along with a *free* subscription and premiums to be determined by the circulation.

Your well-known zeal for the people's welfare and your serious interest in religious matters encourage us to hope that you will effectively assist our undertaking; its sole purpose is to safeguard morals and religion.

You can help us not only by purchasing shares, but also by promoting the newspaper. Therefore we are enclosing several copies for distribution among such persons as would appreciate our efforts. The only payment we want is the preservation and growth of our Faith.

Praying that God may reward you with every possible grace, we are honored to be,

On behalf of the editors,

Father John Bosco.

P.S. Local shareholders are asked to bring the stub to the editorial office; out-of-townners should mail it.

This letter did not bring the hoped for results because many Catholics were still not convinced of the need for a good Catholic press. Although Don Bosco did not lose hope and his readers numbered over a thousand, he lacked funds, and his co-workers began to quit in discouragement. The sixty-first issue of *L'Amico della Gioventù* was to be its last. After little more than eight months of an independent, fruitful life, it merged with *L'Istruttore del Popolo*. Founded in February, 1849, and headed by a certain De Vivaldi, this periodical was good and counted a substantial number of readers. Father Joseph Berizzi was among its contributors. *L'Istruttore* took over the subscribers of *L'Amico della Gioventù*. For the next four or five months Don Bosco helped put out this paper to insure right editorial policies and to make it a suitable substitute for *L'Amico della Gioventù*. He also wanted to write articles upholding papal authority for as long as the pope remained at Gaeta. He withdrew from the newspaper only when Pius IX was restored to the papal throne by the French. Don Bosco's withdrawal, however, was unfortunate. The journal changed its editorial policies and fell into the hands of the liberals.

The difficulties he experienced in managing a newspaper quickly

convinced Don Bosco that Divine Providence did not want him to become a journalist. He realized that the time he must spend on research for such varied subjects as political economy, legislation, and Catholic apologetics interfered with his other occupations. Moreover he realized that unless a Catholic journalist went along with the current of the times, he had to be ready to face possible lawsuits, heavy fines, and even the risk of imprisonment. Don Bosco had no intention of cooperating with error, but neither could he run the risk of compromising his primary mission. In fact, *Lo Smascheratore*, the successor of *Il Giornale degli Operai*, after putting up a spirited and intelligent defense of the Catholic cause, became the first, in April, 1849, to be involved in a court trial before a jury. Don Bosco realized that it would be very unwise to create implacable enemies; disputes with irreligious journalists would be unavoidable, and *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, thanks to its powerful secret and public connections, could impose its will even on the Chamber and Senate. Besides, he could foresee that there would be other enemies, the Protestants, whom he would have to fight to the finish, and that in the beginning he would be carrying the whole weight of the struggle almost entirely alone.

As he was giving up journalism, Don Bosco had the satisfaction of seeing that Father James Margotti, a brilliant student at the Academy of Superga, would put up a successful fight against prevailing revolutionary ideas. In a career stretching over thirty-nine years, first as a writer, then as editor of *L'Armonia*, and later as founder of *L'Unità Cattolica*, Father Margotti was not only to defend the honor of the pope but was also to kindle an ardent love for him, for the Church and for her sacred rights in the hearts of Italians. He would fight the revolution by disclosing its past, its admissions, and the lives of its heroes, with whom he was very familiar; he would use the very same weapons. His paper would carry on effective, exciting, and victorious polemics. In a short time *L'Unità Cattolica* gained a daily circulation of more than thirty thousand.

Financial difficulties and bothersome problems arising from the demise of his newspaper further convinced Don Bosco to give up journalism. We shall mention some of these to show how Don Bosco acted in financial matters. He was under the impression that

the printers had been fully paid for *L'Amico della Gioventù*, but he received a letter from them one day asking payment of 1,039 *lire* for printing, and an additional 131 *lire* for postage. This put him in an embarrassing situation. The sponsoring committee of *L'Amico della Gioventù* had been dissolved, and *L'Istruttore del Popolo*, which had inherited the defunct newspaper, had meanwhile changed management and refused to honor a debt which it did not incur. Left alone to deal with this burden—and it was not insignificant in view of his scanty means—Don Bosco asked for clarification, and started proceedings for a settlement. The very fact that Father Cafasso did not come to his aid is a sure sign that the obligation on Don Bosco's part was, at least, uncertain. Finally on August 20, 1852, the printers sent a bailiff to Don Bosco to collect the entire payment of the debt, on the grounds that he had been managing editor of the publication.

Hoping to settle the matter amicably out of court, Don Bosco wrote the printers [Speirani and Ferrero] the following letter.

October 15, 1852

Dear Sir:

Following our discussions and the summons I was served in regard to *L'Amico della Gioventù*, I spoke with the other members of the committee. They were greatly surprised and when I showed them the summons, they raised the following points:

1. They want to know the terms of the contract, and the date from which the printing of the newspaper fell under joint responsibility of publisher and managing committee.

2. Since nothing was said of this at the time of the merger with *L'Istruttore*, they had assumed that no debts were outstanding.

3. They demand the stipulated monthly salary for the time when the newspaper was printed at your expense plus the sale proceeds of several posters, the revenue from newspaper sales from March 20 until suspension of the publication, and the money orders which I had signed and handed over to you. You make no mention of any of these things.

These points are raised by the committee. I personally do not know what to say or what objections to raise.

Aside from the above, speaking for myself only as one friend to another, with no regard to the *pros* and *cons* of the matter, I am ready to offer you the sum of two hundred francs from my own pocket, with-

out prejudice to your claims on other members of the committee. I make this offer since I would regret any straining of the mutually satisfactory relationship we have had for the past twelve years. Consider what it means for poor Don Bosco to pay out two hundred francs!

Meanwhile, please accept my most cordial and respectful regards. Awaiting your reply, I remain,

Your devoted servant,

Rev. John Bosco

P.S. Please send me also a listing of the books I received from you, along with other pertinent information.

The printer did not accept the committee's points, and rejected the offer. Eventually, a settlement was reached on March 2, 1854; Don Bosco paid 272 *lire* including the 131 for postage.

Possessing nothing of his own, Don Bosco faithfully administered whatever the Lord sent him to help his work and his boys. He was a loyal defender of their rights, and protected them from all harm without regard for his own convenience, but at the same time he knew how to temper and reconcile the claims of justice with charity, thanks to his gentle and affable manner.

Lastly we shall note that these troubles taught Don Bosco a lesson which he repeatedly stressed to his followers: that journalism was not their field of action, especially when it dealt in any way with politics. In fact, in the rules for the Salesian Society he inserted an article banning such activity. The Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars had it deleted, not because the Church opposed such a ban, but because the article was too general and would have required inopportune clarifications. Nevertheless, Don Bosco continually repeated that his Salesians were to keep aloof at all times from political contests, because the Lord had not called them to such action, but, rather, to the care of poor, abandoned children. The Church certainly is not lacking in men well equipped for the arduous and dangerous tasks of this particular mission. In an army there are those who fight in battle, and there are also those who move the supplies, do sentry duty, dig trenches, and perform other tasks equally indispensable in a common effort for victory.

Though he retired from journalism in 1850, Don Bosco took it upon himself to promote Catholic publications in a quiet, subtle way. In those years, only liberal and anticlerical newspapers were to be found in the cafés. The owners, fearing public opinion, did not dare offer their customers Catholic periodicals. To offset this, Don Bosco, or more often someone else in his stead, began to frequent the various cafés; then, while sipping coffee, he would call the waiter and ask for a copy of *L'Armonia* or *La Campana*.

"We don't have them," was the invariable answer. The second or third time he dropped in and could not find the paper, he expressed amazement that such a reputable house did not carry such a fine newspaper. He kept this up for weeks until the proprietor would at last subscribe. Then, he would use the same stratagem in other cafés. Thus, he was able to introduce Catholic newspapers in most of the Turin cafés. Since customers were always asking for them, subscriptions had to be regularly renewed. Before long they were to be found also in public meeting places, hotels, and even in stores. This greatly benefited the people of Turin, where a masonic, revolutionary press had set up shop.

Don Bosco himself, however, except for isolated cases when he had to acquaint himself with some important news, did not read the papers. He advised his priests and clerics to do likewise, saying, "Such reading takes up a good deal of time which could be better spent on more important matters. Besides, it diverts the mind to many useless things, which may harm some, and it arouses political spirits." In this connection he also recalled Father Cafasso's advice to the priests at the Convitto. "I would rather that you did not read newspapers when you go for a walk, even though they may be good. People who see you will not make distinctions. They will say or think, 'Everyone reads the paper of his choice.' They will think they are justified in reading *La Gazzetta del Popolo* and *Il Fischietto* because they see you with *L'Armonia* and *La Campana*."

CHAPTER 45

Charismatic Gifts

KINDLY but firmly Don Bosco brought things back to normal in both the St. Francis de Sales and the St. Aloysius oratories after the brief but dangerous political disturbances.

His moral ascendancy over his young charges stemmed from the fact that they daily witnessed his virtuous life. They were convinced that he was truly a man of God; they saw him as a living embodiment of the Gospel, the model of a true priest, a faithful portrait of Our Lord. Even in those days his young boarders and non-boarders, one and all without exception, credited him with extraordinary deeds. This conviction did not diminish as the years went by. Hundreds of boys have told us things they themselves had seen, or things that their companions had recounted to them. Bishop John Cagliero wrote: "Yes, Don Bosco possessed the gift of miracles. For those of us who lived at his side for so many years, this is a fact. Many of the older pupils have assured me that he performed miracles even before I entered the Oratory,¹ and that once the sacred Hosts were multiplied in his hands." We shall cite several incidents reported to us in writing; the first were gathered by Father Cesar Chiala.

On occasion Don Bosco preached or taught catechism informally in the public squares. Once, at Porta Palazzo, finding himself in a group of people, he began to tell them of the need of listening to the word of God. Some young toughs happened to be present. Far from listening, they deliberately and impudently made a lot of noise. Don Bosco warned them several times to keep quiet, but to no avail. One of them, a certain Botta, raising his voice above the others, shouted, "We don't want to hear any sermons."

¹ John Cagliero entered the Oratory on November 3, 1851. [Editor]

"If you were to be struck blind at this moment, would you then listen to God's word?" Don Bosco rejoined.

"H'm, that's easier said than done!" shot back the young tough. Meanwhile he turned to one of his companions and angrily shouted, "You scoundrel, why are you hiding? Are you afraid? Come out!"

"What's the matter with you?" his companion answered. "Can't you see? I'm right next to you." "But I can't see you. . . . Oh, my! I can't see any more. . . ."

Terror gripped the bystanders, and they all begged Don Bosco to restore the young man's sight. He too implored him, "Don Bosco, pray for me. Please forgive me!" And he fell to his knees in tears.

Thereupon Don Bosco replied, "Say an act of contrition. We shall pray too, but meanwhile promise you'll go to confession, and then the Lord will give you back your sight."

"Yes, yes, I will. I'll make my confession right now." He indeed wanted to confess his sins then and there. Don Bosco and the others prayed for him. Toward evening the young man had someone take him to confession, and his sight was then restored to him.

Don Bosco was known for relieving toothaches. Once, when crossing Piazza Emanuele Filiberto near Piazza Milano, he met several boys accompanying a friend of theirs suffering from an atrocious toothache. The boy was screaming in pain and cursing wildly. When his friends saw Don Bosco in the distance, they said to him, "Look, here comes Don Bosco. Ask him for his blessing." But the youngster, maddened with pain, cursed Don Bosco and his blessings. Meanwhile Don Bosco came up to him, but the wretched boy would not listen to him. After a few minutes, however, Don Bosco's kindly admonitions had some effect. The lad calmed down, dropped to his knees and recited an act of contrition, begging God's forgiveness for his cursing and promising to go to confession. Don Bosco then blessed him, and the toothache vanished.

News of these things spread, and persons similarly afflicted flocked to him for a blessing and were instantly healed. To reduce the flow of suppliants and to prevent people from attributing these healings to himself, Don Bosco began to suggest and asked others to suggest to these sufferers some special act of piety in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, the Blessed Virgin, or St. Aloysius. Once they did this, their pain disappeared.

The Oratory boys also received such blessed relief. Charles Gastini told us the following story several times. One Sunday he was suffering from a severe toothache and flung himself into bed. Around eleven in the morning, after church services, Don Bosco heard him groaning with pain and went to him at once. "What's ailing you, Gastini?" he asked. Poor Gastini, writhing in pain, could hardly answer. So Don Bosco placed his hands on the lad's head and drew it close to his own chest. The pain disappeared as if by magic. This was not the only instance of this kind during this period. Joseph Brosio wrote the following account to Father John Bonetti.

One day I was in Don Bosco's room when a beggar came for alms. He said that his five children were fainting with hunger for they had eaten nothing since the day before. Don Bosco looked at him compassionately; then he rummaged about until he found four *soldi*, which he gave to him with his blessing. The man thanked him and left. Don Bosco then expressed his regret at not having been able to give him more, even a hundred *lire* if he had had it, because the man had been speaking the truth.

I replied, "How do you know the man was telling the truth? You don't even know where he lives. Couldn't he possibly be a swindler begging for alms under false pretenses, deceiving honest folk and taking their money to spend it in wineshops, drinking and eating at the expense of others, making fun of everyone, especially priests?"

"No," replied Don Bosco, "don't talk like that, Brosio. That man is sincere and honest. In fact, I might add that he's a hard worker and very devoted to his family. Only misfortune has reduced him to such sorry straits."

"How do you know all this?" I asked him.

Don Bosco took my hand in a tight grip and looked at me fixedly. Then, as if confiding a secret, he said, "I read his heart."

"What? Do you mean to say that you can read my sins too, then?"

"Yes, I can smell them," he answered laughing.

And indeed this was true, because whenever I forgot to mention a sin or transgression in confession, he would remind me of it, just as it had been. How could he have known, unless he could read my heart? After all, I lived at least a mile away from him.

Here is another instance. One day I performed an act of charity at great sacrifice to myself. No one knew of it. The moment I arrived at

the Oratory, Don Bosco came up to me, took my hand as he usually did, and said, "Oh! what a lovely reward you've stored up for yourself in heaven by that sacrifice!"

"What sacrifice?" I asked. Thereupon Don Bosco described in detail what I had secretly done. It cannot be denied: Don Bosco could truly read people's hearts and see things from afar! I was to receive even further proof of it.

One evening in Turin I met the man to whom Don Bosco had given the four *soldi*. He recognized me and told me that with those four *soldi* he had bought cornflour for *polenta* and that there had been enough to satisfy fully his whole family. He added that, after Don Bosco's blessing, his affairs had improved day by day, and that truly Don Bosco was a real saint, and he would never forget him. "At home," he concluded, "we now speak of him as the priest who wrought the 'miracle of the *polenta*' because seven of us were able to eat our fill with only four *soldi* of flour. At today's prices there would hardly be enough for two people."

I frequently witnessed similar occurrences, often even more surprising than the one above. One morning a woman, walking with a crutch and a cane, led by another woman, came to see Don Bosco. She could scarcely take even one slow step at a time, perhaps due to a nervous ailment. She told Don Bosco that she wanted to talk to him privately, so I withdrew to a distance. But when she left, I noticed that she was walking without her crutch and cane. She told me, "Don Bosco has healed me."

But the most extraordinary event of 1849 was the following.

Charles . . . , a fifteen-year-old boy who attended the festive oratory, fell seriously ill and in a short time was at death's door. His father owned a small restaurant whose upper floor was the family's living quarters.

The doctor informed the parents that the boy was in very critical condition and that they should see to his spiritual needs. When they asked their son what priest he wanted for his confession, he showed himself anxious to have Don Bosco, his ordinary confessor. Unfortunately, much to the youngster's grief, that day Don Bosco was out of town. Under the circumstances, the assistant pastor was sent for. Thirty-six hours later the boy was dead; repeatedly he had been asking for Don Bosco.

As soon as Don Bosco returned, he was told that people had come

several times looking for him; Charles, whom he knew so well, was dying and was very eager to speak to him. Don Bosco hastened to the boy's house. A waiter first saw him and told him, "It's too late. He died twelve hours ago." Smiling, Don Bosco replied, "Oh no! He's merely asleep; he just seems dead."

The waiter stared at him with an air of ironic disbelief.

"Do you want to bet a pint that he's not dead?" Don Bosco rejoined almost in jest.

Meanwhile the boy's parents had come downstairs and, hearing his words, sobbingly told him that poor Charles indeed was dead. "It can't be," said Don Bosco. "May I see him?" He was immediately ushered into the boy's room where his mother and an aunt were praying at his bedside. The body was already laid out for burial, swathed and sewn in a winding sheet with a veil drawn over his face as was then the custom. A lamp was burning beside the bed.

Don Bosco drew near the bed, thinking, "Who knows whether his last confession was a good one? Where is his soul now?" After asking the person who had escorted him into the room to withdraw, Don Bosco recited a short, fervent prayer, blessed the dead boy and called to him twice in a tone of command, "Charles, Charles, get up!" The corpse began to give signs of life. Don Bosco quickly hid the funeral lamp, ripped open the winding sheet, and uncovered the boy's face. Charles opened his eyes as though awaking from a deep slumber, looked bewilderedly about him, then sat up and asked, "Where am I?" Finally, his gaze fell on Don Bosco.

"Oh! Don Bosco!" he exclaimed. "If only you knew! I wanted so much to see you! I sent for you so many times. . . . I need you very badly. Am I glad you woke me up!"

"So am I, Charles," replied Don Bosco. "Now tell me everything you want to say. I came just for that."

"Oh! Don Bosco," continued the boy, "it's a wonder I'm not in hell. In my last confession, I didn't dare confess a sin I had committed a couple of weeks before. A bad companion had talked me into it. . . . I had a terrible dream. I dreamed that I was on the edge of a big furnace where many devils had chased me. They were just about to push me over when a lady stepped between me and those ugly monsters, saying, 'Wait! He has not yet been judged!' I was terribly scared, and just then I heard you calling me and I woke up. Now I want to make my confession."

The boy's mother and aunt who had been present all the while, could

not believe their eyes. At a word from Don Bosco, badly shaken, they rushed out to summon the rest of the family.

Meanwhile, Charles had sufficiently recovered from his fear of those demons and began his confession with every sign of true contrition. As Don Bosco was giving him absolution, his mother and the rest of the family walked into the room. Turning to his mother, Charles said, "Don Bosco is saving me from hell."

For about two hours Charles was in complete possession of his faculties, but all the while his body remained cold, even though he could move, look around, and talk. Among other things, he repeatedly asked Don Bosco to warn the boys always to tell all their sins in confession.

At last, Don Bosco said to him, "Now you are in the state of grace. Heaven stands open for you. Do you want to go there or remain here with us?"

"I want to go to heaven," replied the boy.

"Goodbye then, until we meet in heaven," continued Don Bosco. Thereupon young Charles closed his eyes, lay back on the pillow and quietly fell asleep again in the Lord.

It must not be thought that the event caused any stir in the city. Don Bosco had acted most naturally and matter-of-factly when he had stated that the boy was not dead. Besides, the continuous political agitation and war nerves of the early months of that same year fully preoccupied people to the exclusion of everything else. Furthermore, out of delicacy and respect for the boy's memory, the family must have kept the matter secret, and hushed it even among the neighbors.

Nevertheless, the word got around among the boy's companions, and for many years this event was accepted in the Oratory as an undisputed fact. They knew the location and signboard of the restaurant, the boy's full name, the place his family had originally come from, and his long-standing friendship with Don Bosco. In fact, at the beginning of 1849, Don Bosco had called on the family to invite one of Charles' brothers to the Oratory. He came only once; later, he volunteered for military service, fought at Novara, was wounded and sent home; he died shortly thereafter.

In citing only a few among the hundreds of boys who knew of these happenings, we shall mention Joseph Buzzetti first. Although

he did not see the event, he unquestionably did hear of it immediately afterward from one who had been present, for, years later, he never doubted the authenticity of the facts, as he himself told us several times. His conviction was shared by Bishop John Cagliero and by [Peter] Enria,² who came to the Oratory in 1854. Father [John] Garino and Father [John] Bonetti heard of the miracle from their schoolmates when they enrolled at the Oratory in 1857. [John] Bisio³ came to know of it in 1864 from some of the first pupils of the Oratory and from a young lady named Teresa Martano, who knew Don Bosco even before 1849 and who was living in Turin at that time.

A further confirmation of this extraordinary event came in 1889. Father Anthony Sala,⁴ while traveling by train to Parma, met an elderly Christian Brother who was stationed there. When the conversation got around to Don Bosco, the Brother told Father Sala that he had been an elementary school teacher in Turin in 1849, and that the event in question, the temporary resurrection of Charles, was an undisputed fact.

We also have Father Michael Rua's testimony. He declared:

Don Bosco would often come to hear our confessions when I was attending the Christian Brothers' School in Turin in 1849. I remember hearing him once tell us in a sermon that a boy named Charles who had died had been recalled to life by his regular confessor and had again passed into eternity after receiving absolution from his sins. Don Bosco did not tell us who the confessor was, but later I again heard of this miracle from different people, who all attributed it to Don Bosco himself. Many years later, as a priest, or shortly before I was ordained, taking advantage of our deep friendship I asked Don Bosco whether he was really the one, as many people said. He answered, "I never said that I was the priest in question." I did not insist so as not to abuse his confidence. I was satisfied that he did not deny it, but limited himself to the statement that he had never said so.

Moreover, Don Bosco told the story to the Oratory boys more than fifty times, and hundreds of times to pupils in other schools,

² A Salesian coadjutor brother who died in 1898. [Editor]

³ A pupil and later a lifetime Salesian cooperator. [Editor]

⁴ At this time he was a member of the Superior Chapter of the Salesian Society. [Editor]

although he never once alluded to himself or to people and places, and he omitted details that might give him away. It was obvious that he had witnessed something which had made a very profound, lasting impression on him. But once, in 1882, he made a slip in telling the story to the boys at our school in Borgo San Martino after night prayers. His mind was quite tired, and in the middle of the narrative he inadvertently switched from the third to the first person singular, saying, "I entered the room; I spoke to him; he answered me." He continued thus for some time, before switching back to the third person. We were there and noticed that while Don Bosco was talking, the Salesians exchanged significant glances; the boys, instead, were raptly looking at him. After his talk Don Bosco passed through the crowd of boys to go to his room, and as they pressed around him it was obvious from his expression and words that he was perfectly unaware of the slip he had made. No one dared call his attention to it so as not to embarrass his humility.

Lastly, we are quite anxious to report the testimony of a very important person, Father John Joseph Franco, S. J.

Roma, Via di Ripetta, 246
February 24, 1891

Reverend and dear Father Lemoyne:

I have read in the paper that you are gathering material for a biography of the late, lamented Don Bosco for whose introduction to the cause of beatification canonical proceedings have already begun. It was stated that you would accept and welcome even brief notes concerning him; hence, I hasten to add my own tiny stone to this edifice.

I had conversations with that revered man several times in Turin, Genoa, and Florence, occasionally at great length in complete privacy. The first impression he made on me was that of a simple-hearted man of no special talent, but hardly had he spoken than I had to revise my opinion. Indeed, as the conversation progressed, I fully realized that he was an exceptional man gifted with sound judgment, remarkable prudence, the loftiest and purest motives. His quiet, unassuming speech was so measured and meaningful that it would have been worthwhile taking it down verbatim. I can think of no other person whose conversation has inspired me with a similar admiration. I felt I was talking to a saint. . . .

I have held and still hold him to be an extraordinary man, full of divine graces. This opinion I formed from what I knew of his life, his bearing, and his undertakings. I was deeply edified by his sincere, effective, fruitful charity and zeal toward poor children and all kinds of street lads in his attempts to rescue them from vice, provide for their needs, educate them, form their character, and above all win them for Our Lord. In all this I saw a close resemblance to Our Lord's spirit, utterly selfless, a brilliant exemplification of St. Paul's words, "The love of Christ impels us." [2 Cor. 5, 14]

I was so convinced of his extraordinary goodness, that I thought it but natural that he should perform miracles, for this gift is generally granted to the great servants of God by Divine Providence. Had someone told me that he had indeed performed miracles even more than once, I would not have been in the least surprised.

As a matter of fact, I did hear tell of them. . . .

Here the letter describes an extraordinary event concerning Don Bosco to which we shall refer later.⁵ It then continues:

I heard reliable and devout people of Turin tell that Don Bosco was once called to assist a sick boy, but he got to him after the boy had already passed away.

He then called him back to life and heard his confession in much the same circumstances as those in which St. Philip Neri resurrected a young man named de' Massimi. At that time I also heard that someone had recorded this incident and was saving the document to Don Bosco's glory after his death.

This is all I can tell you, dear reverend Father. Please feel free to use this information as you think best.

Father John Joseph Franco, S. J.

For the same reason Archbishop [Marcellus] Spinola of Seville unhesitatingly accepted the fact of young Charles' death and temporary resurrection when in Milo he published his pamphlet *Don Bosco and His Works*. But what we consider most important is the notable number of conversions and sincere confessions that can be traced to the narration of this event. They are indeed moral miracles, each of them as remarkable as the physical one we have already described. The efficacy of speech granted him by God ⁶

⁵ See pp. 404ff. [Editor]

⁶ See Vol. I, p. 386. [Editor]

manifested itself in so many ways that Don Bosco's entire life may be described as a continual hymn of praise to the omnipotence, providence, and mercy of God. Bishop Cagliero, who daily witnessed so many extraordinary happenings, added this: "As for me, the greatest miracle of Don Bosco was his successful struggle of some fifty years to steer his course through a stormy sea amid endless shoals and billows which threatened to submerge the [festive] oratories and the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales."

CHAPTER 46

A Generous Gesture

THE Piedmontese government had not given up all hope of victory, especially since the bulk of the Austrian army was now busy putting down a fierce Hungarian uprising. On February 1, 1849, at the opening session of the Chamber, Charles Albert announced that the army had been reorganized, its morale restored, and that it was now ready to drive the Austrians out of Italy. The people evinced scant enthusiasm for war, but the secret societies stepped up their agitation, volunteers and political refugees kept making warmongering speeches, and the newspapers played up alleged atrocities committed by the Austrians in Lombardy and Veneto. General Radetzky himself was accused of having violated the armistice. Meanwhile, General Chiodo, Gioberti's successor in the cabinet, was forming a military alliance with political agitators who, on February 9, had declared an end to papal rule in Rome and proclaimed a republic. In Lombardy and Veneto liberal leaders got ready for a revolt scheduled to break out in various cities on March 21.

While the stage was being set for new uprisings throughout Italy, the sympathies of all Catholics were with Pius IX who was in a very difficult situation. As shepherd of three hundred million Catholics scattered all over the globe and as teacher of all nations, the pope must meet countless spiritual and temporal needs.¹ Aside from other things, he has to preside over the Sacred Congregations which assist him in the government of the whole Church; he has to provide for the Holy See's representatives, sent to foreign governments for the protection of the faithful subject to them; he has to send and support missionaries in those lands where the true God and

¹ A footnote giving population statistics of 1902 has been omitted. [Editor]

the fruits of Redemption and of Christian civilization are still unknown; briefly, he has to provide for countless needs.

Forced to leave Rome, deprived of all possessions, Pius IX found himself unable to cope with all these needs, to the great detriment of souls. Ferdinand II, king of Naples, generously welcomed him in Gaeta, but he could not be expected to contribute all that was needed for the proper running of the universal Church; nor was it right that the burden of providing for the pope should weigh on one country alone. Consequently, when this state of affairs became known, the bishops of France and later all the bishops of the Catholic Church appealed to the faithful, exhorting them to come generously to the aid of their supreme shepherd. The faithful responded readily, and in a short time all classes of people began to vie with one another to assist the pope. The action of the French bishops was emulated in Spain, Belgium, Germany, and even in the Americas; in India, China, and in the most remote nations of the Catholic world. Collections were taken up in all the churches of Holland and in Amsterdam itself, thanks to the initiative of a Protestant minister. The exile of the pope was the occasion that revived in our times the so-called "Peter's Pence" which enables the pope to make the kindly influence of his lofty apostolate felt in the farthest regions, and meets the immense spiritual and temporal needs of the world-wide Catholic family. It is also a magnificent proof of the loving attachment of the faithful to the See of Peter.

Italy, although in a state of upheaval, could not remain aloof from such a worthy undertaking. Piedmont above all vied with the other regions of Italy in a substantial proof of its unalterable attachment to the Vicar of Christ. In Turin, at the beginning of February, a group of zealous ecclesiastics and laymen formed a committee to solicit contributions from the faithful for the Holy Father. The committee included such prominent figures as Marquis Ludovico Pallavicini-Mossi, senator, Marquis Birago di Vische, Marquis Fabio Invrea, Father William Audisio, Father Cerutti, and Canon [Francis] Valinotti. Other prominent laymen, among them Count Camillo Cavour, brother of Marquis Gustavo, also helped solicit contributions. On February 9, 1849, *L'Armonia* launched its own campaign on behalf of the pope.

When the faithful in farm areas came to know of the straitened

circumstances of Pius IX, they felt honored to come to his aid. Contributions quickly poured in not only from the wealthy but also from the poor, who generously offered the fruit of their toil and their meagre savings. On this occasion, Don Bosco's boys were overjoyed at being able to give tangible evidence of their affection for the pope. Gladly they deprived themselves of the few *soldi* they had—they needed them badly themselves—and offered them to the pope.

While at the Oratory Don Bosco's destitute boys were glad that their gesture would console Pius IX, the Piedmontese government rejected the armistice with General Radetzky, commander-in-chief of the Austrian army, on March 12. The Piedmontese army, six divisions totaling 120,000 men, set out for war. Seventy thousand spread along the banks of the Ticino on a front of over a hundred miles. It was a strategic blunder. Shortly thereafter, Como and Brescia revolted. On the evening of March 14, Charles Albert left Turin for Novara, and on the same day Minister Sineo asked the bishops to convince the people of the need for this war, and to order prayers for victory. The bishops obliged, as they had done before in such circumstances. The Oratory boys also prayed for victory, all the more so because Count [Joseph Provana of Collegno had brought] a gift of two hundred *lire* to Don Bosco on February 5. According to Father Borel's memoirs, everything indicated that this donation came personally from the king.

Meanwhile at the Oratory an unforgettable event was in preparation. On March 25, the "Peter's Pence Committee," at Don Bosco's invitation, sent two distinguished members, Canon [Francis] Valinotti and Marquis [Gustavo] Cavour to the Oratory to receive the boys' contribution personally. The turnout of boys was great since it was Passion Sunday and the feast of the Annunciation. Among documents we have found a copy of the address given on this occasion by one of the boys on behalf of his companions.

Distinguished Guests:

The sad news that the Holy Father was in straitened circumstances filled us with sorrow, all the more so since we realized we could not help him. Yet we wanted to give some token of our esteem and filial

love for the Supreme Pontiff, our common Father, successor of St. Peter and Vicar of Jesus Christ. We all did our best to offer him the modest pittance of the poor. We have collected thirty-three *lire*. Really, it is an insignificant sum, considering the purpose for which it is intended, but surely it will be kindly accepted if our age and social position as poor young apprentices are taken into account.

Respected guests, we know that you are good-hearted, and therefore will welcome our humble offering. You know that we would give much, much more, if only we could.

If the Holy Father could hear us now, we would like to tell him unanimously with profound respect, "Most Holy Father, this is the happiest moment of our lives. We boys consider ourselves lucky to be able to give you this token of our love. We declare ourselves your loving sons. Despite the efforts of the wicked to entice us from the unity of the Faith, we recognize in Your Holiness the successor of St. Peter and the Vicar of Jesus Christ. Totally convinced that whoever is not united with you shall be eternally lost and that no one separated from you belongs to the true Faith, we declare our firm will to live and die forever united to this Church of which you are the visible head, and to sacrifice all we have, our very lives if need be, to prove ourselves worthy sons of so loving a Father."

The youthful orator ended his speech as follows.

Illustrious guests, please accept these simple, sincere words coming from our very hearts. We trust that your great goodness will make up for our insufficiency.

Following this stirring address a group of boys sang a hymn in honor of Pius IX which the enterprising Father Hyacinth Carpano had taught them.²

The distinguished guests were deeply touched by the speeches, the offering, and the singing; in turn, they addressed a few words of praise and encouragement to the boys. On taking their leave, they said, "Such noble sentiments deserve to be brought to the attention of the Holy Father, and this we shall do."

Marquis [Gustavo] Cavour, then a contributor to *L'Armonia*, described this ceremony and praised the Oratory in a special article which we reproduce here.

² Omitted in this edition. [Editor]

A charitable institution, of which the Catholic Faith is an inexhaustible source, had been doing very well for several years in the poorest suburb of this city, inhabited almost exclusively by people who struggle daily for a precarious living and who are often destitute in time of illness or unemployment. In his concern for the welfare of souls, a zealous priest, Don Bosco, has dedicated himself entirely to the merciful task of saving a great number of boys of this neighborhood from vice, idleness and ignorance. Because of the poverty or neglect of their parents, these lads were destined to grow up with no spiritual or mental training. To meet this need Don Bosco has set up house in some small rented homes adjoining a little meadow and opened the [so-called] Oratory, placing it under the patronage of the great bishop of Geneva, St. Francis de Sales. To this Oratory he has attracted poor and neglected boys; in its modest quarters he gives them that training in religion which is the greatest need in life. Don Bosco teaches them to carry out their duties, practice their Faith, and live peacefully and sociably with others. At the Oratory the boys also learn reading, writing, and arithmetic, and in an adjoining playground they play games and enjoy other pastimes. After class and on Sundays and holy days they spend their leisure time in a way that benefits them physically and spiritually, especially at their young age. Don Bosco is always with them as their teacher, companion, exemplar and friend.

On Sundays and holy days some four hundred boys gather on [Don Bosco's] premises, which are plain enough and hardly attract attention; but the good being done there is truly impressive. All these boys, who for the most part would grow up ignorant and dishonest, are being brought up to lead upright and useful lives. Their tireless teacher and friend spares no effort in placing them in apprenticeship with some good employer. A boy recommended by Don Bosco is readily accepted because employers know that Don Bosco's recommendation is a guarantee of his upright character. Many adolescents set out every year from this nursery of honest workers. They are able to stand on their own feet, and we have reason to believe that all their lives they will stay on the path of virtuous living begun in their early years.

We must also add that boys who are orphaned or destitute through family misfortune find a home in this very place and receive food and board until they are able to make a living on their own.

On the feast of the Annunciation two members of the "Peter's Pence Committee" were invited to the Oratory by its worthy founder to receive a donation that those good, exemplary youngsters wanted to contribute to the Holy Father's fund. Informed of the tragic events at Rome and

of the forced exile of the pope, these boys wished to add their mite to the funds now being collected by the faithful in Turin as a token of filial love for the Vicar of Christ.

The two representatives of the "Peter's Pence Committee" were warmly welcomed by the director of the Oratory where so much good is done, and were deeply moved when a lively crowd of smiling youngsters encircled them. Two boys came up to them, and while one placed on a table the thirty-three *lire* they had collected, the other delivered a simple, but moving address, part of which we report below.

After quoting a sample passage, the marquis continued:

The Committee representatives were deeply stirred by the speech delivered with eloquence and deep feeling by a youngster who in daily life is a hod carrier but yet harbors such generous, noble sentiments. In reply they told the boys that the "Peter's Pence Committee" was proud to have them as partners in an undertaking which was a profession of that Faith which so elevates men regardless of their social condition. Then they asked the young orator for a copy of his speech, which they forwarded to the apostolic nuncio. The latter was highly pleased and promised to send it to the pope's pro-secretary of state as evidence of the boys' highly commendable sentiments, all the more praiseworthy when one considers their social condition and their antecedents.

We have dwelt somewhat at length with this undertaking because we consider it a newsworthy event deserving our highest praise.³

The contribution of thirty-three *lire* and the last part of the boy's speech were mentioned also in the [Italian edition of the] *Histoire Universelle de l'Eglise Catholique* by René François Rohrbacher. After describing several moving gestures of solidarity with the pope in his hour of need on the part of the poor, the author introduces the Oratory boys' donation as follows.

... Even more impressive is the fact that a group of very poor young apprentices, by saving a few *soldi* every day, were able to gather the modest sum of thirty-three *lire*, which they gave to the "Peter's Pence Committee" with a deeply moving letter.⁴

³ *L'Armonia*, No. 40, 1849.

⁴ See Vol. XV, p. 558 of the Sixth Italian Edition.

CHAPTER 47

The Pope's Appreciation

ON March 26, [1849] the very day after the Oratory boys sent the exiled pope their token of love, sorrow and consternation struck Turin in the tragic news of the defeat of Charles Albert's army. After several skirmishes on the banks of the Ticino, seventy-five thousand Austrians finally managed to cross the river through the negligence or treachery of General Girolamo Ramorino who was to have prevented such a crossing. The maneuver cut the Piedmontese army in two, and the Austrians, under Marshal Radetzky, marched against a larger concentration of the Piedmontese army camped midway between Mortara and Vigevano. After an engagement on March 21 at Sforzesca, the Austrians succeeded in storming Mortara. Two days later, Piedmontese and Austrians met in a decisive battle at the walls of Novara. Both armies fought gallantly, but toward evening the Piedmontese were forced to retreat.

Throughout the fierce fighting Charles Albert fearlessly spurred his men on. Once he realized that all his hopes were dashed and a truce was imperative, he decided to end his royal career with a final sacrifice, in order to pave the way for a more favorable peace treaty. On the same evening, in the presence of his two sons, Victor Emmanuel and Ferdinand, and his adjutants, Charles Albert abdicated in favor of his older son, who became Victor Emmanuel II. He then embraced and kissed each of those present, thanked them for their services to him and to their country, and left Novara after midnight in the company of two servants. Some days later he was reported to be in Oporto, Portugal, which he had chosen for his voluntary exile.

Bergamo and Como had completed preparations and were all set to rebel when they heard of the defeat at Novara. Immediately

they called everything off. The Brescians instead, misled by false reports of a Piedmontese victory, revolted against the Austrians, but were forced to surrender after eight days of heroic struggle.

That day, March 26, the new king signed an armistice with Radetzky, agreeing to, among other things: a peace treaty; the withdrawal of Piedmontese troops from the duchy of Modena, the territory of Piacenza, and several parts of Tuscany; and the recall of the Adriatic fleet. Fiery newspaper articles demanded the continuation of war; violent speeches in Parliament denounced armistice; mobs roamed the streets shouting curses against the alleged traitors; sorrow and terror filled the homes of peaceful citizens. Greater tragedy could not have struck had the Austrians reached the gates of Turin. Victor Emmanuel II got to the city in the darkness of night, and on March 29 issued his first proclamation to the people, telling them of his ascent to the throne. Significantly he did not follow the hallowed custom of inaugurating his new reign by invoking God's assistance. On March 29 he took his oath of allegiance to the Constitution, dissolved Parliament, and called for new elections.

Turin was again plunged into gloom on April 1 by news of a revolt in Genoa, provoked by the republicans, who falsely alleged that Piedmont had ceded Genoa to Austria. The insurrection was quickly put down by [General] Alfonso Lamarmora, who rushed there from southern Liguria with eight thousand men. News from other parts of Italy was no more encouraging to the liberals. Emboldened by the assistance of 140,000 Russians overrunning Hungary, Austrian troops marched into the duchies of Parma and Modena and restored their dukes to power. In Tuscany the populace, weary of oppression, had driven the republicans from power and recalled Leopold II to his throne from Mola di Gaeta. Pushing through Tuscany, the Austrians attacked Leghorn at the beginning of May, scattering the rebels who had dug themselves in there in a last ditch stand. At the same time the Neapolitan troops seized Palermo on April 20 and subdued the whole of Sicily. All these events kept in great ferment political refugees. They kept pouring into Piedmont.

That year the St. Francis de Sales and the St. Aloysius oratories were not in the least bothered by demonstrations in the city. On April 8, the boys in both oratories celebrated Easter, after attend-

ing the Lenten catechism classes undisturbed. This was due not only to Don Bosco's prudent, unceasing endeavors, but also to certain amazing happenings which periodically were said to have taken place and which made the boys look upon Don Bosco as a truly extraordinary person.

Joseph Buzzetti told us that once while he was listening to Don Bosco in the Oratory chapel, the boy sitting next to him, a certain Vincent Bosio, a faultless, innocent youngster, kept staring astonishedly at something and, turning to Buzzetti, exclaimed, "Look at Don Bosco!"

"What for?" he whispered back. "He's only talking about church history."

"No, no, not that! Don't you see? His whole face is shining! It's shooting out rays all over!"

Buzzetti saw nothing and told the young boy that he was just imagining things! It was only with great difficulty that he could keep him quiet to the end of the sermon. Immediately after Mass, the youngster, still visibly excited, told his companions what he had seen.

The slow but steady growth of the Oratory was a clear sign of God's blessing. When Pancrazio Soave's lease expired, Don Bosco immediately signed a new contract with the proprietor, Mr. Francis Pinardi.¹ The deed describes the promises. We shall report it here so that the reader may notice some slight alterations made since 1846.

1. The premises consist of fourteen rooms: nine on the main floor, including one oblong room used as a chapel, and five on the upper floor, together with an attic.

2. A shed, or garage, linking said house to a wall on the north.

3. Courtyards facing east, west, and north; also a yard and strip of meadow facing south, with roofed-in fountain for laundering, and several trees.

The lease was for three years, from April 1, 1849 to March 31, 1852, at 1,150 *lire* per year. It was signed by Father [John] Borel and Francis Pinardi. Through his notary, the latter declared that he was leasing the property at a relatively low figure because he wanted

¹ See Vol. II, p. 333

to help the tenant's worthy enterprise. The document is dated June 22, 1849.

Don Bosco immediately started repairs on the dilapidated shed adjoining the eastern side of the house; it had previously served as a storeroom for lumber, a stable, and a garage. The shed was turned into a large hall for recitations and stage plays to be given especially during the winter, by knocking down a dividing wall, as we have already mentioned,² thus enlarging the chapel by almost half. Don Bosco gave much importance to recitations. Among the bills submitted by the Speirani Press to Don Bosco we have one for five hundred invitations to a recitation on church history and for an equal number to a second recitation on the same topic in December of the same year.

Expenses for these alterations, for rent, for church and school supplies, and for the boys' entertainment put Don Bosco in straitened circumstances, all the more so since the war had brought much poverty in its wake. But he never doubted for a moment the help of Divine Providence, ever confident that he would find the necessary means. He was never disappointed.

Once when Mr. Pinardi was pressing for an overdue rent of three hundred *lire*, Don Bosco asked for fifteen days' grace, but he had no idea of where or from whom he would get the money. Some time during those fifteen days, Chevalier Renato d'Agliano called on Father Borel and asked if he knew a certain Don Bosco, a priest who took care of poor boys. He explained that he was quite eager to contribute to his undertaking, although he had never met him. After Father Borel assured him that Don Bosco was indeed sacrificing his life for the Christian education of youth, the gentleman gave him three hundred silver *scudi* wrapped up in a roll, the exact sum Don Bosco needed!

From that day on, this benefactor took a great liking to Don Bosco; for several years after, he had a big basket of bread delivered to the Oratory boys every week. Father [John] Borel and Father [Felix] Reviglio are sources of this information; the latter even ate that bread.

Another reason why the boys lovingly obeyed Don Bosco without question was his personal example. To have sincere love and

² See Vol. II, p. 417. [Editor]

obedience from one's own subjects, one must first obey his own superiors. Don Bosco was all for the pope. He often talked about him and had prayers said for him in exile at Gaeta, to soften the pope's grief over the excesses of the revolution in the Papal States. Complete anarchy reigned in Rome. The most fanatical revolutionaries, rabid foreign agitators, heretics, apostates and socialists, driven by an implacable hatred of Catholicism, had flocked to Rome from all parts of Italy. They assaulted priests and honest citizens and robbed them, to enrich themselves or increase the government's revenue. Assassinations were frequent in other provinces of the Papal States, and many bishops were thrown into prison. On April 20, 1849, Pius IX again appealed to the European powers as he had on December 4, 1848. Spain invited France, Austria, Portugal and Bavaria to discuss ways and means of restoring the pope to his throne; Piedmont and England rejected the invitation, but the other nations accepted. Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, president of the French Republic, would have refused too, had it not been for the pressure of his cabinet. Unable to prevent Austria from coming to the pope's assistance, he tried to get ahead of her by sending an expeditionary force to Rome. His aims were to reach some agreement with the Roman Republic rather than overthrow it, arrange for a plebiscite, seize leadership of the Italian movement for independence, and limit the prerogatives and freedom of action of the pope. Thus he would save, at least in part, the revolution, and establish a liberal constitutional government in Rome. In short, he wanted to bring about a moderate revolution. Mazzini's followers, however, to their own sorrow, did not see Napoleon's aims, although he spelled them out clearly enough, and the French generals were too loyal to go along blindly with such intrigues. On April 25, fifteen thousand French troops landed at Civitavecchia; on April 30, General Oudinot reached the outskirts of Rome with six thousand men, but his first assault was repulsed. On April 28, the Spanish fleet hoisted the papal flag over the fortress of Torre Gregoriana and landed a contingent of soldiers who occupied Terracina with Neapolitan troops. King Ferdinand then marched eight thousand troops to Palestrina, where a skirmish took place with Garibaldi's forces. An armistice followed; but since Napoleon had barred King Ferdinand from any part in it, he withdrew, but not without

first driving back the republican troops twice. Toward the end of May, nine thousand Spaniards landed in Gaeta and occupied Piperno, Frosinone, and Velletri, setting up a front from Palestrina to Spoleto, through Rieti and Terni. Prior to that, the Austrian army had set out from Castelfranco and had forced Bologna to surrender on May 16, after launching an attack on the city with sixteen thousand men. The victorious Austrian troops pushed on to Rimini, raising the papal flag wherever they went. On May 24, they besieged Ancona and forced it to surrender on June 19. Five thousand additional Austrian troops had come to Macerata from Tuscany, through Perugia and Foligno, to aid in the siege of Ancona.

Meanwhile, Pius IX, in the midst of his tribulations and concern for the rights of the Church and the liberation of his oppressed people, had received the small but loving contribution of the Valdocco Oratory boys. It pleased him immensely, and he remembered it all his life. Close associates of his described his reaction as follows.

The young boys' donation of thirty-three *lire* and the simple, sincere words accompanying it touched the heart of Pius IX. He personally wrapped both money and accompanying letter together, carefully identified them with a notation, and said that he wished to put the money to a specific use. He then instructed James Cardinal Antonelli to ask the nuncio in Turin to express the pope's pleasure to the donors for their gift.

Shortly thereafter, [Archbishop Anthony] Antonucci addressed the following letter to Don Bosco.

Turin, May 2, 1849

Very Reverend Father:

In presenting to His holiness through His Eminence [James] Cardinal Antonelli, another contribution to the Peter's Pence Fund, delivered to me by Marquis Fabio Invrea and Marquis Gustavo Cavour on behalf of the committee formed for this purpose in the city of Turin, I took it upon myself to single out for His Holiness' attention the donation of thirty-three *lire* from your boys. I also mentioned the sentiments they expressed in presenting their contribution to the committee.

In a reply dated April 18, His Eminence was pleased to inform me that the Holy Father was moved by the loving and sincere contribution of these young apprentices and by their words of filial devotion.

Would you kindly therefore tell them that the Holy Father was pleased by their offering, and considered it singularly precious since it comes from the poor; that he felt deeply consoled by seeing that they were already imbued with genuine reverence for the Vicar of Jesus Christ, a sign no doubt of the religious principles impressed upon their young minds.

As a token of his paternal benevolence, therefore, His Holiness imparts the apostolic blessing to you and to each one of your young pupils, while I express my own esteem and affection.

Sincerely yours,

Anthony B. [Antonucci]

Archbishop of Tarsus and Apostolic Nuncio

We can readily imagine how happy Don Bosco and his boys were on receiving this letter. It showed them that, regardless of the afflictions and tribulations connected with the government of the universal Church, the pope had graciously taken notice of their modest contribution. Their faces beamed with joy, and a rousing cry of "long live the pope! long live Pius IX!" reverberated throughout the Oratory.

An identical sum, under similar circumstances, was collected in the St. Aloysius Oratory by Don Bosco's co-workers. In this connection it is of interest to reproduce part of the article that appeared that year in the fifty-third issue of *L'Armonia*.

In our fortieth issue a learned, zealous contributor to this newspaper called the attention of the public to the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, founded here in Turin by the distinguished priest, Don Bosco, who, inspired by the loftiest charity, has devoted himself entirely to the training and education of poor boys. People soon came to realize the usefulness of this institution; it was not long before a number of humble, learned and saintly priests joined its founder to help him. New houses were established; boys and young men of the poorer classes were attracted. As a result, useful and upright members have been given to society, instead of burdening it with people who follow evil ways and give little hope for the future.

This is indeed a holy mission. In its exercise a priest truly reveals the splendor of his vocation and closely imitates our Redeemer, who, de-

lighted to be in the midst of children and chiding those who sought to keep them away from Him, was the first to give the example.

For this reason the names of Father [John] Vola, Father [John] Borel, Father [Hyacinth] Carpano, and Father [Peter] Ponte are dear to all. On Sundays and holy days several hundred boys gather around these priests, who give them religious and civic training in a small house near the royal Valentino Park.

We were deeply moved when we were asked to accept the donation of these good youngsters to the exiled pope, and we were impressed by their discipline and obedience to their superiors during playtime. The Holy Father will most certainly welcome their offering, and his blessing will surely help them grow in virtue and wisdom.

It would be a good thing if those who call themselves democrats were to visit this place where Christian charity labors unceasingly for social reform. It would do them good to see the work of these priests who, rejecting life's more attractive blandishments, sacrifice themselves to train better citizens for society. Let these democrats learn that not idle talk, but action is needed. Let them also learn a useful lesson by seeing the patience and hard work required of those who undertake the mission of educating people.

By instilling respect and love for the Holy See in his boys, Don Bosco gave Pius IX great comfort. A month later he tried to do even more. The Holy Father had decided to forbid the reading of certain books authored by priests who were being then greatly acclaimed, lest the imprudent be led into error. On May 30, 1849, the Sacred Congregation of the Index forbade the reading of Vincenzo Gioberti's *Il Gesuita Moderno* [The Modern Jesuit] and Antonio Rosmini's *Le Cinque Piaghe della Chiesa* [The Five Sores of the Church] and *La Costituzione Secondo la Giustizia Sociale* [The Constitution in the Light of Social Justice]. The decree was promulgated in Gaeta on July 6. Father Gioberti's reaction was insolent and impudent. "The censure of Gaeta," he wrote, "is both sickening and laughable. I do not want to waste my time on it. This prohibition puts me in good spirits."

But even though Gioberti's conscience did not bother him for refusing to submit to the decisions of the Holy See, there was one priest in Turin who prayed for him. We are convinced that Don Bosco's main aim in trying to reach many who were active in anti-religious parties was the good of their souls and of the Church.

He always bore in mind the Lord's injunction expressed in the Scriptures, "[To] each of them he gives precepts about his fellowmen." (Sir. 17, 12) He acted in accordance with it to the point of heroism. Thus, for a while, he hoped he could persuade Gioberti to submit. In fact, the philosopher—whatever his political motives were—had sided with the pope and was trying to restore him to his See. Moreover, since Gioberti had been repudiated by his own party and barred definitively from any influence in government, as well as from the honors which he craved, Don Bosco thought that a kind word in his bitter isolation might find a healing response in the heart of this controversial priest. It required an intense spiritual fortitude to approach a man of such fierce pride, who had done so much for the revolution, but Don Bosco did not hesitate. He recited a Hail, Mary, as was his custom in similar circumstances, and called on Gioberti with Father Borel. After referring to the hopes that Gioberti had aroused among the faithful by his defense of the pope, Don Bosco beseeched him to console the Holy Father and earn for himself merit and glory in the eyes of God and the Catholic world by accepting the decree of the Sacred Congregation of the Index and retracting his errors. Gioberti, a man of unfailing courtesy, was not offended by Don Bosco's impromptu intervention, but in a tone which did not admit further discussion, he stated, "My retraction consists in not replying! My silence should be enough!" The interview was over. Father Michael Rua testified to this charitable attempt by Don Bosco and to Gioberti's reply.

As he deplored the unhappy philosopher's stubbornness, Don Bosco was shocked to find that all his books had somehow found their way into the Oratory. He had accepted an ex-seminarian and this young man, a great admirer of Gioberti, had bought all the philosopher's works for 120 *lire*. Ever obedient to the Church, Don Bosco did not allow the ex-seminarian to keep those books in his possession. As for himself, Don Bosco deleted from subsequent editions of his *Storia Ecclesiastica* [Church History] all references to Gioberti's name and some paragraphs which he had quoted for very grave reasons. Several years later, at a symposium in honor of St. Thomas [Aquinas], the opening speaker took as a text some statements of Gioberti. At the end of the session Don Bosco, who

was presiding, told him privately, "It is unwise to mention certain people or cite them as authorities. This only arouses in the listeners a desire to read their books, and they will certainly derive no benefit from them."

Did Don Bosco's visit make any impression on Gioberti? Some time later Gioberti moved back to Paris, but he never again knew a moment's peace. In his last days he was afflicted by anxiety-ridden dreams in which he saw strange, fearsome figures, heard indistinct murmurs of growling tigers, and had the feeling of clutching the hand of a skeleton. In his letters one can detect the torment that was his for having ignored the Holy See's condemnation.³ He died of an apoplectic stroke on the night of October 25-26, 1852. Beside his bed the *Imitation of Christ* lay open.

How happy he might have been for the rest of his life, had he followed the example of Father Antonio Rosmini who, as a good priest and religious, respectfully submitted to the decree banning his two books! That is why Don Bosco continued his friendly relations with the Rosminians, as the following letter to Stresa⁴ indicates.

Turin, June 5, 1849

Dear Father Fradelizio:

This morning I had the great pleasure of dining with your two envoys (not plenipotentiary) who are on their way to St. Michael's Shrine.⁵

I am enclosing twenty copies of my little book, *Il Sistema Metrico Decimale* [The Metric System];⁶ they sell for forty *centesimi* each. I am also enclosing a dozen copies of *Pensieri Ecclesiastici*, by an excellent priest of Turin. I am anxious to see these books circulate.

I have two young men (one really not so young) who have been begging me to recommend them for admittance to your Institute of Charity. One is a tailor and claims to know his trade well, but he is about forty. The other is seventeen, has attended a course in humanities, and is related to the Blessed Sebastian Valfrè whose name he bears, together with some good qualities. I think he is a boy of excellent character.

³ Pallavicino, *Memorie*, Vol. II, pp. 586ff; Massari, *Ricordi e Carteggio*, Vols. II, III, IV.

⁴ Headquarters of the Rosminians. [Editor]

⁵ See Vol. I, p. 368. [Editor]

⁶ See Vol. II, pp. 374ff. [Editor]

I thank you for the many books you have been sending me recently. I really enjoyed reading them. Do let me know if I can help in any way, and I will be delighted to be of service.

Your affectionate friend,

Don Bosco

The answers he received mentioned the ordeal through which the Institute of Charity was going.⁷ In his next letter, recommending the promotion of his own book *Il Cristiano Guidato alla Virtù* [The Christian Guided in the Practice of Virtue]⁸ Don Bosco added a few words of encouragement.

December 5, 1849

Dear Father Fradelizio:

I have received several letters from you and from several of my boys,⁹ for which I thank you all heartily.

Since we are at the end of the year I think it opportune to give you a financial statement, which I enclose. It may have errors, since I very often jot things down in a hurry; I shall abide by your figures.

I am sending the first five issues of the association's newspaper¹⁰ for Father Paoli. For subsequent issues he can apply to the secretary of the bishop of Novara, who handles it for the whole diocese.

Now, coming to ourselves. What are people saying about the Institute of Charity or about the prohibition of Father Rosmini's books and his submission? Whether publicly or privately, people talk very favorably about the Institute of Charity. The Rosminians are praised for the education they give, and are admired particularly (I am quoting literally) for following the established curriculum and not trying to impose books which they themselves have authored. The same cannot be said of others who by so doing arouse envy, jealousy, and perhaps even rivalry.

As regards our excellent Father Rosmini himself, it seemed as though the ban would tarnish his reputation, but this was not so. His books showed him to be a learned philosopher, but by his submission to the

⁷ A reference to the Holy See's condemnation of two of their founder's books. [Editor]

⁸ See pp. 268ff. [Editor]

⁹ Boys Don Bosco had sent to their novitiate. [Editor]

¹⁰ Perhaps they were issues of *L'Istruttore del Popolo* with which Don Bosco had merged his paper, *L'Amico della Gioventù*. Cf. *Epistolario di S. Giovanni Bosco*, S. E. I., Torino, 1955, Vol. I, Letter 23, p. 27. [Editor]

Holy See he has also revealed himself a truly Catholic philosopher. He showed himself a man of conviction, and proved that the respect which he professed all along for the chair of Peter was genuine, not merely a show. This cannot be said of other distinguished persons who were once in the public eye. As you can see, people are well-disposed toward your institute. For my part, I have always had and still have the sincerest and deepest respect for the Institute of Charity and its most revered founder.

Please give my heartiest greetings to my friends and my boys who are together with you. Should Father Rosmini be in Stresa already, please give him also my humble regards. He does not know me personally, but still I hold him in the highest esteem.

Love me in the Lord, and if I should be able to do anything for you please let me know.

Your most affectionate friend,
Father John Bosco

CHAPTER 48

A Symbolic Gift

IN the last chapter we stated that one reason why the boys loved and respected Don Bosco was his love for his own superiors. After the pope he recognized the bishops as successors of the Apostles, charged by the Holy Spirit to govern the Church of God under the Roman Pontiff. Don Bosco constantly preached this doctrine to his pupils, insisting on the need of obeying their orders. One day he reproached a priest who admitted in the middle of the year that he had not yet read the instructions of the diocesan ordo.¹ "If you don't read these things, what other important things do you read?" Don Bosco asked him.

If ever a bishop arrived unannounced at the Oratory, Don Bosco always welcomed him with utmost cordiality and respect, not just for courtesy's sake but as a strict obligation of his own, and he immediately gave orders that all receive him warmly. If notified of such a visit in advance, he joyfully passed the news on to the boys, stressing the respect due to a bishop's sacred character. On such occasions he would put the whole Oratory in motion, setting the example himself in preparing or having others prepare the entire program. Sometimes he would put together a musico-literary entertainment. If the bishop planned to say the boys' Mass, he would exhort them to receive Communion. The visit was always a red letter day; the boys would receive the bishop with hearty applause, the band often adding its strains to the cheerful reception. Don Bosco knelt on greeting the bishop and then accompanied him through the house, biretta in hand. Since he wanted such visits to be more frequent, he always invited a prelate to the principal feasts of the

¹ A liturgical calendar listing the offices and feasts of the Catholic Church for each day of the year. [Editor]

Oratory and for Confirmation. He would always consult them on meeting difficulties in his mission or in connection with any other important matter, and he deemed it a privilege to be of service to them. Thanks to his filial devotion and saintly life, more than a thousand episcopal visits took place at the Valdocco Oratory during his lifetime; the bishops came from all parts of the world, nearly always on matters concerning the welfare of the Church. Such visits began in 1848. The apostolic nuncio, [Archbishop] Matteucci was among the first; his friendship with Don Bosco was lifelong. During his stay at the Oratory as a scholastic, Father Ascanio Savio recalled the visit of Bishop [David] Riccardi of Savona, Bishop [Louis] Moreno of Ivrea, Bishop Balma, a missionary in India, and Bishop Cerretti, who came to administer Confirmation in 1851. The visitors generally gave a brief, affectionate talk to the boys, boarders and non-boarders, in church or outdoors, asking them to thank the Lord for having led them to that blessed place and exhorting them to live in keeping with the fatherly instructions and care given them by Don Bosco.

For these and similar reasons the boys felt unbounded love, respect, and gratitude toward Don Bosco. A prime occasion on which to manifest these sentiments was the feast day of St. John the Baptist.² In 1847 and 1848 the boarders were content to read several brief compositions expressing their good wishes, while the non-boarders brought him bouquets of flowers. After all, what more could these poor youngsters do? But [this year, 1849] love prompted them to greater things. Perhaps the collection for Pius IX and the receptions given to the visiting bishops showed them new ways of honoring Don Bosco.

Two boys, Charles Gastini and Felix Reviglio, had a bright idea. They secretly agreed together to save their tips and even some food money for several months. Their savings enabled them to purchase two silver hearts. They were uncertain just when to present their gift, because they were very keen on keeping it a secret so that it could be a real surprise to Don Bosco. On the very eve of the feast

² The titular of the Turin cathedral. Don Bosco had received at Baptism the name of the Apostle John, but the Oratory boys, believing his patron to be John the Baptist, began to keep his name day on this occasion. *See* Vol. II, p. 381. [Editor]

of St. John the Baptist the two lads, still not knowing when to present their gift, kept asking each other, "When can we give it to him?" Don Bosco's room was near the boys' sleeping quarters because he wanted to supervise them at all times. So when the others were fast asleep, Gastini and Reviglio got up and knocked on Don Bosco's door. In spite of the late hour, Don Bosco was still up and invited them in. He was surprised and deeply moved when the two youngsters gave him the two silver hearts and lovingly wished him a happy name day. The next morning the news got out, not without a tinge of jealousy on the part of the rest of the boys; they all resolved that the next year the whole Oratory would prepare a fitting celebration for the occasion. On this day, nevertheless, the Oratory echoed to songs³ which Father Carpano had composed and which the boys sang with great gusto on every occasion wherever they went.

In subsequent years a committee was formed for this purpose and all the boys, boarders and non-boarders, took up a collection to buy Don Bosco a gift. Then, on the feast day of St. John the Baptist, or on the eve if the feast fell on a Sunday, the boys would gather before the little house to honor him with music and speeches. In 1850 a delegation of the older boys went to Don Bosco's room and for the first time formally presented their greetings and gift. Don Bosco then walked out to the balcony for a tumultuous ovation from a thousand boys outside, expressing their filial, sincere devotion, truly the fruit of Christian love. He thanked them for their greetings and gifts, and then the band led the boys in a song. The same program was followed the next few years; in addition, the young boarders always prepared their own informal musico-literary entertainment. Eventually this celebration became more solemnized with intensive preparation, gifts, reading of compositions, individual letters from boys expressing their gratitude, promises, petitions, requests for advice, and, above all, their deep affection. Don Bosco always treasured them. From 1849 on there was always a new song to Don Bosco, set to music by some expert composer. The feast of St. Aloysius was kept either before or after that of St. John the Baptist.

³ See Appendix 9. [Editor]

After these celebrations Don Bosco usually went to his own annual spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine ⁴ [near Lanzo] where Father Cafasso wanted him at all costs. Succeeding Father Louis Guala as shrine director and retreat master, Father Cafasso was carrying out the former's plans: completing the road to the shrine, increasing the accommodations for the retreatants, building a wing on the eastern side, rebuilding with finished stones the steps to the church. Don Bosco felt completely at home at the shrine in Father Cafasso's company. During his retreat he reflected, heard many confessions, and with his benefactor and spiritual guide firmly decided to lay the groundwork for his own religious congregation.

Back in Turin, Don Bosco made preparations for the usual spiritual retreat to be held in July for his young boarders and some non-boarders. Father Vola, who [back in 1846] had donated his watch to Don Bosco when he had met him and his mother on their way to the Pinardi house,⁵ owned at this time a beautiful villa in the hills of Moncalieri ⁶ near Santa Margherita. Here the Blessed Sebastian Valfrè used to spend some time to refresh himself spiritually and physically. Father Vola invited Don Bosco to bring some of his boys there for their spiritual retreat. A chapel was set up and Father [Louis] Botto and Father [John] Vola preached, while Don Bosco presided, gave a few talks, and nightly addressed an exhortation to the boys. The first retreat, attended by twenty-eight boys, was held the first week of July. The second began on Monday, July 23, and ended on Saturday, with thirty-nine boys in attendance: two of them were from Moncalieri, four from Cambiano, and four from Chieri. Don Bosco recorded the names of [nearly] all these boys, and we have preserved his list as a precious souvenir of this occasion.⁷ Since the house was rather small for the number of retreatants, even the attic and the space under the staircase was occupied. The rooms lacked even the most essential furniture. Describing the retreat in later years, Don Bosco loved to tell a string of anecdotes about the sleeping and eating arrangements, recalling how the boys good-humoredly coped with the inconveniences and minor hard-

⁴ See Vol. II, pp. 96f, 112f. [Editor]

⁵ See Vol. II, p. 409. [Editor]

⁶ On the hills overlooking Turin. [Editor]

⁷ See Appendix 10. [Editor]

ships. Benches, two chairs, a board, a blanket on the floor, a straw mattress made up their beds.

Sunday, July 15, fell between these two retreats. On this day French troops, after lengthy negotiations and fierce clashes, forced their way into Rome and hoisted the papal flag over the city; however, they allowed the leaders of the revolutionary parties to escape. General Oudinot immediately sent the keys of the Eternal City to the pope.

Don Bosco and his boys rejoiced at this news, but it was soon followed by another event which brought them deep grief, the death of Charles Albert. Under the weight of misfortune and the worsening of an old illness, Charles Albert died a holy death on July 28, in Oporto, comforted by the last rites of the Church. Don Bosco had prayers said for the deceased sovereign, whom he greatly loved and respected, and who often befriended and helped the Oratory. His grief was tempered by hope, since he knew that the king had been deeply devoted to Our Lady of Consolation [the Madonna of Turin] and very generous toward the poor. He often came to Don Bosco's mind as a beloved memory. Once, many years later, he told us of an interesting nightlong dream in which the king figured.

I seemed to be walking down an avenue on the outskirts of Turin when I suddenly saw King Charles Albert coming toward me. He was smiling, and stopped to greet me.

"Oh, Your Majesty!" I exclaimed.

"How are you, Don Bosco?"

"Quite well; and I'm delighted to meet you."

"In that case, why not accompany me on my walk?"

"Gladly!"

"Let's go then!"

We began walking into town. The king wore no sign of his rank but was dressed in a simple off-white suit.

"Well, what have you got to say about me?" the king asked.

I answered, "I know that Your Majesty is a good Catholic."

"Well, to you I am even more," rejoined the king. "As you know, I have always had a special liking for your work, and I always wanted to see it prosper. I would like to have helped you much more, but the crises I went through prevented me from doing so."

"In that case, Your Majesty, I should like to ask you a favor."

"Speak up."

"Would you be prior⁸ for this year's feast of Saint Aloysius at the Oratory?"

"I'd gladly accept, but don't you think it would stir too much talk? There is no precedent for it, and I don't think it would be wise to set one. However, we shall see to it that you have your wish, even if I am not present."

We continued talking of other matters until we neared the shrine of Our Lady of Consolation and what appeared to be an underground entrance almost at the foot of a lofty hill. The tunnel was very narrow and ran uphill. "We have to go through here," the king said. Then, dropping to his knees and lowering his forehead almost to the ground, he began to inch his way up almost prostrate; then he disappeared from my view. As I stood at the entrance, peering into the darkness beyond, I woke up.

We later checked on the date of that dream and discovered that the Oratory had shortly afterward received a substantial donation from the Royal House. Don Bosco, like Piux IX and the Venerable Cottolengo, had understood Charles Albert. Don Bosco's boys several times had the honor of singing the Requiem Mass, on the anniversary of the king's death, in the cathedral of Turin.

But let us resume our narrative. Since Archbishop Frasoni was still in exile, the bishops of Piedmont opened a five-day episcopal conference at Villanovetta in the diocese of Saluzzo, on July 25, to prepare themselves for the fierce struggles which they sensed in the offing. This is not the place to discuss their decisions; we shall limit ourselves to the aspects of this convention which were of concern to Don Bosco. The episcopal conference ordered public prayers that the pope be inspired to proclaim the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. Through Father Felix Reviglio we know that such prayers were offered at the Oratory without delay, because Don Bosco was very eager to see the Blessed Virgin crowned with this new merited diadem.

The conference also appointed a committee of bishops to compile a uniform catechism, using the catechism of Bishop Casati of Mondovì and that of Cardinal Costa of Turin as a basis. Don Bosco had long desired such action and had already discussed it with Archbishop Frasoni. The boys attending the Oratory came from

⁸ An honorary temporary title bestowed on prominent benefactors of the Oratory. They usually responded by treating the boys. [Editor]

every province and diocese, and a uniform text was needed to avoid confusion when the boys returned to their own dioceses and found the truths of Faith expressed in a different manner. Unfortunately this project was not carried out at this time.

The bishops of Mondovì and Ivrea were appointed to study a plan for printing and distributing good books to counteract the teachings of an irreligious press against Faith, Church authority, and morals. It was at this time that Don Bosco began to plan the *Letture Cattoliche* [Catholic Readings] and to discuss his project with Bishop [Louis] Moreno on his frequent visits to the bishop at Ivrea, or whenever the latter was a guest at the Oratory.

We shall add that Don Bosco had another reason for being thankful to God; he had been able to weather political and religious upheavals without compromising himself or his priestly office. His charity toward men of all persuasions made him beloved by all who were not wholly blinded by evil. When Venice, despite months of heroic resistance, again fell under Austrian rule on August 24, Don Bosco generously extended aid and comfort to several families of Venetian refugees and exiles. This earned him the favor and even the protection of a great many liberals in Turin, as is proven by an article in the *Giornale della Società d'Istruzione e d'Educazione* [Journal of the Educational Association], Volume I, issues thirteen and fourteen, July 1849, Turin. The article was authored by Casimiro Danna, professor at the royal university and member of the party in power. After describing what had been done to improve public education, the professor wrote:

Thus while Racheli impresses the need for education on those parents who can afford to send their children to school, a man of no less generous spirit has concerned himself with the children of parents who either are so poor that they are unable to do so, or so backward that they neglect to provide even a minimum of education for their offspring, wallowing in the mire of ignorance—truly the lowest level of society. I am referring to Don Bosco's Sunday school. I cannot mention this priest without feeling a most sincere and profound veneration for him. He has opened an Oratory outside Porta Susa in the Valdocco neighborhood, and has named it the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales, not without reason or in vain. Even more than the name, the spirit of that ardent apostle of enlightened zeal has been breathed into this home by this

admirable priest, who has dedicated himself entirely to alleviating the sufferings of the poor through education. His glory consists in what he has done in the past, and does daily, thus proving how our religion is a religion of civilization. On Sundays and holy days he assembles some four to five hundred boys, eight years of age and over, in the Oratory playground, to keep them out of trouble and teach them Christian principles. He does this by keeping them busy in joyful, wholesome recreation, after they have attended religious services and devotions. In all things he is their pontiff and minister, their teacher and preacher, their father and brother, in the most exemplary spirit of holiness. He teaches them bible and church history, catechism, and the rudiments of arithmetic. He trains them in the metric system, and also teaches reading and writing to illiterates. All this he does for their civil and moral education. Nor does he neglect their physical education. The boys engage in calisthenics in the enclosed playground adjacent to the Oratory, and play with swings, stilts, *piastrelle*⁹ and marbles, thus growing strong and vigorous. He attracts crowds of boys to the Oratory not only by gifts of holy pictures, lotteries, and an occasional free meal, but by his cheerful countenance and his constant desire to brighten their young lives with the light of truth and mutual love. When one considers all the evil he spares boys, the vices he prevents, the virtues he implants in their hearts, and the resulting good they receive, it is hard to believe that this work should run into obstacles and opposition. From whom? From those who could be pardoned many shortcomings, but not that of ignorance. After all, education should be regarded as a most noble branch of the priestly ministry, and these same opponents should be thankful to Don Bosco. In no way does he try to keep these boys from their religious duties. Rather, he is all intent on promoting them among those boys who, abandoned by their parents, would never go to their parish churches, or even if they did, would still deprive themselves of the beneficial influence of catechists. The souls of many boys appear less precious, in the eyes of the world, if they are poor; on occasion, some apostolic laborers, especially in crowded cities, neglect to cultivate piety when these souls are hidden under rags and tatters. It is here that evil takes root; while judges pronounce heavy sentences against criminals plaguing society, wrongdoers are actually growing up within our cities. Several years old now, the Oratory had enjoyed the protection of our wise king, Charles Albert, who appreciated its immense contribution to public morality. The steady increase in the number of boys has necessitated the opening of another oratory. Named after St. Aloysius Gon-

⁹ Flat pebbles, slightly larger than pucks, used in a throwing game. [Editor]

zaga, it has been established at Porta Nuova between Viale dei Platani and Viale del Valentino, under the direction of Father [Hyacinth] Carpano, a devout, zealous, and worthy collaborator of Don Bosco. Yet these two oratories are but one in life, spirit, and purpose. A third oratory was also opened in Vanchiglia through the efforts of the assistant pastor of the church of Our Lady of the Annunciation, Father [John] Cocchis. I regret to say that, for reasons unknown to me, it has been closed.

But what gives Don Bosco every right to the city's gratitude is the hospice which he has opened on the same premises for the poorest and most ragged street urchins. Whenever he hears of or meets a homeless boy, he takes an immediate interest in him, brings him to the Oratory, feeds him, gives him clothes, shelters him, and finds him a job, thus preparing him to earn an honest livelihood. In this hospice he can educate both his mind and heart with greater probability of success. Several priests contribute to defraying the many expenses of this great work of charity, but the main expense is borne by this true minister of Him who declared Himself the loving refuge of troubled souls. What a wonderful example this priest has given on the use of wealth! It is not always wise to abandon all earthly possessions in one fell swoop, for in wise hands wealth may become an instrument of generous charity. True poverty consists in being detached equally from riches which one does not have as from those which one possesses.

Casimiro Danna

CHAPTER 49

An Important Decision

DON BOSCO was determined to have, in due time, priests of his own for his oratories and other vast undertakings. Young Michael Rua often heard him exclaim, "Oh, how much good I could do if only I had twelve priests at my disposal! I would send them out to preach our holy Faith, not only in the churches, but in the streets as well!" Whenever he glanced at a world map he would heave a deep sigh at seeing so many regions still lying in the shadow of spiritual death, and he would eagerly long for the day he could carry the light of the Gospel to places unopened by missionaries.

Years before, while still at the Convitto Ecclesiastico, he had tutored boys who he believed possessed the necessary aptitudes to be his future helpers. The first four were [John] Piola, Occhiena, Boarelli and [Louis] Genta. He had great hopes for them, but just as they were about to don the cassock they left him. He repeated this experiment a second time, and was again disappointed, after spending much time and effort. Dissuaded by their families, or for other reasons, the boys quit their studies and often the Oratory as well. Don Bosco also tried to persuade priests who came to teach catechism at the Oratory to form a community with him, pointing out to them how much this would promote the welfare of souls, but his exhortations fell on deaf ears.

How was he to achieve this purpose? Even if he had appealed to right-minded people in the world, he would not have found anyone to heed his call. Obedient to his mission, Don Bosco wanted to found a religious congregation, but in those stormy times everything conspired against it. Governments had engaged in a relentless war against religious orders, suppressing them and confiscating their

property. Several congregations had already been disbanded. Plays, novels, and tabloids smeared religious life with the most infamous calumnies, and cast ridicule upon it. People were deeply prejudiced against religious orders, and often expressed their contempt publicly. The very word "friar" rang with scorn and contempt. For the most part, even secular priests were hostile to monks for monetary reasons or out of jealousy.

Indeed, monks themselves bore the burden of religious life grudgingly and seemed to justify the criticism and abuse poured on them by the godless, by journalists, and by novelists. All this made vocations to the religious life hard to find.

Yet Don Bosco simply had to find them; he had to select the stones on which to build a great spiritual edifice, a vast religious community. That was his mission. The Holy Spirit clarified the mystery of that dream of wild beasts being transformed into sheep, and some sheep into shepherds.¹ It obviously meant that he had to seek his followers among the type of boys indicated to him. However, he realized that they too would turn their backs on him, should he make it clear from the very start that he wanted them to embrace the religious life. He had to act with mature caution in this matter, making slow but deliberate progress in winning them over unwittingly to this idea.

Starting a new religious congregation was a most arduous undertaking. The founders of the old religious orders had found among their followers men who were mature, virtuous, scholarly, and experienced in material and spiritual matters. They had a firm vocation ready for even a severe test, but in those days the world had praise for those who dedicated themselves to God.

Things were entirely different in Don Bosco's case. He had to found a congregation wholly from scratch, and so it was not so much a question of testing vocations as of creating them. If he wanted dedicated, learned co-workers, he first had to form them himself. As for experience, that was entirely out of the question; he had to impart it to them.

Alone, with no human means of support, he had to concentrate his efforts on this or that boy among the thousand attending the Oratory. He had to form that boy's character, train him to receive

¹ See Vol. II, p. 190f, 232ff. See also Vol. I, pp. 95ff, 316f. [Editor]

the sacraments often, and then teach him catechism and the rudiments of Italian and Latin grammar. Also he had to provide him with food, lodging, and clothes; send him on to higher studies; then prepare him for the clerical garb and appoint him to teach others who might follow in his footsteps while he was studying philosophy and theology until his priestly ordination. This was the plan that the Blessed Virgin had unveiled to him in his dreams, which he had been maturing in his mind for a long time now. Thus, step by step, he would form the personnel necessary to his mission.

During his spiritual retreat at St. Ignatius' Shrine above Lanzo, Don Bosco definitely decided to get started on this plan. It is for this reason that he had organized the above mentioned spiritual retreats for boys with Father Vola. The two retreats were attended by seventy-one boys, chosen from among hundreds in the two oratories. During the retreat Don Bosco carefully studied their characters and tried to discern signs of a priestly vocation in some of them. Of the large number he chose the three best: Joseph Buzzetti, Charles Gastini, and James Bellia. Their basic disposition, intelligence, goodwill, and exemplary piety seemed to offer good promise. He added a fourth to their number, Felix Reviglio, who had been unable to join the others for the retreat because of illness. Don Bosco's plan was to have them leave their jobs, to test their spirit of obedience for a few months to ascertain their true intentions, and then give them an education. Of the four, only Bellia had completed elementary school; the others had more or less learned to read and write before taking up a job.

One day in July, Don Bosco called together Buzzetti, Gastini, Bellia, and Reviglio, and said to them, "I need your help at the Oratory. Would you be willing?"

"What do you want us to do?"

"First, I will prepare you by teaching you elementary school subjects, then I'll start you on Latin. If it is God's will, some day you may be priests. Do you agree?"

"Yes, yes!" the youngsters replied in unison.

"But if you want to succeed, you'll have to get over some hurdles. You'll have to be as pliable in my hands as this handkerchief," and he took his handkerchief and began to fray it. Then he continued, "I must be able to do with you what you saw me do with my

handkerchief. In other words, I want your total obedience." The boys consented, accepted his proposal, and agreed to resume their studies.

Meanwhile, Don Bosco had several posters tacked here and there throughout the Oratory with the words, "Every moment is a treasure." Although he wished to make haste, he realized that his pupils' ignorance equaled their goodwill. Further, he fully realized that people accustomed only to manual labor would find any other occupation a wholly different world to live in. Hence, he planned to introduce them into their new world little by little. In August 1849, he asked Father Chiaves to teach them the elements of Italian grammar. The four youngsters went to his home near St. Augustine's Church for their lessons. Things went well the first month, and so Don Bosco himself started them on elementary Latin with a truly admirable patience. Thanks to steady teaching, not only at fixed hours but even during recreation and meals, within a month they learned the five declensions and the four conjugations, and started on some simple translations.

In mid-September Don Bosco took them with him to Becchi for a rest and change of scene. From Morialdo he wrote to Father Borel, who regularly took over the direction of the Valdocco Oratory during his absence.

Castelnuovo d'Asti, September 20, 1849

Dearest Father,

I know you would like to hear about our trip. We left Turin in the morning on the six o'clock train and arrived safely in Valdichiesa where we got off. When we reached the Savi farm, I had to witness a sad scene—the burial of a man slain by his own brother. Apparently the story is that, peacefully and otherwise, these two brothers had already divided their paternal inheritance, except for some fertilizer. A heated, abusive exchange between them got so out of hand that the elder brother lost his head, rushed at the younger, and stabbed him. The victim was only eighteen years old and unmarried; his brother, the murderer, twenty-four, is married and has children. These accursed quarrels! Another strange thing: a man was found dead in a wooded area only a little distance from here, his body half decomposed. He was a native of Chieri and, as rumor has it, half insane.

I was very ill on Monday and Tuesday but felt much better yester-

day; I hope my health will improve as the days go by. I think it will do you all a lot of good if you, Father Carpano, and Father Vola take a trip up here as we planned. The route is easy: Valdichiesa, Croce Grande, and Morialdo, that is, my house.

Everyone here is well, except for Gastini who still has a fever.

My mother and the boys join me in greeting you, Father Pacchiotti, Father Bosio, Father Vola, etc. Believe me always,

Your dear friend,

Don Bosco, leader of the street boys

P. S. You can entrust the entertainment program to Augustine. I think he will be able to manage it, especially if Arnaud will help him.²

While Don Bosco was at Castelnuovo, the archbishop's absence from Turin was ever more acutely felt, since he had now been out of the country far too long. The cathedral chapter, therefore, appealed to the government to recall him and guarantee his safety. Chevalier Edoardo della Marmora, a friend of Don Bosco and a frequent visitor to the Oratory, drew up a similar petition and presented it with 10,154 signatures to the minister of the interior. However, ever since the Gioberti Cabinet, the government had decided to keep Archbishop Frasoni from his see at all costs. Besides, a shameless, anticlerical press continued to heap slander and insults on his person. Despite this vicious campaign, the dauntless prelate went to Savoy as soon as he heard of the action taken on his behalf, and sent word for his residence in Pianezza to be readied. When the government got wind of this, it pressured Bishop [Andrew] Charvaz [of Pinerolo] to notify the archbishop that the king did not favor his return. In view of this, the archbishop stopped at the home of the bishop of Chambery.

This was the news that Father Borel sent in reply to Don Bosco, along with news of the Oratory. He asked to be excused for not coming to Morialdo, as he had to help the canons of Holy Trinity Church to gather signatures among the clergy for a carefully-worded petition to the civil authorities, requesting that the unjust ban on the archbishop be lifted, since it greatly impaired the efficient administration of the diocese.

² Hyacinth Arnaud, a pupil at the Oratory. [Editor]

Don Bosco sent the following note in reply.

Morialdo, September 25, 1849

Dearest Father,

I am all in favor of the petition for which you are soliciting signatures, and I want to add mine too, but I don't think that one day's delay will cause any harm. If the other priests come, without you, the visit won't be as good. I am glad to hear that everything is fine at the Oratory. I trust that the Lord will continue to bless it. Please tell Father Vola to give shorter sermons; otherwise fewer boys will come in the mornings. Greetings to our common friends. Believe me, with all my heart,

Your affectionate friend,
Don Bosco

From his very first day at Becchi Don Bosco did not interrupt the boys' teaching program. To his way of thinking, rest did not mean doing nothing. His pupils made progress, even unwittingly, merely by listening to their teacher. The subject of conversation at mealtime was usually quite varied; table talk included declensions and conjugations. For diversion, Don Bosco would take them on a walk to a neighboring village or to some vineyard for the vintage, but he never left out their lessons. Thanks to his spirit of self-sacrifice and his love-inspired energy, he was able to prepare his pupils to pass their grammar examinations by the end of October.

When, on August 11, 1889, a commemorative tablet was unveiled at Becchi near the house where Don Bosco was born, Father [Felix] Reviglio concluded his eloquent speech as follows.

Farewell, O hallowed places that recall the outstanding goodness of my noble benefactor. These vines, these meadows were the stands from which he taught his first sons the elements of Latin, to prepare them for the priestly ministry. At work, on walks, during meals, he taught us with admirable patience, making us repeat rules a hundred times over, impressing them on our minds with frequent exercises if necessary—and indeed it was often necessary—until we fully understood them. How often I tried to dodge him for fear of being interrogated. Yet he would call me gently to his side and give me some lines to translate, nouns to decline, verbs to conjugate. Although we were slow to learn, he never lost his patience. . . . Farewell, beloved house, where I experienced such

fatherly predilection, whose only purpose was to make me more persevering in doing good.

It was during this same autumn that Don Bosco met a fifteen-year-old boy who was one day to become a valued helper in many undertakings, a faithful witness of his virtues, and who was to die a missionary in distant Ecuador. Don Bosco had gone to Ranello, a hamlet in the township of Castelnuovo d'Asti,³ to buy grapes from Charles Savio, father of the cleric Ascanio. Mr. Savio had prepared a luncheon for the visiting boys, and while they were there he introduced Angelo, another son of his, to Don Bosco, and asked him to accept him at the Oratory. Don Bosco gladly consented, and the following year took the boy with him to Turin.

After the feast of the Holy Rosary, the boys left Becchi for Turin. Don Bosco was to follow them a few days later. One evening, as Don Bosco was going from Becchi to Buttigliera or, as others have it, from Capriglio to Castelnuovo, about half way along the main road, paralleling a dark, lonely, wooded area, he saw a young man sitting on a slope. The boy got up and came toward him, asking for money. He spoke threateningly; his request really was a demand. Unafraid, Don Bosco stopped and replied, "Take it easy, son."

"What do you mean, easy? Hand me over your money quickly, or I'll kill you!"

"I have no money," replied Don Bosco. "As for my life, God gave it to me and He alone can take it away."

A lonely spot, deserted, was an ideal place for murder. Although the boy's hat was pulled down over his face, Don Bosco recognized him as the son of a neighboring landowner. In fact, Don Bosco had taught the young man his catechism and heard his confession in jail in Turin. He had been released but a few days before upon Don Bosco's personal intervention with the attorney general. What with the darkness and his excitement, the youth had not recognized Don Bosco, who raised his head high and said in a low, reproving voice, "Why the nasty trade, Anthony? Is this how you keep your promises of only a few days ago near St. Augustine's Church? Didn't you swear never to steal again?"

³ See Vol. I, p. 20. [Editor]

The poor fellow now recognized Don Bosco. He hung his head in utter shame. "You're right," he said, "but, you see, I need money desperately. I'm ashamed to go back home. I had no idea it was you. I would never have pulled this on you. Please forgive me."

"That's not enough, son. You've just got to mend your ways. You're abusing God's mercy, and if you don't get on the straight path soon, I'm afraid it will be too late."

"I really want to mend my ways. I promise."

"That's not nearly enough, yet. You must begin at once by making your confession, because if you were to die now your soul would be forever damned."

"Yes, I'll make my confession."

"When?"

"Now, if you like. But I'm not prepared."

"I'll prepare you. And you must promise Our Lord never to offend Him again."

Don Bosco took the poor lad by the hand and went up the slope with him. There they came upon a little grove of trees. Don Bosco sat on a grassy mound and motioned the boy to kneel. Moved to tears, he obeyed and made a confession with every sign of true contrition. Then Don Bosco gave him a medal of Mary Immaculate and what little money he had and took him back to Turin. The boy had been imprisoned for stealing a watch, and his father had thrown him out of the house for having dishonored his family. After convincing him that from then on he had to lead an upright, honest life, Don Bosco found him a job. Thereafter the youth really changed his ways and eventually became a model Christian husband and father.

Don Bosco was back in Turin on October 12. On that day King Charles Albert's casket, having been landed at Genoa, arrived in Turin for a solemn requiem Mass in the cathedral, and was then escorted to the basilica of Superga for burial in the royal crypt. Also, Don Bosco had arrived in time to add his signature to the petition prepared by the canons of Holy Trinity Church, requesting the return of Archbishop Frasoni. Signed by more than a thousand priests, it was presented to the minister of justice on October 25, 1849. Don Bosco eagerly and lovingly awaited the return of his archbishop, with whom he had been in correspondence and from

whom he had received some financial help for the Oratory. In the register of alms and expenditures Father Borel recorded a contribution of a hundred *lire* from Archbishop Frasoni on February 5, 1849. His return was needed above all for his wise, steadfast leadership of the clergy. However, on October 15, the government further harassed the Church. It prohibited religious corporations or institutes from acquiring real estate, even that left to them by legacy, and forbade sales or long term leases without the previous authorization of the government, which could be obtained only after consulting with the Council of State.

CHAPTER 50

The Guardian Angel Oratory

IT is not easy to describe in an orderly manner the various new projects that Don Bosco undertook or completed at one and the same time. They were all directed to God's glory, but while some were basically along the same lines and interrelated, others had specific individual purposes. Among other things, Don Bosco, in the latter half of 1849, had busied himself with a third festive oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia.

Father [John] Cocchis had closed his oratory or boys' center at the time the war against Austria had been resumed. His boys, already trained to handle rifles and swords and feverishly anxious to fight, volunteered for the front and were accepted. About two hundred of them, accompanied by Father Cocchis, who did not have the heart to abandon them, left Turin armed with weapons supplied by the army. Romantically they dreamed of covering themselves with glory. Unfortunately, after a few days' march they reached Chivasso and then Vercelli, only to find neither ammunition nor food nor billeting quarters. Without orders from the capital, the commander refused to recognize them as soldiers. To make matters worse, news arrived of the crushing defeat of Novara. Since the battlelines were now beyond reach, the young volunteers had no choice but to retrace their steps. Left to their own resources, they turned in their weapons and hiked back to Turin. Along the way they begged food from the peasants, but these, taking them for highwaymen, drove them from their doors and even chased them through the fields. When at last, exhausted and famished, the frustrated young soldiers came in sight of Turin in full daylight, they hid behind hedges and in ditches alongside the road lest peo-

ple laugh at them. At nightfall they quietly returned to their own homes in twos and threes.

Father Cocchis, after living in hiding for some time, went to Rome, after its liberation by French troops, to offer his services to the [Sacred Congregation for the] Propagation of the Faith, but he changed his mind and returned to Turin on October 13. There, together with two other priests, Father Tasca and Father Bosio, he drew up plans for a hospice for poor young apprentices. He started by boarding two of them with the doorkeeper of his oratory in Borgo Vanchiglia, paying for their keep out of his own pocket. This was the cradle of the Istituto degli Artigianelli [The Young Apprentices' Hospice] which was later erected in Corso Palestro by Fater Cocchis' indefatigable co-workers, Father Robert Murialdo and Father Joseph Berizzi. Meanwhile Father Cocchis was running out of funds to pay the rent and feed the boys, whose number was increasing. Like Don Bosco, he had to find ways and means to get them food and clothing. This task, on top of his other priestly duties, made it impossible for him to reopen his oratory.

After a few months, Don Bosco and Father Borel, realizing the acute need of an oratory in that section of the city, discussed the matter with Father Cocchis and with his consent took over the house which he had already rented for that purpose. Then, with Archbishop Fransoni's written permission, they reopened the oratory and named it the "Guardian Angel Oratory".

It consisted of a large enclosed lot adjoining the owner's residence and had two sheds, one facing north, the other west, and a small two-room dwelling at the corner formed by the two sheds. The shed facing west had been extended to the south to form an enormous room. Don Bosco used this as a chapel and converted the adjacent tool shed into a sacristy. The rent agreed upon was nine hundred *lire* per year. We can scarcely realize the amount of work this new undertaking cost Don Bosco.

With the help of Father Louis Fantini, pastor of Annunciation Church, the Guardian Angel Oratory was opened on or about October 24, feast of St. Raphael, the archangel. Because of his great devotion to the Guardian Angels, Don Bosco established that this particular feast be solemnly celebrated in Borgo Vanchiglia every year. The same schedule, system and regulations which had worked

so well in the St. Francis de Sales and St. Aloysius oratories were in force here in regard to church services, practices of piety, games, and awards. This new oratory was somewhat like a younger brother of the other two, but it meant heroic patience and toil to those assigned to run it. They often felt the need of invoking the assistance of the Guardian Angels as Don Bosco had often suggested.

The old Borgo Vanchiglia was a cluster of hovels whose cracked walls, blackened by time, threatened to come tumbling down at any moment; it looked like a fortress manned by men hostile to any form of order, greedy for the possessions of others, driven by some fierce instinct to evil, ever ready to shed blood. Crime, poverty, and vice rubbed shoulders. In this neighborhood was born the notorious, feared "cocca" of Vanchiglia, which we have already mentioned.¹ No one dared set foot there after dark, not even the police. At night the area resembled a fortress which had raised its drawbridge, barring entry to anyone who was not a member of the gang.

Don Bosco's priests and catechists took their posts. The first director was Father [Hyacinth] Carpano, who had given up his post at the St. Aloysius Oratory, now greatly expanded, to an excellent priest, Father Peter Ponte of Pancalieri, who ran it with fatherly care until 1851. Father Ponte was assisted by Father Charles Morozzo, later royal almoner and canon of the Turin cathedral, by Father Ignatius De Monte, by Attorney [Cajetan] Bellingeri, by Father Felix Rossi, and by Father Berardi.

The first troubles at the Guardian Angel Oratory came from the youngsters for whom it had been opened. Unappreciative, disobedient, going so far as even to insult and threaten the priest in charge, no better than their parents, they were wild and rough at their games, ready to run off or force their way out as soon as the bell rang for church services. The few who had been coaxed into church clowned during the sermon and catechism class and scoffed at the good advice given them. In short, they behaved so outrageously that all efforts exerted for their own good seemed to be wasted. Yet Christian love was to triumph in the end. By ignoring their insolence, by dint of unwavering kindness, by occasional gifts and new games, by celebrations, free meals, and refreshments, and by

¹ See p. 231. The word "cocca" is Piedmontese for "gang".

cultivating the more receptive boys, the oratory workers managed to control the youngsters. Don Bosco came to visit them several times; his persuasive and engaging manner completely won them over. Some boys began to approach the sacraments; slowly their example influenced others to do the same; eventually most of them came to love the oratory, as Father Felix Reviglio has told us. Father John Baptist Bertagna, now archbishop, [1903] taught catechism there for several years at Don Bosco's invitation. As a boy, Father Michael Rua visited the Guardian Angel Oratory several times in its early days and was surprised to see how many boys of all ages frequented it.

Father Carpano remained as director up to 1853, when he was appointed chaplain of the church of St. Peter-in-Chains, succeeding Father Tesio.² Father Carpano was followed by his assistant, Father John Vola. Don Bosco gave him Joseph Brosio, "the bersagliere," to help him with catechism and recreation. Brosio left us a written account of some disturbances that took place at that time.

I began by teaching calisthenics and military drills, which were then favorite pastimes of spirited youngsters. Nearly all the boys preferred them to other games, and we spent happy and peaceful Sundays together.

Some members of the "cocca" hated the oratory because it was breaking up their gang, so they came around every Sunday to start trouble by shouting taunts and insults, and even hitting the boys who came to our gatherings.

One Sunday, about forty, armed with stones, sticks, and knives, showed up to force their way into the oratory. Father Vola panicked. Realizing that they were itching for a real fight, I decided to meet them head-on, because we would have been done for if they had sensed our fear. I bolted the main gate and asked Father Vola to go to his room for safety. Then I got the bigger boys together, divided them into squads, and handed out wooden drill rifles. I instructed them that, if the "cocca" members should break in, at my signal they should attack from all sides and pound them without mercy. After herding all the little boys, whimpering with fear, into the church, I stood guard at the main gate to see whether it would hold out against the vigorous pushing.

Meanwhile the doorkeeper and other people in the street, who overheard the "cocca" members boasting of what they were going to do to

² See Vol. II, pp. 223ff. [Editor]

us, had run to call the cavalry troops from the nearby barracks. A squad came with drawn swords, along with four carabinieri; the "cocca" members immediately scattered.

When these toughs found out that I had been a bersagliere, and that I was all set to defend myself under any circumstances, they no longer tried close range insults. Instead, they hurled stones at us from a safe distance. We kept up our brave show and paid no heed to their threats; at the same time we refrained from appeasing them or taking revenge. Some of them eventually calmed down, started to come to the oratory, and even began to set a good example by their excellent conduct. Of the rest that kept up the harassment, some landed in jail and two were actually hanged at the Valdocco Circle³ near the St. Francis de Sales Oratory. Don Bosco visited them in prison and heard their confession.

Father John Vola was succeeded by Father [John] Grassino, who with great zeal furthered the new oratory's development. He was followed by Father Robert Murialdo, a devout, hard-working Turin priest, who was assisted by his cousin Father Leonard Murialdo and by the catechists whom Don Bosco sent from Valdocco every Sunday. He held this difficult post for several years, and the Guardian Angel Oratory prospered, thanks to his efforts and guidance. The oratory boys often numbered close to four hundred, at times over five hundred. In a short time the chapel had to be enlarged.

The "cocca" of Vanchiglia had called off its war against the Guardian Angel Oratory, since many of its members now attended it, but it was still powerful. The directors of the oratory had to be very cautious in dealing with them. Any overt suggestion to break with the gang would certainly be reported to the leaders and rekindle their old animosity. Although the gang had mellowed under the influence of the oratory, it still retained its old spirit of solidarity which could sometimes be dangerous. Both young and old were so closely bound by it that an injury to one was an injury to all and called for gang revenge. All of them carried a knife or a switch-blade. One Sunday, a catechist who had foolishly forgotten Don Bosco's many warnings to the contrary, punched a member of the gang. In a matter of moments the whole gang, en masse, stormed into the playground in search of the catechist who, luckily, had

³ See Vol. II, p. 291. [Editor]

been able to hide. To forestall reprisals, new catechists and assistants came the following Sunday. The priest who was the acting director that day wrote the following report:

That day we were keeping the feast of St. Aloysius. During services the boys were raising such a racket inside the chapel that the choir could hardly be heard. Shortly after services, a crowd of young toughs came along and began to saunter about the playground provokingly kicking the games around; several streetwalkers, who lived in nearby houses, leaned out over their windowsills and exchanged obscenities with the invaders. I got the smaller boys together and tried to distract them from the scandalous ribaldry by telling them a story, but my efforts were useless. The young toughs ambled toward me; a confrontation could not be avoided. They surrounded me and scornfully asked obscene questions. I didn't know how to get myself out of the tight spot. It would have been foolhardy to reprimand them because they were itching for a pretext to start a fight, so I tried a trick. They had questioned me in Piedmontese. I replied in Italian to make them think I did not understand their dialect. After a vulgar outburst of laughter in my face they finally gave up, or so I thought. While I did my best to reason with them, I smelled something burning. The boys behind me had put straw under my cassock and set it afire. I stepped aside and stamped out the fire. As there were about a hundred of them, there was nothing I could do but be patient. Controlling myself, I continued talking calmly to them, with my arms folded across my chest. Suddenly a little boy pushed his way through their ranks. He was no more than four years old and had a most angelic look. To my horror, I saw him remove two burning sheets of paper from my pockets. "These boys are going to burn me alive," I thought. After hastily calling on the Blessed Virgin for counsel, I said, "Well, I think we've chatted enough. How about a game now?"

"Did you hear that? The priest wants to play!" they said to each other in great fun. "Play what?"

"Let's play *barra rotta*,⁴ and split up into two groups," I suggested. We drew lots and I yelled to the other side, "We challenge you."

The game was somewhat slow in beginning, but the young toughs soon put their heart in it, trying to catch me; but they never succeeded. I kept dodging behind a pillar or a swing or a group of boys, and managed to keep the upper hand. The game grew very exciting and the spectators enjoyed it, applauding enthusiastically. "He's not a fast

⁴ A running and dodging game. [Editor]

runner," said the boys, referring to me, "but he surely knows how to dodge."

When evening came the gang members gradually drifted home, except for four of their leaders. I asked them into the doorkeeper's quarters and offered them wine, but they just stared at me and refused to drink. It was getting dark now and I had to return to Valdocco. They offered to escort me, and I accepted. On the way we spoke of the importance of leading an upright life, without making allusions to what had taken place. When we reached my door, they kissed my hand ⁵ and left saying, "We want to apologize for our rudeness today!" Poor boys! Good-hearted and intelligent, but spoiled by the bad example of some and the neglect of others!

Fortunately these disturbances were rare and did not hamper the normal routine. The spiritual benefits reaped by the boys attending this oratory were equal to those reaped by the boys of Valdocco and of the St. Aloysius Oratory. Father Michael Rua, as a student, seminarian, and priest, used to go there to supervise recreation, teach catechism, preach, and conduct church services. He was always cordially received and trusted by the boys; those days have remained among his fondest recollections. He and Joseph Bongioanni were its last directors.

The Guardian Angel Oratory prospered in that neighborhood under Don Bosco's enlightened guidance for about twenty years. On April 1, 1858, he renewed the lease for nine more years at six hundred and fifty *lire* per year. In 1866, when the new parish church of St. Julia was built almost entirely through the charity of Marchioness Julia Barolo, Borgo Vanchiglia, severed from the St. Augustine parish, became part of the new one. In her legacy, the marchioness had stipulated that the new parish should have an oratory where the neighborhood boys were to gather for Lenten catechism instruction and on Sundays and holy days. She left funds for this special purpose. When the St. Julia Oratory was opened, Don Bosco, believing that one oratory was more than sufficient for that area and not wishing to appear in competition, closed the Guardian Angel Oratory, toward the end of 1866. The priests and clerics who had been working there were transferred to the St.

⁵ A customary mark of respect toward priests in many lands. [Editor]

Joseph Oratory in Borgo San Salvatio where their services were more needed.

After this brief account of Don Bosco's third oratory in Turin, we must mention a precious friendship which he formed in 1849, and which continued to keep alive his interest in the foreign missions, especially on behalf of African children.

Father Nicholas John Baptist Olivieri of Voltaggio in Liguria, now a venerable servant of God, deeply concerned over the wretchedness of poor African slave children, but more worried over their poorer spiritual condition, had dedicated his whole life and wealth to their ransom. In May, 1849, he arrived in Genoa with a group of young slaves he had ransomed in Egypt. Since all his money had run out, he was trying a fund-raising tour through Italy and France to finance his apostolate. Upon arriving in Milan with a group of little Negro girls, he sought help in his quest for alms. A saintly priest, Father Biagio Verri, volunteered his services, and managed to collect substantial sums for this most worthy enterprise.

Father Verri and Don Bosco had become friends that very year. The young priest, deeply impressed by Don Bosco's piety, was a frequent guest at Valdocco. It was he who put Father Olivieri in contact with Don Bosco, who would have gladly embraced the whole world in his zeal to convert it to the true Faith. On October 29, 1849, Don Bosco took a young Negro, Alexander Bachit, into his hospice at Valdocco. In successive years he also sheltered other young Negroes ransomed by Father Olivieri in the slave markets of Alexandria of Egypt. He not only made them good Christians but also treated them with great patience and fatherly affection, realizing their loneliness and homesickness. So we have been told by Father [Michael] Rua and Father [Felix] Reviglio. He also interested himself in finding a home for the little Negro girls in an institution of Sisters; some he himself lodged in places where they could live the rest of their lives as good Christians.

Really, this was not the specific field of Don Bosco's vast apostolate, though we can say that it was the initial phase of a mission which Divine Providence was later to assign to him and his sons.

Young Negroes were always in his mind. In his dreams, as we shall narrate later, he saw himself surrounded by crowds of them

imploring his help for their eternal salvation. As a prelude to this happy mission, in our hospices, especially in Brazil, the sons of former African slaves sit side by side at table with the other children. As for the future, requests for Salesian missionaries to take care of the young have already been received from Liberia and from Haiti. They have been assured that their appeal will not be forgotten. One more thing; it was at the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales that a decision was made to continue the work of Father Olivieri. Old and exhausted, this saintly priest needed a companion to help him in this arduous mission. Father Biagio Verri felt inspired to be that companion, but before coming to a decision he wanted to spend some time in prayer to make sure of God's will. Without further ado, he left Milan and went to Turin to spend a few days with Don Bosco and talk it over with him. "It was here, in our chapel of St. Francis de Sales," Don Bosco wrote, "that Father Verri decided to join Father Olivieri in his mission of ransom. One evening he asked permission to spend the night before the Blessed Sacrament to ask our Lord's counsel. He remained in solitary, constant prayer until dawn, and by the time the chapel was opened he had made up his mind to dedicate his life to the eternal salvation of Africa's young slaves."

The voice of God undoubtedly had made itself heard that night because Father Verri sold all his possessions and turned the money over to Father Olivieri. In December, 1857, both left for Egypt. When Father Olivieri died at Marseilles in 1864, Father Verri continued the holy and arduous mission alone. Words are inadequate to describe the hardships of his incessant travels, his extreme poverty, and his endless begging throughout Europe. Other tasks also weighed heavily on him: finding a home for these poor children, providing for many of them at his own expense, patiently enduring the outbursts of their primitive temperaments, which at times made them unappreciative. Let it suffice to say that Father Verri ransomed about two thousand Negro children, and that the ransom alone cost five hundred *lire* each. Whenever he came back to Italy he never failed to visit the Oratory with his little Negro boys, some of whom found loving hospitality and instruction there. One young Negro girl was accepted by the Daughters of Mary, Help of Christians in their house at Nizza Monferrato.

At last, worn out by a long and painful illness, Father Verri came to Turin from France on October 23, 1884, and entered the Cottolengo Hospital, where he became bedridden following a stroke. Votive candles were lighted for his recovery at Our Lady of Consolation Shrine and in Mary, Help of Christians Church. People tried to see Don Bosco to seek his prayers for Father Verri's recovery, but since Don Bosco himself was ill in bed the message was left with one of his priests. Don Bosco was not able to visit his saintly friend, whose soul departed for heaven the night of October 25-26.

A note found in Father Verri's wallet was addressed to Don Bosco. It said:

July 2, 1882

Very Reverend Don Bosco:

If the Lord should reveal to you *serious* or *slight* things in my soul that are displeasing in His sight, for the good of my soul, I beg you not to keep it from me.

Devotedly in Jesus and Mary,

Father Biagio Verri

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

P. S. Please drop me a few lines in reply (at the Cottolengo Hospital).

At the bottom of the same page Don Bosco jotted down his answer. *Bono animo esto, et vade in pace. Noli temere.* [Be of good cheer and go in peace. Do not fear.]

Such was the regard that this heroic and virtuous priest had for Don Bosco's holiness! He himself was favored by God with graces and miraculous powers,⁶ but he was convinced that through Don Bosco he would learn God's own judgment in his regard.

⁶ *Cenni sulla vita del Sacerdote Biagio Verri*, Savona, Stabilimento Tipografico Andrea Ricci, 1887.

CHAPTER 51

The Multiplication of Chestnuts

THE Latin lessons, which had not been interrupted in Castelnuovo, continued at a fast pace after the boys' return to Valdocco. Don Bosco was anxious to bring his four pupils to the point where they would be able to don the clerical habit within the shortest possible time. Father [Peter] Merla, a fellow seminarian of his in Chieri and founder of the Istituto di San Pietro [St. Peter's Institute] in Turin, agreed to help Don Bosco for about a year in carrying out a well-integrated curriculum covering the most necessary elementary and secondary school subjects. Buzzetti and his three companions went to Father Merla's house every evening to practice translating selections from the classics. Although the cleric Ascanio Savio was appointed to assign and correct their translations from Italian into Latin, Don Bosco was the moving spirit behind the whole teaching program. Realizing that, under the circumstances, the usual teaching methods would not yield satisfactory, speedy results, he devised a method of his own; its results more than justified his bold approach. He gave a brief, crystal-clear explanation of grammar rules and required a reasoned repetition from each pupil to ascertain a thorough grasp of the lesson. His keen, penetrating understanding of matters, his gift for facile transference of ideas and, above all, his unwavering patience and kind manner soon brought them to a point where they could come to grips with Latin.

This is no surprise, if we take a look at their daily schedule. They rose at 4:30. Their first hour was given to Mass and some spiritual reading. At about 6:00 they reported to Don Bosco's room for class. Playing the role of a pupil, Don Bosco would briefly summarize the previous lesson and then have them repeat it as best they could with his constant help and encouragement. The grammar

book was opened in class only when some special point required clarification. Mentally, the boys were now fully adjusted to the requirements of study and the learning process. The same technique was used in teaching them the other subjects. At 8:00 they had breakfast, then a brief recreation and a study period until noon. Classes resumed at 2:00 in the afternoon.

He was quite aware, naturally, of the danger of pushing them too hard, so, on alternate days, he would take them for an afternoon walk from 4:00 to 7:00, thereby keeping them alert in body as well as in mind. But he never let them out of sight for a moment. Even when they rested a while in the small square in front of the church of Our Lady of the Countryside, or on the old parade ground, or along Viale di Rivoli, Don Bosco would tirelessly resume his lessons in a novel and delightful way by asking them to repeat what they had already learned. This procedure indelibly, but effortlessly, impressed knowledge on their youthful minds. To be sure, study in the open countryside had its temptations. The boys of course preferred to play rather than study, and now and then they did enjoy a bit of relaxation in romping about and chasing each other. Despite their inclinations, Don Bosco exercised a calm, steady control over them and never allowed them to waste a moment of their precious time. The teaching program continued at this pace until the end of 1850.

Father Giacomelli had occasion to observe Don Bosco's teaching methods during this period and has testified to the extraordinary results he achieved.

Though busy with his four special pupils, Don Bosco began to give a thought to compiling a set of regulations for his hospice in Valdocco and for the boarding schools which he planned to open. For this reason he began to study educational methods used elsewhere, especially in charitable institutes and boys' boarding schools. He sent for prospectuses and regulations, and personally visited institutes in Turin and other parts of Piedmont.

At the end of 1849, he sent Father Peter Ponte, director of the St. Aloysius Oratory, to Milan, Brescia, and several other cities to study the regulations of various hospices for boys of the working class and those of some of the better boarding schools for middle-class boys. He also was to inquire about their customs in regard to

practices of piety, teaching methods, discipline, and administration. Father Ponte returned to Turin at the beginning of 1850 with plenty of useful notes and observations.

Don Bosco was also looking ahead to his future seminarians, and he therefore obtained from Bishop [Jacob Philip] Gentile of Novara the rules of his minor and major seminaries. Thus, joining prayer to study and his own experience, he got ready for the eventual training of the members of the new community which he was gathering about him.

Before the close of 1849 an amazing event occurred which Father John Joseph Franco, S. J., mentioned in a letter which we have reported [in chapter 45]. After stating his personal conviction that he could consider it natural for Don Bosco to work miracles because of his extraordinary saintliness, Father Franco added:

Had someone told me that he had indeed performed miracles even more than once, I would not have been surprised in the least. As a matter of fact, I did hear of them, but I do not recall the details. However, I can state having heard that one Sunday, before dismissing a great crowd of boys who had spent the day [at the Oratory] in happy pastimes, he wanted to treat each one to a handful of boiled chestnuts. He was told that there were simply not enough for all. Undismayed, he began to distribute them himself, giving each boy a generous ladleful. He gave out so many chestnuts that the bystanders realized that they had been multiplied under his hand. I think I heard this from Chevalier Frederick Oreglia of Santo Stefano who either witnessed it himself or knew of it as being true and common knowledge at the Oratory, where he was a frequent and welcome visitor. But I cannot say for sure whether he told me of this before or after he entered the Society of Jesus.

Father Joseph Franco, S. J.

What really happened is this. One Sunday after All Saints' Day in 1849,¹ at the close of the Exercise for a Happy Death,² Don Bosco took all his boys, boarders and non-boarders, to the cemetery to pray for the souls of the departed. He promised them chest-

¹ Probably November 4, the first Sunday after All Soul's Day, the customary day in Italy for visiting the cemetery. [Editor]

² A practice of piety that promotes spiritual recollection and fervor by meditation on one's eventual death. It stresses the reception of the sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist as for the last time. [Editor]

nuts³ on their return to Valdocco. Mamma Margaret had bought three bags, but she cooked only a small amount, thinking it would be enough. Joseph Buzzetti came home ahead of the other boys. When he went into the kitchen and saw the small pot, he immediately told Mamma Margaret that one pot would never be enough for all the boys, but it was too late to do anything about it. The other boys were already arriving and milling around the chapel door. Don Bosco set himself there and began to dole out the chestnuts that Buzzetti had poured into a basket which he was holding in his arms. Thinking that his mother had cooked all the chestnuts, Don Bosco kept filling every boy's cap quite generously. Buzzetti became worried. "What are you doing, Don Bosco?" he cried. "We don't have enough for everybody. If you keep this up, there won't be enough for even half of the boys."

"Oh, don't worry," Don Bosco replied. "We bought three bags and my mother cooked all of them."

"No, she didn't. This is all," insisted Buzzetti. But Don Bosco did not have the heart to give skimpy portions and calmly replied, "Let's keep giving them out as long as they last." He continued to ladle them out as before, while Buzzetti, visibly worried, watched him continue the distribution until finally there were only two or three portions left in the basket. Only one third of the boys had as yet been served, and there were some six hundred in all. Their shouts of anticipated pleasure now gave way to an anxious silence as the boys nearest to Don Bosco noticed that the basket was almost empty.

Thinking that his mother had economically put aside the rest of the cooked chestnuts, Don Bosco ran upstairs to fetch them, only to find to his surprise that they had not been cooked. Instead of filling the big pot, Mamma Margaret had taken a smaller one that was used for the superiors. For an instant Don Bosco was at a loss. Then, undismayed, he said, "I promised the boys chestnuts and I have to keep my word!" Thereupon he took a colander and, digging into the basket, scooped up as many chestnuts as it could hold, and he resumed the distribution. At this moment something extraordinary happened. Buzzetti was quite beside himself; each time Don Bosco dipped his ladle into the basket, he brought it up literally

³ A treat for boys at that time of the year. [Editor]

brimming over with chestnuts, while the quantity inside the basket seemed never to diminish. Not two or three, but about four hundred boys received a generous portion. When finally Buzzetti brought the basket back into the kitchen, he noticed that there was still a portion left; our Blessed Mother had provided a portion also for Don Bosco. As this distribution was in progress, the boys nearest Don Bosco told the others about what was happening and all stood there with bated breath, waiting to see how it would end. When the last boy had received his share, a loud shout broke out in unison: "Don Bosco is a saint! Don Bosco is a saint!" Don Bosco immediately tried to silence them, but this was quite a task, as they all thronged about him noisily. To commemorate this wondrous event, Don Bosco prescribed that chestnuts be distributed to the boys on the eve of All Saints ever afterwards. This we came to know from Canon John Baptist Anfossi.

We have faithfully reported this multiplication of chestnuts as told us by our friend Joseph Buzzetti, confirmed in writing by Charles Tomatis,⁴ and recognized as authentic by all the former pupils who were then attending the Oratory. What could be the explanation of such an extraordinary event? None other than this: our Blessed Mother was showing how pleased She was with the Oratory boys.

The Oratory was veritably a garden of virtue. A glowing tribute to it was published in 1849 in the newspaper, *Il Conciliatore Torinese*,⁵ edited by Canon Lawrence Gastaldi. His article [on the Oratory] is so enlightening that it is quite fitting that we report it in its entirety in this biography as documentation and confirmation of what we have narrated.⁶

Anyone whose fancy leads him to leave this city by way of Porta Susa and stroll leisurely down the avenue on his right past the barracks, the St. Aloysius Hospital, and the mental hospitals, will find himself going down a delightfully sloping road leading to an imposing building at the far end. Here, turning left, he will follow a charming little path, flanked by various buildings, until he reaches a wooden gate which opens

⁴ See pp. 118f, 221. [Editor]

⁵ *Il Conciliatore Torinese* was published from July 15, 1848 to September, 1849, when it went out of existence.

⁶ See *Il Conciliatore Torinese*, 1849, No. 42.

on a fairly spacious courtyard where he will come upon a long, very low, attractive building, more rural than urban in aspect. It juts out on its north side and divides the courtyard into two sections; the larger one is cultivated as a vegetable garden, the other is narrower and bare. At first sight, it can be taken for a farmhouse like any other in this neighborhood. But a closer look at the modest structure, with its varied religious inscriptions and tiny belfry surmounted by a cross and the words, "This is the House of the Lord," inscribed over the entrance on the west wall, leads to the surprising realization that it is a chapel. The visitor's amazement will increase once he begins to ask about the founder and the purpose of this chapel. He will be told that a humble priest, with no other resources than a boundless charity, has for several years regularly assembled from five to six hundred boys here every Sunday and holy day, to instruct them in the practice of virtue and to train them, at one and the same time, to be true children of God and good, upright citizens.

This admirable priest, imbued with that philanthropy which springs from no other source than the Catholic Faith, was sorely distressed by the sight of hundreds and hundreds of boys abandoned to their own devices on days sacred to the Lord. Instead of going to church for instruction in the ways of holiness, they wandered aimlessly through the city streets or the surrounding countryside, wasting the entire day in dangerous pursuits, returning home in the evening more dissipated, irreligious, and disobedient than before. This priest was deeply grieved by the sight of so many youngsters who, through their parents' and their employers' blamable neglect grow up in total ignorance of things that matter most, exposed to the evil influence that springs from idleness, bad companions, and evil example. He resolved to remedy these evils as best he could. What did this new disciple of St. Philip Neri do? Inspired by a zeal of his own, armed with well-proven patience and innate kindness and humility, because he knew that all these qualities would be needed in his arduous undertaking, he began to walk the outskirts of Turin on Sundays and holy days. Wherever he came upon a group of boys at play, he would go up to them and ask them to let him join. Then, after making friends with them, he would ask them to continue these games in some other spot which he considered more suitable for them. We can easily imagine the many rebuffs, the many rude, insolent sneers he must have endured. But, little by little, his perseverance and gentleness triumphed in a truly surprising fashion. Eventually the most rebellious and toughest boys, won over by his humble and kind ways, let themselves be led to the humble dwelling which I have already

described and which had been partly converted into a modest chapel. Here the boys divide their Sundays and holy days between church services and wholesome games in the playground.

As soon as the first boys who responded to his call tasted the sweet fruit of piety and felt the ineffable joy of being rescued from the abyss of corruption or raised high by the firm hope of eternal reward, they became apostles among their former friends and companions in evil. They promised them more fun at Don Bosco's place (for this is the name of the admirable priest) than that they had ever before had. This news spread from mouth to mouth, and very soon boys began to flock there to their immense spiritual advantage, as we may well imagine. We may describe Don Bosco's Oratory as a swarm of bees, some busy outdoors, the great majority tranquilly at work indoors. Groups can be seen on every road leading to the Oratory; they can be heard singing far more joyfully than if they were on their way to a carnival. Within the Oratory boys are everywhere. Divided into small groups, they play and romp; balls, *bocce*, swings keep them busy, while others amuse themselves with acrobatics. Meanwhile, others gather in the tiny chapel to learn their catechism or prepare themselves for the sacraments, while in adjacent rooms boys learn their alphabet or study arithmetic, penmanship, and singing. Several priests supervise this motley crowd of youngsters, so different in temperament and inclinations. They do their best to channel their thoughts, affections and activities to religion, and when it is time for prayer and instruction they see to it that all the boys interrupt their games to assemble in the chapel. It is a delight to see how docile these boys are who were so unruly; they devoutly attend church services, frequent the sacraments, receive religious instruction even during the week if necessary, and attend the several days' spiritual retreat.

Even more remarkable is the love and gratitude of these boys for their benefactor, Don Bosco. No father is given more affection by his children. They are around him constantly, eager to talk to him and kiss his hand. If they chance to see him on the street, they instantly dash from their workshops to greet him. His words have a prodigious effect on them. He can teach them, correct their faults, influence them to do good, train them in virtue and uprightness, and instill in them even a love for perfection. His modest dwelling is open at all hours to any boy seeking protection against the corruption and danger of the world, or wishing counsel and help for some honest endeavor. Since Don Bosco could not accommodate all the boys who come flocking to the Valdocco Oratory, he opened another a few months ago at Porta Nuova, entrusting its direction to some priests whom he had already

trained in a spirit of charity akin to his own. We hope that this second undertaking will bear no less abundant fruit for Christian education.

The talented writer, full of enthusiasm for Don Bosco, concluded his article with a ringing salute.

Hail, new Philip [Neri] hail, eminent priest! May your example be imitated in many cities; may priests throng from all sides to follow in your footsteps; may they open to young people the doors of similar havens of holiness, where piety may blend with wholesome amusements. Only in this way will we be able to overcome one of the deepest wounds of civil society and of the Church, the corruption of youth.

Such was the praise which Canon Gastaldi bestowed, in those days, on the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales.

CHAPTER 52

Spiritual Formation at the Oratory

ON November 18, 1849, Father [John] Giacomelli came to live with Don Bosco at the Oratory. As he himself told us, some thirty boys were then boarding there, most of them orphans taken in by Don Bosco because they had no home and were exposed to unwholesome influences. Don Bosco had also been asked often to accept youngsters who had lost their fathers in the war and he had obliged, but his willingness was curtailed by limited finances and lack of space. As was the custom at the Oratory, the young boarders were served soup at their meals and received five *soldi* to buy their own bread.¹ Some of the boys who paid a regular fee for their board and lodging ate at Don Bosco's table at dinner and supper, and attended school in the city, among them Benedict Cagno, successively a principal of a girls' school at Mondovì and director of a technical school in Turin; a seminarian who later left the seminary and majored in literature; and the cleric Ascanio Savio.

Father [John] Giacomelli lived at the Oratory for almost two years and helped Don Bosco especially in hearing confessions; later, he left Turin to become assistant pastor. When he returned in 1854 he was appointed chaplain and spiritual director at the St. Philomena Hospital, where he remained forty-seven years until his death. The hospital was but a stone's throw from the Oratory, and

¹ In one of Don Bosco's notebooks we found the names of these boys in his own handwriting: Charles Gastini, Augustine Rocchetta, Anthony Comba, Charles Tomatis, Baptist Rosselli, Dominic Rosso, Costante Zeffirino, John Tarditi, Joseph Bruno, Augustine Castini, Peter Nigra, Joseph Rossi, Felix Reviglio, Bartholomew Berrutto, Louis Pelizzetti, John Piumatti, August Grulio, Peter Sarali, Gabriel Fazio, Paul Mainetti, Louis Fabbretti, Joseph Buzzetti, Joseph Genti, Joseph Canale. To which we add: Chiosso, Frassini, Pasero, Audisio, Chiappero, who were all witnesses of what we have written.

Father Giacomelli remained a close friend of Don Bosco, to whom he felt deeply obliged. He came to see Don Bosco, who was also his confessor, several times a week and always spent some time in the chapel, setting the boys an edifying example.

We have mentioned these things here to emphasize the importance of his testimony, which is fully corroborated by the statements of others who lived with Don Bosco. We shall here enter a report Father Giacomelli dictated to us concerning the early years of the Oratory. We shall intersperse it with remarks of other reliable witnesses.

When I came to live in Valdocco, I began to be convinced of the truth of Don Bosco's guiding principle, namely, that the only way to win the confidence of youngsters and to protect them from evil is to be honest and open-hearted with them. I had ample opportunity to observe how he was able to win them over by his affable ways and small gifts. Once I brought a little nephew of mine to meet Don Bosco and to start him attending the Oratory on Sundays and holy days. Don Bosco was exceptionally kind to the boy and to my great surprise gave him a little gift of twenty *centesimi*. From that moment my nephew took an instant liking to the Oratory and later attended its classes.

I noticed that as the boys drew closer and closer to Don Bosco, they became better behaved and more diligent in work habits. His orders, admonitions, or corrections were given in such a tone and spirit that it was clearly evident that this all-round supervision was being exercised for their ultimate good. By preventing them from doing wrong he removed the need for punishment. In exchange, the boys loved him dearly and held him in such veneration that all he had to do was express a mere wish to be instantly obeyed. They avoided also whatever might displease him, but there was not a trace of servile fear in their obedience; it stemmed from their filial affection for him. Indeed, some boys avoided wrongdoing more out of regard for him almost than for fear of offending God. When he would come to know of this, he would reprimand them severely, reminding them that, "God is much more than Don Bosco!"

What surprises me most of all is the fact that these poor, ignorant boys were constantly being replaced by others, by newcomers whose way of thinking and acting needed to be reformed with no little effort and trouble on Don Bosco's part. But his inexhaustible patience and his spirit of sacrifice always triumphed in the end.

He followed the same system with the boarders. Once they had completed their regular chores, he was happy to see them have fun with games and calisthenics, saying that recreation was also meritorious in the eyes of God. But he tried to steer them away from games that required too much concentration or made them inactive, or that might cause them physical or moral harm. He used to tell them, "Raise all the rumpus you want, run and jump, just avoid sin." And he himself set the example by his constant cheerfulness, by his efforts to make them happy with every possible means, joining them in their games and taking them on pleasant trips whose destination was usually a shrine.

Occasionally, I saw him walking around the playground in the morning while the boys were having breakfast.² He would smile at one or the other and greet them all with friendly words. Now and then, with mock severity, he would tell some boy who was munching on his piece of bread, "Throw that stone away!" The boy, in response, would take a huge bite from it. As I intently studied every word and gesture of his, I became convinced that he constantly had a spiritual end in view, even in seemingly trivial matters. I sensed that his remark alluded to Our Lord's fasting and temptation in the desert, to the omnipotence and goodness of God, to our duty to be grateful to Him, and so on. In fact, he would immediately after whisper some word in the lad's ear which was received with reverence and joy.

He always knew how to make a word of reproach sound like advice. For example, to a boy with a bent for overeating he would say, "We were not created to eat and drink, but to love God and save our souls." To a boy who was work-shy, "Do this for Our Lord. Whatever you may have to suffer here lasts only a moment; heaven will reward you for everything you've done." If a boy showed signs of vanity and self-satisfaction, Don Bosco would say, "I'm glad to see that you're making progress in your trade. But if you were to gain all riches and all knowledge in the arts and sciences and were to lose your soul, what would it avail you?"

Don Bosco had a very delicate conscience; he not only avoided any semblance of evil, but by his constant, loving supervision, by his exhortations to frequent the sacraments, and in so many other different ways he did everything possible to keep any dangerous occasion far from his boys and to forestall anything undesirable. So great was his horror of sin that he would have sacrificed his life a hundred times a day to prevent a single sin. "How is it possible," he sometimes ex-

² A very simple breakfast: a small loaf of plain bread which they munched out-doors. [Editor]

claimed, "that a sensible person who believes in God can possibly let himself go and offend Him grievously?"

Whenever a serious fault was committed, it distressed him more than any personal misfortune. In deepest sorrow he would say to the transgressor, "Why do you treat God so meanly when He loves us so much?" Sometimes I saw him actually in tears. Both in private and in public, his words aimed at instilling a genuine horror of sin in his hearers.

"Whenever he spoke of the terrible judgment of God in a sermon, in informal conversation, or in the confessional," Father Ascanio tells us, "he himself seemed to be so awed by what he was saying that all of us were filled with a terror of hell and an equally strong desire for heaven."

He always urged us to pray devoutly, pronouncing the words distinctly and paying attention to their meaning. He expected all of us to make the Sign of the Cross with great reverence as a profession of faith. He never spared a gentle reprimand, even to priests, if they made it carelessly. In his "Good Nights"³ he always urged us to employ our time usefully and always to carry out our duties for the glory of God, thus familiarizing us with St. Ignatius' motto, *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam* [to the greater glory of God]. He often exhorted us warmly to work and suffer readily for Our Lord Jesus Christ. Although physically very sensitive to climatic changes he was ever tranquil and serene regardless of the weather being dry, humid, windy, cold, or hot. His life was one continual sacrifice, his meals acts of self-denial.

To accustom his boys, boarders and non-boarders, to live in the presence of God, he saw to it that the crucifix and the picture of the Blessed Virgin were kept in a prominent place on the playground and in every room of the Oratory. The thought of God's presence was so constant in his mind that it was reflected in his whole countenance. Whenever I looked at him, I felt urged to exclaim, "Our citizenship is in heaven." [Phil. 3, 20] Wherever he might be, at table or in his own room, he was always modest in demeanor: his eyes showed no restlessness; his head was usually bowed slightly as if in the presence of some great personage, or better still, of the Blessed Sacrament. Although he was quite sociable by nature, he very rarely took notice of people greeting him on going through town. He always seemed to be concentrating on some very important, absorbing thought, and his whole comportment clearly indicated that he was totally immersed in contemplation of God. Often

³ A short talk, immediately after night prayers, giving advice, exhortations or occasional remarks. It is a custom in all Salesian houses throughout the world. [Editor]

people would come to him for spiritual advice in moments when he seemed to be concerned with earthly matters, but he always answered them as though he were ever engrossed in attentive, devout meditation of things eternal.

So far, Father John Giacomelli. Father Ascanio Savio was convinced that Don Bosco kept vigil during long hours of the night and sometimes for the whole night, deep in prayer. He noticed that when Don Bosco recited [morning and night] prayers with the boys, he pronounced with a special delight "Our Father, who art in heaven." His voice stood out clearly among those of the boys, marked by an indefinable melodiousness which deeply moved all those who heard it. "When he prayed he was an example to all of us," Father Savio states. "Although there was nothing extraordinary in his behavior, I never once saw him rest his elbows on a pew or kneeler either in the sacristy or in church; he merely rested his forearm while his hands remained clasped or held a book."

"His demeanor was so devout," declared Father [Felix] Reviglio "that Bishop [John Baptist] Bertagna once remarked that there was 'something angelic' about Don Bosco when he prayed." Father [John] Giacomelli's report continues.

His devotion to the Blessed Virgin was uppermost in his thoughts, and She was ever present in his conversation. One day, when reciting the antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater* [Mother Benign of Our Redeeming Lord], he said to me, "Just meditate on those words, *Stella maris succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat populo*. Put the words in the right sequence: *Stella maris, succurre cadenti populo, qui curat surgere* [Star of the sea, unto thy fallen people help afford]. This explains the goodness of Mary and our obligation to cooperate with Her. Therein lies the whole secret of 'Help yourself while I help you,' that is, our cooperation." He seemed to foresee already the glorious spread of devotion to Mary, Help of Christians.

On an outdated poster calendar of 1848 Don Bosco, the following year, for reasons I don't know, pasted five pictures of the Blessed Virgin, three of which depicted her as Mary Immaculate. The first of the three pictures showed several boys grouped around a priest in a field, some kneeling, others standing, but all turning toward a vision of the Blessed Virgin amid the clouds, surrounded by angels with hands clasped in

prayer, her head crowned with a diadem of twelve stars, the moon and the serpent at Her feet. The priest was pointing to Her, and the picture bore the legend, "Be devoted to the Blessed Virgin, my sons." The legend on the second picture read, "Blessed ever be the Holy and Immaculate Conception." The third carried the following prayer: "O Immaculate Virgin, You who have overcome all heresies, come now to help us. We invoke You with all our heart. Help of Christians, pray for us." Under this prayer, Don Bosco had added in his own handwriting, "From You we await consolation." The fourth depicted Our Lady of Victory with the legend, "Refuge of sinners, pray for us." The fifth showed the Virgin holding the Child in Her arms and sitting beside a small cloth-covered table on which stood a basket of fruit. The Child's left hand was raising the veil that covered His Mother's face, while with the right hand He seemed to be offering Her fruit to give to the needy. Beneath the picture were the words: "Mother of the poor" and "Come to Me, you who love Me and I shall fill you with My blessings." Below these pictures Don Bosco put a map of Palestine and then hung that poster in his room. Knowing him intimately, I, Father Giacomelli, saw in that poster the program of his entire life. Anxious for a souvenir of his devotion to Mary Immaculate, the Help of Christians, I secretly took that poster and kept it as a precious relic for almost forty years until after his death. Then, because of my advanced years, I feared it might be destroyed after my death and I gave it to the superiors of the Oratory for proper safekeeping.

So far, Father Giacomelli. Don Bosco's devotion to the Blessed Virgin was matched by his angelic purity. Bishop [John Baptist] Bertagna, Angelo and Ascanio Savio, Father Giacomelli, and others were unanimous in declaring that on this score Don Bosco thoroughly enjoyed the most enviable reputation both at Castelnuovo during his adolescence and later in Turin. Further, it was generally believed that he had a special gift for instilling love of purity in youthful hearts. Bishop John Cagliero, for example, declared: "Because of the intimate confidence I enjoyed with him, I am convinced that he lived and died in absolute chastity. He was always correct in his conduct and extremely reserved when dealing with the opposite sex. It was obvious that he found a certain distaste in dealing with women, even relatives." In his report Father Giacomelli continues:

During those years, I more than once saw his brother Joseph's daughter come to Turin from her village to visit her grandmother Margaret and her uncle. Don Bosco did not show himself too pleased with this and soon had the young girl go back to her mother. He later told me, "I'd rather have a dozen boys visit me than this girl or any other." The cleric Ascanio Savio states that he heard Don Bosco tell Mamma Margaret that it was not proper for his niece to come to the Oratory.

Although Don Bosco's pupils loved him dearly and he returned their love in a fatherly way, he was always reserved and dignified in his behavior toward them, avoiding any sentimental gesture or turn of phrase. At most, whenever he wanted to express pleasure for someone's good conduct, he would momentarily put his hand over the boy's head or shoulder or pat him lightly on the cheek, accompanying this gesture of affection with a suitable piece of advice.

In 1890, [Louis] Fumero ⁴ asked Gastini, "Do you ever recall any gesture, word, or glance on Don Bosco's part which could even remotely be interpreted as unseemly or less than correct?" "Never!" replied Gastini. Both had been familiar with him ever since those early years. One day young Charles Tomatis, his clothes in unseemly disarray, joined a group of companions with whom Don Bosco was talking. The others began to laugh at this bizarre appearance, but Don Bosco's face was impassive. When he was asked, in this and similar circumstances, how he could restrain his mirth, he usually replied, "I laugh when I want to, and when I don't want to, I don't laugh."

He discussed chastity in his sermons and in his writing with admirable tact. In familiar conversations he often praised this virtue highly and suggested ways and means to foster and preserve it. As we shall see later, he had words all his own to excite love for this virtue, thus revealing the beauty of his soul. Sometimes, when sending some to the oratories to teach catechism he would say, "Remember, I am sending you out to fish, and not to be fished."

To help his young charges avoid sin, he had them discreetly supervised at all times by their more virtuous companions, thus making it practically impossible for them to commit a transgression. It was

⁴A pupil at the Oratory in its early years. [Editor]

his great love for purity that led to his starting dramatics to keep his boarders busy. On Saturday evenings, Don Bosco generally returned late from his many duties in town. He would then hear confessions until eleven or even later, because Sunday mornings were reserved entirely to the non-boarders. How could he occupy those boys who had already made their confessions? And on the eve of solemn festivities, or during the Exercise for a Happy Death for the festive oratory boys, how could he occupy the boarders, who had already made their confessions in the morning? Since they could not very well study, work, or even play in the playground [without disturbing confessions], they generally waited for Don Bosco in their dormitory.

Charles Tomatis, twenty, resided at the Oratory from November 5, 1849 to [sometime in] 1861. He was something of a prankster and humorist. With Don Bosco's approval and advice, he would gather all the boys in a room. Then he would take two handkerchiefs, make a knot in the middle of each, and tying one to a finger of each hand, he would improvise amusing dialogues between them to the great amusement of the boys.

This type of entertainment began to fade after a while, so Tomatis bought a *Gianduia*⁵ and delighted his audience even more with the incredible tricks of this wooden puppet, to which he gave all the characteristics, gestures, and running patter of that particular masque of the Piedmontese theatre. Marquis [Dominic] Fassati, who occasionally sat in on these informal shows, gave the boys an entire set of marionettes. Tomatis was always the puppet master; his assistant from 1849 through 1851 was a certain Chiappero. More than once, bishops heartily enjoyed the show, along with the rest of the audience, according to Tomatis and young Chiosso.

Finally, the young boarders began at times to enact some farce or comedy on the stage which had been set up in the new hall on the east side of the house. The same motive which had started these pastimes now governed their development. Don Bosco quickly realized that this kind of activity required vigilant supervision. He had always maintained that stage plays presented a grave moral

⁵ A Piedmontese puppet. [Editor]

danger for the performers and the audience unless the plays presented were carefully selected and their staging supervised. He forbade parties for actors after a performance and insisted that the productions be ordinarily very simple and unpretentious. In those days he would not hear of money being spent on renting costumes, because of their cost. The boys had to make do as best they could. Once, as a result of their insistent pleading, he allowed them to present *Gelindo*, or *The Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ*, a very popular play in Piedmont. But since it could hardly be adapted properly, its unpleasant aftereffects prompted Don Bosco to declare that never again would he allow its staging.

Indeed, when it was a matter of moral propriety, Don Bosco was inexorable. Once he was invited to attend a stage performance in a boarding school for upper-class boys. The play dealt with a son born of a "careless love affair," as the program described it, who was preferred to the legitimate son because of his many virtues. At the end of the first act Don Bosco stood up and asked one of the superiors who sat beside him, "Is this the kind of play you present?"

"Well, now, to shut your eyes and ears to such things you would have to leave this world."

"Perhaps, but in the meanwhile I'll say good day."

"Are you leaving?"

"Precisely!" And he left.

Father Giacomelli concludes his report as follows.

Don Bosco did not limit his concern only to his boys. I used to go with him to the prisons, where he taught catechism and heard confessions. Sometimes he sent me to buy white bread and fruit, which he would distribute among the prisoners. I also accompanied him to the Albergo di Virtù where he preached to more than a hundred boys. In his love of neighbor, he began to receive, in the sacristy or in his room, townspeople who came for advice or help. Don Bosco listened to each one calmly and patiently and, if he could, he generously assisted them. Sometimes his assistants tried to send such people away, considering them importunate, but I saw that this displeased him. I never saw him waste a single moment or while away his time at cards or *bocce* for relaxation. He always found time to hear confessions and visit the sick, especially at the Cottolengo Hospital.

Charles Tomatis told us that Don Bosco would also visit patients afflicted with infectious diseases. As an aftereffect of one such visit he contracted a malignant pustule on his arm with accompanying fevers, from which he recovered without taking any medicine. Soon his truly priestly conduct won him the affection and esteem of almost all the Piedmontese bishops. They praised and supported his work, convinced that his undertaking was inspired by God. A venerable priest remarked of Don Bosco, "St. Benedict said that three things make a saint: sobriety of life, justice of action, and piety of feeling. Don Bosco meets this test." We have heard many other eminent people say, "Few are they who, upon carefully studying another man, do not eventually find some defect in him which at first had escaped their attention. But this was not the case with Don Bosco. The more one studied him, the more one's admiration for him grew." Father Giacomelli said further, "I always considered Don Bosco a priest who performed even his most ordinary duties, especially those enjoined by religion and charity, in an extraordinary way." When someone asked him, "Who is this Don Bosco, after all?" Father Giacomelli usually answered, "If only you knew him! He was a model seminarian, and now he is a model priest!"

In conclusion, we concur with what Father Felix Reviglio also told us, "During the eleven years that I had the good fortune to live with Don Bosco, I can attest that his virtues were so resplendent and eminent that we boys even then regarded him as a saint, and precisely because of his heroic virtues allowed him to guide us in all things."

CHAPTER 53

A Timely Stage Play

WE shall now describe a most unusual stage play which caused something of a stir in Turin when presented by the boys of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales. By royal decree, the metric system was to go into effect in January of 1850, and the time was now drawing near. To insure its success, the government, through the Department of Agriculture and Commerce, sent a circular to the bishops of the realm asking that they and all pastors cooperate in briefing their congregations on the new system, to dispel prejudices and help them change time-honored habits with a minimum of discontent, fraud, and deception. The prelates, ever ready to promote the best interests of Church and State, promptly consented.

Bishop Philip Artico of Asti, overlooking the slanderous campaign against his good name conducted even in the courts and in the Chamber of Deputies by the minister of justice, cooperated fully by writing a circular to his clergy from his residence in the Camerano seminary. It concluded: "I consequently strongly urge you, also in the name of the government, to set up, with the agreement of local teachers, Sunday and evening classes after Church services, at hours most convenient to parishioners. Where there are no teachers, pastors should zealously take their place." This was more or less also the tenor of the other bishops' letters, and the pastors promptly carried out their suggestions.

Don Bosco had already introduced the metric system at the Oratory years before, because he wanted the boys to learn it thoroughly in good time. Now, in 1849, he picked some talented and hard-working teachers to help him in this particular task; one of these

was Joseph Brosio. After closing his store in town, he came to the Oratory every evening to teach the metric system. Don Bosco had published a new and improved edition of his book, *The Metric System*, whose first edition, favorably reviewed in the papers, sold out in less than three months.¹ Moreover, several teachers had introduced it into their classes and had discovered to their delight that the book was ideally suited to the intellectual level of their pupils, thanks to Don Bosco's clear style and presentation.

Don Bosco, however, did not rest on his laurels. In that same year, he thought of another effective way to familiarize his pupils with the new system. He wrote and staged a brief three-act comedy entitled *Il Sistema Metrico-Decimale* [The Metric System]. The setting is a marketplace with different characters representing buyers and sellers. The buyers either do not know that the new weights and measures are obligatory, or they firmly refuse to use them or have anything to do with them and stubbornly cling to the old weights and measures. The seller, who knows the law, informs his customer that the old weights and measures have been abolished, whereupon the buyer begins to decry the new-fangled ideas, declaring the whole business a fraud and deception. At times the tempers of buyer and seller boil over, the seller attempting to persuade, the buyer refusing to yield. Finally, by dint of endless patience, the seller convinces the buyer of the advantage of the new system, shows him the difference between the various weights and measures, as well as respective and reasonable differences in price, and sends him away in peace, well-informed and satisfied. The scene then shows a poor, confused workman who meets a fellow worker, or his old boss, asks and receives the necessary explanations, during which the new weights are presented and the difference between the ounce and the *etto*, the pound and the *kilo*, the *rubbio* and the *miria* explained. Linear and liquid measures are also discussed, along with the corresponding difference between *raso* and meter, *boccale* and liter, *brenta* and hectoliter, and so on. Don Bosco so skillfully interwove fact and fiction and provided his young actors with such incisive and humorous lines that he converted a dull, dry subject into delightful entertainment.

¹ See Appendix 11. [Editor]

The scene of the *brenta*,² liter, and hectoliter always had the audience rolling in the aisles. In one performance an amusing ad lib made it even funnier. One of the actors, young Hyacinth Arnaud, playing the part of an oldtimer, appeared on stage with a *brenta* strapped to his shoulders. After putting down his burden, he was supposed to lean against it while asking his fellow actors, "How big is a liter?" But he forgot his lines as well as his position, so the prompter whispered him instructions on both points, ending with the words, "Lean up against the *brenta*!" Arnaud, in a stage fright, paid no heed to the meaning of the words and boomed out, "Oh, the liter is very big! It's leaning against the *brenta*!" The audience roared with laughter, the prompter was too convulsed to speak, and the actors tried their best to keep a straight face. Several minutes elapsed before the play could go on according to script. Among the distinguished guests at the performance was the famous Father Ferrante Aporti³ who, deeply impressed, remarked, "Don Bosco could not use a more effective method of popularizing the metric system. This way people learn it by laughing!"

L'Armonia, in issue No. 149, 1849, reviewed the performance.

Yesterday (December 16) we watched a stage play on the metric system presented by the boys of the St. Francis de Sales Oratory. It is general knowledge that this institute was founded by the well-deserving Don Bosco who, as its director, has given all his means and entire life to the education of young apprentices. We shall not eulogize him here, since his boys yesterday paid him such a substantial and genuine tribute by their intelligent replies, delightful manners, and praiseworthy deportment. But we want to commend him highly for having concluded that stage play with admirably well-written historical recitation on Pius VI and Pius IX. One of his boys declaimed it so spiritedly as to win a resounding applause from the packed house.

It was perhaps as a result of this recitation that the Regio Economato came to the aid of the Oratory on December 20, and presented Don Bosco with the sum of four hundred *lire*.

² A conoidal wooden vessel whose liquid capacity varied from about fifty to ninety quarts. It was carried on the back, strapped to the bearer's shoulders. [Editor]

³ See Vol. II, pp. 148f, 165ff, 171f, 311f. [Editor]

It's hard to imagine how Don Bosco, in this particular year, could find time to write this little comedy, put together from eight dialogues which he had previously written on the metric system. These dialogues he later staged again and again in varying sequence and number assigning the roles to some forty or fifty boys between actors and understudies.

With a truly heroic patience and industry he rehearsed these untrained youngsters, who could hardly read and who sometimes did not even understand the meaning of many words or see the connection between one sentence and the next. Yet he never wearied of explaining or teaching them how to mimic, repeating a dialogue over and over again until the boys had committed it to memory! Sometimes he could not get them to say correctly some words which they invariably mispronounced during the performance, thereby actually adding to the humor of certain situations.

Nevertheless, his stage direction brought such results that the knowledge which the boys willy-nilly acquired and the aplomb with which they acted their roles more than rewarded his efforts.

These skits were also an excellent instruction for the young members of the audience, as the settings were either a store, a workshop, a wineshop, an open field in the country, or a farmhouse where the old and new weights and measures, prominently displayed, were put to practical use before the spectators. In some scenes the stage would appear as a classroom with charts, abacus and blackboard. Joseph Brosio⁴ acted as the teacher, but Don Bosco always wanted him to wear his bersagliere uniform on stage. The boys, acting as pupils, were dressed as peasants, porters, cooks, country squires, and so on; a miller was powdered from head to toe with flour, a blacksmith with soot. The audience responded enthusiastically to these realistic settings, as did the young actors.

"In one of these performances," Joseph Brosio wrote to us, "the pupils in the last act were so enthusiastic with my teaching that they held a little party in my honor right on stage, but it was at Don Bosco's expense because he had planned it all in advance. It was a little surprise treat he had wanted to give me to show his appreciation for my humble efforts. I think [Charles] Gastini⁵ may

⁴ See pp. 76f. [Editor]

⁵ See pp. 243ff. [Editor]

still remember how he played a trick on us by eating our oranges to make the audience laugh, and how in punishment Piumatti⁶ grabbed him, pushed him inside the *brenta*, hoisted him on his shoulder and carried him off stage.”⁷

In the midst of all these varied tasks and labors, Don Bosco never lost sight of his ultimate goal. A few days after the December 16th performance, he shifted his boys' attention from mathematics and current events to spiritual considerations. The excellent results of the spiritual retreats of the previous years encouraged him to hold them again, not only for boys at Valdocco but for those of all three oratories, and possibly for all the boys in Turin. Therefore, since the St. Francis de Sales Chapel was too small and too far from the center of the city, he got the permission of the ecclesiastical authorities to hold the retreats in the church of the Confraternity of Mercy, known as the “Merchants' Church,” much larger and conveniently located. On the third and fourth Sundays of Advent, December 16 and 23, he announced the opening date and schedule of the spiritual retreat, warmly inviting everyone to take part. “Ask your parents and employers in my name,” he told them, “kindly to give you time off a few hours every day so that you can take part in the retreat without worry. On your part, promise to make up for the time with greater diligence and punctuality.” He himself called on parents and employers he feared would give such a request no attention.

To make sure that a large number of young workers would participate, he decided to hold the retreat during the last week of the year when the most beloved and generally observed feasts of the liturgical year fall. The schedule was arranged so as to cause the employers as little inconvenience as possible.⁸ He had the Paravia Press print fifteen hundred copies, which were then affixed to the church doors in town and mailed to many homes and workshops. The wording of this notice, in the style of the time, reveals Don Bosco's zeal and sincere dedication to the spiritual and temporal interests of young people. It reads:

⁶ An Oratory pupil. [Editor]

⁷ Don Bosco's eight dialogues on the metric system have been omitted in this edition. [Editor]

⁸ See Appendix 12. [Editor]

Youth is the segment of society upon which we build our hopes for the present and the future; it warrants our closest attention.

If young people are educated properly, we have moral order; if not, vice and disorder prevail. Religion alone can initiate and achieve a true education.

To counteract the evils of the times and the efforts of misguided minds to instill irreligious principles in the pliable minds of young people and to satisfy the wishes of many parents, employers, and shopkeepers, a spiritual retreat for young people has been planned in the church of the Confraternity of Mercy, which has generously been put at our disposal for this purpose.

Parents, employers, and owners of workshops and stores: if you are concerned with the present and future welfare of the youngsters whom Divine Providence has entrusted to your care, contribute effectively to their spiritual good by cooperating with us. Send and urge the young people under your care to attend this retreat. Our Lord will not fail to reward you for the time off you give them for so holy a purpose.

And you, boys, who are particularly dear to God, do not begrudge any discomfort you may have to put up with because of the weather, but consider the everlasting benefits you will derive for your souls. By calling you to listen to His divine word, the Lord is offering you a favorable opportunity to receive His favors and blessings. Take advantage of it. You will be happy if you accustom yourselves to keep God's laws in your youth. "It is good for a man to bear the yoke from his youth." [Lament. 3, 22]

The Church of the Confraternity of Mercy was packed with boys, almost all of them young apprentices, from the very first day, the evening of December 22. The cleric Ascanio Savio was supervising them. The preachers, Canon Borsarelli, Father [John] Borel, Father Peter Ponte and Canon Lawrence Gastaldi, chosen personally by Don Bosco, were eminently suited to the needs of young people. The retreat lasted seven days and was fruitful. Despite the raw winter, hundreds of boys crowded the pews in the early morning, listening attentively to the preacher, while an even greater number attended the midday sermon in dialogue form and the evening instruction and meditation. During the last days of the retreat, the lads literally besieged the confessionals, and Communion on the last morning was truly general, devout, and impressive. Parents and

employers were most pleased with the results, called blessings down on Don Bosco for having thought of it, and expressed the hope that it would be held every year, as indeed it was. At the present time the retreats are sponsored by the Catholic Association of Turin Workers, and are held especially at the close of Lent, to encourage boys who need spiritual assistance to make their Easter duty fruitfully. Our praise to this well-deserving society whose members are true friends of youth!

At the close of the spiritual retreat, Don Bosco distributed a printed leaflet to all the retreatants and to those attending his three oratories. We reproduce it here.

Friendly and Timely Advice to Boys

1. Remember, my boys, that you are the delight of the Lord. Blessed is the lad who begins to observe God's laws in his youth.
2. God deserves to be loved because He has created us, redeemed us, showered us with countless benefits, and prepared an eternal reward for those who obey Him.
3. Charity is what sets the sons of God apart from the sons of Satan and of the world.
4. He who gives his companions good advice performs a great act of charity.
5. Obey your superiors in accordance with God's command, and everything will go well with you.
6. If you wish to be a good Catholic, beware of those who speak disrespectfully of religion and its ministers, especially of the pope, the father of all Catholics. You may always be sure that he who speaks badly of his own father is a bad son.
7. Keep away from evil books and magazines, but read good ones.
8. Habits you form now will last all your life. If they are good, they will lead you to virtue and to the moral certainty of salvation. Woe to you if you contract evil habits!
9. Bad companions, immoderate drinking, a passion for gambling, and the habit of smoking are the usual lures that draw you away from virtue.
10. Bad companions are: a) those who take pleasure in talking of unseemly things or commit acts offensive to modesty; b) those who speak contemptuously of religion; c) those who try to keep you from church or entice you to neglect your duties.

11. Immoderate drinking saps physical vigor, makes religious devotions tedious, and leads us to unwholesome places.

12. Heavy gambling leads to quarrels, blasphemy, neglect of one's duties, and profanation of holy days.

13. Smoking or chewing tobacco ruins the teeth, saps youthful strength, and leads one to seek bad companions.

Recommendations

1. Avoid idleness and idle people; carry out your duties. Whenever you are idle, you are in serious danger of falling into sin, because idleness teaches us all kinds of vice.

2. Have all the fun you want, as long as you do not commit sin.

3. Make every effort to pay attention to the sermon on Sundays and holy days.

4. Choose a confessor you trust, and go often to confession and to Communion. St. Philip Neri, the great friend of youth, used to recommend to boys to make a weekly confession and to receive Communion even more frequently, according to the confessor's advice.

5. My son, you have only one soul; try to save it. Even if you were to conquer the whole world, you would avail nothing if you were to lose your soul. Happy is the man who, on his death bed, can look back to the good works he has performed during his lifetime. Write, my son, these words of mine in your heart: "The world is false; our one true friend is God."

During the retreat, Don Bosco celebrated Christmas Midnight Mass and the boys made a general Communion; the Holy See had renewed the privilege for another three years. He also distributed to the Oratory boys five hundred copies of a hymn to the Infant Jesus; the text and music had been printed by the Speirani & Ferrero Press.

CHAPTER 54

A Promise Fulfilled

AS the year 1849 drew to a close, it cast shadows of grievous events in store for the Catholic Church. The gloomy forebodings of the saintly Father Bernard Clausi, who died on December 20, at Paola in Calabria, were well-known. Father Clausi, whom Don Bosco had met at the Convitto Ecclesiastico in 1842, had stated that terrible catastrophes, unprecedented afflictions, and fierce persecution of the faithful would be visited upon the world before the passing of the present generation. However, at the peak of these evils, according to his prediction, there would be miraculous conversions and a swift triumph for the Church.

The surest index of sad times in the offing was the sudden, almost general shortage of priestly vocations. Most seminarians, imbued with revolutionary ideas, had discarded the clerical habit, or had been ordered to do so by their bishops. Something had to be done to remedy such great harm, but by what means?

Due to the war, the Turin seminary had become a barracks to billet soldiers. Consequently, even the few seminarians faithful to their vocations had either had to return to their homes, without any chance of continuing their ecclesiastical studies and formation, or had to board with private families in Turin in an environment that might prove dangerous to their priestly vocations.

In the school year 1848-49, Don Bosco invited a few seminarians to the Oratory for lessons in theology, but this hardly met the urgent recommendations of his archbishop [in exile].¹ Hence, notwithstanding the difficulty of the times and his total lack of means, Don Bosco set about this task of restoration. After a calm, sober

¹ See p. 224 [Editor]

review of the situation, he put his trust in Divine Providence and decided to open a temporary seminary in the Oratory itself.

He persuaded Mr. Pinardi to help this project by making available a room still occupied by some tenants on the main floor of the house. Enraged, the tenants threatened Don Bosco, his mother, and the landlord himself, with the result that Don Bosco had to make a substantial financial sacrifice to get rid of them peacefully, but he achieved two highly desirable results. First, he eliminated tenants who had turned the premises into a den of Satan; their visitors were such as to force decent folks to shut their eyes and ears to avoid scandal. The second advantage, a very important one, was that, having more room, he was able to start taking in seminarians who had nowhere to go. Thus the clerics Vacchetta, Chiantore, and the two Carbonati brothers joined Ascanio Savio, and were followed, in November 1850, by Damusso, and gradually by others. Those whose families could afford it paid forty-five or thirty *lire* a month for their keep, while others paid far less, and poorer boys were given free board and lodging. They lived and studied at the Oratory and shared Don Bosco's frugal meals. Daily they attended classes at the seminary in the few rooms unoccupied by the troops, facing the street and serving both as private quarters for the rector, Canon Vogliotti, and the other faculty members, and also as classrooms for philosophy, physics, and moral theology. Lectures in dogmatic and mystic theology were held in a vast, poorly lit mezzanine, whose most conspicuous appointment was a large kitchen stove camouflaged with wooden boards. A tiny, miserable room adjoined it. This was the setting in which the canons, Father Francis Marengo, Father Francis Molinari, Father Bernard Appendini, and Father Allais, all friends of Don Bosco, lectured. Father Lawrence Farina taught philosophy. Almost all their students were lodging at the Oratory and were quite determined to pursue their studies to completion. Canon August Berta taught philosophy and mathematics to some in his own home. He later became a canon in the Congregation of St. Lawrence and a professor at the Turin seminary when it was vacated by the government sixteen years later, in 1864.

From 1849–50 on, the Oratory became the seminary for the archdiocese and for the whole of Piedmont. We might say that, in

a way, it remained a seminary for the next twenty years because, as we shall see, a large number of boys living there studied Latin and, on donning the cassock, were sent to attend classes under the seminary professors at Don Bosco's expense. When they were finally ordained priests, Don Bosco sent them to their own bishops.

The seminarians performed their practices of piety in common. They learned the sacred ceremonies and took part in the liturgical services with the boys, assisting or serving at the altar on the principal feasts of the church calendar. Don Bosco always saw to it that these feasts were celebrated with the greatest solemnity, and that the parts of the Divine Office were chanted properly. He particularly exhorted the young clerics to receive Holy Communion. In this connection Ascanio Savio recalled:

He never let pass an opportunity to urge us to visit the Blessed Sacrament daily, even if only for a few moments, but regularly. He also encouraged us to acquire a spirit of prayer, telling us, "Prayer is as necessary to those who consecrate themselves to God's service as the sword is to the soldier." He exhorted us to have faith, since all blessings, spiritual and material, come to us from the Lord, to whom we should always turn first in every need, without wasting time in useless worry or grief. If we were praying for some grace for ourselves or especially for the salvation of some soul or the success of some undertaking for the glory of God, he advised us to make a temporary vow of something which was then especially pleasing to the Lord. He assured us that this would greatly increase the efficacy of our prayers. From his manner of speaking, we sensed that this must be a means by which he obtained heavenly blessings for his own undertakings. He took great care of us seminarians, frequently calling us together to strengthen our priestly spirit and faithfulness to our vocation, constantly stressing that self-denial is the first virtue of a disciple of Jesus Christ. "Begin to practice self-denial in little things," he often told us, "so that later you will be able to do so in bigger ones." He would constantly ask us whether we were progressing in studies, exhorting us to get ready to save as many souls as we could by a holy life and a sound theological formation. He would add, "If we were to have knowledge without humility, we would never be children of God, but rather children of the devil, the father of pride." On occasion, alluding to some among us inclined to boast of their intellectual ability, he would say, "Don't show

off what you know, but try to know thoroughly what you are talking about."

He kept close watch over our conduct and treated us with such loving kindness that we felt a filial affection for him and put all our trust in him. He labored indefatigably to root out of us everything which might lead to sin. To encourage us to correct our faults, he used to say that one should not expect to become a saint in a few days, since perfection is acquired only by degrees.

Hardly a day passed that Don Bosco did not especially advise one or other of the seminarians. "Always try to act on some principle of faith;" he would tell Ascanio Savio, "never at random or for purely human motives. Always give great importance to whatever you do." To some other he would say: "Think of God in terms of faith, of your neighbor in terms of charity, and of yourself in terms of humility. Rate yourself low. Speak of God with veneration, speak of your neighbor as you would wish him to speak of you, and speak of yourself humbly or not at all."

If any of the clerics discussed politics heatedly, Don Bosco would remind them of Father Cafasso's maxim: "Keep out of politics for virtue's sake, and do not take sides if you want to be wise." Whenever the clerics discussed scientific, historical, or educational matters, Don Bosco's suggestion was that they should never directly contradict another's opinion, but express their own with modest reservations, prefacing their words with "it seems to me; I suppose; it's like this; unless I be mistaken. If we try not to contradict others, our opinion will be heard with attention and goodwill, and we will be better able to persuade those we wish to influence. Lack of moderation in speaking indicates lack of good judgment."

Don Bosco used great prudence and charity toward individual sensibilities; when giving orders or when assigning duties he avoided high-handedness. But he never hesitated to correct the slightest fault he saw in the seminarians, while taking great pains not to hurt their feelings. A correction of his was never taken as an irritating reprimand, because all realized that his only aim was their own good. Once he told a rather self-willed cleric, "You're a sensible young man and you know better than I do that only obedience can lead us along the right path." On another occasion he came to know

that some clerics had held an unauthorized little party of their own. This was no crime, but neither was it an act of virtue. Upon meeting them several weeks later, he said smilingly, "You study moral theology. Please tell me something. In how many ways may one sin by eating?" The young seminarians, who had forgotten their party, promptly replied, "In five ways: *praepropere, laute, nimis, ardentius, studiosius*" [hastily, sumptuously, excessively, gloatingly, studiously].

"Good!" Don Bosco said, adding not another word. The comment hit home and was fruitful. That winter a cleric failed for some mornings to show up at Mass because he stayed in bed. When, one day during the recreation period, he approached Don Bosco, he was heartily greeted, "Oh, I am so glad to see you! How do you feel?"

"Fine, thank God," answered the cleric.

"Good! I was afraid you might be sick, because I haven't seen you at Mass the last few days." The lesson was not lost.

At times, if he was convinced that a delay would be more beneficial, Don Bosco postponed a correction for even several months. Naturally, if the offense was serious, he would reprimand the transgressor immediately, although always gently. Sometimes a mere glance was more effective than an entire sermon. Thus spoke Father Felix Reviglio who attentively watched his every word and move. He also added that Don Bosco was good at devising ways to spiritualize the environment of the clerics.

Sometimes, during recreation, he would open the *Imitation of Christ*, at random or ask a cleric to open it, and read the first or last verse of the page, or select a verse from the middle of the page for some salutary admonition. He always told them to accept respectfully the message they thus received, assuring them that it would benefit them. As a matter of fact, the contents of this golden booklet are such that on whatever page the eye may fall, one may find timely advice. The clerics certainly did not believe that these random messages were infallible, but they very often exclaimed, "Just what I needed!" Others, while listening to a colleague read a passage, would laugh saying, "Fits you like a glove." On occasion, some cleric would start reading, then suddenly flush with embarrassment, close the book and refuse to disclose what he had read.

Another of Don Bosco's expedients was to send a little note to some one in need of advice. Here are some samples:

Speak little of others, even less of yourself.

Love your duties, if you are to perform them properly.

Put up willingly with the faults of others, if you wish others to put up with yours.

Do not try to excuse your faults; try to correct them.

Forgive others everything; yourself, nothing.

Do not consider one a friend if he praises you excessively.

Forget the services you have rendered to others, but not those rendered to you.

The surest safeguard against anger is to let it cool off.

Do not praise a man for his looks, as the Holy Spirit teaches us.

From the earliest days of the Oratory, Don Bosco started the custom of giving a general and an individual recommendation to all the Oratory boys at the close of the year.² The general recommendation offered guidelines for the smooth running of the Oratory during the new year, and at times predicted events that would happen during its course. The second recommendation was a maxim or counsel, given confidentially or in writing, adapted to the specific needs and conduct of the individual concerned. For the clerics he wrote it in Latin, drawing from the Scriptures or the Fathers of the Church. Some of these notes were treasured by these first clerics. We have copies of some.

Non coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit. [One . . . is not crowned unless he has competed according to the rules. Cf. 2 Tim. 2, 5] To a second: *Delectet mentem magnitudo praemiorum, sed non deterreat certamen laborum.* [Cherish the thought of the heavenly reward, but do not be disheartened by the necessary struggles.] To a third: *Cogitas magnam fabricam construere celsitudinis? De fundamento prius cogita humilitatis.* [Are you planning to build a lofty structure? Make humility its foundation.] To others: *Semper, dico, vigila.* [Be ever on guard, I tell you.] *Fili, sine consilio nil facias et post factum non poenitebis.* [My son, seek advice before acting; you will never regret it.]

² This came to be known as the "annual practice." It was a brief saying, in the form of a motto, proposed as a spiritual program for the coming new year. [Editor]

Some of these notes, however, were of such an intimate character that their recipients have not revealed them. These characteristic messages always made a deep impression and bore wonderful fruit in the course of the year when Don Bosco privately recalled them to mind at an opportune moment. Don Bosco continued to distribute such personal advice nearly every year throughout the rest of his life.

Under Don Bosco's care, the clerics advanced not only spiritually, but also intellectually, as we shall see later. To round out their education and to keep in contact with them, Father Giacomelli tells us, Don Bosco went to the seminary during 1850 and 1851 to lecture on biblical geography. He himself, the better to understand and appreciate the Scriptures, diligently studied the geography of the Holy Land and the adjoining regions of Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece. The scholarly Canon Joseph Ghirighello, professor of Hebrew, had such respect for Don Bosco's learning that on occasion he consulted him on questions of hermeneutics and certain biblical narratives that needed clarification.

Those seminarians who lived in town also greatly enjoyed Don Bosco's lectures because he was able to describe with exactness the topography of the different regions and cities and the events that had transpired there. He also had a consummate gift for aptly quoting the prophets and the sapiential books, with which he was very familiar, relating them meaningfully to every important circumstance.

He surpassed himself in speaking of the places sanctified by Our Lord's presence during His mortal life. In order to impress the significance of the passion deeply on their hearts, he urged seminarians and priests to study the Redeemer's travels through Palestine from an archeological standpoint, especially the route to Calvary and the circumstances of Our Lord's death, so that it might become more vivid in their minds and excite in them greater gratitude toward Jesus Crucified.

After a little more than a year, he was obliged to give up his lectures at the seminary because his many other duties left him no time. Nevertheless, wishing to continue such instruction in some form, he resumed these lectures at the Oratory. Young Michael Rua, though not yet a cleric, attended them with the seminarians, and more than once heard him gently chide those who made free

with words or phrases of Holy Scripture. "Do not quote Holy Scripture for fun,"³ he would exclaim. His tone and expression left no doubt about how much this superficiality and irreverence toward the word of God pained him.

In addition to biblical geography, Don Bosco also taught global geography as related to the history of the Church, both at the Oratory and in the archdiocesan seminary. He was well-versed in this subject, and his Sunday instructions on it were most interesting and attractive. Young Marchisio and others came just to hear him on this subject. It was Don Bosco who encouraged Marchisio to design his renowned postal map, first of Piedmont, then of all Italy, which won for him his appointment as postmaster in Rome. Don Bosco, in fact, corrected it as he was making it. In 1890, Bishop Miotti of Parma told Father [John Baptist] Francesia: "In 1862, when I was director and teacher at the Chieri municipal school, I visited Don Bosco at the Oratory. I met him on the playground, and at his invitation went up to his room. In the course of the conversation we spoke of geography; his knowledge was so vast, deep, and thorough that I was truly amazed."

Don Bosco's virtuous life, his knowledge and untiring efforts won the affection of all those young seminarians. One day, one of them asked Don Bosco what he could do for him that would please him most. Don Bosco replied, "Help me save many souls, and first of all, your own." The same answer he often gave to other clerics who put similar questions to him. In gratitude for his instruction and spiritual guidance, many helped him in supervising the boys and in teaching catechism in the festive oratory. Their example, as we shall see later, inspired many boys to don the clerical habit. However, Don Bosco could not depend very much on them for the boarders' supervision at the Oratory or for the evening classes; only rarely could he get them to go to the Guardian Angel or the St. Aloysius oratories on Sundays. Their plans did not fit in with Don Bosco's, inasmuch as their studies were their primary concern. Therefore, with his customary perseverance, Don Bosco continued to teach the four boys he had originally chosen: Bellia, Gastini, Reviglio and Buzzetti.

³ Don Bosco's exact words were, "*Nolite miscere sacra profanis.*" [Editor]

Besides looking after the training of the diocesan seminarians, Don Bosco performed another eminent service for the Turin archdiocese by providing decorous church services. He himself, or others invited by him, instructed the clerics in the sacred ceremonies. Father [John Baptist] Bertagna, for example, came to the Oratory throughout 1855 for this specific purpose. The chancery and the pastor of SS. Simon and Jude always insisted that Don Bosco's clerics attend the liturgical services in the cathedral, where the diocesan seminarians would normally be present, and at the parish church of SS. Simon and Jude, to which the Oratory belonged. Don Bosco, who always tried to please his ecclesiastical superiors, even at grave inconvenience to himself, regularly sent his clerics to their own parishes to teach catechism and serve at the church services. He offered the same service to the canons of the cathedral on all the solemn feasts of the year. Other seminarians were sent to churches in the city whose pastors or rectors requested it. Preference was always given to Our Lady of Consolation Shrine for the Christmas Midnight Mass and during Holy Week. In that week, however, the clerics, with great zeal and sacrifice, served at all the long services in three different churches, the last one being the cathedral. Don Bosco kept for himself only the few that were indispensable for the boys' supervision in his festive oratories.

The service that Don Bosco was performing for the diocese was necessary and highly meritorious, especially when, through the deaths of many older priests, the shortage of sacred ministers began to be felt in Turin. In fact, as soon as Don Bosco had his own priests, he had to send one every Sunday and holy day to say Mass at the cathedral, at the request of the vicar general; Father Celestine Durando was one of them. This went on until 1865 and even for some years beyond during the summer vacations when the only young clerics in Turin were Don Bosco's.

Under the circumstances, the lamentation, "The harvest indeed is great, but the laborers are few." [Luke 10, 2], was quite apt, but Don Bosco did not forget Our Lord's exhortation, "Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into the harvest." [Luke 10, 2] From the very first years of the Oratory Don Bosco had ordered that a *Pater*, *Ave*, and *Gloria* be recited daily for the pressing needs of the Church. God heard his prayers, and gave him

the necessary grace to arouse, preserve, and foster priestly vocations. While Don Bosco's edifying demeanor instilled great esteem for the priestly character and vocation in his boys, his loving kindness disposed them to carry out the advice he gave them in the name of God. All who knew him intimately declared that he had won the hearts of all. To him they applied the words from the Book of Proverbs, "In the light of the king's countenance is life, and his favor is like a rain cloud in spring." (16, 15).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY, 1887 EDITION

(See Chapter 9, footnote 1.) ¹

Chapter 1. *The Director*

1. The director is the head superior and is responsible for all activities of the oratory.

2. He must be outstanding among the other staff members in piety, charity, and patience. He should always show himself a friend, companion, and brother to all, and therefore should encourage all to carry out their duties by persuasion rather than by command.

3. Before appointing someone to an office, he should first of all consult the other staff members. If the appointee is a priest, the director should consult the priest's ecclesiastical superior (or the pastor in whose territory the oratory is located, unless the priest is well-known and it can be assumed that there will be no objection to his appointment.)

4. Once a month he will hold a staff meeting to hear or suggest what is best for the boys.

5. It is the director's duty to warn, to see that each one carries out his duty, to correct and even to discharge staff members when necessary.

6. *He hears the confessions of those who freely come to him.* When confessions are over, he or another priest will celebrate Holy Mass; there will follow a homily on the Gospel (or an incident from the bible or church history).

7. He ought to be as a father among his children, and should strive in every way possible to instill in the boys love of God, respect for sacred things, frequent reception of the sacraments, filial devotion to Our Lady, and the elements of true piety.

¹ Words in italics appeared in the first edition of the regulations in 1847 and were later deleted; words in parentheses were added in or about 1852 and later. See p. 72. [Editor]

Chapter 2. *The Prefect*

1. The prefect must be a priest, and he takes the director's place whenever necessary.
2. He receives orders from the director and communicates them to the other staff members. He is to see that there are teachers for the various catechism classes and that order and discipline are observed.
3. If a staff member is absent, the prefect is to provide a substitute without delay.
4. He should see that the choir rehearses the antiphons, psalms, and hymns they are to sing.
5. (In areas where priests are scarce, the prefect will also carry out the duties of spiritual director.) *He is the ordinary confessor of the boys. He will celebrate the boys' Mass, teach catechism, and, where necessary, give the sermon.*
6. It is also his duty to supervise the (day), evening, or Sunday classes.

Chapter 3. *The Catechist or Spiritual Director*

1. It is the duty of the spiritual director to be present at and direct church services. He should, therefore, be a priest. *If occasionally he cannot personally carry out his duties, he should arrange with the prefect for a substitute.*
2. (On Sundays and holy days, at the appointed time he shall start or assist at the morning recitation of Matins of The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin; after the *Te Deum*, he will vest and say the boys' Mass.)
3. He will teach catechism *to the adults* in the apse, preside at Vespers, and prepare everything for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament.
4. He should keep himself well-informed about the conduct of the boys so as to be able to give information or issue certificates of good conduct when necessary.
5. On major feast days he should arrange for a sufficient number of confessors and Masses. He will prepare for all church services.
6. The spiritual director of the oratory is also director of the St. Aloysius Sodality. His duties are described in the sodality regulations *and in those of the Mutual Aid Society.*
7. If he should come to know that an older boy needs religious instruction—as often happens—he should very carefully fix a time and

place best suited for it. He himself should give it or see to it that it be done by someone else *patiently and charitably, since it is a matter of gaining a soul for God.*

8. The offices of prefect and spiritual director can easily be combined in the same person. *Whenever it is not possible to have a priest as spiritual director, all the latter's duties shall be entrusted to the prefect.*

Chapter 4. *The Assistant*

1. The assistant *should be a lay person imbued with charity and zeal for the glory of God.* It is his duty to assist at all Oratory church services to see that everything proceeds smoothly.

2. He shall see that each one enters the church in an orderly manner, blesses himself devoutly with holy water, and genuflects before the Blessed Sacrament.

3. Should any small children cause a disturbance in church, he shall kindly request those responsible to take them out.

4. When calling someone to order in church he should use gestures rather than words; if it is necessary to reprimand anyone at length, he should wait until after the services, or else take the boy out of the church.

5. When Vespers or other sacred offices are being sung, he should announce the page.

Chapter 5. *The Sacristans*

1. There shall be three sacristans: one should be a clerical student and the other two should be chosen from among those boys noted for piety, neatness, and ability for this office.

2. (The clerical student is the head sacristan; he should consult the ordo, prepare the missal and teach, if necessary, the ceremonies of low Mass and Benediction.)

3. Their first duty in the morning is to arrange the altar for Mass, prepare the wine and water, altar-breads, chalice, and if necessary the monstrance for Benediction; (then, while Lauds of the Blessed Virgin Mary are being chanted, or *at the latest when the hymn is being intoned*, they should ask the priest to come and vest for Mass.)

4. They should inform the preacher when it is time for the sermon, and accompany him to and from the pulpit.

5. Two candles should be lit for low Mass; four for the Community Mass on Sundays and holy days; six for solemn high Mass. At Vespers

four candles shall ordinarily suffice; but on solemn feast days six should be lit, and fourteen for Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. (*Synod. Dioc. Taurin.* Tit. X, 22.)

6. Candles should not be lit while a sermon is being given, lest the preacher and the congregation be distracted.

7. Silence is to be kept in the sacristy; conversation is allowed only for matters pertaining to the service or the duties of the sacristans.

8. It is very important that one sacristan stand by to ring the bell when the priest turns to bless the congregation with the Blessed Sacrament. He should wait until the priest has closed the tabernacle before ringing it a second time, lest the boys become restless and start leaving the Church, acting irreverently toward the Blessed Sacrament.

9. The sacristans must be in the sacristy on time before the start of church services; they must not leave until the sacred vestments and other appurtenances have been put away and locked.

10. Before leaving the sacristy they should see to it that the closets and the sanctuary gates have been closed.

Recommendations to Sacristans

1. A very important duty of theirs is to open and lock the church doors, to keep the church clean, as well as all the vestments and appurtenances of the altar or of the Sacrifice of the Mass, such as basins, cruets, candlesticks, towels, napkins, corporals, purificators, etc. When linen or any objects need laundering, cleaning, or replacing, the sacristans should notify the prefect.

2. One of the sacristans will ring the church bells and give the signal for the end of recreation and for going into church.

3. (In the evening, shortly before the bell rings for church, they will put the benches in order, arranging them in separate groups to match the number posted on the wall of the church.)

4. (As the boys file into church, the sacristans will distribute the catechism books to the catechists; five minutes before the end of the class, two of them, one on the right and the other on the left, will distribute the Vesper books. Toward the end of the *Magnificat*, they will collect them, put them away in the closet, and return the key to the head sacristan.)

Chapter 6. *The Monitor*

1. He is responsible for leading the vocal prayers.
2. On Sundays, and holy days he intones the morning prayers, reads those to be said during Mass, leads in reciting five decades of the rosary. *After Mass he should recite the acts of faith, hope, and charity.*
3. On greater solemnities, he should read the preparation for Communion after the *Sanctus*, and later the thanksgiving.
4. Following the sermon, he should recite a Hail, Mary. In the morning prayers he should add an Our Father and a Hail, Mary for the benefactors of the Oratory, and another in honor of St. Aloysius, ending with the invocation *Praised Forever Be, etc.*
5. Before evening catechism class he should start reciting the Our Father and a Hail, Holy Queen as soon as there are a sufficient number of boys present. When the catechism class is over, he should recite the acts of faith, hope, and charity *alternately with the congregation*, as at morning prayers, and he should take care to place himself in church where everyone will be able to hear him.
6. He should strive to read loud, clearly, and devoutly, so that his listeners may be edified.
7. He must also take care that at the elevation of the Host and chalice, at the *Ite, Missa est*, and at the final blessing, the prayers be interrupted, for at these important moments, each member of the congregation must speak alone to God in his own heart.
8. The same should be done at Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament in the evening.

Chapter 7. *The Chapel Subassistants*

1. The chapel subassistants should be chosen from among the more exemplary boys to help especially at the evening church services.
2. There should be at least four of them and they should take their places at strategic places or corners of the church (one near Our Lady's altar, a second near St. Aloysius' altar, and the other two in the center of the church toward the main entrance). They should not leave these posts without a good reason. If they have to warn someone, they should do so without undue haste, and should never pass in front of the main altar without genuflecting. In places where the catechists can remain from the beginning to the end of the service, they and the assistant should be enough for supervision.

3. As the boys enter the church, the subassistants should see that they occupy their proper places, kneel to the Blessed Sacrament and behave with due respect when waiting or singing.

4. If they should notice any boy dozing or chatting, they should call him to order in a nice way, moving from their places as little as possible, never under any circumstance hitting anybody, never scolding in a harsh or loud voice. In cases of a serious misdemeanor, they are to summon the offender outside the church for a reprimand.

Chapter 8. *The Catechists*

1. The office of catechist is a very important one, since this is the main reason for running an oratory. "You, catechists, by teaching catechism, perform a meritorious work in the eyes of God. You cooperate in the salvation of souls redeemed by the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ by leading them on the path of eternal salvation. This is also praiseworthy in the eyes of men. The boys you teach will always bless you, for you have pointed out to them the way to become *good Christians*, good citizens, a credit to their own families and to society." [Don Bosco]

2. As far as possible the catechists should be priests or clerics, but since we have many groups to teach and can fortunately count on the services of several exemplary gentlemen who have volunteered for this task, they should be offered a class to teach. It would be advisable, however, that adults be taught, whenever possible, by a priest in the apse.

3. If catechists are not available for all the classes, the prefect, in agreement with the director, should appoint some of the better instructed boys to teach a class.

4. Every catechist should be in his class when the Our Father is being sung [sic].

5. The catechist should have his pupils sit in a semicircle, with himself in the center. He must never bend toward his pupils when asking them questions or listening to their replies, but should stand upright, frequently looking about him at the class.

6. He is never to leave his post during the class. If he needs anything, he should inform the prefect or assistant.

7. Each teacher should remain with his class until after the recitation of the acts of faith, hope, and charity, and if possible, should not leave until after church services are over.

8. At the sound of the bell, five minutes before the end of the catechism class, he should tell his pupils some story from bible or church

history, or some incident emphasizing the ugliness of a certain vice or the beauty of a particular virtue.

9. No teacher should begin to explain the catechism until he has thoroughly learned the subject himself, and *never before the boys have learned by heart the answer to the question to be explained*. Explanations should be brief.

10. The catechist should never go into difficult topics or raise questions that cannot be answered simply and easily.

11. The evils which the catechist should caution against are: blasphemy, the profanation of holy days, impurity, stealing, lack of sorrow for sin, lack of a firm resolution or of sincerity in confession.

12. The virtues he should stress the most are: charity toward companions, obedience to superiors, love of work, shunning idleness and bad companions, frequent confession and Communion.

13. The catechism classes will be located as follows: fifteen-year-olds who have been permanently admitted² to Holy Communion will assemble in the choir; those who have been permanently admitted to Holy Communion but are not yet fifteen should gather near Our Lady's and St. Aloysius' altars; the other classes should be arranged according to age and knowledge. When assigning a class to those who have not yet been admitted to Holy Communion, care must be taken not to put small boys together with adults. One class, for example, should have all the boys over fourteen; another, twelve to fourteen; another, those from ten to twelve. This will make for better discipline and will not embarrass older boys.

14. Marginal numbers next to the catechism questions indicate the order to be followed in teaching. The questions marked 1 are to be taught to everybody, both young and old. Those marked 2 are for those who are preparing for Confirmation or First Communion. Those marked 3 and 4 are for those desiring to be admitted for the whole year. Those marked 5 and 6 are for those wishing to be promoted permanently.

15. The catechist teaching in the apse usually has pupils that are permanently admitted to Holy Communion, therefore he should not require literal answers from the catechism. When explaining some point, he should do so clearly and briefly. To hold attention he should consider practical cases which fit in with the subject under discussion, and should avoid matters unsuitable to the age or understanding of his pupils.

² According to a diocesan custom, admission to First Communion was on a temporary basis to insure that first communicants continued to attend catechism instruction. [Editor]

16. The catechist should always show a pleasant disposition and should realize the importance of what he is teaching. *When correcting or admonishing, he should always encourage, never use irritating words or expressions.* He should praise those who deserve it, but be slow in rebuking. All members of the staff who are free during catechism class are to be considered catechists [in case some teacher should be needed] since they already know the boys and how to deal with them.

Chapter 9. *The Archivist*

1. It is the archivist's duty to keep records of everything concerning the Oratory.

2. He should post the full name and office of every staff member in the sacristy. He should draw up an inventory of all objects needed for church services, (particularly those donated for a particular altar). In this he should comply with the prefect's instructions.

3. He is the custodian of and is responsible for the books, inventory, and any other items belonging to the St. Aloysius Sodality and the Mutual Aid Society.

4. He should keep the music scores under lock and key, and should hand them over only to the choirmaster. He may not allow scores outside the premises; it is, however, permissible to copy them within the premises.

5. He shall also have charge of a small juvenile library and should lend books freely for reading on the premises or at home. The name and address of the borrower must be recorded in order to trace the book, if not returned within a month. (See Rules for the Librarian in Part III.)

6. The principal duty of the archivist is to make sure that nothing belonging to the Oratory is lost or taken off the premises without being first checked out.

7. *The duties of the archivist should rightly be performed by the prefect, and this office is only entrusted to others if the prefect is unable to perform it.*

Chapter 10. *The Peacemakers*

1. It is the peacemaker's duty to prevent fights, quarrels, swearing and any kind of unseemly talk.

2. In the event of such offenses, which fortunately are rare among our boys, they should immediately warn the culprit and *patiently and*

kindly explain that such faults are strictly forbidden, show lack of manners and are an offense against God.

3. If a correction is necessary, it is to be given privately, except when it is necessary to repair a scandal given.

4. The peacemakers must always prevent, in a nice way, anyone from leaving the church during the services or disturbing by lingering nearby or playing. If this should happen, the peacemaker should patiently ask the offender to enter the church as soon as the bell gives the signal.

6. The peacemakers shall also reconcile offenders with their superiors, take runaway boys back to their parents and, during the week, encourage their companions to attend the Oratory on Sundays and holy days.

7. *Finally, the peacemakers should discreetly invite those in need to go to confession and reconcile themselves with God.*

8. *Although all staff members may be considered as peacemakers, these duties should nevertheless be entrusted to two in particular. They should be elected by a majority vote of the staff.*

9. The prior and vice-prior of the St. Aloysius Sodality are peacemakers *ex officio*.

Chapter 11. *The Choirboys*

1. It would be desirable for all to join the choir since all should take part in singing; nevertheless, since this is not possible, a few boys with fine voices should be chosen to lead the singing.

2. There are two sets of choirboys: those singing in the choir loft and those in the sanctuary. No one may belong to the choir unless his conduct is exemplary and he knows how to read Latin correctly.

3. To be a choirboy, one must know solfeggio and Gregorian chant.

4. A chanter and a vice-chanter are in charge of the singing. They must see to it that the singing parts are fairly apportioned, so that all may willingly perform their duties.

5. The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin is sung *recto tono* in the morning by all except for the hymns, lessons, *Te Deum* and *Benedictus*, which will be sung in Gregorian chant. (On solemn feasts all parts of the Office will be sung in Gregorian chant.) In the evening the Vespers will be those indicated in the diocesan ordo. When it is not possible to sing Matins of the Office of the Blessed Virgin, then the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin, or at least the *Ave Maris Stella*, with the *Magnificat*, and *Oremus* should be sung in the evening.

6. When a psalm or antiphon is intoned, all should join in unison. should any member of the choir make a mistake when singing, his companions should not laugh or make fun of him, but the choirmaster should endeavor to bring him back to the proper tone.

7. The choirboys in the sanctuary should be careful to sing on the same tone and pitch as those in the apse or in the choir loft. The choirmaster should see to it that the psalms and hymns are sung alternately by the choir and congregation.

8. On the last Sunday of each month, the Office of the Dead shall be sung for departed companions and benefactors. This office shall also be sung on the *Sunday* immediately following the announcement of the death of a staff member or of his parents.

9. Choirboys should avoid vanity or pride, two deplorable vices which spoil what they are doing and cause bad feeling among their companions. (A truly Christian choirboy should never take offense, or have any other purpose in singing than to praise God, uniting his voice with those of the Angels who bless and praise Him in heaven.)

Chapter 12. *The Playground Subassistants*

1. It is most desirable that everybody take part in some game in the proper manner and time.

2. Permitted pastimes and games are: *bocce*,³ *piastrelle*,⁴ swings, stilts, merry-go-round, target shooting with balls, gymnastic exercises, *oca*,⁵ checkers, chess, *lotto*, mailman, *barra rotta*,⁶ traders, the merchant, and other games which contribute to the agility of the body.

3. Card games, taroks and any other pastime which might give occasion to offend God and harm one's neighbor or oneself are forbidden.

4. Regular recreation hours are from 10:00 to 12 noon, from 1:00 to 2:30 in the afternoon, and after church services until nightfall. In winter, recreation will be allowed in the evening until eight o'clock, but not when classes are in session.

5. Five subassistants, one of whom is to be the captain, will control the distribution of the games.

6. The captain should keep a record of the number and kinds of

³ Italian lawn bowls played outdoors on a long narrow court. [Editor]

⁴ Flat pebbles, slightly larger than pucks, used in a throwing game. [Editor]

⁵ Literally, goose. It was played with two dice over a board with sixty-three squares in various sections. The fifth and ninth square in each section had the picture of a goose. [Editor]

⁶ A running and dodging game. [Editor]

games on hand, and should be responsible for them. When replacements or repairs are needed for the games, he should inform the prefect.

7. Two monitors at a time will be on duty on Sundays. It is the captain's task to prevent disorders, but he is not obliged to be on duty unless one of the monitors is absent.

8. Each game or piece of equipment should be numbered. For example, if there should be nine sets of *bocce*, each set should be numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and have a corresponding check-out card. If there are five pairs of stilts, they should be marked with the numbers 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, and so on for the rest of the games.

9. When borrowing games, every borrower shall leave something on deposit to which the monitor will affix a number corresponding to that of the game he asked for. *In the event that a game is damaged or lost, the captain of the subassistants should inform the prefect, and only with his permission shall the deposit be returned.*

10. During recreation one subassistant should walk around the playground to prevent damage or stealing; the other subassistant should not leave the game room and should not under any circumstances allow anyone else to enter it.

11. The subassistants are urged to see that everyone takes part in some kind of game, preferably those games more frequently played at the Oratory.

12. After recreation, the subassistants should check to see that nothing is missing, store away all the games and equipment in their proper order, lock the game room, and hand the key to the prefect.

Chapter 13. *Patrons and Protectors*

1. The patrons and protectors have the important task of finding employment for the poorer and homeless boys. They must make sure that apprentices and young artisans coming to the Oratory do not work under employers or in an environment that might jeopardize their eternal salvation.

2. The patrons return a runaway boy to his parents and should do all they can to find employment for those boys who need to learn a trade or are unemployed.

3. The protectors, who should be two in number, must keep a record with full names and addresses of employers who have vacancies in order to send them their protégée.

4. The protector should help and watch over his charges, but should not assume any financial obligation, not even with the boys' employers.

5. In any agreement with employers, the first condition is that apprentices must not work on Sundays and holy days.

6. If the protector should learn that the boy is working in an unwholesome environment, he should help him be on his guard, should warn his employer, if advisable, and should do all that he can to find him another job.

Part III, Chapter 5. *The Librarian*

1. A librarian shall have charge of a small collection of books. They should be loaned out to those who want them and who, most likely, will benefit from them.

2. He shall take note of the full name of the borrowers and inform them that they must return the book within a month.

3. He should keep a record of books returned or borrowed, so that he may give an account to the proper superior.

4. The library staff should consist of two persons: the librarian, who gives the books, and the general assistant, who checks them out.

5. The office of librarian and assistant may be combined in the same person, just as either can substitute for the other in case of absence.

6. All those using the library are strongly urged not to lose the books, damage them, or write their names in them. Books must be returned within a month.

Part II, Chapter 1. *General Rules for All Staff Members*

1. Every task in this Oratory should be motivated by charity, and discharged with zeal as a homage to God. All should encourage one another to persevere in their office and carry out their respective tasks.

2. Those boys who already frequent the Oratory should be exhorted to do so regularly, and new boys should be invited to attend. *Staff members should never criticize the rules or anything else concerning the Oratory, and should never disapprove of any directive of the director or any other superior in the boys' presence.*

3. It is a great privilege to be able to teach the truths of our Faith to one who does not know them and to prevent even a single sin.

4. Mutual charity and patience in putting up with each other's defects, in promoting the good name of the Oratory and its staff, and in urging everyone to be friendly with and have confidence in the director are warmly recommended. Without these things order will never be

maintained, nor will the greater glory of God and the welfare of souls be promoted.

5. (Since it is very difficult to find enough people to fill all these offices, one person may fill several; for example, the tasks of peacemaker, patron and assistant may all be held by the same person.)

6. (Likewise the prefect may also be the spiritual director. The peacemaker, chapel subassistant, and prayer leader may all be one person. Also the role of archivist, assistant and librarian can all be entrusted to one of the sacristans who has the necessary qualities.)

Appendix 2

REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY

(See Chapter 10, footnote 1.)

Part II, Chapter 4. *Conduct in Church*

1. As soon as the signal is given for church service, everyone must promptly get there in an orderly manner and properly attired. Those who can read should bring their prayerbooks.

2. On entering the church, each boy should bless himself with holy water, then go to his place and kneel for a brief prayer. He should recall that he is now in the House of God, the Lord of heaven and earth.

3. There should be no need of supervision in church; the mere thought that one is in God's House should be enough to banish any distraction, but since one may thoughtlessly forget himself and where he is, everyone is urged to obey the assistants or monitors. No one should leave the church without serious reason.

4. All should avoid dozing, chattering, playing, or doing anything to cause laughter or disturbance. Such misbehavior should immediately be corrected and even punished according to Our Lord's example, when He drove the moneylenders from the temple with a whip.

5. When anyone is warned, rightly or wrongly, for any infringement of the rules, he should accept the warning politely and without protest. After services, he may tell his side of the story.

6. In the morning, no one should leave the church until after the singing of the invocation, "Praised Forever Be the Names of Jesus and Mary." At the evening services, each one should remain kneeling until the Blessed Sacrament has been replaced in the tabernacle.

7. All should earnestly try not to leave the church during sermons. After services, all should file out in an orderly manner and then take part in the games or go home.

Appendix 3

REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY

(See Chapter 11, footnote 3.)

Part II, Chapter 3. *Behavior During Recreation*

1. Physical exercise is very good for young people, and all should join in the games in use among us.

2. The boys should willingly use the games that are available, and should play in the area assigned to them.

3. (During recreation and at all other times it is forbidden to talk about politics or bring in any newspaper or book not previously approved by the director.) ⁷

4. It is forbidden to gamble for money, food, or any other object without the express permission of the prefect; serious reasons demand that this article be strictly observed.

5. If, during recreation, any visitor enters the oratory, those nearby should greet him, tip their hats, and make way for him, momentarily interrupting the game if necessary.

6. It is generally forbidden to play cards or taroks, or with small or big balls. One should likewise refrain from immoderate shouting; interfering with other games; throwing stones, wooden balls or snowballs; damaging plants, posters or pictures, walls, furniture, or scribbling on them in any way.

7. Fighting, striking, or roughhousing is expressly forbidden. Vulgar or contemptuous language is also forbidden. We are all children of God and must love one another with the same charity we would display toward brothers.

8. At the sound of the bell, fifteen minutes before the end of the recreation period, everyone should hurry to finish the round or set he is playing and not start a new one. At the second bell, each boy should return the game he borrowed and pick up whatever he left as a deposit.

9. Oratory games may not be taken off the premises.

10. During recreation everyone must show a proper respect for those in charge and obey them.

⁷ Words in parenthesis date from 1852 or later. [Editor]

Appendix 4

REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY

(See Chapter 14, footnote 1.)

Part II, Chapter 7.

1. Remember, my dear boys, that confession and Holy Communion are your two most solid supports along the road to heaven. Therefore, if anybody tries to make you give them up, consider him an enemy of your soul.

2. We do not intend to force anybody to approach these sacraments. You are entirely free. Love, not fear, should tell you what to do. This policy has brought good results. Many go to confession and Communion every two weeks, others every week, and some every day, even though they have to go to work. Among the first Christians, Communion was a daily practice, and the Council of Trent has exhorted all the faithful to receive Holy Communion at every Mass they attend.

3. However, my advice to you is to follow the diocesan rules, namely, confession every two weeks or once a month. St. Philip Neri, the great friend of youth, recommended a weekly confession and even more frequent Communion on the advice of a confessor.

4. I urge all of you, particularly the older boys, to receive these sacraments in our Oratory chapel in order to give good example to the others. When you go to confession and Communion with devotion and recollection, your example is more effective than a good sermon.

5. The superior of the Oratory, the spiritual director and the prefect are the ordinary confessors. On solemn feast days other confessors will also be available.

6. Although you are free to change confessors, I advise you to go regularly to the same one, because your soul must be tended as a gardener tends a plant and a doctor his patient. Furthermore, in case of serious illness, the ordinary confessor will be better acquainted with the state of your soul.

7. On the day you choose to receive these sacraments, as soon as you arrive at the Oratory do not start playing, but go straight to the chapel and prepare yourself as *The Companion of Youth* and other prayer-

books direct you. If you have to wait your turn, offer it up in atonement for your sins. Never quarrel to keep others from going ahead of you, or to go ahead of others.

8. Your confessor is the friend of your soul; therefore, I suggest that you have the greatest trust in him. Tell him all the secrets of your heart. Have no fear that he will ever reveal anything he has heard in confession; he is strictly forbidden even to think of such things. Always ask your confessor's advice in matters of grave importance, such as the choice of a vocation. Our Lord says that he who listens to his confessor is listening to God Himself. "He who hears you, hears me." [Luke 10,16]

9. After confession, withdraw to some quiet spot and make your thanksgiving with attention and recollection. If your confessor allows you to receive, make a devout preparation.

10. After Communion, spend at least a quarter of an hour in thanksgiving. It would be very irreverent if you were to leave the church only a few minutes after receiving the Holy Eucharist, or if you were to start laughing and chatting, gaze around, spit or stare, or do unbecoming things.

11. Between confessions, try to remember and practice your confessor's recommendations.

12. One more thing about Holy Communion: when making your thanksgiving, always ask God for the grace of worthily receiving Holy Viaticum at the hour of death.

Appendix 5

REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY

(See Chapter 15, footnote 1.)

Part II, Chapter 5. *Behavior Outside the Oratory*

1. Remember, my boys, that the observance of Sundays and holy days will bring the Lord's blessing on your work throughout the week. But there are still some other things you must do or avoid when you are not at the Oratory.

2. Do your best never to omit your morning and night prayers. Every day, try to spend a few moments in meditation or spiritual reading, and, if it is at all possible, hear Mass. Always tip your cap when passing before a church, a crucifix, or a religious picture.

3. Avoid all conversation that is unseemly or against religion, for, as St. Paul tells us, evil conversations ruin one's morals.

4. Stay away from stage plays which are held during the day or at night, and keep out of saloons, cafés, gambling houses, and similar places.

5. Do not go with those who have been expelled from the Oratory, who criticize your superiors, or who try to make you neglect your duties. Especially avoid those who suggest that you steal from your parents or from others.

6. Swimming or watching others swim is strictly forbidden because of the serious physical and moral dangers involved.

Appendix 6

ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS OF THE ST. ALOYSIUS SODALITY

(See Chapter 19, footnote 1.)

1. The members of the St. Aloysius Sodality aim at imitating this saint as far as possible, and at obtaining his protection in life and death.

2. The approval of this sodality by the archbishop of Turin should further encourage us to join it.

3. For the peace of mind of all concerned, it must be noted that the regulations of the St. Aloysius Sodality do not bind under sin, even venial. Therefore, by neglecting any of them, one does not commit any sin whatever, although he deprives himself of a spiritual benefit. The pledge made before St. Aloysius' altar is not a vow. Anyone, however, who is not determined to keep that pledge should not join this sodality.

4. This sodality is guided by a spiritual director, who must be a priest, and by a prior, who must be a layman.

5. The spiritual director is appointed by the superior of the Oratory. It is his duty to see to the observance of the rules, to admit new members, and to keep a roll of all, living and dead. It is also his duty to visit the sick belonging to the Mutual Aid Society. There is no limit to his tenure of office.

6. The prior shall be elected by a relative majority of votes at a general assembly on Easter Sunday evening. His term of office shall be for a year, and he may be reelected.

Appendix 7

A RECITAL BY THE BOYS OF THE ORATORY OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES ABOUT OLD TESTAMENT HISTORY

(See Chapter 39, footnote 5.)

August 15, [1948] 4 p.m.

Introduction Background information.

1st Epoch From the creation of the world to the deluge.
Hymn to the Blessed Virgin.

2nd Epoch From the deluge to the call of Abraham.
Song: *The Night*.

3rd Epoch From the call of Abraham to the exodus of the Jews from
Egypt.
Hymn to St. Aloysius.

4th Epoch From the exodus of the Jews from Egypt to the building
of Solomon's Temple.
Song: *The Wine*
Disquisition on the method of studying bible history.

5th Epoch From the building of Solomon's Temple to the Babylonian
Exile.
Song: *The Assumption*

6th Epoch From the Babylonian Exile to the birth of Christ.
Song: *Let us give praise to God*

Anthem to Charles Albert
Dialogue on the History of the Oratory
Anthem to Pius IX
Awards

Anthem To The King

Long live Albert! Let us raise Albert's name
To the purest spheres:

These are days of bitter trial,
But let us not give up hope, companions,
Let us not give up hope!

Among the rulers of nations, Albert,
Endowed with heroic valor,
Shines in infinite splendor,
As the sun amid glowing planets.

So many are his virtues
Human utterance cannot recount them.
Glory and calm radiate from his countenance
Satisfying universal yearning.

Blessed are we, to whom Fate gave
So wise a warrior-king!

May gloomy death never overtake you,
O sincere friend of peoples!
We are still in the dawn of life,
But we would gladly serve our country.
For Albert we defy all hardships,
All danger and death itself.
Charles Albert! Hearken to the voice of a youthful band,
Among your ranks.
Thou art great above all imagining,
Thou art the glory of Italian soil!

Long Live The King

Anthem To Pius IX

Come, companions, let us sing a joyous song
To the magnanimous heart of Pius,
Whose most loving thoughts were kindled
From God's own divine spark.
May peace resound along every shore!
And may every heart respond in joy;
Blessed be the smile of love,
Which leads to the path of our salvation.

Glory to the Vicar of Christ;
In exultation let us sing *Gloria*.
At your sweet call, our brothers
Open their frozen hearts to love,
And on the flowery crests
We advance in virtue with hearts sincere.
Truth echoes in your voice,
Peace and love, duty and justice.

The orphaned and the poor
Gaze upon the father's face,
Recalling the beloved features
To the joyous light of day.

Oh! happy children, open wide your arms,
Run to the embrace denied:
Behold the day, the yearned for day
Which restores life to your young hearts.

The prayers of so many unhappy souls
Find grace in the eyes of God,
Who sent us the mercy of Pius,
To bring us true peace and love.

Rejoice, companions, rejoice,
Let each heart thankfully respond:
Behold the day, the yearned for day,
The day of peace and love.
Let us shout in unison,
Children of one and the same father,
Long live the mighty Pius,
Whom heaven gave to our love!

Let us all sing in jubilee,
Long live Pius the Ninth,
Long may he live; let our love and faith
Echo our shouts.
Long live Pius the Ninth!

Appendix 8

REGULATIONS FOR THE FESTIVE ORATORY

(See Chapter 43, footnote 2.)

Subject Matter for Sermons and Catechetical Instructions

1. The subject matter of sermons and catechetical instructions must be chosen and adapted to the needs of young people and interspersed, as much as possible, with examples, similes, and stories with a moral.

2. Examples are to be taken from Holy Scripture, church history, the Fathers of the Church, and other approved authors. Stories casting ridicule on the truths of Faith must be shunned. Similes always please young people, but they must concern things they either know or can readily understand. Further, they are to be carefully prepared, and their application must be clear and suited to the circumstances.

3. It must be borne in mind that examples are to be used solely for confirming truths of Faith that have already been proven. Similes must serve to clarify some truth proved or about to be proved. Sermons should be in Italian, in the simplest and most popular style; if necessary, the local dialect may be used, even if there are educated people in the congregation. Those who can understand a polished sermon can also understand a simple one, even one in Piedmontese.

4. Sermons should never last more than half an hour. St. Francis de Sales used to say that it was better for a preacher to leave the congregation with the desire to hear more rather than to bore them. Young people especially need sermons and are willing to listen to them, but great care should be taken never to weary or bore them.

5. Those who generously volunteer to come and preach at the Oratory are asked to be as simple and clear as possible; at all times the boys should understand the virtue being taught to them and the vice being condemned.

Appendix 9

SONGS TO DON BOSCO

(See Chapter 48, footnote 3.)

Let's go, companions:
Don Bosco awaits us!
Joy unconfined
Awakes in our hearts.

The balmy weather
Invites us to sing.
Let's welcome this summons
To feast and rejoice.

Happy and joyous we go in all haste.
Let all our hearts be gay;
May no sound of lamentation
Issue from our lips today.

Long live Don Bosco,
Who leads us
Ever toward the light
Of virtue,
Which is in his heart,
Burning ever bright!

Let the fires blaze
In our hospice.
Kindle the fire
Of our love
For our loving shepherd,
Don John Bosco!

Appendix 10

(See Chapter 48, footnote 7.)

Retreatants in the First Week of July, 1849

Father [Louis] Botto, Don Bosco, Father [John] Vola, Stephen Castagno, James Soles, John Baptist Sansoldi, John Appiano, Edward Giozza, Simon Boasso, Ignatius Scrivan, Charles Ludre, Michael Billula, Louis Bens, Laurence Bussone, Michael Formica, Natale Delponte, Felix Aschieri, Germano Candido, Candido Musso, Joseph Timossi, Anthony Comba, James Bellia, Edward Razetti, Seraphim Servetti, Ascanio Savio, cleric, Malacarne, Avatanio, Dominic Viano, [John] Costantino, [Francis] Picca, [Joseph] Buzzetti.

Retreatants on July 23, 1849

Vandano, Minetti, [Charles] Viglietti, [Paul] Perrona, Gaddo, [Bartholomew] Ongo, [Charles?] Buzzetti, Hyacinth Gallo, Piacenza, two boys from Moncalieri, Dominic Garda, Juvenal Borda, Francis Blengio, Stephen Sola, Cumiana, Benedict Cagno, Joseph Oddenino, Charles Gastini, a boy from Lombardy, August Giordanino, Louis Mondo, Marchisio, four boys from Cambiano, four from Chieri, Montafameglio, Ceruti, Sardo, Degiuli, Truffo, Victor Pavesi, Piovano, Bartholomew Berrutto, Bartholomew Gribaudo, John Baptist Crosa, Francis Sandrone, James Poma.

Appendix 11

A REVIEW OF DON BOSCO'S BOOKLET, *THE METRIC SYSTEM*

(See Chapter 53, footnote 1.)

L'Armonia, June 1, 1849.

Several useful and valuable books on the metric system have already been published. Don Bosco, however, author of the slender volume we are reviewing, did not find them particularly suitable to the needs of many young apprentices entrusted to his care by Divine Providence. These books, besides being written in a highly lofty style, failed to show the equivalence between the old and the new systems; this is really a sad deficiency.

Don Bosco picked the best from the works of other authors on this subject. Beginning with the first four operations of arithmetic, he goes on to describe the new system in a simple way. He compares it with the old one, and shows how to convert the old weights and measures into the new, and vice versa, by simple multiplication.

In our old system we really did not have any foolproof way to check on the exactness of a multiplication. The usual checking procedure became impractical when dealing with fractions. Don Bosco is the first to apply it to the metric system and to discover that now it works perfectly in all cases. The author explains this standard checking procedure very clearly and shows how one may check the accuracy of any multiplication, to any number of digits.

Since the need for such information is felt more and more as 1850 approaches,¹ we hope that people will make profitable use of this little book, especially those who cannot attend classes that have been set up for teaching this new system.

¹ The metric system became the exclusive legal system in Piedmont in 1850. [Editor]

Appendix 12

SPIRITUAL RETREAT SCHEDULE

(See Chapter 53, footnote 8.)

<i>Weekdays:</i>	A.M.	5:30	Mass
		6:00	<i>Veni Creator</i> , Meditation, <i>Miserere</i>
		12 noon	Mass, Hymn, Dialogue
	P.M.	7:00	Instruction, Hymn
		8:00	<i>Veni Creator</i> , Meditation, Litany of the Blessed Virgin, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament
<i>Sundays:</i>	A.M.		As on weekdays
	P.M.	5:00	Instruction, Hymn
		6:00	<i>Veni Creator</i> , Meditation, Litany of the Blessed Virgin, Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament

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ABBREVIATIONS

D.B.	Don Bosco
M.M.	Mamma Margaret
S.S.	Salesian Society

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